French president signals shift away from Islamists in Libya mediation

Lamine Ghanni

French President Emmanuel Macron seems to have taken Libya by storm, achieving in one day what Arab countries in the Maghreb and other European states failed to reach for years: diplomatic success.

Macron played host to Libya’s two main actors: Fayez al-Sarraj, head of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, Sarraj’s rival in eastern Libya. During the landmark meeting, July 25 outside Paris, Macron urged the two leaders to agree to a roadmap that includes elections next year and a conditional ceasefire.

In doing so, Macron became the first Western leader to give Haftar centre stage. European powers had treated Haftar as a pariah in light of his uncompromising stance against Islamists and for what they perceived as authoritarian tendencies.

By agreeing to the ten-point blueprint, Sarraj can begin rallying support among allies in western Libya for his own plan for elections in March 2018 and extend his government’s tenure beyond its scheduled end in December.

Macron has repeatedly said that the stability of Libya was important for security in the Mediterranean. Libya’s black soil has served as a springboard for waves of migrants to Italy, as well as a destination for migrants and traffickers travelling across the Sahara from Africa’s desert region, where Libya deploys its largest stance against Islamists.

Haftar, who was an ally of dictator Muammar Qaddafi before turning against him as a CIA-backed dissident, has seen his profile grow at home and abroad as his Libyan National Army (LNA) has crushed radical Islamists in battles since the launch of his Karama (Dignity) campaign in 2014.

Haftar claimed victory over al-Qaeda-affiliated extremists in Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, on July 5. He has also taken sides with the Saudi-led Arab camp opposed to Qatar, whom he has accused of collusion with Libya’s Islamist militias.

Sarraj and Haftar met with Emirati leaders in Abu Dhabi on July 24, last May. Russian President Vladimir Putin also endorsed Haftar as an ally in the fight against Islamism.

Macron hailed the “legitimacy” of both Sarraj and Haftar through which they can unify other factions and militias and reach a common consensus on “the road map of national reconciliation” agreed on in France.

The mediation is the fruit of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian’s “pragmatic policy.” Le Drian invested in Haftar at a time when France and other Western powers were embracing the region’s Islamists.

On July 20, 2016, when Le Drian was defence minister, three French special forces soldiers were killed in a helicopter crash in eastern Libya. While former President François Hollande confirmed the troops were carrying out “dangerous operations,” reports said the troops were helping Haftar’s forces defend an airbase from Islamists. An Islamist militia, Benghazi Defence Brigades, claimed to have shot down the helicopter.

While Macron appears to have swiftly and successfully mediated the Libyan road map, it could rapidly unravel given the many actors in Libya’s conflict.

“Haftar and Sarraj are not the only players in the Libyan landscape,” said Khaled Safi, an Algerian security specialist regarding Libya. “Their meeting in France could worsen the fragmentation of the country.”

Lamine Ghanni is an Arab Weekly correspondent in Tunis.

British tourists eyeing return to Tunisia as UK restrictions scrapped

Mahmoud el-Shafy

London

Honestly, we would have gone to Tunisia this summer if we had known,” said British holidaymaker Sara Hellis, one day before she and her family were to leave on her summer holidays.

“The kids loved Hammamet last time and we would all love to go again but we’ve already booked our holidays to Spain.”

British officials changed their travel advice regarding Tunisia, announcing on July 25 that travel to the North African country was deemed safe. That, however, was too late for the Hellers this year.

The United Kingdom had advised against all but essential visits to Tunisia in June 2015 following the Sousse beach attack in which 38 people, including 30 British holiday-makers, were killed by an Islamic State (ISIS) gunman.

British holidaymaker Mounira Ben Cherifa, director of the Tunisian National Tourist Office in the United Kingdom.

Approximately 425,000 Britons visited Tunisia in 2014 and similar figures are expected next year.

Tour operators were caught unawares about the change and most Britons have already booked their summer holidays for this year.

Thomas Cook said the tour operator was “pleased” about the travel advice change but that it would take time to organise future offers.

“I suppose that we are going to start during the winter season but more towards the spring,” Thomas Cook CEO Peter Frankhuizen said.

Smaller specialist tour companies are likely to secure deals with airlines and hotels for British tourists wishing to visit Tunisia in the next few months. Just Sunshine, a leading Tunisian specialist operator, said it hoped to have holidays on sale by the first week of August.

The Tunisian National Tourist Office said about 12,000 British tourists had visited the country in 2017. Approximately 425,000 Britons went to Tunisia in 2014, with similar figures expected next year.

“We will be communicating with all of our tour operators to see how quickly we can get airlift reinstated. Meanwhile, Tunis Air [is] flying daily from London Heathrow and Gatwick to Tunis,” said Moufida Ben Cherifa, director of the Tunisian National Tourist Office in the United Kingdom.
Macron brings Libyan rivals together, ruffles feathers

Lamine Ghanmi
Tunis

French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in La Colle-Saint-Cloud, near Paris, on July 25.

Embracing a strongman. French President Emmanuel Macron (L) and commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in La Colle-Saint-Cloud, near Paris, on July 25.

The Libyan conflict

Libya agreement welcomed in Cairo but bumpy road expected

Amr Emam
Cairo

Libya agreement welcomed in Cairo but bumpy road expected

The ceasefire does not apply to counterterrorism operations and the defence of Libyan territories. The list of groups labelled as "terror-

ist" by one side is not recognised by the other. Haftar and Sarraj declared that they would not part of the deal can torpedo if they are not included in the political process.

The declaration, made July 20 near Paris by Fayez al-Sarraj, the prime minister of Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord, and Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army, came less than two months after the two men met in Abu Dhabi and agreed to work together to end the conflict in Libya.

The deal, brokered by French President Emmanuel Macron, calls for parliamentary elections, finding a negotiated so-

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Egypt closes in on Muslim Brotherhood

Ibrahim Ouf
Cairo

The death of eight militiamen in a clash with the Egyptian military in the central province of Fayoum was the latest in a series of heavy losses to the Brotherhood and its allies caused by the successful prosecution of several cases in absentia, says retired police general Fouad Allam, a former member of the Brotherhood's central leadership.

“I think this is a major blow to the Brotherhood and its affiliated military groups,” Allam said. “It shows that the government is taking the fight to the Brotherhood and that it is only those residents of Warraq who remain loyalty to the group.”

Some of the eight members killed in the Warraq clash were from the Island of Warraq, which has the capital’s affluence and potential to become a new administrative capital. The islands, which have made the country’s history, including assassinations, are considered prime Cairo real estate, and many ecologists say they are home to the islands’ history.

In late July in the Warraq, on July 16, Egypt’s current President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was killed in a gunfight with Hasm militants who were members of the Brotherhood.

The militants, members of the Brotherhood’s military wing, which carried out attacks throughout Egypt’s history, including assassinations.

In addition to killing a large number of police and security officers, Hasm gained responsibility for a number of attempts at assassination, including the murder of former President Hosni Mubarak in August 2015 and Assistant Prosecutor-General Zakaria Abdel Aziz in September 2015.

Militiamen have testified that they received funding from Brotherhood leaders in Turkey.

Unlike ISIS, Hasm’s claims of responsibility for attacks are rare and it seems to prefer to operate in the shadows. Not much is known about the group’s arms or funding or how many active members of Hasm are operating in Egypt but it is clear from the operations it has claimed, or is believed by authorities to be responsible for, that Hasm fighters are well armed and trained.

Authorities obtained concrete information about the group in September 2016 after arresting Hasm member Majid Shallal. He reportedly gave valuable information about Hasm’s leaders, including Mahmoud Kamal, the group’s main financier, who was killed in a flat in southern Cairo on October 1. Egyptian security apparatus portrayed that event as a major blow to Hasm.

Documents in Kamal’s flat provided detailed information about Hasm’s planning, including the list of names of those with ties to the group.

“The documents seized at Kamal’s flat decided the course of police action against Hasm in the following months,” said retired police General Mazen al-Kidwani. “These documents were a real treasure trove that helped police solve the two-and-a-half-year puzzle presented by Hasm.”

Dozens of Hasm members, including key figures, were rounded up in July and left to demolish their properties in the island. They have come to light and even though it was significantly weakened.

Hasm’s elimination would not signal an end to violent Muslim Brotherhood groups in Egypt, Al-lam said. “Some of the attacks were as a result of their presence.”

The militants have quite been able to raise huge amounts of money to finance terrorist operations inside the country.”

Many Muslim Brotherhood leaders fled to Qatar, Turkey and Sudan following Morsi’s ouster. Cairo has prosecuted several cases in absentia but has generally been unsuccessful in securing convictions.

Hasm militants have testified that they received funding from Brotherhood leaders in Turkey. Some of the eight members killed July 23 received training in Sudan, security officials said.

The success of security agencies to dismantle the Brotherhood’s violent arms one after another opens the door for the government to implement the total abdication of violence, said Ahmed Ban, a former member of the Brotherhood. “By all means, this will open the door for more stabilisation. We need to understand that violence is fueled by ideas and ideas do not die easily or quickly,”

Ibrahim Ouf is an Egyptian journalist.

Egypt’s Nile island plan runs into disgruntled residents

Amr Elmas
Cairo

It was a scene on July 15 and Youssef Fouad had just started working his small farm. Suddenly, the 54-year-old Egyptian farmer was confronted by a dozen of policemen. They raided several houses close to his farm and then brought in bulldozers and other equipment to demolish them. Several small clashes put Fouad at the centre of violence that left one dead and dozens of others injured.

Tensions between Warraq island residents and the police continued and government officials met with residents to resolve the crisis.

“The authorities think we will leave our island easily but they are mistaken,” Fouad said. “They don’t intend to simply bow to the interests of the executive members of the government.”

The government wants to demolish the islands, which have the capital’s affluence and potential to become a new administrative capital. There are approximately 80 islands in the Nile that support significant agricultural and fishing output. Increased illegal construction on the islands in the last two years turned the islands into slums that add sewage to the Nile.

To Fouad and other residents, however, Warraq is their home. He was born on the island and his community supported a family, including two daughters and a son, all of whom live on the island. He can imagine no other life.

“This is my house,” he said, pointing to a two-storey building metres from his farm. “I am ready to make it my grave too if the government insists on taking it.”

Approximately 255 hectares and close to downtown Cairo, Warraq could be prime real estate. Gezira Island, which has the capital’s affluent Zamalek district, is home to the famous Cairo Tower as well as the Egyptian Opera House and Gezira Sporting Club.

Many look at Warraq and other Nile islands and see unfulfilled potential. Talk about turning the Nile islands into investment hubs started in 2007 under President Hosni Mubarak. In May 2007, Mubarak asked Defence Minister Mohamed Fathy and Housing Minister Brarim Susan to prepare plans to develop the islands into the Suez Canal.

The plans were released in 2010 but disappeared after the 2011 uprising. They have come to light once more.

New development plans reportedly prepared by an Egyptian and Emirat-Anglophone companies have appeared in local media, including drawings showing villas and high rises, depicting what Warraq island could look like in the future.

Although Egypt’s Ministry of Housing denied the reports, many Egyptians said it was only a matter of time before Warraq and other Nile islands were developed.

“Warraq seems to have already made deals with investors on the island but it is failing to convince the public,” said Salah al-Guindi, an economics professor from Masr University. “This is bad and will have negative consequences.”

Ahmed Youssef Abdel Dayem, who represents Warraq in parliament, said many residents would support new development projects and that it is only those residents of homes built illegally on government lands that oppose it.

“They know that they will lose their homes and will not be compensated,” Abdel Dayem said. “These residents were the ones who have built illegal homes and they are the ones who can be compensated.”

“They don’t want to lose their homes and will not be compensated,” Abdel Dayem said. “These residents were the ones who have built illegal homes and they are the ones who can be compensated.”

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“However, clashes with police indicate that Warraq’s residents do not intend to simply bow to the government’s demands,” Fouad said. “We are inside.”

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in early June alluded to a plan to block some islands in the Nile so they should not be inhabited.

Three years later, a local newspaper published unconfirmed reports that some islands, including drawings showing villas and high rises, depicting what Warraq island could look like in the future.

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Oman dispute continues despite international mediation efforts

Mohammed Alkhereiji

London

After weeks of shuttle diplomacy from the United States, France, the United Kingdom and others, the Gulf crisis, which began with Saudi Arabia and its allies severing ties with Qatar over its alleged support for terrorism, looks likely to continue. The latest high-profile diplomatic attempt to resolve the dispute, by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, failed.

Erdogan, who has sided with Doha from the onset of the dispute, referred to the sanctions on Qatar as un-Islamic and likened them to a “death penalty” words that were unlikely to endear him to the governments opposing Qatar.

Factoring into Erdogan’s visit was the fact that his government is known for its affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, which is one of the chief components of the dispute.

The Saudi-led bloc issued 13 demands it said Doha must comply with for the sanctions to be lifted. One of the demands was the closure of a Turkish military base in Qatar, which houses more than 1,000 military personnel, including special operations units, ground troops and military trainers.

Qatar, which usually welcomed the regional policy positions of its governments, mostly welcomed Erdogan’s visit. Misgivings about his role as a mediator, however, were expressed.

Saudi newspapers reported factually on Erdogan’s meeting with Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, but many editorialists stressed that the solution to the crisis should be sought within the region.

The lead editorial in the Saudi daily Al Yaum, argued for the crisis to “be resolved within the Gulf house.” The publication said: “The dispute over Qatar lies within the Gulf house. “The solution to “be resolved within the Gulf house.”

The crux of the reviled GCC coalition’s rift with Doha is over what kind of future GCC countries want. The ambassador said the dispute is over what kind of future GCC countries want.

Conflicting interests. Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (L) shaking hands with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Jeddah, on July 23.

A less diplomatic tone was taken in an editorial by prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Al-Thabiti, who is widely circulated Oman newspaper, warned about Turkey’s designs for the region.

“What does Turkey want from Qatar?” asked Thabiti. “It’s no longer a question that needs to be asked. After the diplomatic crisis worsened following Qatar’s occupation, this question has become relevant. Is Turkey hoping to realize its imperial designs in the Gulf through the gates of Qatar?”

After weeks of shuttle diplomacy from the United States, France, the United Kingdom and others, the Gulf crisis endures.

Besides Saudi Arabia, Erdogan visited Kuwait, which has played the role of mediator, and Qatar. Despite remaining from using the same rhetoric as during his visit to the Gulf, and endorsing Kuwaiti mediation as the way forward, Erdogan’s attempts at diplomacy seem to have had the opposite effect: The day after he left the region, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt issued a blacklist of 81 groups and individuals alleged to have direct or indirect ties to Doha.

The report had previously designated 93 individuals and 12 entities with alleged ties to Qatar on its terrorism list.

In an interview on the US network PBS’s “Charlie Rose” program, UAE Ambassador to the United States Yousef al-Otaiba said that one of the underlying issues linked to the dispute was Qatar’s failure to fulfill its pledge as a party to the 2014 Riyadh agreement.

“Unfortunately, everything that has been signed into this agreement has been violated for the last three years,” Otaiba said, adding that the four countries’ frustration had hit a new level.

The ambassador said the dispute is over what kind of future GCC countries want.

“If you ask UAE, Saudi, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, what kind of Middle East they want to see ten years from now, it will be fundamentally opposed to what I think Qatar wants to see ten years from now,” Otaiba said, adding that the UAE and its allies want a more secular, stable, prosperous and empowered region.

The crisis broke out after statements attributed to Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani critical of US foreign policy and praising Iran were carried by the official Qatar News Agency.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Doha on June 5, saying that Qatar interfered in their countries’ internal affairs and supported radical groups such as Hamas, the Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood.

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

Washington forum debates Qatar foreign policy advances

The Arab Weekly staff

Washington

Oman’s conflicting foreign policy choices in several areas have drawn the ire of its neighbors and partners within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Trump administration, an analyst at the Hudson Institute in Washington said during a debate.

Panelists discussing the recent isolation of Qatar spoke of how the small country leveraged both its relatively small population and GDP to secure a place on the world stage with a limited risk of blowback.

Mohammed Khalid Alyahya, a non-resident fellow at the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, described how both combined to create circumstances in which Qatar’s leaders could afford to take almost whatever position they liked without serious risk of facing organised opposition at home.

In this way, the Qatari government enjoyed conditions in which there was almost no internal conflict between its decision to host both the 2022 World Cup and the US airbase at Al Udeid, while providing a safe zone in which financial and political adventurers could meet with backers of extremist groups with relative impunity.

“The argument is, why would we do that if we’re doing this?” asked Michael Pregent, an adjunct fellow at the Hudson Institute. “They’re in a position where they’re being courted and this (behaviour) is being incentivized.”

Allyahya ascribed much of the motivation for Qatar’s actions to what he characterised as its search for relevance on the global political stage:

“We’ve seen Qatar purchase Harrods in the United Kingdom, pumping billions into the real estate market in England alone and much more around Europe,” he said. “We’ve seen Qatar purchase Harrods in the United Kingdom, pumping billions into the real estate market in England alone and much more around Europe.”

For Qatar, that search for relevance carried little or no risk but Doha’s adventurism carried considerable peril for its neighbours, considering the presence of hostile cells in Qatari borders benefiting from Doha’s support.

The Obama administration and much of Western Europe appeared content to accept Qatar’s adventurism, considering it a useful ally in the fight against al-Qaeda and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and its payment of ransom to support al-Qaeda affiliates in Iraq, as well as curbing Iranian influence.

US policies in the region, Pregent added, remained consistent with the aim of deterring Iran, Africa and curbing Iranian influence. However, by turning their fire on the diminutive Gulf state, the other GCC countries were setting the stage for their own policies. “They have to take control over their own isolation of Qatar and [Jabhat Fateh al-Sham] and to protect the interests of their own citizens, and to make sure that their own citizens are in line with their own policies.”

GCC countries have to care of adventurists that support al-Qaeda and [Jabhat Fateh al-Sham] and other groups, Pregent said.

“Here’s a Qatar that is the gateway to the Qatari borders benefiting from Doha’s support. The Obama administration and much of Western Europe appeared content to accept Qatar’s adventurist foreign policies, including its relations with Iran and support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

With a Hillary Clinton victory in presidential election in 2016, looking less secure, there appeared to be little motivation to change tack but with Donald Trump’s accession to the presidency and his choice of the destination of his first overseas trip, the US has been in the regional balance of power was predictable.

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Could a Turkish-Iranian axis develop after the Qatar crisis?

Sahabat Khan

Dubai

When Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain ran out of patience with Qatar’s contrarian foreign policy and imposed a punitive boycott in response to its alleged support of terrorism, they hoped to isolate Doha. While this may yet prove successful, they also embarked on a course of action that risks creating unanticipated regional alliances, as trade and the shared threat of Kurdish separatism draw Tehran and Ankara into an unlikely, in interest preventing the potential territorial break-up of the country and the emergence of an independent Kurdish state.

Both Turkey and Iran are home to significant ethnic Kurdish minorities that could be emboldened by a breakaway Kurdish state in Iraq or at least see their hopes transformed. For decades, Turkey has been working to crush the Kurdish Free Life Party (PKK), which poses a threat to Turkey and seeks to support the 7 million ethnic Iranian Kurds.

Turkey and Iran provided a besieged Qatar decisive support, which diminished the likelihood of the worst-case scenarios many had predicted in the face of its defiance of the region’s most powerful Arab countries. Qatar is just the latest area of emerging common interests between Turkey and Iran. They have maintained a common area of strategic influence, Turkey and Iran provided a be

Marriage of convenience? Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) meets with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Ankara, last May.

Erdogan knows very well that Turkey has no credibility as a mediator given its blatant bias in favour of Qatar.

More than the Qatar crisis in Erdogan’s Gulf talks

Erdogan and his regional allies are an important regional pole with significant international ramifications and that it would be wise and beneficial for his country and its political regime to maintain good economic, political and geo-strategic relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Erdogan is also quite weary of Turkey’s shaky relations with Moscow, Washington and the European Union and fears that his country’s influence in Iraq and Syria will decline.

For the purposes of the Turkish president’s quick tour of the Gulf, the Qatar crisis does not seem to be at the top of Ankara’s agenda in terms of regional and international issues and in relation to Turkey’s own security.

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Qatar crisis

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Erdogan knows very well that Turkey has no credibility as a mediator given its blatant bias in favour of Qatar.
Tensions over religious sites in Jerusalem will delay the prospects of a two-state solution. Days of rage and seasons of outrage are not the way forward. It falls very well that Palestinians will continue to vent their frustrations over a brutal occupation that seeks not just to deprive them of their holy sites but to impose its own fait accompli in such a sensitive and contentious issue.

It is dangerously irresponsible for Israel to seize on every opportunity to impose its own fait accompli. Not without reason, Palestinians suspect Israeli leaders, especially right-wing extremists, of trying to unilaterally impose their will over Jerusalem’s holy sites, which are sacred to all three Abrahamic faiths. This claim is rejected internationally. The sad reality is that Israel seems to have learned nothing from the last three years.

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The Dome of the Rock belongs to us all

Rashme Salhani

The reality is that there is no alternative to reaching a lasting solution to the problem.

The recent violence erupted after Israeli security installed metal detectors at the entrance to the Dome of the Rock, considered Islamic space, and could not be contained. The UN Security Council, such as the Security Council meeting, has yet to be implemented.

Indeed, after saying that the security reforms would remain in place, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu agreed, even if reluctantly, to remove them. As pressure mounted, the Israeli cabinet approved to remove them with other systems.

The massacre has removed the metal detectors and back down from the dome, but it is a major change in Israeli policy, but it is unlikely to be the last word regarding this issue.

Claude Salhani is a regular columnist for The Arab Weekly.
Mosul yet to begin a long process of recovery

Mamnoon Alabbi

London

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is trying to shore up support for his government in the face of growing calls for its resignation as the battle to drive the Islamic State out of the city of Mosul shows no signs of slowing down. But analysts say the move is likely to further exacerbate tensions between the Shia-led government and its Sunni and Christian constituents.

Some argue that the move is merely a stunt by Hakim in full coordination with the militias of Tehran.

Ammar al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), announced he was stepping down from his leadership role in the major Shia political party, following a long-standing dispute with some of its members. Three senior members of SCIRI have left the party over the past year following report of disagreements with Hakim on the direction of the party.

Hakim said he will form a new party, called the National Wisdom Movement, which he said would be more inclusive of Iraq's other components. "We need a new movement to present national projects," Hakim said in a televised statement.

The move is viewed as an attempt by Hakim to recoup votes for his new party in April's parliamentary elections because many Iraqis have expressed discontent with the SCIRI's pro-Iran stances.

Hakim, who enjoys good ties with pro-government Shia groups, has been a vocal critic of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He has said that suspects could be freed by Iraqi authorities have held a single

"I was a prime pillar of militia rule and the downfall of Saddam Hussein was a prime pillar of militia rule and the downfall of Saddam Hussein the hereditary group looks like, " Belkis Wille, Iraq Press (AP), acknowledged that their torture, and abusing Iraqis in this conflict," read a statement by human Rights Watch (HRW).

Iraqi officials have yet to clarify the number of people who died during the campaign to dislodge ISIS and the militants’ "hidden bombs." Among the most pressing needs of Mosul's residents are shelter, food and medical attention. There is a need to resume vital services and begin the costly process of reconstructing the city.

An estimated 90% of Mosul's infrastructure was destroyed during the campaign to dislodge ISIS. Only one bridge remains to allow people to travel between western Mosul and the better-off eastern side. Approximately 70% of private property in the western side was reportedly destroyed. Many residents are not holding their breath as normally it has failed to return to other areas of Iraq that were cleared of ISIS and the militants’ “hidden bombs.”

The search goes on. Iraqi civil defense workers search the bodies of victims in the rubble of buildings in western Mosul's Zanjili district, on July 26.

The view is ascribed to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which has led to the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS. The search goes on.

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Corruption in Iraq

Hussain Abdul-Hussain
Washington

Everyone I go, Iraqis are telling me that money simply isn’t getting to them. Not to their ministries after we’ve made allocations, not to provinces, not to pockets,” Paul Bremer, the first American administrator charged with rebuilding Iraq, wrote in 2003.

In his book, ‘A Year in Iraq,’ co-written with Malcolm McConnell, Bremer argued that, under former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Finance Ministry controlled only 4% of the national budget. Consequently, as US administrators sought to maintain the entire national budget through the relatively small ministry, staff and systems became overwhelmed.

Today, many Americans observers agree that the United States’ management of post-Saddam Iraq was one of the worst instances of post-conflict governance in history.

Under pressure from international organisations, Baghdad moved to cut PPP’s annual budget from $5.5 billion in 2013 to $2 billion in 2016.

Overestimating the power of market forces, Iraq’s American rulers increasingly thought that the wealth that had fuelled Saddam’s regime would translate into robust capitalist democracy. This prove not to be the case.

Prior to the American invasion, Iraq had been under the regime of the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party for decades. True, the Ba’ath was not as socialist as it claimed to be, instigating an economy largely based on oil rent and clientelism. Socialists often issued cards for de-centralizing an economy largely based on oil rent and clientelism.

In 2003, the removal of Saddam’s regime was touted as a kind of rebirth for Iraqis but the reality has shown that they were so caught up with the theft of the Islamic State (ISIL) that they were prone to turn a blind eye to the conditions that contributed to the rise of ISIL and Shia jihad gangs.

What Iraqis received at the barrel of US tanks was not democracy but a Frankenstein’s monster of a democracy.

Iraq’s Provision Portion Programme fuels corruption

Victims of inefficiency. A 2016 file picture shows demonstrators shouting slogans during a protest against government corruption at Tahiri Square in Baghdad.

One can talk about a Dawafica process but must also bear in mind that Iraq’s woes extend far beyond the Dawafica. Among its chief allies is the Badr party, whose power structures appear to be the inverse of the US-instated and Baghdad-executed de-Jihadisation process, in which hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were stripped of their jobs and pensions usually on trumped-up charges of being part of the former ruling regime.

For this year, the Iraqi government has set spending levels for the PPP but if Baghdad continues to fund the programme from outside the approved budget, PPP will consume 7% of total Iraqi expenditures, estimated at $91.2 billion in 2017.

For many, Iraq’s PPP remains a relic from the country’s socialist past. Disbanding the programme or replacing it with a more efficient one designed to feed the poorest requires political capital and over time. With Iraq’s leaders incapable or unwilling to lift their country’s rank of international indices of corruption, the inefficient PPP will continue to linger outside official books, while sucking a considerable amount of resources from both the nation’s annual expenses and, ultimately, its future.

Hussain Abdul-Hussain is a Washington-based specialist in Middle Eastern affairs. Follow him on Twitter: @hubalssain.

People are so caught up with ISIL that they are prone to turning a blind eye to conditions that contributed to its rise.

Dawafication. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (C), flanked by Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari (L) and Iraqi President Fuad Masum, attending a meeting of ambassadors in Baghdad.

Corruption in Iraq

From top to bottom, Iraq reeks of corruption

Spotlight

What Iraqis received at the barrel of US tanks was not democracy but a Frankenstein’s monster of a democracy.
Syrian militiants establish enclave to fuel ‘global jihad’

Simon Speakman Cordall

Tunis

As the world’s rival armies compete for control of Syria’s blood-stained soil, one of the country’s major jihadist groups has turned on its erstwhile partners in Idlib, vanquishing rivals and inviting possible regional retribution on the inhabitants of the north-western province.

Idlib fell to a coalition of rebel militias in 2015. Since then, Turkish-sponsored Ahrar al-Sham has shared territory with an array of other groups, such as the China-sponsored Ahrar al-Sham (HTS) in January, the group’s military arm and the dominant militia in the region, the shifting fortunes of Jabhat al-Nusra.

While Turkish recognition may be a goal for the HTS leadership, it has overtaken Turkish influence within Ahrar al-Sham that likely prompted recent hostilities.

From publicly severing relations with patrons, al-Qaeda’s move in August 2019 dismissing itself Jabhat Fateh al-Sham in 2019, to assuming a lead role in the jihadist coalition Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in January, the group has proven a finer presence within Idlib. Though the group has tried to distance itself from its former sponsors, fealty to past masters is widely thought to remain.

Taking control of Idlib in January, the group has declared a new front in the Syrian conflict. Ahrar al-Sham has sought to share the revenues with HTS after forfeiting its monopoly to a “civil administration.”

With HTS dominance of Idlib as assured, the province will present a tempting target for the Assad regime, whose military will need to reassert its hold on the heart of HTS. “We’re really on the verge of a war,” Nicholas Heras, a fellow at the Centre for a New American Policy, said in a telephone interview. “They can bomb it, they can reduce it to the desert but they can’t occupy it and hold it.”

Moreover, with control of the border crossings wrenched from its former allies and current rivals, the Turkish government must deal with the jihadist conundrum as an established fact within the province.

While Turkish recognition may be a goal for the HTS leadership, it was overt Turkish influence within Ahrar al-Sham that likely prompted recent hostilities. “You’ve got to remember, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) are fighting for what they see as the goals of the revolution,” Heras said. “They want to make Syria a better state, and for that, that’s a state. Ahrar al-Sham aren’t fighting to that end. They’re fighting for whatever Turkey’s ends are.”

With the US-led coalition focused on routing the Islamic State (ISIS) from its enclaves and the regime’s and its allies unable to control the province for the foreseeable future, HTS’s new stronghold appears to be a fact.

“Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham’s ultimate goal is to co-opt as many of the extreme elements of Syria’s armed groups as possible and subordinate them to their control,” Heras said. “This is about creating a social political dynamic within Idlib that is self-sustaining and is going to fuel the global jihad.”

Simon Speakman Cordall is a section editor with The Arab Weekly.

Viewpoint

Abdulrahman al-Maari

U.S. officials told the Washington Post that US President Donald Trump may have decided to end the CIA programme aiding Syrian nationalist-oriented rebels in the struggle against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Unquestionably, the Free Syrian Army groups supported by the CIA were alarmed that the US leadership may no longer be interested in the fight against the Assad dictatorship. Yet, what is likely of more concern for these groups, which have fought on multiple fronts against different actors (Assad, the Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda-linked forces) — is where they will have to go now.

The CIA covert programme started in 2011 under US President Barack Obama’s administration to provide military and assistance to what the US government labelled moderate Syrian opposition factions. The aim of the programme is to undermine Assad’s military capabilities to a level that forces him to the negotiating table. The programme failed to achieve its goal, thanks to the Russian and Iranian military support that has kept the Assad regime in place. The CIA programme has also been seen as ineffective for many reasons, including the lack of sufficient, advanced weapons and the conflicting agendas of regional powers.

Still, it kept the nationalist-oriented, non-extremist rebels alive in many parts of Syria. With this programme ending, the Syrian mainstream opposition is left in limbo with very few options.

Once Russia entered the Syrian war with military force in 2015, the question of reaching a settlement to the war that guarantees a transition of power started to fade, as did the prospects of the CIA programme. While Moscow provided substantial military support to the Assad regime, the opposition was at a point where it could no longer militarily challenge Damascus nor be able to drive the regime towards meaningful negotiations.

The CIA-run programme, therefore, was as much about creating a test as to whether the US-led coalition could reorganise and bolster their positions. With these groups no longer receiving funding, their options no longer rely on their nationalist cause. The fighters of these groups would need to decide whether to face perilous odds as nationalists or join a jihadist or Islamist group.

Turkey may offer support to these groups but that would require them to be part of the overall Turkish agenda in the north, which may not serve their national interests. Various metrics point to rebel-held northern Syria being much easier to conquer for Assad and his allies than ever before. The future of Syria’s rebel-held north will be largely dependent on what the Russians and the Turks agree upon.

As for the south, where Free Syrian Army groups are in such strong positions, the future remains vague. Russia recently reached an agreement with the United States and Jordan on establishing a de-escalation zone where the fight between the Assad regime and the opposition would be frozen. Jordan will push the southern front forces to other counties.

It is uncertain whether another funding channel will emerge from other Arab or Western ally so that the rebels can take the fight to ISIS and tighten their positions.

Islamist groups in the south could reorganise and bolster their influence among displaced and abandoned nationalists. Given the south’s strategic location near regime-held Damascus and its significance as the area that initially sparked the 2011 revolution, Assad forces would likely move to destabilise the southern front, despite the de-escalation agreement.

The CIA programme has long been ineffective at but at least sustained Free Syrian Army rebels enough to survive through the years of war. The goal of the CIA programme may have needed to change from fighting Assad to force him to negotiate, to one that signifies the importance of nationalist rebels and the need to sustain their existence.

The Trump administration may think that halting the programme may make the Russians more open to talk with Israel on regime change, or even serve the interests of the United States in the regional allies. Continuing Obama’s short-sighted doctrine of avoiding escalation would only cause the United States to lose more leverage with Syria and the region sliding towards never-ending instability.

Abdulrahman al-Maari reports on politics and news in the Middle East and Syria in particular. He can be followed on Twitter:@AbdulrhmanMaari.
Failing EU migration policy produces perfect storm

**Viewpoint**

**Francis Ghilès**

The situation in Libya is unlikely to improve soon if new European politicians dare tell their voters the truth.

A parliamentary vote in February was supposed to begin the process of ending the failed Dubs amendment. Yet it seems that the British government is fighting to futilely claim its failure. In fact, thousands of vulnerable child refugees raise major questions about the country’s moral obligations.

The Dubs amendment was passed in April 2016, part of the Conservative government’s response to the refugee situation. This shocking revelation that the British government is failing to fulfil even the bare minimum it promised to provide care to the most vulnerable and particularly British bombs — has been the case for decades.

According to the UNICEF, the Dubs amendment has had little effect on the flow of irregular migrants. It is now up to us to change the situation.

In May’s election, the Brexit vote last year, we saw how the British public now have an even greater incentive to vote for a party that will do what it promised to help refugees stranded in Calais but we were told that “it’s the end of the story.” UNICEF UK Deputy Executive Director Lily Caprani said in a release.

“We are seeing too many children still having to make dangerous journeys to reach safety. It’s time for a sustainable solution.”

There needs to be a sustainable and expanded solution to this crisis.

The scant assistance that the British government has offered refugees from countries that have been directly affected by the conflict in Syria and Afghanistan has been slow and small in scale. UK’s commitment to provide care to the most vulnerable and particularly British bombs — has been the case for decades.

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The situation in Libya is unlikely to improve soon if new European politicians dare tell their voters the truth.

Faron said some child refugees accepted under the scheme had been waiting for more than a year to be transferred. The horrific truth is that the longer they go on, the more likely they will be to fall prey to the type of human rights abuses that have come to define the situation.

**Show of solidarity:** Children hold a box of signed petitions to urge the British government to consult local authorities on their ability to accommodate vulnerable refugee children from Europe, last February.

**Migrant crisis**

**EU curbs rubber dinghy sales to Libya to stop migrants**

The European Union has adopted limits on the export of inflatable boats to Libya in a bid to make it more difficult for smugglers to send migrants to Europe. The new restrictions come after foreign ministers of the 28 EU members agreed last week to impose an arms embargo on Libya to stem the flow of migrants to Italy, now the main route for entering the Union.

“We took a decision to introduce a decision from today onward on migrants to Libya in a bid to make it more difficult for smugglers to send them. The decision has been taken to protect the human rights of migrants and lives even more complicated.”

The asylum and migration commissioner of the European Commission, Dimitris Avramopoulos, said in a statement that the new restrictions would “make it harder for smugglers to organize the export of rubber dinghies and outboard motors to Libya.”

The measures, which include a ban on the export of dinghies and motors, will be in place until the end of 2019. EU officials said the ban would affect all EU member states.

**Amnesty International**

To blame rescuers for acting as a pull factor ignores the bleak reality that the number of people seeing Africa is increasing. The rush factor pushes the pull one. But as this situation collides with the migration, the world’s way to respond to this crisis.

The situation in Libya is unlikely to improve soon if new European politicians dare tell their voters the truth.

**EU policies have made the situation worse.**

**Some EU policies have made the situation worse.**

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“The ban on the export of dinghies and motors will affect all EU member states,” he said.

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Hezbollah seizing territory along Lebanon’s northern border

News & Analysis

Lebanon

Hezbollah’s surrender to Hezbollah

Nicholas Blanford

A long-awaited assault against extremist militias holed up in mountainous regions along Lebanon’s northern border with Syria is under way with Hezbollah spearheading the attack, swiftly seizing territory.

The offensive began on July 21 as Hezbollah units moved north from their base in Homs province in Syria to a town of Arsal into terrain controlled by Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS), formerly known as al-Nusra Front. In just a few days, Hezbollah had seized the area and moved along the eastern border as far south as the slopes of Mount Hermann. The 4th Land Border Regiment, which dominates the ground north-east of Arsal, has a presence along the entire border. There are also three painstakingly guarded hilltops south-east of the Bekaa valley as part of the government’s complete determination to fight terrorism.

The government’s complete surrender to Hezbollah’s agenda shows the extent to which it has lost any capacity to review the militant group from hijacking its sovereignty.

The Lebanese Army, which has a strong defensive perimeter around Arsal and a line of fortified observation towers along the western flank of the battleground, was using fire against groups of militants who tried to infiltrate the town during the fighting.

Tough terrain. Lebanon’s Army troops on route to the newly constructed Nimrod military base near Tufail on Lebanon’s eastern border with Syria, on July 14. (Nicholas Blanford)

It is unclear how long ISIS will be able to hold on when Hezbollah has finished with JFS and turns its attention to the extremists.

As this battle is fought in the rugged mountainous terrain along Lebanon’s northern border with Syria, the Lebanese Army’s 4th Land Border Regiment is building a line of fortified observation posts that gives sweeping views over most of the ground held by pro-Damascus factions in Syria. The project of establishing land structures along that line is no longer needed for full control of the area. It seems that the battle for Arsal has ended with JFS and the army.

The government’s complete surrender to Hezbollah’s agenda shows the extent to which it has lost any capacity to reverse the militant group from hijacking its sovereignty. It is possible to say that Lebanon is officially within the sphere of Iranian influence. That would allow the 4th Land Border Regiment to complete its deployment by moving into the area south of Arsal and build new outposts adjacent to those manned by the 2nd Land Border Regiment. Once that deployment is complete, the Lebanese state will have a full presence along the entirety of Lebanon’s border with Syria for the first time since independence in 1943.

What’s incredible is that every Lebanese official is silent about the presence of Hezbollah’s troops in the Lebanese state. It is unclear how long ISIS will be able to hold on when Hezbollah has finished with JFS and turns its attention to the extremists. The government’s complete surrender to Hezbollah’s agenda shows the extent to which it has lost any capacity to reverse the militant group from hijacking its sovereignty.

The offensive began on July 21 as Hezbollah units moved north from their base in Homs province in Syria to a town of Arsal into terrain controlled by Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS), formerly known as al-Nusra Front. In just a few days, Hezbollah had seized the area and moved along the eastern border as far south as the slopes of Mount Hermann. The 4th Land Border Regiment, which dominates the ground north-east of Arsal, has a presence along the entire border. There are also three painstakingly guarded hilltops south-east of the Bekaa valley as part of the government’s complete determination to fight terrorism.

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Jerusalem tensions put Palestinian-Israeli issue under spotlight

Mamoon Alabbi

London

Tensions between Pales-
tinians and Israeli forces are heating up, with both sides accusing each other of using excessive force.

Israel began occupying East Jeru-
salem in 1967 and has annexed it as its capital city. This unilateral act is widely seen as illegal under international law. The United Nations views East Jerusalem as occupied territory and has said its fate should be decided in a peace set-
tlement that includes both Israel and Palestine. Jerusalem is divided between Israel and Jordan with a 16-kilometer separation.

At the height of the tensions, Is-
raeli forces killed six Palestinians and a Palestinian child with live ammunition at the entrance of the al-Aqsa Mosque in a standoff over whether metal detectors would be allowed inside the mosque. Palestinians say the Israeli measures are intended to limit access to the site. Israel says the measures are necessary to ensure security.

Israel recently announced plans to build a new neighborhood in East Jerusalem, which Palestinians call East Jerusalem, a move that has been condemned by the international community.

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah has called on international organisations to push Israel to reverse its decision. The UN Security Council has called for a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

It is not apparent, at least publicly, how the Trump team will respond to the Israeli-Palestinian tension.

Viewpoint

Gregory Aftandilian

It is a former US State Department mediate

discuss about the situation.

Trump team helps defuse Jerusalem crisis but broader deal is far off

Removal of the metal detectors may have been the result of internal discussions within the Israeli security

establishment.

Wrong target. Israeli police officers aim their weapons as Palestinians protest outside Jerusalem's Old City, on July 28.

Worries over new move

Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah called on the international community to push Israel to reverse its decision.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has condemned the Israeli move and called for a peaceful resolution.

The US position on the issue has been widely condemned by the international community.

While the US position on the metal detectors was not revealed publicly, Friedman congratulated all parties for “defusing the crisis without a lot of noise and fanfare.” Although tensions in East Jerusa-
lem remain high and another crisis could erupt, Friday prayers on July 28 took place without violence at al-Aqsa Mosque.

Netanyahu said in a state-
minted metal detectors.

Jordan has a peace treaty with Israel and is the official custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, which has been a focal point in a strategic way we get hit

It may not be apparent, at least public-
ly, how the Trump team is going to move the Palestinian government to make substantial concessions necessary to strike the ultimate deal.

As Israel’s new prime minister, however, is facing regional and inter-
national pressure, including from some allies, as his policies on Jeru-
salem inflamed public opinion in the region. The high level of sen-

sitivity surrounding the holy sites remains a sticking point for Israel’s foes and friends.

The episode reveals that Trump’s main goal in the region is to normalise ties with, “stressed the need for the return of calm.” It’s a step

However, on the broader goal of achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, they are a long way from success.

Still, while the Trump team’s efforts seem to have been effective in defusing the current crisis, it is unclear how much progress will be made in future discussions.

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

German politicians across the spectrum supported a harsher stance against Turkey, with some, including Social Democratic Party (SPD) candidate for chancellor Martin Schulz and Horst Seehofer, the leader of Bavaria’s right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU), demanding an end to financial aid to Turkey. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier suggested tougher measures and a strong language for Ankara “as a question of self-respect.”

Time and again, the two countries have been running high over Germany’s decision to recognise the Armenian genocide in a June 2015 resolution, the arrest of Turkey’s main opposition leader, Selahattin Demirtas, and several other executive measures.

German correspondents Sigmar Gabriel reacted to the arrest by saying: “We can’t continue as we have done until now.”

We need to be clearer than we have been until now so these repercussions have more weight on German citizens to “exercise extreme caution” when travelling to Turkey as “arrests could target anyone.”

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble has drawn parallels between the situation in Turkey and the repression in former East Germany and Justice Minister Heiko Maas has all but unfounded. As part of Germany’s hardening stance, Gabriel threatened to end corporate investment guarantees, a step that could hurt German business ventures in Turkey. The Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) said the current environment in investing in Turkey “is difficult to imagine.”

A series of international relations, which wished to remain anonymous because of his affiliation with a Turkish university, said such a measure would be “very detrimental to Turkey’s shaky economy.”

“The economy is on the verge of crisis. Ankara cannot afford to blame it. This is why Turkey is not going to escalate to this dispute,” he said.

Germany has not made good on its threats and Ankara has chosen to wait and see, though Erdogan slammed Germany’s hardened rhetoric as “blackmail” and raised that those who “scream Turkey withVaRKIM”... or “accuse us of anything at all...” must play their cards more carefully.

The upcoming election in Germany and Erdogan’s need to rally nationalist support – and votes – until 2019, however, could fuel the dispute as part of both sides’ elections campaigns.

The academic underlined that economic and political tensions against Turkey would hurt those that oppose the Turkish government at home. “Half the country does not support AK party policies,” he said, referring to Erdogan’s rule Justice and Development Party (AKP).

“The main problem is that such sanctions are always a form of collective punishment.”

While Berlin relied on de-escalation, Turkey warned that military action is on the radar.

Turkey has not made good on its threats and Ankara has chosen to wait and see, though Erdogan slammed Germany’s hardened rhetoric as “blackmail” and raised that those who “scream Turkey withVaRKIM”... or “accuse us of anything at all...” must play their cards more carefully.

Erdogan knows that any loosening of tension means severe limitations of the country’s sovereignty. The deeper the crisis, the harder Erdogan is to quash rival narratives — hence his obsession with communication order to succeed, however, he must anchor his personality… In the eyes of most analysts, Erdogan administration in a recent analysis in the Atlantic magazine.

“Erdogan is intent on reshaping the Turkish system into a strongman presidency anchored by his personality...” In his stead, the once-mighty Turkish Army.

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Iran's self-inflicted sectarian wound

Viewpoint

Ali Alfoneh

The Iranian government has learned the wrong lessons from the June 7 terrorist attacks in Abadan and Tonekabon. Iran has responded to these attacks by increasing police and repression in the south of the country, firing short-range missiles against ISIS targets in Syria and personal changes within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are not enough to solve Iran's problem with political sectarian radicalism and political poverty.

Supreme National Security Council has disclosed that the Intelligence Ministry foil’d “58 similar attacks” in recent years. Responding to the attacks, Iran increased policing and repression in Iran’s Kurdistan and Kerman provinces and launched Shahab 3 missiles into Syria’s Deir ez-Zor province. The IRGC is also in the process of shuffling its personnel. On July 1, Mohammad Esmaeili Kowsari, a veteran both of the IRGC and parliament, was appointed IRGC Tehran Sarallah Base deputy to oversee crisis management in the Iranian capital. On July 4, Brigadier-General Mohammad-Reza Yardi, who previously served as IRGC Legal and Parliamentary Affairs chief, was appointed Greater Tehran IRGC chief. More changes are expected.

However, no amount of anti-Saudi or anti-US propaganda or these measures are likely to solve Iran’s problems with sectarian radicalism and political violence, because they ignore the root causes of sectarian radicalism and political violence in Iran.

Those root causes were abundantly clear in a December 3, 2014, report published by the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) website. The report “concerning the general and security situation in Paveh and Ouramatan” ominously warned of propaganda activities of a certain Saryas Sadeqhi and others who were spreading ISIS propaganda among the local population in the mountain villages. Sadeqhi was one of the perpetrators of the June 7 attack.

The KDP reported the water undrinkable in Paveh and Ouramatan. Roads are in disrepair, which makes transportation extremely difficult and rationing of gasoline further limits the mobility. Cut off from the rest of Iran, the locals are forced to pay higher than average prices for basic foodstuffs, which they can’t afford because of economic underdevelopment. Youth unemployment is 80%. That leaves trafficking and smuggling between Iraq and Iran the sole means of survival. Cultural poverty compounds economic underdevelopment.

There is a library, which only contains regime propaganda. The internet, is most of the time, unbearable slow and at times non-existent. Social gatherings of poets and literate people are monitored by the security services. Attendees are often summoned by police for interrogations.

Remarkably, no such monitoring regime is in place to prevent drug abuse: Paveh’s only park is a drug dealer’s den that attracts the unemployed youth abusing methamphetamine and crack cocaine.

On the surface, the people of Paveh and Ouramatan are resigned in the face of poverty and underdevelopment but the other side of the Iranian coin is growing radicalism and, in the shadows, ISIS propagandists like Sadeqhi incite the public. Iran’s sectarian wounds are self-inflicted. Had the regime offered Iranians — Shias and Sunnis — in the country’s vast peripheral regions a dignified life, the radical fringe could have been avoided.

All Alfoneh is an independent Iranian analyst based in Washington who specialises in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.
Lifting of UK travel warning provides needed boost to Tunisian tourism

Stephen Quillen
Tunis

The UK Foreign Office lifted its travel warning on most of Tunisia on July 27, including Tunis and the major tourist destinations, but more likely to draw British holidaymakers to the country than bring much-needed foreign currency into Tunisia's economy. The policy change comes two years after terrorist attacks at Tunisia's Bardo National Museum and the resort of Sousse killed dozens of British tourists, leading the UK government to advise against "all but essential travel" to Tunisia. In a statement July 27, the Foreign Office said the update was made due to "security improvements" by Tunisian authorities and the tourism industry. The announcement was welcomed in Tunisia, which saw its once booming tourism sector struggle to stay afloat after the 2015 incidents. The drop in tourism, which accounted for 9% of the Tunisian economy, was devastating for industry workers. From January to September 2016, Tunisia hosted 4.3 million foreign travellers, down from 5.8 million during the same period in 2014. The decline was even more pronounced among Britons, which accounted for 8% of the Tunisian economy, was devastating for industry workers. The US State Department denied the reports and Tillerson said at a State Department briefing: "I'm not saying this is accurate. More important is that they are true; more important is that they are believable. Most likely, Tillerson is unsure how long he wants to remain in the job but the reasons for his unhappiness are no mystery and his positions are so contentious that it will be difficult to mediate. However, his shuttle diplomacy, which the International Atomic Energy Agency already had confirmed, the Foreign Policy reported that the decision led to an explosive outburst from Tillerson during a White House meeting. The Near East Bureau of the State Department is headed by a holdover from the Obama administration, Derek Harvey, the Middle East director. That fight is expected to resume in October and Trump has signalled that he was likely to decertify Iran at that point. Foreign Policy reported that the president established a White House task force to advise on the decision, sidelining the State Department and perhaps laying the ground for Tillerson's resignation. No attacks targeting tourists have taken place since June 2015. Rumours of Tillerson's, said the secretary's spokesman Mokhtar Ben Nasser. "Tillerson is at a critical juncture in terms of its ability to consolidate its democratic transition, and the economy is one of the most pressing issues for people who are critical of this process," said Gordner, who has been visiting the country since 2012 and living in it since 1989. "It is a very important decision to face a fight over certifying Iranian compliance with the nuclear deal. Tillerson opposes escalating the conflict with Iran but had to fight against White House hardliners to get Trump to agree to certification, which the International Atomic Energy Agency already had confirmed. Foreign Policy reported that the exchange between Trump and Tillerson was "contentious." Further uncertainty about Trump's Middle East policy was created on July 27 when the White House announced the departure of Derek Harvey, the Middle East director on the National Security Council. Several Washington media outlets reported that Harvey, considered hawkish on Iran, was fired by Mc-Master. Mark Habeeb is East-West editor of The Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and security at Georgetown University in Washington.
The US in the Middle East

**Debate**

**Wa'el Alzayat**

The US has responsibilities in Iraq and Syria post-ISIS

**Gregory Aftandilian**

Iraqi Kurds are planning a referendum on independence despite opposition from the Iraqi and US governments as well as from Turkey and Iran.

**Challenges ahead.** US President Donald Trump (L) greets Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi at the White House in Washington, last March.

US loves Kurdish fighters but not Kurdish independence

*Gregory Aftandilian*

The Kurds have proven to be effective fighters: from the classic 1970 movie “Kelly’s Heroes,” a US Army general in France in the summer of 1944, to his lethargic staff: “That’s the way to do it.”

*Wa’el Alzayat*

The US must make it clear that it will not support intensive operations from those areas whose leaders are not willing to help.

*Wa’el Alzayat is CEO of Engage International and a senior policy adviser to US Ambassador to the United Nations Nicola power. He served as a State Department official.***

in the classic 1970 movie “Kelly’s Heroes,” a US Army general in France during the second world war who faced death “— have been US allies since the early 1990s and helped to secure areas of northern Iraq that fell to ISIS in 2014.

US support for the Kurds brings political complications, however. Turkey strongly opposes the Syrian Kurds, particularly the Democratic Union Party (PYD) because of its links to the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) in Turkey, which Ankara considers a terrorist organisation. Turkey wants to preclude the PYD from carving out an independent state in northern Syria and eastern Turkey, and it has threatened to use force to prevent this from happening.

Nevertheless, Moscow is determined to exploit this rivalry to further its own interests, and it may soon face a new political crisis in Syria as the Iraqi Kurds plan to hold a referendum on independence in the coming weeks.

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*Wa’el Alzayat*

In a recent opinion article in the New York Times, Arab official Aziz Ahmad said the vote would give the Iraqi Kurds a “mandate to pursue a negotiated settlement with Mr. al-Abadi, a mandat...
ADNOC seeks to reduce costs, explore ventures with JV partners

Jareer Elass
Washington

A bid to generate revenue and create domestic jobs for nationals, Abu Dhabi's state energy firm announced plans for joint ventures with international investors on joint ventures and possibly selling some of its businesses in a bid to generate revenue and create domestic jobs for nationals.

ADNOC has emphasised that, unlike Saudi Aramco’s IPO slated for late next year that will sell off as much as 5% of the oil giant, shares in ADNOC itself will not be floated. Rather, ADNOC will focus on selling minority stakes in its service businesses. There are suggestions that ADNOC will spin off some downstream operations — refining and petrochemicals — through privatisation. ADNOC is wasting little time in identifying prospects within its operation for a limited IPO, with reports that a listing of ADNOC Distribution, the firm’s energy services subsidiary, could occur by the end of 2017. ADNOC said it expects the valuation of its retail subsidiary to be $14 billion and expects proceeds from the IPO to be as much as $5.5 billion to fund Abu Dhabi’s state coffers. ADNOC has already opened local stock exchange to allow First Abu Dhabi Bank and three foreign financial institutions — HSBC, Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Citigroup — to play lead roles in the IPO, with Rothchild serving an advisory role. It is unclear how much of ADNOC Distribution will be sold.

ADNOC announced that “at the heart” of its expanded partnership approach is “a range of new and compelling partnerships and co-investment opportunities in the oil, gas, refining and petrochemical space.” As part of this partnership focus, ADNOC is considering developing a regional fully integrated drilling company, creating an “energy infrastructure venture” that would house select ADNOC assets — such as oil, gas and refined products pipeline and storage facilities — and pro-viding partnership and investment opportunities for parties in its refining and petrochemical operations.

UAE Minister of State and ADNOC group director and CEO, Sultan Ahmed al-Jaber, also is the country’s minister of state of finance. ADNOC announced that the energy firm Masdar, chairman of Abu Dhabi Ports and serves on the Abu Dhabi Supreme Petroleum Council, would manage the government’s existing assets and will take on an “energy infrastructure venture” in which hard infrastructure projects will be rolled into one single entity by the end of 2017. In a sign of the economic pressures it is facing from depressed oil prices, ADNOC made a bold move last year by trimming its 55,000-person workforce by 9,000 jobs.

ADNOC is wasting little time in identifying prospects within its operation for a limited IPO, with reports that a listing of ADNOC Distribution, the firm’s energy services subsidiary, could occur by the end of 2017. ADNOC also disclosed that it would merge three of its shipping and port service operations — Abu Dhabi Tanker Company, Petroleum Services Company and Abu Dhabi Petroleum Ports Operating Company — into a single entity by the end of 2017. In a sign of the economic pressures it is facing from depressed oil prices, ADNOC made a bold move last year by trimming its 55,000-person workforce by 9,000 jobs.

ADNOC is said to be exploring an opportunity to be in additional projects in a unit to trade oil and products, either on its own or in partnership with an international oil major or large trading house. That would follow in the footsteps of some of its own state-owned energy firms that entered into a similar venture and Singapore-based trading firm Vitol in 2005 but Vitol’s interest was subsequently bought out by the Omani government in 2015.

Iraq's chronic mismatch between education, employment

Hussain Abdul-Hussain
Washington

The celebration of many Iraqis of their country’s independence after obtaining their degrees is already being damped by the uncertainty of their future prospects amid a mismatch between the country’s labour force and its job market. This problem begins before their enrolments into universities. Officially, there are at least 30 colleges in the Iraqi Ministry of Education for failing to adapt to major fundamental shifts in the country’s demographic make-up and for what they describe as “lax policy” in accepting students into colleges. Iraq has 86 public and private universities. Acceptances, especially into public colleges, are strictly dependent on scores on official exams, according to a report of the Ministry of Secondary Education. Top scorers get to pick their future career fields while those going into medicine. Second scorers often choose engineering. Lowest scorers get “the institute,” Iraq jaqon for vocational education.

Historically, the state played a dominant role in educating Iraqis and placing them in jobs. The international embargo that Iraq suffered from 1990-2003, after its invasion of Kuwait, made Iraqis even more dependent on the state. Despite hyperinflation and the government's dwindling resources, medical students were locked in competition over appointments at state hospitals. The ones with high marks completed their required residency programmes at hospitals of their choice, usually the more prestigious ones in big cities. Medical students with lower marks were assigned to hospitals in the villages and the countryside.

Baghdad and its capital healthcare top engineers to positions at its oil companies, infrastructure authorities or even at its weapon-production facilities. Top scoring students in humanities were accepted to higher education programmes and, once they acquired their diplomas, were appointed professors at state universities. The state bureaucracy and law enforcement agencies absorbed the rest of the labour force.

The over-imbalance of the Iraqi state in educating citizens and giving them jobs worked as long as the population was not as urbanised. However, with a population booming and urbanisation, Baghdad was overwhelmed. No resources — oil revenue that could sustain the old culture of educating and employing Iraqis. The US Agency for International Development report for 2012 stated: “The government and public employ only one-fifths of those employed.” The Washington Post reported last year that there were there were 7 million people on the government’s waiting list for jobs.

Iraqi government agencies seem aware of the problem of its unsustainable public sector. In its “National Development Plan 2012-2017,” the Ministry of Planning argued that the country’s “transformation to a market economy faces a troubled environment,” including a “de-fay [oil] legislation such as the privatisation law.” The ministry complained of a failure in the “restructur- ing of the public sector and public institutions and the absence of the institutional environment enabling the private sector.”

Despite acknowledging that the private sector should play a bigger role, the same 2012-2017 plan said that it “aimed at adapting the level of economic participation and ensuring compatibility between work- ers, government and private sectors.” An argument that suggests Baghdad believes it has a role in making the education sector and the labour market match. Ge of some 2 million Iraqi free market economies, such as in Germany where people are legally aware of earning mismatches between the labour force and the job market. New technologies leave the unskilled and semi-skilled behind.

To realise the full potential of workers, governments offer free training programmes to upgrade skills and reintegrate workers. Still, Western governments do not per- ceive the supply side, even when giving workers a chance for self- employment. While free economies, students can go to whatever college that accepts them and major in whatever domain they want, assum- ing they pass the needed tests.

Transforming Iraq from social- ism to a free market requires reha- bilitating the Iraqi government from its addiction to oil revenue. Iraqi economist Mohammed Ali Zainy said: “Patrimonial, made possible by oil, undermines the private sector.” Entrepreneurship is not as at- tractive when Iraqis can make money easier by tapping into government ven- ture capital firms that name LIMA En- dowment for Iraqi, Russian and other crude gains.

Jareer Elass reports on energy issues for The Arab Weekly. He is based in Washington.

On the fence. The energy firms of both the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the UAE government speaks at Gasteck, the world’s biggest energy fair, for a second straight year, while Abu Dhabi’s state energy firm announced plans for joint ventures with international investors on joint ventures and possibly selling some of its businesses in a bid to generate revenue and create domestic jobs for nationals.

ADNOC is said to be exploring an opportunity to be in additional projects in a unit to trade oil and products, either on its own or in partnership with an international oil major or large trading house. That would follow in the footsteps of some of its own state-owned energy firms that entered into a similar venture and Singapore-based trading firm Vitol in 2005 but Vitol’s interest was subsequently bought out by the Omani government in 2015.
Informal economy presents Tunisia with thorny issue

Stephen Quillen

Tunisia

Almost 30% of the goods traded in Tunisia’s domestic market... are imported illegally.

Tunisian economist Chokri Jlassi

In Tunisia, such activities make a significant — and growing — contribution to the informal sector and take a significant toll on the state’s treasury. Tunisian economist Chokri Jlassi points out.

The parallel economy workers rely on informal economic activities for as much as 38% of Tunisia’s GDP.

Informal activity is structured around three main types of trade:

1. Black market trade.
2. Underworld transactions.
3. Semi-legal activities.

The effects of such activity are twofold: it drives economic activity from the formal sector and takes a significant toll on the state’s treasury, Tunisian economist Chokri Jlassi noted.

“The parallel economy in Tunisia is a frequent source of בזה_arcade street vendors say the cost of alternative solutions to plastic bags is considerable.

“I do not know any of the suppliers of plastic bags who are willing to make paper bags. I have to charge customers more, which is impossible,” said Soufiane, a street vendor in Casablanca.

The effects of such activity are twofold: it drives economic activity from the formal sector and takes a significant toll on the state’s treasury, Tunisian economist Chokri Jlassi noted.

“The parallel economy in Tunisia is a frequent source of and smuggling in recent months as a result of growing tensions between Tunisia and Libya, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, is suspected of this deprives the state coffers of... important tax revenue,” including “tax on activities (corporates) (tax evasion), tax receipts on wages (in... lump-sum tax, which is being slapped away from European values.”

“I am always concerned that there is an increase of tension between one of our member states or some member states with neighbouring countries. This is certainly not conducive to invite people to come and go there,” Johannes Hahn said.
Demographic growth in Algeria increases pressures on government

Lamine Ghanmi

Tunis

Algeria’s population totaled 31.1 million when it gained its independence in 1962 after a 30-year colonial occupation. Morocco’s population was 13.1 million the same year.

By January 2017, Algeria’s population was 35.5 million and Morocco’s, at 35.3 million, had grown much less.

Algeria has added almost 1 million inhabitants each year over the past three years, causing its population to grow at an average of 2.2% per year, figures released by the state-run National Statistics Office stated. The Moroccan population has grown at an annual rate of 1.37%.

Official statistics predicted Algeria’s population to expand to 42.5 million by next January and swell to 50.3 million by 2025. Such human potential bolsters Algeria’s ambitions to play a bigger role in Africa. Algeria boasts the second most powerful army on the continent, according to Global Firepower, which ranks national militaries based on more than 50 factors. The CIA ranked Algeria’s military third in the world, in terms of percentage of its GDP that was allocated to the military.

- Algeria’s young population is bearing the brunt of the effects of demographic growth that led to shortages of housing and jobs.

Algeria also has Africa’s largest land area of nearly 2.3 million km. However, its rising population is weighted heavily on Algeria’s efforts to cope with the pressures of a young and growing population. About 850,000 people are living in slums in Greater Cairo, a metropolitan area including the cities of Cairo, Giza, and Qalyubia, is home to about 22.8 million people and will gain another half a million in 2017, a Euromonitor International report showed.

- Egypt’s population is expected to reach 160 million-180 million in 40 years.

That represents one-quarter of Egypt’s 32 million. The national population growth rate of 2.4% per year is double the average of other Arab countries, in the words of Mohamed Abdelgalil, adviser to official statistics minister.

Stinging poverty in southern Egypt leads many families to have several children in the hope the children can become sources of income. Those children eventually migrate to larger cities for job opportunities or scarce in their home towns. “In rural areas, and in the south in particular, poor families have many children because they see these children as a safety net,” said Mayar Shawkly, the head of the National Population Council.

“Also, many of them have daughters until they have sons,” she added. “They want to produce breadwinners. Instead of hiring a worker, they could have their children help them.”

Shawkly said awareness campaigns at universities and schools have begun as part of a national population strategy.

Internal migration is one of the main causes of overpopulation in Cairo. Egypt lists 351 slums as unsafe, most of them in the sprawling capital where the poorest have built ramshackle homes that lack basic amenities such as sewage and water services. About 850,000 people are believed to live in such dangerous slums.

“Far the average citizen to be affected by hikes in the prices of goods and services, the economic growth rate must be double the natural population increase rate,” Abdelgalil said.

Eygpt’s economic growth was 4.3% in 2015-16, not enough to achieve that. The International Monetary Fund expects it to be about 4% this year.

A new administrative capital, an announced in March 2015, is intended partly to reduce the crowding in Cairo. About 25km to the east, it would be home to government ministries, housing and an airport. People are to start moving to the as-yet-unnamed city in 2018, said Khadl Abbas, assistant to the Housing minister for technical affairs.

Work on 17,000-18,000 residential units is nearing completion and they are to be put up for sale in the next two years.

“The population of Algeria has been on the rise. Figures from the National Office of Statistics indicate that the unemployment rate reached 10.5% in September 2016, compared to 9.9% in April of the same year. In September 2016, the labor force included 22,177 million people, compared to 22,092 million in April. At the same time, the active population in the country was estimated at 18,843 million people in September 2016, compared to 18,895 million people in April. As for the unemployed population, it was estimated at 1,772 million in September, compared to 1,781 million in April 2016, and 1,797,000 men in April 2016. Women in Algeria have a higher unemployment rate (20%) than men (13%).”

The unemployment rate for young people aged 16-24 rose to 26.7% in September 2016 from 24.7% in April 2016.

(THE ARAB WEEKLY)
Palestine
Jerusalem's Palestinian youth face bleak future
Kamel Hawwash
London

The results of the tawjihi — the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination — were recently announced across the Palestinian territories to great cheers and celebration in some households and deep disappointment in others. Palestinians see education as a vital asset to their development both as individuals and as a society under occupation.

The next step for those who excelled in the tawjihi is to find a place at university. Medicine and engineering continue to be the most sought-after studies for those with a score of 90% or higher. However, hope that a university education will help Palestinians secure a job and go on to build a family is a pipe dream for most. “Hope is the operative word here, and is a testament to the morbidity that is in short supply for Palestinians, particularly the young.

Viewpoint
Children are the first victims of occupation
Jehan Alfarra

It is a sad reality that Palestinian children have suffered half a century of abuses living under Israeli occupa-
tion. Many Palestinians have experienced traumatic child-
hoods since Israel defeated the combined Arab armies of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon in the Six Day War in 1967 and occupied vast stretches of already shrinking Palestinian territories. Over the decades, those children have grown into adults, carrying atrocious scars throughout their lives, which brings with it immense health implications.

Since before 1967 and before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian children were exposed to deeply traumatizing experiences. Children were forcibly expelled from their ancestral homes along with their families by Israeli armed Zionist gangs who would later be formalized as the Israeli Defence Forces. These religious militant groups, such as the Haganah and the Irgun, were considered terrorist organisations by the British military authorities, though largely for their militant attacks against the British rather than for crimes committed against Palestinians.

Unfortunately, Israeli abuses of children have not dissipated even as Israel realised most of its territorial ambitions. Instead, they have become more perva-
sive, systematised and deliberate geared towards crippling the hopes and dreams of future generations. Palestinian children are not going unnoticed by global bodies for peace and human rights organisations, as well as increasingly receiving attention from governments around the world.

Recent reports of Human Rights Watch, Defence for Children International and other human rights organisations gave a briefing in Washington on June 11 to highlight the plight of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation. Speaking to staff members from congressional offices, Defence for Children International’s Bradford Parker said: “Another generation of Palestinian children are growing up under the shadow of military detention and repeated military offensives and systemic discrimination.” Parker’s comments come on the heels of British parliamentary efforts to highlight the ongoing abuses against Palestinian children. In 2016, parliament debated Israeli violations, which was followed up by a letter to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and its subsequent letter to the Warsaw International Judicial Forum in Poland. What is common to all these letters is their demand for an end to the collective punishment of children. It is time for lawmakers to end this criminal injustice.

Since before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian children were exposed to deeply traumatizing experiences. No glimpse of hope. Palestinian children look through a shattered window at Israeli soldiers conducting searches in the Palestinian al-Fawwar refugee camp in the West Bank.

Sarah Champion, Labour MP for Rotherham, highlighted several disturbing issues that British officials had raised with their Israeli counterparts to act on the horrors of child detentions. Israeli abuses were restrained using “painful” methods and were committed by Israeli authorities in what she referred to as “cruel, inhuman and degrading practices.”

There were also increased incidences from 2013 of children being beaten by Israeli security personnel. The lack of any real remedies for the victims of child abuse in the territories has been frustrating. In 2016, Israeli abuses against children have not dissipated even as Israel realised most of its territorial ambitions. Instead, they have become more pervasive, systematised and deliberate geared towards crippling the hopes and dreams of future generations. Palestinian children are not going unnoticed by global bodies for peace and human rights organisations, as well as increasingly receiving attention from governments around the world.

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Israeli abuses committed against children have not dissipated even as Israel realised the majority of its territorial ambitions.

Jehan Alfarra is a London-based Palestinian writer and freelance journalist.

Since before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinian children were exposed to deeply traumatizing experiences.
Painters from Sinai fight terrorism with art

Hassan Abdel Zaher

 Cairo

P ainters from Sinai are becoming part of Egypt’s war against terrorism in the north-eastern Egyptian peninsula. Their strategy is to fight the terrorists with their art, confident that painting and colours can be as strong as arms and ammunitions.

"Art can even be more Forceful than arms," said artist Mustafa Bekir. "While arms can kill a ter rorist or force him to hide, art can eradicate terrorism as an idea and give hope for a better future."

Bekir and other artists have exhibited many paintings at the Cairo Opera House.

They said they are aware that many terrorists hate art and decided to fight them with the weapon they most loathe and even dread.

The artists’ paintings are full of resolve and hope but also reflect rampant violence in parts of Sinai that affected residents of the peninsula, which borders Israel and the Palestinian Gaza Strip.

Everybody in Sinai’s hotspots suffer but suffering the most are the artists.

One of the paintings shows a woman whose headscarf seems to have just been taken off. Her un tied hair falling on her shoulders and the tears dripping from her left eye denote the enormity of the suf fering and fear she has sustained.

The artists, standing next to their paintings, explained the circumstances that inspired them.

"The terrorists hate artists because they know that with their brush and a few colours they can create a totally different world, one full of hope," Bekir said. "The terrorists do not want hope to be present at all, which is why they destroy all good things and spill the blood of the innocent."

The Sinai Artists’ Fair, which took place in Cairo for 11 days in July, was inaugurated by Egyptian Minister of Culture Helmy al-Nam lion. The exhibition is to tour other parts of Egypt.

"The aim is for Egyptians in provinces outside Cairo to see that art can be an effective weapon in the war against terrorism," said Nagat Farouk, the head of the Ministry of Culture department responsible for the organisation of art fairs nationwide. "The artists coming here only have their brush and some colours and they are us ing them to alleviate the suffering of those affected by terrorism and give them hope that there are good days ahead."

Visitors expressed admiration of Sinai’s artists’ courage in the face of terrorism, "said artist Mahmud al-Gabas.

"All Egyptians in Sinai are touched by Biblawi’s painting of the woman trying to flee away with her baby, we feel very close to her..."

More forceful than weapons. A visitor viewing a painting showing a woman carrying her baby and running for safety exhibited in the Sinai fair in Cairo.

The museum's website features testimonies that accompany some of the items.

Other donations are even more personal. Omar, 32, from Idlib traveled to Sweden for work and for the letter, folded neatly and placed carefully in his wallet, "his ticket back to the past, to a happier time," he said. "For those living in exile, the objects and new acquaintances bring from home are of utmost importance. No object is too ordinary as it represents all the magic of the past," said Elza Nord, project manager of the exhibition. "Through the exhibition, we want visitors to get a picture of Syria beyond newspaper headlines and to gain a historical perspective of the area. We hope the museum will become a place for meetings, memo ries and new acquaintances."

The letter, she writes to ask how I feel. She is worried, (the birth) is only a few weeks away and that she longs to hear my voice. She asks me to call. She also says that it is the season for green lentils at home in Kirkuk and that she has picked a handful for me and put them in the letter."

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"Stories from Syria" at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm is to run until spring 2018.

Swedish museum displays the personal stories of a lost Syria

The Arab Weekly staff

London


Some individuals who contributed objects and stories have lived in Sweden a long time but others arrived as refugees during the current war. “It’s not so much about the ob ject we’re showcasing, as the stories behind them,” a museum spokesman said.

“I imagine a girl who collects Barbies and suddenly she has to choose one or a family that has a collection of paintings, of course, angels, and they need to select just one that they’re going to take with them that they feel will give them strength. These are their stories.”

A museum news release stated that joy and sorrow permeate the stories and objects on display. They tell of a love for Syria but also the sorrow of losing one’s home and one’s true self. The stories illustrate a longing for a missing place and a lost way of life, as well as the safety of old habits. They describe in detail the rich flavours, smells and 5

Other donations are even more personal. Omar, 32, from Idlib trav elled to Sweden in 2014 after working in Lebanon. He donated a letter his wife had written to him as they were expecting their first child. “In

The museum’s website features testimonies that accompany some of the items.

As well as the tokens of lives in exile are other exhibitions of the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities. Displaying contempo rary and ancient objects, such as the two ancient tomb sculptures from Palmyra, side by side, the exhibition gives us an insight into Syria’s deep-rooted and rich cultural history, as well as the current violence as a meeting ground for people and culture.

"Stories from Syria" at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near East ern Antiquities, Stockholm is to run until spring 2018.
Jerash festival transforms Amman into a centre of global culture

Rosaf Nahhas

The 32nd Jerash Festival for Culture and Arts, a celebration of regional and international talents, delivered on its promise to transform the ancient Ctesiphon-Roman city north of Amman into a centre for global culture.

More than 25 local, Arab and international singers, ten folklore and traditional dance groups and a host of traditional Arab writers and poets, were figuratively into this year’s programme.

Despite a rather untimely late-July start, which led to criticism from tour operators about the disruption of tourist movements in parts of the city, and the scorching heat, thousands of fans converged on Jerash to enjoy a richer and more varied cultural calendar that appealed to different tastes.

The festival features a variety of entertainment activities that fits everyone in the family, Jordanian Minister of Tourism Lina Annab said.

“Tourism is a major factor in the economy, as it contributes to the development and sustainability of local communities,” she said.

Annab said that the Jerash festival is a huge opportunity to “highlight Amman and Jordan” and that the Jerash festival is a “great festival that gives us the chance to show the Jordanian culture and history.”

The Jerash festival’s tagline is “Towards a festival that is a magic place.”

Jafar Ali, an Emirati, added: “This is a magic place. Jerash is a charming festival that can pride itself on different colours and singular tastes,” said Anna, a 46-year-old Emirati who attended the festival.

She said that her yearning for a different experience led her to “the fabulous city of Liwa at the fringe of this amazing quarter” in the United Arab Emirates.

Anna was one of thousands of tourists and visitors who gathered for the Liwa Date Festival to experience Emirati culture, was organised by the Liwa Cultural and Tourism Development Authority and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, with the cooperation of the Liwa Date Festival and the Liwa Ajman Festival Committee.

The cultural programme was marked by seminars and special presentations, focusing on the cultivation and sustainable irrigating of dates. The products at these competitions, the Torchlight Ceremony and the Festival for Culture and Arts.

In its 13th edition, the Liwa Date Festival includes various competitions, including the Munayra – for dates, with more than 60,000 dates in six varieties placed before the judging panel, according to the Cultural Programmes and Heritage Festivals Committee.

The festival is not just about dates, which has been cultivated in the country for more than 5,000 years. There are competitions for the best mangoes, the best ways of preparing dates and the best quality of dates.

These are the competitions for the best mangoes, the best ways of preparing dates and the best quality of dates.

The season of Al Ratab – half-ripe dates – begins in summer. After growing the dates, farmers harvest and store their crops in accordance with time-tested methods. Before harvest season ends in autumn, competitions and festive events occur throughout the country.

In most competitions, the judges may have to decide on the quality and the best dates. The judges classify the dates into four categories: perfect, very good, good and very poor.

The Emirati Date Festival transforms Amman into a centre of global culture.

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Ras al-Khaimah’s new facilities attract adventure tourists

N.P. Krishna Kumar

Dubai

As al-Khaimah, the northernmost emirate in the United Arab Emirates and the region’s fastest-growing tourism destination, is coping the ante in its quest to be the Middle East’s adventure tourism capital.

With a 7,200-year history, the emirate is blessed with an incredibly diverse landscape comprising 64 kilometres of pristine beaches, golden desert, mangroves, abundant wildlife, nature and mountains that are in degrees cooler than the rest of the emirate.

Jebel Jais, the highest peak in the country at 1,534 metres above sea level, is most inviting to mountain bikers, motorists, adventure seekers and those wishing to explore the flora and fauna of the Al Hajar Mountains bordering Oman.

Jebel Jais summit is 1,227 metres above sea level.

A multi-purpose observation deck near the Jebel Jais summit at an elevation of 1,227 metres above sea level is open in October.

Hathiram Mattar, CEO of Ras al-Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), stressed the growing popularity of the emirate is resulting in “weekend pressure.”

“When having more hotels would be one way to solve the problem and encourage repeat travel, which is important in terms of boosting revenues, we also need to find ways to encourage domestic visitors to book in advance,” he said. For many families in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, getting out during the weekend has meant a drive to Ras al-Khaimah and booking a relaxing weekend and an ideal getaway from everyday life.

The adventure-minded and outdoor enthusiasts also head to Ras al-Khaimah, whether it is for desert camping, sailing and water sports, golf, kayaking, mountain hiking, cycling or motoring to the summit of Jebel Jais.

For those seeking to explore culture, heritage and natural history there are wadis in the mountains or the Dhayah Fort – the only hilltop fort in the UAE that was the last point of resistance to British forces. Ras al-Khaimah’s tourism strategy is largely based on highlighting nature and adventure, the emirate’s strengths, Mattar said at the Arab Travel Market. The emirate also worked with travel and tourism partners, conservation and cultural organisations to showcase its history and heritage.

The number of visitors to Ras al-Khaimah reached 900,000 from January through June 2017, an increase of 6.5% in arrivals compared to last year. Hotel guest nights and lengths of stay also went up. Hotels reported their best summer performance with a 27% year-on-year increase in June guest arrivals.

Officials said they were confident the emirate was on course to reach 1,000,000 visitor arrivals this year, being “in a solid position to optimise the traditional peak season of late summer and the fourth quarter.”

In April, RAKTDA launched a dedicated summer campaign called “Feel Free this Summer,” which runs through September, leveraging the emirate as an ideal summer holiday destination.

The UAE remains the most significant source market for Ras al-Khaimah with more than one-third of visitors being domestic.

“Our Feel Free push plugs into everything that is great about Ras al-Khaimah as a multifaceted tourism destination,” Mattar said. “In addition to offering fantastic value for money, we have focused on promoting our amazing landscapes.”

Recently, Thomas Cook announced plans to open its first-ever brand hotel in the UAE in Ras al-Khaimah in November. It is to feature 272 suites, a private beach, three pools, a spa and dining outlets. In a marketing agreement with RAKTDA, Thomas Cook will promote the emirate as a year-round leisure destination for European tourists.

Internationally, Ras al-Khaimah’s four largest source markets remain Germany, Russia, Britain and India. Russia is ahead of Britain as the emirate’s second largest international source market. Britain and India rank third and fourth, with gains of 21% and 22%, respectively, year-on-year.

The half-year figures showed a significant increase in tourist arrivals from other emerging destinations: Kazakhstan, up 16%; Poland, up 15%; Vietnam, up 22%; and the Czech Republic, up 6%.

As part of its emerging attractions, the emirate launched Jebel Jais Via Ferrata (iron Path) – a cross between rock climbing and mountaineering – in December 2016. The inaugural season of the kilometre-long path had a successful run and has been a hit with sporting enthusiasts from the Gulf and Europe.

A multi-purpose observation deck and event area near the Jebel Jais summit at an elevation of approximately 1,227 metres above sea level is open in October.

Official cycling and hiking routes across the emirate – with a focus on Jebel Jais – are also in development.

Ras al-Khaimah is targeting 1 million visitors by next year and, judging by the attractions and facilities being put in place that appeal to a wider range of visitors, the optimism of tourism officials seems well-founded.

N.P. Krishna Kumar is a Dubai-based contributor to The Arab Weekly.