As Russians extend footprint, US troops move back into Syria

Thomas Seibert

Istanbul

n a yet another reversal of US policy in Syria that could trigger new tensions with Moscow, Damascus and Ankara, Washington is sending US troops back into the country only weeks after President Donald Trump ordered their withdrawal.

The deployment follows repeated statements by Trump that the United States would secure oil fields in eastern Syria.

The goal of the new US mission was to “defeat” remnants of the Islamic State (ISIS), “protect critical infrastructure & deny ISIS access to revenue sources,” the US-led anti-ISIS coalition posted on Twitter.

The announcement published pictures of US armoured vehicles being loaded onto a transport plane for the de-

p" will travel to Riyadh on October 29 by declaring that the approximately 1,000 US troops deployed in Syria would leave the country.

Three days later, Turkey, a sworn enemy of the YPG, launched a cross-border operation to push the Kurdish fighters back from the Turkish-Syrian border and create a “safe zone” to resettle millions of Syrian refugees from Turkey.

Once the new US deployments are complete, Washington could have as many as 10,000 soldiers in Syria, just 100 fewer than before Trump’s withdrawal order.

US officials said one goal of the troop return would be to safeguard oil revenue for the YPG to enable the Kurdish militia to keep guarding ISIS prisoners.

Syrian President Bashar Assad said his country only weeks after Trump’s withdrawal order.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used a telephone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Ca-

We return to The Arab Weekly's coverage of the Arab world’s events and developments.
The rise and fall of the caliphate

April 2013 Abdi al-Qader, the leader of al-Qa’ida’s franchise in Syria, announced the merger of his group with al-Qaeda’s franchise in Iraq, forming the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

2014

January: Baghdad’s forces over-run the city of Falluja in Iraq and parts of Ramadi. In Syria, they seize control of Raqqa and it becomes their de facto capital. February: Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri disavows Baghdadi after the Iraqi militant group’s leader criticizes him for being soft on the US. June: ISIS captures Mosul and pushes south, eventually capturing Tikrit and reaching the outskirts of Baghdad. When US troops threaten Shia holy sites, Shia volunteers, largely backed and armed by Iran, join militiamen. October: The group renews its Islamic State and declares the establishment of a self-declared Islamic caliphate in the territories it controls in Iraq and Syria. Baghdadi is declared caliph.

July: Baghdadi makes his first public appearance, delivering a videotaped sermon at the historic Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul. August: ISIS captures the Iraqi town of Sinjar and begins a systematic slaughter of the Yazidi religious community.

The United States launches a series of air strikes against ISIS in Iraq. September 22: The US-led coalition begins an aerial campaign against ISIS in Syria.

2015


2016


2017

February 6:(period not provided) Mosul; (The Associated Press)

2019

February: Erdogan’s gone, I think this thing was the biggest obstacle in Turkish-US relations. “I think the minute Erdogan’s gone, I think this thing turns around,” Risch said. The Turkish president said he had not decided if he would go ahead with a long-planned November visit to Washington. The US House of Representatives has approved two resolutions aimed at limiting US military involvement in the war against ISIS.

The US-led coalition is carrying out air strikes and ground operations against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The group’s leaders have been killed in air strikes or in battles with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.

ISIS is still a potent force, with thousands of fighters still operating in Iraq and Syria. The group’s leaders have been killed in air strikes or in battles with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces.

The death of ISIS’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is a major setback for the group, which has been losing territory and influence in recent months.

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ISIS still has global reach despite military demise of caliphate and constitute a genocide. War I but denies that the killings of million Armenians by the Ottoman empire voted 405-11 in favour of a resolution met with ISIS's approval and support. Not only they are making multiple mistakes dealing with the aftermath of Marawi, a peace deal with major Islamist group is contested, but also aid workers have problems battling major IS rhetoric in show CRM in suburban Quezon city north-east of Manila, last April. The Philippines is not an isolated story of franchised success for ISIS. its affiliates in Africa continue independent of the central authority in Iraq and Syria, in Afghanistan, ISIS-Khorasan, as it is called, operates amid a situation that contains a shaky national government in the process of losing US support. In the Sinai, Egypt is fighting a campaign against an insurgency that existed before ISIS's caliphate but was bolstered by the latter's declaration. ISIS is not invincible. The death of its leaders shows that clearly. It can still be badly led and defeated by carefully coordinated efforts of its enemies. However, amid failures among its foes and diversity in the global coalition charged with preventing ISIS's return, its insurgency in Iraq and Syria and foreign provinces around the world will continue to threaten the peace. "This and the flow of foreigners and adapting to worldwide ISIS strategy, for me, are the problems that will only grow in the near future and the aftermath will be bigger," Wojcik said. American population, had sought US commandos by US President Donald Trump. Al Baghdadi had been building up in Wash- ington for some time, Turkey has been criticised by US officials for its stance in Syria and for "buying" a Russian missile defence system. Even a brawl in Washington during a visit by Erdogan to the US capital two years ago, when bodyguards of the Turkish leader clashed with protesters, still rankles. Erdogan made so many en- mies in Washington over the years, said a terrorism researcher and analyst, said of ISIS in the Levant. A local force, with significant indirect support from the United States, fought a series of urban battles to defeat jihadist enemies. The battle of Marawi shattered the city as the battle for Mindanao and Raiaq but resulted in the defeat of the jihadists. It's and its ideological affiliates embrace other tactics aside from urban warfare. Jihadists use suicide bombings, both on their person and in vehicle-borne explosive devices, for warfare and propaganda. These groups are largely autonomous but their violent successes bolster the image of ISIS and its re- ligious agenda. Despite putative defeat of its leader in Syria, the region would enable ISIS to regroup and strategize leadership from the US government, which the Russians, but not the US military, repulsed by Baghdadi's group's brutality but, as with most things in Washington these days, it became part of the political theatre. Not surprisingly, Trump took credit for the operation in a nationwide television address, hailing it as a major victory. He claimed it was a bigger achievement than the killing of Osama bin Laden. In Trump's words: "Bin Laden was a big thing but this [the operation that took down Baghdadi] is the biggest thing." For whatever reason, Trump always wants to prove that he is better than his predecessor, US President Barack Obama. He had a White House photographer take a picture of him looking stern and in charge, flanked by his vice-president, defence secretary, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and his national security adviser. Reported, the photograph was taken after the raid on Baghdadi and was used to contrast it to the one that was taken of Obama in the House situation room during the raid on Bin Laden that showed some members of the Obama national security team looking worried. Trump clearly wanted the news of the raid to distract from other controversies swirling in Washington over impeachment inquiries against him and his handling of the Turkey-Syria-Kurdish crisis. Biden also criticised Trump's withdrawal decision on national security, adding that the latest Democratic debate of presidential candidates made the United States less safe because the US was not prepared for the region would enable ISIS to reemerge. The Washington foreign policy establishment, which has generally been very critical of Trump, warned against complacency following Baghdadi's death. Brett McGurk, who resigned in 2018 as US envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition under Trump's first iteration of wanting to withdraw US forces from Syria, said in an op-ed article in the Washington Post that the "concept of containing ISIS" would make it harder for the US military to employ its intelligence that was found in Baghdadi's compound. Hence, what would normally be interpreted as a non-partisan takeaway of a brutal terrorist leader who ordered the beheading of several Americans in addition to the killing of thousands of civilians and members of minority groups, descended into partisan politics and underscored again the disdain of foreign policy professionals for the self-congratulatory stewardship of the US presidency of its foreign and national security.
Lebanon’s Protests

Protests lead to Hariri’s resignation, political uncertainty

Samar Kadi

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation in the square on October 28. After two days of negotiations, Nasrallah and parliament Speaker Nabih Berri offered to form a government of technocrats.

Forming a government in Lebanon typically takes months. Regional political leaders often bicker for weeks before agreeing on a government lineup, a scandal to the country that has been facing an economic crisis.

Hours before Hariri’s announce- ment October 29, supporters of the two Shia parties, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, attacked protesters, chanting slogans hailing their leaders.

The nationwide protests followed the resignation, a response to Hariri’s resignation, and the challenges that await them.

Although the demonstrations have been peaceful, supporters of the two Shia parties, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, attacked protesters, chanting slogans hailing their leaders.

For many the demand for a new government to deliver on its promise of change was too low. If the oligarchs fail, more terrible times are ahead.

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The nationwide protests followed the resignation, a response to Hariri’s resignation, and the challenges that await them.
Iraqi students joined anti-government protests despite crackdown. An Iraqi demonstrator takes photos during an anti-government protest at Tajik Square, November 1.

Defying the crackdown. An Iraqi demonstrator joins the crowd in solidarity with protesters' demands and threatened to take a stronger stance if the demands were not met.

The teachers’ syndicate on October 28 announced a 4-day general strike in solidarity with protesters' demands and threatened to take a stronger stance if the demands were not met.

I fully support informed student demonstrations for reforms. It is important for students to become educated not out of texts but also to raise their voice and speak truth to power,” said Khalil, a student from the Sadrist bloc in parliament, and is the general electoral bloc of the Sadrist and other groups, including the Iraqi Communist Party.

What is striking is that none of these clerics could be seen at the demonstrations in Baghdad and the other districts. Most of the demonstrators were people born in the mid- and late-1990s. What can be concluded from the support speeches they received from Shia scholars and their condemnation of the sniper operations that killed more than 150 young Iraqis is that there is an Iraqi resistance after years of sectarian stagnation.

The change of heart is affecting all forms of Iranian hegemony. He said the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88 had left deep scars in Iraq’s hearts and that the religious parties that had been fighting with Iran had no political bases in Iran and, if not for Iran’s direct support, those parties would not have any legitimacy to dispose of Iraq blood and wealth. We know Khamenei’s message to Khamenei was the same that Khamenei received from Romanian protesters a few years ago when they chanted “Iran out, out!”. It is no doubt that Iran’s vanity and arrogance in Iraq, thanks to its armed proxies militiamen, are in decline. The Iranians were shocked to learn that the change of heart is affecting all forms of Iranian hegemony. He said the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88 had left deep scars in Iraq’s hearts and that the religious parties that had been fighting with Iran had no political bases in Iran and, if not for Iran’s direct support, those parties would not have any legitimacy to dispose of Iraq blood and wealth.
Editorial

ISIS remains a threat despite killing of Baghdadi

The death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, during a US raid October 27 in the Syrian province of Idlib, was a big blow to the terrorist organisation. In Washington, the counterterrorism exploit was treated as a feather in the cap of US President Donald Trump, who is fighting off an impeachment procedure while trying to boost his chances for re-election in 2020.

For many foreign governments, as well as for many among the Syria war benefactors, the dramatic raid unleashed a race to claim credit for helping the Americans. Beyond the expedient and predictable reactions, there has been debate over the effect of Baghdadi’s demise and the extent it could alter the trend through the Islamic State (ISIS) in the region and the world.

As Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of Russia’s upper house of parliament’s foreign affairs committee, said, “Countering terrorism is a much more difficult task than the physical destruction of its leaders, even the most irreconcilable.”

Despite its military defeat and the virtual demise of its claims to have control of territorial borders to its “caliphate” in the Levant, ISIS can count on the loyalty of thousands of fighters.

US Representative Mike Rogers, a member of the House Homeland Security Committee, said that after 8 years of war in Syria “about 10,000 ISIS fighters remain in the region and will continue to carry out guerrilla attacks and seek new territory.” Others put the ISIS figure at 14,000. Regardless of the obvious margin of error in such estimates, the shadow of ISIS lurks in the Levant.

In Syria and Iraq, the terrorist group can draw on its dormant cells as well as on reserves consisting of fighters of ISIS and their families in detention centres and displacement camps such as Syria’s al-Hol refugee camp. In recent months, even after its declared demise, ISIS has continued its mischief in the two countries with guerrilla-style attacks, bombings, kidnapings for ransom and arson for the purpose of extortion. In Iraq, “silent cells” are said to be active in many provinces, including Diyala, Salahuddin, Anbar, Kirkuk and Nineveh. In Syria, attacks were attributed to ISIS in the Damascus region as well as Deir ez-Zor, Hasakah, Homs, Aleppo and other locations.

For years now, the presence of the terrorist organisation extended well beyond the Levant. Many jihadist factions proclaimed themselves ISIS-affiliates in West Africa, the Maghreb and other parts of Africa. In Asia, the preponderance is in a concern in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia and other countries.

Malaysian politician and counterterrorism chief Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay told Reuters the terrorist organisation extended well beyond the Levant. Many jihadist factions proclaimed themselves ISIS-affiliates in West Africa, the Maghreb and other parts of Africa. In Asia, the preponderance is in a concern in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Indonesia and other countries. The answer is simple. Now more than ever, Iraq has become a victim of its own deeds. The answer is simple. Now more than ever, Iraq has become a victim of its own deeds.
Despite Hariri's resignation, the Lebanese revolt may still flutter and wither away

Claude Salhani

There is no valid reason why replacing a bunch of corrupt politicians should reignite the civil war.

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Rashmee Roshan Lall

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Theatrices, Syrian artist Aziz al-Asmar (C) poses with relatives near a mural, in the town of Binnish in Idlib province, depicting US President Donald Trump directing the “play” of killing ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Syria, October 28.

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Saud Arabia's third Future Investment Initiative conference gathered an impressive 6,000 attendees, including a king and a prince. Sheikh Sabah of Kuwait and of Kuwaitis in the region.

The first message from the October 29 event was the statement to welcome Sheikh Sabah, accompanied by Kuwaiti Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah and Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq al-Ghanim. The emir welcomed the出席ed to the conference the Kuwaiti people's bands of love for the person of the emir and for his role. It was particularly heartwarming knowing that Sheikh Sabah, 90, had been convalescing for some time.

Sheikh Sabah's face trans- lated his tremendous gratitude and happiness to be with his people as he returned the applause and greeted the audience.

Saud Aramo signed at least four deals worth a total of more than $2 billion, including a $1 billion memorandum of understanding with Spanish pipeline firm Tubogas. Other deals announced during the event involved Saudi non-government entities and foreign firms, including an agreement between Saudi and Alibaba Group and Japanese tech investment giant SoftBank. Although his pre-decessor Jim Yong Kim skipped last year’s gathering, World Bank Presi-dent David Malpass attended the 2020 forum.

The Kuwaiti emir’s messages of wariness and concern

Khalilah Khalilah

Sheikh Sabah urged everyone to renounce pessimism and to look at things with optimism and hope.

The second message concerned the situation in the Gulf. “It is no longer acceptable and bearable to continue with a dispute between us brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC,“ Sheikh Sabah said. “This dispute has weakened our capabilities and threatened our achievements. The situation requires that we immediately rise above our differences and strengthen our unity and solidarity,“ he added.

Those closely monitoring Kuwaiti efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis were aware of the momentum given to the mediation by recent weeks. It is hoped those efforts will culminate in high-level negotiations, considering the high-level exchanges between officials from Kuwait and other GCC countries.

Kuwait’s optimism remains dependent on Qatar’s desire to respond to Sheikh Sabah’s endeavours and meet the conditions required of it, which would allow renewed dialogue with the boycotting coun-tries.

Sheikh Sabah also urged Kuwaitis to strengthen national unity against the crises raging in the region. “We have to learn the lesson from what is happening around us. We have no choice but to consolidate our national unity and the cohesion of our society and reject the causes of sedition, divisiveness and the hateful ethical strife,“ the emir said.

Sheikh Sabah had in previous speeches alluded to this issue and especially to the vile role of some social media that have become “shops“ for rent by Kuwaiti forces that are hungry for power and want to settle internal scores.

Kuwaiti media recently revealed the identities and goals of those behind fake anti-Kuwait social media accounts. Investigations by the Public Prosecutor’s Office uncovered disturbing and dangerous facts about those people’s intentions and sources of funding. Sheikh Sabah devoted part of his speech to sedition and internal strife, saying that one of the most serious causes of those evils is “the deviant use of social media and turning them into destructive tools and virtual picks to chip away at our national unity and liberal people. I’ve said many times more than once to act quickly and forcefully in order to eliminate this dangerous phenomenon and protect our society from its deadly pests. “

A fourth notable message was Sheikh Sabah’s renewed trust in the parliamentary leadership of Ghanim and of Prime Minister Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah. The emir praised the man’s “fruitful roles in giving shape to the desired cooperation between the two branches in pursuit of the national goals in the service of the homeland and the citizens."

He renewed the call for parliament and government to cooperate in the interest of Kuwait and of Kuwaitis in compliance with the democratic and the constitution al instruments related to oversight and accountability. He said: “I ask everyone in the Assembly and in the government to always make Kuwait’s interest your first con-cern and preoccupation and to never place any other interest or purpose above it. This requires you to cooperate constructively and seriously and to serve Kuwait’s supreme interest. "I do not mean, that you should forgo your constitu-tional oversight prerogatives but to put them to bear use, fairly and without exaggera-tion."

Sheikh Sabah urged everyone to renounce pessimism and to look at things with optimism and hope. “We have to evaluate our affairs objectively and fairly,” he said. “We have shortcomings and we should not accept to leave them unattended but we also have a lot to be proud of and we have enough ambition and aspirations that require us to roll up our sleeves and get on with the job of achieving them.”
Ahmed Fouad

In a speech, Fouad discussed Qatar's lobbying efforts in the United States, which he believes are aimed at influencing US policy towards Qatar and its allies.

Qatar's lobbying efforts have become increasingly prominent in recent years, with officials and business leaders actively seeking to influence US policy decisions on issues such as Qatar's relationship with Israel and its support for Hamas.

One of the key figures involved in Qatar's lobbying efforts in the US is Nick Muzin, a former employee of the US State Department who has worked closely with Qatar's government.

Despite the increasing importance of Qatar's lobbying efforts, there is little information available on the specifics of these efforts or the techniques used by Qatar to influence US policy. However, it is clear that Qatar is willing to spend significant amounts of money to achieve its goals.

Imran Zayat

Zayat's article discusses the challenges faced by Qatar in terms of its image in the US, and the efforts that it is making to improve its relationship with the US government and the American public.

Qatar is facing a number of challenges in terms of its image in the US, including allegations of human rights abuses and its support for extremist groups. In response, Qatar is investing heavily in lobbying efforts aimed at influencing US policy decisions.

However, the success of these efforts remains uncertain, as the US government and the American public are wary of Qatar's intentions and its track record.

Whereas Qatar's lobbying efforts may be effective in the short term, it remains to be seen whether they will have a lasting impact on US policy decisions. The challenges facing Qatar are complex and multifaceted, and solving them will require a sustained effort and the development of long-term strategies.
Tunisian President Kais Saied fired two key ministers last week, raising eyebrows as he goes about shifting his government, as he seeks to chart a new course as commander-in-chief.

Tunisian Defence Minister Abdelfettah Zbidi and Foreign Minister Khaled Jhinaoui both said they had already resigned from their posts, raising questions about the president’s leadership style and policy direction.

Saied, a retired law lecturer, became Tunisia’s second freely elected leader in October 22 after a resounding victory in presidential elections. Bolstered by support from young Tunisians, the conservative jurist who ran with no party and a limited budget, outperformed his more established rivals to become Tunisia’s second freely elected leader.

Saied had his first meeting on December 8 at the Carthage Palace in Tunis, where he met with members of the Tunisian cabinet to thank them for their service.

The firing of Jhinaoui is a clear indication that the president wants to return to Libya against his wishes. This raised questions about Moscow’s policy to push Libya.

The Wagner Group, which has been involved in operations in Syria, is known to be close to Putin and is impossible that it would operate in Libya against his wishes. This raised questions about Moscow’s policy to push Libya.

Saied has stressed his support to “leverage” and “stabilisation” by Saied, who had been sidelined by Saied’s Islamists, nationalists and leftists for a previous diplomatic assignment in Israel, as unfair and as “damaging humiliation” by Saied, who has had normalisation with Israel that is tantamount to treason.

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Russian technicians repairing Russia-based government and is fighting to win control of Tripoli. Although Saied has stressed his support to “leverage” and “stabilisation” by Saied, who had been sidelined by Saied’s Islamists, nationalists and leftists for a previous diplomatic assignment in Israel, as unfair and as “damaging humiliation” by Saied, who has had normalisation with Israel that is tantamount to treason.

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Russia’s stance in Libya between ‘equidistance’ and support for Haftar

Michel Cousins

Tunis

The head of the Tripoli-based internationally recog- nised Presidential Council, Fayez al-Sarraj, attended the recent Russia-Africa summit, having been invited by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Also at the meetings, hoping to put forward a different side of events in Libya, was Abdul Hal al-Hweij, the foreign minister of the rival, eastern- based government. He had no official status and although he drew the attention of Russian media and reportedly met with representatives of Russia’s African ambassadors.

The conflict in Libya serves Russia’s interests because it complicates US policy in the region. Moscow is keen to stabilise Europe, setting France against Italy.

While Sarraj was being formally welcomed by the Russians, former Russian servicemen working for the Moscow government took command of Russian tanks. They had been fighting in conflict with the Russian team.

Russia is also keen to maintain its influence in the region and destabilises Europe, setting France against Italy.

Hafter continues to shun the UN Support Mission in Libya and the LNA is furious with UN Special Envoy Ghassan Salame for saying there is no QNA military equipment at Mitiga airport and for announcing the opening of its own terminal to allow further LNA attacks.

Meanwhile moves are taking place in Washington, independent of the White House. Legislation was intro- duced to the US House of Representa- tives aimed at targeting anyone who supports Russian military interven- tion in Libya. There is no guarantee to the Libyan Stability Act will pass through the US Congress and there is still a long way to go procedurally.

Michel Cousins is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on Libyan issues.
Coptic TV serial tests boundaries of religious tolerance in Egypt

Amr Emam

Cairo

The Coptic Orthodox Church plans to produce “Pope of the Arabs,” a 34-part television series about Pope Shenouda III, Egypt’s most popular Christian leader.

There are fears, however, that the programme will anger Egypt’s Muslims, especially with the church hoping to broadcast the serial on state television.

The serial would be the first about Shenouda, who died in 2012 after serving as Coptic pope for 34 years. It will also mark the entry of a sponsor state which is not easy to access in a country where the religion has operated at the orders of the group’s leadership. "Expecting involvement in criminal acts, including murder."

These charges led to an all-out crackdown by post-Morsi Egyptian authorities on the affiliates of the entities, charities and companies of the Muslim Brotherhood, which resulted in many Brotherhood leaders and members to be imprisoned.

That is why most Brotherhood exiles are afraid to return. Outside Egypt, including in Turkey, they do all types of menial jobs, including dishwashing at restaurants, working in factories and working at farms.

This comes as financial assistance to the Brotherhood by some sponsor states is not easy to access because of the failure of the Islamic movement’s leadership to return to power in Egypt, analysts said.

Sisi ordered engineers planning Egypt’s new urban communities to construct a church in each of them. In January, he opened the Middle East’s largest church in a new administrative capital being built on the outskirts of Cairo.

This is why Egypt’s Muslims accept the legitimacy of Sisi’s Christianity. Airing “Pope of the Arabs” on state television may increase attacks against the Egyptian leader, observers say.

Eurasian actor Maged al-Kedwany, who has many of the facial characteristics of the late pope, will play Shenouda in the final stages of his life.

Some attacks may come from Egypt’s ultraradical Salafists, who are intolerant towards Christians. The Salafists ask their followers not to congratulate Christians on their religious occasions and say Christians are not fit for top government positions.

“If they set their sights on Shenouda, who is the most popular figure in the history of the Coptic Church, they will deserve the murder,” said Nabil Naeem, a jihadist leader turned expert on religious extremism.

Sisi should not care about these radicals who do nothing but tarnish the image of Islam.”

Amr Emam is an Arab Weekly contributor in Cairo.
Syria

Constitutional Committee convenes with historic opposition involvement

Baha al-Awam

Kurds have bargaining chips in negotiations with Damascus

For nearly nine years of the civil war in Syria, the Kurds have been sitting across the negotiating table from the Syrian government. The Kurds have been seeking a constitutional regime that recognizes the Kurdish national identity and guarantees their rights in the new Syria. The Kurds have been advocating for a federal system that would give them a say in the decision-making process, including in foreign affairs and defence.

The Russians have a vision for a new Syria, not because the Kurds want it, but because it is in their best interest. They want to provide a good model for countries suspicious of the Kurds' participation in drafting the new constitution, which would give them a say in the decision-making process, including in foreign affairs and defence.

The Kurds have bargaining chips in negotiations with Damascus, as they are the only ones who can impose anything on the regime. They can easily acquiesce to that, provided Moscow guarantees their participation in drafting the constitution and in the elections. The Russians are not going to let go of the Syrian Democratic Forces military formations, those who would come in handy in rebuilding the Syrian Army after removing their sectarian officers. Kurdish intelligence could also be part of the deal between the Kurds and the Syrian regime, which would give them a say in the decision-making process, including in foreign affairs and defence.

What the Kurds are negotiating with the Russians is to reclaim their Syria, which had been stolen by Assad, not just from them but also from tens of millions of other Syrians across the country.

The Kurds' first winning card is that they have the flexibility to negotiate everything. Their main purpose is to ensure their rights in the next Syrian state, regardless of what has happened and regardless of Assad's continued presence in power. The Russians want the Kurds to have equal rights and duties in the new Syria, not because the Russians are seeking fairness but because it is in their best interest. The Russians want to end the Syrian crisis in a way that ensures their presence in Syria for decades. They want to provide a good model for countries suspicious of the Kurds' participation in drafting the constitution and in the elections. The Russians are not going to let go of the Syrian Democratic Forces military formations, those who would come in handy in rebuilding the Syrian Army after removing their sectarian officers.

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Israel’s old habit of ignoring the rule of law dies hard

Kamel Hawwash

Israel uses administrative detention to keep individuals in custody without finding a trial or charge. The detainees are not told of which crimes they are being accused or shown any evidence against them. The reason that it is virtually impossible to defend oneself against an administrative detention order. Examples of Palestinians held repeatedly under administrative detention include Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council Aziz Dweik and Legislative Council member Khalida Jarar. Jarrar was released in February after 20 months of imprisonment without charge. She was rearrested October 31. PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi called on the international community not to criticise the inability of the Palestinian Executive for the Israeli Law Authority in Status of Emergency. The practice has been severely condemned by human rights organisations.

Activists in Israel recently began an internet campaign that included a photo of Labadi with the caption “Have you heard of me?” in Arabic and Hebrew, to draw attention to her administrative detention. “Want to know what I’m accused of? Me, too.” If there is evidence against any of the detainees, then surely a democracy, which Israel claims to be, would charge the individual and bring that evidence to the court to rule on whether they have committed any crime. If it has no evidence, then it has no right to detain them, much less subjecting them to this psycho-legal process, demeaning them as extremists.

Kamel Hawwash is a British-based Palestinian university professor and writer.

Shin Bet. This suggests she was arrested for expressing views she published on her private Facebook page, which expressed support for Holocaust and violent attacks in the West Bank. Labadi’s brother, Iyad Bolous, who visited her during her detention, said that since her arrest she has been interrogated for six consecutive days without being allowed to see her lawyer. Bolous said interrogators cursed at and spat on Labadi, threatening to arrest her sister and her mother. Most interrogations lasted hours while she was handcuffed and tied to a chair. On 10 August, Labadi wrote: “The Israeli threats are not in line with the administrative detention if I did not confess, saying they did not have evidence against me but they could renew my detention for another six months.” Labadi had been on hunger strike since 26 September against the administration of her administrative detention since September 24. Her health deteriorated significantly and, reports by Palestinian journalists said, she was transferred from Jalma Prison to a hospital in Hebron for treatment but was released in custody from a hospital. Another Jordanian citizen, Abdulrahim Mili, has been held by Israel since he tried to attend a wedding in the West Bank. Despite protests by the Jordanian government to release its citizens, Israel has refused. Jordan recalled its envoy to Washington to assay its responses. Compare this with the fate of an Israeli Embassy guard who killed two Jordanians in July 2017 and was organised to Israel under the guise of diplomatic immunity. While the Israeli Foreign Ministry sent a memorandum expressing “deep regret and apology” over the incident months later and pledged to take legal action in the case, the Israeli perpetrator never faced justice. Neither, for that matter, did the Israeli soldier who killed Jordanian Judge Jaber in March 2014 face justice for that crime. It is impossible to speak above the law when it comes to its citizens but uses administrative detention to will incarcerate Palestinians and other foreign nationals when it chooses. Israel uses administrative detention to keep individuals in custody without finding a trial or charge. The detainees are not told of which crimes they are being accused or shown any evidence against them. The reason that it is virtually impossible to defend oneself against an administrative detention order. Examples of Palestinians held repeatedly under administrative detention include Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council Aziz Dweik and Legislative Council member Khalida Jarar. Jarrar was released in February after 20 months of imprisonment without charge. She was rearrested October 31. PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi called on the international community not to criticise the inability of the Palestinian Executive for the Israeli Law Authority in Status of Emergency. The practice has been severely condemned by human rights organisations.

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Kamel Hawwash is a British-based Palestinian university professor and writer.

How Trump’s Deal of the Century became old news

Debate

Palestine / Israel

Geoffrey Aronson

It seems Israel operates above the law when it comes to its citizens but uses administrative detention to will incarcerate Palestinians and other foreign nationals when it chooses.

"Israel’s old habit of ignoring the rule of law dies hard"

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"Israel’s old habit of ignoring the rule of law dies hard"
Erdogan enjoys domestic boost from Syria move but economy weighs on citizens’ minds

Thomas Seilbert

Istanbul

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is enjoying a boost in popularity triggered by Ankara’s military action in Syria for the past year, as news reports of victories continue to fuel growing public support for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). But the AKP’s opportunities to capitalise on Erdogan’s popularity could be eroded by the ongoing economic crisis. The AKP is likely to face significant challenges at the local elections in March 2023.

After shrinking 2.4% in the first quarter this year and 1.4% in the second, the Turkish economy was predicted to record zero growth in 2019 overall, the World Bank said.

The country’s main opposition group, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) supported the latest military action in Syria along with the conservative Iyi Party, another group opposed to Erdogan, while the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) opposed it.

The three parties had formed an unofficial partnership in this year’s mayoral elections that enabled CHP candidates to win in Istanbul and elsewhere. The split over the military action in Syria means that it could be hard to revive their alliance in future elections.

Balk Aginci, head of the Konda polling firm, told the T24 news portal that the CHP would find it difficult to attract many HDP voters in the future.

Erdemir said it was up to the opposition to overcome the rift.

“Turkey’s opposition bloc seems to have suffered a major setback following Erdogan’s triggering of ethnic fault lines running through the Turkish-Kurdish alliance that was close to falling apart in 2019, Erdenir commented. “If Turkey is to avoid descending further into authoritarianism and inter-commu-

Favourable terms. A Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jet is prepared for takeoff at the Russian military base of Hmeimim in Syria’s Latakia province. (AFP)
Iran toils to stifle protests in Iraq and Lebanon

The Arab Weekly staff

Tunis

A protest continued across Iraq and Lebanon, demonstrating notable support for the firings in the United States and internationally. The demonstration was called “at Iraq and Lebanon for freedom, dignity, and the end of corruption.”

Abbas Mosawi, the country’s deputy leader, could mobilise a section. “We are sure that the Iraqi government, nation and clergy can overcome these problems,” he said.

However, a previous effort by Iran to quell protests in Iraq after they began was quickly revealed despite the extent of its concerns. One day after protests in Iraq broke out, Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani went to Baghdad’s Green Zone.

The Arab Weekly staff

Iran toils to snuff out turmoil in its zones of influence

The Arab Weekly staff

On edge, Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani (C) attends a meeting of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps members with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, October 2.

Washington revealed October 31 that Iran spent $6 billion on its “militias” in Iraq and Syria, in statements made by US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesmen Abbas Mousavi said the countries’ leaders could mediate a solution. “We are sure that the Iraqi government, nation and clergy can overcome these problems,” he said.

However, a previous effort by Iran to quell protests in Iraq after they began rapidly revealed despite the extent of its concerns. One day after protests in Iraq broke out, Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani went to Baghdad’s Green Zone.

“After all of the parties and factions are corrupt and this is connected to Iran because it’s using them to try to export its system of clerical rule to Iraq,” he told the AP. “The people are against this and that is why you are seeing an uprising against Iran.”

In Lebanon, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets demanding the resignation of a government dominated by pro-Iran factions. As in Iraq, protests were focused on local grievances.

While Lebanese protesters have only rarely called out Iran and its main local ally, the militant Hezbollah, groups, they have focused much of their rage on Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, from a Christian party closely allied with Hezbollah.

The chant “All means all” implies that none of Lebanon’s factions, including Hezbollah and its allies, are beyond reproach.

Fights broke out at a rally when protestors chanted against Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who said he was withholding his supporters from the protests, Reuters reported.

Hezbollah supporters rampaged through the main protest camp in Beirut on October 29. Shortly thereafter, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, a Western-backed leader who had worked with pro-Iran factions in a national unity government, resigned. Protesters cheered their first victory since the demonstrations began October 17.

Iran-backed Hezbollah is the most powerful armed group in Lebanon and was alone in refusing to disband after the 1975-90 civil war. The militiamen sent thousands of fighters to neighbour- ing Syria to help defend the uprising against Syrian President Bashar As-

Corps members with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, October 2.

Iran's hard-won empire is able as new governments prevent protests spread like wildfire. Well aware of the perilous circumstances, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei made an impossible choice: to use Iran's scarce economic resources to stabilise his allies and proxies in the region and to resolve the worst conditions in recent US intervention in the country and leave allies and proxies to their own devices.

Khamenei’s initial response indicates he is opting for the former but he also makes it clear to be sideswiping those who demand compromising the role of Iran's regular military to safeguard the regime. At the Air Defence Force Officer Academy on October 30, Khamenei, addressing “those who care for Iraq and Lebanon,” said: “The main priority is to remedy insecurity. The people of these countries should know that the enemy is trying to create a void by disrupting the legal structures. The only path for the people to achieve their legitimate demands, is by pursuing them within the legal structures.”

Khamenei added: “The enemies had similar designs for dear Iran but, luckily, the vigilant nation entered the arena in time. The armed forces too were protected and the conspiracy was neutralised.”

Khamenei’s reference to irrepressibility of the “armed forces” was surprising, since Iran has, in its 40-year history, never used the regular military to suppress domestic unrest. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), rather than the regular military, has traditionally secured the survival of the regime in the face of domestic opposition.

Desperate times call for desperate measures and Khamenei’s statements may reflect his willingness to break the IRGC’s monopoly on suppression of the opposition at home and perhaps even the IRGC’s monopoly on operating beyond Iran’s borders.

Khamenei’s talk of a special mission for the armed forces reflects change in the role of the regular military: “The armed forces must be careful of sedition and must have the necessary procedure and preparedness to counter it… since sedition is worse than murder and murder,” he said.

The Iranian leadership appears to share Khamenei’s concern about developments in Lebanon and Syria. Hassan Hanizadeh, political analyst quoted October 30 by the Fars News Agency, a megaphone for the IRGC, warned against “conspiracy against the axis of resistance,” a reference to Tehran’s allies in Lebanon and Iraq. He claimed that “the hands of the IRGC’s and Shia movements dependent on the American Embassy [in Baghdad] are completely visible in recent demonstrations and gatherings in Iraq.”

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so, another key Iranian ally. Iraq’s powerful Iran-backed militias, initially mobilised to battle the Islamic State, have also fought alongside Assad’s troops, and Iran violently suppressed its own pro-democracy protests, known as the Green Move- ment, after the disputed 2009 presidential election.

Washington revealed October 31 that Iran spent $6 billion on its “militias” in Iraq and Syria, in statements made by US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook. Hook did not give details on the militias or say where Iran had spent the money but the revelation could signal Washington’s growing frustration with Iran’s role in hampering stability in the region.

(Wire news agencies.)
Egypt, Russia bolster military cooperation with first joint air defence exercise

Hassan Abdel Zaher

Oil and gas are critical to Russia’s economy and domestic stability and its ability to finance foreign policy ventures.

Hassan Abdel Zaher is a Cairo-based contributor to The Arab Weekly.

News & Analysis

Egypt, Russia bolster military cooperation with first joint air defence exercise

Hassan Abdel Zaher

Cairo

Russia is bound to the Middle East by more than energy ties

Francis Ghilès

Viewpoint

Russia is bound to the Middle East by more than energy ties

Francis Ghilès is an associate fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.
US Democratic candidates unprece- dented stance on aid to Israel

Emily Przyborowski

Washington

US Senator Bernie Sanders was the most outspoken critic, deliver- ing a hard-line speech against Is- rael. Sanders has always been criti- cal of Israel but his ideas appear to be gaining traction. A poll in New Hampshire, the first state to vote in the Democrats’ primary season, placed Sanders, from neighbour- ing Vermont, atop the Democratic field.

The J Street Conference is an an- nual meeting of the who’s who of Jewish liberals. A non-profit or- ganization founded in 1997, it focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and was formed to act as a counterbalance to the powerful is- raeli lobby in Washington.

Other Democratic presidential hopefuls who spoke at the Octo- ber 26-29 event included Senator Amy Klobuchar, South Bend, Indi- ana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro and Senator Michael Bennet. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was also a speaker.

The Trump administration’s close relationship with Netanya- hou, as both struggle with compu- tion allegations, has made Israel an increasingly partisan topic and Democratic candidates are break- ing from their traditional stands to voice stronger criticisms of Israel.

J Street has supported Trump’s and Netanyahu’s scandal-ridden former supporter for its cause. Michael Kope- low, a policy director at the Israeli Policy Forum, said Trump is deeply unpopular with Jewish Americans, which “has translated to a more critical attitude towards Israel.” Kopolow, who dis- like Trump tend to also be critics of Israeli policies.

In his speech, Sanders advocated tying military assistance to a two-state solution to the Israeli- Palestinian issue. He proposed redistributing some military assis- tance given to Israel into humani- tarian aid in the Gaza Strip, a stark break from the traditional views of the Democratic Party.

In 2016, US President Barack Obama signed a 10-year agreement with Israel promising more than $38 billion in military aid despite publicly calling for Israel to return to the 1967 borders.

Guy Ziv, director of the Israel National Security Project, said the shift in views among Democrats is unprecedented.

“Those prominent presidential candidates are openly engaged in a discussion of whether we should shatter a taboo — that our foreign aid to Israel is unconditional.”

Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldon

US Defense for the Democratic Party nomination for president, a point underscored by candidates at the October 26-29 event included Senator Amy Klobuchar, South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro and Senator Michael Bennet. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was also a speaker.

The Trump administration’s close relationship with Benjamin Netanyahu, as both struggle with corruption allegations, has made Israel an increasingly partisan topic and Democratic candidates are breaking from their traditional stands to voice stronger criticisms of Israel.

A number of US troops are in Syria, in part to protect oil fields where they have the oil. "Three US troops will remain in the area but officials have said the plan for a near-total withdrawal is far from the ideals that Washing- ton articulated may change its mind and could halt any withdrawal.

Trump has offered varying de- cisions on the military’s role in eastern Syria. On October 25 he said: "We’ve secured the oil and, therefore, a small number of US troops will remain in the area where they have the oil." Three days later, he declared the oil to be America’s. "We’re keeping the oil — remem- ber that," he said in Chicago. "I’ve always said that: ‘Keep the oil.’ We want to keep the oil. Forty-five mil- lion dollars a month? Keep the oil.”

White House officials declined to explain what Trump meant by “we’re keeping the oil” or his esti- mate of the value. Pentagon offi- cials said privately they’ve been given no guidance on how to maintain any of Syria’s oil re- sources, among the nation’s oil wells and stored crude.

US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said he interpreted Trump’s re- marks about keeping Syria’s oil as meaning the US must maintain control over the oil fields. "We don’t want to lose the oil," Esper said.

Another change of plan. A US military convoy drives near the town of Qamishli, likely heading to the oil-rich Deir ez-Zor area or possibly to another base nearby, October 26.

**Economy**

**Tunisia enters debt-to-repay cycle**

**Lamine Ghanmi**

**Tunis**

Tunisia will funnel its loans from its creditors to its current accounts as an intensifying economic crisis pushes the country into recession. Borrowing to boost liquidity gaps, officials said. Tunisia is on the road to double digit economic growth since 2011, however, borrowing went largely to fund government salaries and subsides, “such as electricity, gas, petroleum products, water, sugar, coffee, music festivals and television programmes.”

The transitional government, which took office in August, is negotiating with creditors to ease Sudan’s debt. Tunisia’s currency has depreciated almost 75% since 2011, slashing its ability to import goods. Some economists estimated that up to 4% of GDP will be spent on repaying foreign debt this year. The country’s political stability has improved, allowing it to attract foreign investors. However, political stability is not sustainable without economic growth.

**For board debt a burden some see hindering Sudan’s economic recovery**

**The Arab Weekly staff**

The Sudanese government stepped up international efforts to find a solution to the mountain of debt that stands in the way of reviving the country’s economy. The government is negotiating with international creditors to reduce the country’s debt. Tunisia is one of the hardest hit countries with a debt of $100 billion. The government has engaged in discussion with the IMF and the World Bank to negotiate debt forgiveness. Some Sudanese officials have suggested that the country should default on its debt obligations to reduce its debt burden. However, the government has been reluctant to do so, fearing it could lead to further economic sanctions.

**Slow recovery. A shipping container arrives at the Port of Tunis in La Goulette.**

**Aramco shares to start trading in December**

A long-delayed initial public offering of its giant Saudi Aramco will see its shares traded on Riyadh’s stock exchange. Officials said. Aramco’s net profit in the first six months of the year was $21.8 billion, according to the company’s chief executive officer. Aramco is expected to be the world’s largest initial public offering, raising $10 billion. The company has been approved for an $8 billion initial public offering in December, raising new jobs, with unemployment at more than 10%.

**Libya stops salaries of thousands of teachers**

Libya’s internationally recognised government has stopped paying the salaries of more than 10,000 teachers and education ministry staff who do not have the government’s documentation. The government said in an anti-corruption push that sparked protests. The government previously suspended payments to public sector employees without providing documents to prove employment status.

**Egypt’s first smartphone maker to export to Germany**

Silicon Industries Corporation said it will begin exporting its devices in November as part of its expansion plan. The company is one of the few exporters that exports to the Gulf and aims to start production in other European countries, said the company’s chief executive officer. The company is operating in Europe to market its products.

**Volatile politics, oil prices hinder growth in Middle East**

Political uncertainty and oil price volatility are hindering growth in the Middle East this year but trends should reverse next year, a report released by the International Monetary Fund stated.

The report on Europe’s regional outlook projects growth in the region of 2.6% this year, compared with 1.6% in 2018. Inflation in the oil and gas sectors is expected to generate 2.7% growth in 2019.

The report also said that the spreads were linked in part to the performance of some oil-producing countries whose economies were expected to face some stress. The report said/that the hardest hit countries have been Iran and Libya.

**(The Associated Press)**
Economic

Saudis reform open tourism gate but still have a way to go

Aziz El Massassi

Riyadh

In Riyadh’s old quarter, a small group of Polish holidaymakers exploring the mud-brick Al Masmak fort, stumbles upon one of history’s first foreign tourists to visit Saudi Ar-

abia. It opened its doors.

The jasmine plants turn the jasmines into per-

Fruits are being grown, cut and processed in mass.

“Before coming here, I was afraid of
to Saudi Arabia at an average of 10 kilo-
grammes every day at most. Shubra Blula

A vast area of land with

in front of Mohamed Abdul

Salman. Sticking out on green

flowers on which they bloomed, the flow-

ers are a blessing for Abdul

Salam and all his workers at the field.

Abdel Salam and his fellow resi-
dents of Shubra Blula, near Egypt’s

Nile Delta, use their fingers to
gently cut the jasmine flowers and put

them in plastic buckets.

“We keep cutting the flowers for seven or eight hours every day,”
said Abdel Salam, a father of two.

“They are how we earn a living.”

Almost all other village residents
earn their living the same way.

Shubra Blula, a village of 10,000

people in Giza province, is the hub of jasmine cultivation in Egypt and its
centre of fragrance making.

The village has gained interna-
tional fame for growing the world’s

Finest grandiflorum. An Egyptian farmer emulates a basket of

jasmine in Shubra Blula.

(Saeed Shahat)

November 3, 2019

Shubra Blula

Ahmed Megahid

A vibrant village finds vital lifeline in

growing high-quality jasmine flowers

behind every jasmine flower
grown, cut and processed are

memory-storing cells of

village residents.

Abdel Salam and other villagers
start at 7am every day, working for

four hours cutting flowers and filling

plastic buckets with the blooms. They
then head to collection points where they sell the jasmine

produce of the day.

The collection points ship the
harvest to processing factories
that turn the flowers into con-

crete, a semi-solid mass obtained
by solvent extraction of jasmine,

and absolute, essential oil,

fragrance factories in France, the

United Kingdom and Canada.

This is how Shubra Blula is mak-
ing an international reputation.

For visitors who love to spend

money of tourists, about 350 hectares

of Shubra Blula’s farmland is

cultivated with jasmine grandiflo-

rum. About 7 tonnes of jasmine

grandiflorum is produced annual-

ly, more than 80% of Egypt’s over-

all production.

Ahmed Megahid

“Abdulaziz’s Vision 2030 reform

programme is aimed to

prepare the Arab world’s largest economy, which is rich in oil, for a
diversified future.

Citizen cumulative campaigns
focus on ancient sites as well as

beautifying desert and coastal

landscapes. Authorities are also

banking on large cities such as Ri-

yadh and the western Red Sea port

of Jeddah to play a part through
tourist investments in enter-

tainment offerings.

Despite these efforts, Riyadh,

home to 7 million people, including

2 million foreigners, has a sleepy

air, with little of the glamour and

buzz of its counterparts elsewhere in

the Gulf.

With its wide sidewalks

and high-end shops, Al-Tahlia Street

in central Riyadh is often compared

with the Champs Elysées but it has

little of the energy and style of its

famous Paris counterpart.

On an average weekend, just

a few families or groups of friends

can be found seated at the restau-

rant terraces. Conversations are

quiet and, until recently, music was

not played inside dining venues.

In the middle of the avenue,

which is periodically decorated

to celebrate the city’s first metro sys-

tem, a flashy facade stands out with

a gigantic, luminous inscription an-
mouncing the “Soho Club.”

Electronic music beats from

inside, as the doorman, sporting a

blazer and an earpiece, welcomes a

visitor with a smile but also a warn-

ing: “It’s a respectable club.” Inside,

the atmosphere is subdued, as peo-

ple enjoy meals and a cozy decor

that is more reminiscent of an Eng-

lish pub than a nightclub.

“We are in favour of tourism but

foreigners must respect our tradi-

tions and customs in the way they

dress and behave,” one man said as

he passed by in his traditional robe

and chequered headress.

The conservative country, which

forbids alcohol and is notorious for

its gender segregation, may seem

an unlikely destination for global

tourists. Some young Saudis share

depends.

“Don’t talk to me about Riyadh.

I’ve just returned from a weekend

in Dubai,” said a 37-year-old tele-

phone salesman, who asked to re-

main anonymous.

“We haven’t holidays, we
go to Dubai,” his friend, re-

ferring to the comparatively free-

wheeling emirate just a 2-hour

flight from Riyadh. “Why would

foreigners come here?”

Crown Prince Mohammed has

sought to shake off his country’s

ultra-conservative image, lifting a

ban on cinema and women drivers as

well as allowing gender-mixed

corridors and sporting extravag-

anzas.

However, the kingdom must

match its reforms with a revamp of

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“Riyadh is a key pillar of Saudi

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Saad bin Abdulaziz’s Vision 2030

reform programme but

shouldn’t be used to represent

the absolute into fragrances.

The factories do not go, how-

ever, beyond buying the jasmines

for turning the absolute into fra-

grant materials, they do not possess

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Framed off by a wall of trees, and with a water body 23km from the high-rises towering over Dubai’s skyline, the 509ha city is a small-scale solar-powered settlement aiming to become a green oasis in the desert. 

Opened to residents in 2016 and later extended, the initiative dubbed Sustainable City is a private settlement on the outskirts of Dubai designed to use as little energy and water as possible. Comprising 500 low-lying villas that are home to nearly 3,000 people, its vast open spaces, gardens and a mosque, the city aims to be a “net-zero settlement” producing all the energy it needs from renewable sources on site.

“The Sustainable City is a living laboratory for testing future technologies and innovations,” said Karim el-Jzier, executive director of SEE Institute, the research arm of the city's developer, Diamond Developers.

When the project started six years ago, building a zero-energy development “seemed a bit like a dream,” he said.

“Today it is not difficult anymore. Tomorrow everybody will have to do it,” he added.

Kasper Moth-Poulsen, who leads the research team, “Combining the chemical energy storage with zero-energy solar panels enables a conversion of more than 80% of the incoming sunlight.”

Despite continuing roadblocks, the Desertec has remarked potential to revolutionise the global energy market, providing an effective, renewable solution with a limited carbon footprint.

Omar el-Huni is a contributor to The Arab Weekly on environmental issues. He studies environmental science at the University of Reading.
When Huda Ahmed was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago, she prepared for a long, painful journey to defeat the disease. She never imagined that her physical ailment would come with social repercussions, leading to the breakdown of her marriage at the most delicate point in her life.

“I had to undergo a surgery to remove a breast because of the tumour,” said Ahmed, who is in her mid-40s. “But this caused a total change in the way my husband viewed me.”

Ahmed’s story is far from unique. Women who are diagnosed with breast cancer, the most common form of the disease in Egypt, often face social stigma and lose their spouses during their medical battle.

While the disease affects Egyptians of all socio-economic backgrounds, the poor have an especially rough road, finding it difficult to finance the costs of effective treatment.

The Egyptian Health Ministry said breast cancer is detected in approximately 1.2 women every year. It is most common among older women but prevalent among middle-aged women as well, with 86 out of every 100,000 women between the ages of 40-45 receiving a diagnosis every year.

While the disease affects Egyptians in all parts of the country, it is detected at a far higher rate in rural areas. In Egypt’s National Cancer Institute, the largest state-run cancer hospital in the country, said breast cancer is the most common form of the disease for women “because it attacks the most sensual part of the female body.”

This is why it comes with social repercussions, often including strains within marriages, victims said. Ahmed said she sensed a gradual change in her husband’s attitude towards her even before she was diagnosed with breast cancer but especially after she had breast removal surgery.

“I noticed the change in his attitude towards me,” Ahmed said. “This attitude morphed into total withdrawal from initial sympathy.”

Ahmed’s husband secretly married another woman, after which Ahmed demanded a divorce.

In Egypt, many breast cancer victims die of the disease, especially if it is not detected until its late stages, but the country is working to increase awareness about the importance of frequent exams to detect the disease early.

Health authorities began a nationwide campaign of free exams at hospitals and clinics for women of all ages. Still, the social stigma that breast cancer victims endure remains.

While there is no statistics on how many divorces are linked to health-related reasons, experts said the numbers are high.

Ahmed Abdel Zaher, an oncology professor at Ain Shams University who specialises in the treatment of breast cancer, said many of his patients were stigmatised or divorced after being diagnosed with the disease.

“Sometimes breast cancer patients face positive discrimination when they have the disease,” Ahmed said. “Other times, people are afraid to come close to the patient, especially when symptoms, such as hair loss, appear.”

Ahmed recalled the story of a patient who died of the disease a few years ago. She said the woman, in her 30s, refused to undergo chemotherapy, lost her hair and stopped being attractive to her husband. She opted for breast-conserving surgery but her husband divorced her anyway.

When she remarried, she told her new husband that the scar in her breast was caused from the removal of a benign tumour.

“Unfortunately, the tumour was malignant and she had to get chemotheraphy,” Abdurrahman said. “She refused all treatment options for social and marriage-related reasons” and died shortly thereafter, he said.

Other women, such as Ahmed, who lives in her family home, survive the disease but find it difficult to move on after being neglected by their spouses.

“It is very difficult to be abandoned by those closest to you at the time you need them the most,” said Ahmed.

In 2014, approximately 60% of rural Moroccan women were illiterate, compared with 35% of urban women. In 2013, approximately 60% of rural Moroccan women were illiterate, compared with 35% of urban women.

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One of the most awaited festivals. Tunisian Culture Minister Mohamed Zine El-Abidine (C) attends the opening ceremony of the Carthage Film Festival in Tunis.

The festival's broad reach and the availability of affordable tickets for thousands of moviegoers in the country reflect the JCC's goal to be as accessible to the public as possible.

"We are a big country with a small cinema industry," said Tunisian filmmaker Nejib Belkacemi, whose debut feature was shown at the festival. "In cinema we identify with the characters and we see the world through their shoes, which creates a deeper connection to the cinema, aims to educate industry experts, journalists, filmmakers and cinema professionals to today's film trends and digital possibilities everywhere. It is not a given that new techniques allow us to move forward, Philippe Reynaert, director of JCC, said.

"We have a new generation that is rising in the cinema industry and I believe we are harvesting the fruit of good training and education as well as new techniques that are constantly supported by some countries, including France,＂he added. Moreover, "the idea that helped a number of filmmakers from Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon. Another is also the advent of new technologies like virtual reality cinema, said Latiri.

"Digital technologies are here to stay. I think virtual reality cinema is one of today's most prominent cultural events, bringing together people from all walks of life. The international Carthage Film Festival was blessed with something that other festivals are still eager to acquire and it's the incredible public support," said Tunisian director Saad Amine, whose debut feature was shown at the festival. "Scenes were motivated to keep up with the visual pressure and it’s the incredible public support," said Tunisian director Saad Amine, whose debut feature was shown at the festival. "Scenes were motivated to keep up with the visual pressure and it’s the incredible public support," said Tunisian director Saad Amine, whose debut feature was shown at the festival. "Scenes were motivated to keep up with the visual pressure and it’s the incredible public support," said Tunisian director Saad Amine, whose debut feature was shown at the festival. 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Iraq heritage: from the cradle of civilisation to the vortex of destruction

Zainab Mehdi

London

The detrimental effects of heritage destruction on humanity were the focus of an exhibition at London’s Imperial War Museum that covered a period from World War I to the Islamic State’s devastation of cultural sites in Iraq.

“Culture Under Attack” involved three themes: “Routed Sounds” concentrated on four cases of musical defiance during conflicts. “Art in Exile” revealed how cultural artefacts in Western museums and galleries were evacuated and protected during the second world war. “What Remains” examined how damaging the loss of heritage is for humanity.

“What Remains” started with Zeppelin raids in the first world war. The German blitz and continued through the Islamic State (ISIS) destruction of Mosul. A striking feature of the exhibition is British artist Piers Secunda’s two-piece work “ISIS Damage Painting (Genie)”.

Having studied at the Chelsea College of Art, Secunda has produced a vast number of engaging works, including elaborately detailed oil-on-canvas paintings and a wide range of projects investigating the past and present.

With the help of previous Culture Minister of Iraq Fiyad Rwandao, Secunda visited Mosul in 2018 and documented devastation by ISIS inside the Mosul Museum. He said he made moulds of sculptures ISIS damaged using alginate, an elastic hydrocolloid impression paste often used in dental practice.

The advantage of using alginate is that it is very easy and does not stick to surfaces, Secunda said in a telephone interview. “I simply mix the alginate using my hands and then secure the material on to the surface that I am interested in. The moulds are then placed in a plastic bag, which I carry back to the UK.”

Because of the importance of artefacts in the Mosul Museum, Secunda stressed that he used a different process, developed by a Tate conservator, to make moulds of the “Genie” head.

British artist Piers Secunda hopes the Iraqi education system will encourage the teaching of cultural history so students understand why damaging cultural heritage threatens not only peace but humanity as well.

The process involved painting water-based latex paint on areas Secunda wanted to mould. When the paint dried, he placed dental putty on top so the latex would dry and transform into a very thin film. The process does not detract from the granular level of the statue that he makes.

The latex allows separation between the sculpture and the dental putty, which means that, when the dental putty is pulled away from the sculpture, there is no trace of its existence having been there. Secunda recalled his visit to Mosul Museum in a concerned and remorseful tone. He said his biggest surprise while walking through the museum was not seeing many artefacts because ISIS had looted the museum and sold or destroyed the pieces.

Speaking with Iraqi soldiers who accompanied him to the museum, Secunda said it appeared that many large artefacts, such as the winged Lamassu, were broken to pieces and dumped into the Mosul River.

The artist recounted his visit as a “very emotionally loaded situation and a very powerful place.”

Video recordings of ISIS gunmen smashing ancient artefacts were deeply distressing for people living not only in the West but also in Iraq and the wider Middle East.

For those detached from the distress that others felt and still feel, Secunda said he hopes his work will demonstrate “what has happened and what the smashing of objects was all about.”

The artist emphasised the pivotal role of education in raising the awareness of future generations on the importance of cultural heritage. “The destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria was a direct result of education failure,” he said.

Secunda explained that, if ISIS recruits had been educated about the significance of preserving and protecting cultural artefacts and sites, they would not have joined such a brutal and inhumane terrorist organisation.

Secunda said he hopes the Iraqi education system will encourage the teaching of history and cultural history in schools. In addition, he said he hopes cultural heritage threats to women’s beauty. The artist, who was born in the southern Moroccan city of Erfoud, scripts her performances using songs, music and dance.

The exhibition continues through November 5 at L’Atelier 21 Art Gallery in Casablanca.
New Hermopolis: an ecological retreat blooms in Egypt's desert

Karen Dabrowska

In 2007, Professor Mervat Abdel-Nasser quit a teaching position at a prestigious British university and left the comfort of her London home to live in the harsh Egyptian desert. She was there to make her dream come true – setting up New Hermopolis, an ecological retreat.

New Hermopolis is connected to the thought and philosophy of ancient Hermopolis with its belief in harmonious living and the power of art to transform society. “The idea of such a project has been in my mind since the early 1980s, triggered by the growing wave of religious extremism that was caught up in the political turmoil that led to a decline of tourism.”

The concept was born and Abdel-Nasser said: “Many factors were behind this sad phenomenon – political, economic and educational but, in my opinion, the single-most important reason was the almost total disso- tion at a prestigious British university and left the comfort of her London home to live in the harsh Egyptian desert. She was there to make her dream come true – setting up New Hermopolis, an ecological retreat.

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