A Nobel Peace Prize brings hope in tension-plagued region

The Arab Weekly staff

London

The announcement of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stirred hopes for a new peace momentum in the Horn of Africa and the neighbouring regions.

The prize recognised the role Abiy had in reaching a peace agreement on July 9, 2018, with Eruto-African President Itahan Afwerki. The Nobel Peace Prize jury also said the distinction was “meant to recognise all the stakeholders working for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia and in the East and North-East African regions.”

That would include the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which were instrumental in bridging the gap between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Emirates, which hosted an Abiy-Afwerki summit in July 2018, pledged $3 billion in aid and investments to Ethiopia. Abiy’s Dhah Bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki.

Eritrea has played a key role in defusing tensions in Sudan and concluding an agreement there between military rulers and the opposition.

It remains to be seen whether Abiy can move Ethiopia to resolve its long-running dispute with Egypt over Ethiopia’s Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and ease Cairo’s concerns of the effects of the dam on its already scarce water resources.

Egyption President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is in a hopeful mode. “I hope that our constructive efforts aiming at ending all conflicts and differences in Africa will continue thanks to the will of our great sons and people,” he said.

Also, in a region rife with ethnic groups and outside interference, notably from Turkey and Qatar, Abiy and other leaders in the Horn of Africa could face more challenges ahead.

EU Foreig policy chief Fed- erica Mogherini said: “In times when competition for power is spreading across the region and to the Horn, we stand at the side of bridge-builders like Prime Minis- ter Abiy.”

Regional peace. File picture of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed attending a rally in Ambo, Ethiopia, April 2018. (AP)

Turkey threatened with ‘sanctions from hell’ after foray in Syria

Thomas Seibert

Istanbul

Turkey is more isolated than ever following a barrage of international criticism di- rected against its latest mili- tary foray into Syria.

The United States and the European Union, Turkey’s most important partners in the West, are considering economic sanctions against Ankara and political leaders for what they see as a move that could hurt civil- ians, further destabilise Syria and weaken the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS).

US Defence Secretary Mark Esper “strongly encouraged Turkey to dis- continue actions in north-eastern Syria,” the Pentagon said. Esper warned that the incursion could have “serious consequences” for Ankara. US Treasury Secretary Ste- ven Mnuchin warned Turkey that it could “open the gates” to flood Eu- rope with Syrian refugees if they called Turkey’s action an occupa- tion.

EU Council President Donald Tusk rejected Erdogan’s statement and called it attempted “blackmail.”

An EU meeting, scheduled for October 17, is to include discussions on entities that do business of Turkey’s leadership, including Turkish Erdogan, and impose sanc- tions on those that do business with Turkey’s military until Ankara withdraws from Syria.

The Netherlands and Norway, NATO partners of Turkey, suspend- ed weapons exports to Turkey in protest against the incursion.

In the United States, a bipartisan group of senators introduced legis- lation that would freeze all US assets of Turkey’s leadership, including Turkish Erdogan, and impose sanc- tions on entries on entities that do business with Turkey’s military until Ankara withdraws from Syria.

EU President Donald Tusk rejected Erdogan’s statement and called it attempted “blackmail.”

Ankara argues that the move into Syria is an act of self-defence aimed at pushing militants linked to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a group internationally recognised as a ter- rorist group, from its southern bor- der.

New wars. Soldiers and military vehicles at a Turkish staging area in the Turkish town of Alakale along the border with the Syrian town of Tal Abyad.

Independent cinema blossoms in Egypt

Hassan Abdel Zahir

Cairo

When Nveen Shalaby started making films, she was on a shoe- string budget and had no time to use a simple video camera she had saved for months to buy.

More than a decade later, she has made significant progress and has no trouble producing films that in- volve the attention of both local and international audiences.

“There are a large number of agencies and institutions ready to bankroll independent film-mak- ing,” Shalaby said.

Shalaby, in her early arts, has directed 120 films, including 15 in- dependent ones. Many of her in- dependent films have won awards at local and international film festi- vals.

Behind her success, she said, is the growing space independent cinema is occupying on Egypt’s ar- tistic stage.

Known as the “Hollywood of the East,” Egypt’s film scene is turn- ing to independent works at a time when traditional studio films are having trouble increasing produc- tion, keeping high artistic stand- ards and reaching the public.

Independent films are attractive because they touch on thorny social topics that mainstream films often avoid.

Depending on simple cinema equipment and low budgets, inde- pendent filmmakers are filling in the void, despite the funding chal- lenges and licensing problems they face.

Much of their success is likely due to a change in public mood, critics said. A decade ago, few audi- ences were interested in anything “independent” but now the label draws viewers.

“There go to a cinema theatre to watch an independent film know they are going to see something dif- ferent,” said film critic Nader Ahy.

Independent films are attractive because they are known to chal- leng the thematic and structural rules of studio cinema, touching on taboos and tackling the social topics that mainstream films often avoid.

By the same token, these films at- tain a success in the art world when traditional studio films can evade state control, unlike stu- dio cinema, which is more strenu- ously monitored by the govern- ment.

While independent films are only screened by a small number of chain cinemas, their content is having a big effect on society. Film critics said it is “just too is it still early to say that independ- ent cinema has reached the level of competing with studio cinema” but that it is “well on the road to getting there.”

(All version of this article appears on www.thearabweekly.com)

Hassan Abdel Zahir is a Can- toon-based contributor to The Arab Weekly.
Turkey warned to expect ‘Pyrrhic victory’ through Syria intervention

Possible fallout from Syrian incursion:

• Might unleash new conflicts, revive ISIS from its ashes.
• Possibility of US and EU sanctions, growing international outcry.
• More displacement of Syrian population.
• Boost support and legitimacy for YPG and its mother organisation, the Kurdish Workers’ Party.

Turkish assault displaced 100,000 people, UN says

Cover Story

Turkey’s military intervention in Syria is unlikely to produce the political results sought by Ankara and could trigger new conflicts in the region, analysts said. Ankara said it sent its troops into north-eastern Syria to drive the Syrian-Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia from the border area and to prepare the creation of a “security zone” to resettle millions of Syrian refugees.

“We take this step to eradicate the terrorist organisation from the region and lay the groundwork for peace,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. Turkey said it wants to end the threat posed to its national security by the YPG’s presence along its southern border but insists it has no intention of holding Syrian territory permanently.

The government in Ankara has not spelt out how this can be achieved and has given no clear time frame for the operation. Turkey has been occupying patches of Syrian territory west of the current area of fighting for more than three years since earlier cross-border actions against the YPG.

Critics said the Turkish move against the YPG – a group that has been a crucial US ally in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) but is seen as a terrorist group by Ankara – is likely to result in additional foreign policy headaches for Ankara.

In addition, the intervention could provide ISIS with breathing room and the chance for a new uprising months after it lost the last territory of its “caliphate.”

Shortly after the start of Operation Peace Spring, Turkey was facing the possibility of US and EU sanctions. Erdogan also said it would not pay for the construction of housing for returning refugees in the proposed “security zone,” a project expected to cost at least $3 billion.

While Turkey’s modern army enjoys a clear military advantage over the YPG, that does not guarantee overall success. Turkish journalist Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in a column for the T24 news portal: “I can say even now that this will be a Pyrrhic victory.” Yilmaz wrote. He pointed out that the intervention, Turkey’s third in Syria since 2016, had been condemned around the world. Yilmaz added the incursion would hand the YPG and its parent organisation, the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), which is regarded as a terrorist group by Turkey and the West, “foreign support on a scale they couldn’t even dream of” in normal times and give them legitimacy as a player in northern Syria.

Tensions between Turkey and the United States soared as a result of the incursion. In recent years, the YPG provided ground troops for the US-led international campaign against ISIS in Syria. In return, the Kurdish militia received US protection to build a self-rule region along the Turkish border, much to Ankara’s anger.

The fighting raised the spectre of a military confrontation between NATO allies Turkey and

Erdogan and the making of

Keenly aware of this, Erdogan adopted a strategy of taking extraordinary measures. The Kurdish issue, deeply entwined with the Syria crisis, now seems to be his favourite. The strategy helps Erdogan in three ways domestically: First, it weakens the anti-Erdogan coalition, particularly putting pressure on the nationalist opposition IYI Party. A tense atmosphere regarding the Kurdish issue is likely to push the IYI closer to Erdogan’s position. An escalated crisis over the Kurdish issue could even change the position of the secular main opposition Republican People’s Party, which has been reaching out to the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP).

The aftermath of the Turkish operations is the more worrying aspect.

The second and more critical effect is structural. Erdogan has benefited from the polarisation of politics along the Islam versus secularism fault line. He knows that a political fault line over the Kurdish problem might also help him. Erdogan could convert tension

Thomas Seibert
Istanbul

Turkey’s deadly assault against Kurdish positions in north-eastern Syria has forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes, the United Nations said. Shortly after the start of Operation Peace Spring, Turkey was facing the possibility of US and EU sanctions. Erdogan also said it would not pay for the construction of housing for returning refugees in the proposed “security zone,” a project expected to cost at least $3 billion.

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Viewpoint

Gokhan Bacik

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is fighting for his own political survival by beginning a war in Syria with the Kurds. Escalating tension in Syria is the only option Erdogan has because he is no longer able to win support through peaceful means, such as a building the economy, providing welfare, the rule of law and a free society.

In the last three years, Erdogan has attempted to regain support with extraordinary economic measures, such as the distribution of cheap credit and aggressive public infrastructure investment. Though some of those populist tactics worked for a while, none provided a solution to structural economic problems such as unemployment and inflation.

Erdogan’s economic failures cost him this year’s mayoral elections in Istanbul, Ankara and other big cities, suggesting he might lose a general election.

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Turkish Incursion

As they rock Syrian boat, Erdogan and Trump ignites consequences

With the Turkish military incursion, the Syrian plot is made even thicker. We owe the sharp escalation to two entirely unprepared acts. US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Erdogan’s military action against the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain soon after the US withdrawal from the area. This means that the immediate threat of renewed attacks against northern Syria to leave, a decision that is not a matter of concern for US President Donald Trump, in his apparent ignorance of the foreign and security policies, had not paid attention to the decision that his jihadist allies will have a say in the future in Syria’s future.

Erdogan, an Erdogan in the game, Erdogan is back in the game, with the same playbook as a sandbag.

Erdogan had his way and used his diplomatic efforts to isolate Syria from its allies. This is a Turkish journalist and regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.

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Over the Kurdish problem into a new line of polarisation through which they can consolidate a large constituency.

Turkish armed forces and Kurdish and Arab parties, to support the Kurds.

The positioning of major powers in the Middle East will force regional powers in the UN Security Council, coupled with the rather mild initial reactions from the European Union and statements from Erdogan’s aides, indicates that the massive cross-border operation, which could be a probable outcome, might lead to further consequences. Already a Turkish limited operation in the area and time.

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Tunisia faces uphill task forcing stable government after polls

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunisia

The Islamist Ennahda Movement won first place in Tunisia’s parliamentary elections on October 13, according to official results. However, the outcome of the vote could leave Tunisia at a political impasse that hampers efforts to fashion a stable government to overcome its economic crisis and streamline a political system widely seen as cumbersome.

The turnout of 41.4%, versus 65% in the parliamentary elections, 36% of voters were women and only 16 more than the barest majority in the Tunisian population of 11.5 million.

A stable government needs a minimum of two-thirds of the 217 seats, making a potential coalition of 125 seats, counting Ennahda’s 52, sufficient to form a government. However, the country’s economic crisis and streamline a political system widely seen as cumbersome.

The political landscape is complex with a mixture of Islamist, secular and left-wing parties, whose policies differ on the role of government and the role of Islam in political life.

Ennahda, which is led by Rached Ghannouchi, is a moderate Islamist party that supports Western values and has a track record of promoting democracy and human rights.

On the other hand, the secular opposition, led by Kais Saied, a constitutional law professor, has called for a technocratic government and has criticized Ennahda’s past as a party of corruption and a lack of accountability.

The elections were seen as a turning point in the country’s political history, with the possibility of a change in government and a shift towards a more democratic and inclusive political system.

However, the political landscape remains complex and fragmented, with parties and factions vying for power and influence.

The current political situation in Tunisia is a reflection of the region’s broader challenges, including economic hardship, political instability, and the need to address the needs of young people and women in particular.

The country is also facing external pressures, including sanctions from the international community for its human rights record.

The government’s ability to address these challenges will be crucial to the country’s long-term stability and development.
Tunisia's parliamentary elections appear to have accomplished their goal of providing the country with a clear path to mend divisions and promote the kind of strong leadership that it needs to address lingering crises, social and security concerns.

Instead, low voter turnout and an increasingly fragmented political landscape have soured the mood and raised questions about how Tunisia will cope with the challenges ahead, analysts said.

“We are faced with three main problematic issues in the election process, a parliament that is too fragmented to function properly and the rise of radicalism that is affecting figures who could pose a threat to the country’s democratic transition,” said political activist Yamine Ben Salem.

Though EU observers hailed the October 6 polls as “orderly and free,” the Independent Tunisian associations said voting had been marked by serious irregularities and poor oversight by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE).

The Tunisian Association for Integrity and Democracy (ATID) and the independent election observatory pointed out flaws in the registration process, violations at voting centres and observations’ exclusion from some counting procedures that they said raised questions about the process.

There were also concerns about interference, which was 20% lower than in 2014 polls.

The watchdog organisation I-watch said Ennahda was the only party that had broken campaign finance laws in the parliamentary polls, exceeding the limit by 40% in the Tunis District 1.

Many, including ATID Vice-President Bassem Matar, pointed the finger at the ISIE, saying the body failed to effectively mobilise voters and prepare the country for a flawed process meant Tunisia’s democratic transition. “We are faced with three main issues, the ISIE probably won’t take the violations into consideration, estimating in the end that such violations did not affect the results. Whether the violations affect the process or not, we are asking the ISIE for more transparency and for rendering all violations public,” Matar said.

On the day of the legislative elections in the country, we were not able to reach the ISIE or any of its members, starting from 8 in the morning, when we began receiving reports about violations in different voting centres. We witnessed the massive distribution of small clips, bearing lists’ numbers and names, in front of polling centres.

“Some supporters of Ennahda and lists’ members, for example, were present in voting centres and were able to participate in total violation of the electoral law. In some cases, the ISIE intervened. In other cases, there was no action at all,” he added.

“Some observers said Ennahda and lists’ members were present, in front of the polling centres, and were able to participate in total violation of the electoral law. In some cases, the ISIE intervened. In other cases, there was no action at all,” he added.

“ISIE as a committee has been infiltrated by some political actors. When you hire 70,000 volunteers and train them for only three days, how do you expect to scrutinise their performance later?” he asked on Tunisian television channel elfihawe etounsi.

“They want to preserve what they see as the future political stability in Tunisia and the unique model of democracy in the Arab world, even if this model is flawed,” Ben Salem said.

“The post-election period will be challenging and marred by tensions and divisions. What happens next? That remains to be seen,” she said.

Iman Zayat is Managing Editor of The Arab Weekly.

**Fragmented landscape. Members of the Independent High Authority for Elections announce the preliminary results of the Tunisian parliamentary elections, October 9.**

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**Why Tunisia’s parliament is more powerful than presidency**

The Arab Weekly staff

Since Tunisia’s independence in 1956, political power has historically been concentrated in the hands of the presidency.

However, following the 2011 uprisings, Tunisians opted for a mixed parliamentary-presidential system with the presidency’s role largely confined to foreign affairs and defense.

Under the terms of the 2014 constitution, the 217-seat Assembly of the Representatives of the People is charged with nominating a prime minister, who is tasked with forming a government and running day-to-day affairs.

In recent years, disagreements between the late President Beji Caid Essebsi and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed led to policy initiatives being delayed and fuelled resentment of the “hybrid” system.

Some politicians in Tunisia say the mixed parliamentary-presidential constitution does not provide a foundation for the kind of strong leadership that is necessary to overcome the country’s problems.

Caid Essebsi had voiced such concerns. Before the first round of presidential elections in 2014, Tunisian Defence Minister Abderrahman Zbidi called for a referendum to amend the constitution.

Zbidi was not alone in that ambition. Other candidates explicitly campaigned to increase the powers of the presidency. Among them was Ali Mosawi, the leader of the Free Destourian Party.
Editorial

Corruption ravages Levant’s hearts and minds

It is no secret that corruption is rampant in Iraq. The result is the eviction of business integrity and fighting corruption will mean a great deal for the future of the country.

editorial.replace their optimism with cynicism and elites can sap the confidence of the young and bureaucracies even more bloated and further opportunity, especially when it comes to the activism and discrimination at the expense of fair sanctioned quotas, based on sectarian, partisan discrimination.

The cost of corruption can also be measured in terms of business opportunities. It is no coincidence that corruption thrives in economic systems that are burdened with red tape. Bribe, both petty and substantial, are normalised in environments where complex bureaucratic restrictions are a daily challenge. Genuine administrative reform—not political lip service—can do wonders to combat corruption but it can also draw investors and motivate young entrepre

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development stated: “strengthening business integrity and fighting corruption will be essential for establishing investors’ confidence and levelling the playing field for doing business.”

Of course, corruption also has its political side, discrediting governments in their efforts to cure endemic social ills that can even provide public services. Corrupt politicians destroy trust in government and in the possibility of citizen participation in public affairs such as in electoral processes.

The growing awareness among the region’s youth of public integrity and fighting corruption coupled with their frustration over the limited opportunities that await them after a wave of destabilising. Social media can boost that kind of awareness and shed light on abuses.

Corruption manifests both in individuals and in the systems in which they operate—sanctioned quotas, based on sectarian, partisan or regionalism. Corruption enables nepotism and discrimination at the expense of fair opportunity, especially in the hiring of civil servants. Such practices can make bureaucracies even more bloated and further delegitimise governments.

Loss of trust in governments and political elites can sap the optimistic—and replace their optimism with cynicism and desperation.

Trump’s Iraq war tweets are too little, too late

President Donald Trump posted on Twitter October 19 that US involvement in the Middle East wars, including its mass invasion of Iraq, was “the worst decision ever made.”

“GOING INTO THE MIDDLE EAST IS THE WORST DECISION EVER MADE IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY.” It was the “wrong decision ever made.”

“THERE WERE NO NUNS.” Now we are slowly & carefully bringing our great soldiers & military home. Our focus is on THE USA IS GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE.”

The problem with Trump’s reassessment of the US rationale for the invasion of Iraq is that it comes 16 years and thousands of casualties too late.

That war continues to carry a huge cost for Iraq beyond the body count. Whatever the preferences that led to the US failure to prevent the war, the US invaded and displaced the people of the region.

Iraqis, too, are entitled to focusing on “the big picture” and are looking forward to the day when their country “is great again.” The lingering effect of the invasion keeps that day removed from their sight.

The rise of populism

Haitham El-Zobaidi

Arab populism seems well established, easy to understand but in many ways also incomprehensible.

The task of this intellectual system is to give us a road map to this solution. If in the meantime, the price to pay for this solution was the total disruption of the social or political orders, it is still worth pursuing because the result is divine and it is beckoning us.

And that is what happened. It started with the Iran-Iraq war, then Arabs and Islamists attempted to fight in Afghanistan; then we had the invasion of Kuwait followed quickly by invasion of Iraq. These wars were the prelude to the all-out Arab civil wars.

Many wars are raging right now backed up by an even greater number of cold wars. The biggest winner of all the current wars is populist rhetoric armed with religion. For decades, Arab ears and hearts have been bombarded with this rhetoric, which has resulted in the evication of Islam. That leads us to the present moment.

Except for a couple of modest and impressive attempts, there has been no Arab intellectual one. It did not last long and was fatally wounded in the 1990s war and then died with what was buried in Baghda in 2003.

The Islamist alternative has been to use us since the day the Ottoman Army was ousted from our countries. Still, calls for establishing a caliphate or an ideological front were to no avail and took on different bases such as the one of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism and Khomeinism, while, in reality, they are all similar in their core.

They all say that the solution to our problems is right under our noses but we fail to see it.

Dr Haitham El-Zobaidi is an Arabic writer based in London. He is the Executive Editor of Al Arab Publishing Group.
An Emirati opportunity for Lebanon

Khairallah Khairallah

Perhaps Lebanon’s geographic position is what motivates the United Arab Emirates to support Lebanon in the delicate circumstances it is going through.

The UAE Arab Emirates wants to help Lebanon. This is the official message that emerged from the visit of Lebanon Prime Minister Saad Hariri to the UAE at the head of a large delegation of cabinet ministers, senior officials, businessmen and representatives of Lebanese civil society concerned with reviving the Lebanese economy.
The United Arab Emirates has always been supportive of Lebanon and the interests of thousands of Lebanese citizens who live in the Emirates. Whenever humanitarian and political circumstances in Lebanon called for it, the United Arab Emirates has not hesitated, since the time of Shishakli Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, to render a helping hand. What better proof of that than the United Arab Emirates’ participation in the operations of southern Lebanon many hospitals and clinics built by the United Arab Emirates in Lebanon? These initiatives are not limited to any discrimination by the United Arab Emirates towards Lebanon community the other or in favor of any region at the expense of another. In 1976, the United Arab Emirates participated in the Arab deterrent forces sent to Lebanon by the Arab League to ensure the country’s security and stability after the war. It was then that we witnessed how those Arab forces were replaced by Syrian troops. Lebanon then began its occupation of Lebanon. People may recall the United Arab Emirates’ role in supporting the Lebanese Army in the battle against the drug and arms cells in the summer of 2007 against the “Fatah al-Islam” gang sent by Syria. The United Arab Emirates takes partial credit for the Lebanese Army’s victory in that battle and for understanding the dangers represented by having a Palestinian camp in southern Lebanon rebel against Lebanon authorities. The involvement of Syrian and Iranian outfits, and even Hezbollah, have contributed to Lebanon’s national security.

The visits of CEO of Abu Dhabi development company Mubadala, a financial institution, to the UAE and other Emirati businesspeople who are repeatedly visiting Lebanon, are also tangible proofs of how the United Arab Emirates wants to help Lebanon.

The situation in Lebanon is of great concern to the United Arab Emirates. The Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. The UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. The UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears. Although the UAE Arab Emirates understands that the political and economic crisis are what the situation in Lebanon bears.

What could Erdogan have possibly offered Trump in return for the promise of a tactical US retreat from the very areas of northern Syria from where he is trying to launch his invasion? The US President appears not to miss any international opportunity and is willing to strike any severancy over its periphery. Perhaps it is the financial aspect that is part of what is motivating the United Arab Emirates to support Lebanon in the delicate circumstances it is going through. It would be hard to overlook an Emirati financial contribution to countering Iran’s expansionist policies in the region.

Hariri’s visit to Abu Dhabi was a valuable opportunity to address the challenges created by Hariri’s defeat in Lebanon and prohibit Lebanon’s involvement in the region. He talks about the challenges confronting Lebanon in the context of the country’s internal and external situation.

Khairallah Khairallah is a Lebanese writer.
The United States’ Incursion in Syria

Kyle Orton

The US and Turkey’s Incursion

There is no need for the US military leadership to override a Trump veto. At a time when Trump needs more supporters at home, he is squandering his political capital.

Kyle Orton is a Middle East analyst and freelance journalist, and a lecturer at Boston University and King’s College London.
Lebanon hopes on Emirati investment to solve crisis
The Arab Weekly staff
Beirut
The United Arab Emirates has become a topic of conversation in the country recently, following a meeting between Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan and Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Abu Dhabi. The Emirates barred its citizens from travelling to Lebanon in 2020 due to the economic crisis and Riad El Khoury, a former Lebanese ambassador to UAE, had repeatedly voiced concern about the political situation in Lebanon, which is in a war-torn Syria and is home to the heavily armed Hezbollah group backed by Iran. Hariri, who led a Lebanese delegation that included six ministers and other top officials, said the United Arab Emirates promised investments and financial aid to his deeply indebted country, though work remains to finalise the agreement.

“Through the Emirates, we agreed to sign agreements with investments in some banks in the central bank. The Emirates promised investments and financial assistance,” Hariri was quoted as saying in an official transcript of his comments in Abu Dhabi.

Lebanon is a failed state and the economic catastrophe that is engulfing the country is a direct result of the political malfeasance of the ruling elite. The ongoing protests that have gripped the country since October 2019 have been driven by anger at the government’s failure to address the worsening economic crisis, which has pushed the country to the brink of default on its sovereign debt.

The economic situation is desperate, with the Lebanese pound tumbling against the US dollar and the currency rush escalating. The government has imposed capital controls, including a freeze on bank deposits, to prevent capital flight, but this has only temporarily slowed the decline in the currency’s value.

The Emirates’ willingness to invest in Lebanon comes as a relief to the Lebanese leadership, which has been struggling to secure international support for its economic reform plan. The Lebanese government has been working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to design a reform package that would unlock badly needed foreign assistance, but the talks have been stalled due to disagreements over the scope and timing of the reforms.

However, the promise of Emirati investment comes with conditions, and the UAE’s past history of political interference in Lebanon raises questions about the nature of the proposed investment. The UAE has a history of intervening in the region, often to pursue its strategic interests, and has previously supported political parties and groups that have been involved in the Lebanese conflict.

While the Emirates’ offer of investment is welcome, it is crucial that the Lebanese government ensure that any aid is tied to concrete reforms that address the root causes of the country’s economic crisis. The government must also demonstrate its commitment to implementing the necessary reforms, as the international community has expressed concern that the country is on the brink of default and may require additional support.

The United Arab Emirates’ promise of investment is a sign of growing interest in Lebanon’s economy, but it is essential that the government seize this opportunity to secure lasting solutions for the crisis. The Emirates’ investment is a small step towards stabilising the country, but it is only a stopgap measure that must be accompanied by comprehensive reforms to address the underlying causes of the crisis.
Cairo mulls options after Nile dam talks fail

Amr Emam

The Egyptian Ministry of Irrigation described a recently concluded round of talks between Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian officials regarding a massive Nile River dam as a failure. The ministry said two days of negotiations in early October between representatives of the three countries could not find a way forward during their meeting as the Egyptian and Ethiopian water rights.

Numerous foreign nationals were arrested during protests in large cities and other sites around Egypt in recent days, according to observers. Many of the arrests have been accused of being members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement or of being supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.

Claims of coerced confessions raise doubts about official accounts

Special Correspondent

Cairo

Foreign nationals arrested during recent protests in Egypt have faced coerced confessions, according to observers. Many of the arrests have been accused of being members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement or of being supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.

Serious revelations. Jordanian citizens Abdel Rahman Ali Hussein and Thaer Matar, who were detained during the September-care anti-government protests, arrive at Queen Alia International Airport after being released by Egyptian authorities.

A slow process. Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam under construction in Guba Woreda, Benishangul Gumuz Region, Ethiopia.

September 26.

The impression in Cairo is that the talks would drag on until the situation reached a point that Egypt would have to accept whatever Ethiopia gives it when it starts dam operations in 2022.

All Nile Valley countries have a right to economic development and prosperity," the White House said in a statement. "The administration calls on all sides to put forth good faith efforts to reach an agreement that preserves those rights, while simultaneously respecting each other's Nile water equities."

Ethiopia, which accused Egypt of disrupting the talks, said bringing in new partners would indeed extend the negotiations.

The Ethiopian Foreign Ministry said the water ministers of the three countries could not find a way forward during their meeting "due to the predetermined path of delegation of Ethiopia to make the process fail." The Ethiopian Foreign Ministry said technical consultations between the three countries must continue because they are "the only option" for solving differences.

However, Egypt has apparently lost confidence in negotiations with Ethiopia and the impression in Cairo is that the talks would drag on until the situation reached a point that Egypt would have to accept whatever Ethiopia gives it when it starts dam operations in 2022.

"This is why Egypt has to follow all political, diplomatic and legal channels to defend its water rights," said Ayman Shabana, a political science professor at the Institute for African Studies at Cairo University. "It should resort to the UN Security Council and also the International Court of Justice because this dam is a make-or-break issue for its people."

Egyptian officials have arrested foreign nationals, including Jordanian and Sudanese nationals, cast doubt on Egyptian accusations against protesters and raised questions about security measures in place.

Since September 20, Egyptian authorities have arrested approximately 2,000 demonstrators and activism groups, accusing them of rioting and staging unlicensed assemblies. Many detainees were charged with public incitement and were taken into custody.

Several of those arrested were filmed by Egyptian police confessing to having joined protests from the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood movement to denounce Morsi. However, after some of the foreigners returned to their home countries, they said the "confessions" had been coerced after they had been kept in police custody for days.

"The legal rule is that suspects should not be coerced into confessing crimes," said rights activist Khaled Emam. "Most of those who make confessions in police custody do this for fear of torture."

The prosecution is under obligation to investigate the cases of all the people who appeared on TV in the past to confess perpetrating crimes," Emam added.

Egyptian authorities have not released an official statement regarding the allegations of coercion made by foreign nationals but a retired police general accused the foreigners of lying about their participation in protests.

Revelations by several foreigners, including Jordanian and Sudanese nationals, cast doubt on Egyptian accounts of protesters.

General Mamonoud al-Kidwani, a former assistant to the Egyptian Interior minister, said foreigners directly participated in protests and others were arrested while filming demonstrations from rooftops near Tahrir Square.

"It is normal for them to deny the charges levied against them," Kidwani said. "Investigators always take all the necessary legal measures before they refer suspects to the prosecution, which also revises the same measures to ensure that arrests are done in a lawful manner."

Protests broke out in Egypt in September after opposition activists Mohamed Ali, who lives in self-imposed exile in Spain, accused Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of squandering public funds to construct luxury palaces and called for the public to demand his removal.

Ali, who previously worked with the Egyptian Army, also accused the military of manipulating the economy.

Egypt's Islamist opposition, including the Muslim Brotherhood, which has many senior leaders living in Turkey and Qatar, capitalised on the public discontent to fuel the anti-Sisi sentiment.
Michel Cousins
Tunis

International efforts to resolve the Libyan conflict have been in place for some months, and the latest round of talks brings the conflict to a head. While the会议 was supposed to take place in October, it has been delayed. This is due to various factors, including the political situation in Libya, and the lack of progress in negotiations. Despite these delays, the meeting was held in Tripoli on October 8.

The meeting was concerned with the Libyan issue with the aim of stopping the flow of arms to the region. It was agreed that there could be no military solution to the conflict and that there had to be a return to the political process. The meeting was also concerned with stopping the arms trade in the region.

Given the growing international condemnation of the Syrian operation, Sarraj said all countries concerned with the Libyan issue “with- out any exclusion” had to be invited to the conference. The meeting was concerned with stopping the arms trade in the region.

That is particularly important. About five months ago, the security directorate and the military opera- tions room in Tripoli dropped their allegiance to the GNA and said they were taking their orders from the LNA. There have been reports that they were considering switching back to the GNA and had asked for guarantees that they would not face reprisals if they did.

The capture of Azizphone by the LNA would stop any such move. On October 7, there were reports that the LNA forces attacked LNA, even downing an LNA aircraft and seizing it. There have been reports that LNA soldiers and killed Russian mercenaries fighting with the LNA. The LNA counted with claims that it was advancing on Tripoli and had surrounded Azizphone. However, with the Berlin conference delayed, the pressure on LNA Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar to advance is reduced. Turkish support, though, remains existential for the GNA. Because of it, opposition to almost anything Turkey does is an automatic re- sponse of the LNA and the other au- thorities in eastern Libya.

After the French-based govern- ment decided last April to recognise the 1957 Armenian genocide, the Tobruk-based House of Representa- tives, not infrequently noted for its sup- port for the Kurds, condemned the Turkish offensive in northern Syria. Given the growing international condemnation of the Syrian operation, Sarraj may not want to be seen as wholly tied to Turkey but he has little option.

Michel Cousins is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.
I blir啖哈独Ưknai baih uii icka di，na i icka ddi da i ci mi ddi na i gi. Saleh ci a lek icka di da i ci lek baih uii icka di da i ci ni g. "The southern armed forces scored a series of victories over the Houthis in Dhale and they have penetrated deep into the border and prevent heavy artillery from reaching Houthis militias that have been targeting residential neighbourhoods. Southern forces reportedly inflicted heavy losses on pro-Houthi elements, including killing prominent leaders. Saleh added that there were efforts to revive the economy and provide basic services, cultural and sports activities and all that enhances the chances of a normal life."

He said the establishment of the southern security services was carried out through a comprehensive military plan in which the Southern Coalition forces and the STC participated. The STC’s structure was established in parallel with a military one consisting of the southern resistance forces and Security Belt and Elite forces, in addition to the council’s efforts on the diplomatic level that have enabled it to claim a significant foothold in the southern governo-...
Baghdad protests taper down but causes for renewed flare-up remain

Mamoon Abbasabi

London

Massive anti-government protests in Baghdad and across Iraq's Shia majority provinces have wound down but the grievances that led to them remain. Streets in Baghdad are no longer swarmed with demonstrators into the streets have yet to be addressed, threatening to spark renewed unrest.

More than 110 people, mainly protesters but including security forces, were killed and some 6,000 demonstrators were reportedly injured since the unrest began October 1. Demonstrators called for an end to corruption and chronic unemployment as well as an improvement of basic services and the standard of living. Some protesters demanded the resignation of the government's caretaker called by influential cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi refused to step down but oversaw a minor cabinet reshuffle and said there would be government reforms. His promises of more subsidies, social housing and employment opportunities for young people were viewed by observers as too little.

Abdul-Mahdi vowed to open an investigation into the killing of protesters. He said those killed, whether protesters or members of the security forces, were “innocent” and that the families will receive financial compensation. Some families were mourning over their death starting October 12.

Abdul-Mahdi's government was criticized by protesters who did not appear to end their two consecutive weeks of demonstrations. The top Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. In his Friday sermon October 11, Sistani gave authorities two weeks to announce the findings of the government investigation into protest-related deaths.

“The government is responsible when, under the eye of law enforcement, protesters who have faced illegal arrest and media and were beaten or attacked to terrorism were sitting on the employees,” said Sistani. Authorities must act to “put an end to threats, beatings, abductions, sniper fire and violence by those who believe they can act with total impunity,” said the cleric’s representative.

Video footage released by activists showed snipers firing directed towards protesters who did not appear to pose threats to security forces. Witnesses said protesters were attacked by masked men believed to be members of the country's Iran-backed militias.

“Trapped beating, unemploy- ment, flawed institutions and poor public services linger in Iraq and have provoked protests since 2011, including notably in Basra in 2018,” said Muqtada al-Sadr, a researcher at the University of Exeter's Strategy and at the “2019 World Press Free-

Viewpoint

Opening Iraq-Syria border gives Iran yet another advantage

Talha Abdulrazaq

Eight years after it was closed, Iraq has opened its Quim border crossing with Syria in an attempt to revive trade and bridge the gap between the two neighbouring countries.

Islamic State (ISIS) extremists had held the area around the desert border crossing for a decade ago but with their defeat and the ever growing dominance of Iran-backed but Iraq-sanc-

The move, which Baghdad had feared would lead to a flood of ISIS fighters, has been welcomed by the US and the US-led coalition, which had previously said it would move on with its plan to make the desert border crossing half a kilometer near the Syrian town of Albu-Kamal the new border between the two countries.

With this in mind, Syria directly supports terrorists in Iraq in coordination with Iran to the detriment of the Iraqi people, first and foremost, and the occu-

ting US forces second.

What has fundamentally changed is to pressure the United States by sealing its military power in Iraq so any idea of “regime change” would be forced from Washington's strategic calculus.

However, considering the As-

sad regime's proximity to Iran's Shi'ite militant groups, it seems apparent that the Syrian regime has been marked with the Islamic State and a new force called “the Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF), which is supported by Iran, has been formed.

The SDF was formed after the recapture of Iraqi lands from the Islamic State (ISIS) and its members are said to be dominated by Iranian-backed but Iraq-sanc-

Sistani “demands that the govern-

ment investigate to find out which ministries gave orders to shoot pro-

testers, whatever their affiliation,” said the cleric’s representative.

Opening Iraq-Syria border gives Iran yet another advantage

Iraq under fire for attacks on media

The Arab Weekly Staff

London

Iraqi authorities came under criticism for attacks and threats to journalists, bloggers and media outlets reporting on mass anti-government demonstra-

tions in coordination with Iran to the downfall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, the new Baghdad merely plays a passive role.Because Iran is the main supporter of the US troops, it continues to pressure the United States to continue with its plans to make the desert border crossing a border crossing.

National and regional television stations were ransacked by armed, masked men on October 5. Affected offices included the Baghdad bureau of Al Dijla channel, the National Radio and TV, Al-Nahdah and Assyri-

A source in a Middle East media company said the government in Baghdad has made moves to look into the matter at the request of the US authorities.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi said that attacks against the television station offices were ransacked by armed, masked men, whom wiring linked to supporting Al-Qae-

da extremists in the region.

With the Iraqi side of the border being secured by the PMF and the Syrian side being secured by an enormous Iranian military presence at a new base at Albu-

kamal, there can be no doubt that the shots shot at journalists and media outlets in Baghdad are related to the conflict between the US and Iran.

Iraqi authorities, including some who worked at Huwa Baghdad and Al Rasheed TV, said they were threatened by unidentified people via telephone asking them to change their editorial line.

Iraqi President Barham Salih condemned the attacks and Al Arabiya said it has received “assurances” from Iraq’s Prime Minister Adel Ab-

tid-Mahdi that attacks against the television station's office would be investigated.

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the top official of the United Nations in Iraq, said she was “shocked at the vandalism” and “informed me of the attacks and threatened about our work.”

Amnesty International blasted the “sinister campaign of harass-

ment, intimidation and attacks on peaceful journalists, activists and protesters by the authorities.”

Iraq ranks 156th out of the coun-

dom Index” by Reporters Without Borders, which accused security forces of “disproportionate and un-

warranted restriction of the right to inform.”

"Instead of banning all journal-

istic activities, the security forces and local authorities have a duty to guarantee the safety of journalists so that they can do their reporting," she added.

Cyberspace NGOs NetzBlacks said the Iraqi government imposed a near total telecommunication shutdown in most regions, se-

verely limiting press coverage and transparency around the ongoing crisis.

National and regional television station offices were ransacked by armed, masked men on October 5.

“The disruption comes at a criti-

cal time when Iraqis need most a free press,” said NetBlocks.

Internet connections returned to normal the following hours on October 9. Journalists and activists used the time the internet access was avail-

able to upload videos of alleged po-

lice brutality during the protests.

Access to social media sites re-

main restricted.

Iraq
In the Middle East, Egypt-Israel ties stand out

The entirely new 21st-century agenda promises to define future ties between Israel and Egypt, leaving their unfinished business of the 20th century, foremost Palestine, as an artefact of history.

**Interview**

Why Raja Shehadeh sees hope for Palestinians despite current ‘disengagement’

Raja Shehadeh

Sharmila Devi

Egypt established the gold standard declared by Ahmed Khatib, former PLO chief negotiator. Ties with Washington remain critical to both Sai and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While each has a good relationship with the mercurial American president, Binyamin Netanyahu, both have a greater comfort with the next generation, foreign relations

"The high court in Israel has two sections: the section that deals with Palestinian issues in the region. There has been a total disengagement with politics and there's a move towards culture. It's quite amazing how much culture there is and how sophisticated people are becoming. Yet, it is a confusing time because when I was young it was clear: there was an occupation and we wanted to end the occupation and we saw signs of possibility for ending the occupation so it was clear. Now, with the Oslo agreements, there is much more complicated. They stay away from politics because they see no usefulness in being involved in politics.

"On the other hand, Israel has become a new breed in a sense. The appearance of the settler lobby and the settler lobby. I think their power came from observing the rules of the game as far as their project was concerned, not as far as their power in their midst but as far as enabling their projects not to be carried out and justifying everything in their own way under international law. Now this is breaking down.

"The court in Israel has two judges living in settlements and sometimes it's [legally] justifying what they do. It's not that anyone wants to use violence, but the country is powerful only as long as its legal system is intact and strong and otherwise it is breaking down in that sense."

**TAW:** What made you decide to describe the occupation that you grew up in, in your book “Ramallah, a city that is under siege”?

"A country is powerful only as long as its legal system is intact and strong and otherwise it is breaking down in that sense."

**Raja Shehadeh, lawyer and founder of the human rights organisation Raja Shehadeh, 68, studied law in New York.**

**TAW:** What hope do you have for the future?

"The entire new 21st-century agenda promises to define future ties between Israel and Egypt, leaving their unfinished business of the 20th century, foremost Palestine, as an artefact of history."

**Viewpoint**

In the Middle East, Egypt-Israel ties stand out

Geoffrey Aronson

It is arguably true that the Middle East, in modern times, has been so weak and has invited a target for foreign intervention. In the last generation, foreign powers have dominated the region. Turkey, Iran and France have played an outsized role in the destiny of millions across the Fertile Crescent. The system of states established after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire — from Iraq to Syria, Libya and Yemen — have a long history behind them. In the best of worlds, the balance of generations will be required to re-establish the sovereign power of states enveloped by crisis and foreign occupation.

The intimate relationship between Egypt and Israel stands as a critical exception to this trend of disillusion and imperialism.

At the heart of the Middle East, there are two strong states, former enemies now reconciled for almost half a century. Each has kept the overwhelming intervention of foreign states at bay. The intersecting strategic interests of Egypt and Israel have produced a powerful working alliance that stands alone in an otherwise tumultuous region whose weaknesses continue to tempt foreign intervention.

Who could have imagined such a thing? Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Gamal Abdel Nasser’s opposition leader, were deadlocked. The confidence might have been renewed with a new Israeli government made.

Raja Shehadeh (RS): “It doesn’t really matter because for both (Israeli) parties, the occupation, the conflict, how to end it and relations with the Palestinians are not an issue. They’re not on the agenda of the Israelis. Both sides are competing to show how much they can appease the settlers at the same time. I think Netanyahu is destroying Israel in so many ways, I think his presence has cast a dark shadow over everything. His removal would be welcome. There hasn’t been a happy day since he took over. Not that Gantz is much better.”

**TAW:** You write that your generation has failed to liberate Palestine and it is up to the next generation. How do you view young Palestinians?

"One of the motivations for setting was every time I came upon a certain checkpoint in the outskirts of the city. I was aware that somebody like my nephew, who is 23, can’t use except for what it is now and he doesn’t know what it was before. It’s the same with the Ofer prison (an Israeli jail near Ramallah), which used to be a beautiful place and where there were lots of plants growing there — tomatoes, cucumbers, delicious things."

"Also, the experience of the first intifada is 38 years, which is amazing and the second intifada is growing old. People don’t talk about it much and, if they do, they talk about it in a romantic way and young people are fed up with romanticism and they don’t want to hear any more.”

**TAW:** What hope do you have for the future?

"Both sides are competing to define future ties between Israel and Egypt, leaving their unfinished business of the 20th century, foremost Palestine, as an artefact of history."

**A shift from romanticism.** Raja Shehadeh, a Palestinian author, lawyer and human rights campaigner.

(Courtesy of Raja Shaheeh)
News & Analysis

Protests in Iraq could pose problems for Tehran

Thomas Seibert

Istanbul

The wave of deadly protests against corruption and foreign influence in Iraq could pose problems for neighboring Iran.

Iraq descended into violence when protests that began with demands for an end to rampant corruption and chronic unemployment escalated to calls for a complete overhaul of the political system. Official figures stated that violence in Baghdad and across southern Iraq killed more than 100 people, mostly protesters but also several police, with more than 6,000 others wounded. A tentative calm returned to the country ahead of Arbaeen, a major pilgrimage that sees millions of Shia Muslims walk to the holy city of Karbala, south of Baghdad. Nearly 2 million Iraqis took part last year. Tehran, this year, urged citizens to delay travel into Iraq because of the protest violence. Arbaeen begins October 19.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Centre, said the Iraqi protests were partly directed against the role Iran plays in the country. “This might complicate the continuation or expansion of Iran’s influence in Iraq,” Fathollah-Nejad said by phone. Iran, a predominantly Shia country with a Shia majority, pursues its interests in much smaller Iraq, which it can present as a “safe zone” in Syria, closed off to a Kurdish militia that will house some of Turkey’s 1.5 million Syrian refugees, became closer to realisation after the US military withdrawal from the war against the Islamic State, Gen. Ehsan Ghaderi, the former chief commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said. The plans are a part of Iran’s strategy to “strengthen its influence in Iraq, which is the country of its influence in the region,” Ghaderi mused about the psychological impact that the Islamic State, in comparison with which it can present itself as an ally of the civilised world.

Tehran is not likely to be concerned with the prospects for a small-scale revival of the Islamic State, in comparison with which it can present itself as an ally of the civilised world.

Ali Alfoneh

Iraq never objects to Trump when he is making a mistake

Turkey’s plan for a “safe zone” in Syria, closed off to a Kurdish militia that will house some of Turkey’s 1.5 million Syrian refugees, became closer to realisation after the US military withdrawal from the war against the Islamic State, Gen. Ehsan Ghaderi, the former chief commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said. The plans are a part of Iran’s strategy to “strengthen its influence in Iraq, which is the country of its influence in the region,” Ghaderi mused about the psychological impact that the Islamic State, in comparison with which it can present itself as an ally of the civilised world.

Tehran is not likely to be concerned with the prospects for a small-scale revival of the Islamic State, in comparison with which it can present itself as an ally of the civilised world.

All Alfoneh is a senior fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.
During eight months of massive street protests, one act of terrorism has occurred through bilateral country agreements. The police forces have ensured a free and fair poll, but independent observers to monitor the presidential poll, it should not happen. Besides, casting is forced to sing Gaid Salah’s song of resistance. Protesters in Algeria have shown a clear appetite for a change of their government. Since the EU Commission is working on the EU- Algeria Partnership Agreement, some of those who have been arrested are on hunger strike and Algerian National Radio journalists are striking to meet the requests of a large part of the Algerian public.

If the European Union fails to stand up for its principles at a time when growing repression is taking place, when some of those who have been arrested are on an hunger strike and Algerian National Radio journalists are striking to meet the requests of a large part of the Algerian public.

The European Union needs good relations with North African countries to help manage immigration flows and broaden security, two themes that feed into the rising tide of populist discourse. North African policy worthy of the name can be constructed without a dialogue of equals between major European countries – notably Spain, Italy, France and – and those of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. The EU-Maghreb partnership is a major turning point in Islamist terrorism and it is worth to be taken into account.

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As Iraqis protest Iran’s encroachment, US may have better opportunity at engaging Baghdad

Emily Przyborowski

Washington

Protests in Iraq have centred on Iranian influence in the country and may provide an opportunity for the United States with a “strategic opening,” experts said. Iran and Iraq are two nations whose hearts and souls are tied together through faith in God and love for Imam Hussein, a Shia saint, said a Irani government official. “The fact that the majority of these protesters are Shiites, many of whom are former soldiers, including some who fought against [the Islamic State] ISIS, must be of particular concern to Tehran,” she said.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recently tweeted: “Iran and Iraq are two nations whose hearts and souls are tied together through faith in God and love for Imam Hussein, a Shia saint.”

John C.K. Daly

An opportunity

President Donald Trump (R) and Iraqi President Barham Salih hold a meeting in New York, September 24. (AFP)

The protests in Iraq have been a response to the American forces being present in the country, as well as the American use of military bases in the region. However, the protests have been met with violence and repression, with many people being injured and killed. The protests have also been met with a crackdown by the government, with many people being arrested and detained.

The United States has been trying to engage with the government of Iraq, but has been met with a lack of cooperation. The US has been trying to work with the government of Iraq to address the issues of security, corruption, and the influence of Iran in the region. However, the government of Iraq has been slow to respond to the US’s calls for action.

The US has also been trying to work with the Iraqi protests, with some experts saying that the protests could be an opportunity for the US to engage with the government of Iraq. However, others say that the protests are too chaotic and violent to be useful for the US.

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Viewpoint

Russia deepens private military footprint in Libya, Africa

John C.K. Daly

Once the end of the Cold War, many countries have discovered the value of deploying private military companies (PMCs) to control some regions of the world. While Russia has deployed private military companies to Syria, the Central African Republic, and Africa, an interesting development concerns China and its growing presence in the region.

Russia’s growing presence in MENA and Africa is reaping financial rewards but is not without cost, as the Libyan fatalities attest.

The result of the increasing violence in Libya is that UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kate Gilmore warned that escalating clashes and a deepening humanitarian crisis in Libya are pushing the nation towards a return to the full-scale civil war that overthrew Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

PMCs have become an increasingly useful foreign policy tool for Russian President Vladimir Putin because they provide plausible deniability in foreign relations, particularly since PMCs are illegal in the Russian Federation. Wagner, Russia’s most high-profile mercenary organisation, is controlled by an oligarch named “Putin’s cook.”

In October 2018, the United States President Donald Trump announced an announcement about American forces being withdrawn from northern Syria, which began in October 2017, but is not without cost. Independent Russian media reports suggest that a Russian Wagner PMC mercenary was killed in a recent air strike in Libya during the Libyan National Army (LNA) offensive to capture Tripoli.

Wagner mercenaries provide logistical support for government forces as well as operate military drones for the LNA. The LNA controls the capital of the country away from the UN-recognised Government of National Accord. Western intelligence services estimate that several hundred Russian PMC mercenaries are present in Libya, says from those in Syria, and many are former soldiers with combat experience ranging from Chechnya to Donetek.

In the past 18 months, combat operations in Syria have diminished significantly, although the impact of US President Donald Trump’s early announcement about American forces being withdrawn from northern Syria is being seen as a serious problem for Iran. The fact that meddling targeted Saadi — who was perceived by Tehran as not having done enough to manage relations between the regime and Iraq and its vital ties to the United States with a “strategic opening,” experts said.

The Russian President Vladimir Putin critic Mikhail Khodorkovski published documents purportedly detailing Russia’s ambitions to turn both North and sub-Saharan Africa into a strategic hub by reducing Western influence there. The documents detail what Wagner PMCs have accomplished and plans to do in 13 African countries, including not only Libya but the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Sudan, Zimbabwe and South Africa as well. A month after Russia and Mozambique signed protocols, approximately 200 Wagner mercenaries arrived at a small airport in the Mozambique city of Quelimane.

The Russian government officially reported that the PMCs and “elite troops” would assist authorities in Cabo Delgado province combat Islamist terrorists who burn villages and arbitrarily execute residents.

Ever eager to provide a diplomatic fig leaf, Russia’s intervention followed a four-day state visit by Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi, the first by a Mozambican head of state to Russia since 1999, the year that the Soviet Union ended. During the visit, Nyusi signed several agreements covering issues from energy to military assistance.

Many African governments, from Libya to Mozambique, benefit from rampant corruption and rising extremism, have an asset to offer foreign governments providing assistance — raw materials. This “race for Africa” is evolving into a three-cornered affair, with China competing with the United States with a financial reward but not without cost, as the Libyan fatalities attest.

Russia’s growing presence in MENA and Africa is reaping financial rewards but is not without cost, as the Libyan fatalities attest.

John C.K. Daly is a Washington-based specialist on Russian and post-Soviet affairs.
**Economy**

**Viewpoint**

**Iran works to reroute oil exports away from Hormuz**

**Gareth Smyth**

Iran has embarked on a project to reroute some of its oil crude oil exports away from Hormuz, a strategic choke point for its Gulf neighbours that rely on the narrow waterway for their oil sales. Moving forward with a costly project to reroute oil exports is both a financial and security play for Tehran as it looks to maintain control of its exports and avoid sanctions that specifically target its oil sector.

The plan involves the construction of a pipeline to link the Kharg terminal, Iran’s second-largest oil terminal, with a new port on the Gulf of Oman coast. This would allow Iran to export oil around the Strait of Hormuz, thereby avoiding the US sanctions that have been imposed on the country.

**Costly project.** A map of Iran locating Jask.

**Kuwait is entirely dependent on its crude being exported via the Strait of Hormuz. State oil firm Kuwait Petroleum Corporation investigated export options in 2013 that would have entailed pumping oil through pipelines extending into Saudi Arabia’s territory and using existing ports to route the crude.** Kuwaiti oil exports to Asia via the Persian Gulf route would accommodate approximately one-third of the country’s oil sales, with the majority transported through the country’s most important infrastructure.

**When US-Iran tensions increased in May, Kuwait stopped shipments to the Chabahar port in Iran.** This made it necessary for Kuwait to find alternative export options. The country’s crude exports, which account for about 90% of its total export revenue, are crucial for its budget and foreign currency reserves.

**Kuwait has exclusive economic rights in a maritime zone extending 12 nautical miles from its coastline and 200 nautical miles from its territorial sea.** This makes it possible for Kuwait to explore alternative export routes outside the Strait of Hormuz, although the costs and logistical challenges associated with such a move would be significant.

**When the project is completed by the summer of 2022, Iran can consider using alternative export options should the Strait of Hormuz be disrupted in the Strait of Hormuz. Riyadh is threatened by a US decision to pump 2.5 million bpd of crude oil.”** The new export option would provide Iran with an alternative route to send its oil to the Singapore market, which is the world’s largest oil trading hub.

**Altogether, the project would enable Iran to reduce its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz and diversify its oil exports.** It would also help Iran maintain its share of the global oil market and secure its economic interests in the face of US sanctions.

**The project is expected to cost between $2 billion and $3 billion.** This amount includes the cost of constructing the pipeline and building the new port facility. The pipeline is expected to be completed by 2022, allowing Iran to start rerouting its oil exports.

**The new port would be constructed in the Jask Special Economic Zone in southern Iran.** This zone is strategically located and has access to the Sea of Oman, which connects to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

**The new port will be equipped with modern facilities and have a capacity of processing 1 million barrels of oil per day.** This will enable Iran to export its oil without relying on the Strait of Hormuz, thereby reducing its vulnerability to US sanctions.

**Iranian oil.** The CNPC struggled to balance the costs of securing new export routes and the risks associated with a potential disruption of its oil exports.

**Chinese companies are often a poor substitute for Western companies that have experience in the refining and marketing of Iranian oil.** This makes it challenging for the CNPC to sign contracts with other companies to transport its oil.

**The project is a significant development for Iran as it seeks to maintain its oil exports despite US sanctions.** It demonstrates Iran’s determination to diversify its export routes and minimize its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.

**The project is also a strategic move for Iran as it looks to strengthen its ties with other countries in the region.** This would help Iran to maintain its influence in the Middle East and secure its energy interests.

**The project is expected to start operations in late 2022, allowing Iran to start exporting its oil through the new port.** This will enable Iran to reduce its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz and diversify its oil exports.

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**Estonia’s economic forecast for 2023.**

**Estonia’s economy is expected to grow by 3.5% in 2023, down from 5.3% in 2022.** This is due to a slowdown in consumer spending and a decrease in investments.

**Inflation is expected to remain low, with the consumer price index projected to rise by 3.5% in 2023.** This is lower than the 5.5% increase recorded in 2022.

**The unemployment rate is expected to fall from 3.8% in 2022 to 3.5% in 2023.** This is due to a strong labor market and an increase in employment opportunities.

**GDP growth is projected to slow to 3.0% in 2023, down from 4.8% in 2022.** This is due to slower growth in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

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**Egypt’s annual urban consumer inflation falls to 4.8% in Sept as reforms bite.**

**Egypt’s urban annual consumer price inflation decreased to 4.8% in September from 7.5% in August as the government continued to implement structural reforms.** This is the lowest rate since February 2021 and reflects the success of the government’s economic reform program.

**Inflation has been easing in recent months as Egypt approaches the end of an IMF-backed economic reform programme that began in 2017.** This program includes structural reforms aimed at reducing the budget deficit, improving the business environment, and easing inflationary pressures.

**The IMF reforms helped the government get its budget deficit under control, precluding the need to expand the money supply.** This has reduced inflationary pressures.

**The Arab country faced domestic fuel price hikes in July as part of the terms of the agreement.**

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**UAE excise tax to include e-cigarettes, beverages with added sugars.**

**The United Arab Emirates said it is expanding the scope of excisable goods to include electronic cigarettes and beverages with added sugars.** This is part of efforts to reduce harmful consumer practices, a statement from the UAE Ministry of Finance said.

**The UAE Cabinet in December 1 is part of efforts to reduce harmful consumer practices, a statement from the UAE Ministry of Finance said.** This is part of efforts to reduce harmful consumer practices, a statement from the UAE Ministry of Finance said.

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**Saudi Arabia welcomes 24,000 tourists in 10 days.**

**Saudi Arabia welcomed 24,000 tourists in the first 10 days after it issued tourism visas for the first time, state television reported.**

**Riyadh announced in late August that it had issued 35,000 tourist visas, opening the kingdom to holidaymakers as part of a push to diversify the Saudi economy away from oil.**

"In 10 days, some 24,000 foreign visitors entered Saudi Arabia on a tourist visa, the television station reported, citing the Saudi Foreign Ministry.

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**Egypt, Cyprus, Greece condemn gas composition deal with Turkey.**

**Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece condemned an “unlawful and illegal” agreement between Turkey and Libya to drill inside waters where Cyprus has exclusive economic rights.** This agreement, which was signed in November 2021, was described as “irregular and illegal” by the three countries.

**President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt, Cyprus’ President Nicos Anastasiades, and Greece’s Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis described the agreement as a “blatant assault on the rights of other countries” and said it would have “severe negative implications.”**

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**Turkey’s unacceptable actions constitute a serious threat to international law, “ Anastasiades said at a news conference.**
New hydrocarbon law divides Algerians

Sabir Blidi

Algeria

Analysts questioned the authority of the Algerian interim government to adopt new laws to attract international companies to work in the hydrocarbon sector and ease previous conditions on foreign investments.

The Algerian cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad, last month approved a bill October 2 but opinions on the measure are divided with some considering it risky and requesting it be postponed until a permanent government takes office.

Algerian authorities are seeking to increase exploration and exploitation of the country's hydrocarbon resources to increase revenues and meet growing popular demands. Sources said international oil companies pressed Algeria to enact the law on time.

Lifting the subsidies could lead to a nearly 300% increase in petrol, diesel and electricity retail prices.

law in return for investments to re-

store activity to the sector.

The sources said the measure was designed to suit the interests of international companies working to expand business activities in Algeria after decades of legal obstacles ham-

pering their entering the oil and gas sectors in Algeria.

Representatives from Chevron and ExxonMobil met with Algerian in-

dustry officials and government offi-

cers to discuss the possibility of en-

acting the law, although the move rep-

resents a strategic shift outside the previous government.

Economic and popular circles were surprised by the boldness of the caretaker government to work in the strategic file. They said the law could complicate the political situation if it includes significant concessions to foreign partners and unforeseen so-

cial and economic repercussions.

The Arab Weekly obtained a copy of the draft law, which indicates the temporary government plans to lift subsidies on energy and electricity prices and subject them to international pric-

ing. Lifting the subsidies could lead to a nearly 300% increase in petrol and diesel and electricity retail prices, experts said, adding that family budgets would not be able to handle the increases.

Another step by Algeria that some specialists supported the government's approach, stressing the need to end the subsidies in time because it would reduce the CPG's debt on the CPG to its rescue.

The new hydrocarbons bill was expected to be introduced last year but was delayed due to political tension, rising public protests and questions about the legitimacy of the interim government to make such decisions.

Observers said the bill is similar to a draft measures prepared by for-

mer Sonatrach CEO Abdelmoumen Ould Kaddour, who has since fled to the United States. The government is betting on offsetting incentives of-

fered to foreign companies by acceler-

ating oil and gas exploitation op-

erations and by preventing to shale gas extraction to save the country from bankruptcy.

Available data indicate that Alge-

ria would need to sell its crude oil at a price that is 10% higher than the current 12-year period to 32 years. The measure would set an exploitation period of shale gas fields at 10 years. It would extend oil exploitation licences to nine years instead of the current two years, in addition to granting contracts by mutual consent rather than through international tenders, which increases the possibility of having specific international companies, mainly US and French, dominating the sector.

The draft law refers to reducing the time limit of the law of “pre-

emption,” used by the government to stop the waiver of the assets and investments of foreign companies in the country, from one year to two months, which would affect the public sector’s ability to intervene in such operations.

The old standard of having the state own a majority share in large investment projects remains a con-

troversial point in the government’s draft. The 2020 budget bill mentions waiving it in “non-strategic sectors.”

Almost $1 billion a year were lost since 2011 because of disruptions caused by the protests.

Tunisia’s phosphates company at risk of collapse

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunisia

Tunisia’s state-owned phos-
phates company Compagnie Des Phosphates de Gafsa, which had been providing Tu-

nisia with 10% of its total exports, is caring towards bankruptcy unless the government steps in to its rescue, a leader of the country’s main trade union said.

“The government must come to the rescue of the Compagnie Des Phosphates de Gafsa (CPG). The company’s downward spiral is spiralling,” said Mohamed Sghira Minaoui, sec-

tary-general of the Gafsa branch of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT).

“CPG’s collapse will be a blow to the region and a blow to the national economy,” he added as he tried to draw the attention of the country’s leaders during presidential and par-

liamentary election campaigns.

The returns of the CPG and the slump of the output of the key phos-
phates company constitute a call on Tunisian efforts to balance its experiment with full-fledged democ-

racy and economic growth.

Recurrence of the economy has been hampered by a demand to increase salaries, and poverty and provide enough jobs despite GDP growth of about 4%.

“Expectations to the crisis of the CPG if there is concern and goodwill at the political level to think fast and deliver quickly on these solutions,” Minaoui said. “We are raising the alarm as the clock is ticking and we will all rue the time of our inaction if the CPG collapses.”

Minaoui’s plea came after the UGTT called on the authorities “to accelerate the implementation of measures of rescue of the company.” The government in the Gafsa region, the government increased the CPG work-

force from 10% before 2011. CPG’s layoffs have now reached 30,000, many of them said to be ghost jobs.

Its hiring spree was aimed at calm-

ing protests to fuel the country’s tran-

ditional process last year, data showed.

Almost 60% of Gafsa’s workforce were unemployed clamoured to be hired. Security forces had to intervene last May to pull down a tent erected by protesters on train tracks used to ship phosphates through Menzel Roua-

nieh outside Gafsa. The protest was a continuation of demands for jobs and other benefits.

The Tunisian army is supposed to protect facilities linked to phos-
phates, gas and oil production against disruption but the government, mindful of social stability, shed away from cracking down on protests and leaned on CPG to hand out more jobs, giving new incentives for the protests to continue.

Phosphates output has been halted in its since 2011 and CPG’s losses have accumulated as the sales bill expanded.

CPG spends almost 90% of its $800 million annual budget on salaries, of-

ficial figures show. It has lost almost $1 billion a year since 2011 because of the loss of pre-tax profits caused by the protests.

The protests slashed CPG’s normal production of 14,000 tonnes a year at its five mining mines to an average of 4,500 production days, official data indicate.

Protests blocking trains transport-

ing phosphates cause the CPG to more than triple its transport costs. A tonne of phosphates costs $15 to transport by train but when the tracks are blocked by protesters CPG must use trucks, which charge up to $140 a tome.

As result, Tunisia’s phosphates output put dropped from 8 million tonnes in 2010, accounting for the main earner of foreign currency revenues, to 3.3 million tonnes in 2018, 29% lower than in 2017.

Output for the first four months of this year was 3 million tonnes com-
pared to 800,000 tonnes in the same period in 2018.

Because of the drop in phosphates production, olive oil replaced phos-
phates as Tunisia’s top export earner in 2018. The phosphates industry ex-

ploit shun shams to about 4% from 10% before 2011.

The Tunisian phosphate industry has been losing 10% of its work-

force from 30,000, many of them said to be ghost jobs.

The phosphates industry has been losing 10% of its workforce from 30,000, many of them said to be ghost jobs.
The first order was to dissolve the Ba'ath Party. So-called “de-Ba’athification” as an attempt to ban all Ba’ath members above a certain societal rank from holding a position in the public services was also put in place.

The second order had more of an emphasis on dismantling the Iraqi Army and the security apparatus of the Ba’athist regime. This form of exclusion was more of an option, in which Nazi ideology and authority were to be removed from all forms of public life in Germany. In the long run, de-Nazification positively affected German education, as well as society at large.

De-Ba’athification and the dissolution of Iraq’s armed forces, however, saw more negative than positive outcomes. An insurgency was fuelled and the insurgents who took part in the brutal and bloody fighting post-2003 Iraq joined the Islamic State.

Although the Islamic State was defeated by a variety of means and more arrows have been fired in Iraq’s direction, the Muhasasa Ta’ifia system still has a long way to go until stability in Iraq can be fully achieved. A change of governance seems like the only option to ensure the future. However, changes to governance have proven difficult in the past.

Despite promises, former prime ministers such as Nouri al-Maliki and Haider al-Abadi, failed to govern the people of Iraq correctly and, as a result, a vast number of protests took place during their time in office.

Aside from corruption, Iraqi people took to the streets beginning from October 29 to protest the lack of public services and unemployment. World Bank statistical data showed that 17% of men and 27% of women are unemployed.

That number may be a surprise, especially when compared to the Iraqi Bureau of Statistics, which stated that 50% of adults of any age are unemployed. We cannot believe that in the 21st century and cancer patients, brain tumor patients, must travel outside of their country of origin to be treated. The new political system has proven to be futile.

The protests have shown that the Muhasasa Ta’ifia system has not benefited the Iraqi people in any way. The existing government failed to govern the Iraqi people properly. The Ba’ath post-2003 state-building process. Iraqi people have simply had enough of living in a country that has been falsely advised by exter- nal actors to ignore reality, tolerate instability and greed and see promises collapse into deadly failures.

Enough is enough and the time for the Iraqi people to rise once more has come.

Zainab Mehdi is an Arab Weekly intern.
Society

‘Lady Go’ taxi safely steers Baghdad’s women through cultural barriers

Oumayma Omar
Baghdad

By day, Anwar is among few women who has driven a taxi in Iraq. She said she was hired by “Lady Go,” a new service catering to women fearing sexual harassment while empowering them socially and professionally.

“Never completed a school education, which makes my chances to find a job very limited,” being hired as a driver in a women’s taxi network was a positive step in my life. It helps me sustain my only child for whom I am fully responsible after divorcing my husband."

Having restaurants, cafes and taxis exclusively for women is “a limited reaction” that does not effectively curtail harassment.

“Even men feel more comfortable when their wives and daughters use women’s taxis instead of ridesharing services like Uber or Careem, which are provided by men. The feeling of safety and security is the main incente for using our service without risking the possibility of being harassed by male drivers,” Anwar added.

In addition to empowering women, the “Lady Go” initiative was welcomed by Iraqi women who prefer to be driven by other women.

Female taxi drivers are a rarity in Iraq and generally looked down upon because many see it as an “un-ladylike” profession. Nonetheless, it is empowering women and carries fewer risks because clients are exclusively female, said Marwa Majed, 30, a government employee who commutes to work in taxis.

Majed said she fully supports the idea of being driven by women and noted that male drivers are often provocative, tactless and indiscriminate.

“They try to entrench on personal matters without any reason, just to provoke and harass women,” she said.

“When we know about ‘Lady Go’, through social media, my husband hired one of the drivers to take me to work daily. It was the first time I felt relaxed sitting in the front seat next to the (female) driver. Usually, I sit in the back to avoid being perused,” Majed said.

“Beginning such a project is kind of resistance or revolt against those who demine their capacities in holding down a job and women must get those jobs that were out of reach,” University student Shamal Sattar questioned the sustainability of the project. "Women don’t have the same capacities as men in handling emergencies in the street, such as unexpected mechanical breakdowns or embarrassing situations in light of common and targeted traffic violations and encroachments,” Saadi said.

She suggested limiting female taxi drivers to certain areas and certain hours, mostly during the day.

“Unlike women, men can work late hours and go to remote areas that are risky for women,” Saadi added.

There are cultural barriers for women in various fields in Iraq and having female taxi drivers is regarded as strange in conservative Iraqi society. Derogatory comments and gestures are thrown around, a reflection of a perjonal misogyny in Iraqi society.

Project founder Shahid Mohamad said she was underpinned by cultural barriers, stressing that the aim of “Lady Go” is to empower women and reduce their dependency on men by creating jobs.

“The project targets widows and divorcées, mainly the marginalised who have little chance to get employed,” said Mohamad, noting that men and women have, for the most part, welcomed the idea.

Psychologist Naz Cindy said the increase in sexual harassment incidents in Iraq has “detritual consequences on women and children.”

“Harassment is a growing phenomenon in Iraq that is being exacerbated by the absence of laws or failure to implement them. Because of social taboos, women avoid reporting sexual harassment to the society that almost always blames them for their own” Cindy said.

She said having restaurants, cafes and taxis exclusively for women is a “limited reaction” that does not effectivcly curtail harassment.

“Women are still being harassed in the street, or in their workplace,” Cindy said: “Measures should be taken to curb this phenomenon including raising awareness about the problem, countering extremist thought which demeans and belittles women and implementing strict gender equality laws.

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

Fewer risks. A “Lady Go” taxi drivers in Baghdad. (Oumayma Omar)

Muslim feminists looking for a third way

Hamid Zanaz

The phrase “Islamic feminism” may raise questions and perhaps surprise Muslim conservativists alike.

For the first group, the topic of women in Islamic societies was settled by sharia and there is nothing more to say, which makes demands for women’s liberation alien to Muslim culture and a product of Western culture.

Their opponents in the second group may see a contradiction in terms in combining the word “feminism” with the word “Islamic” because Islam and women’s freedom run parallel to each other and can never cross paths.

For Muslim feminists, however, the issue goes beyond those propositions. As with Jewish, Christian and Protestant feminism, this is a feminist current in the Muslim world that is attempting to undertake a feminist reading of religious texts to reconsider the unequal status of Muslim women.

It is necessary to distinguish between one group of Muslim feminists who, like their male counterparts, advocate a peasant feminism based around the axes of poverty, demanding only equity, and the Muslim feminists who speak of gender equality from an Islamic perspective.

However, the idea of gender equality has long been present, albeit not explicitly, in the writings of enlightened scholars and especially among educated women.

While the onslaght of Islamist revivalism that befell many Arab countries in the past 40 years, there has been a major backlash against women’s rights and disruption of their integra- tion into society. Muslim women found themselves victims of escalating tugs of war between a state that is neither secular nor Islamic, enacting laws supposing to sharia and proliferation of Islamist groups, demanding a return to pre-secular laws.

How can a Muslim woman be committed to the teachings of her religion and subscribe to the demands of women’s emancipation, amid the conflict in Muslim Arab societies since independence?

For two decades, an “Islamic” feminist movement has evolved, even if it avoided to explicitly call itself “feminist.” Female scholars have entered the domain of research in Quranic science and interpretation to counter male dominance in Arab and Muslim countries.

There hasn’t been a single homogeneous feminist movement but it has varied from country to country, depending on local context and historical experiences.

While Islamic feminism is not homogenous – there isn’t one single way of defending the dignity and rights of women – many Muslim activists for gender equality have concluded that “While the defence of women’s rights must go through a reinterpretation of the basic texts of Islam.”

As we are witnessing the development of feminist ideologies that seek to destroy the sexist interpretations of Qur’an and Hadith, meaning those that discriminate on the basis of sex, and to engage into a reeding of religious texts that highlight equality between men and women and lift centuries-old injustices done to women through sexual discrimination.

How do Muslim feminists interpret the religious texts that Muslim scholars and extremists have used to discriminate against them?

Muslim female activists start with the belief in the general principle that the divine message was not intended to normalise unfair relations between women and men. On the contrary, it came to elimi- nate inequality between them.

Three concepts are usually used in the feminist re-readings of religious texts: divine pedagogy, purposing and the principle of “abrogating” previous texts, known in Islamic exegesis as Nash.

Regarding polygamy, femi- nists consider that Islam’s placing the limit of four wives was a sort ofреволюционное innovation for the Arabs of the seventh century.

It is unfair to regard this as an eternal Islamic rule because it is not absolute. That the Quran clearly states that it would be impossible to treat all wives fairly is proof of the temporal character of polygamy in Islam. The debate may have been to constrain this type of mar- riage until it disappears by itself due to evolution in mindsets.

As to the veil, many Muslim feminists said the veil is overstated as a fundamental law that will not survive and secondary because it is the product of pre-Islamic circum- stances characterised by slavery and prostitution.

Overlooking the many female intellectuals and activists outside the Arab world who have contributed to the develop- ment of Islamic feminist thinking since the 1970s, Moroccan scholar and feminist Fatma Mernissi must be considered a fundamental reference for the feminist movement in Arab countries.

We should not be surprised at the outbreak of a feminist revolution in the Muslim countries.

In her controversial book “Le Harem politique: Le Prophète et les femmes”, (The Political Harem: The Prophet and Women”), published in French in 1987, she reconsidered the authenticity of the Hadith: “No success will come to any people who appoint a female as their leader.”

Muslims have used this Hadith to argue for the inferiority of women and to exclude them from the public sphere and political responsibilities. This led Muslim women to seek a third way to allow them to enjoy their universal rights and freedoms through a critical re-examination of the religious texts from an angle sympathetic to their cause while preserving their Muslim identity.

We should not be surprised at the emergence of feminist revolution in the Arab-Muslim countries. In fact, we should be surprised if it does not happen.

The reason is a simple necessity: Muslims are not at all divided. They all have the same capacity to understand and interpret the Quranic texts, regardless of the justifications used for that.

Hamid Zanaz is an Algerian writer living in France.
T
here is always a visual commu-
nication that serves to guide the audience into the realm of the performer’s art. In the case of Syr-
ian artist Safwan Bahlawan. Thus,
the viewer’s ability to assess the artist’s compositions to heighten the listener’s sensitivity and awareness of the music.

In his musical depictions, Bahlawan portrays an alphabet of color and the hymns of the sun and melts them down into orchestral bodies that mimic the very pulse of life. That is not surprising, given that the artist was born and lived on the quiet Syrian island of Arwad, off the coast of Tartus.

Bahlawan is a Syrian composer, singer and accomplished oud player. The Arab Weekly met with him recently and the artist spoke of his love affair with the sea.

“I was born on the island of Ar-
wad, surrounded by the sea from all directions; the sea with its tranquilit
y, space, compulsion, and dominance,” he said. “The sea lives in me and is the pillar of my spirit. The sea was generous with me and gave me a lot and in exchange, it took a lot from me. It took loved ones, relatives and friends. It inspired me towards love, good and generosity. The sea lives in my imagination and deep in my subconsciousness; it is an every aspect of my life.”

“I think the monk’s task stops at just putting music to the po-
etic word; it should be much deeper,” Bahlawan said. “...and if the music come up with a musical equivalent of the lyric. The poem necessarily contains many layers and the music should reflect psy-
chological and nervous tensions, and the poetic spirit. This is why I tried to pick the melody and highlighted by the ap-
propriate musical phrases.”

In his work and particularly the orchestral parts, Bahlawan seeks to create visual introductions in the lyrics that are used to. He tries to cre-
ate a visual perception of music.

Almost 30 years ago, Bahlawan composed the melody of the poem “The Front of Glory” dedicated to Damascus by the Iraqi poet Moham-
med bin Salman bin Abdulaziz’s Prayer.” He added: “I hold complete the adventures and used all my energy and musical knowledge. It was a strong musical performance by singer Marya al-Hinnawi and it was a hit. We recorded it with the Cairo Orchestras and it was a pain-
taking and arduous work involving more than a hundred people, includ-
ing the choirs.”

“It became a success and the work of the first one to frequently search on Syrian music. An excerpt was used as a musical cue for the official news bulletin on Syrian tel-
evision for 11 years.”

“That particular work was unique as it came out,” Bahlawan continued. “It stands outside all kinds of classi-
fications. It is a symphonic poem, a piece that is known by everyone all over the Arab world. The melody was purely oriental, it was composed on authority ori-
tental instruments, such as the oud, and it had an impressive orchestral music distribution.”

“Ask the current level of Saudi artistic music. Bahlawan said: “Mu-
sic and the arts, in general, are a re-
fection of the reality of a society at a specific time and in specific circum-
stances. Everyone knows that the Arab reality is not good; it is rather deteriorating. The arts and music are following the times.”

“This is why we don’t hear ad-
vanced knowledge-based music an-
ymore, music that we need to hear. Instead, we have music based on fast stylizations that are from being real art and that cannot be called modern and developed and whose primary objective is to quickly garner a wide audience, only to be forgotten a few days after.”

“We are currently living a cri-
sis and so is our music,” Bahlawan continued. “In the past, music was thriving in the Arab world and there were towering musical giants who

competed to offer audiences authen-
tic art that appeals to the mind and refined collective taste. They pro-
duced art that was quite removed from the trance-inducing music that some are currently putting out based on making the least effort in com-
posing melodies and ignoring the deep meanings of instruments.”

Bahlawan has to his credit many recitals and pieces that he has worked on for years. He is waiting for the oppor-
tune time to present them to the general public. Those projects, such as “Ugirat” and “Abraham’s Prayer Call” were inspired by Arab cultural heritage, which he uses to emulate contemporary times.

“In ‘Ugirat, I go back to the roots of civilization in our region,” he said. “I tried to capture the ABC of the first civilization that produced a qualita-
tive leap in the history of human civilisation. “In ‘Abraham’s Prayer Call,’ I en-
tered the space of religious musical heritage, especially the ‘talhakheh’ during Eid prayers. I used an or-
chestral formula with loud wind in-
struments, huge drums and a large choir.”

“I got my inspiration for ‘Abra-
ham’s Prayer’ from the Quranic verse ‘And proclaim to the people the bajah, they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass.’ In it, I try to demonstrate the tolerance, depth and purpose of the Islamic religion through music.” Bahlawan added.

Nidhal Qushha is a Syrian writer.
‘Road Through Kurdistan’ stops in London

Karen Dabrowska

Kurdish history, heritage and culture are celebrated at a festival in London’s P21 Gallery marking the 100th anniversary of Gulan, a British charity promoting Kurdish culture and identity. The festival’s focal point, “Road Through Kurdistan,” is a major exhibition of contemporary Kurdish art that brings together an eclectic group of international artists, both Kurdish and non-Kurdish. Curated by Gulan’s Creative Director Richard Wilding and Kurdish artist Marwan Jalal, the exhibition marks the 100th anniversary of post WWI peace treaties that created the modern borders between Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, denying the Kurds an independent state.

It reflects the region’s religious and ethnic diversity, genocide under Saddam Hussein’s regime, religious persecution and destruction of heritage by the Islamic State (ISIS) and future hopes for the Kurdish people.

From memory, Rebewar Saed’s notebook about the chemical attack on Halabja. (Gulan)

The exhibition takes its name from a book written by New Zealand engineer A.M. Hamilton, who was commissioned by the British administration to build a road from Erbil through the mountains and gorges of Kurdistan to the Persian frontier in 1928. In his book, “Road through Kurdistan,” published in 1927, Hamilton describes the numerous challenges in constructing a route through some of the world’s most beautiful but difficult and dangerous terrain. The curators said the show looks forward to a more positive future, in which Kurdish culture and identity may flourish and more bridges be built between religious and ethnic neighbours. “There are now new ‘roads through Kurdistan’ to be explored, with opportunities for peaceful coexistence, trade and tourism,” they said in a news release.

Gulan’s founder and trustee Sarah Panizzo said she set up the institute in 2003 after meeting Della Murad, a Kurdish fashion designer. “Her clothes, inspired by traditional Kurdish costumes, were wonderfully colourful and beautiful,” Panizzo said. “Della is passionate about her Kurdish identity and taught me to love her people and her country. This led to the forming of Gulan to celebrate Kurdish culture.”

The exhibition, which features unique and varied works from 17 artists, provides a penetrating flash of insight into the plight and suffering of the Kurdish people. Wilding insisted that, although many of the works are issue-based, it is not a political exhibition. However, “If you are doing work in Iraqi Kurdistan you can’t avoid politics. The works reflect history and the persecution of Kurds under Saddam and the terrible events that happened since 2014 because of ISIS.”

“One of the great challenges of doing an exhibition like this is that people living in Kurdistan are very cut off from the West. It is very difficult for them to travel here (to London) and to bring their works but some, like Baldin Ahmed [who lives in the Netherlands], were able to travel and set up their works in the gallery,” Wilding said.

Ahmed, a Kurdish artist, showed a sculpture of “The Lady of Warka” (3200BC). Leaning on the ground, the stone square is meant to evoke the ideal order as a symbol of the juxtaposition of earth and sky and celebrate the universe.

Drawings by Osman Ahmed depict, in storyboard format, testimonies from survivors of the Anfal genocide in which 50,000-182,000 Kurds were killed.

“A lot of my drawings come from memory and my experience as a witness to the years of political and cultural repression, culminating in the horrendous event in 1988 (the Anfal) that left a profound effect on my life,” Ahmed states.

Anfal also features in drawings taken from the notebook of Rebewar Saed, once a pedicab fighter who is now in charge of the Department of Fine Art at Sulaymaniya University. The notebook is from 1988 and entries describe a chemical weapon attack on Halabja in which he was injured. “Memory and Loss,” by Ali Raza Garmiany, is one of a series of portraits made of poured sand and fabric. It pictures Taimoor Abdulah, a survivor of Anfal, whose family was killed and buried in the desert.

London artist Piers Secunda exhibited three cases of an Assyrian relief in solid paint. The work dis-integrates as casts of bullet holes that were made by ISIS are superimposed on the paintings. Secunda also exhibits a charcoal drawing of a church in Karakosh burned by ISIS. He visited the church and collected charred pieces of wood that he used as charcoal to make a very poignant drawing.

The work of Henn Hamed focuses on children in Mosul making imitation weapons from scraps of wood and bicycle tyres.

Films, including “The Deminer,” a portrait of a Kurdish colonel who disarmed thousands of roadside bombs and mines armed only with a pair of wire cutters, are also on the programme.

“Road Through Kurdistan” will be at the P21 Gallery, London, through October 26.

Karen Dabrowska is an Arab Weekly contributor in London.

Art with a message. “Beyond Time” by Baldin Ahmed. (Gulan)
Hiking grows in popularity in Saudi Arabia

Omar Ali al-Badawi

As a sport, hiking is relatively new to Saudi Arabia but its popularity, especially among young people, has rocketed as enthusiasts take advantage of the kingdom’s environmental conditions and opportunities through this hobby.

The English words “hike” and “hiking” have become part of the lingo of young people who have become advocates of free and organized hiking tours in areas of Saudi Arabia where the terrain is favourable to practising the activity. The experience is very enjoyable and combines sport and fitness with enjoyment of the great outdoors and discovering Saudi Arabia’s natural treasures.

The Taif Season is an excellent opportunity for hikers to experience an integrated event that includes hiking and a full range of entertainment activities.

Al-Walid Al-Ko’aid, supervisor of the Hiking Team in Saudi Arabia said: “Hiking is one of the best sports that help people leave behind the hustle of city life and the onslaught of modern technologies and relax in unspoiled nature in the company of a group of people. It helps to discover unknown areas of our country and invites tourists to come to us for an unforgettable experience.”

The Hiking Team has attracted many newcomers to the sport, many of whom are from other countries. The sport has spread to remote Saudi villages whose natural environment is praiseworthy for hiking and where people of the Arabian Peninsula have been familiar with hiking since ancient times.

Hikers in Saudi Arabia number more than 50,000. Some of them are organised in groups that coordinate with each other to set up periodic trips.

Ghawi said the Rakayib Caravan across the Saudi Empty Quarter (“Rub’al khali”). He said his journeys in the kingdom has built relations and strengthened ties to the vast land, reinforce his sense of the value of the country and of belonging to it.

Hikers in Saudi Arabia number more than 50,000. Some of them are organised in groups that coordinate with each other to set up periodic trips. They have expanded their activities, becoming more professional, which increased the sport’s popularity.

Musa Ghawi, an experienced hiker, said he has travelled long distances across Saudi Arabia. He was among people from 20 countries hiking the Rakayib Caravan across the Saudi Empty Quarter (“Rub’al khali”). He said his journeys in the kingdom has built relations and strengthened ties to the vast land, reinforce his sense of the value of the country and of belonging to it.

“Through this experience, I have rediscovered my country. I experienced the suffering and hardship of our people before the unification of the Arabian Peninsula and the foundation of this generous country.”

The Taif Season, which are organised by the Entertainment Authority, aim to transform Saudi Arabia into an important tourist destination through major artistic and cultural events and unique tourism experiences. Seasonal activities are planned for throughout the year in most parts of the country, giving visitors a glimpse of the history of Saudi Arabia and its unique culture, in addition to the charm of its picturesque and diversified natural environment.

There have been several hiking and mountaineering events in areas characterised by mountainous terrain, such as Taif, Abha and Qiddiya.

The Taif Season is an excellent opportunity for hikers to experience an integrated event that includes hiking and a full range of entertainment activities, with all safety precautions available. The attention given to the minutest of details makes the experience unforgettable.

Ahmed Fahad al-Jaid, a member of the board of directors of the Saudi Association for Tourism Guidance, said the association organises hiking and mountaineering activities, including trips to Maqla’ Tamiyyah and photo competitions and workshops.

The hiking trip to Maqla’ Tamiyyah treats hikers to a spectacular view of Al-Wa’abah Crater, 290km from Taif. The crater is about 3km in diameter and 380 metres deep. The centre of the crater is coated with a white salt layer, which is thought to be formed by rainwater accumulated at the bottom of the crater, forming a shallow lake.

Jaid said he is happy with the inspiring transformations in the Saudi tourism experience and that the future looks very promising. He said hiking activities are very good to promote Saudi Arabia and its natural geographical diversity.

The Saudi terrain represents an inexhaustible wealth and Saudi citizens should take the steps to discover the beauty of the country, create lasting relations with locals and enrich the Saudi tourism.