Pressure mounts on Qatar as Trump summons it to end funding of terrorism

Stephen Quillen

The Arab Weekly correspondent

T

eeling from the effects of sanctions imposed by its neighbours and Egypt, Qatar is faced with the need to innovate to turn ideas into reality in order to avert the damage caused by cutting itself off from international markets. The efficacy of security policies remains a matter of concern.

In a potential game changer, US President Donald Trump delivered a dramatic warning to Qatar over its suspected financing of terrorism.

The nation of Qatar, unfortunately, has historically been a funder of terrorism, and at a very high level, Trump said at a news conference June 9.

"They have to end that funding and its extremist ideology in terms of funding," said Trump, adding that Qatar and other countries must "stop teaching people to kill other people."

Trump's remarks seemed to end a part of the confusion created by conflicting signals sent out of Washing-

ton over the Qatar crisis. Trump initially expressed support for the Saudi-led campaign to isolate Doha while official statements from US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called for the easing of the sanctions on Doha.

The US president's most recent remarks dispelled most of the l

gering ambiguities, as they seemed to reflect the US intention to confront Qatar over its policies.

"I decided, along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, our great gen-
erals and military people, the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding," Trump said.

Washington's tough stance on Do-
ha's alleged funding of terrorism is unprecedented and raises questions about future US military coopera-
tion with Qatar, which hosts a key US airbase with 10,000 US troops.

Trump's position offered strong support to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, which called on Qatar to stop its support of extremism and terror.

US President Donald Trump

After severing ties with Qatar on June 5, Saudi Arabia said it was committed to "decisive and swift action to cut off all funding sources for terrorism," according to an official source quoted in the state SPA news agency.

The United Arab Emirates, in a statement, praised Trump's "leader-

ship in challenging Qatar's troubling support for extremism." The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt on June 9 released a "ter-
ror list" that named 12 organisations and 79 individuals. The list included high-ranking members of the Qatar ruling family, such as former Qu-
tar Interior Minister Abdullah bin Khalid al-Thani, as well as Qatar-connected Muslim Brotherhood and jihadist leaders with a history of in-
volvement in conflict and upheaval in Egypt, Libya and Syria.

Trump's warning coupled with the Gulf countries' determination to sanction Qatar could mean more worries for the Doha rulers, who may find themselves directly affect-

ed by the fallout of any aggressive investigation on the funding of ter-

rorism.

Although Qatar is trying to display resilience in the face of sanctions, the continuation of the boycott measures could prove devastating for its economy, which is heavily re-

liant on the Gulf Cooperation Coun-

cil (GCC) for imports.

Without any lifeline and minimal support from the Arab world, Doha has sought backing from two non-Arab allies, Turkey and Iran. While Turkey has said it will in-
crease its military presence in Qatar and Iran has offered the use of its ports during the crisis, such meas-
ures are unlikely to prove in easing the pressure mounted on Qatar.

Seemingly taken aback by Trump's initial remarks, Qatar turned down an offer to participate in media tion talks in Washington, saying its emir would not travel abroad while his country was blockaded. The US president's June 9 remarks will be even less reassuring to Doha.

Few options seem available to Qa-

tar. Without a change in its policies, it is more likely than not to face ex-
calating pressure.

Gulf countries are showing Doha the way out by defining the end-
game. "This is not about regime change. This is about change of pol-
icy, change of approach," UAE State Minister for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash told Agence France-Presse.

He noted, however, that no one could ultimately control the "dy-

namic of a crisis." The "change of approach" that Gulf countries are seeking involves Qatar ending its support for Islamist extremism and clarifying its ambig-

uous relationship with Iran.

During the Riyadh summit in May, Trump made clear that he shared those concerns and found common cause with Saudi Arabia and its al-

lies on the need to thwart what is seen as Iran's aggressive policies.

Stephen Quillen is an Arab Weekly correspondent. The Arab Weekly

staff in London and Washington contributed to this report.

Election over but UK still faces jihadist threat

Mahmud el-Shafy

London

A

cloud of uncertainty hangs over the United Kingdom after tight
telephone returned Con-

servative Party leader Theresa May to power, although

without an overall parliamentary

majority.

Britons voted June 8 amid tight-
ed security just five days after

t hree terrorists attacked in central London, running down pedest-

rians on London Bridge before in-
discriminately stabbing revelers in Borough Market.

Eight people were killed.

The election campaign was dom-

inated by security and counterter-
rorism. The Conservative Part

was suspens

eous national campaigning twice following the Manchester and London attacks. Reports that many of the attackers, including 22-year-

old Manchester Arena bomber Sal-

man Abedi, were known to police

raised questions about Britain's counterterrorism policies.

Officials raised the terror threat in the UK to "critical" after the May 22 Manchester bombing, which killed 23, meaning that soldiers

were deployed on the streets and an attack was imminent. The threat level was reduced to "severe" — an

level was "highly likely" — a few

days later.

May, the prime minister, said that

"enough is enough" following the London attack, clinging to

down on Islamist extremism. A few days later, the former home secre-
tary said she would be prepared to rip-up human rights laws that im-

posed more robust terror legisla-
tion.

It was a pledge she returned to

after announcing her intention to

form a government with the help

of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party. However, with a

narrow parliamentary majority,

a resurgence of potential Labour Party and

criticism from her own back-

benchers, many questioned how

May intends to push through her

legislative agenda and how long she

can remain at the head of a Con-

servative Party that is notorious for

ningling itself with weak leaders.

Britain is facing an unprecedented

jihadist threat requiring security

officers to innovate.

Friend or foe? Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani during a bilateral meeting with US President Donald Trump (not pictured) in the Saudi capital Riyadh, on June 6.
Qatar crisis
Showdown escalates over Doha’s policies

Mamoon Alababssi

Qatar needs to realise there is a new game in town

The Qatari rulers have always loved to play the game of paradoxes.

They need to update their knowledge of the regional and international contexts. Nicolas Sarkozy is no longer in power in Europe and Obama has left the White House. Like Iran, Qatar benefited to a large extent from Obama’s Middle East policy or rather the lack of it.

The Arab states eliminated bin Laden all right but wrongly estimated the dangers of the kind of terrorism practised by Sunni extremist groups born from the womb of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the type practised by Iranian-controlled sectarian militia in Syria and Iraq. The Qataris thought they smart enough to buy the services of these terrorist organisations and use them to pressure or annoy those they perceived as enemies.

To survive in the current tough world reality, Qatar must perform a quick turnaround in its attitude and seize the opportunity offered by Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Jaber al-Sabah’s mediation. This is the only way to reduce the risk of the measures announced by the Gulf states and to table a serious and worthwhile in thinking that will lead to a real change in Qatar’s policies.

The Gulf states have always misjudged and downplayed the strong relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Qatar has misjudged and downplayed the strong relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The situation in the Gulf is the result of Qatari wrong decisions. Such decisions are likely the cause of the initiative’s failure to take into consideration the recent changes.

In Saudi Arabia, the new king has seen the light with the coronation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in 2015. In this, the abortion of the old administration has taken over from that of Barak Obama, who reduced all the crises and problems of the Middle East to just the nuclear deal Iran has with the United States.

Furthermore, Qatar has misjudged and downplayed the strong relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It thought it could explain potential differences in the two countries’ viewpoints on Yemen but forgot that both countries are willing and able to resolve their differences through negotiations.

Operation Determination Storm is the perfect illustration of the solid relations between the two brotherly states.

During the ordeal of Qatar, other Gulf countries do not, the tiny state, have no choice but to change its policy.

Cover Story
Qatar crisis

Diplomatic crisis in the Gulf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>91.5 millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>8.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>9.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>4.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>6.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>4.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>31.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>78.6 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank (2015 figures)
Is Qatar paying the price for its ‘Hamad Doctrine’?

The Arab Weekly staff

Qatar crisis

Roots of lingering accusations about Qatar’s ties to extremism

Qatar has for years been accused of being a haven for extremists due to political restrictions against extremists in the region. Here are some of the key allegations:

**Muslim Brotherhood**
- Hamas, a militant group in international politics in the late 1990s, the group emirate has, directly and indirectly, supported Islamist groups across the Arab world, including Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and allies of the Brotherhood in Libya, Tunisia and other parts of the Arab world.
- The kingdom was a key backer of Egypt’s former Islamist President Muhammad Morsi, sparking a 2014 diplomatic dispute that led Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to recall their ambassadors.
- Qatar is home to several prominent figures in the Muslim Brotherhood, including its spiritual organisation by Qatar, which is classified a terrorist group in the United States.
- Qatar is regularly accused of leniency in the fight against the private financing of extremist groups, accusations it firmly denies. A 2009 US diplomatic wire released by WikiLeaks slammed Qatar as uncooperative with Washington in cutting off funding for extremist groups.
- In 2015, French politicians questioned Qatar’s reaction to the Islamic State crisis and suggested it should have taken a stronger stance against the group.
- Meanwhile, the country’s foreign policy did not change much with the new ruler, who either to the end of the former emir preferred to walk in his father’s footsteps.

**Knightsbridge in London**
- In November 1996, Qatar launched Al Jazeera satellite television, which quickly gained programmes and reporting and have often been a thorn in the side of many GCC and Arab countries.
- For many years Al Jazeera has been a bone of contention for the Gulf states and Egypt, even before its launch in the mid-1990s.
- In 2015, the government of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt demanded that Qatar make a break with its past policies.
- “We had an agreement in 2014, on paper, signed by the emir of Qatar, pledging that he would abide by the various grievances that were put in the agreement. They have not held to that agreement, so clearly there is a lack of trust,” Anwar bin Mohamed Gargash, UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, told CNN.

**Various countries – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Egypt and other countries – are fed up with this sort of duplicity that we’ve seen, that has been undermining the region... It is time for cooler heads, to re-establish dialogue and begin to make Qatar’s foreign policy,” he said.

Most of the points of contention between Qatar and its adversaries were ironed out in the days of Sheikh Hamad.

Riyadh accused Doha of backing Islamic extremism, an accusation Qatar denied, and Saudi Foreign Minis ter Adel al-Jubeir demanded that Qatar end its support for the Palestinian Hamas group and its close political affiliate, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Critics of Qatar say it has benefited from hosting the region’s largest US military base but Washington’s support may be coming to an end under the presidency of Donald Trump who appears to have given his approval of the Saudi-led measures against Doha.

One incident that observers tout as being the cause of the latest crisis is Qatar’s alleged payment of $1 billion in April to radical groups to secure the release of members of the Qatar royal family held hostage in southern Iraq.

“Commanders of militant groups and government officials in the region told the Financial Times that Doha spent the money in a transaction that secured the release of two of a member of the Qatar royal family in southern Iraq and about 50 militants captured by jehadi in Syria,” the newspaper said. “By their telling, Qatar paid off two of the most frequently blacklisted forces of the Middle East in one fell swoop: An al-Qaeda leader head of state in southern Iraq and a high-level Iranian security official. "Qatar denied the report’s allegations.

France called on Qatar to answer the questions its neighbours had asked. "Qatar must be completely transparent and answer precisely the questions that have been asked notably by its neighbours. That’s what France is asking for," French government spokesman Christophe Castaner said.

Most of the points of contention between Qatar and its adversaries — which include alleged relations with Hamas and al-Qaeda — were inherited from the days of Sheikh Hamad. It is unclear whether Sheik Tamim is willing or able to change them.

Sheik Khalid, a former leader of the party’s London office, has also accused the country of paying the price for its ‘Hamad Doctrine’.

In November 1996, Qatar launched Al Jazeera satellite television, which quickly gained programmes and reporting and have often been a thorn in the side of many GCC and Arab countries.

For many years Al Jazeera has been a bone of contention for the Gulf states and Egypt, even before its launch in the mid-1990s.

In 2015, the government of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt demanded that Qatar make a break with its past policies.

“We had an agreement in 2014, on paper, signed by the emir of Qatar, pledging that he would abide by the various grievances that were put in the agreement. They have not held to that agreement, so clearly there is a lack of trust,” Anwar bin Mohamed Gargash, UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, told CNN.

Various countries – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Egypt and other countries – are fed up with this sort of duplicity that we’ve seen, that has been undermining the region... It is time for cooler heads, to re-establish dialogue and begin to make Qatar’s foreign policy,” he said.

Most of the points of contention between Qatar and its adversaries were ironed out in the days of Sheikh Hamad.

Riyadh accused Doha of backing Islamic extremism, an accusation Qatar denied, and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir demanded that Qatar end its support for the Palestinian Hamas group and its close political affiliate, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Critics of Qatar say it has benefited from hosting the region’s largest US military base but Washington’s support may be coming to an end under the presidency of Donald Trump who appears to have given his approval of the Saudi-led measures against Doha.

One incident that observers tout as being the cause of the latest crisis is Qatar’s alleged payment of $1 billion in April to radical groups to secure the release of members of the Qatar royal family held hostage in southern Iraq.

“Commanders of militant groups and government officials in the region told the Financial Times that Doha spent the money in a transaction that secured the release of two of a member of the Qatar royal family in southern Iraq and about 50 militants captured by jehadi in Syria,” the newspaper said. “By their telling, Qatar paid off two of the most frequently blacklisted forces of the Middle East in one fell swoop: An al-Qaeda leader head of state in southern Iraq and a high-level Iranian security official. "Qatar denied the report’s allegations.

France called on Qatar to answer the questions its neighbours had asked. "Qatar must be completely transparent and answer precisely the questions that have been asked notably by its neighbours. That’s what France is asking for," French government spokesman Christophe Castaner said.

Most of the points of contention between Qatar and its adversaries — which include alleged relations with Hamas and al-Qaeda — were inherited from the days of Sheikh Hamad. It is unclear whether Sheik Tamim is willing or able to change them.

Sheik Khalid, a former leader of the party’s London office, has also accused the country of paying the price for its ‘Hamad Doctrine’.
Qatar crisis

For Egypt, isolating Qatar has political, security advantages

Amr Emam

Cairo

A weakened and isolated Qatar will suffer far-reaching effects on its political and economic ties with Egypt, as well as the problems Cairo faces beyond its borders, experts said.

“Qatar has been an out-alliance war against the Egyptian state for several years, all with the aim of undermining Egypt’s political situation, including the Muslim Brotherhood,” said Tarek Fahmy, a political science professor at Cairo University. “The isolation of Qatar will render it incapable of maintaining this war, even if only in the long run.”

Egypt followed Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates in cutting ties with Qatar on June 5 following accusations that Doha has been supporting terrorism, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Brotherhood followers dominated coverage by the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera and its Egyptian channel, Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr. Al Jazeera’s coverage misrepresented conditions in Egypt, which the Qatari negatively affects Cairo’s ability to attract investment and foreign tourists, economic experts said.

Egypt called for a UN Security Council investigation into a ransom of up to $1 billion allegedly paid by Doha to a “terrorist group active in Iraq” to secure the release of kidnapped members of the Qatari royal family.

This violation of the Security Council resolutions, if proved correct, “shall definitely have a negative bearing on counterterrorism efforts on the ground,” senior Egyptian UN diplomat Bushra Ahmed told the Security Council. Security Resolution 2379 explicitly bans the payment of ransom to terrorist groups “regardless of how few or by whom the ransom is paid.”

“Investors do not put their money in a country that the media keeps portraying as unstable. Tourists cannot visit this country, or even in either,” Egypt’s tourism minister, Hisham Zaazaa, said.

Since Morsi’s overthrow, Egypt attracted little new foreign investment, negatively affecting the economy and creating a shortage of foreign currency reserves that led to last year’s currency flotation. Egypt attracted $6 billion in foreign investment in 2016 but most of that capital was from companies already present in Egypt working on new projects and expansions.

Cairo said it expects to attract $15 billion in investment this year, compared to $11 billion in 2009. For Egypt, the measures taken against Doha will limit Qatar’s ability to fund Islamist militias jockeying for control in Libya, where Egypt is backing the anti-Islamist factions of the National Coalition, who is also on Saudi Arabia’s list of enemies.

The measures taken against Doha will limit Qatar’s ability to fund Islamist militias jockeying for control in Libya.

Egyptian authorities have said that weapons and ammunition that end up in the hands of ISIS fighting the army in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula are smuggled in from Libya. The government of eastern Libya, which is aligned with Haftar, also cut diplomatic ties with Qatar.

Qatar put forth an estimated $3 billion to bankroll the opposition in its early stages.

Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The blocking schemes they can weather the blockade on their land and sea borders by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, leaving them with one access route – Iran.

Deep distrust. A 2015 file picture shows Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (C-B) walking alongside Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (C-L) upon the latter’s arrival at the Sharm al-Sheikh Red Sea resort ahead of the Arab League summit.

Qatar put an estimated $3 billion to bankroll the opposition in its early stages.

Since the outbreak of the Qatari-Saudi feud in mid-May, the Syrian opposition has been remarkably silent, refusing to take sides between two of the staunchest allies. This applied to civil society, politicians and military commanders of the armed groups who have been recipients of Saudi Arabia’s funds for more than six years.

Qatar put forth an estimated $3 billion to bankroll the opposition in its early stages while there is no figure for the Saudis, who were related to Qatar in August 2012 and adopted the Syrian opposition in the spring of 2013.

Most Syrian politicians are anxiously waiting to see how this crisis unfolds and whether Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will surrender to Saudi dictates, a move that would effectively strip his country of all its political tools and influence.

Among other things, this would mean distancing itself from Iran and expelling from Doha the Muslim Brotherhood, including its 95-year-old chief ideologue Yusuf al-Qardhawi, an Egyptian cleric.

Since the outbreak of the Qatari-Saudi feud in mid-May, the Syrian opposition has been remarkably silent, who has been residing in the tiny emirate since 1963. He has been vocal in support of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, a Doha-created political entity set up by the current emir’s father in November 2011.

The government of eastern Libya, which designated the Al-Nusra Front an “international terrorist organization,” recently offered a $500 million bounty on the top leadership of the group that has been residing in the tiny emirate since 1961. He has been active in Iraq” to secure the release of kidnapped members of the Al-Nusra Front.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.

Another prominent Syrian figure who resides in Doha and has been remarkably silent is Mustapha al-Sabbagh, the former secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, who is on excellent terms with the Saudis.

In 2013, the former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani handed the Syrian Embassy premises in Doha to the Syrian coalition and gave it Syria’s seat during the Arab League summit in March in Qatar.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.

Another prominent Syrian figure who resides in Doha and has been remarkably silent is Mustapha al-Sabbagh, the former secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, who is on excellent terms with the Saudis.

In 2013, the former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani handed the Syrian Embassy premises in Doha to the Syrian coalition and gave it Syria’s seat during the Arab League summit in March in Qatar.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.

Another prominent Syrian figure who resides in Doha and has been remarkably silent is Mustapha al-Sabbagh, the former secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, who is on excellent terms with the Saudis.

In 2013, the former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani handed the Syrian Embassy premises in Doha to the Syrian coalition and gave it Syria’s seat during the Arab League summit in March in Qatar.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.

Another prominent Syrian figure who resides in Doha and has been remarkably silent is Mustapha al-Sabbagh, the former secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, who is on excellent terms with the Saudis.

In 2013, the former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani handed the Syrian Embassy premises in Doha to the Syrian coalition and gave it Syria’s seat during the Arab League summit in March in Qatar.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.

Another prominent Syrian figure who resides in Doha and has been remarkably silent is Mustapha al-Sabbagh, the former secretary-general of the Syrian National Coalition, who is on excellent terms with the Saudis.

In 2013, the former Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani handed the Syrian Embassy premises in Doha to the Syrian coalition and gave it Syria’s seat during the Arab League summit in March in Qatar.

With the notable exception of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose top leadership will stand by Qatar until the curtain falls, other figures are likely to slowly distance themselves and quietly shift into the Saudi orbit. This is where the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council stands, after all, and where cash flow and arms will likely continue.

That, of course, is only if Qatar itself does not throw itself completely into the lap of Iran. The regional heist might be the only method Qatar has to withstand the heavy sanctions against it.

For example, Riad Hijab, the former prime minister who now heads the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), lives in Doha but conducts all his meetings in Riyadh. This will become technically difficult as all flights to and from Qatar have been terminated by Saudi Arabia and all land and sea borders have been closed.
Qatar crisis reverberates across the Maghreb

Iman Zayat

Tunis

The diplomatic earthquake in the Arab Peninsula over the Qatar issue seems to have passed political tensions across North Africa.

The interim government in eastern Libya swiftly cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposition of the siege on Doha. The like-minded countries in the Maghreb, including Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, took a step away from Qatar. The documents suggest that Qatar has supported terrorist groups in Libya since 2012. The interim government, which is based in eastern Libya and aligned with military commander Khalifa Hafter, has frequently accused Doha of backing Islamist-leaning factions, including the Muslim Brotherhood and more violent groups. The Libya Army spokesman Colonel Ahmed al-Mesmari later revealed Qatar supported Islamist rebels in Libya and Syria, being a country that has done everything in its power to divide the Arab nation in line with a Zionist agenda.

The Tunisian foreign minister, Ahmed al-Mesmari, later revealed Doha’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. The documents suggest that Qatar has supported terrorist groups in Libya since 2012.

Qatar’s role as a regional powerhouse that has led to it. Its foreign interests through the support of Islamists and one of a leading force meant to unite the region. The two countries have long held ties with this strategic ally and the Muslim Brotherhood phenomenon. As he sees it, the role of his Justice and Development Party is to advance the Muslim Brotherhood movement across MENA while constantly deepening military cooperation. The event of Qatar’s Military Pact, in early 2015, sealed a strategic alliance that went as far as Turkey pledging to defend Qatar against external threats.

The two countries have long held ties with this strategic ally and the Muslim Brotherhood phenomenon. The event of Qatar’s Military Pact, in early 2015, sealed a strategic alliance that went as far as Turkey pledging to defend Qatar against external threats. So close were the leaders that, as Middle East Monitor reported, "Doha sent at least 10 elite members of its Special Forces to defend President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the failed coup attempt on July 15 last year upon his request.

So, the current crisis with Qatar at its epicentre might be an inevitable effect on Turkey, regardless of how primary the Sudanese tension may have appeared to have led to it. In a powerful essay in the National, Hassan Hassan correctly divided the post-Arab uprisings countries in the region into two camps — one that seeks to advance its foreign interests through the support of Islamists and one of a leading force meant to unite the region — "one that seeks to advance its foreign interests through the support of Islamists and one of a leading force meant to unite the region."

Reality has made it clear that no other power in the region is closer to Qatar than Turkey. Due to its fluctuating economy, the latter has become, to a great extent, dependent on Qatar, which has run to its rescue by injecting money whenever needed.

The two countries have long held ties with this strategic ally and the Muslim Brotherhood phenomenon. The event of Qatar’s Military Pact, in early 2015, sealed a strategic alliance that went as far as Turkey pledging to defend Qatar against external threats.

"Doha knows it has little room to move this time," he wrote. "It cannot afford to be isolated but nor does it want to be the next domino to fall."

The sudden isolation of Qatar moves, "he wrote. "It cannot afford to be isolated but nor does it want to be the next domino to fall."

As Turkey pledged to defend Qatar against external threats, the latter has become, to a great extent, dependent on Qatar, which has run to its rescue by injecting money whenever needed.

The two countries have long held ties with this strategic ally and the Muslim Brotherhood phenomenon. The event of Qatar’s Military Pact, in early 2015, sealed a strategic alliance that went as far as Turkey pledging to defend Qatar against external threats.

"Doha knows it has little room to move this time," he wrote. "It cannot afford to be isolated but nor does it want to be the next domino to fall."

"Doha knows it has little room to move this time," he wrote. "It cannot afford to be isolated but nor does it want to be the next domino to fall."
The crisis over Qatar’s policies

The crisis over Qatar’s policies continues to unfold and it is in everyone’s interest for Doha to see the error of its ways and the risks they create. Tiny though it is, Qatar has tried to play an outsized role in the Gulf, the wider region and, indeed, in the whole world. It tried to do so through the baleful influence of the extremists it cultivated. Qatar has long provided sanctuary to many who preach an ideology and a course of action that are fuelling dangerous levels of tension and instability.

Doha is widely perceived as providing moral and material support to a long list of Islamist groups and it is no secret to key figures from the Muslim Brotherhood, the Palestinian group Hamas, Egypt’s Jamaat Islamiyya, Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front, Afghanistan’s Taliban and others. Serious charges have been levied at Qatar. On June 9, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates put 12 organisations and 59 individuals associated with Qatar on a terror sanctions list. Egypt has asked the UN Security Council to investigate reports that Qatar paid terrorist organisations no less than $1 billion to secure the release of Qatari dignitaries kidnapped in Iraq. It serves no purpose for Qatar to simply dismiss its neighbours’ concerns as baseless. It is no longer possible for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to tolerate such unjustifiable behaviour from a member state. It is not wise or desirable to allow regional stability to be endangered by Qatari ambivalence towards Tehran’s use of destabilising proxies.

Qatar claimed it was committed to the GCC’s security and to the containment of Iran but its actions raised serious questions about the strength and depth of that commitment and its motivation in pursuing policies that could only harm its neighbours.

Several Arab countries have expressed concern about Doha’s policy of interference in the affairs of other Arab countries. Doha’s dangerous positions became steadily more untenable when a new generation of Saudi leadership came to the fore. It may have been hubris or just colossal misjudgement that caused Doha to fail to take note of the growing regional unease about its policies. It might have thought itself unassailable because the largest US air base in the region is on Qatar soil. Perhaps it was so delusional that it failed to notice the changes in Washington after Donald Trump entered the White House. The new US president was less inclined to tolerate Iran’s regional meddling and, therefore, much less willing to ignore its ambiguous stance towards Tehran. Doha’s dangerous positions became steadily more untenable.

GCC membership means rights as well as responsibilities. It is time that Qatar behaved in a way that shows, at the very minimum, some commitment to GCC stability and security and that of the wider region.

Media campaigns beamed out of Doha must cease. All countries have the legitimate right to protest but not to the detriment of their neighbours and that of regional peace and stability.

Qatar’s behaviour can no longer be tolerated

If ceasing all the scheming against Saudi Arabia is not a sign of faithful submission to Sheikh Khalifa’s intentions, let it be then a sign of understanding once and for all that the state of Qatar is not in a vast country with a stable regime and that small Qatar cannot in any way destabilise it. We can now understand the motivation of the Qatar regime with all types and hues of political Islam. It seems now on a rogue mission to prove the service of Islam, religion must be the best channel. Qatar’s sudden religious fervour is far from being motivated by a genuine concern for Muslims and Islam. The purpose was to propagate the idea that Saudi Arabia is falling its religious duties towards Islam and especially its jihadist duties. It was hoped that such a message would fall on sympathetic ears inside Saudi society.

Just like Iran, Qatar used the Palestinian cause to advance its project and appear in a leading jihadist role. However, to be on the safe side with the United States, Qatar hurried to establish a complex network of access and open relations with Israel. There were no geopolitical or economic necessities for these relations. Still, this obvious fact did not stop Doha from being completely taken in by Qatar’s comedy. Looking at the twist and turns in Qatar’s declarations and actions, and at the risk of going out on a limb, I would say that Sheikh Tamim and his father had somehow reached the conclusion that the so-called jihadist Salafism in the Gulf region is taking its last breaths.

The jihadist terror groups are disappearing and, although Qatar does not dare declare openly its support for these groups, it will nevertheless seek to replace them and will try this time to appeal to other groups confusing Shia fundamentalism. We all know who is behind this type of extremist group.

Luckily for Sheikh Tamim and his father, the new scarecrow they will be waving to scare Qatar’s regional brothers is already known thanks to Iran’s incessant efforts in threaten- ing security in the Gulf region and the Middle East.

By saying what he said, Sheikh Tamim was launching a test ball to check the strength of relations between the Gulf countries. The strong reactions stunned him, so he probably inferred that his words were taken out of context. Still, he has chosen to escalate the crisis and change his dangerous positions. The other Arab countries had no choice but to start the process of stopping him for good. Adly Sadeq is a Palestinian writer and political analyst.
The many factors behind the London tragedy

Claude Salhani

The terrorist attacks in Manchester and London have brought to light many points in the war to defeat a sick and cowardly ideology led by maniacal men who feel no remorse in attacking defenceless girls. Where is the honour or valor in committing such barbaric acts?

Truth will always prevail over falsehoods and good will always triumph over evil. Look at history as a guideline. Every nefarious philosophy that adopted evil as its code map, be it from the past, the far left or from a ruthless dictatorship, has ultimately been defeated. At times, it may have taken a few more years but, in the end, good, truth and justice emerge victorious over oppressive regimes, be they religious.

Communism, fascism, jihadism — to name but a few — were predicated on lies, hatred and evil. Just how two-faced these groups are is apparent in their interpretation of Islam and the way they cherry-pick what suits them, passing over the rest. They supposedly reject modernity and all tools, yet turn to the most modern of Western advances — the internet to communicate, recruit and communicate between themselves and their agents in the West.

Their propaganda is pure fiction. It poisons on the vulnerability of marginalised youth with a shallow understanding of the faith and instils dangerously distorted and bellicose versions of Islamic history. The Islamic State programme put forward by the Islamic State (ISIS) is based on a platform of hate, lies and unabashed evil. It convinces brainwashed youth of its high-minded backgrounds that their neighbours and fellow citizens are the enemy.

Those who ordered or sanctioned the June 3 attacks in London committed a horrible, horrible sin, not only against innocent bystanders whom they considered to be their enemy but also against their own co-religionists. The ISIS narrative promises jihadis operation that their heavenly reward for their ultimate martyrdom would be multiplied tenfold because they are performing those acts during the holy month of Ramadhan.

God — no matter what you call him — does not condone the killing of innocents and there is nothing in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad — not in the Quran, nor in the Hadith — to suggest that the faithful need to go on a rampage during the very month they are meant to cleanse themselves and rise to a higher level of spirituality. In their sick minds the terrorists consider this latest attack a victory. Indeed, they may have scored points with their followers but ultimately this is a war they cannot win.

This is the last stop in a treacherous road of ideological perversion spanning various gradations. Misguided followers can graduate from the supposedly traditionalist Islamist doctrine to the most extreme forms of aggressive Salafism. Sometimes there is no evolution. New recruits just get dragged into the bloodiest forms of radicalism overnight.

The latest London incident raised many security and intelligence questions. There is clearly a long and difficult road ahead for Britain’s security forces as made evident by their apparent inability to identify the dangerous elements among Islamists or to heed warnings about the individuals who attacked the London Bridge attack but had not considered those individuals dangerous.

This is likely to be a mixture of faulty intelligence and a propensity to underestimate the danger such as individuals are examined through the distorting prism of communitytarianism. They are presumed just to be different. Still, the challenge can be daunting.

British Prime Minister Theresa May revealed that no fewer than five terror attempts had been thwarted in recent days. Security services are refining their strategies. The response time between the moment the alarm was first raised and security forces arrived on the scene was eight minutes. Eight minutes in a city as large and as congested as London is simply outstanding.

As security forces continue to penetrate and pre-empt terror attacks on the home front while confronting the groups on their own home turf, defeating them militarily, there remain two areas of security services need to address aggressively: The internet and social media.

In the meantime, we may find that some of our civil liberties may be constrained as the war on the jihadists from Britain intensifies.

“For enough is enough,” said the British prime minister. That is a phrase the resident of No 10 Downing street should have uttered well before June 5, 2017.

Claude Salhani is a regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.

Difficult road ahead. Flowers placed on the south side of London Bridge near Borough Market in London, on June 5.

New recruits just dragged into the bloodiest forms of radicalism overnight.

Opinion

What is it about Muslims in the West that Trump finds so discomfiting?

Rashmee Roshan Lall

You are a man named Khan, Donald Trump probably has it in for you. How else to read the US president’s savage verbal assault on London Mayor Sadiq Khan within hours of an audacious terrorist attack on the British capital?

It is hard to imagine any other occupant of the White House behaving with such bad taste and insensitivity as to upload London’s highest-elected official at a time of great distress. Trump, however, had no compunction about twisting punching Khan within hours of the terror attack on the bridge.

What happened to the Anglo-American special relationship, one might wonder? Where did all the friendship, sympathy? How about some old-fashioned courtesy.

Good questions but they do not really apply to Trump, who is like no other American president. He is a brawler who acts on his own personal basis. From his track record, the ban appears to be against the Khans who cross his path. For him, “Khan” read Muslims who live and flourish in the West and who dare to call Trump out on Islamophobic words and deeds.

Consider this: Eleven months ago, candidate Trump shamelessly assailed another Khan, Khizr, father of a Muslim US Army officer who died serving his country in Iraq. The besnared father, an American-Pakistani, criticised Trump’s “smears” on Muslims in a powerful speech at the Democratic Party convention.

As is customary, Khizr Khan was listened to with great respect. As the surviving family members of an American who died in war, Khizr and his wife Ghazala were treated with gentle awe by much of the United States. Not so Donald Trump. He belittled them, darkly insinuating that they belonged to a backward strain of Islam that oppressed women. He even trivialised the Khan’s “loss” of son by comparing that ultimate sacrifice to his own, which he described as working hard to create “thousands of jobs.”

Such tastelessness is hardly unusual in Trump’s interactions with people named Khan. From his track record, the ban appears to be against the Khans who cross his path. For him, “Khan” read Muslims who live and flourish in the West and who dare to call Trump out on Islamophobic words and deeds.

The many factors behind the London tragedy

Trump seems nonplussed by Western Muslims who are believ ers and well-integrated, are of some consequence in the world of sports, here, which is to say Europe of the United States. This suggests an orientalism so old-fashioned as to be best summed up by Rudy King’s silly poem “The Ballad of East and West,” which starts with the assertion that “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.”

What is it about Muslims in the West that Trump finds so discomfiting? Does he resent their right to question him as equals, to correct, to look him in the eye and to reject the base stereotyping of a whole faith community?

Both Khizr Khan and Sadiq Khan trained as lawyers and are able to see and call out Trump’s contempt for the law and the principles of natural justice.

So do many other people, to Trump’s chagrin, but he just seems to get a great deal angrier if their name is Khan.

Rashmee Roshan Lall is a columnist for The Arab Weekly. Her blog can be found at www.rashmee.com and she is on Twitter: @rashmee rl.
In Washington, tough position on Qatar despite confused signals

Thomas Seibert

The diplomatic crisis over Qatar is shining a spotlight on the US Air Force base in Qatar — a cornerstone of US military power in the Middle East. With 10,000 US troops, it is a crucial hub for regional operations. Since US President Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh last month, the US military has been re-evaluating its strategy and adjusting its priorities.

The Qatari decision to be in bed with Iran was not — was to make it clear during his trip to Riyadh who the bad guys are terrorist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and a withdrawal of US support for the Qatari government that has sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes. US President Donald Trump visited Riyadh to meet with Sunni Arab leaders he made very clear his own strategy that the GCC will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.

Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics changes.

Mark Habeck

US Al Udeid Airbase is very central to Qatari foreign policy

Mark Habek

The diplomat’s crisis over Qatar is shining a spotlight on the US Air Force base in Qatar — a cornerstone of US military power in the Middle East. With 10,000 US troops, it is a crucial hub for regional operations. Since US President Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh last month, the US military has been re-evaluating its strategy and adjusting its priorities.

The Qatari decision to be in bed with Iran was not — was to make it clear during his trip to Riyadh who the bad guys are terrorist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and a withdrawal of US support for the Qatari government that has sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.


State Rex Tillerson offered comments that stood in marked contrast to Trump’s statements, calling on Saudi Arabia to ease the blockade against Qatar. He said the actions against Doha was disturbing US commercial interests in the region as well as “undermining US military actions by the US and the campaign against the Islamic State.” Tillerson said that “leaders from the US government that have sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes. US President Donald Trump visited Riyadh to meet with Sunni Arab leaders he made very clear his own strategy that the GCC will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.

Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics changes.

Mark Habeck

US Al Udeid Airbase is very central to Qatari foreign policy

Mark Habek

The diplomat’s crisis over Qatar is shining a spotlight on the US Air Force base in Qatar — a cornerstone of US military power in the Middle East. With 10,000 US troops, it is a crucial hub for regional operations. Since US President Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh last month, the US military has been re-evaluating its strategy and adjusting its priorities.

The Qatari decision to be in bed with Iran was not — was to make it clear during his trip to Riyadh who the bad guys are terrorist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and a withdrawal of US support for the Qatari government that has sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.


State Rex Tillerson offered comments that stood in marked contrast to Trump’s statements, calling on Saudi Arabia to ease the blockade against Qatar. He said the actions against Doha was disturbing US commercial interests in the region as well as “undermining US military actions by the US and the campaign against the Islamic State.” Tillerson said that “leaders from the US government that have sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes. US President Donald Trump visited Riyadh to meet with Sunni Arab leaders he made very clear his own strategy that the GCC will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.

Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics changes.

Mark Habeck

US Al Udeid Airbase is very central to Qatari foreign policy

Mark Habek

The diplomat’s crisis over Qatar is shining a spotlight on the US Air Force base in Qatar — a cornerstone of US military power in the Middle East. With 10,000 US troops, it is a crucial hub for regional operations. Since US President Donald Trump’s visit to Riyadh last month, the US military has been re-evaluating its strategy and adjusting its priorities.

The Qatari decision to be in bed with Iran was not — was to make it clear during his trip to Riyadh who the bad guys are terrorist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and a withdrawal of US support for the Qatari government that has sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.


State Rex Tillerson offered comments that stood in marked contrast to Trump’s statements, calling on Saudi Arabia to ease the blockade against Qatar. He said the actions against Doha was disturbing US commercial interests in the region as well as “undermining US military actions by the US and the campaign against the Islamic State.” Tillerson said that “leaders from the US government that have sought for years to have influence with all sides against a Saudi leadership that is saying “It’s time to choose sides.” Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes. US President Donald Trump visited Riyadh to meet with Sunni Arab leaders he made very clear his own strategy that the GCC will not accept promises or cosmetics or changes.

Riyadh will not accept promises or cosmetics changes.
Oman works to relaunch Yemen diplomatic talks as fighting continues

Saleh Baidhani
Sana’a

W ith the humanitarian situation deteriorating and fighting waging between warring factions raging on, diplomatic efforts by Oman, to end the war in Yemen have begun. Muscat is mediating between the internationally recognised government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Iran-allied Houthi rebels to implement the peace plan championed by UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdulkhalim al-Maklafi met with General Sultan bin Sulaiman al-Nuaimi, minister of the Royal Oﬃce and Oman Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi, in Muscat to “discuss ways to bridge diﬀerences with the Houthis,” based on the UN envoy’s latest initiative.

Yemen’s SABA news agency reported that the officials discussed facilitating transit of Yemenis through Oman, particularly Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) resi dence permit holders and students. The Omani side pledged its readiness to offer more facilities for Yemenis in these harsh circumstances.”

Ould Cheikh Ahmed has been involved in shuttle diplomacy to generate support for the plan. However, during an update to the UN Security Council, he said a political solution was far away. “We are not close,” Ould Cheikh Ahmed said. “The reluctance of the key parties to embrace the concessions on offer or even discuss them remains extremely troubling.”

Confidence-building measures suggested by the United Nations include turning the strategic port of Hodeida over to a neutral third party, paying civil servants’ salaries and opening Sana’a airport.

It remains to be seen whether the Hadi government would accept such concessions due to fears of Iran continuing to arm the Houthi militia. Fighting continued in several important locations, with government forces reportedly making gains in Taiz, Yemen’s third largest city.

Dubai-based Al Arabiya reported that fighting between forces loyal to Hadi and the Houthis rebels over control of the Republic Palace continued, with the militia barely holding on.

Gaining control of Taiz is important to government forces’ plans, said political analyst Faisi Al Bel, who added: “The liberation of important areas in Taiz and the progress of the army there, albeit slow, is a significant shift in the conflict due to the strategic geographical importance of Taiz in liberating the entire west coast of Yemen.”

The London-based pan-Arab daily Asharq Al-Awsat reported that troops loyal to Hadi were preparing for offensives on several rebel-held parts of the country, including the Red Sea port of Hodeida.

Several Gulf states made efforts to combat the growing cholera outbreak in Yemen. The first wave spread in September 2016, with about 23,427 suspected cases. An estimated 316 new cases were registered from April 29-May 18, World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics indicate.

The Emirates Red Crescent (ERC) delivered urgent medical assistance to contain the cholera outbreak, particularly in southern Yemen. The WHO and the Yemeni Ministry of Health worked to contain the latest wave of cholera, which has spread across 18 Yemeni governorates.

A Saudi agency was the first to respond to the UN appeal for help with regards to the cholera outbreak, donating $274 million and setting up an urgent response team to deliver rapid intervention programmes, diagnosis of the epidemic, treatment and control and work on prevention while cooperating with OAE Ministry of Health.

Kuwait rushed medical supplies from hospitals in the Abyan governorate of the north to the Red Sea port of Hodeida.

In defence of Saudi Arabia’s role in Yemen

Fadi Farhat

The legal and political context of the conflict in Yemen is rarely provided.

Saudi Arabia is not invading or bombing Yemen unilaterally.

Making distinctions. A boy walks past soldiers from the Saudi-led coalition patrolling a street in Yemen’s southern port city of Aden.
**US-backed alliance begins Raqqa assault**

**Simon Speakman Cordall**

Tunis

A

SDF and coalition forces, which had been steadily massing outside the city, began their assault on Raqqa, where rebels are entrenched in the cage they have built to liberate the city of Raqqa, the alleged heart of the Islamic State group's territory under government control. It is also difficult to know how many civilians remain in the city after three years of ISIS occupation. However, the International Rescue Committee estimated that ownership of any overwhelming loyalty to its population. However, in the course of the civil war, “Nicholas A. Heras, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, said, “The SDF may be a model for life in their caliphate, maintaining a pattern foreign fighters and a key strategic planning centre for terror attacks around the world. Coalition forces estimate the number of ISIS fighters in Raqqa at 3,000-4,000. The Battle-hardened core of the jihadists has returned east, tainting the city with factions in the US-led coalition.”

The Alawi core of the Syrian Arab Republic is a symbolic representation of the regime’s state capitalism, which has mostly endured over the years, allied to Assad’s cousin, Rami Makhlouf, who takes the Sunni-dominated city of Damascus, as a symbol for life in their caliphate, maintaining a pattern foreign fighters and a key strategic planning centre for terror attacks around the world. Coalition forces estimate the number of ISIS fighters in Raqqa at 3,000-4,000. The Battle-hardened core of the jihadists has returned east, tainting the city with factions in the US-led coalition.”

The Alawi core of the Syrian Arab Republic is a symbolic representation of the regime’s state capitalism, which has mostly endured over the years, allied to Assad’s cousin, Rami Makhlouf, who takes the Sunni-dominated city of Damascus, as a symbol for life in their caliphate, maintaining a pattern foreign fighters and a key strategic planning centre for terror attacks around the world. Coalition forces estimate the number of ISIS fighters in Raqqa at 3,000-4,000. The Battle-hardened core of the jihadists has returned east, tainting the city with factions in the US-led coalition.”

However, with the hawks circling the skies over Damascus, questions over how long the regime may continue to enjoy the support of a base with little personal loyalty to its leader are growing more pressing. In the course of the civil war, the power struggle between the hawks and the doves, and a sense of how drawn to the US-led coalition is the turning point. However, with the hawks circling the skies over Damascus, questions over how long the regime may continue to enjoy the support of a base with little personal loyalty to its leader are growing more pressing.

Kerry dismissed them as a “great big zero.” All the same, despite the intense and divisive nature of his regime, Assad’s government remains in power. Traffic runs in the streets of Damascus, taxes are paid, the army remains loyal to his command and the government civil service administration is in the hands of foreign Seenists. How severe public acquiescence to Assad’s rule should not be conflated with public support for Bashar Assad, Heras said, “The Alawi core of the Syrian Arab Republic’s intelligence and security services would withdraw as much military hardware as it could to western coastal provinces...” he said, “and the Iranian-backed Shia militia forces that fight with the Syrian Arab Army would viciously contest rebel forces. Damascus would not be completely under the control of the regime and the regime forces would be pockets of either Assad forces or Iranian-backed Shia militia in the city. It would be a mess that would dwarf Tripoli, Libya or Mogadishu, Somalia in terms of militia conflict and bloodshed.”

**Syria**

**Simon Speakman Cordall**

Tunis

**Simon Speakman Cordall**

Tunis

Seven years into Syria’s civil war, the government of Bashar Assad remains steadfastly at the wheel of the Damascus political machine. Through the conflict, Assad has positioned himself as the moderate guardian of the country’s endangered minorities and the reformist defender of the country’s newly liberalized economic elite. It’s a public message that, given the barbarity of the regime’s jihad, opposition appears more persuasive by the day.

Furthermore, Assad, along with his Russian and Iranian backers, claims an electoral legitimacy denied to those who seek to displace him. In the 2016 elections, Assad and the Baath Party he led were re-elected for their third consecutive term with 88.7% of the vote, which seems at face value, like an impressive achievement for a government denounced around the world for its barbaric and criminal conduct.

However, with conflicts on the ground, especially lacking in political restoration to the 2011-2012 street movements and territories under government control, the results were hardly a ringing endorsement of Assad’s success. The European Union branded the vote “invalid” and former US Secretary of State John Kerry dismissed them as a “great big zero.” All the same, despite the intense and divisive nature of his regime, Assad’s government remains in power. Traffic runs in the streets of Damascus, taxes are paid, the army remains loyal to his command and the government civil service administration is in the hands of foreign Seenists. How severe public acquiescence to Assad’s rule should not be conflated with public support for Bashar Assad, Heras said, “The Alawi core of the Syrian Arab Republic’s intelligence and security services would withdraw as much military hardware as it could to western coastal provinces...” he said, “and the Iranian-backed Shia militia forces that fight with the Syrian Arab Army would viciously contest rebel forces. Damascus would not be completely under the control of the regime and the regime forces would be pockets of either Assad forces or Iranian-backed Shia militia in the city. It would be a mess that would dwarf Tripoli, Libya or Mogadishu, Somalia in terms of militia conflict and bloodshed.”
Mosul civilians bear brunt of battle with ISIS

Mamoon Alabbaasi

London

Civilians from the northern Iraqi city of Mosul are facing many threats as Iraqi forces draw closer to the western part of the city from the Islamic State (ISIS). The UN human rights office said it believes ISIS has killed more than 250 civilians trying to flee the last stronghold of the militants in western Mosul since May 26. "Shooting children as they try to run to safety with their families — there are no words of condemnation strong enough for such despicable acts," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein said in a statement. "The murder of civilians, as well as the intentional directing of an attack against civilians who are not directly participating in hostilities, are war crimes," it said. ISIS militants are known for using civilians as shields as well as shooting those who try to escape. There are an estimated 200,000 civilians — about half of them children — in Mosul's Old City and surrounding areas. "Some (children) were reportedly killed as they desperately tried to flee the fighting which is intensifying by the hour," UNICEF said.

The UN rights office statement said it is investigating the death of as many as 80 civilians reportedly killed May 23 during an air strike by the US-led coalition against ISIS in Mosul's Zanjili neighborhood. The UN statement called on the "international coalition to ensure that their operations comply fully with international humanitarian law and that all possible measures are taken to avoid the loss of civilian lives." Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amman's International Women's Rights Organization and other rights groups warned against using large air-dropped bombs. "Iraqi and coalition forces should recognize that in the crowded Old City, using explosive weapons with wide area effects puts civilians at excessive risk," HRW Middle East Deputy Director Lama Fakih said in a news release.

Iraqi authorities said they were investigating reports that their forces used phosphorus in western Mosul. Residents in the city are also reportedly suffering from serious shortages of food and medicine.

Those who have fled ISIS-held areas, however, face other troubles. "At least 26 bodies of bound and blindfolded men are being found one after the other in and around Mosul and in the Tigris River, raising serious concerns about extra-judicial killings by government forces," Fakih said in a statement. "The lack of any apparent government action to investigate these deaths undermines the government’s statements on protecting detainees rights.

The UN rights office is investigating the death of up to 80 civilians reportedly killed during an air strike against ISIS.

"Iraqi authorities want civilians who spent over two years living under ISIS to feel safe and protected, they need to ensure that anyone responsible for murdering prisoners is brought to justice," Fakih said. The Iraq Shia militia of Imam Ali Brigades criticised the actions of one of its commanders after a video surfaced purportedly showing him holding the body of a suspected ISIS fighter.

It was not the first time that the commander, Ayoub Falah Hassan al-Rubaye — whose name is Abu Azrael (Angel of Death) — appeared in videos depicting gruesome acts but he apparently has not been punished by the government. Rubaye dismissed reports that his militia had disowned him, saying that the Imam Ali Brigades condemned his actions in the video but still serves with them near Mosul.

Kurdish authorities in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, which will have a referendum on its independence on September 25, were dealing with controversy.

"New cases have emerged of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities detaining men and boys fleeing Mosul on suspicion of affiliation with the Islamic State," said HRW. "Family members report that after Kurdish authorities took their relatives into custody, the families had no contact with the detainees for as long as four months."

Kurdish authorities denied the HRW allegations, insisting that only suspects are arrested and they are provided access to lawyers and their families are aware that they are detained.

Is now a redefining moment for Iraq's civil society?

Nasli Tarzi

The release of seven anti-graft activists by unidentified captors marked civil society’s flagging attempts to rekindle the movement at a grim juncture.

Jubilant crowds greeted the release of the male university professors held for two days in April by militia who were a victory for Iraq’s grassroots community. Hysterical crowds greeted the men as heroes on their arrival at Al-Andalus Square in Baghdad at 2.30am April 10.

Civil society movements have not been entirely dormant after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Manpower had been mobilised and civil activism had been revived but largely co-opted to service of Islamist parties.

In a statement signed by Interior Ministry advisor Wahab al Taei, the activists were said to have been released “unharmed” — words belied by signs of physical abuse that marked some of the returning men. They are known players in the domestic civil rights scene. They are involved in student politics and have an unflagging stance on corruption official.

Their release operation was executed with the help of officials of the Student’s Union who had called in the voice of vocalist. “Not anyone can pass through official checkpoints unchallenged. You must obtain official access. The operation was no doubt linked to agents of political parties,” the person said.

The government, in typical fashion, promised further investigations into the matter but failed to divulge information regarding the men’s disappearance or their kidnappers’ identities. More than ever before, civil society in refusing to cower, while kidnappings and raids remain a cost of testing the promise of free speech in Iraq.

Religion no longer holds the sway it did under the reign of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Divisive voices have at last grown louder as civil society has struggled to shift the power to its side.

In a recent news conference, Iraqi Member of Parliament Faaiz al-Shaikh Ali denounced the kidnappings, stating that “this will not be the first or the last time civil society dissenters will be kidnapped for demonstrating and protesting against Iraqi government corruption.”

In today’s Iraq, to question the actions of political figureheads or militants movements is almost tantamount to blasphemy. This line of thinking was recently reflected in a draft law involving political speech. One of its clauses advocated the imprisonment of any person who debases religious symbols, figures or underlines a verse on the measure was postponed.

The postponement comes as an extension to a decision to discontinue the Independent High Electoral Commission — a postponement reportedly sealed by a secret handshake between Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and members of the National Iraqi Alliance.

Months of tireless protests in Iraq’s Tahrir Square have amounted to very little as Sadrist backpedals on the promise to change Iraq’s electoral law. That has led activists to question the fervor of the protests, with some describing them as a decoy to distract from bigger issues. This would not be the first time in which unrealistic promises voiced by political figureheads have been unmet. Sadrist’s efforts to purge the Independent High Electoral Commission of Daawa Party elements who effectively pull the government’s body’s strings are a mere reflection of his political ambitions.

Following the agreement to postpone the commission’s fate, new hands — most likely of Sadrist ilk — could take charge.

The limitations civil society faces remain but continuing the drive to the right is the possibility of the existence of Iraqi civil society.

Nasli Tarzi is an independent journalist, whose writings and films focus on Iraq’s ancient history and contemporary political scene.
Egyptian human rights chief outlines challenges

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

The fight against terrorism, a lack of will from the government and scant cooperation from state institutions hinder efforts to improve human rights in Egypt, said Mohamed Fayek, the head of the country’s rights watchdog.

“These are problems that make it difficult for human rights conditions to improve,” said Fayek, who heads the semi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), “but it must be known to everybody that the fight against terrorism, for example, cannot justify human rights violations.”

Egypt’s military has been fighting against a branch of the Islamic State (ISII) in the Sinai Peninsula while police and security forces have taken steps to clamp down on radical Islamists, such as designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation.

However, local rights groups said authorities are relying on illegitimate measures, particularly temporary detention, that contravene human rights. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced a 3-month state of emergency in April after ISII attacks on two Coptic churches killed 42 people. The emergency laws give police expanded powers of arrest and surveillance.

“When you put innocent person in temporary detention, you punish him for a crime he did not commit,” Fayek said. “Our next move will be to submit to parliament a bill to limit temporary detention.”

Observers said the number of Egyptian citizens being arrested but not referred to prosecution as stipulated by the constitution is rising under Sisi. A 2016 Amnesty International report said that hundreds of students, political activists and protesters had been forcibly disappeared.

Asked about human rights conditions in Egypt, Sisi conceded that the state has made “mistakes” but asserted that they are unavoidable as the government works to combat terrorism.

Sisi’s critics, however, say that citing the fight against terrorism is an easy way to wave away human rights abuses.

“The authorities keep violating the constitution by putting innocent people in temporary detentions,” said human rights advocate Nagad al-Bous. “The enforced disappearances of citizens is on the rise and nobody is acting against it.”

Fayek said countries that strike a balance between combating terrorism and protecting human rights were best able to protect their citizens. The NCHR has said it has received little cooperation from Egyptian state institutions to address human rights issues.

“Although some progress has happened in this country, including the drafting in 2014 of a constitution that enshrines human rights, the elimination of the emergency laws that [were] enforced for three decades under ex-President Hosni Mubarak and the end of sexual urgency trials in his council still has a long way to go to improve human rights conditions,” Fayek said.

“The fact is that we are not fully satisfied with this progress. We try to raise awareness about the importance of protecting human rights, which is a difficult mission.”

Founded in 2003 as the country’s national rights agency, the NCHR works to promote human rights and investigate alleged violations. The organisation produces an annual report about the state of human rights in Egypt.

The 2016 report, published earlier this year, cited the enforced disappearances of dozens of citizens, instances of torture inside police custody and the death of prisoners. The report pointed out on the Interior Ministry to improve prison conditions and cooperate in revealing the whereabouts of citizens reported by their relatives to have disappeared.

At the same time, the NCHR faces criticism from those who say it does not go far enough to take the government to task and overlooks many human rights violations.

“The NCHR is a council that only cares about giving a good impression about the government,” said Gamal Eid, head of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information.

“Prisoners die in prison cells because of systematic torture, which makes it necessary for some policemen to be punished.”

The NCHR rarely mentions this but asserts that allegations of torture cannot be described as “systematic.” He acknowledged that the government “individual cases” of police and prison officers allegedly committing violations but these are investigated by the Interior Ministry when the council reports them.

“We are not saying everything is perfect but also do not like to look at the negatives only,” Fayek said.

“We still have a long way to go because protecting human rights always needs a lot of work and we are doing it, despite challenges.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian journalist in Cairo.

Islamic State growing beyond Sinai and into southern Egypt

Ibrahim Ouf

Cairo

The killing of 28 Christian pilgrims on a desert road in the central province of Minya raised fears about the growth of the Islamic State (ISII) beyond the Sinai Peninsula and into southern Egypt.

Buoyed by ISIS’s survival and its ability to attack across the country, the Islamic State’s extremist ideology is finding additional adherents, particularly in southern Egypt.

“ISIS has succeeded in creating its own cells in the southern provinces,” said Khaled Okasha, an Egyptian security expert. “This means that security agencies need to open their eyes and intensify investigations to improve, “ said Fayek, who heads the semi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), “but it must be known to everybody that the fight against terrorism, for example, cannot justify human rights violations.”

The fact is that we are not fully satisfied with this progress. We try to raise awareness about the importance of protecting human rights, which is a difficult mission.”

Founded in 2003 as the country’s national rights agency, the NCHR works to promote human rights and investigate alleged violations. The organisation produces an annual report about the state of human rights in Egypt.

The 2016 report, published earlier this year, cited the enforced disappearances of dozens of citizens, instances of torture inside police custody and the death of prisoners. The report pointed out on the Interior Ministry to improve prison conditions and cooperate in revealing the whereabouts of citizens reported by their relatives to have disappeared.

At the same time, the NCHR faces criticism from those who say it does not go far enough to take the government to task and overlooks many human rights violations.

“The NCHR is a council that only cares about giving a good impression about the government,” said Gamal Eid, head of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information.

“Prisoners die in prison cells because of systematic torture, which makes it necessary for some policemen to be punished.”

The NCHR rarely mentions this but asserts that allegations of torture cannot be described as “systematic.” He acknowledged that the government “individual cases” of police and prison officers allegedly committing violations but these are investigated by the Interior Ministry when the council reports them.

“We are not saying everything is perfect but also do not like to look at the negatives only,” Fayek said.

“We still have a long way to go because protecting human rights always needs a lot of work and we are doing it, despite challenges.”

Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian journalist in Cairo.

Most economic development has been concentrated in Cairo and the coastal cities for decades, a trend President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is trying to reverse.

Sisi has designated a large portion of the state budget to projects in southern Egypt. Egypt’s new investment law offers incentives to investors who want to start industrial projects in the southern provinces.

In April, 2016, government launched a new 5-year economic programme that included $20 billion worth of projects in the southern provinces. The programme is part of a broader plan to reduce the country’s reliance on oil and natural gas exports and diversify the economy.

The programme, which is expected to create thousands of jobs and bring about economic growth, is part of a broader plan to reduce the country’s reliance on oil and natural gas exports and diversify the economy.

However, until the government’s projects bear fruit and improve living conditions for those in the south, Egypt must deal with the ramifications of its previous neglect of the southern provinces.

“The lack of development in these provinces for a long time has affected the quality of life of people. Those of us who have turned these provinces into a magnet for radical thinking and radical groups.”

Ibrahim Ouf is an Egyptian journalist in Cairo.
Sudanese investment in Sudan is expected to grow to $3.5 billion this year.

The improvement in Sudan-Saudi ties follows a low point less than five years ago when Khartoum allowed three Iranian ships to dock and Riyadh prevented al-Bashir’s plane from using its airspace. Since then, Sudan has moved out of Iran’s orbit and the two nations have embarked on a full-scale cooperation in various fields.

Saudi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour (R) met with al-Bashir in Riyadh last January. Riyadh pursued its regional ambitions against Sudan and backing Egypt is backing armed opposition groups in Sudan and their help to the country are unprecedented.”

He also pointed to Egyptian-Sudanese tensions over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in the Halyeb Triangle, an area administered by Egypt and claimed by Sudan. The “Egyptian occupation” was a stab in the back, al-Bashir told the Qatari newspaper Al-Sharq.

Sudan’s ties have improved with Riyadh, provoking tensions between the countries.

Egypt-Sudan tensions rise as each side sticks to its guns

Egypt and Sudan.

Tensions between Cairo and Khartoum remained high following a meeting in Cairo between Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Sudanese counterpart Ibrahim Ghandour. Although both officials highlighted bilateral ties between the countries, they accused each other of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir declined to attend the summit after the United States signed a joint statement long and steady dialogue to enable regional relations. “This is why, if it acts to improve relations with the international community, we will remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism,” said Egyptian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Abdul Bait Badawi Al-Sansouly.

London

Cairo

Deadlock.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour (R) speaks with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry following a news conference in Khartoum, last April.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Tensions between Cairo and Khartoum remained high following a meeting in Cairo between Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Sudanese counterpart Ibrahim Ghandour. Although both officials highlighted bilateral ties between the countries, they accused each other of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir declined to attend the summit after the United States signed a joint statement

Sudanese investment in Sudan is expected to grow to $3.5 billion this year.

The improvement in Sudan-Saudi ties follows a low point less than five years ago when Khartoum allowed three Iranian ships to dock and Riyadh prevented al-Bashir’s plane from using its airspace. Since then, Sudan has moved out of Iran’s orbit and the two nations have embarked on a full-scale cooperation in various fields.

Egypt-Sudan tensions rise as each side sticks to its guns.

“Egypt is angry at unrelenting harassment by the Sudanese president who seeks to pick a verbal fight with his country’s northern neighbour whenever there is an internal problem in Sudan,” said Tarek Fahmi, a political science professor at Cairo University. “Egypt has more than enough reasons to view Sudan and its leader with suspicion.”

These reasons include Sudan’s support for a massive dam being constructed by Ethiopia on the Nile. Egyptian officials have expressed concern that Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam would lessen its Nile water supply and create dangerous water shortages in the country. In addition to Khartoum’s recent decision to report to Trump on the lifting of sanctions imposed on Sudan and remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism — citing health issues — to ban al-Bashir’s plane from using its airspace.

Al-Bashir’s visit to Riyadh on May 21 and captured what he described as Egyptian armoured vehicles. He defended his country’s position from Egypt. “There are deeply entrenched problems between Cairo and Khartoum. They must take a need for change to improve relations with the international community, we will remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism,” said Egyptian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Abdul Bait Badawi Al-Sansouly.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi vehemently refuted the claim that Egypt is illegally occupying a border territory known as the Halyeb Triangle. Khartoum said it would seek international arbitration to resolve the 20,580 sq.km territory. Although Sisi did not mention Sudan explicitly, Cairo’s expanded counterterrorist policy has fuelled tensions between Egypt and Sudan.

Egypt-Sudan tensions rise as each side sticks to its guns.

“All these measures, Egyptian political analysts said, reflect Khartoum’s insistence on escalating the conflict

“Egypt tried to become part of the Sunni tent against Iran but Sudan is slowly easing Khartoum’s re-entry into the Arab Gulf States.”

Egyptian-Sudanese ties improve as Khartoum moves out of Iranian orbit

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir (R) meets with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in Riyadh, last January.

London

Cairo

“Egypt is angry at unrelenting harassment by the Sudanese president who seeks to pick a verbal fight with his country’s northern

“Egypt is angry at unrelenting harassment by the Sudanese president who seeks to pick a verbal fight with his country’s northern neighbour whenever there is an internal problem in Sudan,” said Tarek Fahmi, a political science professor at Cairo University. “Egypt has more than enough reasons to view Sudan and its leader with suspicion.”

These reasons include Sudan’s support for a massive dam being constructed by Ethiopia on the Nile. Egyptian officials have expressed concern that Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam would lessen its Nile water supply and create dangerous water shortages in the country. In addition to Khartoum’s recent decision to report to Trump on the lifting of sanctions imposed on Sudan and remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism — citing health issues — to ban al-Bashir’s plane from using its airspace.

Al-Bashir’s visit to Riyadh on May 21 and captured what he described as Egyptian armoured vehicles. He defended his country’s position from Egypt. “There are deeply entrenched problems between Cairo and Khartoum. They must take a need for change to improve relations with the international community, we will remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism,” said Egyptian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Abdul Bait Badawi Al-Sansouly.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi vehemently refuted the claim that Egypt is illegally occupying a border territory known as the Halyeb Triangle. Khartoum said it would seek international arbitration to resolve the 20,580 sq.km territory. Although Sisi did not mention Sudan explicitly, Cairo’s expanded counterterrorist policy has fuelled tensions between Egypt and Sudan.

Egypt-Sudan tensions rise as each side sticks to its guns.

“All these measures, Egyptian political analysts said, reflect Khartoum’s insistence on escalating the conflict

“Egypt is angry at unrelenting harassment by the Sudanese president who seeks to pick a verbal fight with his country’s northern neighbour whenever there is an internal problem in Sudan,” said Tarek Fahmi, a political science professor at Cairo University. “Egypt has more than enough reasons to view Sudan and its leader with suspicion.”

These reasons include Sudan’s support for a massive dam being constructed by Ethiopia on the Nile. Egyptian officials have expressed concern that Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam would lessen its Nile water supply and create dangerous water shortages in the country. In addition to Khartoum’s recent decision to report to Trump on the lifting of sanctions imposed on Sudan and remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism — citing health issues — to ban al-Bashir’s plane from using its airspace.

Al-Bashir’s visit to Riyadh on May 21 and captured what he described as Egyptian armoured vehicles. He defended his country’s position from Egypt. “There are deeply entrenched problems between Cairo and Khartoum. They must take a need for change to improve relations with the international community, we will remove the country from the list of state sponsors of terrorism,” said Egyptian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Abdul Bait Badawi Al-Sansouly.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi vehemently refuted the claim that Egypt is illegally occupying a border territory known as the Halyeb Triangle. Khartoum said it would seek international arbitration to resolve the 20,580 sq.km territory. Although Sisi did not mention Sudan explicitly, Cairo’s expanded counterterrorist policy has fuelled tensions between Egypt and Sudan.

Egypt-Sudan tensions rise as each side sticks to its guns.
Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed has appeared to struggle to meet the country’s socio-economic challenges since he took office 11 months ago and became the country’s youngest head of government in decades.

As head of a nationalist unity government, Chahed, 41, was supposed to be the glue that brought political groups that have a majority in parliament as well as two leading political movements together. That support was only lukewarm as the prime minister was confronted by a tense social climate and a sceptical public.

At least twice his office had to issue statements to scotch rumours that he was stepping down.

Chahed appeared isolated in the face of protesting youths clamouring for jobs and a return to life as normal for development in the southern region of Tataouine. The protesters moved to El Karmour area where the main oil pipelines in Tunisia lie. They attempted to choke the flow of oil on May 23, warning alarms in Tunis where security officials presented evidence on television for how they described as the collu- sion of shadowy businessmen with the protesters.

Chahed huddled with his top security aid to discuss plans for a meeting of the heads of the three North African countries’ mediation teams on the crisis in Libya. That support was “strong but we knew that we were on top of them.”

Chahed’s government of national unity has been in constant decline, “Tonight’s government is functioning ‘in a mafia manner’,” according to the former minister who leads the left-wing Tunisian Socialist Party, the main opposition party. In addition, the government has to heed the warning of experts who have repeatedly run into roadblocks, “It is not the case today. A business- man with plenty of cash is able now to blow a political party up. The result is a feeling that the state is functioning ‘in a mafia manner’ that is widespread among the popu- lation and the confidence of Youssef Chahed’s government of national unity government has been at an all-time low,” the adviser was quoted as adding.

The report added that “while macro-economic indicators are deteriorating, struggles are intensify- ing among businesspeople whose hidden influence on the political scene and protest movements con- tinue to grow.”

It cited an expert as saying: “Be- fore 2011, there was, on one hand, the state and its best representatives who enjoyed respect and, on the other hand, there were the ma- boos, namely the Trabelsi family who were hated. Today, the state itself is perceived as a mafia. There is no distinction between the state and the mafia.”

Chahed’s campaign has received wide public support. “It is too early to pass judgment on the campaign against corruption but it is a break- through in the political life as it is giving back trust and hope to the citizens who had lost hope that the government could arrest, jail and seize the assets of the symbols of corruption,” wrote Nouri al-Sal, a columnist with the Arabic-language daily Al-Chourouk.

Politicians from all sides accu- plauded and voiced support. Some linked Chahed’s battle against cor- ruption to his political survival ins- titutions. “Fighting corruption will be followed by his resign- ation from the position of prime minister,” said Mohamed Abbou, a former minister who leads the left- ist Democratic Current party.

The Gulf crisis has further polar- ized Libya, with leading factions in the region opposing, and in some cases supporting, the different factions in the oil-rich country.

The Gulf crisis has further polar- ized Libya, with leading factions in the region opposing, and in some cases supporting, the different factions in the oil-rich country.

The_big_gest_images_of_the_gulf_crisis_in_Libya_is_the_conflict_between_the_gulf_countries_and_the_Libyan_government.

Tunisia and Egypt called on all of Libya’s neighbours and its people to engage in inclusive dialogue to restore the 2011-15 period we knew that the state was functioning ‘in a mafia manner’.”

“From today onwards, we will have put Tunisia on the path of growth, definitely won the war against corruption and done the same with corruption,” Chahed told Essabah daily.

Lamine Ghamni is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.
The blueprint for occupation. An Israeli researcher scans declassified documents for Akevot NGO in Jerusalem on May 10.

Trump should appoint pro-Palestinian advisers

Kamel Hawwash

Viewpoint

using his recent trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, US President Donald Trump expressed his desire to bring peace to the region, achieving what he has repeatedly named the "ultimate deal.

At a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Trump said: "We want to create peace between Israel and the Palestinian people. We will do it. We will be working so hard to get it done."

While there were calls from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for Trump to demand that the Palestinian Authority stop allowing protests and those whom Palestinians consider martyrs, Trump did not do this publicly.

Trump spent a day in Israel meeting with its leaders and minutes in Bethlehem meeting with Abbas. Initial reports indicated positive meetings in both areas but recent revelations about Trump’s meeting with Abbas suggest that the president’s promise to meet with the Palestinian leader, accusing Abbas of “deceiving” him about the Palestinian Authority’s role in inciting violence against Israel.

Trump’s senior advisers and ambassadors hold pro-Israel views with no counter view seemingly present.

Diversity needed. Israel’s Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (R) and US President Donald Trump (L) chat as White House senior adviser Jared Kushner is seen in between them, during their meeting at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, on May 22.
Living among jihadists tests Tunisia's anti-terror strategy

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunisia

The gruesome killing of a Tunisian shepherd, 16 months after his 16-year-old brother, was kidnapped and killed by the same group, has rekindled concerns over the threat of terrorism. On June 3, the body of Khalfi Soltani, 16, was found by an army patrol in Mount Mghila, a rugged area in central Tunisia where various militant groups are known to be active. The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for Soltani’s killing, saying he was a spy for Tunisian intelligence.

Khalfa’s 16-year-old brother, Mahrous Soltani, 33, was found by an army patrol in Mount Mghila, a rugged area in central Tunisia where various militant groups are known to be active. The Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for Soltani’s killing, saying he was a spy for Tunisian intelligence.

The Soltani family around $50,000 for the killing of the two brothers, according to Adel Ouni, a Tunisian analyst. Ouni said the family had been forced to leave their home in the village of Slatniya.

The killing of the two shepherds is a blow to the government’s efforts to gain popular support and show the world that it is committed to protecting its people.

As pressure on ISIS grows, Western officials continue to call for a “metastasising” of terror threat

Thomas Seibert

Washington

A s forces of an interna-
tional coalition coalesce against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, US officials said they are bracing for a heightened terror threat by battle-hardened foreign fighters returning home amid the dismantling of the ISIS caliphate.

Robert Gates, a former US defense secretary, warned in May that ISIS is “metastasizing” and become “more active and more aggressive in a variety of places in the West.”

An improved exchange of information about who is travelling to and from ISIS areas is crucial.

Three years after fighting through Syria and Iraq, ISIS is on the defensive. Iraqi officials said the area under its control shrank from 40% of the country to about 7%.

A senior European security official warned that the situation is under way against ISIS in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul and US-backed forces in neighbouring Syria are preparing for an attack on the militant’s headquarters in the city of Raqqa.

Close to 70,000 ISIS fighters have been killed in recent years, US officials said. Arab and US-led coalition forces have killed more than 100,000, officials said.

Foreign fighters are still entering Syria and Iraq, officials say.

Gates said that while a defeat of ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa was important, it would be wrong to think about an overall victory because “people leave, scurry away from those sites” to target plots elsewhere.

“Just as we have seen al-Qaeda metastasise subsequent to the killing of Osama bin Laden back in 2011 in eastern Africa and North Africa and else-

Danger ahead. French policemen secure the area at the Paris Orly Airport following the shooting of a man by French security forces, last March.
London Bridge attack

UK facing counterterrorism policy questions after London attack

Mahmud el-Shafey

For Islamist extremists, the far right shows the true face of a West that will never tolerate Islam.

Gareth Smyth

Anjem Choudary is serving five years in prison after he was convicted for calling on Muslims to support ISIS.

ISS and al-Qaeda are the authentic expression of Islam, continuo...
London

AFTER a bruising election campaign, Theresa May remained Britain’s prime minister but with fewer seats, in parliament and only with the help of an alliance with Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

“What the country needed more than ever is certainty and having secured the largest number of votes and the greatest number of seats in the general election, it is clear that only the Conservative and Unionist Party has the legitimacy and ability to provide that certainty,” May said on June 9.

Although May remains prime minister, she is a vastly diminished figure and some Conservative MPs called for her resignation.

British voters delivered a hung parliament, reflecting the uncertainty that has governed the political scene since the Brexit vote last June. May ran an indifferent election campaign and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn made an unexpected strong challenge.

The final tally for the Conservatives (122 seats) was a 48-seat increase over her previous 74-seat cushion, compared to her previous 17-seat majority, which she deemed insufficient for a majority government.

“This is an election where every single vote counts and every single vote for me and Conservative candidates will be a vote that strength- ens my hand in the negotiations for Brexit,” May told supporters in Bridgend, Wales, during the first week of campaigning.

It was a message that she repeat- ed throughout the campaign, dis- maying Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership and asserting that only she could deliver a Brexit demanded by Britain.

“If I lose just six seats, I will lose this election and Jeremy Corbyn will be sitting down to negotiate with Europe,” May tweeted on May 20.

Although May remains prime minister, she is a vastly diminished figure and some Conservative MPs have called for her resignation. After a campaign that saw her pledge to reverse the fox hunting ban and perform a U-turn over proposed changes to social care, May saw her personal popularity plummet.

Security and counterterrorism were a major focus during the cam- paign after the Manchester and London attacks. Questions were raised about May’s more than six years as home secretary during which she presided over major cutbacks to Britain’s police and security forces.

Under Conservative Party rules, 15% of MPs – which translates into 48 seats – can trigger a leadership contest by calling for a vote of “no confidence.”

Even if May manages any lead- ership challenge, many analysts expect another election to be called before the end of the year, owing to the inherent unsustainability of a minority government.

Conservative former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, who held on to her seat in Loughborough but with a significantly reduced major- ity, said “the buck stops at the top.”

“I think there’s real fury against the campaign… I think she [May] should stay for now but I think she won’t fight another election and I think eventually, whether it takes weeks or months, we will have to look at the leadership,” she told Britain’s Guardian newspaper.

Although the historic chaussé following the June 8 general election, other records were also broken. This will be the most ethnically diverse Brit- ish parliament in history with a re- cord 123 ethnic minority MPs in the new House of Commons, integra- tion think-tank British Futures said.

“The 2017 parliament will be the most diverse ever, with ten new ethnic minority MPs taking the to- tal of non-white parliamentarians to 31. Thirty years on, that tells a positive story about integration since the breakthrough election of 1986,” British Future Director Sun- der Katwala said.

Britain also elected a record 201 female MPs, with the previous re- cord of 191 set in 2015, a num- ber that increased to 196 in by-elec- tions.

May’s failure to address the cost of Brexit mirrored her failure to engage in a serious debate about terrorism.

Viewpoint

British Prime Minister Theresa May has called for a “vastly diminished” figure and some Conservative MPs have called for her resignation.

May’s failure to address the cost of Brexit mirrored her failure to engage in a serious debate about terrorism.
The racist roots of Italy's anti-immigrant movement

Justin Salhani

T

he influx of thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers to Italy has sparked a proliferation of conspiracy theories and an indelible belief among right-wing politicians that human smugglers are working with NGOs to bring illegal immigrants to Italy. This belief, which has been a staple of anti-immigrant rhetoric in Italy for decades, is now being used by political parties to inflame xenophobia and racism.

To understand how this belief has taken hold in Italy, it is necessary to look back at the history of Italian politics and the ways in which right-wing politicians have used anti-immigrant sentiment to gain political capital.

A common claim in Italy is that the new immigrants bring crime. For example, in a 2013 radio interview, Borghezio repeated racist slurs against Italy's Ivorian immigrant. Zuccaro’s claim that human smugglers – includ- ing Doctors Without Borders and Save the Children – quickly spread. Leopoldo Parisi, a prominent politician in Italy, was recently ordered to pay $55,690 by a Milan court for making repeated racist slurs against Italy’s Ivorian immigrant. Such claims are regularly re- peated for political currency. The repetition of racist rhetoric is one of the most common tactics used by politicians to gain political advantage.

For decades, immigration to Italy has been minimal, even as France, Germany and the United Kingdom welcomed thousands of immigrants, many from former colonies or overseas territories. That changed when thousands of immigrants from as far as Peru, Niger and Bangladesh and as close as Romania arrived and formed communities in Italian cities and towns.

The rapid change shocked the country, which some experts say was built on cultural and political racism, including internal discrimination against those in the more prosperous north.

A common claim in Italy is that the new immigrants bring crime.

“New immigrants bring crime. I used to be able to leave my front open because I can’t let my wife walk to church alone,” said Piero Cerri, an Italian man from outside Milan who is married to an Israeli.

Zuccaro’s claim that human smugglers – includ- ing Doctors Without Borders and Save the Children – quickly spread. Leopoldo Parisi, a prominent politician in Italy, was recently ordered to pay $55,690 by a Milan court for making repeated racist slurs against Italy’s Ivorian immigrant. Such claims are regularly re- peated for political currency. The repetition of racist rhetoric is one of the most common tactics used by politicians to gain political advantage.

It is misleading to think that the United States can simply dictate policy to Israel and the Israeli government will comply.

The United States and the legacy of the 1967 war

The 1967 war has complicated the achievement of a regional peace ever since.

The United States can indeed be a force for peace. President Jimmy Carter’s Mediation in the Camp David Accords in 1978 between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was crucial to achieving an agreement but US presidents cannot “force” a deal. The large number of settlements that have been constructed in the West Bank since the 1967 war do indeed pose a problem for a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The United States can help build settlements with impunity and ignore Palestinian national aspirations. Despite strong support for Israel has continued unabated under US administrations, it is misleading to think that the United States can simply dictate policy to Israel and the Israeli government will comply.

When the United States has applied strong pressure on Israel on settlements – such as in 2009 during former US President Barack Obama’s first year in office – the most Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was willing to do was freeze settlement construction for ten months with caveats – such as exemptions for settlement construction in East Jerusalem and “natural growth” within existing settle- ments. The United States can indeed be a force for peace. President Jimmy Carter’s Mediation in the Camp David Accords in 1978 between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was crucial to achieving an agreement but US presidents cannot “force” a deal. The large number of settlements that have been constructed in the West Bank since the 1967 war do indeed pose a problem for a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The United States can help build settlements with impunity and ignore Palestinian national aspirations. Despite strong support for Israel has continued unabated under US administrations, it is misleading to think that the United States can simply dictate policy to Israel and the Israeli government will comply.

When the United States has applied strong pressure on Israel on settlements – such as in 2009 during former US President Barack Obama’s first year in office – the most Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was willing to do was freeze settlement construction for ten months with caveats – such as exemptions for settlement construction in East Jerusalem and “natural growth” within existing settle- ments. The United States can indeed be a force for peace. President Jimmy Carter’s Mediation in the Camp David Accords in 1978 between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was crucial to achieving an agreement but US presidents cannot “force” a deal. The large number of settlements that have been constructed in the West Bank since the 1967 war do indeed pose a problem for a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The United States can help build settlements with impunity and ignore Palestinian national aspirations. Despite strong support for Israel has continued unabated under US administrations, it is misleading to think that the United States can simply dictate policy to Israel and the Israeli government will comply.

Gregory Aftandilian is a lecturer in the Purdey School of Global Studies at Boston University and is a former US State Department Middle East analyst.

It can maintain such high-level support while using inflammatory language against migrants and refugees, one must consult Italian history.

“The history of northern Italy [in particular] is one of widespread prejudice,” said Marcello Marini, a professor of sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. “Rac- ism towards southern Italy was replaced in the late ’80s and early ’90s with racism towards those outside the European Union. One result has been reactions marked by prejudice, discrimination and fear from people abroad.”

Justin Salhani is an Arab Weekly contributor in Milan, Italy.
Qatar’s row with neighbours carries economic cost

Jareer Elass
Washington

Although the severing of diplomatic, trade and transportation ties with Qatar by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt is not dampening Doha’s primary exports of liquefied natural gas and crude oil in the short term, Qatar is quickly feeling the effects of what is effectively an economic blockade that directly affect the Gulf emirate, key industries and its citizens.

Qatar has an estimated $335 billion of assets in its sovereign wealth fund and its merchandise trade with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members is minimal, as is the amount of trading that the GCC countries typically do on the Qatar stock exchange. This means that Doha is not facing an immediate financial collapse but the dispute could have severe short-term, as well as long-term, economic implications for the Qatar government.

Despite its financial assets, Qatar has been borrowing heavily both domestically and abroad to help finance $200 billion in major infrastructure spending in anticipation of hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. It may find that borrowing will become more expensive if Qatari bond prices continue to dip as they do on news of the Saudi-led break in diplomatic and trade ties with Doha on June 5.

Alluding to the severing of ties, S&P Global Ratings cut Qatar’s credit rating one notch to AA- and placed it on “credit watch negative,” implying another downgrade could occur soon.

Dairy, meat and vegetable prices are expected to spike, and the Qatari region might have to fly in fresh foods from Asia or Europe.

Qatari banks and currency are feeling the heat from the severing of trade links as some banks from GCC countries decide to de-risk and撤离 their South Asian or European operations.

Paris

French Justice Minister François Bayrou said France should end tax breaks on property deals granted to countries, including Qatar, a day after several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members severed ties.

Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008 granted Qatari investors exemptions from taxes on profits from the sale of properties in France. Sarkozy is said to have hoped the tax advantages would coax Qatar into substantial military purchases from France, an end that was not filled although Qatar’s royal family has built a portfolio of assets that includes a Champs-Elysées shopping mall and the Lido cabaret.

“Under the responsibility of Nicolas Sarkozy, the French government gave Qatar an incredible tax advantage,” Bayrou told BFMTV television. “Can this situation continue? I don’t think so. I think it’s very important that in France we have tax fairness.”

During this year’s French election campaign, French President Emmanuel Macron said he wanted to end Qatar’s tax concessions.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar, which denounced the move as based on lies about its support of Islamist militants.

“I will be extremely demanding with regard to Qatar and Saudi Arabia in terms of foreign affairs and to have full transparency in the role they play in the financing or actions that they could lead with regard to terrorist groups that are our enemies,” Macron said during the campaign.

Macron had blamed the “unfair advantage” extended to Qatar on “the lax attitude” of the Sarkozy administration. He also raised the issue of the Qatar tax agreement as part of his pledge to seek “clarifications” from Gulf countries about the financing of extremist groups.

Macron’s and Bayrou’s criticism of Sarkozy’s Qatar tax deal took place against a backdrop of mounting criticism of Doha’s “undue” influence in France’s society, economy and sports.

End of the road. France’s Justice Minister François Bayrou (L) and Interior Minister Gérard Collomb speak before the start of the weekly Defence Council meeting in Paris, on May 31.
Gas reserves bring Israeli-Lebanese maritime border issue into focus, alternative option proposed

Nicholas Blanford

Beirut

D espite disputes between Lebanon and Israel, both land and sea, have bedevilled international mediations since the creation of the Jewish state 70 years ago. Failing an agreement, the UNResolution of April 2020 called upon the parties to bring the disputes in the waters off the coast of Lebanon to an end.

The邊境 is located in the Western Mediterranean Sea, approximately 53 km to the west of the port of Lebanon's capital, Beirut. The border runs through the Lebanon’s territorial waters, which span an area of 960 square kilometres, and the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, which provide a natural barrier to the north and east.

A recent report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) highlighted the challenges facing the region, including the potential for armed conflict, the presence of foreign combatants, and the risk of piracy. The report also noted that the border could be used as a transit point for arms smuggling and other illicit activities.

The report recommended that the region take steps to strengthen its borders, including the deployment of additional military personnel and the establishment of a regional cooperation mechanism.

It is difficult to see the Lebanese government quickly hosting an Israeli gas pipeline in its territorial waters. More recently, the maritime boundary between Lebanon and Israel has come into focus because of the potential for gas reserves to be found in the East Mediterranean Sea. A new gas field, which has been identified in the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea, could provide a significant source of revenue for Lebanon and Israel.

The field is located in the eastern Mediterranean, about 100 km south of Lebanon's coast. The gas is estimated to be worth around $30 billion and could be developed by a consortium of international companies.

The discovery has sparked considerable interest among the regional players, including Israel, which is keen to expand its energy sector and reduce its dependence on imported gas.

However, the negotiations on the country's maritime border with Lebanon have been complex and protracted, and there has been little progress in recent years. The two countries have been unable to reach an agreement on the division of the maritime resources in the area.

The main sticking points have been the demarcation of the maritime boundary, the rights to the gas resources, and the sharing of the benefits. The two countries have been unable to agree on a fair and equitable solution, and the issue remains unresolved.

In the absence of a formal agreement, the two countries have been relying on international legal principles and conventions to regulate their maritime relations.

The potential for gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean has not gone unnoticed by the international community, and there has been considerable interest in the region's potential for commercial development. The discovery of the new gas field has added further momentum to the efforts to develop the region's energy resources, and there is a growing sense of optimism that the two countries will be able to reach a resolution to their differences in the not-too-distant future.

Despite the challenges, there is a sense of hope that a resolution to this long-running dispute may be possible, and that the region could see a bright future in terms of energy development and economic growth.
Ramadan in Libya: Cash shortage and deadly clashes

Rim Tahar

Ramadan began with a cash shortage for millions of Libya’s capital, as a cash shortage festered, prices rise and deadly clashes return to Tripoli.

Prices rose outside banks just to withdraw a few tens of dinars have become routine for most Libyans, whose chaos-plagued North African country faces a persistent liquidity shortfall.

Despite the difficulty of getting by on a daily basis, the small Tomzini grocery store was crowded on the eve of Ramadan. However, shoppers were extra-careful about their purchases, with cutbacks the order of the day.

During Ramadan, Muslims are supposed to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and having sex from dawn to dusk. They break the fast with a meal known as iftar and before dawn they have a second opportunity to eat and drink during suhur.

In addition to economic mayhem, Libyans have had to cope with a country in chaos after the 2011 revolution that ousted strongman Muammar Qaddafi.

Fierce clashes on May 26 in the capital between forces loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and rival militias killed at least 28 people and wounded 130, the Health Ministry said.

The fighting broke out in the south of the city after several months of relative calm in Tripoli, with even heavy weapons being used in residential areas.

“This is their gift to the people for the month of Ramadan,” a GNA statement said of the month generally marked by sacrifice and piety.

With such lofty ideals in mind, Tripoli residents have been helping others to cope with a country in crisis.

“Instead of buying 3 kilograms of almonds, I’m buying 1 kilogram for 20 dinars. I only buy one kilogram for my family and the rest I’m buying for the poor assistance. I’m buying 3 dinars ($2.10) for my family and I send some to the poor assistance,” said Mohamad Yassin and his wife Sabah, who have been helping others to cope with a cash shortage.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone, ” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover.

“We have undertaken big preparations during the holy month through the distribution of large food portions to the refugees whose number exceeds 235,000 families in Erbil alone,” Obeid said. An estimated 700,000 people have been displaced from Mosul since the offensive to recapture the city from ISIS began in October. They include 176,000 refugees from eastern Mosul and 525,000 from the western part of the city, which is cut through by the Tigris River, said Seif Sulah, spokesman for Iraq’s Ministry of Immigration and Refugees.

“They have been unable to help us return to our homes or give us any kind of compensation. We have lost everything to the war.”

“On normal days, we suffer to secure our basic needs. During Ramadan, it is even worse amid scorching heat and up to 15 hours of fasting a day,” Diab added. Dick and his family have been at al-Khazir camp in Arbil in northern Iraq for almost a year since fleeing their hometown of Falluja. His house and all his belongings were destroyed in the battles that ended the ISIS occupation of the city.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.

“With the beginning of Ramadan, the ministry launched the ‘summer cladding’ programme to provide aid to the large number of displaced people in camps that have been set up by the Ministry in Erbil alone,” Obeid said.

“Responsibility lies primarily on the shoulders of local, Arab and international humanitarian organisations. The internally displaced population of Iraq wishes to return to their homes and cities and recover their homes and cities and recover,” Sabah said.
Ramadan TV drama on ISIS stirs mixed reactions

Samar Kadi

Beirut

Ramadan is traditionally peak time for television viewing across the Arab world with stations offering a large variety of new productions, mainly comedies and romantic series. This year, however, large audiences are hooked on a no- easy-viewing drama called Al-Ghurab-beeb Al Soul ("Black Crows"), depicting the lives of some of the women who joined ISIS and the actual experiences of some of the members of ISIS for the evil it represents.

The series, which started on May 28, coinciding with the beginning of Ramadan, was expected to elicit strong and visceral reactions from audiences but MBC Group TV Director Ali Jaber said that "it was not meant to be that hard-hitting and controversial."

"MBC as a media organisation wants to stay relevant to the conversation in the societies where our audiences are," he said. "There is no point in burying our heads in the sand while this conversation is still happening in every country, every home."

"Black Crows" TVC drama shows Lebanese actors Joe-Trad and Samar Alami.

"MBC represents the voice of moderation in the region," Jaber added. "We need to tackle this issue in the way we believe in – with better message, more progressive and compelling. ISIS is not just a terrorist organisation. There is a narrative and an ideology behind it. The only way to counter this was by putting out our own narrative and exposing ISIS for the evil it represents."

Jaber said it took two years of planning and hard work to prepare the series, which was filmed in Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia with three prominent directors involved and some of the top actors from the region in featured roles.

This is not the first time MBC has addressed the rise of extremism in its productions. The Saudi satirical show "Sults," which was popular during Ramadan for several years, used dark humour to mock the militant group in sketches featuring characters played by Saudi comedian Nasser al-Qasabi. He and MBC received death threats from ISIS because of the series.

"Black Crows" actors have not been spared from ISIS's wrath, either. "We have all received threats, which we take seriously," said Syrian actor Ahmad al-Alaham who plays ISIS Emir Abu Talib al-Yakouti. "The whole region is in danger. The existence of human being is threatened by such extremists and we are part of the place and this region."

"We had to do something about it. That is why our objective as actors is to convey a message through our work. Drama is sometimes a tool to confront danger, just like the weapon in the combat field. The series shows that ISIS’s charismatic systematic terrorism that is annihilating and destroying the whole region," Ahmed said in a telephone interview.

Although he played down the effect of the programme in shifting deep-rooted beliefs, Ahmed said he helped "it might strengthen immunity (to extremism) and clarify ideas and misconceptions."

The series has won both supporters and critics. "Black Crows" - the series is proving to be very effective.

Ahmed, an Egyptian civil servant is among the keen audience. "I like it because it is based on the actual experiences of some of the women who joined ISIS and managed to escape. The events show that such radical organisations have nothing to do with Islam but are there to destroy everywhere they set their foot," said.

Iraqi housewife Balkis Kazem said she preferred to watch comedy and entertainment shows. "Watching ‘Black Crows’ is an additional tool for Iraqis as we try to switch from bloody events and violence,” she said.

Samar Kadi is The Arab Weekly Travel and Society sections editor. N.P. Krishna Kumar in Dubai, Oumayma Omar in Baghdad and Amr Elsam in Cairo contributed to this report.

Realities of extremism. A scene from the “Black Crows” TV drama shows Lebanese actors Joe-Trad and Samar Alami.

Aunt Wedad: Egyptian puppet promotes mental health

Marwa al-Aasar

Cairo

Egyptian puppeteer Emaa el-Sawy said she is looking to launch a psychological resolution in Egypt through the power of puppetry. Or, at least through the power of one specific puppet, Al-Khala Wedad – Aunt Wedad.

Al-Khala Wedad is a matronette that looks like a kindly old woman. The puppet is the star of a modest YouTube channel called Hakawy with Al-Khala Wedad – Aunt Wedad which逾期 how, Al-Khala Wedad, or Aunt Wedad appears for 15 minutes then leaves her puppet, “I derive the subjects of my shows from real life stories and experiences and the psychological problems people usually suffer from,” Sawy said.

In the shows, Al-Khala Wedad offers tips on how to lead a fruitful life and how to deal with common problems, whether it is dealing with teenagers or extremism.

“I derive the subjects of my shows from real life stories and experiences and the psychological problems people usually suffer from,” Sawy said.

“Thank you for your videos. I benefitted a lot from your show,” one viewer said in a comment on an episode of Hakawy al-Khala Wedad.

Sawy said she hopes her YouTube show can turn into a TV programme to reach the largest number of people, especially those who do not use the internet.

“I truly believe in your idea, God will open the doors for your success for you that you have never imagined,” she said.

Marwa al-Aasar is a Cairo-based journalist.
Cairo’s Al-Muizz Street showcases ancient glory, modern culture

Amr Emam
Cairo

Al-Muizz Street, at the centre of Cairo, is a living symbol of the city’s ancient glory and becomes the heart of Egypt’s cultural and religious life in the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. A walk along the street is enough to take visitors back hundreds of years to the time of the Islamic conquest of the country, Fatimid and Mamluk rulers and the founders of modern Egypt.

The street was named after Al-Muizz Li-Din Allah al-Fatimi, the fourth caliph of the Fatimid Dynasty, who ruled Egypt for 22 years from 953. It was during his reign that Cairo was founded and the centre of the Arab Fatimid Dynasty power moved to central Egypt. The kilometre-long street is an open-air museum but one whose contents are in their places by the force of history, politics and the artistry of their makers. The street contains by far the largest number of medieval architectural treasures in Egypt. Its treasures include centuries-old mosques, homes of Egyptian dignitaries of different historical eras and the residences of the country’s most noted merchants and government officials hundreds of years ago.

The street extends from Bab al-Futuh south to Bab Zuweila, two of three remaining gates in the walls of Old Cairo. The towering gates protected medieval Islamic Cairo against enemy attacks. Made of wood and steel, they need a mighty force to open and close. They reflect the military intelligence and uniqueness of the Fatimids who built them. The walls are only the outer defensive layer of a rich treat of history along the street trail. Each of the great buildings that fill both sides of the street leads to another of more greatness.

One of these buildings is al-Hakim Mosque, which was built 1004 years ago. The mosque is named after al-Hakim bin Amr Allah, the sixth Fatimid caliph. It consists of a spectacular rectangle with four arcades surrounding its courtyard. It has a monumental entrance with a stone porch. The mosque is south of Bab al-Futuh.

Another great building in the street is also the Abu Bakr Ma’had Mosque, which is 1173 years old. This mosque was built by noted religious scholar Zain al-Deen Abu Bakr ibn Ma’had al-Amine. The mosque’s central door is a piece of art. It has geometrically shaped and star-carved bronze ornaments. The pulpit, the abuta area and the aisles of the mosque are so admirable that a visitor would need to tour these areas several times to appreciate the extent of their beauty.

“Although we talk about a mere street, a one-day tour is never enough for visitors to see everything and enjoy every detail of the buildings here,” Gaber said. “Every single building is a study in the period in which it was built.”

Al-Muizz Street suffered from neglect for years as its historical buildings are left to decay and tourists deserted it. At the end of the 1990s, however, authorities launched a lavish renovation process.

After renovation, entry into Al-Muizz Street was limited to pedestrians and that revolutionised commercial activities in the area. Some of the supervisors that used to sell cheese, biscuits and fruits turned into bazaars. Shops that used to sell traditional Egyptian food, such as falafel and beans, turned to selling handmade carpets and rugs as residents prepared for the return of tourists.

The renovation brought life back to the street and tourists are returning but Egyptians are also rediscovering the place.

The street has turned into an unmatchable place of rest and contemplation for Egyptian civil servant Majed Gaber. “A visit to this place takes you on a tour into the depths of Islamic history,” said Maghrabi, 40. “With no entrance ticket, no costly transport to it and very affordable drinks at one of its many cafes, this street gives visitors an eye-opening experience that is better than reading a thousand history books.”

Egyptians and foreigners enjoying tours at Al-Muizz Street.

Travel

Agenda

Amman: During June

Starting on the third night of Ramadan, Amman celebrates traditional Arab culture with the Citadel Nights Festival. The city comes to life each night of Ramadan with concerts, recitals of classical Arab music, traditional dishes and authentic souls.

Tunis: Through June 17

The 35th Tunis Medina Festival is set for the month of Ramadan and the Medina unites Tunis, Dar Lasram, Dar Hussein and Tahrir Club. The festival includes concerts by Salamie al-Tarab from Syria, Ziad Gharra from Tunisia and others. More than a dozen artistic performances will take place in the streets of the Old Medina and downtown Tunis.

Doha: Through July 27

Modernist Women of Egypt, an exhibit of works by Egyptian female artists, takes place at the Green Art Gallery in Doha. Works on display date from 1950-70 and show the evolution of styles that shape the Egyptian identity of today and reflect the direct and emotional effects of political unrest in Egypt and the rest of the world at the time.

Jounieh: June 24-August 15

The Jounieh Summer Festival, set near Jounieh Bay north of Beirut, kicks off with spectacular fireworks on the beach. The festival includes performances from international artists such as Michael Bolton.

Marakek: July

The Marrakech Festival of Popular Arts and Folklore showcases Moroccan traditions, music and costumes through the ages. There are concerts, exhibitions and Moroccon street troupe performances.

Downtown: July 1-August 12

The Downtown Art Festival, in Lebanon’s downtown cores, includes a variety of performances for music, art and culture. The festival welcomes more than 50,000 visitors, as well as numerous star performers. Majida el-Roumi, Pink Martini and Kadim Al-Saher are due to perform at this year’s festival.

Zouk Mikael: July 4-6

Set in a renovated Lebanese souk 14km north of Beirut, the Zouk Mikael International Summer Festival features Arab and international artists.

Hammamet: July & August 26

Hammamet, a Tunisian town on the northern edge of the Gulf of Hammamet, hosts the 35th Hammamet International Festival. Concerts and plays are included for more than a month.

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

Please send tips to: editor@thearabweekly.com