Saudi-Iranian tensions escalating as Houthi missile attack deemed ‘act of war’

Mohammed Alkhereiji

The Arab Weekly

November 12, 2017

London

Tensions dramatically escalated in the Arabian Peninsula in Riyadh was launched from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen. The missile, said by US officials to be of Iranian origin, was intercepted by the kingdom’s air defence system.

“Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain advised their citizens to avoid traveling to Lebanon. This came as a comparable national was reported missing and suspected of being kidnapped in Lebanon.

Since his accession to the throne in 2015, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud has adopted an assertive foreign policy that has seen the kingdom’s political relations with the United States improve under President Donald Trump. However, the kingdom’s relations with Iran have deteriorated.

Face of terror. A 2015 file picture shows a journalist looking at documents on bin Laden’s office in the US Department of the Interior Intelligence’s website.

Meeting challenges. A Saudi man walks past posters depicting Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (R) and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz in Riyadh.

CIA documents shed light on bin Laden's Machiavellian mindset

Mamoon Alabbasi

London

Osama bin Laden’s 228-page handwritten, yellow-bound diary was among the intelligence pearls of the vast trove of material seized during the US Navy SEALs’ raid on his walled compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011, in which the al-Qaeda founder was killed.

The documents show that bin Laden had gravitated to a “new generation” of leader to replace those assassinated by the Americans – among them his son Saad, killed in a US air strike in Pakistan in July 2009. Saad’s half-sister, Hamza, now in his late 20s and Osama bin Laden’s supposed favourite, is apparently being groomed to take command.

More than that, bin Laden’s diary appears to show that the future al-Qaeda leader considered political expediency more important than ideological and religious convictions.

An example of this Machiavellianism was revealed in an audio file of an al-Qaeda operative who was killed in a US strike in Yemen in 2007. Iran offered al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, a notorious al-Qaeda leader who was killed in 2006 in Iraq, negotiated with its ideological nemesis – Iran’s Shiites – to gain entry into Iraq.

The ultimate illustration of bin Laden’s Machiavellian nature, however, was his cynical marriage of convenience with Iran.

“Anyone who wants to strike America, Iran is ready to support him and help him,” bin Laden noted in 2007. Iran offered al-Qaeda “money and arms and everything they need, and offered them training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in return for striking American interests in Saudi Arabia,” he said.

This was a far cry from the 1990s, when al-Qaeda sided with the United States to combat the godless Soviet Union. Al-Qaeda considered that strategy to be in conformity with Islam at the time since Americans – unlike Soviets – were among the “People of the Book,” an Islamic expression that includes Christians and Jews.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mohammed Alkher...
Houthi missile attack rattles Gulf states, compels Saudi-Iranian tensions

Mohammed Alkhereiji

**London**

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalated with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his Arab allies. In a telephone call with British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, the Saudi government alleged that Iran was behind cross-border missile attacks in the region, potentially destabilizing the Middle East.

Crown Prince Mohammed accused Iran of direct military aggression against Saudi Arabia. The involvement of the Islamic Republic in supplying its affiliated Houthi militia with missiles is considered an act of war against the kingdom, the crown prince said in a report by the official Saudi Press Agency.

Saudi Arabia intercepted a ballistic missile fired November 4 from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. The missile was described as a threat to be an intended target, King Khalid International Airport, on Riyadh’s northern outskirts.

The Houthi movement also threatened to attack Saudi Arabia and its allies, with reports indicating that the attack was Iran-backed. "All airports, ports, border crossings, and areas of any importance to Saudi Arabia are at risk," said the Saudi-led coalition. The Houthis claimed to have carried out a "well-documented" attack.

A report in the Iranian hard-line daily Kayhan suggested that the Tehran-sponsored Yemeni militia would target other Saudi cities or "change the direction of their missiles to the Shia-held parts of the country, including the port of Dubai."

The White House lauded the kingdom for exposing Iran’s support for the Houthi militia and called for the United Nations to consider evidence of Iran’s support for the Houthis and other proxies, warning that Iraniandling of the militia in Yemen is well-documented, however.

A UN report stated that Iran’s arming of Houthi rebels dates to 2009, the early years of their insurgency. The report, by a panel of experts and presented to the UN Security Council, included findings of an investigation into the "tentative involvement of the Iranian regime in support of the Houthis in Yemen, which was found carrying weapons.

The information in the report "suggests that the Houthi case follows a pattern of arms shipments to Yemen by sea that can be traced back to at least 2009," said the document seen by Agence France-Presse.

A letter from last March said that Iran’s "newest and most advanced" missile was used in the attack, with some media organs that Hariri was unilaterally removed from the kingdom and could be considered an act of war.

Hariri's announcement of his resignation on November 4 from his position as Lebanon's prime minister in a speech November 4 from Riyadh, in the presence of Riyadh's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, was brokered in which Hezbollah received permission to operate unchecked.

Hariri was informed of how critical the current situation is in the region and in Lebanon, as well as the aggression against Saudi Arabia by Lebanese militia groups. In a statement, Hariri said that he had been told that such acts are considered as a declaration of war on Saudi Arabia, due to its allowing Hezbollah to operate unchecked.

Serious breach, which outlines conditions in which a country can engage in self-defence.

"It was an Iranian missile, fired from Saudi Arabia by Lebanon's Hezbollah group," said the report. The report revealed that the IRGC had increased arms and logistic support to the militia in a strategy that mirrors that of Iran’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels fired at Riyadh by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

"It was an act of war against the kingdom," Hariri said in a statement condemning an attack he had accused of coming from Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s minister of state for Gulf relations, Adel al-Jubeir, reiterated the kingdom's position on Iran's support for the militia in Yemen. "We see this as an act of war," he said.

"Iran cannot lob missiles at Saudi cities and towns and expect us not to take steps."

Saudi Arabia and its allies have increased their military presence in Yemen, with a number of air strikes launched against Houthi positions. The likelihood of a direct confrontation with Iran is possible, with the kingdom’s leaders warning of the potential for a direct conflict.

The Houthis have been at war with the Iran-backed Houthi-led coalition temporarily closing all of Yemen’s land and sea border crossings and airports. Riyadh offered a reward for information leading to the arrest of 40 wanted individuals from the Houthi movement.

GCC-Lebanese relations tumble

Mohammed Alkhereiji

**London**

Following the abrupt resignation of Lebanon’s Prime Minister Saad Hariri, relations between Lebanon and its traditional benefactor Saudi Arabia have gone from bad to worse, with Riyadh ordering its nationals to leave Lebanon. Due to the situations in the Republic of Lebanon, an official source in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Saudi government, which had advised nationals to avoid travelling to Lebanon from other GCC countries, would be dealt with as a government declaring war on Saudi Arabia, due to its allowing Hezbollah to operate unchecked.

A media report said that a statement by the Saudi foreign minister in a speech November 4 from Riyadh, in the presence of Riyadh’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, highlighted the kingdom’s position on Iran’s support for the militia in Yemen. "We see this as an act of war," he said.

"It was an Iranian missile, fired from Saudi Arabia by Lebanon's Hezbollah group," said the report. The report revealed that the IRGC had increased arms and logistic support to the militia in a strategy that mirrors that of Iran’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels fired at Riyadh by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

"It was an act of war against the kingdom," Hariri said in a statement condemning an attack he had accused of coming from Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s minister of state for Gulf relations, Adel al-Jubeir, reiterated the kingdom's position on Iran's support for the militia in Yemen. "We see this as an act of war," he said.

"Iran cannot lob missiles at Saudi cities and towns and expect us not to take steps."

Serious breach, which outlines conditions in which a country can engage in self-defence.

"It was an Iranian missile, fired from Saudi Arabia by Lebanon's Hezbollah group," said the report. The report revealed that the IRGC had increased arms and logistic support to the militia in a strategy that mirrors that of Iran’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels fired at Riyadh by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

"It was an act of war against the kingdom," Hariri said in a statement condemning an attack he had accused of coming from Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s minister of state for Gulf relations, Adel al-Jubeir, reiterated the kingdom's position on Iran’s support for the militia in Yemen. "We see this as an act of war," he said.

"Iran cannot lob missiles at Saudi cities and towns and expect us not to take steps."

Serious breach, which outlines conditions in which a country can engage in self-defence.

"It was an Iranian missile, fired from Saudi Arabia by Lebanon's Hezbollah group," said the report. The report revealed that the IRGC had increased arms and logistic support to the militia in a strategy that mirrors that of Iran’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels fired at Riyadh by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

"It was an act of war against the kingdom," Hariri said in a statement condemning an attack he had accused of coming from Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s minister of state for Gulf relations, Adel al-Jubeir, reiterated the kingdom's position on Iran’s support for the militia in Yemen. "We see this as an act of war," he said.

"Iran cannot lob missiles at Saudi cities and towns and expect us not to take steps."

Serious rupture. An Emirati Eithad Airways' Boeing 787 airliner takes off from Bahrain International Airport, on November 10.
The wave of arrests and seizures that has washed over Saudi Arabia has fundamentally altered the structure of the state as it has ever existed since the princes. Saudi Arabia has practised a form of collective leadership in which disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways. The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.

Big news. A Saudi man reads a newspaper in Riyadh, on November 5.

**Saudi Arabia pursues major anti-corruption drive**

The investigation extended beyond the royal family, with what appears to be Riyadh anti-corruption initiatives, the United Arab Emirates. The UAE Central Bank froze bank accounts belonging to 19 Saudis under investigation, a Reuters report states.

Saudi-owned Al Arabiya news channel reported 11 princes and a dozen former ministers and four current ministers had been detained in an anti-graft investigation.

The list of those arrested read like a Who’s Who of Saudi power brokers and reinforced the concentration of power. If the crown prince’s economic reforms prove too tough on some, it will be necessary to complete the first phase discreetly to preserve the integrity of the legal proceedings.

The plan to drain the swamp is to preserve the integrity of the legal proceedings.

**The Arab Weekly staff**

London

Since the announcement of the crackdown on corruption, there were widespread expressions of support for the Saudi anti-corruption drive.

Social media, where many of the identities of those under investigation were first revealed, Saudi Arabia was overwhelmed with support, with the hashtag “King fires corruption” shared approximately 1.4 million times on Twitter in the first day, the BBC reports.

Social media users compared the arrests to the 2011 “Arab spring”-inspired protests that swept the Middle East, launching the hashtag “November 4 Revolution,” which was forwarded more than 62,000 times in one day.

Saudi news media threw their support behind the arrests, with outlets, especially state-owned, appearing in publications as both Al-Riyadh and Al-Hayat hailing the anti-corruption campaign:

“Anti-corruption laws are all the more necessary as they are a powerful way to bid for popular support to settle internal conflicts. In ancient Rome, rulers used corruption campaigns to eliminate enemies. England’s King Henry VIII used corruption campaigns to weaken young Saudis frustrated by stagnant economic opportunities and threats of the country losing prestige in the eyes of the world. It has the jurisdiction to “investigate, issue arrest warrants, travel bans and freezes accounts and portfolios,” a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

Prominent members of Saudi society, including members of the royal family, high-profile businessmen are arrested on corruption charges. The arrests came after a three-year investigation and more arrests are expected.

**The Arab Weekly staff**

London

Saudia Arabia has launched a crackdown on corruption seeking to hold both powerful princes and royally accountable.

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud issued a royal decree November 4 forming an anti-corruption task force to be overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud. It has the jurisdiction to “investigate, issue arrest warrants, travel bans and freezes accounts and portfolios,” a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

Prominent members of Saudi society, including members of the royal family, high-profile businessmen and former ministers who have been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways.

The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.

The wave of arrests and seizures that has washed over Saudi Arabia has fundamentally altered the structure of the state as it has ever existed since the princes. Saudi Arabia has practised a form of collective leadership in which disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways.

The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.

The wave of arrests and seizures that has washed over Saudi Arabia has fundamentally altered the structure of the state as it has ever existed since the princes. Saudi Arabia has practised a form of collective leadership in which disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways.

The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.

The wave of arrests and seizures that has washed over Saudi Arabia has fundamentally altered the structure of the state as it has ever existed since the princes. Saudi Arabia has practised a form of collective leadership in which disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways.

The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.

The wave of arrests and seizures that has washed over Saudi Arabia has fundamentally altered the structure of the state as it has ever existed since the princes. Saudi Arabia has practised a form of collective leadership in which disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud controlled the financial and economic context, Saudi Arabia’s internal power dynamics and so we also changing in other important ways.

The cardinal rule has always been that disputes are settled quietly within the family, with out the involvement of outsiders. Moreover, the power base of the royal family has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades.

The system was intended to avoid the concentration of too much power in any one branch of the family, and to keep the sons of the founding king a stake in it. While formal power has always resided with the crown prince, in practice the king was expected to consult with other senior members of the royal family and rule by consensus. The Sauds were discouraged and occasion ally censured but, for the most part, princes have been free to accumulate money and business interests.

However, in a fundamental break with past practice, King Salman and his son have launched an anti-corruption campaign and arrested ministers and officials suspected of using their offices for personal gains and embezzlement.

The progressive removal of senior princes from government over the last three years and now the wave of arrests of princes and ministers is jeopardising the safety and wealth of royal family members for the first time.

Corruption has been rife in Saudi Arabia for decades and has drained fabulous amounts of wealth from the state into private hands.
Lebanon watches and waits as regional powers circle

Nicholas Blanford
Beirut

Lebanon and Saudi Arabia are weighing a looming crisis that could result in a blunting of/booted crisis following the resignation of Lebanon’s prime minister, a key ally to the Saudis. Even as Lebanon is facing a potential threat from Iran, as Hezbollah, the tiny Mediterranean country finds itself caught up in the broader regional confrontation between an expansionist Iran and a newly bullish Saudi Arabia.

The initial victim of Riyadh’s tough new policy towards Lebanon is Hariri, who appears to have been compelled to step down by his erstwhile Saudi backers while on an unannounced visit to Saudi Arabia.

Sources close to Hariri and the Saudi king Abdullah said Riyadh — or more specifically Crown Prince Mu- hammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz — had lost patience with Hariri’s apparently accommodating stance towards Hezbollah.

Hariri has repeatedly stated that his priority is to maintain political, sectarian and economic stability in Lebanon, even if that compels him to compromise with Hezbollah. The Saudis, however, appear to believe the arrangement is one-sided with Hezbollah dominating and showing little effort to reciprocate.

“The (political) losses (in Leba- non) from its patronage of Hariri have become unbearable (for the Saudis),” an expert professor of political science at the Lebanon American University in Beirut said by phone. Even though the Hariri resignation could herald turbulent times for the country, Salamey added, “the consequence of Lebanon losing something beyond Saudi interests.”

The sense of frustration with Hariri reflects Saudi Arabia’s changing attitude towards Lebanon since King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud ascended the throne on the death of his half brother King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in January 2015. King Salman’s ascension was a signal for the Saudis to try and influence Leonese diplomacy. The current Saudi administration is something beyond Saudi interests.”

However, like an errant husband, Hariri reflects Saudi Arabia’s changing attitude towards Lebanon since King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud ascended the throne on the death of his half brother King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in January 2015. King Salman’s ascension was a signal for the Saudis to try and influence Lebanon’s diplomacy. The current Saudi administration is

Hariri was useful to Hezbollah as a prominent Lebanese Sunni who could serve as prime minister with whom it is willing to work. A prime minister who does not present an obstacle to the movement. If Hariri does find himself unable to return to the premiership, it could be difficult to find another credible Sunni leader willing to risk the wrath of a belligerent Riyadh by cooperating with Hezbollah in government. Hariri, as the dominant political force in the country, can weather a protracted constitutional and political crisis, as it has done in the past.

“In Hariri’s absence, Hezbollah and Iran’s expansionist agenda to local Sunni families and nations will see their goal being achieved. Iran has already started to make moves that will lead to the collapse of the Hariri-led government. If Hariri does not return to the premiership, his resignation will have profound implications for the region’s political and economic stability.”

Lebanese politicians are watching with interest as Hariri’s resignation could serve as a “strategic opportunity” to boost their political and economic stability. Hariri has been touted as having been an effective leader for Lebanon, but his resignation has left many wondering what will happen next.

One thing is clear: Saudi Arabia is no longer content with Lebanon being a “buffer” state between Iran and Israel. Riyadh is said to be planning to take action against Hezbollah, which it sees as a threat to its regional dominance.

“The Saudis have been waiting for the right moment to strike Hezbollah, and now they are ready. The question is, when will they act?” a Lebanese political analyst said.

Hariri’s resignation does not weaken Hezbollah’s bargaining hand nor improve his chances at excising significant concessions from Hezbollah.

As Lebanon looks internally for the answers for Hariri’s resignation, it omits the wider world in which it exists. Where did the Lebanese state go? By Nicholas Blanford

As Lebanon looks internally for the answers for Hariri’s resignation, it omits the wider world in which it exists.

If you live long enough, nothing will surprise you. It is so. That’s why when Lebanon’s Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned, the country was shocked.

Lebanese analysts say the resignation was a “calculated move” to prevent a future crisis. Hariri’s resignation does not mean the end of Lebanon, but rather a new phase in its political landscape. It is a step towards a new era of political stability and economic growth.

Hariri’s resignation marks a watershed moment in the country’s history, as it is the first time in decades that Lebanon has been ruled by a government that was not controlled by one political party. Despite the challenges that lie ahead, there is optimism among Lebanese that a new era of political stability and economic growth is on the horizon.

The resignation of Hariri and his allies has triggered a series of political changes in Lebanon, as the country confronts the challenge of forming a new government. It is expected that the new government will face a number of challenges, including the need to address the country’s economic and political crises.

The resignation of Hariri and his allies has triggered a series of political changes in Lebanon, as the country confronts the challenge of forming a new government. It is expected that the new government will face a number of challenges, including the need to address the country’s economic and political crises.

The resignation of Hariri and his allies has triggered a series of political changes in Lebanon, as the country confronts the challenge of forming a new government. It is expected that the new government will face a number of challenges, including the need to address the country’s economic and political crises.

The resignation of Hariri and his allies has triggered a series of political changes in Lebanon, as the country confronts the challenge of forming a new government. It is expected that the new government will face a number of challenges, including the need to address the country’s economic and political crises.
ISIS's last stronghold falls, crucial role played by pro-Iran forces

Simon Speakman Cordall
Tunis

With the capture of the border town of Abu Kamel, the Syrian regime is shifting its attention away from its southern stronghold, leaving ISIS to fight the Islamic State (IS/ISIS). The capture of the town marks a significant turning point in the battle against ISIS, which has been steadily losing ground in recent months. Abu Kamel is a key strategic location, providing a crucial supply route for ISIS fighters and their allies. The capture of the town is a major blow to ISIS's ability to hold out in Syria, and it raises questions about the group's future prospects in the country.

Abu Kamel is located on the outskirts of the Deir Ezzor province, which has been one of the most active areas of conflict in recent years. The town is situated on a major border crossing, which has been a key supply route for ISIS fighters and their allies. The capture of the town is likely to disrupt this supply route, further weakening the group's already precarious position.

The capture of Abu Kamel is also a significant blow to the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which have been leading the fight against ISIS in Syria. The SDF has been one of the main forces fighting ISIS in the region, and the capture of Abu Kamel is likely to boost the morale of its fighters.

However, the capture of Abu Kamel is not the end of the story. ISIS still has a significant presence in Syria, and it is likely to continue fighting for as long as it can. The group is likely to continue carrying out attacks and carrying out attacks against US and coalition forces in the region.

Simon Speakman Cordall is an independent Middle East analyst. He is the author of “The New Middle East: Politics, Religion and the Future of the Region.”
Iran’s dangerous game

Russia is testing the times for the region. Four Gulf countries have asked their citizens to leave Lebanon amid rising tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran over the latter’s role in Lebanon and Yemen. What happens next with the crisis over Lebanon remains to be seen but in Yemen, at least, the path forward is clear: Iran must stop its increasingly brazen support to Yemen’s Houthi militants.

The latest dangerous consequence of Iran’s cynical actions became all too apparent on November 3. The Houthis, embodied by the steady flow of lethal weapons and incendiary devices from Tehran, ramped up support to the Yemeni regime in its attempt to export the Yemen war to Saudi Arabia by lobbing a missile at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh. It was intercepted and Saudi authorities denounced the missile attack on their territory as an act of “direct military aggression.”

Riyadh was typically within its rights to do so. Its response is strongly supported within the region and beyond. The US Department issued a statement that “welcomes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s statement expressing the Iranian regime’s support for Houthi militias, including the supply of illegal arms such as ballistic missiles.”

French President Emmanuel Macron, who was in Riyadh and Saudi Arabia last week, said the intercepted missile was obviously “an Iranian missile” and “shows precisely the strength of Iran’s weapons programme.

It also shows the extent to which Iran has become the single most ominous threat to the stability of the Middle East.

Iran has brought the region to this dismal pass. There may be consternation but there cannot, indeed should not, be any expression of surprise. It is hardly a secret that Iran ramped up support to the Houthis many months ago. In May, Reuters released a long report quoting multiple sources to lay bare the increasing impunity with which Iran is fuelling the nearly 4-year-old Yemen conflict.

It described Tehran’s intervention in clear terms: “Iran is sending advanced weapons and military advisers to Yemen’s rebel Houthi movement, stepping up support for its Shia ally in a civil war whose outcome could sway the balance of power in the Middle East, regional and Western sources say.”

It need not have come to this. Iran could have peacefully and profitably used the 2015 nuclear deal as a path to co-operation with the rest of the world. Instead, it chose to undermine the lifting of international sanctions by intensifying its ballistic missile programme and by giving additional resources to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps with the aim to pursue a broad expansionist agenda.

Through its proxy, Hezbollah, Iran has accelerated and widened the scope of its intervention in Syria and Lebanon. Saudi Arabia is not the only Arab country deeply concerned about Iran’s growing interventionism. The world has reason to be alarmed.

The bin Laden documents

T he leak of documents seized from Osama bin Laden’s compound in Pakistan in 2011 and recently released by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is the al-Qaeda leader’s view of Iran. It had generously offered al-Qaeda “money and arms and everything they need,” bin Laden wrote, “and offered them training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, in return for striking American interests in Saudi Arabia.”

The words add breadth and depth to reports that have circulated for years about the ties between Iran and the terrorist group responsible for 9/11. Iran’s former Intelligence Minister Javad Zarif dismissed the newly released documents as “fake news” but they only buttress allegations about Iran’s old habits and new proclivities.

Bin Laden also mused on the destabilising benefits of the “Hizballah Spring” uprisings and the role played by the Qatar TV channel Al Jazeera. He lauded the channel for “working ontribal regimes” and “shaking the foundations of the revolutions.”

Bin Laden was clear about the potential benefits of the uprisings. “This chaos and the abundance of leaders is the best environment to spread al-Qaeda’s thoughts and ideas,” he wrote. His family in conversations that took place between February and April 2011.

In Libya, he said, the chaos could be fully exploited because it had “opened the door for jihadism.”

Ironically, even in his last redoubt, bin Laden saw the possibility of the Libyan situation spinning out of control but the parties that supported the NATO-led campaign that toppled Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011 somehow did not.

The least one can say about Saudi Arabia these days is that this usually conservative kingdom is going through a quiet revolution.

Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud is monitoring every little detail of this revolution. He has entrusted his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, with implementing the necessary steps to place the kingdom on equal footing with the rest of the developed world in all domains, including entertainment.

Saudi Arabia is ushering in an era of non-dependence on oil revenues. The new Saudi Arabia is betting on its human resources and on investments in its other natural resources. It is adopting a firmer and more foreign policy.

The world witnessed the new face of Saudi Arabia when King Salman stood in the way of Iranian presence in Yemen by launching Operation Determined Storm.

This was no ordinary decision. Many people did not understand the significance of the fall of Sana’a to the Houthis on September 23, 2014, just four months before King Salman’s enthronement.

One of the first things the Houthis did after taking over the Yemeni capital was to send a delegation to Tehran to sign an air travel agreement between Iran’s air carrier and Yemeni airlines for two daily flights between Sana’a and Tehran. Just like that, Yemen had become a tourist destination for Iranians and Iran had turned into the one place that all Yemenis wanted to visit.

The Houthis did not take long to start behaving as if they were the legitimate authority in Yemen. They also did not take long to start provoking Saudi Arabia. In addition to the air travel deal with Tehran, they conducted military mau- nouvres along the Saudi-Yemeni border. They were delivering a message from Iran: “Hey, look, We’re here.”

The recent anti-corruption campaign in Saudi Arabia and the arrests of many Saudi officials and business people is part of the rev- olution started by King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed. Vision 2030 is another part. So is the NEOM mega-city project, which is the kingdom’s biggest challenge in terms of investment in human re- sources, renewable energies and robotics.

The changes seen by the world in just two years would fill volumes. The important thing is that Saudi Arabia is over the complex created by the extremist Juhayman al-Qatibi and his gang when they attacked the Holy Mosque in 1979.

The most important thing, Saudi Arabia is no longer trying to outdo Iran in religious conservatism.

In foreign policy, the Saudi revolution finds its best expression in steadfastness in opposing Iran’s expansionist project. Iran has been trying to plant roots in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Just to take one example, the re- gime in Lebanon must decide whether or not to be enslaved by Iran. The matter is quite simple: Lebanon is facing a grave po- litical crisis coupled with a weakening economy. The sole behind that is Hezbollah. Lebanon has become a training ground for Iran’s dirty tricks against Arab regimes.

Check out the scan- dal discovered in docu- ments seized from Osama bin Laden’s compound in Pakistan in 2011, which had offered to have Hezbollah train al-Qaeda fighters in Lebanon. Lebanon could never rebuild itself and its institutions as long as Hezbollah, which is, in reality, just another brigade of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has a free hand in the country. Iran and Hezbollah had gone as far as to ask Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s government to provide po- litical cover for their dirty tricks.

They want Lebanon to be part of Iran’s war on the Syrian people.

They also want to turn Beirut into a propaganda base for the Houthis in Yemen.

Some observers of Saudi affairs simply don’t want to believe that what is going in Saudi Arabia is a revolution. It no longer makes sense to analyse the new Saudi real- ity through the lenses of previous practices. If you don’t believe that, ask Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah bin Abdulaziz or Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal. It never crossed their minds that one day they’d be asked to justify their fortunes.

In any case, Lebanon must make a choice. It can’t enjoy Riyadh’s largesse and oppose Saudi Arabia at the same time. There are profound changes going on in Saudi Arabia and the kingdom is over many previous taboos. Just as an example, the new Saudi Arabia is willing to let go of the Gulf Coop- eration Council.
The risks of Saudi war on too many fronts

Rashme Roshan Lall

is a columnist for The Arab Weekly. Her blog can be found at www.rashme.com.

Only the churlish would deny the necessary logic of the prince’s grand plan for Saudi Arabia: A future that looks beyond oil. A better-adjusted society.

New trend. An employee of Careem, a chauffeur-driven car booking service, talks during a training session for new female drivers in Khobar City in Saudi Arabia. (Reuters)

By breaking up with the history of the “Renaissance,” the kingdom returns to its true history and culture as a defender of moderate Islam.

Mohammad Kawsar

Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz offered young Saudis legitimate outlets such as cinema for the fun-loving instinct shared by humans and many mammals (Dolphins, for instance, are famously playful). Most important of all, Crown Prince Mohammed vowed his country would “return” to a more “moderate, balanced” Islam.

That return is an historic opportunity. It is also a momentous challenge. For decades, the country has been ruled by religious and financial establishments hellbent on opposing secularism. This has not only stifled the economy, but also curtailed the civil liberties of its citizens. That is the crux of the matter.

With the current drive towards moderate Islam, the kingdom wants to be seen as a leader in the Muslim world. And the benefits of such leadership are clear. As the kingdom becomes more moderate, its influence will increase. It will be able to call on other moderate Muslim countries to support its cause. And, as the kingdom becomes more moderate, it will be able to call on other moderate Muslim countries to support its cause.

With the current drive towards moderate Islam, the kingdom wants to be seen as a leader in the Muslim world. And the benefits of such leadership are clear. As the kingdom becomes more moderate, its influence will increase. It will be able to call on other moderate Muslim countries to support its cause. And, as the kingdom becomes more moderate, it will be able to call on other moderate Muslim countries to support its cause.

By breaking up with the history of the “Renaissance,” the kingdom returns to its true history and culture as a defender of moderate Islam.
Recapturing Sinjar poses questions for Iraqi government

The Iraqi central government focused primarily on the peshmerga but it has two options on how to deal with the PKK.

Yunus Paksoy

Ankara

When Iraqi forces marched towards the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, held by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), few would have pondered entering it would be easy. However, in an astonishing outcome, the Iraqi Army and al-Hashed al-Shaabi militia had their dinner in the centre of Kirkuk. The Turkish government was quick to react. “Turkey highlights its readiness for all sorts of cooperation with the Iraqi government to eradicate the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)’s presence in Iraq lands,” the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement, lending its full backing to the Kirkuk operation.

The spats between Baghdad and Ankara may resurface over Turkish military presence in Iraq’s Bashiqa.

Ankara had been locked in turmoil with Erbil over the independence vote in September, which was denounced by the central government a strategic advantage. The control of the PKK-affiliated YBS in Sinjar poses a national threat. The control of the PKK would mean a YPG/PKK dominance in Sinjar. This would risk having the PKK and the Islamic State (ISIS). YBS in Sinjar, the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), and al-Hashed al-Shaabi militias, backed by Iran’s army, stormed the area. Even though Ankara has forced a close alliance with Tehran over recent months, the former has un-doubtedly lost influence over the Turks in Kirkuk to the latter. Many Turks have been among the ranks of the Iran-backed al-Hashed al-Shaabi.

The economic aspect of the post-ISIS era is also of significance. Ankara’s oil trade with Erbil, most of which was thanks to the oil in Kirkuk, may be hampered. The Kirkuk region used to produce 450,000 barrels per day exported via Turkey. Now that the Baghdad government has full authority over the oil fields, the Turkish government will not have the luxury to fall out with Abadi. Amman argued there is no single actor with whom Turkey gets along very well. “Turkey may face potential problems with issues such as Bashiqa and oil trading... Economically and politically, Turkey has to revise its Iraq strategy,” he said.

Turkey places great emphasis on rebuilding the city as well. How the administrative posts will be shaped, especially after the Kurdish dominance, is of utmost importance. Burhanettin Duran, the director-general of the Turkish think-tank SETA, said Turkey could be much more influential than everyone gauges. 

As yet, that Turkish-Iraqi cooperation must continue at full steam. Duran said it was “necessary to establish a political system in which Iraq can exist, which will keep Shia, Sunnis and Kurds together peacefully.”

Omer Ozkizilcik

is an analyst for the Middle East Foundation, a think-tank in Ankara.

I have recaptured the northern Iraqi city of Sinjar by the Iraqi Army and Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) militia in an operation focused primarily on the population of Baghdad and Kirkuk. The KRG withdrawal is likely to give the central government a strategic advantage over the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) but it could also pose threats, where PKK militiamen are based.

In a bid to reassure its federal authority following the KRG referendum on independence of the Kurdish region, Iraq’s government has resorted to reclaiming control of Kirkuk, Tuz Khormato, Alus Kana, Mosul Dam and Sinjar. In most cases, peshmerga forces have withdrawn without a fight.

Sinjar, which is the heartland of Iraq’s Yazidi, enjoys a strategic location on the border area between Iraq’s Nineveh province and a Kurdish-controlled region in Syria. It was used as a land corridor by US-backed military groups of the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) to the People’s Protection Units (YPG) in Syria. The PKK and the YPG affiliate in Sinjar, the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), militia, do not enjoy good ties with the KRG, which, until the referendum, had good relations with Turkey. Last March, YBS and peshmerga clashes led to fatalities.

YPG fighters used to receive training in Sinjar. Other YBS fighters joined the YBS militia, either out of the fear of the KRG or out of a desire to earn a living. Now Yazidi fighters who were in the YBS or in the peshmerga are joining the Yazidi PMF, which answers to the central government.

The warming of ties between Baghdad and Ankara after their two leaders met in September, has restored bilateral ties with Abadi. Ataman argued there is no single actor with whom Turkey gets along very well. “Turkey may face potential problems with issues such as Bashiqa and oil trading... Economically and politically, Turkey has to revise its Iraq strategy,” he said.

Turkey places great emphasis on rebuilding the city as well. How the administrative posts will be shaped, especially after the Kurdish dominance, is of utmost importance. Burhanettin Duran, the director-general of the Turkish think-tank SETA, said Turkey could be much more influential than everyone gauges.

As yet, that Turkish-Iraqi cooperation must continue at full steam. Duran said it was “necessary to establish a political system in which Iraq can exist, which will keep Shia, Sunnis and Kurds together peacefully.”

Many Yazidis appear to have lost their faith in the Iraqi central government instead of relying on the PKK. Baghdad is aware of the demands by the Yazidi population. Turkey has a huge leverage over them due to the Yazidis within the KRG. For now, the Iraqi central government focused primarily on the peshmerga but it has two options on how to deal with the PKK.

The US Department of State has reportedly delivering aid to the YPG in Syria via Iraq, passing through areas that, until recently, had been under peshmerga control. The supplies were mainly transported via the Iraqi-Syria border north of Sinjar towards the Hasakah province in Syria.

It is unclear whether the US would continue to ship the YPG aid in Syria via Iraq, passing through areas that, until recently, had been under peshmerga control. The supplies were mainly transported via the Iraqi-Syria border north of Sinjar towards the Hasakah province in Syria.

The US Department of State has reportedly delivering aid to the YPG in Syria via Iraq, passing through areas that, until recently, had been under peshmerga control. The supplies were mainly transported via the Iraqi-Syria border north of Sinjar towards the Hasakah province in Syria.

It is unclear whether the US would continue to ship the YPG aid in Syria via Iraq, passing through areas that, until recently, had been under peshmerga control. The supplies were mainly transported via the Iraqi-Syria border north of Sinjar towards the Hasakah province in Syria.
News & Analysis

Maghreb

Stabbing of Tunisian police officers points to lingering lone-wolf threat

Lamine Ghamni

Tunis

A suspected jihadist stabbed two Tunisian "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great") attackers last week, an attack that came just four days after a bus of presidential guards killed 12 people in an attack in the Bardo district, was quickly stopped by security services. One officer died of injuries from the stabbing, and another suffered non-critical injuries. The attack came as a controversial police protest law was to be voted on by parliament. Titled "Protection of Freedoms Against the Armed Forces," the measure reinforces penalties for acts endangering police, or security forces, punishes "defamatory speech" directed at them, and enforces duties for the force to be "necessary and proportionate." Civil society groups argued that the bill's broad provisions could lead to a chilling of civil liberties.

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Moroccan King Mohammed VI has rejected any option for Western Sahara outside of Moroccan sovereignty

Saad Guerraoui

Casablanca

Moroccan King Mohammed VI has rejected any option for Western Sahara outside of Moroccan sovereignty. "No settlement of the Saharawi affair is possible outside the framework of the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara and the autonomy initiative, whose sincerity and credibility the international community has recognised," King Mohammed VI said in a televised speech November 6 to commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the Green March.

Jordane Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution. "As former Special Envoy Peter Jordan Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution.

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Tunisian King Mohammed VI rejected any option for Western Sahara outside of Moroccan sovereignty. "No settlement of the Saharawi affair is possible outside the framework of the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara and the autonomy initiative, whose sincerity and credibility the international community has recognised," King Mohammed VI said in a televised speech November 6 to commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the Green March.

Jordane Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution. "As former Special Envoy Peter Jordan Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution.

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Since 2015, there have been no major terrorist incidents and security agencies say they have dismantled numerous cells and prevented several potentially dangerous terror attacks. The Polisario Front criticised the Moroccan autonomy initiative, "was not a realistic proposition. The only way to resolve this conflict is through realistic, pragmatic and compromise-based solutions like the Moroccan autonomy initiative."

Moroccan King Mohammed VI has rejected any option for Western Sahara outside of Moroccan sovereignty. "No settlement of the Saharawi affair is possible outside the framework of the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara and the autonomy initiative, whose sincerity and credibility the international community has recognised," King Mohammed VI said in a televised speech November 6 to commemorate the 42nd anniversary of the Green March.

Jordane Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution. "As former Special Envoy Peter Jordan Paul, executive director of the Moroccan American Centre for Policy, said the autonomy initiative provides the basis for the only viable solution.
Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is yet to officially announce he is running for a second term next year, confirmed he will not seek a third term in office and will adhere to the Egyptian Constitution’s two-term limit on the presidency. “It does not suit me as president to stay one more day against the will of the people,” Sisi said in an interview that will not interfere with [the constitution], I am preserving two years…”, he said during the conference. The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences. Hassan Nafaa, another political science professor at Cairo University, said initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

In Egypt, terrorists resort to divide-and-conquer tactics

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Speaking at the World Youth Forum in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi once again urged the youth to not be devoured by the power of Egypt’s youth. However, the forum, convening under the slogan “We NEED To Talk” and attended by young people from more than 130 countries, apparently failed to convince Egypt’s own youth. “If we think such events will succeed in improving Sisi’s relation with the youth as long as he continues to put many of them in jail,” said Ahmed Darag, a political science professor at Cairo University. “The president is very keen on getting the youth to em- power them to the point of engaging with Egyptian public.” This is a line that other terrorists groups in Egypt, particularly al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Mourabitoun and Ansar al-Islam, have adopted as the latest way to claim they are not the spawn of the devil but the guardians of the people. This difference in modus operandi, security experts said, made al-Mourabitoun and Ansar al-Islam claimed responsibility for a deadly ambush on Egyptian police in October in the Western Desert, it was known that the group itself was supported by the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Many terrorist organisations have emerged in Egypt since the 2013 ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. While some have direct links to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, others with ties to either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS) have found Egypt to be a fertile recruiting ground. The recent arrest of several Hasm members revealed that many were radicalised at a short time ago and showed no history of violent extremism. In drawing their recruits, security experts said, these groups capitalise on traditionally strained relations between police and some of the public. “So, by declaring their enmity to the people, these groups pretend to be in this war on behalf of those victimised by society,” said Mamdouh al-Kidway, a retired police officer. By portraying the situation as a domestic battle against the Egyptian government and its security apparatus, rather than targeting Egyptians or seeking to establish an Islamic state, terrorist groups can recruit from among disenfranchised Egyptians. Ansar al-Islam claimed responsibility for an attack that saw the driver said to be the head of ISIS in Syria was killed in a subsequent Egyptian airstrike, leaving questions about the group and its leadership. It is not clear if Ansar al-Islam and al-Mourabitoun are the same group or separate but allied groups or organisations. However, many critics say this focus on engaging with young Egyptians is superficial and fails to address the most pressing issues facing them. “There are thousands of youth behind bars,” Darag said. “Hundreds of thousands of young people were blocked because Sisi does not want the people to hear a different point of view.” Government supporters argue that those who have been arrested are not political prisoners but have been convicted of criminal offences.

There were previous demands by young people to have a review of youth jailers and the minister. “When I agreed that a youth committee would be formed to undertake such a review, in accordance with the constitution and law. For my part, I was glad to sign such a review,” Sisi said during the conference. “The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences.” Sisi added that such initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

When little known Farouk Hamid and his brother-in-law Ahmed Megahid entered the Bayeux Tapestry last September, it was known that the group was backed by the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Many terrorist organisations have emerged in Egypt since the 2013 ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. While some have direct links to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, others with ties to either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS) have found Egypt to be a fertile recruiting ground. The recent arrest of several Hasm members revealed that many were radicalised at a short time ago and showed no history of violent extremism. In drawing their recruits, security experts said, these groups capitalise on traditionally strained relations between police and some of the public. “So, by declaring their enmity to the people, these groups pretend to be in this war on behalf of those victimised by society,” said Mamdouh al-Kidway, a retired police officer. By portraying the situation as a domestic battle against the Egyptian government and its security apparatus, rather than targeting Egyptians or seeking to establish an Islamic state, terrorist groups can recruit from among disenfranchised Egyptians. Ansar al-Islam claimed responsibility for an attack that saw the driver said to be the head of ISIS in Syria was killed in a subsequent Egyptian airstrike, leaving questions about the group and its leadership. It is not clear if Ansar al-Islam and al-Mourabitoun are the same group or separate but allied groups or organisations. However, many critics say this focus on engaging with young Egyptians is superficial and fails to address the most pressing issues facing them. “There are thousands of youth behind bars,” Darag said. “Hundreds of thousands of young people were blocked because Sisi does not want the people to hear a different point of view.” Government supporters argue that those who have been arrested are not political prisoners but have been convicted of criminal offences.

There were previous demands by young people to have a review of youth jailers and the minister. “When I agreed that a youth committee would be formed to undertake such a review, in accordance with the constitution and law. For my part, I was glad to sign such a review,” Sisi said during the conference. “The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences.” Sisi added that such initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

In Egypt, terrorists resort to divide-and-conquer tactics

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is yet to officially announce he is running for a second term next year, confirmed he will not seek a third term in office and will adhere to the Egyptian Constitution’s two-term limit on the presidency. “It does not suit me as president to stay one more day against the will of the people,” Sisi said in an interview that will not interfere with [the constitution], I am preserving two years…”, he said during the conference. The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences. Hassan Nafaa, another political science professor at Cairo University, said initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

In Egypt, terrorists resort to divide-and-conquer tactics

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is yet to officially announce he is running for a second term next year, confirmed he will not seek a third term in office and will adhere to the Egyptian Constitution’s two-term limit on the presidency. “It does not suit me as president to stay one more day against the will of the people,” Sisi said in an interview that will not interfere with [the constitution], I am preserving two years…”, he said during the conference. The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences. Hassan Nafaa, another political science professor at Cairo University, said initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

In Egypt, terrorists resort to divide-and-conquer tactics

Ahmed Megahid

Cairo

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is yet to officially announce he is running for a second term next year, confirmed he will not seek a third term in office and will adhere to the Egyptian Constitution’s two-term limit on the presidency. “It does not suit me as president to stay one more day against the will of the people,” Sisi said in an interview that will not interfere with [the constitution], I am preserving two years…”, he said during the conference. The committee to review the cases, formed in October 2016, has reportedly secured the release of hundreds of youth activists detained in political cases but not for violent offences. Hassan Nafaa, another political science professor at Cairo University, said initiatives such as this, not youth gatherings, would help Sisi win the hearts of young people. “The real test is for the president to allow for more freedoms,” Nafaa said. “You cannot claim to be a supporter of youth while there are many of them behind bars.” Ahmed Megahid is an Egyptian reporter in Cairo.
Iran pushing for Hamas-Hezbollah reconciliation

The Arab Weekly staff

News & Analysis

Kamel Hawwash

London

While Egypt mediates a reconciliation deal between Palestinian rivals Hamas and Fatah, Iran appeared to be pushing for a thawing of ties between Hamas and the Lebanese movement Hezbollah. The move was both unwelcome developments for Israel. Hamas leaders are willing to strengthen ties with Hezbollah after the two parties, which have been engaged in belligerent hostilities against Israel, took opposing sides in the Syrain war. Prior to the pop-up meeting against Syrian President Bashar Assad in 2011, Hamas was an ally of the Damascus regime, Hezbollah and regional heavy-weight Iran, in what was branded as “the axis of resistance” against Israel. While initially remaining from criticising Assad, Hamas later announced that it supported the aspirations of the Syrian people in its uprising against the regime. Its position on Syria led to the souring of relations with Iran, which reduced funding of the Palestinian movement.

Iranian and pro-Hezbollah media outlets accused Hamas of actively supporting Syrian rebels, a charge the Palestinian group denied. As the war in Syria appeared to be dying down, ties between Hamas and Hezbollah seem to be thawing, likely with encouragement from Iran.

“The alliance between Hamas and Hezbollah is a direct result of the renewed relations between Iran and Hamas,” wrote Khaled Abu Toameh in the website of the Al-Monitor.

Saleh al-Arouri, Hamas’s deputy political chief, had a rare public meeting with Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut on October 31. The meeting occurred as soon as Arouri visited Iran.

Pro-Hezbollah al-Manar TV said Arouri and Nasrallah discussed “the joint effort in opposing Gaza and its ramifications” following an Israeli attack on a tunnel in the Gaza Strip that killed eight members of the Palestinian group’s intelligence service.

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh took part in a Hezbollah-sponsored conference on the Fatah-Demonstration on November 1 in Beirut, which kicked off with a message from Iraqi Revolutionary Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Other senior participants included Hezbollah’s deputy chief Sheik Naim Qassem.

Observers said both sides were likely to benefit from rapprochement.

“It is no secret that Hamas, despite having different positions regarding the Syrian crisis, needs Hezbollah when it comes to fund- ing, training, securing supply lines for weapons and providing resid- ence for Hamas cadres in Lebanon,” said Adnan Abu Amor, wrote on the website Al-Monitor.

“For its part, Hezbollah needs a Palestinian movement, such as Hamas, to restore its popularity among Arab public opinion, which it lost after being involved in the wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen against Sunni Muslims. Hamas, may help doped Hezbollah’s sec- retarian imagery,” Amor added.

The meetings between Hamas leaders and Hezbollah officials have raised alarms in Israel.

In September, the head of Israeli intelligence service Shin Bet, Na- dav Argaman, warned that Hamas and Hezbollah were gearing up for a new conflict against Israel. Argaman’s warning echoed a statement by Israeli Defence Minister Avig- dor Liberman in August in which he accused Arouri of attempting “to boost the relationship between Hamas and Hezbollah” with the help of Iran to plan attacks against Israel.

Israel demanded Hamas cut rela- tions with Iran but the Palestinian movement responded by saying that the visit by its delegation to Tehran is “a rejection of the Zionist entity’s conditions to cut ties with Iran.”

The Hamas-Hezbollah thaw is likely to also reinforce ties with Syria and Arab and Lebanese movement had an all-time low.

“The Syrian escape to rein Hamas from its past and cur- rent ties with Iran, which supports Hezbollah,” wrote Jack Khoury in Haaretz.

Egypt has not publicly criticised Hamas for strengthening ties with Tehran and Hezbollah and Iran, possibly because the Palestinian leaders have made a number of gestures to win Cairo’s favour.

“To ensure Hamas’s survival, (Hamas leaders) are even willing to sever ties with their mother ship, the Muslim Brotherhood, to appease Egypt, its savour and Brotherhood brethren,” wrote Sh- kiima Elfar in Al-Monitor.

Despite rising tensions between Saudi Arabia, which is an ally of Egypt, and Hezbollah, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Cairo was not pulling measures against the Lebanese movement.

“The subject is not about tak- ing on or not taking on Hezbollah, the subject is about the sta- tics of the fragile stability in the region in light of the union foci- ng the region,” Sisi told CNBC.

“Egypt will not be able to support more turmoil,” he added.

Radical attraction. Hamas’s Deputy Political Chief Saleh al-Aroui (L) meets with Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, on October 31.

Palestinians should put more focus on their case internationally

I t is to be expected that the Arab world will react with anger at what it sees as obser- vative criticism of Israel as it has done with UNESCO. This may dis- courage other international bodies and conventions from accepting the state of Palestine as a mem- ber, knowing that it will use this primarily to bring about accountability on Israel for violations that come under the scope of the organisa- tion in question. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation’s response should be to join more internation- al bodies and conventions and use these to pressure Israel back to the negotiating table or face greater accountability.

For example, it should work for Israel’s suspension from football’s world governing body, FIFA, for operating football teams in the illegal settlements.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation should vigorously pursue Israel through the Interna- tional Criminal Court (ICC), which it joined in 2014. A focus on the illegal settlements is the clear- est way to bring other countries regard the settlements as illegal as does international law, which Prime Minister Binyamin Net- anyahus recently promised never to dismantle a settlement and to expand the illegal enterprise.

While the Palestinians and the Palestinian leaders need to take stock and weigh its options.

The Palestinians should be under no illusion that the so-called deal of the century US President Donald Trump’s advisors are work- ing on will be made in Tel Aviv, not Washington or Ramallah. It will be a deal of the century designed to strengthen Israel’s hold on the land from the river to the sea. It will not be based on respect or adherence to international law and will not deliver an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, the minimum the Palestin- ians would accept as a resolution to the conflict.

It will certainly not include a return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. This will make a deal impossible to accept. The super- cessions would be disastrous for the Palestinians as they will once again be blamed for the failure. It would be disastrous for the Palestinian leadership to wait for the above scenario to materialise. It must set its own agenda and make rapid progress on it.

The Palestinians have no option but to escalate their efforts to inter- nationalise their case and to pursue mass international demonstrations and conventions from accepting the state of Palestine as a mem- ber, knowing that it will use this primarily to bring about accountability on Israel for violations that come under the scope of the organisa- tion in question. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation’s response should be to join more internation- al bodies and conventions and use these to pressure Israel back to the negotiating table or face greater accountability.

Palestinians should be under no illusion that the conse- quences of escalating this battle would be costly for them. They will need strong support from Arab allies who should insist on Israel agreeing fully to the 2005 Arab peace initiative as a start. The initia- tive spells out clearly what Israel needs to do to it have the huge benefits normalisation of relations with the Arab and Muslim world would bring.

The Palestinians should insist that a return to talks should be based on international law and well-known UN resolutions on the conflict. The Palestinians have op- tions. None of the same is not one of them.
**Special focus**

Osama bin Laden saw jihadist opportunity in Arab spring

“This chaos and the absence of leadership in the [Arab spring] revolutions is the best environment to spread al-Qaeda’s thoughts and ideas,” bin Laden said. He praised Qatar-based Al Oksur, which was apparently one of the main sources of news, for “working on toppling regimes” and for “carrying the banner of the revolution.”

While pleased with the chaos, bin Laden feared that things were happening so fast that the better organised counter-revolutionary forces would prevail.

**Mark Habeeb**

is East-West Editor of The Arab Weekly and adjunct professor of Global Politics and Security at Georgetown University in Washington.

**The bin Laden files**

Ed Blanche

Beirut

Al-Qaeda’s murky relationship with Iran over and pot-bodied Big question mark, largely because the jihadists are described Sunni extremists, which Iran, with its Shia majority, opposes and is fighting in Iraq and Syria. In December 2010, bin Laden told his listeners that the “Arab spring” was a failing state in the midst of civil war. Laden saw how the Taliban exploited the situation to grab power.

Bin Laden must have been aware of the Arab Spring revolutions were the result of deep grievances against existing regimes, which were seen as corrupt and, in many instances, as being in conflict with the West. Added to these sentiments were feelings of injustice, humiliation and hopelessness — a perfect recipe for jihadist recruitment.

Bin Laden’s observations that it was “chaos” and “the absence of leadership in the revolution” that made the opportunity potential bono to al-Qaeda is worth contemplating. He correctly pointed out that a revolution without leadership quickly degenerates into chaos and that in anarchic situations people naturally look for leadership that promises to restore direction and purpose.

This phenomenon may explain the Islamic State’s initial success in establishing its so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria that were essentially ungoverned.

Societies are based on a sense of accepted communal behaviour among their members and government’s role is to protect and enforce this behaviour. If you remove government — that is, if a country becomes ungoverned — social order can crumble with remarkable speed, creating a societal vacuum that an extremist group may fill. Al-Qaeda seems a prime example of this.

No one, however, has come up with hard evidence of an Iran link to the attacks. In any case, the US 9/11 Commission said it found nothing to substantiate such a charge. The release of the bin Laden documents did not contain material relevant to the accusation.

**Ed Blanche**

Beirut

A mid strong indications that al-Qaeda is staging a major comeback, new leaders are trying to take command of the group, which has lost most of its territory it held in Syria and Iraq. The group recently released images of former leader bin Laden’s son, Hamza.

Al-Qaeda’s ageing leadership is clearly promoting Hamza, in his late 20s and dубbed “the crown prince of terror” by Western law- makers, as the successor to his late father as it seeks to retain the primacy in the jihadist world that the Islamic State (ISIS) snatched in 2014.

Hamza is the most charismatic and in 2015 he was the next generation of jihadis simply because of his late father,” Bruce Riedel, a 30-year Central Intelligence Agency veteran, told The Washington Post.

Al-Qaeda’s current leader, the veteran Egyptian jihadist Ayman al-Zawahiri, who took over after bin Laden was killed by US Navy SEALS in a raid on his Pakistani hideout in May 2011, is widely seen as a figurehead lacking his predecessor’s charisma and innovative operational zeal. ISIS appears to be on its last legs militarily after a string of defeats and the loss of most of the territory it held in Syria and Iraq.

Al-Qaeda seeks to harness ISIS’s legacy of disillusioned supporters and seasoned combat veterans and its propaganda is clearly aimed at winning them over as their organisation’s agents.

“Al-Qaeda is a global terrorist. The group’s attacks on the United States and five other countries in 2015, as well as special forces operations in West Africa, highlight its potential as a regional player,” the CIA said in a recent report.

The material seized in bin Laden’s hideout is being used by some to imply that Tehran backed bin Laden’s attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, a charge that — if ever proven — would most certainly generate a bipartisan clamour for US military action against Iran. No one, however, has come up with hard evidence of an Iran link to the attacks. In any case, the US 9/11 Commission said it found nothing to substantiate such a charge. The release of the bin Laden documents did not contain material relevant to the accusation.

The Wall Street Journal said that the files indicated an al-Qaeda Iran “pragmatic alliance that emerged out of shared hatred of the US and Saudi Arabia…”

“Both sides were willing to overlook profound ideological and religious differences to combat common enemies.”

On October 25, the US House of Representatives approved legislation targeting Iran’s ballistic missile programme and its key figures. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats warned that Iran’s missiles were “inherently capable” of...
Special focus

al-Qaeda-Iran alliance

The first three releases were handled by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. There has been no explanation why the CIA was responsible for the massive November 1 release.

The assertion of an al-Qaeda-Iran partnership has been around since the administration of President George W. Bush. In April 2002, US intelligence perceived what it claimed was a link between al-Qaeda and Tehran following al-Qaeda’s first post-9/11 attack.

The new disclosures to some validate Trump’s hard-line approach to Iran.

That was the suicide truck bombing of the ancient El-Ghriba synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba on April 11, 2002, that killed 13 people and wounded 171. In the aftermath, a Tunisian police source was quoted by the Associated Press as saying: “This bombing ties al-Qaeda and Tehran together.”

With Osama bin Laden and his then-deputy, Egyptian jihadi Ayman al-Zawahiri, hiding out from American missile-armed drones in Pakistan, al-Qaeda was effectively run by two of its most senior commanders then operating in Iran, arab Intelligence sources said at the time.

Safir al-Adel, a former Egyptian special security colonel and considered one of the group’s most dangerous terrorists, headed al-Qaeda’s military committee while a Mauritanian general ran the group’s key planning cell since 1998.

With Osama bin Laden and his then-deputy, Egyptian jihadi Ayman al-Zawahiri, hiding out from American missile-armed drones in Pakistan, al-Qaeda was effectively run by two of its most senior commanders then operating in Iran, arab Intelligence sources said at the time.

Safir al-Adel, a former Egyptian special security colonel and considered one of the group’s most dangerous terrorists, headed al-Qaeda’s military committee while a Mauritanian general ran the group’s key planning cell since 1998.

Hamza latest message, lionising his father and urging supporters to avenge his death at the hands of US drone strikes in Pakistan to respond to “false propaganda”, was the fourth - and by far the largest — by the US intelligence community since the trove of documents seized from bin Laden’s hideout was unveiled in May 2011.

The CIA released some documents concerning the Iran-al-Qaeda alliance early to the Long War Journal, a publication connected to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a conservative Washington think-tank where some analysts are vociferous supporters of a tough approach to Iran. That includes regime change.

His bride was the daughter of Abu Mohammad al-Masri, a long-time senior al-Qaeda commander who, with Saif al-Adel and Abu Khayr al-Masri constituted the big three in the group’s Shura Council. These three men were the young Hamza’s mentors and teachers while all were held in Iran for several years.

Abd, a former colonel in the Egyptian army’s special forces and branded one of the world’s most dangerous terrorists, is said to have Hamza’s ear.

Abu Khayr al-Masri was reportedly killed in a US drone strike in Syria at the end of February.

“When EIS finally crumbles the spotlight will return to al-Qaeda,” cautioned Ali Soufan, a Lebanese-American veteran of the jihad war who has hunted down many of al-Qaeda’s heavyweights. “At that point, they will strike and strike hard.”

With bin Laden’s ill-fated heir and ideological successors family back in the field and the group’s affiliates making territorial gains in Yemen and elsewhere, al-Qaeda once again has the means and the opportunity to attack.

On November 7, al-Qaeda’s propaganda wing, As-Sahab, released Hamza’s latest message, lionising his father and urging supporters to avenge his death at the hands of US drones in Syria and the subsequent dumping of his body into the Indian Ocean.

Hamza called on young Muslims to unleash a new holy war against the US and the West, taking his father’s example as an inspiration for “ridding against tyrants.”

“Do not come out on top, and it seems that what will happen, will have ‘potentially deadly consequences for the West and the rest of the world,’” warned Soufan. “I’m afraid to say it, but it seems that Hamza could be a highly effective assassin. His message is one not to mention his marriage to the daughter of al-Qaeda’s char-acteristic member, automatically entitles him to respect from every jihadi and would appear to spell out the end of the relationship between al-Qaeda and Tehran is a long-standing one.”

The unidentifed jihadi chronicler wrote that the confluence was negotiated by the jihadiis by Mau-rtuan following al-Qaeda’s Septem-ber 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. Mauritani was among sev-eral top al-Qaeda figures who fled to Iran after Afghanistan fell to US forces in November 2001. He was reportedly close to bin Laden.

Mauritan, real name Mahmoud Ould al-Walid, was at that time a senior al-Qaeda Islamic scholar and senior, but unidentified, al-Qaeda senior, but unidentified, al-Qaeda leader. His family pedigree, not to mention his dynastic marriage to an Arab princess, was considered to be one of the group’s largest — by the US intelligence who were responsible for the massive November 1 release.

The documents reveal plenty about bin Laden’s life and inner thoughts – jotted down in blue and red ink, often through his wives and sisters. A 228-page war journal reveals that bin Laden is right all along when he repeatedly stressed that bin Laden was killed, one way or another, with those sworn enemies of the kingdom: Iran, Qa-itar and the Muslim Brotherhood. Links to all three were found in his journal.

In a letter from bin Laden to al-Qaeda’s media committee, he calls for better coordination with al-Jazeera’s correspondent in Pakistan to respond to “false information” being spread about his organisation. Right after the September 11 attacks, bin Laden chose the Doha-based channel, out of all other media outlets in the world, to broadcast his infi-nity of going to Qatar to avoid the attacks on the United States.

He relied heavily on al-Jazeera during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since his death in 2011, bin Laden’s deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has appeared regularly on its broadcasts. In the letter, bin Laden said the channel “rec-ommends that we take precau-tions,” add that satellite chan-nels are “stronger than the heroic poems of the pre-Islamic era.”

In June, Saadi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt suspended ties with Qatar, accusing it of adding groups linked to terrorism and Al Jazeera of being a front for al-Qaeda. Qataris authorities strongly denied the charges.

In the leaked documents, how-ever, bin Laden writes: “Most of the channels have been against us and our interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. ”

In another letter, bin Laden names Qatari as a suggested des-tination for all-Qa’ida members and their families. “In the case of the widows,” he wrote, “the option is available that you might not suit them” without explain-
As Turkey and US agree to disagree, Erdogan heads east

Thomas Seilbert

Turkey

Istanbul

Turkey and the United States have failed to iron out differences in key areas of their relationship, including a visa dispute, during high-level talks that put a spotlight on tensions between Ankara and the West.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim met US Vice-President Mike Pence in the White House on November 9 in the first face-to-face contact by senior officials of the two NATO partners since the United States angered Ankara a month earlier by suspending visa services for Turks in response to the arrest of an employee of the US Consulate in Istanbul by Turkish authorities.

A White House statement issued after the Pence-Yildirim meeting expressed hope for a “new chapter in US-Turkey relations” as well as agreement “on the need for constructive dialogue.” Yildirim told Turkish reporters travelling with him that, while Pence had displayed a “positive” approach towards Turkey, the visa problem remained unsolved. “We will follow developments,” he said.

Turkey introduced similar restrictions for US citizens and both countries had released their visa bans before Yildirim’s visit.

The White House and Turkey were unable to resolve other issues as well. Yildirim said Pence had made it clear that US support for a Kurdish militia in Syria, seen as a terrorist group by Ankara, would continue despite US-Turkish protests. Pence pressed Yildirim on the case of Andrew Brunson, a US pastor under arrest in Turkey, and Yildirim criticised an indictment by US prosecutors against the US pastor under arrest in Turkey, and Yildirim said Pence made it clear that US support for a Kurdish militia in Syria, seen as a terrorist group by Ankara, would continue.

Pence made it clear that US support for a Kurdish militia in Syria, seen as a terrorist group by Ankara, would continue despite Turkish protests.

Standstill, US Vice-President Mike Pence (L) escorts Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim to his car after a meeting at the White House, on November 9.

The prime minister and the vice-president agreed to create a direct phone link and Yildirim said: “Our telephones will be reachable 24 hours.”

Some observers saw Yildirim’s visit as a failure. “The trip’s futility is hardly surprising for Turkey watchers,” Aykan Erdemir and Merve Taboglu of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington think-tank, wrote, in an analysis. “The Turkish prime minister probably had no illusions of his ability to extract any concessions from his American counterparts but, as Erdogan’s loyal caretaker, Yildirim performed the role that his boss had demanded.”

While Turkey’s ties with the United States and key European allies remain difficult, Ankara is strengthening its relations with Russia. Less than two months after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Turkey, the Turkish leader was to see him November 13 at Russia’s Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Turkey raised eyebrows in the West by cooperating with Russia in the Syrian crisis and by talking with Moscow about buying a Russian missile defense system, S-400, a highly unusual step for a NATO country.

Erdogan was also to fly to Kuwait for talks that are expected to centre on the row between Qatar and a Saudi-led quartet of neighbouring countries. Turkey is a supporter of Qatar, while US President Donald Trump has taken a strong stance against what he calls financial support for terrorism by the government in Doha.

Turkey’s strongman is in trouble.

Ankara’s growing kerfuffle of politics, the chief paradox in this: The more Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan consolidates power, the more unstable foreign policy becomes.

There seems to be broad international consensus on this point. The element of unpredictability has reached such a worrisome dimension that commentators, such as Marc Piersin of Carnegie Europe and Steven Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations, remarked on the “roughness” of Turkey’s partnership with its Western alliance.

The reason is obvious: Almost all the components of Turkey’s domestic and international policy are being defined, presented and implemented on the basis of Erdogan’s interests, not Turkey’s national interests. Now, facing a flood of allegations over corruption and the breach of international law, Turkey’s strongman is in trouble and has known it all along.

The case of lorries allegedly carrying weaponry to jihadists in Syria, which led to the harassment of journalists from the Turkish daily Cumhuriyet, which published photos of the incident, is lurking. The so-called RedHack trial, in which reporters, including American journalist Deniz Yucel, were arrested and charged for reporting on leaked e-mail messages allegedly written by Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, Erdogan’s son-in-law, spread further suspicion about corrupt practices.

This is one thing, how the masses perceive a strong-willed leader is another. While it is true that Erdogan can no longer rule Turkey without the state of emergency, under a strict decree regime, he is in control in two key ways. All the state institutions – judiciary, media and academia, etc. – are under his personal control and surveys indicate he is backed by 38-49% of the populace and unchallenged by an alternative.

The only one who could rock the boat is charismatic Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas, who is being held in prison indefinitely.

Erdogan’s self-created paradox

In Ankara’s growing kerfuffle of politics, the chief paradox is this: The more Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan consolidates power, the more unstable foreign policy becomes.

The reason is obvious: Almost all the components of Turkey’s domestic and international policy are being defined, presented and implemented on the basis of Erdogan’s interests, not Turkey’s national interests. Now, facing a flood of allegations over corruption and the breach of international law, Turkey’s strongman is in trouble and has known it all along.

The case of lorries allegedly carrying weaponry to jihadists in Syria, which led to the harassment of journalists from the Turkish daily Cumhuriyet, which published photos of the incident, is lurking. The so-called RedHack trial, in which reporters, including American journalist Deniz Yucel, were arrested and charged for reporting on leaked e-mail messages allegedly written by Energy Minister Berat Albayrak, Erdogan’s son-in-law, spread further suspicion about corrupt practices.

This is one thing, how the masses perceive a strong-willed leader is another. While it is true that Erdogan can no longer rule Turkey without the state of emergency, under a strict decree regime, he is in control in two key ways. All the state institutions – judiciary, media and academia, etc. – are under his personal control and surveys indicate he is backed by 38-49% of the populace and unchallenged by an alternative.

The only one who could rock the boat is charismatic Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas, who is being held in prison indefinitely.

Cold, hard logic tells us that to prevent himself from losing power democratically, Erdogan is holding all the tools in his hand. The fact that he, in pure Machiavellian pragmatism, has forged an alliance with the Turkish state’s military, anti-Kurdish, anti-Western old guard only makes the prediction bleak.

How to deal with Turkey? This is a key question facing the new governing coalition taking shape in Germany and governments in other world capitals. There seems to be no easy way to normalise relations as long as Turkey’s strongman is in power, with no democratic challenge in sight. All Berlin and Washington can do is damage control.
Russia’s economic stakes in Iran are growing

Gareth Smyth

London

It is the past several weeks, Russian President Vladimir Putin has received Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in Moscow and met with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad. Putin’s visit boosts political and economic co-operation after Trump called for tougher sanctions on Iran. This adds to seven memoranda of understanding agreed to last year for seven oilfields with Lukoil, Gazprom, Tameco and Zarubezhneft. The fields are largely established ones with poor recovery rates. Iran has said it was in talks with Rosneft over four oilfields and with Gazprom over gas projects, including a pipeline to India. Memoranda of understanding do not always come to fruition and Tehran is keeping its options open. It is wary of being too reliant on Russia and anyone else. Iran would like to tempt Western energy majors, which have the latest technology and can help meet Iran’s target of $200 billion foreign investment in energy by 2021. Iran has not yet added to the $8 billion deal signed with Total in July for phase 11[1] of the South Pars gas field. While Putin is pushing it closer to Russia, Iran’s exports to Iran are led by pharmaceuticals. Private companies are investing $14 billion (2016 deliveries last year) and grain. Russian energy officials and CEOs are meeting Iranian energy officials and CEOs and in expressing interest in energy cooperation after the Trump administration. Russia’s overall trade with Iran is $7.1 billion in 2016 – is below 2007’s record $12 billion. It is wary of being too reliant on the wider Iranian economy is increasing, the dollar’s special role in oil makes the energy majors fearful of current and possible US sanctions. If the Western companies continue to hold back, Russian involvement in Iranian energy will increase.

Putin’s visit boosts political and economic co-operation after Trump called for tougher sanctions on Iran.

Tehran’s alliance to a military threat from Israel. It is ill-prepared by the Trump administration. Putin’s visit boosts political and economic co-operation after Trump called for tougher sanctions on Iran.

Iran is concerned about Hariri’s resignation fallout

Ali Alfoneh

is a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Middle East at the Atlantic Council.

Iran concerned about Hariri’s resignation fallout

Tehran is forced to provide Hezbollah with increased funds and more arms.

Gareem Smyth is a regular contributor to The Arab Weekly. He was chief correspondent in Iran for the Financial Times in 2003-07.

Expanding reach. Russian President Vladimir Putin steps down from his plane on his arrival to Mehrabad Airport in Tehran, on November 1.
Minister’s resignation over secret Israeli meetings raises questions about UK’s Palestinian policy

Mahmud el-Shafey

London

B

ritish International De

velopment Secretary Priti Patel was forced to resign after she had more than a dozen unauthorised meetings with Israeli officials, rais

ing questions about the UK govern

ment’s policy regarding the Palesti

nians.

Patel faced accusations of breach

ing the ministerial code for failing to
clear the meetings through the For

eign Office and Downing Street.

Twelve of the meetings, including

one with Israeli Prime Minister Bin

yamin Netanyahu, took place while

Pati

el was on a 12-day family holiday in

Israel in August.

The situation escalated after it be

came known that Patel tried to con

ceal other meetings with Israeli of

ficia

ls. She was summoned to

London from Kenya on November

8 and forced to tender her resigna

tion.

Patel faced a storm of criticism at

home and abroad for visiting a mili

tary hospital in the occupied Golan

Heights… this is in total contradic

tion to what I have promoted and ad

vocated, ” said Ghada Karmi, a re

search fellow at the In

stitute of Arab and Islamic Studies

at the University of Exeter, in com

ments carried by RT.

The British government has not of

icially recognised Israel’s pres

ence in the Golan Heights.

“If a cabinet minister says she

wants to funnel money to the IDF

through official channels, “ British

Development Secretary Penny

Mordaunt, a former work and pen

sions minister, who, like Patel, is

known as a keen Brexiteer.

Patel faced a storm of criticism at

home and abroad for visiting a mili

tary hospital in the occupied Golan

Heights and for discussing channel

ing British development aid direct

ly to Israel and for her overall hu

manitarian efforts there.

The British government does not of

icially recognise Israel’s pres

ence in the Golan Heights.

“Israel’s interest in Patel has to

be seen in the context of the Palesti

nians through her depart

ment and fighting the BDS cam

paign, both of which is Patel in

a position to bring about,” said Chada

Karmi, a research fellow at the In

stitute of Arab and Islamic Studies

at the University of Exeter, in com

ments carried by RT.

“Scrutiny also needs to be given
to the fact that two of the secret me

etings were with Gilad Erdan, an of

cial who is influential in Israel,” she

said.

Israel’s minister of public security,

strategic affairs and minister of in

formation, is in charge of deal

ing with the boycott, divestment

and sanctions (BDS) movement.

“Israel’s interest in Patel has to

do with deterring the Palestinians

towards her department and fighting

the BDS campaign, both of which

Patel is in a position to bring about,”
said Chada Karmi, a research fellow

at the Institute of Arab and Islamic

Studies at the University of Exeter, in

comments carried by RT.

“The new secretary of state faces

an immediate challenge of restor

ing integrity to British international

dev

elopment policy after the ac


tions of Priti Patel,” said Shadow In

ternational Development Secretary

Kate Osamor.

In the case of Texas, the law in

question was signed in May by Repub

lican Governor Greg Abbott.

It declares that no one can receive

assistance from or do business

with a foreign government unless

they pledge support and allegiance to

a foreign government may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern

ment unless they pledge support and allegiance to a foreign govern

ment may be

forfeited from their state govern


donate "damages" — for example, a resi

dent of Dickinson, Texas, could sue

the state if he is denied necessary

licensing because he is a BDS sup

porter. The bill has been referred to a Sen

ate committee but no further steps

have been taken.

The slew of anti-BDS laws and

proposed laws will most likely face

court challenges at some point.

Bef

ore that can happen, however, a plaintiff must show evidence of “damage” — for example, a resi

dent of Dickinson, Texas, could sue

the state if he is denied necessary

licensing because he is a BDS sup

porter. The bill has been referred to a Sen

ate committee but no further steps

have been taken.

The slew of anti-BDS laws and

proposed laws will most likely face

court challenges at some point.

Bef

ore that can happen, however, a plaintiff must show evidence of “damage” — for example, a resi

dent of Dickinson, Texas, could sue

the state if he is denied necessary

licensing because he is a BDS sup

porter. The bill has been referred to a Sen

ate committee but no further steps

have been taken.

The slew of anti-BDS laws and

proposed laws will most likely face

court challenges at some point.

Bef

ore that can happen, however, a plaintiff must show evidence of “damage” — for example, a resi

dent of Dickinson, Texas, could su

the state if he is denied necessary

licensing because he is a BDS sup

porter. The bill has been referred to a Sen

ate committee but no further steps

have been taken.
debate

Russia and the United States

Russia draws closer to Egypt

John C.K. Daly

is a Washington-based specialist on Russian and post-Soviet affairs.

Russia's relationship with Russia has helped Egypt cope with chronic economic problems, not least ensuring food and security via wheat imports. Now, comes news that Russia's top oil company Rosneft has bought a 30% stake to help develop Egypt's offshore Zohr natural gas field, the largest in the Mediterranean. There's also an agreement to construct Egypt's first nuclear power plant to address the country's persistent electricity shortage. Egypt-Russia relations date to the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser but have waned and waxed. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, downgraded relations while moving closer to the United States. It was the late 1990s that marked the international stage in late 1999 of Russian President Vladimir Putin that provided the basis for deepening relations. Putin visited the Middle East for the first time in April 2005, picking Egypt as his destination. A turning point came with the overthrow of Muhammad Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood administration in July 2013. The developments were regarded in Moscow with less ambivalence than Mubarak's 2011 resignation. Unlike many Western countries and the African Union, which rejected Egypt's military coup, Russia tacitly supported the coup. Putin's administration had crystallised its view that in the Middle East, stability authoritarianism was much more acceptable than fragile democracy.

Russia's relations with post-Morsi Egypt prepped a year after his overthrow. In November, state media announced that bilateral Russian-Egyptian trade totalled $5 billion, almost double its 2013 level. During a February 2015 visit, Putin signed three agreements confirming that the two countries had reached a new level of cooperation. Tourism was also a significant element in bilateral ties. Before the Islamic State (ISIS) bombed a Russian jet over Sinai on October 31, 2015, killing all 224 people on board, more than 30% of the tourists who had recently visited Egypt were Russian. They provided a major boost to Egypt's tourism revenues, which made up nearly one-third of the country's hard currency income. Talks are under way to revive the Russian tourist market in Egypt. Egypt has strategic value for Russia, as it controls the Suez Canal.

The Egyptian Trade Ministry announced that it expects to sign a formal agreement with Russia by year-end to build a 5 million sq. metre industrial zone east of Port Said. It's meant to attract more than $7 billion in investments. Putin and Morsi, in a meeting in September 2013, invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to sign agreements for cooperation in restraining oil production is crucial for meeting Russia's global satellite positioning system GLONASS. In September, a $2 billion Egypt-Russia arms contract was concluded, written by Saudi Arabia. On the operational side, Russia and Egypt agreed to jointly develop a jet in June 2015, followed in October 2015 by joint Russian-American exercises. In a move to enhance Egyptian-Israeli ties, Russia reportedly deployed Special Forces to Egypt's Libyan border in March. It signals Russia's growing role in Libya and Egypt's blessing for it. Egypt has made known its support for Russia's efforts to assist its regional stability by refusing to condemn its Syrian intervention at the UN Security Council in October 2016 and again in February 2017. In the ensuing feud, there is Russia's stake in the Zohr natural gas field and the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) announced its readiness to build four nuclear power plant units with post-Fukushima technology at El Dabaa in northern Egypt. They would be Egypt's first nuclear power plants.

Putin's aim is not to resolve the Saudi-Iranian conflict but to keep it manageable so Russia can continue and even increase its cooperation with both countries.

For Egypt, cooperation with Russia allows it to counterbalance the United States and Saudi Arabia and diversify its foreign policy options.

Mark Katz

is a professor of government and politics at George Mason University in the United States.

What is Putin's objective? The single US President Donald Trump, who openly showed that Saudi Arabia's inherent hostility towards Iran, Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to avoid taking sides in the growing Saudi-Iranian dispute. Indeed, the recent meeting between Putin and Saudi King Salman bin Abul-Aziz Al Saud in Moscow was quickly followed by Putin's visit to Tehran, where he met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rohani. Russia clearly is seeking good relations with both Tehran and Riyadh despite their antagonism towards each other. What is Putin's objective? The most basic answer is that Russia values and needs cooperation with both Tehran and Riyadh. In Syria, Russia and Iran are very much on the same page and cooperate on almost every issue in the country. This is also the case with Russia and Saudi Arabia. Putin hopes to increase Russian exports and investment from Saudi Arabia to alleviate the economic pressure Moscow faces because of Western economic sanctions related to its policies towards Ukraine. In other words, Putin is seeking good relations with both Tehran and Riyadh at the same time because Russia needs them. Saudi-Iranian mutual hostility provides certain opportunities for Moscow. While neither Riyadh nor Tehran appreciates Moscow's cooperation with the other, it is in both capitals' interest that their mutual antagonism is so great that neither can afford not to cooperate with Moscow. If anything, Saudi-Iranian hostility motivates both Riyadh and Tehran to increase cooperation with Moscow to project the image that Russia really is on their side – a competition that Putin is most willing to exploit. Having good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran gives Putin an advantage over the United States. He understands that Washington's ability to talk with both Arabia and Israel after the Soviet Union broke diplomatic ties with Israel in 1967 and launched Washington to dominate the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and exclude Moscow from a meaningful role in such talks. However, Moscow's ability to talk with both Riyadh and Tehran while the Trump administration is pursuing a hostile policy towards Iran may allow Putin to dominate any Saudi-Iranian efforts to reduce their mutual tensions as well as exclude Washington from any such process. Of course, being able to talk with both sides in a dispute is no guarantee that a third party can reduce face-to-face tension. Still, just being able to do so can help Putin build the image of a responsible statesmen who is genuinely seeking conflict resolution, in contrast to US President Donald Trump. Being seen as promoting Saudi-Iranian conflict resolution as well as Saudi-Qatar, Israeli-Palestinian and other Middle Eastern conflicts offers a helpful in ensuring that Middle Eastern governments do not support Western economic sanctions against Russia. Putin's aim, though, is not to resolve the Saudi-Iranian conflict but to keep it manageable so Russia can continue and even increase its cooperation with both countries. Indeed, in addition to viewing it as not actually possible, Putin may resee the Saudi-Iranian conflict as undesirable because it is very difficult to imagine genuine Saudi-Iranian reconciliation occurring without an Iranian-American one also occurring. There is, of course, very little risk of this taking place so long as Trump is US president. A danger For Putin is that Saudi-Iranian hostility escalates into direct conflict. If this occurred, Washington would undoubtedly support Riyadh, thus confronting Putin with the choice of either siding with Iran or staying out of the conflict. Preventing Saudi-Iranian hostility from escalating, then, is crucial for Putin but it may be beyond his capacity.
**Economy**

**Questions on funding haunt Jordan’s ‘smart' city plans**

The Arab Weekly staff  
London  

Jordan plans to build a city east of Amman to ease population density and traffic congestion but some Jordanians are asking how the cash-strapped country would fund the project.

The plan to build the city Zein from Amman is part of a drive to stimulate the Jordanian economy and attract long-term investment, the government said.

Touted as "environmentally friendly, sustainable and smart" the new city would be built on a major highway that links Jordan to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The cost of the project has not been announced.

The project was aimed at finding "drastic solutions to rising population density and traffic congestion" in Amman and the north-eastern city of Zarqa, said the statement carried by the official Petra news agency.

Amman is home to 4 million people and 1.2 million live in Zarqa. The statement said their combined populations are predicted to reach 10 million by 2050.

The project would "invest in clean and renewable sources of energy and water treatment" as well as provide affordable housing, the statement said. It would be built in five phases with the first completed by 2025 and the last in 2050 when the city is expected to cover 390 sq. km.

"State institutions and ministries will be moved to the new city throughout the project’s various stages," it added.

"Part of the housing lands will be granted to cooperative societies of public employees, professional associations and military retirees’ corporation to help support middle-class citizens and their capability to own houses," the Jordan Times reported.

Jordanian officials said they hoped the project would attract private and foreign investors.

"The venture will be fully financed and implemented in cooperation between the public and private sectors. Developers from the private sector will rehabilitate the location and lay infrastructures under a build-operate-transfer formula with financing secured from local, regional and international financial companies and banks," the Jordan Times said.

Jordan is devoid of natural resources and has been severely affected by wars in its neighbours Syria and Iraq with refugees from both countries seeking haven in Jordan.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Jordan hosts more than 650,000 refugees from Syria, the kingdom puts the number of Syrian refugees at 1.4 million. UNHCR said more than 90% of those refugees live below the poverty line.

"Poverty, however, is not exclusive to refugees in the country and some Jordanians said they are worried that funds going to the new city project might be redirected from more urgent uses for the poor," the Jordan Times said.

"A controversy has hit the Jordanian streets [on whether the new city is going to be the new capital] in the past two days, especially amid questions on the sources that will fund a project like this and its impact on the state’s treasury," reported Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper.

It has been revealed that Amman will remain the capital but concerns over funding remain, especially considering that the government is looking to cut大桥 subsidies to satisfy conditions of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"This government decision could ignite popular protests and a revolution of the hungry," trade union activist Mohammad al-Snaid told the website Al-Monitor.

"The citizens' economic and living conditions are going from bad to worse because of economically fruitless government policies that increase the burdens on the broadest and poorest class. The government ought to address the causes of indebtedness and not hold the society liable for its debts," he added.

The Arab Weekly staff and news agencies.

---

**Lebanon's economy set to pay the price again**

Lebanon seems to be passing through one of its most severe crises for some time. The abrupt resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, announced from Riyadh via a Saudi satellite channel, Al Arabiya, jeopardised the political compromise that led to the election of Michel Aoun to the Lebanese presidency in October 2016 and placed the country's economy at direct risk.

Fueling Lebanon’s woes were the surprise instructions for Saudi citizens to leave Lebanon, hinting at future measures to come. Moreover, while the stability of the Lebanese pound may give comfort to some, other underlying factors, ranging from the country’s refugee population to its ailing infrastructure, may temper Lebanon’s ability to weather the storm.

Plans to address those structural deficiencies, including opening two oil and gas blocks off its coastline for drilling have been placed on hold.

"The council of ministers will not be able to take a decision in the current conditions," said Nahlah Gharib, the chief economist at Lebanon’s Byblos Bank, of the gas and oil bill.

Compounding Lebanon’s difficulties is the public debt, which exceeds $75 billion – 140% of the gross domestic product, giving Lebanon a debt-to-GDP ratio among the highest in the world.

Historically, one of the principal factors in maintaining economic stability has been the strength of the Lebanese pound, which has been pegged to the dollar since the 1990s. For now, experts seem to agree that the pound remains safe.

The Central Bank holds $43.5 billion in foreign currency reserves, which should prove enough to maintain the peg for up to two decades at the current pace of currency conversions.

That notwithstanding, tankers told the Associated Press they had experienced a spike in transactions from pound to dollar among Lebanese accounts since the crisis erupted.

The country’s economy has struggled for some time. Prior to Hariri’s dramatic departure, the prime minister had been understood to have been preparing, along with various other countries (including Saudi Arabia), a donor conference in Paris. His late father, Rafik Hariri, organised three similar conferences.

Differences at home and abroad, however, as well as the Syrian tutelage Lebanon laboured under, severely limited their success.

Now, with its ailing infrastructure, many of Lebanon’s difficulties seem compounded. The country hosts approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees, who have created pressure on its infrastructure and job market.

The influx of money-spending tourists has never reached pre-2010 levels. Accumulating problems in the sectors of electricity, power, telecommunications and other services have not been dealt with. There is widespread knowledge of endemic corruption.

Beyond basic country’s one success story, hopes for Lebanon’s economic turnaround have largely rested on utilities and the potentially lucrative prospects of Siblaw’s reconstruction being staged from the country. However, the oil and gas sector has yet to fully stabilise itself, while many of Dama-cus’s construction projects appear to be earmarked for close allies of the regime.

Many underlying economic and financial issues remain hard to resolve, while the Trump administration continues to levy sanctions and other punitive measures against Hezbollah and its institutions in Lebanon.

While both the Lebanese president and speaker sought to reassure investors and savers, there were fears that Hariri’s resignation could lead to the introduction of several measures that could jeopardise the economy. Not least among these is the possibility of being frozen out of the international economy as Qatar has been. For years, Lebanon relied upon the largesse of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and should that funding source dry up, the country could face real difficulties.

Lebanon and its economy are at a crossroads. How developments unfold will tell a lot about the country’s prospects. What remains certain is that Lebanon is in jeopardy.

---

Rami Rayess  
is a Lebanese writer. Follow him on Twitter: @RamiRayess.

---

Many underlying economic and financial issues remain hard to resolve.
Baghdad runs into a financial crisis

London

Iraq's central bank in Baghdad imposed new financial restrictions on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil to strengthen its autonomy across the country.

Iraq's central bank ordered private banks to close branches in the Kurdistan region to avoid a ban on dollar sales, a banking source told Reuters. All banks must conform they have closed their branches to avoid penalties, the source said.

Iraqi banking sources said the measures were intended to control the flow of hard currency to the Kurdistan region.

A preliminary draft of the 2018 federal budget seen by Reuters and confirmed by three lawmakers and two Iraq government officials showed the Kurdistan region's share of the government budget trimmed to 12.6%, down from the 17% the region has traditionally been entitled to since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The 12.6% figure was “very accurate”, said a government financial adviser on condition of anonymity. The adviser said it was based on population data from the Trade Ministry’s rations card programme.

Iraq's central bank and the Kurdish autonomous region have quarrelled over money repeatedly since Saddam's fall.

The post-Saddam constitution put in place a system guaranteeing the Kurds' self-rule with a share of overall revenue proportionate to their share of the population. For the past three years, Baghdad stopped sending funds while the Kurds held nearly all of northern Iraq's oil infrastructure and sold barrels of oil the central government was prepared to give the Kurds their customary 17% share.

The reduced budget would dramatically add to the KRG's financial difficulties. Another proposal in the draft budget would see the central government distribute the Kurdish region's share of the federal budget to the three provinces that make up the region individually, further undermining KRG control over the allocation of funds.

Baghdad's Response

The rules would strengthen Baghdad's hand in future dealings with the Kurds, Ahmed Yusuf, a Baghdad-based constitutional expert, told Reuters. Abadi said the government was “taking the necessary measures to improve federal authorities.” Baghdad was committed to “preserving Iraq's unity and preventing any attempt for separation,” he added. Baghdad has imposed a ban on direct international flights to and from the Kurdistan region.

Trump presses Saudi Arabia to list state oil company in US

US President Donald Trump said the Saudi government should list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.

Aramco signs $4.5 billion gas contract in Egypt

Saudi Aramco signed on November 12 agreements worth over $4.5 billion with multinational and local gas contractors in Egypt, in a move reportedly dubbed as an effort to diversify the economy.

The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala. Saudi Arabia last year announced plans to sell 5% of Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, in what is expected to be the world's largest initial public offering.

The plan forms the cornerstone of a reform programme envisaged by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdullah Al Saud about list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.

The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala. Saudi Arabia last year announced plans to sell 5% of Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, in what is expected to be the world's largest initial public offering.

The plan forms the cornerstone of a reform programme envisaged by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdullah Al Saud about list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.

The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala. Saudi Arabia last year announced plans to sell 5% of Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, in what is expected to be the world's largest initial public offering.

The plan forms the cornerstone of a reform programme envisaged by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdullah Al Saud about list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.

Aramco signs $4.5 billion gas contract in Egypt

Saudi Aramco signed on November 12 agreements worth over $4.5 billion with multinational and local gas contractors in Egypt, in a move reportedly dubbed as an effort to diversify the economy.

The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala. Saudi Arabia last year announced plans to sell 5% of Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, in what is expected to be the world's largest initial public offering.

The plan forms the cornerstone of a reform programme envisaged by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdullah Al Saud about list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.

The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala. Saudi Arabia last year announced plans to sell 5% of Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, in what is expected to be the world's largest initial public offering.

The plan forms the cornerstone of a reform programme envisaged by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdullah Al Saud about list state-run oil company Saudi Aramco on a stock market in the United States. Trump, speaking as Air Force One flew to Japan, said he wanted Saudi Arabia “to strongly consider the US stock market,” according to a tweet. The deals were signed with companies including Spain’s Tecnicas Unidas, India’s Reliance, and Dubai’s Mubadala.
Lebanon’s schools pave the way for eco-friendly generations

Samar Kadi
Beirut

“Green starts at the school.” With this motto in mind, Lawyer Hadla Traboulsi, founder of the Lebanese Organisation for Green Schools (LOGS), said that encouraging Lebanese private and public schools to turn green is essential in education to promote awareness about the environment and ecology, said lawyer Hadla Traboulsi, founder of the Lebanese Organisation for Green Schools (LOGS). “School is the natural and ideal place to learn, raise environmental awareness, build habits and citizenship values because the aptitude by objectives is to change people’s practices and behaviour.”

LOGS has been approaching schools since 2015 with activities and ideas to help them become eco-friendly. These include training teachers on green practices and introducing environmental issues in the subjects they teach, reorganising the schools’ utilities and premises to make them less harmful to the environment and assisting the schools in establishing environmental clubs. “Students are in charge of running their school’s environmental audit,” Traboulsi said. “By giving them such responsibilities we are actually engaging them. They decide on the activities they want to make and they are being very creative.”

Clubs’ activities include planting trees, clean-up campaigns, building vertical gardens in the school court and showing environment-related movies and documentaries. The NGO has created a glossary of “environmental vocabulary” that teachers can introduce in language, mathematics and science classes, said LOGS educational adviser and board member Spiro Rabah.

“Virtual water” is one example of this worth,” Rabah said. “For instance, it takes 140 litres of virtual water to make a cup of coffee because you need to plant the coffee tree, irrigate the shrub, process the seeds, transport it, etc. This raises awareness about how precious a commodity coffee is. Messages are passed through lessons.”

Helping schools turn green is not an easy task due to financial and resource limitations, Traboulsi noted. “Most schools are set in old buildings and it is not always simple to refurbish them. Financial means and capacities determine how fast the school can turn green. Some schools may have the will but not the means. Others have both and can in one year become eco-friendly by installing photovoltaic systems and solar panels to save on energy, etc.”

Green schools in Lebanon are audited by e-EcoSolutions. The environmental consultancy firm oversees the implementation of the Green Schools Certification Programme, under which schools are progressively rewarded for their achievements and decision-making regarding the environment. “This is a very realistic report and an important tool for teachers that stresses the fact that one of the main challenges we are facing is low qualified teachers and institutions,” Rabah said. “There are many other challenges which have been further strained by taking Syrian refugees students into public schools.”

A report by the World Bank stated that a new system in education was needed in Jordan to improve learning outcomes and raise the level of qualified teachers and institutions.

“The way to overcome this is by encouraging the private sector to invest in education and by building schools and not just using existing buildings,” Rabah said. “We are also trying to see if there are ways to use the land and the buildings in refugee camps.”

Rabah noted that most schools in Jordan, both private and public, are engaged in sorting and recycling paper. Many have replaced bulbs and lighting systems with light-emitting diodes (LED) and energy-saving lights, others installed double-glazed windows to save on energy or revamping water pipes and taps to make them more economical and prevent water leakage. eEcoSolutions has been working with partners and NGOs willing to help schools develop, including a bank offering interest-free loans.

“The outcome that we want to achieve is to change the behaviour of students to become eco-citizens... They should know that there is a problem with climate change but that there are also solutions and that they can act towards it,” Rabah said.

Traboulsi lamented that people in Lebanon fail to react to environmental issues unless they reach a grave stage. “The garbage collection crisis that plagued Lebanon two years ago might have had one advantage in that it acted as a wake-up call and made people realise that it is a very serious problem affecting their life and their health,” she said.

“That is why engaging children and encouraging them to be part of the solution of environmental problems is crucial.”

Samar Kadi is The Arab Weekly Travel and Society section editor.
Turkish women, with a red dot painted on their hands, gather outside the clinic and beauty salon pronounced at a news conference that announced the religious marriage ceremonies if requested by the couple but such marriages were not recognised legally. Only municipalities, registry offices, elected village heads, and religious figures performed marriages. The results aren't always what the customers expect. The trend has been fuelled by the increasing demand for cosmetic procedures. The results aren't always what the patients expected, however. Accidents and mistakes have occurred in unqualified and poorly equipped centres, causing deformities and health problems. Saadi said his clients include men, women without legal protections or unregistered marriages in which at least one party is underage. The next one is a contributor to the Cultural and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.

Ounayma Omar, based in Baghdad, is a contributor to the Cultural and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.

Mostly uncertified cosmetic centres a huge draw in Iraq

Baghdad

Ounayma Omar

Omar al-abdul was happy with her nose job after a cosmetic procedure to increase the volume of her lips at one of Baghdad’s numerous aesthetic centres. The number of cosmetic centres that allow for state-regis- tered surgeons to perform cosmetic operations is on the increase. The trend has been fuelled by the increasing demand for cosmetic procedures. The results aren’t always what the patients expected, however. Accidents and mistakes have occurred in unqualified and poorly equipped centres, causing deformities and health problems. Saadi said his clients include men, women without legal protections or unregistered marriages in which at least one party is underage. The next one is a contributor to the Cultural and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.

With this law [the government] aims to impose a conservative way of life.

Fazil Kerestecioğlu, an Istanbul MP for the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)

Rampant Islamisation. Turkish women, with a red dot painted on their hands, gather outside the Turkish parliament in Ankara to protest against a draft law granting the authority to register marriages to religious leaders, who opt for a religious marriage and who preach that women should not get involved in intimate intervention to straighten cartilage and external beam, charges range $4,000-$2,500. Liposuction can cost up to $5,000. The hundreds of surgeons, respectively, are $4,000-$2,000 and $250-$250 per injection, depending on materials used. Unfortunately, there are dozens of centres, operating without any control, where serious medical mistakes and irreversible deformities have been committed because the material used is not original or suctioned. Radmi said, adding that the government should establish specialised institutes to train and perform medical procedures to meet the increasing demand for cosmetic procedures. There is no official survey of cosmetic centres in the country as refugees and who are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in rural areas. An increase of child marriages, which is a contributor to the Cultural and Society sections of The Arab Weekly.

With this law [the government] aims to impose a conservative way of life.

Fazil Kerestecioğlu, an Istanbul MP for the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)

Rampant phenomenon. A clinic and beauty salon in Baghdad.

(Provided by Oumayma Omar)
A week-long series of festivities and  artefacts take visitors on a historical journey from prehistory to the present, with chapters featuring the emergence of different ideologies,verse cultures in the same space, and the connectedness of different religions. However, art museums are to open the country’s Arab heritage. Currently, the UAE’s cultural sector is a key element of its soft power, as a mechanism through which it can foster exchange, promote knowledge and build bridges between communities. Thus far, the UAE’s cultural preservation efforts have also helped it promote a more open and tolerant image of Islam. It is no wonder, then, that analysts and experts have frequently described the UAE’s cultural achievements as a key element of its soft power, a milestone through which it can foster exchange, promote knowledge and build bridges between communities.

The UAE is likely to inspire other countries to place similar value on shared heritage and culture. The inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi on November 8, which was attended by prominent leaders and cultural figures from around the world, will set a new standard for the world’s vision for a more tolerant and open future. The UAE’s cultural outreach efforts represent a step forward for the country, but much work remains to be done. The UAE views its culture as a principal component of its long-term strategy, which is to use its abundant oil reserves to develop. It envisions cultural tourism as serving as a powerful magnet in the post-oil age. Thus far, the UAE’s cultural preservation efforts have also helped it promote a more open and tolerant image of Islam. It is no wonder, then, that analysts and experts have frequently described the UAE’s cultural achievements as a key element of its soft power, a milestone through which it can foster exchange, promote knowledge and build bridges between communities.

The inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi on November 8, which was attended by prominent leaders and cultural figures from around the world, will set a new standard for the world’s vision for a more tolerant and open future. The UAE’s cultural outreach efforts represent a step forward for the country, but much work remains to be done. The UAE views its culture as a principal component of its long-term strategy, which is to use its abundant oil reserves to develop. It envisions cultural tourism as serving as a powerful magnet in the post-oil age.

The UAE is likely to inspire other countries to place similar value on shared heritage and culture. The inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi on November 8, which was attended by prominent leaders and cultural figures from around the world, will set a new standard for the world’s vision for a more tolerant and open future. The UAE’s cultural outreach efforts represent a step forward for the country, but much work remains to be done. The UAE views its culture as a principal component of its long-term strategy, which is to use its abundant oil reserves to develop. It envisions cultural tourism as serving as a powerful magnet in the post-oil age.
The Carthage Film Festival celebrates film-makers.

"In a nutshell, the stars of the festival are the film-makers. There are great actors and actresses who have talent but we don’t celebrate the cult of stars. This year the festival are the makers of the movies," Ayed said.

Dating to 1966, the Carthage Film Festival is the oldest in Africa.

Aspiring talents. Tunisian actresses Manal Hamrouni (L) and Racha Ben Maaouia arrive for the opening ceremony of the Carthage Film Festival, on November 4.

The 28th edition of the Carthage Film Festival has featured a record number of 37 long features, 18 of which are fiction features, and 41 short films.

Egypt’s cinemas face uncertain future amid closures

Tunisian film-maker Imaaf Arfa stressed the importance of the festival for aspiring film-makers.

"As a Tunisian film-maker it is important for me to participate in one of the oldest and biggest festivals on both the Arab and African levels," Arfa said. "This edition has a great number of film-makers competing in the short film section and they are offering a chance for all film-makers to be noticed." Arfa said. "Tunisian cinema is evolving and you can feel this year that there is a new breath and a new generation of Tunisian film-makers who are producing a different cinema than what we have had. I think that is something to be interested," she added.

Tunisian actresses Manal Hamrouni (L) and Racha Ben Maaouia arrive for the opening ceremony of the Carthage Film Festival, on November 4.

Many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever. The roads are jammed with motorists and pedestrians crossing them while street hawkers sell their wares.

"One thing is missing: The Faten Hamama Cinema — a mecca for Cairene moviegoers for decades — is closed. For Rhoda Island in the Nile, which is home to Cairo’s El-Manial district, the historic cinema had been a major draw.

The Faten Hamama Cinema closure is part of a trend that has seen hundreds of cinemas and theatres across the country shut down in the past few years.

"The closure of movie theatres is a national catastrophe," said film and television director Mohammed Fadel. "It says a lot about Egypt’s receding cultural importance and about the problem the cinema industry is facing." How many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever? Many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever. The roads are jammed with motorists and pedestrians crossing them while street hawkers sell their wares. The films, along with Egypt’s college film programmes, which have a hard time competing with the Internet, are losing audiences.

The closure of movie theatres is a national catastrophe," said film and television director Mohammed Fadel. "It says a lot about Egypt’s receding cultural importance and about the problem the cinema industry is facing." How many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever? Many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever. The roads are jammed with motorists and pedestrians crossing them while street hawkers sell their wares.

"The closure of movie theatres is a national catastrophe," said film and television director Mohammed Fadel. "It says a lot about Egypt’s receding cultural importance and about the problem the cinema industry is facing." How many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever? Many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever. The roads are jammed with motorists and pedestrians crossing them while street hawkers sell their wares.

"The closure of movie theatres is a national catastrophe," said film and television director Mohammed Fadel. "It says a lot about Egypt’s receding cultural importance and about the problem the cinema industry is facing." How many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever? Many historic cinemas in Cairo are as busy as ever. The roads are jammed with motorists and pedestrians crossing them while street hawkers sell their wares.
Hot-air balloons prepare to take-off in the ancient city of Luxor. (Mohamed Abu Shanab)

Hot-air balloons soar in the skies of Luxor

Mohamed Abu Shanab

As they slowly rise into the early morning light, colourful hot-air balloons filled the sky in a few minutes, giving passengers a matchless view of the world's largest open-air museum.

While people on the ground admired the mosaic of colours formed by the balloons, lucky balloonists flew for kilometres and soared hundreds of metres above Luxor, enjoying a rare sight of the ancient southern Egyptian city.

“This is why everybody coming here is so keen to enjoy the experience of flying over Luxor in the balloons,” said Mohamed Ezz, a hot-air balloon pilot. “The flights are a new way to enjoy the beauty of the antiquities of this part of Egypt.”

Not quite new, however, because balloons have been flying in Luxor’s skies for years. However, to some, they top all other means of exploring and enjoying the pharaonic city.

Hot-air balloon activities thrive in the winter when weather conditions are most appropriate for the rides. The flights usually start at dawn to allow passengers to have a sunrise view of the spectacular scenery of the desert, the Nile and the ancient monuments that make up Luxor’s landscape.

Visiting Luxor landmarks, including the Temple of Karnak and the Valley of the Kings, is a memorable experience but seeing the monuments from above is truly a thrill, said Mahmoud Meherani, an anthropologist from Cairo. He said he never visits Luxor without taking a hot-air balloon ride.

“The ride above and past these landmarks gives you a deep insight into the greatness of the ancient Egyptian civilisation,” he said. “Every time I take the balloon flight I discover new things about Luxor, its monuments and its landscape.”

Among the main monuments that balloonists can explore from above are the Temple of Luxor, about 1km north-east of the Temple of Karnak, Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Ramses III, which is a key structure from the New Kingdom phase. Hot-air balloon rides were suspended in Luxor for months in 2013 following an accident in which a balloon caught fire and plummeted to the ground, killing 19 passengers.

An inquiry into the tragedy found out that it was caused by a fuel leak from a gas hose connection. Since then hot-air balloon safety measures have been revolutionised, Ezz said, with attention paid to every detail in the operation of the balloon.

“Before taking off, specialists check the safety of all gas hoses, the strength of the ropes attaching the basket to the balloon and weather conditions and wind direction. The safety of those on board is our top priority,” he said.

The balloons usually travel 35-45 minutes above Luxor for each ride, giving passengers ample time to get a glimpse of almost everything worth viewing from above in the city.

Companies organising the flights usually pick up clients at hotels and transport them to the balloon centres where they receive detailed information about the ride, safety instructions and the sites they will fly over. On the way from the hotels to the centres, the travellers are offered hot and cold drinks and snacks. The flight package usually includes a cultural programme featuring folklore or other performances.

Flight prices depend on the time of the year with winter being the busiest and more expensive season. Prices range E£50-£60 per person.

Ahmed Aboud, the manager of a tour company, noted that an increasing number of visitors are taking hot-air balloon rides.

“Those who take the ride once tell their friends about it, which is the best promotion for our business,” Aboud said. “This is why the rides are becoming an essential part of the packages of almost all those who visit Luxor.”

Mohamed Abu Shanab is an Egyptian reporter.