ISIS days over in Mosul but suffering of victims continues

Mamoon Alabbasi

The recapture of Mosul from the Islamic State (ISIS) has provided Iraq with new opportunities for national reconciliation but the country faces other serious challenges that could make matters worse. The announcement of “total victory” in Mosul by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has rekindled some confidence in the state following the humiliation that plagued the government when ISIS captured the city in 2014 but the war against the militants is by no means over.

ISIS controls the towns of Tal Afar in Nineveh province; Hawijah in Kirkuk; as well as Ruwa, Arab and al-Qaim in Anbar. ISIS continues to attack government-held areas, including in the Old City of Mosul. The reported death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is unlikely to affect the militants’ operations.

In addition to recapturing these areas, the Iraqi government needs to swiftly bring a sense of normality to the people who lived under ISIS control. This does not only mean providing urgent humanitarian attention first but also ensuring the presence of reconstruction and of securing a dignified means of living for them is a priority. Victims of ISIS in those areas will undoubtedly feel relieved after being freed from the ordeal of living under the militants’ rule but, in order for them to trust the state, they are likely to want zero tolerance of human rights violations, including displacement, unlawful detention, torture, rape and summary executions carried out by Iraqi forces, members of the Shi’i militias or Kurdish peshmerga.

The announcement of “total victory” in Mosul by Haider al-Abadi restored some confidence in the state. Although residents in the Kurdish-majority north and the Shia-majority south have faced human rights violations at the hands of security forces, they see the abuses as part of corruption of the authorities, as opposed to being driven by sectarianism, because such acts are carried out by members of their own faith or ethnicity. Residents of the Sunni-Arab community are more likely to view such abuses as sectarian, regardless of the true motivation.

The national focus on the military campaign to dislodge ISIS from Mosul has led the central government in Baghdad and the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil to set aside most of their differences, albeit momentarily. Relations peaked when Iraqi government forces were allowed to enter KRG territory for the first time since 1990. The announcement by KRG President Masoud Barzani in April that he intends to call a referendum on the future of Kurdistan and other disputed areas drew condemnation from the Iraqi government but Baghdad did not escalate the row with Erbil. How the two sides decide to handle the dispute as they approach the September 25 election could determine what Iraq’s next major crisis is going to be.

Mamoon Alabbasi is an Arab Weekly contributing editor in London.
Qatar crisis reflects waning US influence

Thomas Seibert
Washington

Following the apparently conciliatory comments made by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to solve the Qatari crisis through shuttle diplomacy, Washington is facing a stark reality: Observers said the Trump administration, worded with internal differences, does not have enough credibility to mediate the Qatari dispute.

While Tillerson was attempting to mediate a solution between Qatar and its erstwhile Gulf and regional allies, it was his first moment in the spotlight, his first opportunity to demonstrate his diplomatic and political skills. He failed, however, that the crisis was not ripe for resolution.

Overseas observers said there was no easy way forward for the United States and Tillerson’s mediation, which has been under an embargo by them since June 5 and has been widely criticized by them. Tillerson could not secure any help on Iran and Turkey as well as on milk airlifted from Germany.

Qatar said it would negotiate with the four other countries only if they lift their embargo, something the Saudi-led group is unwilling to do. Tillerson warned the crisis is harming US business and military interests in the region.

All parties to the conflict, which revolves around Qatar’s alleged support for extremist groups but is driven by the US and its allies, the United States still has important military bases in Bahrain and Qatar.

Turkey, another important US partner in the region on the crisis by siding with Qatar. Tillerson, who is suggesting (as he did in his CBN interview) that an alternative site would be easy to secure. Tillerson, who is suggesting (as he did in his CBN interview) that an alternative site would be easy to secure. Tillerson, who is suggesting (as he did in his CBN interview) that an alternative site would be easy to secure. Tillerson, who is suggesting (as he did in his CBN interview) that an alternative site would be easy to secure.
Mohammed Alkhereiji
London

As Qatar projects itself as a victim in the dispute in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), US officials and members of the four-member bloc have hinted at the possibility of the crisis being resolved inside the region. While saying Tillerson's media appearance was a result of repeated pressures and demands over the past years to stop supporting terrorism, the US official said that such a step is not enough, and they would look for partners, not masters.

The sources stressed Qatar's failure to follow up on the GCC security agreements was only part of the many pieces of evidence – from financing terrorism and sponsoring militant groups – the four countries involved in the dispute have on Doha. The first agreement signed in November 2013 was handwritten, a possible indication of last-minute negotiations and changes. The 2013 accord, signed by the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah and the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, was controlled on the concept of not interfering in the internal affairs of other GCC countries.

The accord called for no support for anti-Arab movements, but it was not mentioned Al Jazeera directly. The written agreement was clear on not supporting movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The sources said that, despite the Gulf states welcoming Trump to the US presidency and working to deepen the US-Gulf cooperation, they were looking for partners, not masters.

The sources added that the US-Qatari accord to clamp down on terror funding, Harthi said: “This agreement provides evidence of Qatar’s involvement in supporting and funding terrorism. The United States might think that Qatar needs to make a firm commitment to stop this support, so they forced them through this agreement announced in Doha.”

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The agreement to curb terror financing is a new initiative, Tillerson said, that “represents weeks of intensive discussions between experts and reinvigorates the spirit of the Riyadh summit.” However, a statement by the four countries involved in the dispute with Qatar said the memorandum of understanding did not go far enough.

The four nations value the efforts being made by the United States to counter terrorism and dry up sources of terror finance as well as to honour the commitment made at the Riyadh summit, demonstrated in the Islamic-US summit, which formed a decisive international position against terrorism and terrorism, regardless of their sources and origins,” the statement by the US, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and said: “We’re heading for a long estrangement... we are very far from a political solution involving a change in Qatar’s course.”

We are headed for a long estrangement... we are very far from a political solution involving a change in Qatar’s course.

Al-Hayat, another Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily, quoted the Saudi Shura Council Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Zuhair al-Harithi as saying that the Saudis were among the first countries to point out Qatar’s involvement in supporting terrorism.

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Mohammed Alkhereiji is the Gulf section editor of The Arab Weekly.

Saudis and allies are likely to ratchet up pressure on Qatar as US mediation fails

The Arab Weekly staff

Saudi Arabia and its allies were expected to continue their isolation of and could increase pressure on Qatar after efforts by the United States to diffuse the tensions apparently faltered.

A weak of shuttle diplomacy by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in which he visited Qatar, Kuwait and Algeria, showed no significant results.

The Saudi-led bloc’s stance remains firm. However, Tillerson on July 4, 14, it appeared to be a lengthy one, with the US in past mediatory efforts by the US, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt. The sources added that, despite the Gulf states welcoming Trump to the US presidency and working to deepen the US-Gulf cooperation, they were looking for partners, not masters.

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Iraq's ambitions in Iraq threaten victory over ISIS

Mamoon Ababneh

London

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mid the jubilation over the defeat of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul by a US-backed Iraqi force, there are fears that the лу current situation in Iraq might not be entirely secure. The recent defeat of ISIS in Mosul, with the help of US-led forces, marked a significant milestone in the fight against terrorism. However, the challenges remain, and the threat of similar attacks continues to linger.

The most recent of Iran's suspected acts of terrorism was a similar act in 2017, when it attacked a US-led coalition in Iraq, leading to the death of several soldiers. Despite the defeat of ISIS in Mosul, the threat of terrorism remains, and the need for continued vigilance is clear.

There are fears that sectarian-inspired acts of terrorism, such as those committed by ISIS, will continue to go unpunished. The recent attack on a US-led coalition in Iraq is a clear example of this. Despite the defeat of ISIS in Mosul, the threat of terrorism remains, and the need for continued vigilance is clear.

Exploiting sectarianism. Iraqi militia members claim responsibility for the attack on a US-led coalition in Iraq. The attack is an example of the continued influence of sectarianism in Iraq, and the need for continued vigilance is clear.

The brutal rule of ISIS in Mosul endures in the border region near the city, which is likely to be gathering. The perception is that ISIS has been defeated, but this is a false narrative. Despite the defeat of ISIS in Mosul, the threat of terrorism remains, and the need for continued vigilance is clear.

Despite ISIS's sectarian acts and rhetoric against Shia and other communities, Sunni Arabs have been the first to be victimized by the militants. Despite professing to be of the Sunni-dominated Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the group has been gathering strength in the Sunni heartland. This is likely to be gathering.

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Iraq

Uncertain future of Iraq's splintered landscape

Samia Nakhoul

July 16, 2017 | The Arab Weekly | 5

The federal model devised under the Anglo-American occupation and built on a power-sharing formula that held Iraq together is starting to come apart.

The fall of Mosul exposes ethnic and sectarian fractures that have plagued Iraq for more than a decade. The victory risks triggering new violence between Arabs and Kurds over disputed territories or be engulfed by a new insurgency.

Now that the group faces military defeat, the unity that held Iraq together is starting to come apart.

Once a champion of the fall of Mosul itself, a city transmuted by ISIS's brutal rule and shattered by the latest US-led offensive, with thousands dead and nearly 1 million people displaced.

Western, Iraqi and Kurdish officials said they are astonished that Iraqi authorities neglected to pre-pass a post-battle plan for governance and security.

A high-level committee formed by the Kurdish region, the Baghdad government and a US-led military coalition to help Mosul leaders rebuild the city had never convened, they said.

"(Iraqi) Prime Minister [Haider] al-Abadi kept dragging his heels. Every time we raised this issue with him, he said, ‘Let’s wait until military operations are over’," said Hosdyar Zebari, an internationally respected former finance and foreign minister.

"A whole city is being decimated. Look how much the government is contributing, as if they don’t care."

The first indication of possible future conflict came when, in 2014, Barzani president of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, set a September 25 date for a referendum for an independent state.

Another Omar was a push by Iran-backed Shia militias, under the guidance of its own Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), to deploy alongside Kurdish areas and advance towards the Syrian border, motivated by Iran's desire to join Iraq and Syria, and to stabilize the corridor from Tehran to Beirut.

"Today the highway of massacre starts in Tebran and reaches Mosul, Damocles and Beirut," Ali Akbar Velayati, the top adviser to Iran’s supreme leader, said recently.

All this comes against a backdrop of simmering rivalries between regional powers Iran and Turkey, and above all declining US influence and Iraq's vigorous attempts to consolidate its control in Iraq.

While the administration of US President Donald Trump regards Syria and Iraq purely in terms of the military campaign to destroy ISIS, local jihadi fighters will likely melt into the population and could regroup in a new insurgency.

Some Sunni and Kurdish leaders said one solution was to make Mosul a separate state, modelled like Kurdistan, with smaller units of self-rule to accommodate the plethora of minorities, which they said was permitted by the constitution.

"Before, the Sunnis were very sensitive to believing (devolution) would lead to secession, to the breakup of Iraq but now they're coming to terms with it," Zebari said.

The Sunnis are not the only ones who repudiate Baghdad's Shia-dominated government. The northern Kurdish region has called a referendum to move from autonomous self-rule to an independent state.

Barzani said the timing for independence after the vote was "flexible but not open-ended.""There is growing concern about the real purpose of the referendum is not immediate secession but to strengthen Kurdish claims over the disputed territories, such as the oil-rich region and city of Kirkuk, whose future has been in play for over a decade.

Zebari, a senior official in Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party who devoted over a decade in Baghdad trying to make power-sharing work, said the time was ripe for independence.

"We lost hope and faith in the new Iraq that we had built. The government has failed us on each and every constitutional provision and article to establish a new country with equal citizenship, with no discrimination, with partnership. All those dreams have evaporated," he said.

The problem, he said, was that senior Iraqi officials have left no doubt their priority — a corridor for Shia forces carved through the north and policed by Shia recruits — trumps everything.

"They are breathing down our neck all along the Kurdish front line from Sinjar to Khabura," he said. "So far, we have been accommodating, patient, coordinating to pre-vent skirmishes or flashes but this is building up."
The cost of war in Syria

There could have been no better reminder of the urgency of the Syria peace talks in Geneva than the World Bank’s sober assessment of the toll of war. The report was released the very day that the UN envoy to Syria opened the seventh round of indirect talks between Syrian government representatives and opposition leaders to try to wind down the 6-year civil war.

For all the entrenched disagreements between the two sides, there can be no dispute over the great and terrible cost of bloody conflict – to the Syrian state, its people and to the diminishing prospects for future generations. As the World Bank put it: “Conflicts destroy tangible and intangible assets and leave deep marks on a country’s social fabric, culture and collective memories.”

The numbers offered by the report are stark enough and they do not even pretend to tell the whole story. Overall, the World Bank estimates that Syria’s gross domestic product suffered a cumulative loss of $226 billion from 2011-16. That means every year war has ravaged the country, the average decline in the value of goods and services was $50 billion. Syria’s housing stock – the total number of houses and flats available – stands depleted with 7% destroyed and 20% damaged.

These losses are especially severe in Deir ez-Zor, Palmarya and Aleppo but Homs, Damascus and many other cities and towns, too, have suffered the loss of roads, bridges, water resources, grain silos and other economically significant assets. Half the medical facilities and more than half the schools and colleges across the eight governorates covered by the report were damaged. Syria’s once-thriving and lucrative hydrocarbons sector has also been hit hard. Oil GDP declined 93% from 2011.

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This is a tragic snapshot of the consequences of a prolonged conflict, which is not yet over. Syria has become the theatre of a tangled conflict in which many foreign forces, not least Iran, have disparate and dangerous roles. And Bashar Assad’s regime is not projecting a credible vision of the future.

It can only be hoped that good sense and goodwill will triumph as the world contemplates the immense task of helping to rebuild a Syria shattered by war. The damage goes much beyond the World Bank’s estimates. There is the lost opportunity for millions of Syrians – the chance to get an education or a job, raise a family and strengthen communities and country. There are the hundreds of thousands forcibly displaced. They have lost homes and opportunities to build their future. What about the psychological trauma of a child who lived through this war?

No one can ever tally all those cumulative costs but it is fair to say that, for millions of Syrians, there is no turning back the clock. They cannot recover the future they never had. Syrians must be given a chance to rebuild their country and they need the world’s steadfast help.

Can Qatar pay the price of escalation?

It has been more than a month since Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar. A statement after the latest meeting in Cairo that four countries’ foreign ministers threatened further retaliation, highlighting Qatar’s “destructive role” and its “negative” response to the Arab quartet’s demands and insisting on Qatar’s “flee to terrorism.”

What is more important than all of that is the quartet has retracted the deal made with Sheikh Hamad. The Cairo meeting’s official communiqué praised Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir Al Sabah’s efforts to mediate, which have had international backing. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had a telephone conversation with Sheikh Sabah on the crisis with Qatar and visited Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

UAE Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan was clear and straightforward when he said that Qatar must “switch paths from destruction to construction or risk remaining isolated.”

Sheikh Abdullah’s crisp speech contrasts with the convoluted declarations of Qatar’s Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. The latter keeps running in circles and reverting to excuses, such as wanting to prevent other countries from “meddling in Qatar’s affairs” or interfering with “Qatar’s sovereignty.” It would have been best to go straight to the heart of the matter rather than waste time on pointless arguments.

Qatar has resorted to these delaying tactics because there is no real willingness to seriously confront the tiny state. Those who, in the past, allowed Qatar to do what it did found themselves lacking the courage to end Qatar’s evil game. Changes, however, are on the way.

All concerned parties must understand there is a new kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is true that signs of change are evident in traditional Saudi policies. But they have appeared since 2011, when Saudi troops entered Bahrain to stop an alleged coup that the government accused Iran of orchestrating. It was, however, under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud that these changes will reveal their full dimensions.

Qatar was wrong to believe that it could hide its time in the era of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Abdulaziz. The Saudi kingdom went beyond its decision in 2013 to confront the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

We must admit that when Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani seized power from his own father in 1999, he changed Qatar. He also supported the balance of power in the Gulf and beyond, teaching as far as Lebanon, Kuwait and Libya.

Sheikh Hamad was daring. In 2006, for example, he backed Hezbollah in its war against Israel, a war that brought only suffering and destruction to Lebanon but allowed Syrian President Bashar Assad to refer to the other Gulf leaders as “ghosts of men.”

Qatar’s goal was to embarrass Saudi Arabia. We must also admit that Qatar has no particular or private interests with Iran. Still, it turned a blind eye to Iran’s expansionist plan in the Gulf and seemed to overlook that this plan was steeped in a deep hatred for anything Arab and was based on impugning the region in destructive, sectarian strife.

Qatar supported Iran when it tried to cover up its involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri by instigating a war between Lebanon and Israel. As usual, it was Lebanon and the Lebanese who paid the price of that war.

Once again, the rules of the game in the Gulf region are changing. Once again, the region is saying enough to the Qatari Al Jazeera channel. For some years, Doha has relied on the Muslim Brotherhood network to meddle in Arab affairs. That network has lost its punch.

It is useless for Qatar to wave the Iranian card in its possession. That card is double-edged. Iran is going through a deep economic recession coupled with an internal power struggle. It is constantly trying to cover things up that simmer reality by engaging in foreign adventures. Does Qatar wish to become enshrouded by such a country? Qatar seems to have forgotten that the Gulf Cooperation Council was created as a protective umbrella against the Iranian threat.

The Turkish card is no better that the Iranian one. What will Recep Tayyip Erdogan demand as his price for continuing to support Qatar? Turkey has an insatiable appetite for foreign aid and investment. During his recent visit to Washington, Turkish president discussed with his Kuwaiti counterpart only specific projects in which opportunities exist for Turkish companies.

The rules of the game in the Gulf region are indeed changing. Qatar has changed and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani took over from his father. We will all be responsible for these changes realise that the price for escalating the confrontation with the Arab quartet is much higher than the price of agreeing to their demands.

Khairallah Khairallah is a Lebanese writer based in London.
Iran’s post-ISIS blues

The region does not need another crisis

Rashmee Roshan Lall

As Ronald Reagan once put it, peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.

In fact, the recently announced, territorially limited ceasefire is the fifth attempt at making peace in six years. As for Yemen — a relatively young conflict in that it is just 2 years old — no one any longer even expresses hope for an end to war. The situation is so dire the United Nations recently called off its planned preventive vaccination effort against cholera, judging that it would be useless. Iraq remains a dangerously sectarian minefield for all that the government has been trumpeting victory over the Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul. It is true that was a happy event and for Iraq. The technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones.

In the case of ISIS, the Iraqi intelligence services, and in

and some overt. Therefore, the unprecedented international determination to fight terrorism must not stop at the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones.

The battle of narratives pits Qatar’s narrative against the growth of a commonwealth, and it is probably better placed to win the propaganda war.

The crisis credit for which was speedily claimed by Trump, devalidates American security guarantees, especially in relation to small, vulnerable countries. The likely state of mind in Singapore, Kuwait, Bahrain, South Korea, Kosovo, Greece and Djibouti is that small countries and all other hosting US military bases or under the Americans’ security umbrella — can only be imagined. They are likely to be alarmed by the US president’s cavalier approach towards the case of ISIS, the Iraqi Intelligence services, and in

and she is on Twitter: @rashmeerl.

Mohamed Kawas

Iran reaped major benefits by cooperating with the United States and the international coalition in the post-August 2014 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The purely American agenda in the region eliminated in one blow two strategic enemies to Iran: The Taliban in power in the east and Saddam Hussein’s regime to the west.

These days, however, the American agenda in the region does not go well with Iran’s mood. Something has changed in Washington’s thinking of the regime in Tehran. It was very happy when Kabul and Baghdad fell to American hands in 2001 and 2003, respectively, but it certainly was not happy when the American military presence on its eastern and western flanks in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Taliban and Saddam regimes represented regional threats to Iran but with the US presence in the region, it is the very existence of the revolution regime that is at stake.

Tehran and Moscow had covertedly agreed to aid the Taliban resistance against the American invasion. The United States knew that the level of armament and intelligence in the hands of the Afghan jihadist movement was far superior to the movement’s limited resources.

While the Russians remained discrete about their role in Afghanisthan, the Iranian regime did not try hard enough to hide its own role in the war. In recent years, Iranian officials publicly mulled in Tehran with leaders in the Afghan movement and the Iranian media regularly reported the movement’s views.

Iraq was a different story. Iran was closely involved in the US presence in Iraq. Its position was visible in the actions of the Iraqi national opposition and in the anti-coalition stance of Muqtada al-Sadr’s movement. Let’s not even talk about Iran’s role in the reinvocation of al-Qaeda under the influence of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. All these anti-American presences were not easily going to be tolerated by the West. The two major geopolitical sources: Tehran and Washington.

In Syria, the Iranian regime had enough clout to influence security decisions. This is how the Syrian security apparatus followed strictly the Iranian agenda in the area by facilitating the crossing of jihadis to Iraq. It also closely collaborated with Iranian agents toeon communication interfaces with all the jihadist movements, and they feed on the opposition.”

Therefore, the unprecedented international determination to fight terrorism must not stop at the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones. The second is the result of the technical and tactical aspects of the defeat are not as significant as the political and strategic ones.

As Ronald Reagan once put it, peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.
News & Analysis

Latest Syria agreement sparks fears of partition

Sami Moubayed

Beirut

The resolutions of the Trump-Putin meeting in Hamburg took the Syrian political elite by storm, although the effect of what has been postponed at the July 4-5 round of the Astana Syrian peace talks in the north-eastern city of Daraa and the Damascene countryside of the Shafeiyya-Mansoura area was largely ignored. The aim of the round was to continue discussions on a de-conflict zone in southern Syria, one of the main obstacles to restarting the Astana process, meaning that any proposals to make any progress towards a political solution in Syria, the aim of Astana, were largely ignored.

Thetalks, scheduled to last two weeks, ended in a stalemate after the US delegation, led by John J. Sullivan, US ambassador to the UN, put forward a proposal to include the Syrian opposition among other stakeholders in the conflict, a move that has been fiercely vetoed by all parties in the talks.

The US proposal included the Syrian opposition, the Astana process’s guarantor states (Russia, Iran, Turkey) and the UN (as a monitoring body). It was believed that including the opposition could bring about greater participation in the Astana process.

Sami Moubayed is a Syrian historian and author of “Under the Black Flag” (IBTauris, 2019).

Syria

Syria and its neighbours have been hit by severe economic and humanitarian crises since the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of people and the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. The conflict has also resulted in a rise in terrorism and instability in the region.

The United Nations has called for an end to the conflict and for a political solution to be found. The Syrian government and opposition have engaged in talks in Geneva, but these have been stalled due to differences over the issue of the opposition’s role in the country’s political transition.

The US and Russia have been in a bitter battle over who should have the final say on the country’s future. Russia has backed the government in power, while the US has supported the opposition in its fight against the regime.

The crisis in Syria has had a profound impact on the region’s politics, economy and society. The conflict has created a humanitarian crisis, with millions of people forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

There are concerns that the conflict could spill over into other countries in the region, with some predicting that it could lead to a wider Middle East conflict.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in recent years. The US and Russia have agreed to a ceasefire in Syria, and there have been some tentative steps towards a political solution to the conflict.

However, the situation remains fragile, and there are concerns that the conflict could flare up again at any time. The international community must work together to ensure that the situation does not escalate and that a lasting peace is achieved.

Viewpoint

John C.K. Daly

Recent weeks have proved momentous for the long-suffering populations of Iraq and Syria. In the former, the Islamic State’s territorial defeat, and in the latter, the US-led military campaign against the group, have led to significant changes in the country’s political and social landscape.

In Iraq, the defeat of the Islamic State has been accompanied by a political transition, with the country’s long-neglected Kurdish minority gaining greater political representation. In Syria, the defeat of the Islamic State has led to a significant political shift, with the government’s opponents gaining greater political influence.

The defeat of the Islamic State has also led to significant humanitarian changes, with millions of people being displaced and many more remaining in camps or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The international community has played a key role in responding to the crisis, with the provision of humanitarian aid and support for political transition.

Despite these achievements, there are still significant challenges to be addressed, including the issue of reconstruction and the return of displaced people to their homes.

The international community must continue to support the efforts of the Iraqi and Syrian governments and their partners to achieve a lasting peace and to address the challenges of the post-conflict period.
Libya’s Haftar eyes Tripoli after control of Benghazi

Lamine Ghanmi
Tunis

As the eastern Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar has pledged to forge a Libya free of radical Islamists, his forces are making gains in the city of Derna. "Your armed forces conveyed to you the good news of the total and unconditional victory against terrorism from freedom and inform you of the victory of the national army in its battle against extremism," Haftar said early this month.

The 3-year-old war against Islamists in Benghazi claimed the lives of 7,000 Libyan National Army (LNA) soldiers and left the city in ruins.

Days after announcing victory, Haftar flew to the United Arab Emirates to display support for the coalition of Arab countries working to thwart alleged Qatar-funded terrorism.

Many Libyans fault Islamists for preventing the country from rebuilding the army and ensuring a fair transition of power.

While supporting UN Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj, the US administration, Trump, which prioritises the fight against radical Islamists in the region, began contacts with Haftar even before his victory against extremists.

Haftar maintains support from the UAE, which backs his military, and from Saudi Arabia, which backed the GNA in its war against the Islamic State

By positioning himself within the broader anti-Qatar drive, Haftar could further firm up his backing from Arab powers in the Middle East and the Gulf, which were-appointed by the US as part of its strategy to "destroy secular values" in the region and "liberate" Libya from radical Islamists.

A growing wave of anti-migrant sentiment is emerging in the region.

"There are great powers in the world who are tempting to ‘destroy secular values’ in the region and ‘liberate’ Libya from radical Islamists," said the writer, said the fight against radical Islamists in Tripoli could unite the armed forces of Sarraj and Haftar, both of whom are aligned against Qatar-backed Islamists.

"It is not reasonable that the Libyan Army headed by Haftar remains on the sidelines (in Tripoli)," said Ramadan. "The army must unite its forces with the forces under the control of Sarraj to protect Tripoli from the extremists."

Haftar vowed to “free Tripoli” but gave no specific timetable or details about his military strategy.

Lamine Ghanmi is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.

The conflict in Libya

Forces of Libya’s eastern commander Khalifa Haftar move closer to Tripoli in Libya after capturing Derna.

Statements from Algeria, France and the United Kingdom hailed Haftar’s victory in Benghazi as a step towards restoring “peace” and “security” across Libya.

Despite the surge in anti-migrant sentiment in the region, the fight against radical Islamists in Tripoli could unite the armed forces of Sarraj and Haftar, both of whom are aligned against Qatar-backed Islamists.

In struggle for acceptance. A migrant from Guinea working at a construction site in Algiers.

"The willingness to destroy the fundamental values of the Algerian people reflects a strategy by those in power in the region, said Ouyahia. "That value is the basis to the rights of others and the foundations of history and abolition of colonialism."

"There are great powers who are planning to build a wall to separate them from their neighbours and Europe in seeking to transform Algeria and the north into camps to stop migrants from entering the GNA expires."

Haftar and Sarraj, meeting in May in Abu Dhabi, agreed on a fight against terrorism and have presidential elections. "If Haftar and his forces have a solution to ending the sufferings of the Libyan people, why have they failed to come forward with such a solution?" asked Libyan political analyst Ala Farouk.

"Such talks are part of the increasing pressure on the civilian government."

In the Paris meeting, statements from Algeria, France and the United Kingdom hailed Haftar’s victory in Benghazi as a step towards restoring “peace” and “security” across Libya.

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People line up with empty containers and bottles as they wait to collect filtered water in Toukh, Qalyubia governorate, on July 8. The loss of an additional 15 billion cubic metres a year would have a debilitating effect on Egyptian agriculture, including the potential loss of 600,000 hectares of farmland.

Lower agricultural production would require more food imports for Egypt, the world's largest wheat importer, with 12 million tons annually. Lower production would pressure the national budget, already showing deficit of almost 30%.

"These are all catastrophic scenarios for our country," said water and irrigation expert Ahmed Nour Eldin. "Egypt is moving ahead with the project, although it is fully aware of the enormous harm it will cause to Egypt."

The view in Addis Ababa is that the dam will cause no harm to downstream countries such as Egypt and Sudan.

In March 2015, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan signed a declaration of principles that included a pledge of cooperation based on "common understanding" and "mutual benefit" and to "take all appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm in utilising the Nile." The three countries have hired an international firm to conduct technical and environmental studies on the dam but the results of the studies have yet to be published, even as construction of the dam nears completion.

The mood in Cairo regarding the dam is gloomy, with general calls for Egyptian authorities to take action but little hope that anything can be done. A leaked recording purportedly of former President Hosni Mubarak, emerged in June and revealed his preparedness to bomb the planned dam. Muammar Gaddafi’s son, Nemer al-Mabrouk, in a 2013 strategy session with key advisors that was unknowingly broadcast live, appeared to consider throwing support to Egyptian rebels to pressure Addis Ababa.

With the dam almost complete and a new political reality for Cairo, scenarios such as this are unlikely to play out.

"The current Egyptian administration has built bridges of trust with Ethiopia and will not resort to any violent scenario to resolve the issue," Musallem said.

Egypt will have to adapt to acute water poverty while working to alleviate that as much as possible.

The view in Addis Ababa is that the dam will cause no harm to downstream countries such as Egypt and Sudan.

In general terms, Egypt seems to be winning the fight against ISIS.

Cairo appeared to be making gains against ISIS in Sinai in recent months, including securing agreements with Bedouin fighters to try to remove ISIS from the territory. The defectors showed that the setbacks have not hindered ISIS’s ability to coordinate large-scale attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.

Egyptian forces retaliated by attacking the ISIS training camp in Egypt’s eastern province of Sharkia on July 7. At least 200 militants were killed in the same day and many Egyptians expressed anger about the assault.

Despite the setback, Egypt seems to be winning the fight against ISIS. In the first half of 2017, there were fewer terrorist attacks across Egypt than in previous years, including fewer attacks on Egyptian military targets in Sinai Brumuda.

Military experts attributed the drop in terrorist operations in Sinai to a multilevel military strategy that has significantly weakened ISIS in Egypt. While ISIS has executed headline-grabbing attacks, such as the El-Bardah assault or actions targeting Egypt’s Coptic Christian minority, its day-to-day operations have been significantly disrupted.

"Apart from alienating ISIS militants in most of Sinai, the army killed a large number of the group’s leaders and cut off the militants from supply routes," said Reda Yousif, another retired army general.

"Unrelenting army raids, the demolition of hundreds of smuggling tunnels along the border with Gaza and winning Sinai tribes to the army’s side were all measures that paid off," said water and irrigation expert Ahmed Nour Eldin. "The remaining diplomatic efforts but little hope that anything can be done."

The objective of the El-Barth attack was not just to send a message to Cairo, analysts said, but also to hinder rapprochement between the Egyptian government and Hamas.

Egyptian media said some of the ISIS gunmen who took part in the attack were former members of Hamas.

Following the attack, Hamas Deputy Interior Minister Tawfiq Abu Naim said the group would further increase security along the border "to prevent any cases of wanted fugitives attempting to sneak into Gaza from Egypt."

"If anything, this means that Hamas is not in full control of the Palestinian territory," Hamas security analyst and ex-military official Sameh Badawi said.

With increased security along the Egyptian-Gaza border, ISIS supply lines are being squeezed from both sides.

"ISIS wants to say that although it is losing territories, it is far from dead," Badawi said. "The attack aimed to present living proof of its strength."

Amr Emam is an Egyptian reporter based in Cairo.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egypt is short on options to halt or circumvent the construction of Ethiopia’s massive Renaissance Dam, which experts said will have negative effects on Egyptian access to Nile waters.

“Time is running out and the dam is about to become a fact on the ground. Egypt cannot stop it,” said Talaat Musallam, a retired army general and strategic analyst.

He ruled out the prospect of a military solution to the issue, saying that, given that Ethiopia intends to start filling the dam this year, Cairo’s room for manoeuvre is limited.

“The remaining diplomatic and legal options are inadequate because the project has already reached the point of no return,” he said.

Ethiopia hopes to fill the dam in five years but Cairo hopes to extend that period to seven years or more.

Legal experts suggested Cairo take the issue to the UN Security Council to seek a temporary halt in the construction of the multibillion-dollar hydroelectric project until further technical studies can be completed. Egyptian political experts, meanwhile, considered mediation from international players, such as the United States, China or Russia.

Ethiopia’s Grand Renaissance Dam is expected to reduce Egypt’s annual water quota from the Nile from 55 billion cubic metres to 40 billion cubic metres, which would severely aggravate existing water shortages. Egypt, with a rapidly growing population, has a water deficit of 20 billion cubic metres.

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**Spotlight**

**Religious reform in Egypt**

**Quranic schools are Egypt’s newest weapon against radicals**

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

The traditional single-class schools, teaching children to read, write and memorise the Quran have been transformed into Egypt’s latest weapon in the fight against extremism.

Known as “kotah,” from the Arabic word “kata,” these small schools had often been the only source of education for Egypt’s rural poor at a time when there were no government-run schools nearby. Cairo warned that many schools that had fallen under the sway of extremist groups, including the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, posed a threat to regulate the industry.

The new classes are among measures to revolutionise Egyptian education, renew religious discourse and keep radicals out of the mosques.

“This was why we had to act to end control over this important teaching tool by radical groups,” said Sheikh Gabe Taye, a senior official of the Religious Endowments Ministry, which supervises Egypt’s mosques.

With the emergence of political Islam, Islamist movements sought to control the classes to spread their ideology. Western analysts have compared Egypt’s kotah to Pakistan’s madrassas, which have been criticised as training grounds for terrorists.

“Kotah produced tens of thousands of children who were not taught the moderate teaching of the Quran but the radical views of the groups that established them,” said Nabil Nawara, an expert on Islamist movements. “In a way, they were a breeding ground for extremism.”

Egypt’s Religious Endowments Ministry moved to crack down on hundreds of unauthorised mosques across Egypt with little ministerial oversight. The move includes closing classes run by Brotherhood-affiliated charities and Salafist movements.

To provide an alternative, the ministry established Quranic classes with a vested curriculum at many mosques and appointed al-Azhar-trained sheikhs to teach a more moderate interpretation of Islam. Taye said the new schools teach manners and tolerance.

“They aim to create a new generation of enlightened and moderate Muslims,” Taye said of the new classes. “So, they take the children away from venomous radical groups that give them incorrect knowledge about religion.”

The new classes are among measures to revolutionise Egyptian education, renew religious discourse and keep radicals out of the mosques. The measures included a change in Egypt’s academic curriculum and tightening regulations on mosques, including rules ensuring that only graduates of Egypt’s al-Azhar University can become imams.

The drive comes amid a worsening fight against terrorism. The Egyptian Army continues to confront a front of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Sinai Peninsula. The Muslim Brotherhood has been accused of orchestrating domestic terror attacks and seeking to spread chaos domestically and beyond.

In a move to make the classes more attractive, the Religious Endowments Ministry struck a deal with the Ministry of Social Solidarity to give a monthly allowance to cover transportation fees for children attending the schools.

Analysts praised the new measures but many also warned that more needs to be done. “You cannot teach moderation in these [schools] and leave mosques in the hands of radicals,” said Fatima al-Maadool, the head of the children’s section at the Ministry of Culture. “Some of our mosques are still controlled by extremists and the authorities need to take action.”

The Religious Endowments Ministry controls more than 100,000 mosques in Egypt but many small unauthorised mosques in poor districts and rural areas operate outside of ministry control. In a country where Friday prayers often spread from inside the mosques and onto the streets, it is hard to control every mosque.

Taye acknowledged that the new schools were one step on a long road to fight Islamist extremism and promote a moderate understanding of Islam.

“We are working day and night to ensure that extremists will not shape the thinking of the new generation,” Taye said. “It took extrem- ist ideologies decades to prevail here and we do not expect to replace them with a moderate interpretation of Islam in a matter of days or even months.”

**Viewpoint**

Mohamad al-Hamamsi

The call to reform religious discourse unwittingly inflicted further disasters and tragedies.

Plans to revise religious discourse lack proper vision and training.

**The will to reform religious discourse in Egypt is lacking**

Mohamad al-Hamamsi is an Egyptian writer.
Lebanon’s looming showdown in Arsal

Nicholas Blanford

Beirut

The deface of the Islamic State (ISIS) and its imminent expulsion from its self-declared Islamic State (ISIS) in eastern Syria leave the extremist group clinging to a few patches of ground in the Middle East. One of those among the barren mountains of the Qalamoun region straddles Lebanon’s northern-eastern border with Syria where several hundred ISIS fighters are holed up, along with hundreds more from Tahir al-Sham and Saraya Al-ash-Sham, a Free Syrian Army coalition.

Lebanon has been intense speculation that the Lebanese Army or Hezbollah will mount a final offensive to crush the militants, drive them out of Lebanon and seize full state authority in the isolated border town of Arsal. The leading border town, which is surrounded by refugee encampments, is the only area of state control since August 2014 when it was stormed by 700 militants from ISIS and Tahir al-Sham. Several Syrian air strikes in the border region and incessant mobilisation of Hezbollah forces suggest the offensive is imminent but a question remains over who would order the offensive, Hezbollah or the Lebanese Army.

The Lebanese Army recognises this as an opportunity to ISIS positions and Hezbollah’s occasional stages anti-tank missile ambushes.

Hezbollah waged campaigns in the western Qalamoun region in 2017 and 2018, winning back territory on the Syrian side of the border and pushing ISIS fighters into a 145 km exposed of neglected and desolate mountains and valleys filled with acacia and cherry orchards. The militants are essentially hemmed in by a line of outposts watched over by the Lebanese Army to the west and Hezbollah positions dotting hilltops along the north and south flanks. The Lebanese Army routinely shells their positions and Hezbollah occasionally stages anti-tank missile attacks. The Lebanese Armed Forces have also prepared battle plans for an offensive against the militants and, in the past two-and-a-half years, has significantly strengthened its deployment in the area. However, the army requires an order from the government before attacking the militants.” This is because that is Lebanon, “ said Nasrallah.

Beirut

A thin red line. Lebanese demonstrators scuffle with riot police during a protest in downtown Beirut, last March.

Earlier in the year, Hezbollah entered negotiations to secure the evacuation of refugees and some militants to Syria. The move was intended to save the Army from an operation that would cause heavy civilian and military casualties. Sources inside Arsal, saying that there has been little indication that any fighters are willing to cut a deal that could see them relocated to the southern part of Syria.

Since early May, signs of a final showdown in Arsal area have increased. In a speech that month, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, called on militants to leave the Arsal area, saying that they had no future if they stayed.

In late May, heavy clashes broke out in the Arsal area between militant groups in what appeared to be an attempt by ISIS to secure better ground in anticipation of a Lebanese Army offensive against the Islamic State. On June 30, five suicide bombers set off explosives near an army said one on two refugee camps on the outskirts of Arsal, wounding seven soldiers and killing a girl. Several days later, two improvised explosive devices targeted soldiers in Arsal, causing casualties. Sources inside Arsal said several militants and civilians alike are preparing for a showdown. “Everyone knows it’s coming,” said one resident.

Hezbollah’s Thirty-Year Struggle

Nicholas Blanford

Beirut

Ousted from power by a string of political and economic crises, the current government is accused of being caught off-guard and an offensive against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Arsal, Syria’s last stronghold in the east is likely. The government has prepared battle plans for an offensive against the militants and, in the past two-and-a-half years, has significantly strengthened its deployment in the area. However, the army requires an order from the government before attacking the militants.” This is because that is Lebanon, “ said Nasrallah.

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Hezbollah’s Thirty-Year Struggle

Nicholas Blanford

Beirut

 mỗi tiền về lại. Sau đó, chiến dịch phủ sóng khi hàng trăm người dân từ Latakia, Lattakia, có thể bị thương hoặc chết. Chiến dịch phủ sóng này được tổ chức tại một khu vực gần biên giới Lebanon-Syria.

Những quan chức Lebanon đã lên kế hoạch cho một cuộc đột kích vào Arsal, gây sensory shock to the government. Các hoạt động khủng bố của ISIS ở Arsal cũng đã tăng lên, khiến cho tình hình rất căng thẳng. Chiến dịch phủ sóng này có thể dẫn đến một cuộc đột kích lớn vào Arsal. Điều này cũng có thể gây ra căng thẳng với các hoạt động khủng bố khác ở Syria.

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Trump, his son-in-law and the elusive Israeli-Palestinian peace deal

Gregory Aftandilian
Boston

U.S. President Donald Trump is relying heavily on his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to restart the moribund Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The issue of the two American leaders has been a major issue in his meeting with the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in May in Ramallah, Germany. The meeting came after the announcement of the United States’ intention to move its embassy to Jerusalem. Despite the international community’s opposition to the move, Trump has been firm in his stance. Kushner has been tasked with heading the newly created Office of American Innovation, which is tasked with making the US government bureaucracy more efficient.

Trump may have been advised by Kushner to level his mild criticism of Israeli settlement building.

To couple those domestic duties with overseeing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is daunting, to say the least, especially for some one as young as Kushner, 36, who has no government or diplomatic experience.

Although one could argue that efforts by professional US diplomats to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have come to naught and, therefore, a fresh approach may be necessary, there are plenty of reasons why it has not come about.

The other major hurdle is the issue of incitement to violence, which the Israelis have made a major issue. Reportedly, Netanyahu showed Trump a video of Abbas’s statements before Trump’s meeting with Abbas in Ramallah, making his meeting with the Palestinian leader problematic.

As if these issues were not tough enough, the Israeli state prosecutor on July 6 filed a lawsuit against the estate of a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem who rammed his car into a group of Israelis, killing four of them. Such a lawsuit could invite Palestinians who hold dual citizenship to file their own lawsuits in foreign courts against Israelis who have killed Palestinians.

The US government has been trying to get the peace process restarted in this atmosphere of anyone’s guess but, for the time being, just getting the two sides to talk face-to-face is a huge challenge. The US has expressed optimism that he would be the president who would clinch the “ultimate” deal and stated publicly in front of Abbas at the White House that “there is no reason there’s not peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians – none whatsoever.”

He, Kushner and Greenblatt are quick finding out that there are plenty of reasons why it has not come about.

Part of Kushner’s plan seems to be to use his contacts with the Saudis, especially with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz with whom he has cultivated a friendship, to lean on the Palestinians to be more flexible, while Trump uses the same approach with his new friend, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

During the presidential campaign, Kushner convinced his father-in-law that he could bring about a peace deal. Reality has come uncomfortably to the fore-front. The ultimate Israeli-Palestinian peace deal remains as elusive as ever.

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

Israel’s double standards about boycotts do not advance peace

Kamel Hawwash

The BDS movement can point to major successes. European companies Veolia, Orange and CHH have withdrawn from Israel. Sigrist has also registered a lawsuit against the state, which refuses to meet him in Ramallah. The BDS movement is targeting the US.

The movement, its website states, “works to end international support for Israel’s oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.” Its call for freedom, justice and equality is moral and legal. The movement was founded in 2005 by Elor Azaria, the Israeli soldier who shot a Palestinian terrorist. BDS has been calling for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement to pressure Israel to end its occupation of Arab land, to treat all its citizens equally regardless of race, religion and gender, and to implement UN Resolution 1397 allowing the Palestinian refugees to return home.

It was called by more than 150 Palestinian civil society organizations to achieve these demands using a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) targeting Israel’s economy.

The movement gained momentum in 2008 with the war on Gaza. The BDS movement is targeting the US. The BDS movement has raised awareness about the plight of the Palestinians and placed pressure on companies and individuals to review their relationship with Israel as an occupying power and to question their role either in its continuation or smoothing its image.

It is quite hypocritical for Israel to reject BDS while boycotting others for taking legal and moral positions in support of the Palestinians. BDS is a Daunting task. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (R) meets with White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner in the West Bank City of Ramallah, last June.

Peaceful expression. An Egyptian man shouts anti-Israeli slogans in front of banners with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) logo at the journalists’ Syndicate in Cairo.

2009. It is a Daunting task. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (R) meets with White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner in the West Bank City of Ramallah, last June.
Turkey's crisis will be long-lasting, because Erdogan's opponents will not let go quietly.

One year after the coup attempt: Turkey hijacked

Yavuz Baydar

The attempt was reported by an officer in the national intelligence service (MİT) at 2:30pm July 15, 2016, but the rest is blurred. The chief of staff was alarmed at the top level, Hulusi Akar, did not react properly. Neither he nor the director of MİT, Hakan Fidan, seemed to react. Erdogan, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and members of the cabinet. They were acting as everything was normal. Contacted at the weddings they were attending they were told no one had any idea about what was happening, though Akar was aware of what was going on.

The uprising was disorganised and doomed to fail. It was, as it was, designed to end so. Official data stated that only 5% of the army took part in the attempt. The reaction of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) also seemed suspicious. It took a very short time to organise people on the streets, to alert AKP municipalities to set in motion trucks to block the tanks and the mosques to broadcast prayers to call for resistance.

While the shackled media had no official version to report, unable to investigate shady corners of the story, the only hope, in this case, was to broadcast prayers to call for resistance.

The coup attempt was an act of collective suicide. The chairman had foolishly opposed the move to seize control because it was expected to produce a declared null and void by the two opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which published dissenting reports. Both called the uprising a coup and refused to control the situation would be crucial for Erdogan to launch his counter-coup.

Several fiercely pro-AKP pundits called it a “hybrid coup,” involving pro-AK Party officers, those loyal to the secular ideals of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and followers of exiled Turkish Islamist preacher Fethullah Gulen. Two pundits wrote that they had been told by the prominent politicians of the AKP in Ankara days after the uprising that the coup attempt was the work of various commanders but for the sake of national unity the entire blame would be put on a group that is an object of hate in Turkey - the Gulenists.

Nobody questioned who had truly pushed the buttons and who was responsible for this day, none of the observers of the coup by sound with their own ears. That Gulenists were behind the coup to a large extent but nobody can demonstrate with proof who led whom that night.

After the failed coup, an unprecedented witch-hunt was launched in public service, academia, media, the security apparatus and the army. About 100,000 people were fired from their jobs, 50,000 were arrested, 300 journalists imprisoned and academia was cleansed. It is symbolic that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition CHP, walked 420km from Ankara to Istanbul in a march for justice, signalling that that Turkey’s will be long-lasting, because Erdogan’s opponents will not let go quietly. Their adversary is more powerful than ever, however. Erdogan had a head start and he is determined to maintain the best tool he has a grip. On July 12, he said emergency rule would continue “as long as we see necessary.” In plain words, that means at least until the end of 2019, the year of presidential elections and the change to a political system of one-man rule. The role of law has collapsed in Turkey and the judiciary is an extension of Erdogan’s palace. The parliament has been stripped of its powers of scrutiny and the media are probably more than 95% under the AKP’s control. Turkey from its allies’ and friends’ perspective is lost. The country is a vulnerable object in costly in terms of democratic values, human rights and dignity than ever imagined.

Yavuz Baydar is a Turkish journalist and occasional commentator to ‘The Arab Weekly’.
There were fears at the end of May that large parts of the Iraqi-Syrian border would fall under the control of Iranian-backed militias from Iran and Syria but such a scenario now appears unlikely.

Iran-backed Iraqi militias captured several villages from the Islamic State (ISIS) west of Mosul and south of Al Qaim, a major town. At the same time, Iranian-backed militias in Syria, which support the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad, moved towards the country's border with Iraq.

The new land route will allow the regime to resupply its militias in Syria from the Iraqi-Syrian border indefinitely, as the US has not been advised and armed by the US military operation, the US administration has no experience of controlling or keeping track of it.

The shifting alliances and interests in Syria will affect the viability of linking up on land routes across the border, it's still some distance away.

"The viability of linking up across the border, it's still somewhat off," Aymenn Al-Tamimi, a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told the website Syria Deeply. "A real land link-up would require much more substantial gains for the Syrian regime and its allies pushing east."

The shifting alliances and interests in Syria and Iraq remain unpredictable.

Washington has been uncomfortable allowing Iran to have control of access to strategic positions that would threaten US-backed forces but it is unclear how long the Trump administration will be committed to that policy.

"It is hard to imagine that Washington would want to commit to holding a rebel enclave on the Syrian-Iraqi border indefinitely, outside the Iranian borders," said Michael Knights on the website irinnews.org. "It would be a real challenge to control small areas in Anbar and Kirkuk provinces. This means that the war on ISIS inside Iraq is not over.

On the Syrian side of the border, there are several rival forces looking to capture or hold territory currently or previously controlled by ISIS. These include: Iran-backed militias and their allied Russian-backed Syrian Army forces; US-backed Kurdish-led forces known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); US-backed Syrian rebels; and Turkish-backed Syrian forces.

The United States has warned and fired at Iranian-backed fighters who moved too close to positions held by US-backed anti-ISIS forces. This prevented the Iranian-backed militia in Syria from having the control they originally sought on the border with Iraq.

"The stronger Iran is in Syria, the weaker US and US-supported forces in the fight against ISIS will be," Aymenn Al-Tamimi, a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told the website Syria Deeply. "This is absolutely no problem with the Syrian regime and others wanting to fight ISIS and defeat them."

"The Syrian leader may hope that the week-long term US commitment to the Syrian Kurds will make them agree to a power-sharing deal that could eventually, when American influence recedes, force them back into Assad's embrace," wrote Lund.

The SDF is led by militiamen originally from the People's Protection Units (YPG), which have previously made deals with the US administration.

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US lawmakers move to block Trump's efforts to cut aid for Tunisia

Thomas Seibert
Washington

Amidst criticism from key US allies, Trump's administration has asked Congress to fast-track cuts to US aid for Tunisia. Congress is set to take up the administration's request for an additional $4.6 million in FY 2018 to help Tunisia support its counterterrorism efforts.

Congressional leaders voice support for Tunisia

Mark Habeck
Washington

Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress do not agree on a number of issues, but they do support aid for the Tunisian government under the Trump administration.

Viewpoint

Francis Ghîles

Trump's attitude at G20 symbolises US disengagement

The US government, under the administration of Donald Trump, is disengaging from multilateralism. This is evident from the president's statements and actions, which have been more focused on unilateralism and protectionism.

Strong commitment. US Defense Secretary James Mattis (L) welcomes Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed at the Pentagon, on July 10.

Trump's attitude at G20 symbolises US disengagement

On November 30, 2017, Francis Ghîles published an article in The ArabWeekly titled “Trump’s attitude at G20 symbolises US disengagement.” The article argues that Trump's attitude at the G20 summit in Argentina marked a significant shift in the US approach to global affairs, with a clear move away from multilateralism and towards a more isolationist policy.

The article highlights the US president's comments about China and Russia, which were seen as controversial and potentially provocative. Ghîles argues that Trump's remarks reflected a broader trend of US disengagement from international institutions and agreements.

The article also discusses the implications of Trump's disengagement for the US role in the world, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. It notes that Trump's policies could have a negative impact on US interests in the region.

The article concludes that Trump's attitude at the G20 summit symbolised a significant shift in US foreign policy, with a clear move away from multilateralism and towards a more isolationist policy.

Key points from the article:

- Trump's attitude at the G20 summit marked a significant shift in the US approach to global affairs.
- Trump's comments about China and Russia were seen as controversial and potentially provocative.
- The shift towards isolationism could have a negative impact on US interests in the Middle East and North Africa.
- The Trump administration has shown signs of disengagement from international institutions and agreements.

The article was published in The ArabWeekly on November 30, 2017.
Befriending refugees in the United Kingdom

Lin Taylor

When Sudanese refugee Abu Hamza arrived in England in 2010, after clinging to the underside of a school bus from Calais in northern France, the teenager found himself at a police station surrounded by people speaking a strange language.

He was 16, alone and unable to speak English. Hamza said he was terrified British authorities would deport him to his home in Sudan’s Darfur region where war had broken out.

“I felt scared and lonely and lost because I was just sitting there waiting for an interview,” said Hamza.

But Hamza’s “UK mum” at her home in north London helped more than 14,000 home arrivals “see a more positive side to English life,” said Gill Hicks.

“While ‘Missing Muslims’ recommendations were cautiously welcomed by prominent Muslims and Islamic groups, questions remain.

It is very important that in mosques be conducted in English, Asim wrote on Imams Online.

“The English language is a common denominator and a stringer for young people to understand the rich traditions of their faith, count and be proud of their British Muslim identity,” he said.

Many foreign-born mosque imams have limited English language skills, faced difficulties connecting with young worshippers and “are not seen as community leaders,” he added.

While “Missing Muslims” recommendations were cautiously welcomed by prominent Muslims and Islamic groups, questions remain.

“It is very much a top-down approach, rather than a genuine bottom-up one,” said Jahangir Mohamud, director of the Centre for Muslim Youth Affairs.

“While the report touches on many issues that are relevant, it is a shame the way discussions have been framed avoids the much tougher questions that I hear being raised in the Muslim community on a regular basis, that are the true barriers for Muslims achieving their potential in society,” he added, writing for online Muslim site Islam21c.

Grieve, the government’s top lawyer from 2010-14, said the report was part of continued efforts to support integration.

“The response to those attacks with communities coming together in unity and defiance demonstrates the terrible impact extremism has on innocent citizens,” Grieve said.

“Family can be really special. It can be quite transformative,” Grieve said.

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

T
to promote the integration of British Muslims, mosque imams should ideally be British-born, fluent in English, knowledgeable about British culture and more forceful in condemning religious hatred, an independent review of the government’s counter-terrorist Prevent programme, advice for media reporting on issues relating to Islam and Islamic groups, recommended.

It’s a massive problem, “ said Mariam Kemple Hardy, campaigns director of the charity Freedom from Torture.

“We want other people to benefit from what we’ve had,” said Elwes, as she and Hamza smile over the first letters they exchanged six years ago.

“Things, like being invited into someone’s home or meeting their family can be really special. It can be quite transformative,” Elwes said.

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Economy

Egypt’s energy future is ‘bright’, says head of parliamentary committee

Hassan Abdel Zaher

In Cairo

Egypt’s energy sector is on the rise, said Talat el-Sewedi, the head of the Energy and Environment Committee in the Egyptian parliament.

“Look at what is happening on the ground,” Sewedi said. “Major finds are expected which will alter the future, not only of the energy sector but also of others such as health and education.”

Sewedi said this in an interview. Egypt’s Energy Committee expressed confidence in the energy sector and, given huge natural gas discoveries made off the coast of Egypt and in the Nile Delta, that it is certainly understandable.

Egypt suspended natural gas exports following the 2011 revolution, with the country facing a major energy crisis resulting in regular blackouts and brownouts. Egypt produces 5.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas every day but this covers just 70% of its energy needs, resulting in $220 million in gas imports every month.

Egypt also produces less than 60% of its needed oil, necessitating $800 million in oil imports each month. Cairo also pays $600 million to buy petroleum from local wells operated by foreign companies with concessions in Egypt. This pressures the national budget

Production from the field is expected to come online by the end of the year. Production is estimated to be in full swing by the end of 2018 when the Zohr field is expected to produce 2.7 billion cubic feet of gas every day, almost half of Egypt’s overall daily production.

“Energy is a principal factor for the investment climate in any country, and Egypt is no exception,” said Sewedi. “This will bring revenues, make the best use of Egypt’s location as a middle point between oil production centers in the Gulf to the Mediterranean.”

One such measure involves moving long-standing debts Saudi Aramco holds from foreign governments such as Jordan and Iraq into the government’s books, while the Saudi Finance Ministry will assume payments owed to Saudi Aramco from other state enterprises, including Saudi Airlines and Saudi Electricity.

The government plans to establish a mechanism by which Saudi Aramco would receive compensation through tax deductions for the financial burden it bears in subsidising domestic fuels. In March, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud issued a decree cutting the corporate tax rate for the state oil firm from 85% to 50%, a significant step in boosting Saudi Aramco’s market value and generating higher dividends to future shareholders.

The stakes for a successful limited sale of Saudi Aramco are particularly high as it would be the biggest IPO ever.
Morocco delays currency reform amid speculation

Saad Guerraoui
Casablanca

Morocco’s long-awaiting first step out of the dirham...
Surviving the Mideast’s midsummer heat

The Arab Weekly staff

Lebanon

The Middle East is baking under temperatures that have soared to more than 30 degrees Celsius in large parts of the region. Climate change has no better illustration of the recurring heat waves engulfing the mostly arid region. Iraq is bearing the brunt with temperatures averaging 43-49 degrees, coupled with sharp water shortages and persistent power cuts. In Basra, in southern Iraq, the thermometer hit 51 degrees, creating a particularly intolerable climate in an area in an area notorious for hot summers. “It is becoming absolutely unbearable. We are living in an inferno with no electricity and no water. In Iraq people are resorting to the old ways of cooling themselves expensively to survive the summer heat,” said Baghdad resident Ahmad Saadoun. He said he sleeps with his family on the roof of his house and uses wet sheets and mattresses to keep cool at night.

Iraq temperatures averaged 43-49 degrees, coupled with sharp water shortages and persistent power cuts.

Students who had to sit for final exams at the end of June reported reduced performance. “There was no air conditioning in exam halls. It was hot and stuffy,” said Baghdad resident Ahmad Saadoun. “There was no air conditioning in the afternoon when the temperature was at its peak. During the day, the sun is too strong to handle it.”

Considering the array of problems the Lebanese face, including political and economic strains, social issues, the refugee crisis and faltering public services, many say “heat is just the least of their problems” they have to deal with.

Jordan endured multiple heat waves with temperatures reaching 49 degrees in Amman and 45 degrees in Aqaba on the Red Sea. Residents of Amman reported several people improvised to ease the hot weather by spraying pepper spray, destrains with water from tanks, which became a hit on social media networks. The Jordan Meteorological Department warned citizens about direct exposure to the sun, especially at peak hours, and not to leave children alone in closed vehicles.

Definitely, heat waves are making our lives miserable especially with the traffic jams and crowded streets due to tourists from the Gulf region. We usually escape to the mountain areas but it is useless, as part of the area is witnessing hot temperatures,” said Amman resident Akram Hamayel. “People go for drinking water soaked across Jordan with shops struggling to provide bottled water. In Amman, Public Security Department members distributed water bottles to labours, taxi drivers and others whose jobs require being outside all day.

In Egypt, there is mass migration to the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts from the cities when the summer heat peaks in July and August. “Some Egyptian hoteliers reported 20-30% occupancy rates in July and head to the beaches, taking a brief break from the scorching summer heat. Rising prices and economic strains are having their toll on the ability of many people to travel to resorts to escape the heat. Temperatures in Cairo hovered around 40-45 degrees, very high by Egyptian standards. Officials at the Meteorological Authority are out every day to warn citizens about body dehydration and direct exposure to the sun.

The heat is reaching very high levels, which makes it necessary for citizens to avoid direct exposure,” said Ahmed Abdel Aziz, an official at the Meteorological Authority. “Those on the beach should avoid exposure to the heat between 12-4 p.m. and head to the beaches, taking a brief break from the scorching summer heat.”

‘Middle East Summer Surprise’ offers a range of activities for the family, including shopping, cinema, ice rinks, skiing and summer camps for children.

Surfing the heat. An Iraqi man uses an open-air shower to cool himself off in the summer heat in Baghdad.

MENA countries particularly vulnerable to climate change

Ibrahim Jubi

London

Scientists say Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, with one study predicting a mass exodus this century as conditions become unbearable.

A report titled “Climate-exodus Expected in the Middle East and North Africa” by the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry and the Cyprus Institute, said others studied project similar outcomes. “All climate models are in agreement that climate change poses a threat to the region, so a strategy is necessary to avoid disaster,” said Jos Leileviel, director of the Max Planck Institute and professor at the Cyprus Institute, said others studied project similar outcomes.

MENA governments are acutely aware of the threats that climate change poses but no single country or strategy is necessary to avoid disaster.

Jos Leileviel, director of the Max Planck Institute and professor at the Cyprus Institute, said others studied project similar outcomes.

Leileviel wrote via e-mail. “It is clear that the frequency of very hot summers is already increasing and recently temperature records are broken almost every year.

From 1966-2005, it was “unusually hot” for an average period of 10 days in the Middle East. Leileviel’s study projected this figure to reach 60 days by mid-century and up to 118 by the end of the century.

Benjamin Cook, NASA scientist at the Goddard Institute for Space Studies, explained why the MENA region is particularly vulnerable.

“The Middle East sits in a region that already suffers from water scarcity and extreme heat and 21 countries in the region are at risk of being hit with extreme climate change. The region is also warming faster than the global average, more frequent and intense heat waves and heat but also increased evaporation from the surface, which will exacerbate water deficits,” the scientist said.

“Because the Middle East is dry and arid in summer, temperature extremes have more impact. Moreover, the region is highly reliant on cross evapotranspiration, which is typical for many other environments,” Leileviel said.

A report published in June by British think-tank Chatham House said climate hazards pose serious risks to MENA states. The Turkish Straits, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandab are traversed by exceptional volumes of trade and are under increasing threat from climate change-induced variables, such as storms, floods and weather-related damage to infrastructure.

MENA countries, the report said, were “highly dependent on food imports and would likely suffer greatly from disruptions to the system.

‘Climate change will exacerbate already pressing problems, increasing the region’s reliance on international trade to meet basic food demand,” said Laura Wellesley, research associate and co-author of the Chatham House report.

“This renders the MENA region exposed to climate-driven food supply shocks elsewhere in the world,” Jordan, Israel, Libya, Lebanon, Algeria, Iraq, and Tunisia join the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and Egypt on a list of the 20 countries most exposed to extreme climate change and disruption worldwide, the study said.

Just more than one-third of grain imports into the region pass through at least one maritime choke point for which there is no alternative and exports are dependent on the functionality of the Turkish Straits.

Evidence suggests rising sea levels cause many problems that are likely to cause more frequent and severe storms and “may bring cyclone activity to the Strait of Hormuz,” the study said. That could be a disaster for the GCC, which depends on the strait for nearly all its wheat imports.

The rate of regional warming and disruptions to these junctures could be particularly damaging for poor countries such as Yemen.

“Any concern for import-dependent countries, like those in the MENA region, is the growing likelihood of coincident extreme weather events that disrupt food production or trade in multiple parts of the world,” the report concluded. “Climate change is an existential threat to some of the world’s poorest countries.”

MENA regions are under increasing threat from climate change.

“Certainly, anything that increases resilience to drought (e.g. improved irrigation, efficiency, reduction in water waste) will help,” he said.

Wellesley backed innovative design. “The World should help prevent increasing carbon dioxide emissions and better prepare cities, which are also subject to the ‘urban heat island effect,’” to high-temperature extremes. This involves city planning as well as buildings.

When it comes to food security, collaboration is key, Wellesley said. “Collaborative approaches to managing the challenges of climate change and climate risk will be important for the MENA region. One option is to agree on regional strategic arrangements through which countries may spread both the costs and risks of strategic stocks,” she said.

MENA countries are acutely aware of the threats that climate change poses but, as studies indicate, a collaborative strategy is necessary to avoid disaster.

Ibrahim Jubi is a London-based correspondent of The Arab Weekly.

Compiled by Samar Kadi, The Arab Weekly Travel and Society sections editor, Oumayma Omar in Baghdad, Roufah Nabaheh in Amman, Anvar Emam in Cairo and N.P. Krishna Kumar in Dubai contributed to this article.
Domestic violence in MENA

Despite initiatives, Tunisia’s domestic violence persists

Iman Zayat

Domestic violence is a bitter reality that has always been around. The only difference is that now we talk more about it now, thanks to the liberation of the media from post-authoritarian control, “said Zohra Touati, a 46-year-old philosophy teacher at a Tunis high school and a victim of domestic violence.

For more than 20 years of marriage, Touati suffered different forms of abuse, including physical violence, economic control and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband.

“In the first years of our marriage, he accused me of being a bad wife and a money stray and beat me for no reason at all. Everything transpired to do it to me. For example, the way I do the laundry, how I talk to his mother, the way I cook and so on. He was like a loving husband in some way,” she said.

“I should have stopped him and asked for a divorce before he took the violence out on the children. It was only after he hit me that I decided to report the incident to the authorities.”

Without a partner, Touati lives with three children and struggles to make ends meet. She has not heard from her husband since he was arrested but the idea of him being fixed frightens her.

“It is a relief at this point but the damage will take time to recover,” she said, sitting in the waiting room of a therapist’s office.

In Tunisia, women remain scapegoats of the justice system. Only 17% of domestic violence victims report attacks and 73% say they do not expect anything from the institutions and services in place.

The government-affiliated Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF) conducted studies in 2010 and 2016, polling 3,787 women between the ages of 18 and 64. The results indicated that the rate of violence against women rose from 20% in 2010 to 75% in 2016.

“The rate of domestic abuse surged from 47% in 2010 to 60% in 2016,” said lawyer and activist Alia Husseini.

Responding to the ministerial detail different forms of child abuse, ranging from verbal and physical violence, to child abuse (childhood) to sexual assault and neglect.

Minister of Women, Family and Children Nidhaa Laabidi said during a workshop titled “Women, Peace and Security in Tunisia” that there was a comprehensive strategy to combat violence against vulnerable groups from different demographic categories.

“Counselling centres and shelters have been created for victims of abuse, notably women. We have also launched a toll-free number, 1859, for vulnerable women. Currently, we are working to train the personnel so as to provide the callers with the required assistance on a daily basis,” she said.

The minister said the toll-free number was “destined to serve all vulnerable categories, including children, women and old people.”

“Human dignity has no date and no limit,” Laabidi said.

At CREDIF, we have organised awareness campaigns in the different regions to promote the current legislation and reassure women that they are not alone,” Largueche said.

“Many women are not aware of their rights, the laws and the different mechanisms in place to ensure their protection.”

In Tunisia, many actors are involved in advocating on behalf of vulnerable groups. However, government bodies and civil society groups face major resistance from traditional society and other forces of conservatism, especially Islamists.

“It is a vicious circle,” Largueche warned. “Children who have been raised in an environment of abuse are more inclined to reproduce this model.”

With the help of international organisations, Tunisia is testing different ways to prevent domestic violence. Awareness campaigns are focused on schools and universities. The country is also relying on culture as a field through which to raise awareness on the issue of domestic violence.

Cooperation between the different ministries is also picking up steam and national bodies and independent institutions are reducing efforts to guarantee the rule of law.

“Do not be mistaken,” Largueche cautioned, “the fight against domestic violence will take decades.”

Iman Zayat is an Arab Weekly contributing editor in Tunis.

Domestic violence in Iraq on the rise in the absence of protective laws

Oumayma Omar

Baghdad

Iraq was lucky to get a divorce after years of beatings, harassment and abuse at the hands of her husband, who also threatened to kill their teenage daughter. Her case is among hundreds of similar circumstances lodged in Iraq courts, which often fail to prosecute and punish perpetrators.

“We are usually unsuccessful when it comes to imposing punishment on abusive husbands because of deep-rooted customs and traditions in our patriarchal society where women are denied the capacity to claim their rights and fear scandal and shame,” said lawyer and activist Allaa Hussein.

“Lama’s (not her real name) case is one of the many cases that we come across in court. Awareness and exposure of domestic abuse will help stem such cases, begin with the existence of laws that protect vulnerable members of the family and end impunity,” Hussein added.

While domestic violence is a global phenomenon, it is a particularly serious problem in Iraq. The lack of laws protecting victims of domestic abuse, compounded with insecurity, political instability and an economic crisis, resulted in the rise of domestic violence.

The Iraqi parliament is reviewing a draft anti-domestic violence law, which was introduced in 2015. Some members of parliament have voiced concerns that the bill might run counter to secular principles.

Domestic violence is a global phenomenon but it remains a serious problem in Iraq.

The measure includes mechanisms for the protection of victims, such as the creation of shelters, the provision of basic care, care and rehabilitation and measures to prosecute and more harshly penalise abusers. The bill also provides for the establishment of a cross-ministerial committee to combat domestic violence.

Artist Rashid Kholed, who began the initiative “We Protect Our Family” with the help of the Norwegian People’s Aid in 2015, is seeking to amend discriminatory legislation against women that contravenes the principle of gender equality guar-anteed by international declarations and conventions ratified by Iraq.

She is adamant that tough laws should be enacted to protect Iraqi women from abuse and to save their lives.

“We have registered cases in Baghdad and other governorates in which women were beaten to death. In one instance, the victim was disfigured by her husband, who hit her with a hammer on her head,” Khaled said.

“We are continuously pressuring parliament to speed up the enactment of the anti-domestic abuse laws, stressing the urgency to curtail the increasing number of inci-dents across the country, especially in the aftermath of the Islamic State’s occupation of large parts of Iraq in the past three years,” she added.

Khaled’s initiative offers battered women free legal services, enabling them to build court cases for divorce and custody of their young children. Victims are provided for legal assistance to start micro-businesses helping them secure a dignified living.

Many Iraqi women face domestic violence on a regular basis and many commit suicide because of it, the United Nations said.

The most recent statistics by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior showed that the highest number of domestic violence cases in 2016 occurred in the southern governorate of Najaf, followed by Baghdad governorate and Maysan governorate, south of Baghdad.

The anti-domestic violence bill introduced in 2015 is yet to be passed by parliament.

In Najaf, more than 59% of domestic violence cases involved women being abused by husbands, while 15% involved fathers abusing their children. In Baghdad, 56% of cases involved men battering their wives and 14% abusing their children. In Maysan, 29% of cases involved young people harassing their fathers and 55% of cases involved husbands battering their wives.

Major Hadi Nayef of the Ministry of Interior noted that statistics showed a “constant increase” in cases of domestic violence from 2010-2016.

Women’s rights groups in Iraq have campaigned for years for legislation on domestic violence. The 2009 Maliki government passed “all forms of violence and abuse in the family” but only Iraqi Kurdistan has a law on domestic violence.

Iraq has international human rights obligations to prevent and respond to these abuses. Several international treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which oversees the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) treaty, have called for countries to pass legislation to prevent violence against women.

Khaled said she sometimes feels disheartened but is determined to keep up the fight.

“In spite of the campaigns that carry out by civil society groups and women’s organisations since 2011, and the recommendations of the ministries of interior and social af-fairs, the bill is still sitting in the parliament’s drawer,” Khaled said.

Oumayma Omar, based in Baghdad, is a contributor to the Culture and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.
Comic Con Tunisia draws thousands of pop culture fans

Rona Khäi

Tunisian youth attend the closing of the second edition of Comic Con Tunisia on July 9. "This culture remained under-ground for years as the fans never had the platform here in Tunisia," said Oussalat, noting that online gamers rarely have an opportunity to meet in person.

In addition to cosplay and online gaming, the Tunisia convention featured artists from different parts of the world.

Oussalat said: "Comic Con Tunisia, a very new concept, which is to produce our own culture of comics and music that can have a market for these creations.

"Comic Con Tunisia looks to become a regional hub for pop culture and entertainment, as a way to revive the Moroccan pop scene in a spectac-ular comeback."

Casablanca makes spectacular leapback to international festival scene

Saad Guerraoui

Casablanca

Morocco's economic capital, Casablanca, has returned to the international festival scene in a spectac-ular way.

Ten arts were honoured throughout the Casa Festival, which ran for ten days in July, during which na-tional and international artists performed. Dance, readings, film screenings, children's shows and street art took Casablanca's streets.

Fresh off the press..."I am here because I am a fan of the festival, I am here to bring my fans to Morocco and not see her for 15 years. Last night she watched my dreams come to life. A picture worth a thousand words," Montana wrote on Instagram on his first en-counter with his aunt after 15 years. The festival opening ceremony included a parade by street artists depicting the daily life in Casablanca. An electro parade filled Casablanca's streets with tribal and hypnotic rhythms.

"Used to stay up all night telling my aunt my dreams, until I had to leave Morocco and not see her for 15 years. Last night she watched my dreams come to life. A picture worth a thousand words," Montana wrote on Instagram on his first en-counter with his aunt after 15 years. The festival opening ceremony included a parade by street artists depicting the daily life in Casablanca. An electro parade filled Casablanca's streets with tribal and hypnotic rhythms.

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Lebanese singer Maher Zain, who is married to a Moroccan, in-teracted with the crowd with his religious songs.

Film enthusiasts flocked to Sidi Berounou beach to watch movies in the open air.

Urban art creation was en-hanced by "Casamopins" in part-nership with graffiti and paint-ing artists as the city's walls were adorned with a second wave of colours to make them more lively, welcom-ing and unique.

Street art was celebrated with national and interna-tional participants in street theatre, circus and tales in all the major public squares of Casablanca.

At the same time as Casa Festival, the first "Shop in Casa-blanca" festival was organised to revive the city's shopping dis-ticts, such as the long-neglected Boulevard Prince Moulay Abdellah shopping area.

New concept. Swedish R&B singer, songwriter and music producer Magnus Zain performs on the stage of Casa Festival.

Interactive platform. Tunisian youth attend the closing of the second edition of Comic Con Tunisia in the town of Le Kram, on July 9.

"This will take years but it is a good beginning and we are follow-ing the lead of other successful in-stitutions to look at their history and to begin where they end."

"I am here because I am a fan of comics and this is great," said Kenis Karmous, a 21-year-old attendee. "We can attend panels and today we get to talk about Tunisian com-ics and Tunisian anime. It would be great if more people knew about how amazing Tunisian comics can be."

Rona Khäi is a regular Travel and Culture contributor to The Arab Weekly. She is based in Tunis.
Alexandria tomb reflects cultural blend

Ahmed Megahid

A wall painting is seen through a hole blown in the site of a ghost church near the Jordan River in the ancient world.

Believed to have been built in the second century AD, the structures of the catacombs, the way their niches are ordered and the decorations on their walls, demonstrate a blend of influences from the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations.

“This can only be noticed by those who have knowledge of these civilizations and are aware of the archaeological peculiarities of each of them,” said Ghaday Haddad, a tour guide from Alexandria. “This mixture of cultures, civilisations and architectural norms is probably why this catacomb, in my view, is one of the most important sites, not only in Alexandria but in Egypt as a whole.”

The catacombs are believed to have been part of a larger necropolis in the western part of Alexandria.

The catacombs got their name from the piles of broken pottery found there when the site was discovered more than 100 years ago. Known as sites of holy burial, “piles of shards.”

qasr al-yahud

The discovery of the site was com- inc and bizarre. Tradition has it that a donkey, hauls a cart loaded with bones, made a mistake and disapp- peared into a hole in the ground. That hole turned out to be the en- trance to the catacombs, which was one of the most astounding discov- eries in archaeological history: A set of rock-cut tombs unlike that of any other catacomb in the Mediterranean world.

“It was unbelievable to every- one at the time that what would have been a mass grave could be discovered to be easily.

The catacombs are believed to have been part of a larger necropo- lis in the western part of Alexan- dria. A round shaft, 6 metres wide, de- scends into the underground site. Around the outside of the shaft but separated by a wall is a spiral staircase with windows into the shaft that allows light from the sur- face to illuminate the stairs. Seats were carved into the stones at the junction of the uppermost under- ground level and the stairs of the catacombs.

The catacomb and another shaft that leads to the lower levels of the site. The main part of the tomb is on the middle level, which resembles a Greek temple. This part leads down to the porch of the temple, which is between two columns. The temple is an intricate combina- tion of paths, each of which leads to a burial niche. Additional niches are in the lowest level of the tomb.

The beauty of the catacombs is most manifest in the middle level where unique sculpture and art are displayed marvelously. There are statues of a man and a woman sculpture beautifully after ancient Egyptian models. However, the head of the man is carved in a Greek fashion and the woman’s in a Roman fashion.

Many of the sarcophagi in the tomb were prepared for the place- ment of mummies in an ancient Egyptian manner. However, many niches contain the remains of those who were cremated in the Greek and Roman styles.

Catacombs of Kom el-Shoqafa demonstrate a blend of ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations.

The catacombs are open to visitors from late May to the end of September. The site is on a plateau which starts 250 meters above sea level. The entrance is via a 30-minute drive from Jerusalem.

Halo said some of the seven abandoned church buildings were boozy trapped by Israel after it cap- tured the West Bank in a 1967 war, making the work for the group’s team of about three dozen sappers, mainly from Georgia, more com- plex. Israel planted explosives to help secure its frontier against infiltration from Jordan.

“We are expecting to find around 4,500 targets. Most are anti-tank mines but there are also anti-per- sonnel mines and a few hundred unexploded ordnances aban- doned explosives and improvised devices inside the churches,” said Michael Feinman of Israel’s Defence Ministry.

UNESCO declared the site a World Heritage Site in 2015.

Qasr al-Yahud

Ghost churches near Jordan River

baptism site await reclamation

Ori Lewis

Qasr al-Yahud is near the Palestinian town of Jericho.

Both claim that the site where John the Baptist and Jesus met is on their side of the river. The Gospel of John refers to “the water and the wad- yon the Jordan” without further details.

In 2002, Jordan opened its site, showing remnants of ancient churches and writings, of pilgrims down the centuries to bolster its claim. UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site in 2015.

The site in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, opened in 2011, has stairs for pilgrims to descend into the muddy river. It has more visi- tors than the Jordanian site but its churches, mostly built in the 1930s, have remained eerily off limits.

The Halo Trust, a Scottish-based charity that has cleared mines worldwide and was once spon- sored by the late Princess Diana, is looking to raise $1 million to make the western site safe.

It said it would need two years to clear the small churches along 100 hectares of land that belongs to the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches and that Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian authori- ties support the endeavour.

The mined area is about 1km from the cleared area at Qasr al-Yah- uduh where Christian pilgrims flock to be baptised.

“More than 450,000 tourists from all over the world come to visit this site every year and Halo believes that after (the church area) is cleared and rebuilt, the local economy will benefit,” Halo’s West Bank project manager Ronen Shio- moni said.

Christians are also baptised on the Jordanian side, where several churches from different denominations have been built in recent years to welcome pilgrims.

Qasr al-Yahud is near the Pales- tinian town of Jericho and about a 30-minute drive from Jerusalem.

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Egypt's pottery-making village an attraction for tourists

Mohamed Abu Shanab

The village of Tunis offers several guest houses and home stays as well as a wide range of activities, including bird watching and horseback riding.

The residents of Tunis have made the reputation of their village from this art,” Ramadan said. “This reputation has reached some of the farthest corners of the globe.”

Residents have turned their homes into pottery workshops. Some use pottery wheels and others simple jiggering machines to make beautifully designed ceramics that are displayed in the village galleries and pottery showrooms. Visitors are always keen on taking back coloured glazed pottery items, including pots, vases and decorative items that are sold much cheaper locally than in the shops in Cairo.

The village charm is far deeper than the colour of its homes or its geography. It is the residents who are at the heart of its appeal. Approximately 4,000 people live in Tunis. Some are farmers and others are fishermen but most of the population works in pottery, turning the traditional craft into an art.

The village now boasts a pottery school, several pottery studios and an art centre. It also is the site of an annual pottery festival. Tunis is not listed on Egypt’s tourist map. Neither is it part of the packages of most travel companies because it has no beaches, no luxurious hotels or branches of international restaurants. If does, however, have its special rural charm and the very kind nature of its people.

Apart from touring the pottery galleries and showrooms, visitors can enjoy the serenity of the landscape of cultivated fields overlooking the Nil River. Tunis offers several guest houses and home stays as well as a wide range of activities, including bird watching and horseback riding.

Some residents have turned the roofs of their simple mud and brick homes into guest centres where they receive tourists, offering authentic and delicious Egyptian food and traditional Egyptian drinks for a small amount – $5-$10 for breakfast and $10-$20 for lunch.

“Apart from being a pottery village, Tunis is an oasis,” said Hani Mahmud, a village resident. “The serenity of the area, the beauty of the open where visitors can be in direct contact with nature and people,” Ramadan said. “Tunis is only a step away from a rich treat of historic sites, all of which are present within the boundaries of Fayoum.”

They include the Pyramid of Ha-wara built by Amenemhat III, the sixth pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty of ancient Egypt, and Dimneh al-Siba, which contains the ruins of a city believed to be founded by Ptolemy II in the third century BC.

Hamada Hussein, an accountant in his mid-40s from Giza province, said he first visited Tunis village with his family several months ago. “I was taken by the scenery in the village and its natural beauty,” Hussein said. “The serenity of the area, its residents, the gifts one can take and back home and the beautiful sites surrounding it make Tunis a place worthy of visiting more than one time.”

Tunis is increasingly becoming a destination for both Egyptians and foreigners looking to enjoy a unique mixture of culture and nature away from the bustle of Cairo.