Kuwaiti Prince Sheikh Sabah Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, the brother of the Qatari emir, said during a September 8 visit to Washington that efforts to resolve the dispute between Qatar and its Arab neighbors were “lacking”. He welcomed the desire of the Qatari emir to the dialogue table and disavowed the demands of the four countries and that the Qatari crown prince had “welcomed this desire.”

The Arab Quartet is requesting Qatar to try to sit at the dialogue table and desist from making demands of the four countries and that the crown prince had “welcomed this desire.”

Sheikh Sabah, who has been trying to mediate a solution to the dispute between Qatar and the Saudi-led Arab quartet, said during a news conference with Trump, that “Qatar is ready to meet all the demands” set forth by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. The Arab Quartet is request- ing Doha end what it sees as its support to Islamic extremists and close ties to Tehran. There is “still hope that the cri- sis will end very soon,” the Kuwaiti emir added.

His comments were quickly shown to be unduly optimistic, as Qatar Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani declared on the same day that any dialogue should be preceded by the lifting of sanctions. He rejected the Arab bloc’s 13 demands, saying they “attacked the sovereignty” of Qatar. The Quartet of countries opposed to Qatar was quick to react in Doha’s stance, issuing a joint statement saying: “Placing preconditions on dialogue shows Qatar’s lack of seriousness towards dialogue, combating and funding terror- ism and interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.”

The statement said the four coun- tries were “disappointed” by the Kuwaiti emir’s comments that his country’s mediation had availed the possibility of military interven- tion, pointing out that “a military solution never was and will never be on the table.”

During the news conference, Trump said he was ready to facili- tate a solution.

A phone call by the Qatari emir to the Saudi crown prince further compli- cates matters after Doha refused to admit that it initiated the call. “I would be willing to do so, and I think you’d have a deal worked out very quickly,” he said.

On September 8, the White House announced that Trump had spoken separately with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and Sheikh Tamin. The president underscored that unity among the United States’ Arab partners is essential to pro- moting regional stability and coun- tering the threat of Iran, said a White House readout. “The president also emphasised that all countries must follow through on commitments from the Riyadh summit to defeat terrorism, cut off funding for terrorist groups and combat extremist ideology.”

With the crisis at a standstill, Qa- tari opposition figures planned an unprecedented conference in Lon- don. The organiser, Qatari dissident Khalid al-Hail, said the conference September 14 has received wide support within Qatar. He expressed the view that the crisis could well extend into 2018 and may trigger a large-scale civil disobedience drive in Qatar, with a “white coup” a possible result.

“Civil disobedience is highly like- ly, although still far off,” Hail said.

Mohammed Alkhereiji is the Gulf section editor of The Arab Weekly.
Civil disobedience is highly likely, although still far off.

Qatari opposition activist Khalid al-Hail

He said politicisation of the meeting came with claims that Riyadh was imposing an alternative to Qatar’s opposition figures to get together with experts and academics to discuss likely scenarios to end the crisis.

One such situation would be a negotiated settlement based on Kuwaiti mediation. Hall said this is unlikely, however, considering the unwillingness of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to compromise on their demands.

A more plausible scenario, he said, would be a coup from within the Qatari royal family. The opposition activist said military action could occur under certain conditions. He speculated that, if a coup was staged from within Qatar, the government is likely to seek the help of the Turkish military against its own citizens.

“The moment that that happens, neighbours and their families will increasingly cut off from their kin in Doha and the Saudi-led Arab bloc has seen new Qatari figures rising to prominence, with some being viewed as possible alternatives to the country’s leadership. One such figure is Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani, a member of the Qatari royal family living in exile in Saudi Arabia. ‘Sheikh Abdullah is not a politician but an influential Qatari citizen with great integrity who met with (Saudi) King Salman [ bin Abdulaziz Al Saud] to mediate and resolve the hajj issue,’ Hall said.

Civil disobedience was highly likely, although still far off, Hall said, adding that many factors could lead Qataris to say ‘Enough! Where is the solution?’

Hall said the showdown between Doha and the Saudi-led quartet could continue for months as Qataris will themselves increasingly cut off from their neighbours and their families in the Gulf.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir recently said: “We are neighbours and their families in Qatar’s opposition is trying to play an active role in the politics of their country. Khalid al-Hail, a Qatari opposition activist in exile, said conditions caused by the crisis make it imperative that alternative voices to the leadership in Doha be heard.

‘Towards that end, he said, a Qatar, Global Security & Stability Conference will convene September 14 in London.

In an exclusive interview with The Arab Weekly, Hall stressed that the conference likely extend into 2018 and result in a major civil disobedience drive in the tiny gulf state, with a “white coup” being a possible outcome.

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Tensions between the two factions came to a head recently after Saudi’s GPC staged a massive rally in celebration of 35 years since its founding.

The Houthi leader Abdullah al-Houthi gave heavily charged speeches at their respective events. The alteration in Sana’a resulted in the death of Colonel Khaled al-Rudhi, a member of Saleh’s inner circle and the GPC’s vice-president of external relations. Rudhi was killed at a Houthi checkpoint after an argument between his convoy and the rebels escalated to a shoot-out, local reports said.

Saleh called for the arrest of Riyadh’s killers, although he did not mention the Houthis by name.

The political leadership... must take responsibility and accelerate the investigations and the arrest of the perpetrators and bring them to justice,” he said.

The situation should not be a surprise considering that the alliance between the two factions is a marriage of convenience and that there is a long, bloody history between the Houthis and the GPC.

The last decade of Saleh’s 34 years as Yemen’s president saw his government constantly at war with the Iran-allied militia. However, in 2015, three years after stepping down from power due to the ‘Arab spring’ protests, Saleh joined forces with his former enemies and together they seized Sana’a, forcing the internationally recognised government to flee to Aden and later Riyadh. That ignited the current war, which has claimed more than 10,000 lives, UN estimates state.

Saleh’s motivations are unclear but analysts said he was possibly trying to parlay domestic dissatisfaction with the Houthis to reignite his political career.

“Saleh wants to capitalise on popular opposition to both the Houthis and the government, positioning himself as an alternative,” Adam Baron, a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, told Reuters.

“He certainly wants to secure a place for his family in any post-war order... The Houthis are very paranoid and Saleh can deal with Saudi Arabia and the UAE that will leave them out to dry.”

Analysts said the tensions between the GPC and the Houthis could signal the beginning of the end of the Saudi-led military intervention, which began in March 2015.

The US was in a remarkable military alliance with both Saleh and the Houthis, pressuring them into discussing possible solutions, but with the Houthis dominating the battlefield, Saleh was on the back burner.

The interviewed was cut off unexpectedly, giving credence to reports that Saleh was under some form of house arrest.

Saleh’s comments were viewed by many as an attempt to ease tensions with the Houthis and it was reported that Iran had brokered a shaky truce. However, a spokesperson for the al-Masirah news agency said reports from Yemen Today TV network on September 4, claiming there were no talks between him and the Iran-allied Houthis, were unfounded.

“No there is no crisis or differences whatsoever but in the imagination of those who want these decisions,” said Saleh, adding that there were no plans for a coup against the Houthis.

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Tunisian president displays frustration with Islamists, urges constitutional change

The Tunisian president directly accuses his government of failing to control migration from Libya to Europe. The situation is complex, as the government's policies are seen as ineffective. The president's frustration is palpable, and he calls for a new constitutional approach to address the country's challenges.

France and Italy at odds over Libya policy

France and Italy have differing approaches to the Libyan crisis. France supports a political solution, while Italy focuses on migration and security. The two countries are at odds over the impact of migration on their economies and the need for a robust security strategy. This disagreement highlights the complexities of the Libyan situation.

Neither Paris nor Rome is willing to take concrete steps towards long-term solutions.

The challenge of managing migration is a critical issue for both countries. While France supports a political solution, Italy is more focused on short-term measures to control migration. The ongoing conflict in Libya exacerbates the situation, making it difficult to find a lasting solution.

France and Italy should work together to address the root causes of migration and political instability in Libya. This requires a unity of purpose and a commitment to finding a long-term solution to the Libyan crisis.
Levant tensions rising

Iran's 'land corridors' to Syria heighten prospects for war with Israel

The coming war. Israeli soldiers manoeuvre a tank during a military exercise in the northern part of the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, on September 7.

Ed Blanche
Beirut

Israel's warplanes were report ed to have attacked a heavy ly guarded Syrian Army base near the central city of Hama as Israel staged its largest all arms military exercise in 26 years. The operation has been portrayed as a dress rehearsal for crushing Hezbollah, Syria's key ally.

The pre-dawn air strike Septem ber 7 on the Syrian Scientific Stud ies and Research Centre at Maayaf, which has been closely linked to Syria's chemical weapons pro gramme, marked a significant es calation in Israel's aerial campaign against Syria. Since 2012, there have been nearly 100 raids, con gregating Israeli Air Force commander Major-General Amikam Norkin said.

The military action reflects Is rael's alarm at Iran's growing mili tary presence in Syria to support the regime of President Bashar As sal, especially Tehran's strategy of building a land corridor, possibly two, across Iraq, Syria, putting Iranian forces on Israel's volatile northern border.

"The ultimate purpose of the corridors... is to expand Iran's reach into the Golan Heights, with the goal of tightening the noose around Israel," observed Kedri Yaari, a leading Israeli commentator on Middle East affairs, in a May 1 article for Foreign Affairs. That's an actuality Israel cannot accept.

The September 7 raids follow in creasingly hostile threats against Syria and Iran and a greatly ex panded ballistic missile inventory that Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and senior generals dismissed as the Islamic Republic's swelling power in the heart of the Arab world.

This is dramatically changing the region's military and geo political landscapes and heightening the prospect of, at the very least, another war with Hezbollah that promises to be the most destruc tive of their 35-year conflict.

Because of the Syrian war, Hezbollah has increased its military forces to an estimated 20,000 first line fighters, ten times the number it fielded during its guerrilla war to end Israel's occupation of South Lebanon in May 2000, with an ex panded reserve of at least 10,000.

"If Iran and Hezbollah were to expand their military presence near the Israel controlled Golan Heights, Tel Aviv might come to the conclusion that it has no choice but to attack Hezbollah forces posi tioned there," analyst Randa Slim, director of the Track II Dialogues Initiative at the Middle East Insti tute, noted in a post on the Cipher Brief website.

American strategists are con cerned that, with the possible end of the battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq, Tehran could deploy its Shia militias across the region. This move to enforce US military rule would be part of what US analysts Michael Eisen stadt and Michael Knights, Israeli specialists with Washington Insti tute for Near East Policy, call "Is ran's efforts to remain parts of the region in its own image."

The land bridge concept is largely the brainchild of Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iraq's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which spearheads Iran's expansionist adventures. He also is responsible for executing the Iranian strategy of wresting control of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, key links in securing the planned corridor from the Islamic Republic to the Mediterranean.

Control of this swathe of largely Sunni territory by Iran, the world's only Shia power, could be a longer term geopolitical sign ificance across the region and beyond that alarms the United States, Israel and the Arab monarchies of the Arabian Gulf.

"The bloody quagmire involving (Syria, Iraq and Lebanon) offers more opportunities to consolidate power than what would surely be a sinister confrontation in the Gulf, where Iran would have to contend with the United States and its al lies," observed Yaari in the Foreign Affairs article.

"Success in the narrower ap proach, moreover, could ulti mately strengthen Tehran's hand against Saudi Arabia and those in the Sunni bloc."

Israel, like the Gulf monarchies, which see themselves most at risk from Iran's territorial ambitions, finds the US failure to confront Iran's expansionist ambitions perplexing - and dangerous.

"The Iranians publicly express their keen interest in opening up the Golan Heights to their proxies, and high-ranking IRGC officers are engaged there now in the establishment of a new militia - the Go tan Regiment," Yaari observed.

"Iran's Arab adversaries, led by Saudi Arabia, are aghast at the US reluctance to curb what they see as the emergence of a new emi racy of the Middle East."

With impulsive US President Donald Trump possibly shackled by Barack Obama's 2015, nuclear deal with Iran for years to come, the Americans, it seems, are pow erless to curb Iranian ambitions at a time when Tehran is driving to modernise its largely obsolete mili tary - ironically, with funds made available under the nuclear deal.

"For the last three years (Soleim ani) has been keeping busy setting up the building blocks for at least one, but more likely two, land corridors across the Levant (one in the north and one in the south), linking Iran to the Mediterranean..." Yaari wrote.

The idea... would be to out source the supervision of the cor ridors to Hezbollah, Syria's Hezb oliah and the various Shia militias in Iraq and Syria to avoid using its own military to control the routes. Iran has a long standing aversion towards investing manpower abroad.

Ed Blanche
Beirut

The land bridges that Iran's forces across Iraq to Syria would greatly ex tend Tehran's control of the region and dram atically change the strategic balance in the Middle East as the United States distances itself from the region.

It is largely the brainchild of Major-General Qassem Soleimani in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, which spearheads the Islamic Re public's expansionist ambitions, fulfilling the late Ayatollah Ruh ol lynn Khomed's edict to spread his Islamic Revolution throughout the Muslim world.

The project envisages at least two corridors running approxi mately 1,500km from Iran's west ern border through the Euphrates and Tigris valleys to the Syrian border, with the broader corridor of the Golan Heights in southern Syria, a strategic plateau that has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

The northern route was planned to run through the frontier town of Jalawla in Iraq's Shia-dominated Diyala province east to the town of Shingal, then push into Syria through the mountainous Tal Afar and Sinjar regions, currently held by pro-Iranian Kurdish forces.

Recent gains by US-supported forces to the south of the border have forced Soleimani to divert this route 250km south to avoid the American forces battling the Islamic State (ISIS).

That corridor will now run through Syria's energy-rich Deir ez-Zor province to cross the east ern desert to the ancient city of Palmyra and then to the Lebanon border, ensuring Hezbollah of an uninterrupted supply of weapons. Iranian-backed regime forces have captured part of ISIS-held Deir ez-Zor city in a major offen sive and expect to drive the jihad ists out completely.

One leg of the route, Syrian of ficials said, would extend to the Mediterranean port of Tartus, a stronghold of the Damascus re gime's pro-Iranian client, but it would have to develop as a maritime link and additional supply line, allowing them to avoid the Arabian Gulf dominated by the US Navy's 5th Fleet.

Iranians call this route "the path to the sea."
Israel's muscular flexing is geared towards Hezbollah

Mamoon Alabbasi
London

Israel appears to be flexing its muscles with its largest military drill in almost 20 years and air strikes in Syria that have Lebanon's Hezbollah in its sights. Israeli officials said the ten-day exercise would involve tens of thousands of soldiers, including thousands of reserves, deploying aircraft, boats and submarines. More than 18 months were reportedly spent to prepare for the drill. The drill is to simulate "scares we'll be facing in the next confrontation with Hezbollah," an unidentified defence source told Agence France-Presse. The last large-scale Israeli drill was in 1998, when it simulated war with Syria.

Conflicting interests. A woman and a girl walk past a replica of the Dome of the Rock emblazoned with the emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the "Garden of Iran" park in the Lebanese Maroun Al-Hass village along the southern border with Israel.

Since the ceasefire ac-
cord following the October 1973 war, Syria has never been a source of worry to Israel. As a matter of fact, the Syrian regime has always made sure that nothing, not even a spontaneous outbreak by an Arab citizen sick of the Syrian occupa-
tion, would disturb the ceasefire. The Syrian regime made sure that sort of friction was channelled through the Lebanese-Israeli border alone. Syria's admirable show of self-discipline and restraint produced a pro-Syrian regime lobby among elite political and military circles in Israel. This lobby made sure the Syrian regime was spared from US and Western plans that had wiped out entrenched regimes in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia. The Syrian regime was a victim of the paramount importance of Israel's security to the world's major powers. Just in case of its entertainment, Rami Makhlouf, a Syrian business tycoon and maternal cousin of Syrian President Bashar Assad, reminded the world of that simple fact, declaring in a televised interview on the New York Times: "If there is no regard for Syria, there will be no way there will be stability in Israel." Israel was not overly interested in the heated debate about the probable shape of Syria's future regime. It could not care less whether the next Syria would be secular or Islamic, a confederation or separate states. All the clamour and the number of cooks in the Syrian kitchen have never been a problem or even have a field to flourish or its air force. Taking advantage of international immunity, Israel carried out assassinations and air strikes against targets of its choice, the latest of which was near Ma'ayd at Hama. The perspectives and agendas of the United States and Russia have diverged many times and on many international issues but there is one thing both superpowers always agree on: Israel's security. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has been a frequent traveller to Russia, more so as in fact than to the United States. In September 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin was careful not to start Russia's military campaign in Syria before reaching agreements with his Israeli "partners." It was also out of concern for Israel's security that Russia offered in 2013 to elimi-
nate the Syrian regime's chemical weapons. None of Israel's actions inside Syria has been possible without coordination with or complete cover from Russian air defence in Syria. Now that the Americans are present on Syrian soil, nothing indicates a change in the rules of the game.

Russia's planned arrangements for Syria suggest additional grounds for "surgical" operations in accordance with the interests of all countries in the region, especially Syria's neighbours, and Moscow has a very keen interest in the region. Hence, the creation of "de-escalation zones." Iran's influence in Syria is in direct conflict with the agendas of the various countries with stakes in Syria. The Trump administration has always condemned Iran's presence in Syria and Jordan wants to keep Iran backed forces in Syria far from its borders. Turkey is trying to find common ground with Iran on the Kurdis-

Whose stability and security are we talking about?

Mohamad Kawas
is a Lebanon writer.

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In September 2017, the Arab Weekly | 5

Levant tensions rising

September 10, 2017

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Opinion

Back to school in the Arab world

Children across the world are returning to school after the holidays. Much more than most other places, educational systems in the Arab world face serious challenges when they are not going through tragic circumstances. Too many children in the Middle East and North Africa are out of school because they live in conflict zones, in dire poverty, are displaced and refugees or face conditions that are not conducive to receiving a decent education.

Furthermore, too many of the children who do make it to school and stay the course to graduate, fail to acquire the skills to fully fulfill their potential and reduce teacher absenteeism. This chimes with a recent report by UNICEF’s sister agency UNESCO, which estimates that many millions could avoid poverty if all adults had just two more years of education.

Public education, which is suffering from inadequate learning environments, lack of infrastructure, the absence of teaching materials, poorly prepared teachers and the lack of a learning culture at home or within the wider community.

The systemic problems are compounded by conflict. War continues to take a heavy toll. For all the schools that have reopened in Mosul, liberated from the Islamic State (ISIS), and the same process is under way in Raqqa. UNICEF said the crisis can wait because all indications are that a unified Iraq is dead. The crisis in Iraq is so deep that there seems to be no way to recover the country that was founded in the 1920s after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Regardless of Kurdish independence in Iraq, a big question remains unanswered: What about the Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran?

This is a serious question because there is a greater possibility for an alliance between the Syrian regime, Iran and Turkey against Syrian Kurds than against Iraqi Kurds. The likelihood of this scenario was apparent in Hezbollah’s efforts to guarantee the transfer of Islamic State (ISIS) fighters and their families from the Syrian-Lebanese borders to Deir ez-Zor. After all, Hezbollah is just another brigade in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of Iran.

To save the skin of ISIS, Hezbollah was keen on brokering a cease-fire between them and the Lebanese Army. It also assessed the conditions and logistics for their transfer to Deir ez-Zor.

What the Lebanese need to know and absorb is that the events in the region are far bigger than Lebanon.

The crisis in Syria is so deep that there seems to be no way to recover the country that was founded in the 1920s.

A bigger game. An Iraqi Kurdish boy plays football past posters bearing the image of Iraqi Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani and supporting independence in Erbil, on August 30.

The vote will be more of a chance for them to gain their rights than just a chance to declare independence.

What’s important is that the referendum succeeds. Independence can wait because all indications are that a unified Iraq is dead. The crisis in Iraq is so deep that there seems to be no way to recover the country that was founded in the 1920s after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

What the Lebanese need to know and absorb is that the events in the region are far bigger than Lebanon.

The Lebanese might find it confusing to understand Hezbollah’s role as Iran’s agent in the case of the Kurdish referendum. To understand the situation, they must accept the unavoidable fact that Hezbollah is a sectarian militia and Lebanese elements in the service of Iran.

The Lebanese go about their business in a critical phase and that they need to be no way to recover the country that was founded in the 1920s. The crisis in Syria is so deep that there seems to be no way to recover the country that was founded in the 1920s.

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Religious extremism remains the world's top enemy

Claude Salhani

Pacifying the Middle East will be a long and painful process but there is no alternative other than wasting another 16 years or more fighting shadows.

September 10 will be the 16th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Those attacks led to the beginning of the so-called war on terror. No one was ready to believe that there could be such a war.

As a handful of Middle East analysts asked at the time, how do you launch a war on terror? You can wage war on terrorists, yes; but terror is an ever-present threat. How do you launch a war on terror? You can wage war on terror, yes; but terror is an ever-present threat.

The attacks on Pearl Harbour, the headquarters of the US Navy, in 1941, necessitated the participation of the United States, including the participation of all the countries of the US coalition, as “the largest al-Qaeda operation ever”.

On September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in New York and Washington, DC, forced the US to enter the so-called “war on terror”. The attacks on Pearl Harbour, the headquarters of the US Navy, in 1941, necessitated the participation of the United States, including the participation of all the countries of the US coalition, as “the largest al-Qaeda operation ever”.

The attack on Pearl Harbour was described by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt as “a day that will live in infamy” and drew the United States into the second world war, a conflict in which some 58 countries fought and which resulted in the death of at least 55 million people and caused millions more to become refugees.

From the outset of the war until the capitulation of Nazi Germany and Japan, six long years passed – four for the United States, which officially entered the war after the attack on Pearl Harbour.

Thankfully, the fallout from September 11 is far from the casualty figures of the second world war, even if the war in Afghanistan has lasted four times longer. Unlike the raid on Pearl Harbour, which necessitated the participation of thousands of American military personnel – from planners to pilots to thousands of sailors aboard the Japanese fleet in the Pacific Ocean – and the mobilisation of military hardware at the cost of billions of dollars, the 9/11 terrorists who carried out the 9/11 attacks were armed only with box cutters and religious fervour. What made the key to resolving the Middle East conflicts: Address religious fervour: Its advocates remain of democracy’s right to exist.

Sixteen years after the 9/11 attacks, the United States remains involved militarily in one manner or another in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Americans can expect to remain so until the religious fervour is addressed. For that to happen, the countries concerned need to adjust their curricula and remove parts calling for the elimination of non-believers, including members of the Shia community.

Pacifying the Middle East will be a long and painful process but there is no alternative other than wasting another 16 years or more fighting shadows.

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Iraq forces gear up to retake Hawija from ISIS

Mamoon Alabbasi

London

Iraqi forces are gearing up for an offensive to retake Hawija in Kirkuk province from the Islamic State (ISIS) as territories controlled by the militants continue to shrink, Iraq's military said.

Iraq's military press office, the War Media Cell, dubbed the operation “the coming days” after Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over ISIS in Tal Afar in Nineveh province.

Iraqi forces have retaken Tikrit, Sinjar, Ramadi, Falluja, Qayyarah, Mosul and Tal Afar from ISIS over the past two years. In addition to Hawija, ISIS remains in control of al-Qaim, Rawas and Ana in al-Anbar province.

Representatives from the predominantly Shia Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and the Kurdistan peshmerga said their fighters would partake in the operation in Hawija, where an estimated 1,000 ISIS militants are present.

ISIS has reportedly lost many of its militants and is resorting to recruiting more female fighters.

“Despite Islamic State's claims to the contrary, urging women to seek an active role in combat is most likely an attempt to reduce the impact of severe manpower shortages caused by the decimation of male fighters, and a recruitment crisis,” said Mohammed Colin, a senior analyst at ISIS Market Country Risk, said in a release.

This rhetoric marks a stark contrast to previous propaganda that highlighted women's primary function as widows and mothers of mujahedeen.

Despite new attacks in Baghdad and Saladin province, there are signs ISIS has been less successful in posing a threat to the country in recent weeks.

Iraq and Jordan reopened their only border crossing, which had been closed for two years due to security fears. The move “means we have told the world we are great...er, than any terrorist group,” Iraqi Interior Minister Qasim al-Araji said during its opening ceremony on the Jordanian side of the border.

The US-led coalition carried out an offensive to retake Hawija from ISIS in their strongholds in northern Iraq, read a report by Integrity Prisoners.

“Understanding that to fully defeat ISIS, the threat that monitors the MENA region. Mamoon Alabbasi is a researcher at the University of London. $8,500. The going rate for a second-hand car. Her life and all that means in terms of hope, opportunity and freedom will be reduced to bringing a sick and screaming child to a customer.

Why do we find ourselves stricken by silence and apathy in the face of Iraqi children being bought and sold like cattle by criminals who have been roaming the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003? Why can Michelle Obama stand with placards saying “Bring Back Our Girls” for girls kidnapped with placards saying “Bring Back Our Girls” for girls kidnapped by barbaric criminals like Boko Haram in Nigeria, yet cannot summon the moral grit to show a simple sign for Iraqi children? Considering what has happened to Iraq since 1930 and the decades of destruction wrought upon it by the United States and its allies, one would think that at least Iraqi children would deserve their compassion and mercy. However, mainstream media outlets do not want to show their audiences, already weary because of the US invasion, the realities afflicting the children of one of the countries from which they originated.

The lack of concern for the children of Iraq will continue at an accelerated pace and will be assisted by destroying its future and the innocence of several lost generations, scarred by war and abuses from which they may never recover.
Kurdish referendum

Tensions in Kirkuk over Kurdish referendum

Nermeen Mufti

Kirkuk

Kirkuk is often described as “Little Iraq” as it reflects the country’s diverse communities, including their divisions, but a decision by the Kurdish authorities to include the oil-rich province in the referendum on the future of Kurdistan sparked renewed tensions.

The Kirkuk Provincial Council, at its regular weekly meeting on August 29, voted to bar Kirkuk from participating in the referendum on September 25.

The council was asked to vote by Kirkuk Governor Najmuddin Karim, a high-ranking Kurdish official in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party, which is led by Jalal Talabani.

The Turkmen and Arab blocs in the council boycotted the meeting, leaving 24 of the 41 members present. Twenty-two voted in favour of participating in the referendum. The majority of those who voted were Kurds.

Turkmen and Arab council members issued statements claiming Kirkuk’s participation in the referendum was unconstitutional.

Their view echoes that of the central Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, which says – along with most of the major parties in Baghdad – that Kirkuk and other disputed areas are not part of Iraq’s Kurdish region.

They insist the referendum violates the Iraqi Constitution, which confirms the unity of the Iraqi lands.

Those who boycotted the meeting are the real representatives of our people, said Majed Ezat, a member of the Turkmen bloc. “The ones who attended – whether Turkmen, Arabs or Christians – are members of the Kurdish bloc and were on the Kurdish list in the local elections.”

An earlier move by PUK-led KRG authorities to include the oil-rich city in the referendum triggered an outcry from Baghdad.

The Turkmen who boycotted the meeting underlined divisions over the issue.

“The council has the right to call off the vote,” said Ezat. “We are searching for a quiet resolution to the dispute but the regional administration did not offer a way out of this deadlock,” said Mohammed Tamim, an Arab member of parliament from Kirkuk.

Due to doubts over voter registration and the volatility of the situation in Kirkuk, the province had local elections only once, in 2004. There are fears that residents of the predominantly Arab district of Hawija, still under control of Islamic State (ISIS) militants, would not have the chance to vote, should their areas not be liberated before the referendum.

Turkmen and Arab residents of Kirkuk said they fear that Kurdish officials would rig the referendum in order to strengthen the Kurdish position in negotiations with Baghdad rather than automatically lead to independence.

There are fears that sharp divisions in Kirkuk could lead to instability and violence.

The Kurds in Kirkuk appear to be predominately in favour of the referendum. Whichever the people of Kirkuk decide within the referendum, that decision should be respected, said Kirkuk Governor Masoud Barzani.

Christian officials are divided on whether the referendum should extend to Kirkuk. The Kirkuk Christian Group argues that only Christians should be allowed to vote. Barzani has acknowledged Kirkuk’s Christian minority’s right to vote in the referendum.

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The Kirkuk Provincial Council has the final say on whether Kirkuk participates in the referendum. The Kirkuk Provincial Council, on August 29.

Hoshyar Zebari, a former Iraqi government minister and now a senior adviser to the KRG, has suggested a “yes” vote would strengthen the Kurdish position in negotiations with Baghdad rather than automatically lead to independence.

One outstanding issue is the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which was to have settled territorial disputes between Baghdad and Erbil by the end of 2009 by polling their inhabitants.

Barzani has cited non-compliance with the September referendum. “Whatever the people of Kirkuk will have decided will be predominately in favour of the referendum,” he said.

Those Kurds – almost certainly a minority – who intend to vote “no” to independence, at least for now, are putting their faith in Baghdad. The US and Iran have, to varying degrees, prevented them from calling the referendum.

Some in Kirkuk are afraid of outside pressure to build the will not take place.
The human cost of the battle for Raqqah unclear

John Mellor

Hospitals aren’t functioning and heavy machinery is scarce.

Nadim Houry, director of the Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Programme with Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Though ISIS has the capability to maintain a pretty lethal insurgency, it’s probably still looking for a last pitched battle.

Nicholas Heras, Middle East security fellow at the Centre for a New American Security

BREAKTHROUGH.

Syria

Regime victory at Deir ez-Zor heralds a new chapter in Syria’s conflict

Simon Speakman Cordall

Tunis

A s Syria regime forces appear to have broken the two-year-long siege at Deir ez-Zor, the US-led coalition’s fight to reclaim the Islamic State’s self-declared capital at Raqqah, north along the country’s Euphrates River, grinds on. Figures from the UN Commission for Human Rights indicate that, during August, 45 civilians were killed in coalition strikes, which the international community suggested may be in contravention of international law. For the Islamic State (ISIS), like its numbers within the city, fatalities are unknown, though its propaganda machine claims to have killed around 1,300 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters since hostilities began June 6.

Bloody though it may be, progress appears to be inching up. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said ISIS controlled the city, as of September 2, had fallen to around 27% of overall territory. SDF fighters claim to have seized control of Raqqah’s old city and, in a morale-boosting coup, took the city’s Great Mosque on September 5.

Outside the city, some semblance of economic life has returned. Markets are open and essential supplies can be bought and sold, though electricity remains unavailable since the destruction of the Tabqa Dam by ISIS in the same year.

Rubble is commonplace throughout the governing and occupied territories to local governments and little information appeared to have made its way to those on the ground.

“We’re obviously relieved to be free from ISIS but they have no idea what is really just a cover for an eventual occupation,” said Nicholas Heras, Middle East security fellow at the Centre for a New American Security. “The situation is far from over. Though ISIS has the capability to maintain a pretty lethal insurgency, it’s probably still looking for a last pitched battle.”

Heras said ISIS remains a significant fighting force, capable of undertaking established battle manoeuvres in the desert and able to serve as a significant counter to any further regime advance. “The regime and Russia can carpet-bomb Deir ez-Zor as much as they like but as long as ISIS is on the ground throughout the governorate and within parts of the city, they are afraid that they will be arrested or killed, often without being (officially) accused.”

People in Deir ez-Zor have cause to be scared. Justice for Life’s figures stated that from January 1, 2016, through August 30, 2017, 790 civilians were killed in and around Deir ez-Zor, most of them by the regime and its Russian allies.

Moreover, with a suspicion of the regime’s Shia militias and the loyalty of its Sunni population uncertain, Deir ez-Zor will likely prove costly to take and hold. However, the significance of its capture goes beyond mere territory.

In addition to the region’s oil output, estimated by the Financial Times in October 2016 at $34,000-40,000 barrels per day (bpd), is the message breaking the siege at Deir ez-Zor sends to Syria and the world. “It lets people know that Syrian President Bashar Assad is still in the fight against ISIS and supports the notion that the US presence in Syria is really just a cover for an eventual occupation,” said Nicholas Heras, Middle East security fellow at the Centre for a New American Security.

“The situation is far from over. Though ISIS has the capability to maintain a pretty lethal insurgency, it’s probably still looking for a last pitched battle.”

The Islamic State (ISIS) has made its way to those on the outskirts of Syria’s regime forces at the desert city of Deir ez-Zor, according to the two-year-long siege in 2016, through August 30, 2017, 790 civilians were killed in and around Deir ez-Zor, most of them by the regime and Russian allies. However, though the battle for Deir ez-Zor may have ended, the war still has a long way to go.

Simon Speakman Cordall is a writer in Tunis.

Regime victory at Deir ez-Zor heralds a new chapter in Syria’s conflict

Simon Speakman Cordall

Tunis

The breakthrough of Syria’s regime forces at the desert city of Deir ez-Zor, following years of siege, shelling and the attempted starvation of its inhabitants marks a dramatic turning point in the Syrian war. Though the siege may have ended, the battle is a long way from won. The Islamic State (ISIS) has a strong presence throughout the governorate and within parts of the city.

Though the Assad regime’s recent point toward proved successful, it has only been able to make gains after the establishment of de-escalation zones in the west fixed its forces to do so. Nearly 100,000 people are said to be in Deir ez-Zor, cut off from the rest of the way by ISIS, which surrounded the city for two years, leaving the inhabitants and regime forces within the city reliant on UN air drops for food and regime air drops for munitions. With the regime advance, the regime advance was met with trepidation. Some questioned whether the recent concentration of the regime’s finite firepower at Deir ez-Zor risks having Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly known as al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria) free to strike up its stronghold in Idlib in north-western Syria.

Though relieved to have his Freedom House base liberated from ISIS, Jalal Alhamad, executive director of Justice for Life, who visited Raqqa in June, said by phone, “The number of ISIS fighters with-. . .”

The number of ISIS fighters with-. . .

Abdul Rahman told Agence France-Presse. "Many schools, hospitals and health centres were destroyed. They say nothing is functioning inside Raqqah city." UN estimates said that 10,000-20,000 people were trapped within the city, caught between snipers, car bombs and homemade ISIS and air strikes of the US-led international coalition.

"A month ago, I had a loaf of bread and a bowl of za’atar (thyme)," said a man from south of the Euphrates, Tabqa, who visited Raqqa in June, said by phone. "After seven years of fighting between rebels, the Assad regime, ISIS and the US-backed coalition, the population has emerged from the jihadis’ authority exhausted and bewildered as to what the future might hold.

Though the coalition claimed to have clear plans for restoring lib-
Lebanon to the Syrian city of Abu
lowed ISIS fighters to freely leave
happy with the deal because it al-
Instead, they received an extreme-
eration in May 2000 of southern
serious setbacks along the way.
August 29 but stalled, running into
were allowed to terminate the
said to be complaining in private
August. Senior Lebanese officers were
the approximately 600 ISIS fighters
by finishing off its last remaining
were visibly upset, having suffered from
the backbone of Hezbollah, were
community. At a bare minimum,
they wanted revenge against ISIS
visibly upset, having suffered from
that spread havoc within the Shia
that the deal was a grave insult to
bollah.

The deal brokered
by Hezboll-

Iraqi border on Syrian territory
Qaa in Lebanon and the Syrian-
region, on August 28.

It was, in fact, the mere thought
of having American warplanes
warn against a human tragedy
leadership, there are calls for Iraqi
leadership, there are calls for Iraqi

The deal brokered
by Hezbollah

Hezbollah's leaders were
negotiated safe pas-

in Syria, especially entrusted with
important it was for Iran to receive
what was Hezbollah thinking?

The deal brokered by Hezbol-

Since entering the Syrian war zone in 2012, Hezbollah has paid lit-
tention to its critics and cases
very little for what is being said
about it on the streets of Beirut or
beyond in the Arab world. Clearly
from its support for the agreement,
it remains firmly convinced that
it has done the right thing and even
if it hasn't, nobody will lift a finger
to stop them, mainly because nobody
can.

Sami Moubayed is a Syrian
historian and author of “Under
the Black Flag” (IR Times, 2015).

Iran's post-ISIS game

The deal brokered by Hezbollah
might be the precursor of a
new Iranian strategy in the
region.

What was Hezbollah thinking?
How could an ISIS convoy cross
about 590km between Hurud al-
Qaa in Lebanon and the Syrian-

Israel was the Russian missiles, which
have razed hospitals and killed
in Aleppo and elsewhere, that
prompted the sectarian party to

It is clear the game is afoot for
the post-ISIS phase in the region.
The Iranian axis is busy rehood-
fighting enemies and allies, espe-
cially now that Iran can no longer
get any mileage out of the sectar-
ian card.

Even among the Iraqi Shia
leadership, there are calls for Iraqi
national policies free of Iranian in-
fluence and more open to the Arab
world. The best illustration of this
is the recent visit to Saudi Arabia
by Iraqi cleric Muktada al-Sadr,
head of the Sadrism Movement in
Iraq and his meeting with Saudi
Prince Mohammed bin Sal-
man bin Abdulaziz. Many similar
actions are taking place under US
cover.

In Syria, the post-ISIS phase
will be marked by the enactment
of regional and international
partnerships under US and Rus-

The deal brokered by Hezbollah
might be the precursor of a new
Iranian strategy in the region.
As an agent of Iran in the Arab zone,
Hezbollah will be the spearhead of
Iranian policies in Lebanon and
Syria, especially entrusted with
repairing Iran's relations with
other Islamic organisations.

Iran and its allies are aware
that their relations with Sunni
Islamic organisations have been
deeply shaken. That is why they
are repairing the damage by taking
advantage of their relations with
Turkey and Qatar. It is known that
Iran instructed its proxies in the
Arab world to revert to negative
anti-American discourse and close
the gap with Islamic organisations
such as the Muslim Brotherhood.
Through Hezbollah, for example, Iran
made it possible for Hamas leaders
to move from Qatar and settle in
Lebanon.

By touting competition with
Washington in the Middle East,
Iran is hoping to bridge the sectar-
ian gap created with Sunni Is-

The deal brokered by Hezbol-
was committed to fighting national-
ists and to spreading chaos by
removing national borders.
For Iran to play a pivotal role
in the post-ISIS Middle East, it
must remove any potential source
of threat to it in the Sunni envirom-
ment, something it failed to do
in the past. As examples of this
failure, we can cite Iran's siding
with the Assad regime and against
the wishes of most of the Syrian
population, plus its influential role
in Iraq, which resulted in exclud-
ing the Sunni from power.

Now, Iran is trying to project a
more positive image by appear-
ing to have enough influence to
broker agreements with organisa-
tions such as ISIS or Jihadi Fatah
which are under US cover.

It is also trying to see how far
it can impress the global Islamic
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by Western countries.
Hamas's shift to Tehran rings alarms in Cairo

Amr Emam

Cairo

Hamas chief in Gaza Yahya Sinwar (R) visited the border with Egypt in Rafah in southern Gaza Strip, last July.

Edging closer to Tehran, Hamas chief in Gaza Yahya Sinwar (R) visited the border with Egypt in Rafah in southern Gaza Strip, last July.

The strengthening relationship between Hamas and Tehran has set off alarms in Cairo and threatens a rapprochement between the Egyptian government and the Palestinian group.

"Improving relations between Hamas and the Islamic Republic is a direct threat to our national security," said Samir Ghattas, a member of the Egyptian parliament.

"Most of the arms that reach Hamas in Gaza enter the blockaded Gaza Strip through smuggling tunnels in Sinai, even as the Egyptian Army has been working hard to demolish these tunnels," said Ghattas, who also heads the Middle East Forum for Strategic Studies.

Analysts in Egypt warn that Cairo is unlikely to just accept Hamas's brazen rapprochement.

Relations between Hamas and Tehran were returning to normal after a three-year halt. A delegation from the Palestinian movement visited Tehran in August to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, in late August at his first media briefing, said that relations between Iran and his movement were "excellent." Sinwar said Iranian support of Hamas was "strategic" and that the Islamic Republic offered funds, arms and training to the fighters of al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing.

The day before, New York Times reported that for Cairo, which has been trying to contain the challenge of the Palestinian enclave, the new leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, will be a "brutal" test. The Hamas leader had vowed to support Palestinian resistance against Israel and defend the national rights of Palestinians.

Relations after the Egyptian President Muhammed Mursi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, in July 2013. Angered Hamas, an ideological offshoot of the group, Cairo accused Hamas of adding Israeli state (IS) militants fighting the Egyptian Army in Sinai and operating a network of tunnels between Sinai and Gaza.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

The agreement between Egypt and several other African countries to form a rapid response force is part of Cairo's efforts to cut supply routes from central and western Africa to terrorists in North Africa, specifically Libya, experts said.

"Terrorist groups in Nigeria, Somalia and Mali have managed to establish links with and send recruits to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) in Libya," said Sameh Abu El-Haiya, a former Egyptian Army general and an adviser at Nasser Military Academy. "This is a major threat to Egypt and for the rest of Africa."

Egyptian defence ministers in August agreed to the formation of a rapid response force that could be deployed anywhere in the continent.

"This is why I say Egypt's fight against terrorism cannot be restricted to its own territory or its immediate vicinity," said Mokhtar al-Ghobashi, vice-president of Egypt's Arab Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. "To be more secure, Egypt needs to take this fight against terrorism to other countries in the continent."

The defence ministers of the countries forming the new African rapid response force are from Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The force, which is to be officially announced in 2018, will need an initial budget of $30 million.

In Cairo, experts said that, despite the difficult economic conditions facing Egypt, the government will readily contribute a significant amount, as well as provide for the logistical requirements of the force's operations.

For Egypt, the central role it is to play in the African rapid response force represents a return to African Union politics.

"Foreign policy planners in the past did not give enough priority to relations with other African states," said Mostafa el-Guindi, a member of the African Affairs Committee in the Egyptian parliament. "This was a miscalculation and it caused us to lose a lot."

One of the losses Egypt sustained because of neglect of ties with other African countries was the lack of African support it received in efforts to convince Ethiopia regarding construction of a multibillion-dollar hydroelectric dam on the Nil. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which is nearing completion, will greatly affect Egypt's water security and has been a major point of contention between Cairo and Addis Ababa.

Egypt, which has the strongest military in Africa, as rated by the US-based Global Firepower Index, has sought to market itself as a prime arms manufacturing and export destination for other African countries.

The factor is the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation, Egypt's military production hub, have become a major draw for visiting African officials.

"The new policy line in our country is to open up to fellow Africans," Abu El-Haiya said. "True, closer coordination and cooperation with other African countries will help them address their security problems but it will secure our security interests first and foremost."
London

President Mahmoud Abbas has clamped down on social media and news websites — the main outlets for debate and dissent in the West Bank — with a vaguely worded decree that critics said allows his government to jail anyone on charges of harming national unity or the “social fabric.”

Rights activists said the edict, issued in July without prior public debate, is perhaps the most significant step yet by the new government to restrict freedom of expression in the autocratic Palestinian territories. Abbas’s main rivals — former side-turning political foe Mohammed Dahlan and the Islamist movement Hamas, MADA said. A few of the blocked sites support- ed the Islamic State (ISIS).

Five journalists working for news outlets linked to Hamas were charged for violating the new law, but they were released after Hamas released a court order linking them to a Hamas authority-linked reporter.

Mahmoud Abbas has been taking steps against journalists and bloggers in the Gaza Strip. “The Palestinian split between Fatah and Hamas and between the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip is hurting the media and the government and its enemies more than not employ sarcasm and humour, not to say insults, to criticise Basill’s often am- biguous, indeed often at loggerheads, the journal- ists’ syndicate called for media to media ire appears to be centred on Abbas’s political clique. His government placed restrictions on the Palestinian territories’ media and rigorously enforced the coun- try’s censorship laws. While today, this style of heavy- handed censorship seems com- mitted to the destruction of the press, the issue of freedom of expression remains a constant, with the coun- try’s ruling elite losing to miss any opportunities to silence the public that speaking out can carry poten- tially dire consequences. As it stands, the traditional Leba- nese media sphere of newspapers and TV exists as a form of virtual hodgepodge, with competing out- lets pledging financial and political allegiance to the country’s various local and regional factions. It’s nei- ther politically effective, nor does it stand a chance of ousting the near structural failings of Lebanon’s ruling establishment.

However, whatever legal restrict- ions might still apply to traditional media largely disappear on the country’s social media platforms, where political activists are looking towards to protest what they see as the state’s political and economic corruption, ultimately evidenced in the elec- tion of Michel Aoun as president. The bulk of Lebanon’s social media appears to be centred on Aoun’s political clique. Specifically, it targeted his son-in-law, Gebran Bassil, the often am- biguous, indeed often at loggerheads, the journal- ists’ syndicate called for media to media ire appears to be centred on Abbas’s political clique. His government placed restrictions on the Palestinian territories’ media and rigorously enforced the coun- try’s censorship laws. While today, this style of heavy- handed censorship seems com- mitted to the destruction of the press, the issue of freedom of expression remains a constant, with the coun- try’s ruling elite losing to miss any opportunities to silence the public that speaking out can carry poten- tially dire consequences. As it stands, the traditional Leba- nese media sphere of newspapers and TV exists as a form of virtual hodgepodge, with competing out- lets pledging financial and political allegiance to the country’s various local and regional factions. It’s nei- ther politically effective, nor does it stand a chance of ousting the near structural failings of Lebanon’s ruling establishment.

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Turkey faces new tensions with Germany and the United States

Thomas Seilbert
Washington

Following a build-up of tensions over several months, Turkey is faced with rapidly deteriorating ties to two key allies – Germany and the United States – a double blow that could deepen Ankara’s isolation.

German weekly Focus on Wednesday published a column by Angela Merkel, campaigning to win a fourth term at the helm of Europe’s most powerful economy in an election this month, said she would ask the European Union to end membership talks with Turkey. Merkel’s challenger, Martin Schulz, promised to do the same if elected.

The twin announcements, coming months after bickering between Berlin and Ankara and amid concern in Germany about German citizens held in Turkish prisons, were a bombshell. Even though Merkel’s plan has little chance of becoming reality as few EU countries are keen to cut ties with Turkey, the powerful political symbolism of the move by Turkey’s biggest trading partner points to a long period of crisis in relations. Even before Merkel’s new statement, the Berlin government said it would review its overall policy towards Turkey.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Merkel of “insult” and told the chancellor to “mind your own business.”

Even as Erdogan slammed Germany, Turkey’s relations with the United States took a turn for the worse. Federal prosecutors in New York charged a former economy minister in Erdogan’s cabinet with violating US sanctions against Iran.

The case against Zafer Caglayan expands an investigation into allegations by an Iranian-born Turkish gold trader, Reza Zarrab, who is accused of helping Tehran to circumvent US sanctions against Iran.

The case against Zafer Caglayan came several days after a US grand jury indicted 19 people, including 15 Turkish security officials, allegedly involved in a travel between Erdogan’s bodyguards and demonstrators during a visit by the Turkish president to Washington in May.

The indictment means that Erdogan must leave some of his most trusted bodyguards behind when he travels to the US General Assembly in New York this month. He called the indictment a “completely scandalous” but a US Senate committee has approved a measure that would ban the sale of US weapons to Erdogan’s bodyguards.

In another sign of a deepening crisis between Washington and Erdogan, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Washington has launched a “dramatically fundamental review of the ties” but a US Senate committee has approved a measure that would ban the sale of US weapons to Erdogan’s bodyguards.

Turkey’s new attacks on the US government in 2013. Erdogan called the investigation the Erdogan government in 2013.

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The Erdogan-style challenges to Germany, in fury over attempts to import oppressive policies onto its market, marks serious business. If Merkel asks for a two-thirds majority to back her proposal, it will be a slam dunk. There is good reason to presume that Erdogan’s Syrupaphic economic advisors have no idea what the consequences of such a radical move would be to the frail Turkish economy.

The obstinacy in Ankara shows no sign of letting go. On the contrary, Erdogan is left to remain defiant and Erdogan is left to remain defiant in the West and in NATO is picking up speed at a time when Ankara is increasingly in isolation.

Since the failed July 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan has harmed Turkey’s relations with the United States and other states, to include now Germany, of bordering coup plotters. Andrew Liedtke, a Middle East analyst at the Atlantic Council, wrote in a double now e-mailed comments. “This narrative strengthens Erdogan’s democratic support.”

Domestic politics also shapes Erdogan’s approach to Turkey’s EU accession talks, analysts said. “Erdogan has aligned the EU with his own allies – Germany and the United States – a double blow that will damage his position.”

Amanda Sloat, a Middle East expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, told senators the United States should conduct a full review of the “value” of its relationships with Turkey and Erdogan’s support for the US. The downward spiral in Turkey’s ties with two of its key allies in the West and in NATO is picking up speed at a time when Ankara is increasingly in isolation.

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One expert, calling Turkey’s treatment because of what critics say is Erdogan’s extortion of the Syrian border.

Walking away. German Chancellor Angela Merkel (L) stepping next to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he arrives to attend the G20 summit in Hamburg, on July 7.

If the US and Europe abandon Turkey, Ankara will seek partners elsewhere.

Erdogan could be caught in a double gripper

The two countries have clashed over conflicting priorities in Syria, where Washington is supporting Kurdish rebels seen as terrorists by Ankara. In return, Turkey angered the US with its threats linked to EU capitals to an all-time high. Further on, it seems that the US will be more aggressive in public rhetoric.

Erdogan is left with no choice but to remain defiant to whatever comes his way.
Iranian President Hassan Rohani began his second term in a stronger position at home than either of his predecessors, principled Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and reformist Mohammad Khatami. Rohani’s backing from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at his inauguration was followed by parliament’s acceptance of 77 of his ministerial nominations.

Rohani wants domestic support for a diplomatic offensive designed to ease international pressures that he's generation. During the inauguration, both Khamenei and Khomeini spoke of Iran’s success in avoiding “isolation.” Rohani told parliament Iran would “not start violating” its nuclear agreement with world powers. Known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it should that it will serve as a model for resolving other disputes. For Rohani, the Islamic Republic has taken the moral high ground. This suggests Iran would seek to maintain the JCPOA alongside other signature agreements — Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — even if US President Donald Trump abandons it in October when the US Congress is required to review the deal. Whether Trump maintains the JCPOA or strengthens unilateral sanctions over Tehran’s missile programme or support for terror groups, Iran might argue it was the justified. It could then argue it was entitled to further assistance from Russia, China and Europe in achieving economic benefits from the JCPOA.

Rohani’s greatest diplomatic challenge may be Syria. Peripherally, there may be further signs of progress this month with meetings in Kazakhstan in the next stage of the Astana process involving Russia, Iran and Turkey. But “de-escalation zones” reflect the battlefield power of the Russian Air Force, the Syrian Army and Lebanon’s Hezbollah. Syria represents a nadir for diplomacy. Carla Del Ponte resigned from the UN war crimes commission of inquiry on Syria because of what she called “a disgrace for the international community” in the UN’s face of Russia’s veto — to refer to the International Criminal Court evidence reportedly implicating senior Syrian political and military figures. Drawing a contrast to her work in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, Del Ponte said there was “no possibility of seeking truth and justice” in Syria. Syria has been reshaped with assorted people, mainly Muslims, feeling the country. The Assad regime has spread a sense that Syrian President Bashar Assad holds power through an atonement violence. As this perception permeates the Sunni Arab world, it makes it increasingly difficult for Saudi Arabia to tolerate Iran’s complicity. This deepens the Iran-Saudi rivalry and complicates efforts to find diplomatic solutions for any regional issues.

The Qatar file is probably just one of the JCPOA in Rohani’s in tray.

“Thank God, I wear the chador,” was the headline of the daily, edition of Vatan-e Emrooz quoting Namdari. In the interview, she said: “The women inj my family wore the chador... so, too, began to wear it...” By demanding we wear the chador, respect that I admire and the older I got I felt I should thank God for wearing the chador in a male-dominated work environment. “Thank God that I work in TV and wear the chador... I’m indebted to it. It’s a blessing. Forgive me for saying this, but I feel more beautiful with the chador.” Namdari claimed many Iranian women had reached out to her saying her appearance on TV was the inspiration behind them wearing the chador. In a June TV interview with Iranian actress Niki Karimi, who is generally barred from appearing on television because of her “insufficient” hijab, Namdari asked: “Can’t you just adjust your headress to cover your eyes and appear on TV?” Karimi said she has not a habit of surrendering her freedom. Namdari was visibly repulsed by Karimi’s response. Against this background, sudden emergence of Namdari’s photos and video footage — without the chador and drinking beer — sends ripples waves throughout the Persian language blogosphere. Reacting to the scandal, Namdari uploaded a video claiming her recall bad – she has fallen off her head when the pho her chador had — for a moment — disappear on TV. Karimi said she was kept silent about drinking beer. Ending her tumultuous family picnic, Namdari returned to Tehran, where she, the Mizan news agency reported, was arrested by the police upon her arrival at Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport. News of her arrest has been dismissed by other Iranian media but there is no trace of Namdari in the public sphere. Namdari’s little act of hypocrisy is the symptom of a bigger malady in Iranian society. Difference between the private and public face of Iranian women, who have no choice but pretend religiosity in the public sphere but do otherwise when at home or abroad, outside the reach of the prying eyes and ears of the moralistic state. Once a public face of moral, in this case Namdari, is untethered the victim of an unforeseen miscalculation. Having a beer in the park, the irreligious “duplicity” and “hypocrisy” against the political system and its underlying religious ideology, losing faith both in the political and religion. This is the pit of mixing religion and state in Iran.

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**Tough words and dangerous scenarios between the US and Iran**

Jeffery Aftandilian

It's a lecture in the Pasteur School of Global Studies at Boston University and a former US State Department Middle East analyst.

**Mixed messages.** US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley speaks about the Iran nuclear deal at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, on September 5.

News & Analysis

**East/West**

**Iranian nuclear deal in trouble: Tillerson tries to avoid collapse**

Thomas Seibert

Washington

A mid signs that US President Donald Trump is looking to scrap the Iran nuclear deal, the US and European allies are weighing their weight behind US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, a prominent supporter of the agreement within a divided administration.

Tillerson is obliged by US law to tell Congress every three months whether Iran has been following the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 landmark treaty designed to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons. The next report is due October 15. US officials critical of the agreement between Iran and the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, Germany and the European Union say the deal puts US security interests at risk.

While there is no doubt the Iran deal has its shortcomings, an exit by the United States could enable the Iranians to strike a deal with Russia, China and the European powers.

In the two most recent reports to Congress, the State Department certified that Iran was in compliance with the agreement but the upcoming report could be different. Trump has been very critical of the Iran deal, which some officials say has emboldened Tehran to embark on disruptive actions throughout the Middle East, with money coming to the country because of a phase-out of sanctions under the treaty.

Trump told the Wall Street Journal in July he expected the next State Department report to say that Iran had acted against the agreement. “If it was up to me, I would have had them non-compliant 180 days ago,” he said, adding that Tillerson did not share his view. “It’s easier to say they comply. It’s a lot easier but it’s the wrong thing. They don’t comply.” Trump said.

Nevertheless, US Ambassador to the United Nations and a vocal critic of the deal, Haley, defended the deal and said the Iran deal had “so many flaws that it’s tempting to leave it.” Speaking September 5 at a panel of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a conservative think-tank in Washington, she warned Iran could become “the next North Korea” if Iran’s nuclear ambitions were not checked.

Haley accused the Iranian government of launching a “reflective wave of rhetoric” that the international community regarded the nuclear agreement as essential for world peace. “They are threatening the entire world because the truth only adds to the fact that the JCPOA is un-touchable but it’s not,” she said.

The UN ambassador admitted that America’s European allies wanted to save the agreement but said the United States had to look out for itself. “Our job is not to make sure that Europeans are happy with us,” she said. “Our job is to make sure we’re happy and import-public safe.

In contrast to Haley, Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and national security advisor H.R. McMaster argue that the United States should stick with the Iran agreement. Their position received a boost in late August when the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog said in a report that international inspectors did not find evidence of Iranian violations of the agreement.

“The administration is divided,” said Allen Keiswetter, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and a scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington. Keiswetter warned that declaring Iran to be in non-compliance carried the risk of separating the United States from its allies in Europe.

“Open all doors of opportunity for the Iranians to play the allies against the US,” he said.

European officials, concerned that a collapse of the JCPOA could lead to an international nuclear crisis, are keen to support Tillerson. “If we want to make the Iranians adhere to every last comma of the [treaty], he will have the British, the French and us on his side,” a senior German official said under condition of anonymity. “We have to prevent the agreement from blowing up in our faces.”

Keiswetter said that, while there was no doubt the Iran deal had its shortcomings, an exit by the United States could enable the Iranians to strike a deal with Russia, China and the European powers. “The US would be standing alone,” he said.

Haley’s AIE speech offered a glimpse at a possible way for the administration to move forward despite its inner divisions and the pressure from allies. She said a re- fusal by Trump to confirm that Iran followed the deal would not automatically mean that the United States would turn its back on the agreement as a whole. If Trump declares Iran in non-compliance, Congress has two months to decide whether to reimpose unilateral US sanctions against Tehran. This procedure would buy the administration time.

Keiswetter said he did not believe such a course would provide a way out for the Trump administration. “The agreement would not be dead” after a declaration of non-compliance by the United States, he said, but the United States would break with its allies in an important question.

In essence, Keiswetter said, it was better for Washington “to accept what we have and move on to seek to improve.”

If it was up to me, I would have had them non-compliant 180 days ago.

US President Donald Trump

Despite having certiﬁed twice to the US Congress that Iran is in compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US President Donald Trump and his UN ambassador, Nikki Haley, seem determined to deepen certiﬁcation in October, even if evidence of Iranian non-compliance is lacking.

Under US law, the president must report to Congress every 90 days on whether Iran is complying with the terms of the nuclear deal. Trump seems to put aside his strong opposition to the Iran nuclear deal – a key issue in his campaign for president – and focus instead on Iranian behaviour in the region that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf Arab countries fear the return of Iran with a new president, having long worried about the regime’s political ambitions.

At some point during the week, however, Trump focussed on refocusing on the nuclear deal. In July, he very reluctantly certiﬁed to Congress, based on advice from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and national security advisor H.R. McMaster that Iran was in compliance.

Tillerson and McMaster told Trump there was no strong evidence that Iran was not in compliance and to claim otherwise would damage US relations with its allies and be in violation of a UN Security Council resolution that has strong international backing.

Shortly after certiﬁcation, Trump told the Wall Street Journal that he “did not expect” Iran would be considered to be in compliance by October and, in August, he said Teh ran was not “living up to the spirit of the agreement.”

Haley defended this position and said the nuclear deal should not be “too big to fail” and that Iran must be held accountable for its nuclear program, its support for terrorism and its human rights record.

In the meantime, Trump ordered an interagency review of the nuclear deal.

Though words were matched by equally harsh rhetoric coming out of Tehran, Iran would only stick to the deal if it was not subsequently mandated to apply additional sanctions on its country, with one US offi cial claim ing that Tehran could easily resist the US stance of supporting the JCPOA programme in five years if the deal broke down. (This comment was more bravado than reality because of current restrictions.) Even Iranian President Hassan Rohani, who wants the deal to succeed, was defiant, probably to protect his political flank inside Iran.

In late August and early September, Haley was in Vienna for a meeting with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN body charged with monitoring nuclear installations in the Middle East. However, under the terms of the deal, the IAEA can only visit military sites if there is credible evidence related to the nuclear programme at those locations.

In its latest quarterly report, the IAEA on Iran was following the terms of the deal, including limiting uranium enrichment to a low level. The State Department under Tillerson’s stewardship, has been unequivocal that Iran has “full confidence” in the IAEA and that it has “highly skilled and professional inspectors.”

September 5, after returning from Vienna, Haley said Congress should debate whether the nuclear deal was in US national security interest – even though Congress did so. She said if Trump finds Iran is not in compliance, “we would have to make the difficult decision of doing what we’re convinced the best interests of the US.”

Regardless of who prevails in the White House, the US and Iran are likely to be at odds. Such a move could take the US and the Middle East and the Western allies, which many fear could lead Congress to demanding an Iran sanctions bill.

Under this scenario, Trump could lead Congress to end the US-Iran nuclear deal that were lifted under the terms of the agreement.

Although the other members of the P5+1 countries – the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany – advised – as part of the deal could still adhere to it, hardliners in Iran who never liked the deal to begin with because it severely restricts Tehran’s nuclear capabilities could pressure the Rohani government to pull out of the agreement and restart the nuclear programme.

In December, Trump said the US would launch strikes at Iranian nuclear targets and missile programs, as well as putting Iran to retaliate by attacking the nuclear deal. She tried to use proxy forces such as Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to attack Iran.

It is unclear whether Trump has considered the wide-ranging consequences of such a scenario. Coo lonial powers such as Tillerson, Secretary James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor John Bolton, a hawkish ideologue, from the US military and intelligence community, may prevail and convince the US President not to take such a rash step. Kelly reportedly blocked former Ambassador John Bolton, a hawkish right-wing ideologue, from sending a memo to Trump on why he should cancel the JCPOA.

Trump, however, wields enormous power as both chief executive and commander-in-chief and may override his more pragmatic advisors – a dangerous scenario indeed.
Europe’s problem of returning jihadists

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

Following the fall of Mosul and the retreat of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria, many European countries face the spectre of returning jihadists. An estimated 6,000 Europeans joined ISIS to fight in Iraq and Syria, not including hundreds other so-called Jihadi brides who married ISIS fighters and, in many cases, had their children. European countries have yet to produce consistent procedures on how to deal with those who wish to return home. The issue is expected to represent a major security challenge.

Britain recently stripped more than 150 suspected jihadists of their citizenship, the country’s media reported. “That’s an awful lot of people we have found who will never be coming home again. Our number one preference is to get them on trial. If we don’t think that’s possible, we use disruption techniques,” an unnamed British security source told the Sunday Times. However, this measure only applies to suspects with dual nationalities. International law bars Britain from leaving people stateless. While the UK government can revoke the British citizenship of jihadists with dual nationality, this leaves the issue of how to deal with those with sole British nationality.

“Prosecution and conviction is always challenging, but for dealing with terrorists,” security minister Ben Wallace told the Sunday Times. “We have planned and prepared for the risk posed by British returnees as ISIS is defeated in Iraq and Syria and we are using a range of tools to disrupt and diminish that threat.”

Following terrorist attacks this year in St. Petersburg, Paris, Stockholm, Brussels, Hamburg, Barcelona and Cambrils, it is clear that “soldiers of the Islamic State” are seeking to carry out revenge attacks in Europe, particularly targeting countries that are part of the anti-ISIS coalition. European fighters, hardened by years of battle in Iraq and Syria, are believed to be across Europe, representing a major security challenge.

Perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Europe, including the November 2015 Paris attacks and the London Bridge attack earlier this year, were known to have fought in Syria. A report by Europol, the European Union’s law-enforcement agency, warned that up to 1,000 jihadists could return to Europe from terrorist training camps.

“The number of returnees to Europe is expected to rise if ISIS, as seems likely, is defeated militarily or collapses. An increasing number of returnees will likely strength domestic jihadist movements and consequently magnify the threat they pose to the EU,” the 2017 “Eurorisk Terrorism Situation and Trend Report” said.

Europol Director Rob Wainwright acknowledged that European countries faced an unprecedented threat. “The kind of attacks that ISIS has used in the conflict zone, including car bombs perhaps and others, if that technical capability is known within the organisation, then clearly there’s potential for that to be transferred into a European scenario,” he told the Associated Press.

Wainwright called for a nuanced response to the threat, particularly given that many Europeans had left ISIS after growing disillusioned and that the major concern was how to distinguish those who had left the group on those terms from those who would seek to return secretly to form new terror networks and carry out attacks.

“It’s a reflection of the very serious threat that we face in Europe and a reflection of the fact that I’m afraid we can’t get that threat down to zero,” Wainwright acknowledged.

A UN report on foreign fighter returns outlined how all-equipped European governments are to differentiate between those who pose a threat and those who won’t be reintegrated into society. “There is no one profile for foreign terrorist fighters and this report warns against sweeping generalizations,” authors Hamid El-Saad and Richard Barrett warned.

The report clearly stated there was no solely military solution to the problem of returning fighters. “A single focus on such a ‘hard’ approach is more likely to increase the problem by complicating and prolonging the conditions that persuade individuals to become foreign terrorist fighters,” it said.

It is not just jihadists fleeing Iraq and Syria who pose a risk. ISIS has a strong presence in Libya, with many warning that terrorists could reach mainland Europe posing as refugees. ISIS is known to have issued sophisticated forged Iraqi and Syrian documents to its fighters to smuggle them into Europe.

Interpol has circulated a list of 173 ISIS fighters believed to have received training to carry out attacks in Europe.

It is unclear what role, if any, these have played in setting up terrorist networks involved in recent attacks but what is clear is that attacks carried out by “soldiers of the Islamic State” are not going away anytime soon.

Three weeks later

Barcelona

Francis Ghiles is a Attaché fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.

While Spain, like other European countries, has been under threat from radical Middle East groups since 2001, a certain complacency seems to have set in.

Three weeks after the terrorist attack in Barcelona, a property in the region, which the Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility, many questions are being asked. Some can be answered, others not.

In this context, it is important to try to establish a few facts. Like France, Spain does not allow classification of those who reside in the country by religion. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that 1.8 million Muslims live in Spain, which amounts to less than 4% of the population.

The Salafi groups in Spain are of Moroccan origin. 700,000 are legal Moroccan residents and 250,000 have acquired Spanish nationality. Other well-represented groups include Pakistanis, 66,000 of whom live in and around Barcelona, Bangladeshis, Tunisians and Algerians.

While the Mediterranean coast, in Valencia and Murcia and in Madrid.

Contrary to what is sometimes written, most Moroccans in Spain are not from the northern Berber-speaking Rif region, through which many are from Tangiers. Others are from Beni Mellal, a poor central region whose children have volunteered to take up residence in European countries, such as France and Belgium.

No one knows the complexity of the Muslim community in Spain better than the former El Pais journalist Ignacio Cembrero, author of an authoritative book on the Muslim community in Spain, “La Espaňa de Ali” (Editorial La Esfera 2016).

The second point is that while Spain, like other European countries, has been under threat from radical Middle East groups since 2001, a certain complacency seems to have set in since there had been no terrorist attack since the Madrid bombings in March 2004, an attack by al-Qaeda that caused more deaths (193) than any other such attack on European soil.

The former head of Spanish intelligence service (CNIO) Jorge Dezcallar warned last June in the former El Pais that Spain was still very vulnerable. “The terrorist threat is clear,” he said.

While leaks regarding 15 terrorist networks in the past year, a multi-agency coordinated counterterrorism, anti-crime and intelligence centre to work with four Spanish hosts in combating terrorism and criminal activities in the region.”

“Criminal activities” refer to the fact that, the cable said, “money-launderers gravitate to the region... Spain remains the principal and transhipment zone for the exportation of Amphetamine, Moroc- cocaine, Moroccan cannabis and Afghan heroin destined for Spanish and European Union consumer markets.”

To which can be added hundreds of Moroccans from this region who have gone there from France, Belgium and other European countries.

Francisco de los Rios of the Spanish National Police’s anti-terrorist unit said that the kingdom’s officials were offering a satisfactory answer as to why so many Moroccans were going to the capital of a country plunged in civil war.

The charitable explanation is that the kingdom’s officials were glad to be rid of people they felt were a menace to their country’s security. That is not a helpful way of coordinating the international fight against ISIS.

A Europl report warned that 5,000 jihadists could return to Europe from terrorist training camps.

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Tunisia eyes West African markets to make up for economic downturn in Maghreb, Europe

Tunisia

Tunisia is turning to West Africa for trade and business opportunities to offset the economic downturn in the region. As war in Libya rapidly creates more instability, Tunisia stands at an impasse and Southern Europe as a market is out of reach. Tunisia is looking beyond its traditional partners to boost its economy. Former Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, at the Tunisian African Empowerment conference August 22 in Tunis, said Tunisia is expected to be confirmed as a member in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at a summit in December.

The gathering, which Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed said should take about ten years. Tunisia is expected to be confirmed as a member in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at a summit in December. The meeting, which Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed said should take about ten years.

Unlike traditional markets in southern Europe, ECOWAS offers a range of new trade opportunities including the free movement of people, goods and capital.

Libya had for years functioned as Tunisia’s main trade partner before the 2011 uprisings in North Africa plunged the region into chaos, with the fall of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Libya had for years functioned as Tunisia’s main trade partner before the 2011 uprisings in North Africa plunged the region into chaos, with the fall of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

The land border between Algeria and Morocco, which has been shut down since 1994, the Maghreb Union was launched in 1989 with the aim of creating a Maghreb economic and political union. Tunisia has spent considerable resources trying to ward off the threats of jihadist infiltrating from Libya, Morocco and Mauritania, which, along with Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Mauritania, are members of the Maghreb Arab Union, are also seeking to be ECOWAS members.

The negotiations to join ECOWAS have been ongoing for the past 30 years and the region’s leading players have had their last summit.

Tunisia must compete with Morocco to find a solution in the region. The offer of the region’s leading players has been shut down since 1994, the same year the region’s leading players had their last summit.

New horizons, Libya’s President and ECOWAS’s Economic Community of West African States Chairman Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (L) and ECOWAS President Marcel De Souza (R) during the ECOWAS summit in Monrovia, on June 4.

Tunisia has spent considerable resources trying to ward off the threats of jihadist infiltrating from Libya, Morocco and Mauritania, which, along with Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Mauritania, are members of the Maghreb Arab Union, are also seeking to be ECOWAS members.

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Chahed visited with a delegation of 100 businessmen and toured Niamey, Burkina Faso, Mali and Sudan as part of his diplomatic efforts. Tunisia’s tie to join ECOWAS’s regional free trade area and the free movement of people found a new market in 2011 after a NATO-backed uprising in Libya in 2011 destroyed the hopes of a third of the region.

Tunisia also wants to boost its soft power in Africa, expanding educational and cultural ties. Tunisian universities received about 7,000 sub-Saharan graduates and plan to accept another 10,000 more by 2016.

For Tunisia, gaining a small share of the ECOWAS’s market, which has a total population of 330 million, will not be easy. New challenges will be its powerful neighbour, Algeria, which is unlikely to accept Tunisia’s move to join Morocco in the African group. Algerian leaders have long been referring to “French vipers under the rocks of the ECOWAS.”

“Will we be dreaming to think that ECOWAS is just waiting for Tunisia to join? We should face the truth when we see the stream of immigration from Tunisians and some economic vipers towards Africa,” wrote columnist Meriem Omar in the Tunisian daily, Echourouk.

“The second truth is that Moroc- co had understood all,” she added, pointing out how Moroccan King Mohammed VI had visited the continent several times to meet lead- ers, businessmen and citizens in the region.

El Mehdi Fakir, an economist and a strategy and risk management consultant

Algeria approves measures to cover budget deficit

Algeria’s government approved amendments to a law aimed at securing more revenue to achieve its budget deficits as it struggles to cope with a drop in oil revenue and earnings. Amendments to the Money and Credit Act were discussed at a cabinet meeting, led by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The cabinet discussed plans for the newly appointed government of Prime Minis- ter Ahmed Ouyahia.
The Bahraini former pilot with a food security vision

Michael Jabri-Pickett
Abu Dhabi

Ahmad Almas is a retired Gulf Air pilot who knows one of the greatest issues facing the long-term survival of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is where the region will get its food a generation from now.

The Bahraini businessman is the founder and owner of Pegasus Agriculture, a Dubai-based hydroponics company looking to help the Gulf and the rest of the Middle East figure out their food needs.

“My family has been in the food business for 40 years,” said Almas, who joined Bahrain’s national airline as a flight attendant in 1973. “Part of my family is in farming, like my grandfather, and part in food distribution. “

In 2003, Almas went to Australia to earn his pilot’s licence. When he returned, he flew for Gulf Air for nine years, leaving in 2013 to start Pegasus.

“While flying I was thinking of doing something with food,” he said. After years of research, he said he realized that, despite the weather conditions in the GCC, there was much that the region could control.

Hydroponic farming grows plants in a water-based solution that is rich in nutrients; no soil is needed. This method uses 90% less water than traditional soil-based agriculture. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the founding father of the United Arab Emirates, was so interested in the method that, just before the country was formed in 1971, he invited a research team from the University of Arizona to establish a hydroponics farm in Abu Dhabi.

Forty years later, in a May 2011 report by the University of Arizona titled “Hydroponics system grows crops with less water, no soil,” author Brandon Merrill said: “Hydroponics allows farmers to adapt to any situation, whether it’s Antarctica’s frozen tundra or [or] Saudi Arabia’s windsept and barren deserts.”

Almas said: “Hydroponics is a way forward because of the shortage of water and because of food-security concerns. Food security is a long-term concern. The water issue is number one.”

Aquasta, which is part of the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation, said 65% of the Earth’s freshwater goes to traditional, soil-based agriculture.

In a 2014 report titled “The Future of Global Water Stress: An Integrated Assessment,” the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said that, by 2050, more than 50% of the world’s population will live in areas where freshwater supply is under pressure.

“Companies should be looking to enhance the technology to use the water efficiently,” Almas said. “At Pegasus, we are spending a lot of money on [research and development] to reduce the electricity output of our greenhouses as well as to reduce our carbon footprint and labour costs.”

The company has established a futures fund that focuses on food security. While it is trying to help reduce the GCC’s reliance on imports, it is investing in food manufacturing and technology, research and development, and supply-chain transparency. Operating out of Abu Dhabi, the fund will focus on establishing and growing operations in the Middle East and North Africa region as well as in the United States and Europe. Pegasus also offers a Hydroponic Investment Product, which is sharia compliant.

Almas said hydroponic farming offers solutions in both the short and long term, including controlling the environment so crops can grow year-round.

“Anyone can grow in the GCC in the winter time,” he said. “The challenge is can you grow in the summertime with 30% humidity and 45-degree temperatures.”

NASA data indicate that the warmest year on record was 2016. Combine that with a 2014 World Bank report that said the GCC imports about 70% of its food and the challenges for the region are immense.

“There is no way we are going to stop all the imports because not everything can be grown hydroponically but at least we can get some fresh food delivered on a daily basis to the local market rather than importing it,” Almas said.

“For example, in wintertime, you have flight cancellations and delays, weather conditions affect flights. These issues will increase the prices in the market. Therefore, growing locally will make sure that everything is delivered on time rather than depending on imports. That is part of the solution.”

Another part of the problem is what consumers don’t see. “Consumers see the most polished apples but what has been sprayed on these products — pesticides, which is a big no-no when it comes to food safety,” Almas said.

In April, the UAE banned importation of certain fruit and vegetables from Egypt, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen because of pesticide use.

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment said that as of May, the UAE would no longer allow all varieties of pepper from Egypt, paprika, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, squash, beans and eggplant from Jordan, apples from Lebanon, melons, carrots and watercress from Oman, and fruit from Yemen.

Hydroponic farming uses no pesticides.

In Lisbon, Pegasus is setting up 27 hectares of greenhouses to supply one of the biggest supermarkets in Germany as well as customers in the United Kingdom and Poland.

In the United States, the company has about 73 hectares of land leased for 25 years in Fort Pierce, Florida, north of Miami. “We will be growing strawberries there for the local market and exporting it to the UAE,” Almas said.

In the GCC, Pegasus has operations that include lettuce growing in Oman, mint farms in Abu Dhabi and a greenhouse and technology supplier in Saudi Arabia. Almas said hydroponics is not just about technology, it is also about ways to help the region survive and thrive.

“You’ve got to know what works where, what to grow where, how the food supply moves around the world,” he said. “Because very soon — and I’m talking about in ten years — only five or six countries are going to control food in the world. We have to secure food for the Middle East as well.”

Michael Jabri-Pickett is an Arab Weekly contributor in Abu Dhabi.

Companies should be looking to enhance the technology to use the water efficiently.

Mahmood Almas, founder and owner of Pegasus Agriculture

The Bahraini former pilot with a food security vision
### Maghreb education systems under scrutiny as children head back to school

**Lamine Ghanmi**

**Tunisia**

Teachers and workers in the Maghreb are demanding higher educational standards for students as the academic year approaches. Nearly 2 million students are to resume studies this month, a landmark achievement for a region that has long lacked modern schooling.

Six decades ago, Morocco had just 350 university students, only two of whom were female, the Moroccan Planning Committee said. The situation was similar in Algeria where the National Office of Statistics said there were 1,000 university graduates at the time. Official data from Tunisia said there were only 700 university students in that country at the time of its independence.

Families, intellectuals, politicians and business leaders are looking to education to provide young people with the knowledge and skills needed to advance society and spur economic growth.

They also view schooling as a gateway to civic participation, political engagement and increased capacity and viability of life, as well as a shield from radical Islam, which has jolted the region.

Education experts cite studies showing that highly educated people play an active role in their communities and are less likely to commit crimes. They also point to a direct link between cognitive skills and economic growth.

A look at the region’s education systems reveals an urgent need for reform, however.

A recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said the Maghreb was behind other regions in terms of basic maths and science skills.

Tunisia and Morocco were ranked 64th and 74th, respectively, in school performance out of 76 countries surveyed. Students in the United Arab Emirates were a step above others in the Middle East and North Africa, followed by a group including Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, 66th, Qatar 68th and Oman 72nd.

The study, written by Stanford University Professor Eric Hanushek and Munich University Professor Ludger Woessmann, was compiled from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends or International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

**Tasouk Bouachiche**, publisher of Akhbar Youm.

“Teachers give only 20% of their energy and capacity in the task while the best among them deploy their skills in private schools,” he said. Meanwhile, parents buy books and other materials for their kids and wait for good scores without checking up,” Bouachiche noted.

The situation is similar in Algeria and Tunisia. In Libya, children going to school stand at risk of violence.

“The immediate outcome of the mess the education system has become is that 300,000 students drop out each year without gaining any diploma and without learning the basics of reading and writing,” said Bouachiche.

Tunisia’s former Education Minister Neji Jalloul was pushed to resign in the middle of the academic year after he came under pressure from the teachers’ union. He had attempted to give teachers an end-of-year exam, a tradition of the Arab system, including a crackdown on teacher absences.

The quality of Tunisia’s educational system was reflected in last year’s Program for International Student Assessment – the final placement exam for university students. In which 7,000 students received a mark of zero on the English section and 5,000 received a zero in French.

This alarmed the country where foreign language competency is key to stronger ties with a diversified world.

Tunisia, like many other countries in the region, has seen a rising number of its teachers leave the country for better wages and conditions. More than 1,000 university teachers have left the country in the past three years.

“Some university professors left the country in the beginning of 2011 but the number increased in the past three years. 800 of them this year,” Higher Education Minister Slim Khebous told a local interviewer.

“They practice their rights to choose their future but we lose important skilled national competences.”

In Algeria, thousands of highly skilled university teachers, doctors, nurses and others left the country during the 1992-2003 civil war.

In Libya, more than 500,000 children need assistance due to violence and political strife that have displaced families, UNESCO said in a statement.

### Schoolgirls in Iraq’s Mosul aim to catch up on lost years

**Simon Valmary**

**Mosul**

Despite having fallen three years behind their peers elsewhere in Iraq, it’s been mostly smiles all around for the girls at Mosul’s Tunisian School since it reopened its damaged gates after the jihadists fled.

With a blast from her whistle to signal the end of recess, a supervisor in a black robe and white headscarf called the teenage girls back to class.

The girls chatted all the way back to the classrooms, each packed with an average of 35 pupils.

In late May, the school became the first to reopen in western Mosul, as Iraqi forces pressed a sector-by-sector campaign that expelled Islamic State (ISIS) militants from the whole of the country’s second city.

Several of the schools had followed suit.

Under ISIS, “we had 27 pupils. Now, they number 65,” said Nihad Jaseem, an administrative employee at the school in the Mosul al-Jadida district.

Its Christoph-scratched metal gates have been covered with sheets and blankets, shuttered windows let in the earring summer heat, the walls are cracked, water and electricity were only restored in late July, the teachers have not been paid and the school has a severe shortage of books.

“We’re happy!” insisted Jaseem.

After three years under ISIS rule, “we want to develop, we want to be civilised again. These girls have a fresh chance,” she said. “Their future was about to be destroyed forever.”

At the next recess, the girls, aged 13-15, chat and giggle in the corridors or outside in rare spaces in the shade. They all sport headscarves, at times with a brooch or bow attached, some wearing makeup and a small number in the full-face veil.

“We cater to everyone here,” Jaseem said.

“We have a mission, I want them (the girls) to succeed,” said Iman Yunis, who has been a teacher for 26 years, ten of them at Trubla school.

Under ISIS rule, teachers were forced to show up or face arrest by the religious police.

“We never ran away but those with nowhere to go had to come,” she said.

Biography, history, geography and sciences were scrapped from the curriculum, leaving only studies on Islam and the Arabic and English languages.

“We don’t talk about those times anymore. It’s like a wound that hasn’t healed, so we don’t touch it,” said Shads Shammaa, who teaches Arabic at the school.

“In any case, we are not totally rid of ISIS. Some of the girls may have family members in ISIS.”

Behind the stream of smiles around the school, fear and sorrow sometimes come to the surface.

“We’re all happy but our happiness is not complete because we’ve all lost someone. A friend of mine was killed together with her family a few days ago in the Old City,” the last sector of Mosul recaptured, said 15-year-old Seema Farsi.

A schoolmate, Nur Kheiri, chipped in: “The other day someone appeared to want to carry out a suicide attack on a school but was stopped in time. The government should send in soldiers to protect us.”

On the academic front, the priority for pupils aiming to become professional one day is to catch up with their peers, as the Iraqi government has said it does not recognise schooling under ISIS, which scored control of Mosul in 2014.

“In the race to catch up, schools in western Mosul, which was retaken months after the eastern sector, are operating in the summertime, with holidays cancelled this year,” said a high school student.

“We have a day left after the exams and we’re only covered half the book,” complained Shamsa Mahes.

“It’s very crowded and the heat is unbearable but we don’t care. What we want is books,” said her friend Khetti, with a cheeky smile on her face.

“My favourite subject is chemistry because that’s the only book available.”

(Agence France-Presse)
After Tunisia, gender equality inheritance debate grips Egypt

Ibrahim Ouf

Cairo

W

any Egyptians are calling on Cairo to fol-
dow Tunisia’s lead towards gender
equality and grant women equal inheritance
rights as men.

“Everything is changing, which makes it necessary for the religious establishment to reconsider the interpretation of texts governing women’s inheritance rights,” said liberal activist Khalid Montasser.

“Men of religion insist on the application of religious texts governing men. Women equal inheritance rights as men have totally changed, which requires a change in their share of the wealth in inheritance issues,” said Hoda Badran, chairwoman of the Alliance for Arab Women.

“This fact is that the economic role played by women in society has totally changed, which requires a change in their share of the wealth of their families, if any,” said Hoda Badran, chairwoman of the Alliance for Arab Women. “We need to reach new interpretations of the religious texts, ones that can cope with this change."

The constitutional Article 308 of the Egyptian Penal Code, which allows rapists or sexual assault perpetrators to escape punishment by marrying their victims, has been abolished by the Lower House of Parliament, marking a victory for women activists.

They have been fighting for years against the “provocative” article that had a negative effect on the lives of many young women.

The amendment was hailed as a triumph of justice, and is expected to lead to a decrease in sexual violence and abortion. Nearly 140 rape cases were reported in Jordan last year, crimes against morality and public morals increased 22% and abortion crime rates were up 60%, a report by IT Criminal Management Police Organization.

Wafa Bani Mustafa, chairwoman of the Coalition of Women’s MPs, a group leading in Combat Violence Against Women, which has rallied legislators against Article 308, described the abrogation as “a major win.

“While many Egyptians welcomed debate on the issue, it is unclear whether policy will move beyond discussion to actual change. Montasser and other advocates said, while al-Azhar insists that this process cannot be challenged, it is happy to overlook other outdated applications of Islamic law, including punishments for theft and adultery.

Montasser called for a religious “revolution” to modernise and reform gender equality in Islam, matching requests from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to reform religious discourse.

"You cannot ask women to shoul-
der the burden of lives with men and men and then tell them that they will not be equal to those men in inheritance," Montasser said. “This thinking needs to change.”

Ibrahim Ouf is an Egyptian journalist.
Casablanca street art burgeoning in bustling Casablanca

Saad Guerraoui

Casablanca’s street art is now making a living from this art. This shows that it’s not a hobby anymore to fill the time with,” said Malouli. Emerging talent Mehdi Gero, 24, painted murals for a cube-shaped fortress in the Al Hank neighbourhood along with two other artists as part of Shagha Bagha. Gero said: “The experience was exhilarating, which allowed me to interact with my fellow artists and exchange ideas and skills.” From far and wide, the walls, Mohammedi Y Square was turned into an open-air theatre on a June evening hosting “The Tale of Noses,” an adaptation of an African tale that tackled a thorny issue in the Moroccan society. A packed audience watched the play that denounced racism against sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco.

The “Urban Art Wave” project has given Moroccan street artists carte blanche to redraw the face of Casablanca. Shahira Bagha is another street art initiative, which is managed by the Eac-L’Boulvart Association. Salah Malouli, artistic director of Shahira Bagha, said the idea for the initiative came while he was living in Barcelona. “We are preparing for this year’s edition, which will be in October. It will be completely independent from L’Boulevard Festival,” Malouli said.

“We now fully insist on local artists, whether they are specialising in graffiti or mural paintings, because we want to give them the opportunity to shine in the Sbagha because we want to give them the opportunity to shine in the Sbagha Casablanca Street Art Festival,” he said. Malouli said street art is winning hearts and minds of Moroccan and international artists, which is proof that Moroccan artists are improving.

“The goal was to educate children on the art of cinema,” Bchini said. “Little by little we held movie workshops to teach children the language of cinema.” Bchini emphasised that the films are entirely the children’s work. They are involved in every part of the process, he said. From writing the script to filming the movie. Bchini selected the films “Little Hands,” an open-air theatre on a June evening hosting “The Tale of Noses,” an adaptation of an African tale that tackled a thorny issue in the Moroccan society. A packed audience watched the play that denounced racism against sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco.

The group has put on various cultural events, such as “Cinema is Coming,” a festival that features movie screenings and debates in various neighbourhoods. Another initiative, “The Screen of Schools,” took movie screenings and discussions inside classrooms. “We introduced children to the language of cinema, to the ideas of directors,” Bchini said. “For many, this was their introduction to the world of cinema as they never knew what it is. It was fascinating and surprising for them to attend and watch the film.”

“The idea is to help rise this generation who will be the leaders of the cultural scene and animators of these film societies in the future,” Bchini said. Rollz Khlifi is a regular Travel and Culture contributor to The Arab Weekly.

Tunisian cinema club focuses on next generation of artists

Roua Khlifi

Douar Hicher

A group of children focused their attention on the screen as a weekly movie screening began at Douar Hicher, a municipality in the Tunisian governorate of Manouba. As soon as the credits rolled, a lively debate about the movie began.

Douar Hicher’s Cinema Club for Children is one of many activities organised by the Tunisian Federation of Film Clubs (FTCC), which aims to introduce cinema to children in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

Saheem Bchini, president of the children’s cinema club, said that it was one of the only cultural programmes for children in the area. “Over the past years, the children’s cinema club moved from Le Bardo to Bouali before we settled in Douar Hicher. The cinema club has also expanded to the surrounding regions,” Bchini said. “It is the product of the dream we had to set something for children.”

The FTCC has organised an annual workshop at the International Amateur Film Festival of Kelibia. The initiative, titled “Little Hands,” includes daily workshops that conclude with an original film written and produced by children. The film is screened at the festival closing ceremony for thousands of attendees and international film-makers. “The goal was to educate children on the art of cinema,” Bchini said. “Little by little we held movie workshops to teach children the language of cinema.”

Bchini emphasised that the films are entirely the children’s work. They are involved in every part of the process, he said. From writing the script to filming the movie. For some of the children, the “Little Hands” workshop is a highlight of their year. “I have been going to the festival for years now but I have been attending the workshop for four years,” said Sabra Elmakhlif. “When we started this year, we decided to work on the idea of recycling. It is important to recycle to protect our country and keep it clean. We used origami to convey this idea, which is what we can reuse the garbage. I want to continue this, making films.”

Bchini praised the children’s ability to learn and get involved in cinema. “It was fascinating and surprising to hear the children’s remarks and opinions about the movies,” he explained. “Sometimes you would not even expect their questions. It is amazing how, at that young age, they are interested in learning about everything including the details of the film.

“They have creativity and wit. They focus and ask smart questions and there is a great response and interaction,” Bchini said he hopes the initiatives will help children revive cinema in Tunisia and bring a new perspective. “The idea is to help rise this generation who will be the leaders of the cultural scene and animators of these film societies in the future,” Bchini said. Rollz Khlifi is a regular Travel and Culture contributor to The Arab Weekly.


Some Moroccan artists are now making a living from this art. This shows that it’s not a hobby anymore to fill the time with,” said Malouli. Emerging talent Mehdi Gero, 24, painted murals for a cube-shaped fortress in the Al Hank neighborhood along with two other artists as part of Shagha Bagha. Gero said: “The experience was exhilarating, which allowed me to interact with my fellow artists and exchange ideas and skills.” From far and wide, the walls, Mohammedi Y Square was turned into an open-air theatre on a June evening hosting “The Tale of Noses,” an adaptation of an African tale that tackled a thorny issue in the Moroccan society. A packed audience watched the play that denounced racism against sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco.
Egypt is seeking to rebrand Sinai as a destination for international religious tourism despite tight security conditions in parts of the peninsula because of bloody incidents between the army and a branch of the Islamic State (ISIS).

The government is organising a conference in September to promote Sinai’s potential as an international religious tourism centre. It is hoping to capitalise on the significance the area holds for the three major monotheistic religions to attract millions of pilgrims and visitors every year.

“Sinai is a place where all religious meet,” said Gaber Taye, a senior official at the Ministry of Religious Endowments, which is sponsoring the new drive. “It is the headquarters of the Prophet, who is believed to have received the Ten Commandments. It is also an important place for three major monotheistic religions, which has some of Egypt’s most ancient sites and a history that stretches back over 4,000 years.”

“The terrorists want to scare everybody out of Sinai so they can claim the land for themselves. They will hide like rats as tourism activities develop throughout the peninsula,” he said.

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

**BOOK REVIEW**

*Shoah Through Muslim Eyes* by Mehnaz M. Afridi

Dunia El-Zobaidi is a regular Arab Weekly contributor in London.

Many Muslims say Jews used the Shoah to colonise Palestine.

Dunia El-Zobaidi

Many Muslims say Jews used the Shoah to colonise Palestine. Engineers and architects in a number of Middle Eastern countries have started to work on rebuilding the ancient city of Jerusalem as a place of pilgrimage for Israeli tourists.

Researchers are divided on the location of the real Mount Sinai, and many say that the one in Sinai is where Moses is believed to have received the Ten Commandments.

Near Mount Sinai is Saint Catherine’s Monastery, said to be the oldest continuously occupied monastery in the world. The Companions Mosque opened in Sharm el-Sheikh in March. It cost $1.6 million to build and can accommodate up to 3,300 people.

Egypt’s tourism sector was dealt a painful blow in late 2015 when ISIS operatives allegedly planted a bomb on a Russian passenger plane, killing 224 people on board. This led to Russia and other countries suspending flights to Egyptian tourist destinations, depriving the nation of millions of international tourists and billions of dollars in lost revenue.

International tourists have started returning to Egypt in numbers in recent months, with hotel occupancy in traditional destinations such as Sharm el-Sheikh, Hurgha- da and Luxor experiencing an increased number of visitors.

Tourism experts said, however, that Egypt has a long way to go before it returns to the pre-Russian plane bombing tourist flow rates.

“This is why we say putting Sin- ai’s religious sites on the interna- tional religious tourism map will carry a huge number of bene- fits,” said Ahmed Shoukry, the head of the International Tourism section at the Ministry of Tour- ism. “This can bring in a new type of tourists overlooked for years by entertainment and heritage tourism campaigns.”

Renewed international interest in Sinai, especially in unusual tourist sites, could sabotage plans by the ISIS militants bent on establishing an Islamic caliphate in Sinai, retired police Major-General Fawaz Megrahi said.

“Terrorists want to scare everybody out of Sinai so they can claim the land for themselves. They will hide like rats as tourism activities develop throughout the peninsula,” he said.

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

**INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS HAVE STARTED RETURNING TO EGYPT IN NUMBERS IN RECENT MONTHS**

A long way to go. Hikers walk in the Wadi Hudra area in South Sinai.

**RENEWED INTEREST**

The Saint Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula.

**SHOAH THROUGH MUSLIM EYES**

For the past four years, Sinai, which has some of Egypt’s most renowned beaches and resorts, including Sharm el-Sheikh, has made headlines, not for its tour- ist charms, but for the blood spilled in it. ISIS militants carried out at- tacks that claimed the lives of hundreds of troops and policemen and turned some parts of northern Sinai into no-go areas for civilians.

ISIS has specifically targeted Christian attractions frequented by hundreds of Christian families to flee to cities west of the Suez Canal.

“Followers of Islam, Christianity and Judaism would lose a lot by not visiting religious sites in Sinai,” Taye said. “We are speaking here of sites that witnessed the very beginning of the three religions.”

Among the sites the ministry will try to put on the international tourism map is Mount Sinai. Also known as Mount Horeb, it is men- tioned many times in the Book of Exodus, the Bible and the Quran. Researchers are divided on the loca- tion of the real Mount Sinai and many say that the one in Sinai is where Moses is believed to have received the Ten Commandments.

For Afridi, denying the Shoah is a “crime against humanity.” Many Muslims claim the death toll is exaggerated despite evidence. The subject is taboo to speak about and, if it is spoken about, it must be seen relative to other discus- sions of suffering, some argue.

“God created the lives that were killed so it is our responsibil- ity to remember them,” Afridi emphasised. She said misperceptions be- tween Muslims and Jews go back to the time of the Shoah.

She points out that the term “Muselmman” — literally meaning “the Muslim” — is seen in many Shoah testimonies. It was used to describe a prisoner who was sur- rendering, as Muslims surrender to God, Afridi said.

Many testimonies described the surrendering as “defeaces,” “dying of malnutrition,” “useless garbage” and “the drowned.” How- ever, Muslims see surrender in a positive way, as it is a surrender to God in the act of prayer.

In her book, the author high- lights stories of Muslims who were directly linked to the Shoah. Some helped Jews, some were imprisoned in camps with Jews and some turned away. Albania, a predominantly Muslim country, saved all its Jewish citizens during the Shoah. Afridi wanted to give those Muslims a voice regarding the Shoah.

She also stressed the miscon- ception that there was a strong relationship between Arabs and the Nazis. Arabs needed alliances and did not want Jews to immi- grate to Palestine. Therefore, the alliance was sparked by material interests and strategic concerns, not by ideology, Afridi contended, noting that Muslims and Arabs were also seen as racially inferior by the Nazis because they were seen as foreigners.

Many Muslims say Jews used the Shoah to colonise Palestine and Jews were given support from Europe and the United States because of the Shoah and the guilt from European culpability, witnesses and the power of the American Jewish community. Afridi said we must deconstruct stereotypes of Jews in the Muslim world and vice versa.

Further educating about each other’s history and suffering will deeply affect the political realities and circumstances of Jews and Muslims, Afridi said, adding that history was taught very differently in Muslim countries, compared to Western ones.

“While in the United States, the narrative of colonial history has changed with regard to events such as Native American geno- cide, enslavement of Africans, Vietnam and the civil rights move- ment, this change has not hap- pened in many Muslim curricula,” Afridi said.

One lesson to be learned from the Shoah, Afridi noted, is that when the Jews went to France, they emerged in a Jewish ghetto because they did not speak the language. Today many Muslim and Arabs are travelling to the West and doing the same thing.

“This is a problem because it is important to assimilate and be kind to all so stereotypes are fur- ther broken down,” she said.

Afridi stated that if a Muslim be- lies Jews are his enemies, then he must be listening to extremist factions that openly call to exter- minate Jews. “Prophet Moham- med, peace be upon him, married a Jewish woman who is given by God the title of ‘The mother of believers’,” she said.

She said anti-Semitism was not created by Muslims but its roots are traced to Christianity and the accusation that Jews were Christ’s killers.

“Shoah Through Muslim Eyes” is an excellent study of overlooked facts connecting Muslims, Arabs and Jews. Afridi’s intelligent analysis successfully breaks down common stereotypes and miscon- ceptions and provides vital les- sons from the past that can easily be implemented.
The Bent Pyramid at Dahshur, about 60km south of Cairo, Egypt.

**Dahshur pyramids set the standards for Egypt's ancient architecture**

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

The Pyramids Plateau in Giza might be many times more famous, more visited and more read about than Dahshur, the royal necropolis 40km south of Cairo, but the Giza pyramids were constructed using lessons from the necropolis.

“A reading of the history of the pyramids of the necropolis shows this to be totally true,” said Adel Okasha, an official of the Ministry of Antiquities. “The Dahshur pyramids set the standards of pyramid building in Egypt for many years after their construction.”

**Around the Dahshur pyramids, there are the cemeteries of the officials of the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom.**

Located in the desert on the west bank of the Nile, Dahshur boasts a number of pyramids, the most important of which is the Bent Pyramid. The pyramid provided a good learning experience for pyramid builders in Egypt, one that shaped the ancient Egyptians’ knowledge about construction of the gigantic structures.

Sneferu, the founding monarch of the Fourth Dynasty who ordered the building of what became the Bent Pyramid, envisioned a smooth-sided structure but the result was a pyramid bending towards its centre because of a mistake in the base design.

“Nevertheless, the mistake would prove to be very useful later when Sneferu ordered the construction of another pyramid, one that sought to avoid the mistakes of the turned-bent one,” Okasha said.

Thus, the Red Pyramid, the largest of the pyramids in Dahshur and Egypt's first smooth-sided one came into existence. The pyramid, which derives its name from the colour of its limestone, is the third largest in Egypt, after Cheops and Chephren in Giza.

The experience the pharaohs acquired in Dahshur formed construction knowledge that helped them master their work for many years to come. It caused a change in the pyramid construction techniques, opening the door for the existence of smooth-sided pyramids long after steep-sided pyramids were the only structures possible.

Sneferu’s son, Cheops, continued his father in pyramid construction by building his own on the Giza Plateau. This pyramid the “Black Pyramid” of Sneferu is by far Egypt’s largest and most famous. It is 146 metres tall. His father’s Red Pyramid is 157 metres tall.

“Despite this, the pyramids in Dahshur are a study in architecture,” said Abdel Monem Madbouli, a tour guide. “This is why they are popular among those who want to get information about the evolution of ancient Egyptian architecture.”

Cheops could never have built his pyramid the way he did without lessons learned from his father’s mistake.

The Black Pyramid is the third biggest pyramid in Dahshur. It dates to the rule of Amenemhat III, a pharaoh of the 12th Dynasty who ruled from 1860-1814 BC. Though it is not in a very good shape, the Black Pyramid continues to attract visitors to the necropolis.

A broken wooden statuette found by a Japanese mission inside an unidentified burial shaft in Egypt’s Dahshur Necropolis, south of the Giza Plateau.

It lies close to the tomb of King Hor of the 27th Dynasty and the burial site of his daughter Nubet-ka-hered.

Around the Dahshur pyramids, there are the cemeteries of the officials of the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom.

What makes Dahshur a site worthy of visiting, Madbouli said, is that it can be part of a package tour including the Pyramids Plateau in Giza and Saqqara, another wonderful necropolis, 15km south of Dahshur.

Meanwhile, the first phase of the New Egyptian Museum, only metres from the Pyramid Plateau, is expected to be inaugurated in early 2018. The museum, which has been under construction for more than a decade, will replace the museum in downtown Cairo.

“When opened, the New Museum will be a strong source of attraction to the area,” Madbouli said. “This will give the chance to a large number of people visiting the Pyramids Plateau to visit wonderful sites like Dahshur as well.”

It takes visitors almost half an hour from the Pyramids Plateau to arrive in Dahshur.

Transportation of all types is available and the ride is not expensive. It costs history student Khalid Mahmoud and a group of friends $44 to travel from southern Cairo to Dahshur and $5 each for entry fee.

“The whole journey cost us this amount of money, which is negligible compared to the value of the places,” Mahmoud said. “We made a tour of the pyramids as well as the burial sites but the impression we got was the pyramids were so pervasive that they could not rest before they mastered pyramid building as an art of which they became the world’s masters.”

**The remains of an ancient Egyptian pyramid that were discovered near the well-known Bent Pyramid of King Sneferu in Dahshur. (AFP)**