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Turkey adds the Black Sea to its wish list

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Ankara has achieved the discovery of a large natural gas reserves off the Black Sea coast.

Erdogan said that the discovered gas amounts to is estimate at 320 billion cubic meters. He indicated that energy was of “great importance to secure national independence” in addition to being “a crucial element for development”. He also stated that the “New Era” would open doors to other discoveries, not only in the seas, but also on Turkish mainland.

Turkish Zaman opposition newspaper pointed out that energy experts believe the recent Turkish discovery of gas, has been exaggerated by the media.

Similarly, Mehmet Uyuch, head of the strategic consulting firm, pointed out that extracting natural gas from the field may take at least 7 to 8 years, and that if Turkey really did it by 2023, as Erdogan declared, «it would be a world record!»

European Union’s natural gas annual consumption is 350 billion cubic meters, while the reserves of the discovered field are only 320 billion cubic meters, which means it would barely cover a one-year consumption of Europe’s needs of natural gas.



A minister exposes Erdogan's lies on supporting Syrian refugees

Turkish Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services, Zahra Zumurud Selcuk, said that all aid provided to Syrian refugees in Turkey is fully funded by the EU.

This contradicts previous statements made by Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in which he claimed that his country had spent 40 billion \$. on Syrian refugees. Meanwhile, Turkish opposition parties sought to incite the Turkish public against Syrians, by falsely claiming

that they were receiving public funds that are meant for Turkish citizens.

Selcuk, stressed that all aid provided to Syrian refugees was fully funded by the EU. She also confirmed that Turkey would never use the financial resources designated for its citizens to provide aid and finance projects that are designed for Syrian refugees, pointing out that the cash aid does not exceed 120 T.L per month, and that it goes only to those who meet the requirements.

U.S sanctions against 14 Iranian diplomats

U.S. Department of State reported that Washington is announcing visa restrictions on 14 Iranian individuals for their involvement in gross violations of human rights on behalf of the Iranian regime.

The State Department confirmed that the Iranian diplomats have been involved in «a brutal and intricately planned assassination carried out in Switzerland in 1990.» Department of State also stated that it was “publicly designating Hojatollah Khodaei Souri, who as director of Iran’s notorious Evin Prison, oversaw an institution synonymous with torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”

Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, the President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), welcomed the designation of the director of Evin Prison and 13 assassins, who murdered Dr. Kazem Rajavi, the great martyr and advocate of human rights.

“The designation, prosecution, and punishment of the assassins of Dr. Rajavi and other terrorist members and leaders of the Iranian regime has been overdue in European countries for many years. This has emboldened the regime to shed more blood and engage in terrorism in Europe and elsewhere around the world,” NCRI President-elect highlighted.

An Israeli researcher touches on the UAE-Israel joint agreement

There have been several Western and Arab reactions to the recent joint agreement signed between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. Some have talked about its contents and others saw the opportunities it offers in developing relations and creating a conducive environment for peace in the region.

The Levant News met with Dr. and researcher Nir Boms, one of the founders of the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, who touched on the importance of this agreement and talked about its aspects.

This agreement had been in the works for a some time. There is much that is in common between Israel and the UAE and much that is shared in terms of the regional challenges and opportunities. While the UAE has been the first, others might follow, although I would rather not comment

on specific engagements.

The “annexation” aspect became a sort of an opportunity since it produces at least an ‘glimpse’ of an achievement on the Palestinian front (although not very significant considering the context). However, it does something else: it conveys a message that the normalization train is the one that could move things forward in the region and that those who drive this train are moderate leaders who are willing to pursue a process of re-thinking the Middle East. Of course, Qatar, Turkey and the MB will not applaud; Iran has already described the agreement as “illegitimate”, while Erdoğan stated that the Palestinians have the full right to reject it. Once again the two-man paths come to light: that of Resistance (Mukawama) and armed struggle, on one hand, and that of normalization, regional cooperation

and Muslims haj to the temple, on the other. It does not change much on the ground when it comes to the Palestinians – but it adds another voice, that of the Gulf, to the discussion.

Israel has a strong interest in safeguarding this agreement, despite the resistance from Netanyahu’s block (not the agreement but to the annexation suspension). Remember, that the agreement was declared – not yet signed – and that the UAE will not be able to push some more on the Palestinian issue.

I do not think that we need to see this as a religious conflict and, actually, the fact that we have now an accord with another Arab/Muslim country is a reminder that our conflict is not one between Muslim and Jews. The white house has described it as “an accord” but has used one reference



Nir Boms

to mark the historic nature of the agreement.

As for the “People to People”: much more could happen here. In fact, this is already happening to a degree. While we have long standing peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, I cannot say that “normalization” really exists. The opposite is true when it comes to the Gulf where over 500 Israeli companies are already operating and NGO’s have begun to work. Much more can and will happen.

Covered by charities..

Qatar finances weapons deliveries to Hezbollah

The lead has finally been found for the relentless Qatari circle funding radical and terrorist groups around the world. A German intelligence agent has managed to plant a fake arm sales contractor, to infiltrate the process of purchasing military equipment in Qatar for Hezbollah.

Recent illegal financing operations to arm Hezbollah members with military equipment have been revealed. Those weapons pose a threat to American forces stationed in Qatar itself.

According to a linked and verified dossier, of which an American news agency obtained a copy, the Qatari

ruling family continues to finance the Lebanese group - Hezbollah- which is proscribed by the United States and the European Union.

Qatar is known for funding and supporting extremist Islamic groups responsible for spreading terrorism around the world, online magazine «Economy Club» explains.

Hezbollah operates as a political party in Lebanon, but carries out extremist attacks with religious motives in Iraq and Lebanon repeatedly, confirming that it is in fact just a Shiite militia working by proxy for Iran. The group is known for its reliance on Iranian funding

and its support of the Iranian regime’s malign activities, The magazine added.

The dossier describes in detail the role of members of the Qatari ruling family and their involvement in illegal military activities since 2017, which explains the main reason behind the boycott of Qatar by four Arab countries that very year.

European politicians support a certain type of policy to stop terrorist financing in Qatar. A more appropriate procedure would be to start freezing bank accounts in various banks in Europe, especially in Belgium. According to the dossier, two Qatari charities supplied

cash to Hezbollah in Beirut «under the guise of food and medicine.»

The charities were named as Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Association, and the Education Above All Foundation founded by the mother of the current Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in 2012. These details are consistent with what has been previously uncovered about Qatari practices of similar nature—hiding illegal funding under the cover of donations and charities.

Former intelligence agent Jason G was expecting to receive 10 million euros from the Qatari ruling family

in return for his silence, but the offer he was given during negotiations did not exceed €750,000. They were conducted by a Qatari diplomat, who is Doha’s current ambassador to Brussels, Abdul Rahman Al-Khulaifi. The offer included €300,000 as fees for the mediator who arranged for calls and meetings representing the Qatari side, the German weekly “Die Zeit” reported last month.

Senior German intelligence officials have verified the information provided by the former intelligence agent, referred to as «Jason G», who is credible resource, having worked for various intelligence services.

Iran is escalating war against Kurds

The last two months have witnessed a series of security operations and furious attacks carried out by Iranian authorities against Kurds in some of its western regions. The attacks targeted areas along the borders with the Kurdistan region, as well as the Kurdish areas in eastern Turkey. Tehran keeps doing its best to silence the voice of Kurdish dissidents, along with the voices of other ethnic minorities in Iran, as part of a scheme to rule Persia alone.

Iranian-Turkish coordinated attacks
In mid-June, the Kurdistan region in Iraq witnessed a new violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Turkish warplanes launched raids on a town in Amadiyah district, causing physical damage in agricultural areas. At the same time, Iranian bombing, targeted the headquarters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, classified as terrorist by Ankara, and the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party, which provokes Tehran's sensitivity.

The sites of the Iranian and Turkish Kurdish parties, in the heights of Alana, in Hajj Omran region, was subjected to artillery shelling by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the Turkish Air Force, at the same time. It is a border area between the Kurdistan region in Iraq, and what Kurdish activists call «Iranian Kurdistan», where fighters of the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iran) and the Free Life Party are present. Those parties are fighting to for the rights of 9 million Kurds, including political rights.

Threats and intimidations

On 23 June, Iranian Revolutionary Guard, during military training at Iran's western borders, stated that it would respond to any move it deems as «terrorist», initiated by the Kurdistan region in Iraq. Major General Muhammad Pakpour, commander of the ground forces in the Revolutionary Guard, said that some «terrorist groups» were sneaking into Iran through the Kurdistan region in Iraq, indicating



An Iranian Kurdish woman holds a Kurdish flag

that Iran would respond fiercely to any terrorist activity, and would not compromise what he called its «national security».

Pakpour called on officials in Iraqi Kurdistan, and what he described as «our friends in the Iraqi government», to gain more control over the Iraqi side of the border and prevent terrorist groups from exploiting those areas. He also called on the tribes in Iraqi Kurdistan to expel terrorist groups from among them, or to move away from them. He also threatened to target any headquarters or base linked to those groups.

Two days later, on 25 June, Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) announced that «violent clashes broke out between units of the Peshmerga and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard» in Halkard mountains, located within the Iraqi borders.

A statement published on the party's website claimed that the central leadership of Peshmerga forces reported that «a group of Revolutionary Guard forces had planned to attack one of the bases of the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, but their scheme was thwarted.»

According to the statement, «the Peshmerga unit had defeated the Iranian forces and forced them to retreat out of the region, while the Peshmerga unit did not incur any

injuries.» It threatened that «the Peshmerga forces in Kurdistan (Iran) will respond firmly to any attack by the military forces of the Iranian regime.»

The party has «Peshmerga forces» and are considered the military arm of the party, but they are not the same forces that protect the Kurdish region in Iraq, despite the great standing the name enjoys among all Kurds.

On 16 July, after twenty days of mutual mobilization between the Iranian authority forces and the Kurdish parties in Iran, Iranian Revolutionary Guard reported that two of its gunmen were killed, and another was injured during confrontations with Kurdish fighters in the Kurdistan region (a province in Iran not the Kurdish region in northern Iraq), located in western Iran.

Sayyid al-Shuhada's headquarters of the ground force of the Revolutionary Guards reported that the clash took place outside the village of Balbar in the Oraman region in the city of Sarawabad, while Faris, the agency of the Revolutionary Guard, stated that the two dead men were Officer Jamal Karimi, commander of Basij forces in Oraman, and Muhammad Karami, member of Basij Region.

Criticizing Iranian aggression against helpless Kurds

Earlier in August, Iranian activists

created a hashtag against the practices of Iranian border guards on different social media platforms under the title «Do not kill porters». Many Iranians tweeted the hashtag (Do not kill porters), to protest against killing Kurdish porters who transport goods on their backs or on horses and mules between rugged mountains across the Iran-Iraq borders.

After several human rights organisations reported the killing of at least 6 porters and injury of 14 last July, activists called for a law to regulate the work of those poor people. According to Kurdish human rights agency Hengau, 20% of the deaths and injuries were due to harsh environmental conditions, such as walking in snow covered mountains and rugged valleys, but 80% of them were killed by «direct fire».

The Iranian escalation, against the Kurds in the country, over the last two months, shows that there is no intention to change the exclusion-based project. Instead, Kurds' plight may worsen even further if Tehran and Ankara continue their frantic coordinated attacks on the Kurdish forces, whether armed or political. Even if the Kurds were the first to pay the price, it seems that it will not stop with them, and will affect other ethnic groups in the region.

Turkification... changing the Somali cultural identity

Ever since the Turkish Justice and Development Party took over the government in Turkey, it has sought, by all means, to dominate the Middle East, masked under the so-called “brotherly ties” with neighbouring countries. Economic expansion was its priority, in order to set foot in Muslim societies. It is reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire which used to claim that it represented Muslims, before its final fall in 1923, and the rise of the new Turkish republic.

In his attempts to restore the «glory of the Ottoman Sultanate» in a modern Turkish secular formula, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is trying to play both sides in regional and international politics. He leads a secular state when he talks to Europeans, in order to join the European Union (the Turkish dream). However, when the context changes he turns into an Islamic leader, supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the world. He is the main drive behind the restoration of the Ottoman Empire fantasy; he dreams of declaring himself Sultan. Some leaders in the Justice and Development Party have left in protest against his authoritarianism, as the Muslim Brotherhood linked leader seeks to find a foothold in Africa, particularly in countries that have a Muslim majority.

Those “Ottoman” aspirations have certainly pushed Erdoğan beyond the geographical borders of his original plan. Suddenly, the African continent has become a priority, particularly African countries which suffer from extreme poverty. Erdoğan sneaked under the cloak of humanitarian aid, and he was not alone in that. In 2008, Doha, making the best out of its relations with some organisations and groups, also preyed on the conflicts in the Horn of Africa to infiltrate and extend its influence.

Erdoğan sets foot in Somalia masked as humanitarian relief

The modern Turkish presence in Somalia dates back to 2011. It was during the famine that struck the country as a result of recurrent droughts. A Turkish delegation headed the then Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visited the Somali capital, Mogadishu. That visit, which was described as “historic”, had received local and world-wide media attention. Ever since that date, the Turkish presence in Somalia has started to grow day by day. Turks, along with humanitarian aid, began to take over other vital areas, which was part of their agenda. The visit was a prelude to an integrated well-prepared Turkish policy. Organizing scholarship programs for 1,200 Somali students in Turkish universities and institutes, had preceded that visit. The scholarships offered various university education opportunities, from medicine, to engineering, law and others, at a cost of \$ 70, 000, 000. A further \$ 414, 000, 000 had also been provided by public and private sectors, as a contribution to several relief and development programs in Somalia.



Erdoğan in Somalia

Turkification is a «Neo-Ottomanism» tool to dominate Somalia

In 2015, during Erdoğan’s last visit to Somalia, 9 agreements and memorandums of understanding were concluded on economic, security, military and health investments, in addition to a cooperation agreement in the fields of mineral water and agriculture. Somalia, indeed, needs to prosper in all those fields, but it is not a secret that the greatest return mainly benefits Turkey.

In a relentless effort to accelerate the process of «Turkification» in Somalia, the Turkish government launched a program, provided by «Kaplunuma» school, to teach Turkish language in Mogadishu.

The free program is enthusiastically joined by a large number of high school and university graduates who wish to continue their studies in Turkey, or to find jobs in Turkish companies and institutions, which demand applicants to master the Turkish language as a prerequisite for studying or employment, or even to carry on with current jobs. Turks have accomplished a large part of the scheme, the Turkish language has topped Arabic, English and even

the local Swahili, especially among young people. In 2014, for example, after three years only of Turkish presence, almost 6000 Somalis became fluent in Turkish language which has started to spread faster than any other language.

Erdoğan realised at some point that the Egyptian schools and Al Azhar missions might stand against his schemes in Somalia, he decided, therefore, to wipe them out and revoke their license through loyalists in the Somali government. An institution called «Nael» linked to Fethullah Gulen group and an institution called «Anadolu» linked to The Turkish Religious Attaché’s office started to run “Sheikh Sufi high School”, an Azhari school in the first place. Somali students who used to study Al Azhar curriculum, with Egyptian professors from Al Azhar Mission turned to learning Turkish.

Without anyone taking notice, a Turkish campaign has been at work in full swing to obliterate the features of the Somali society’s identity. Turkey, for example, restored the Abdul Aziz Makhzoumi Mosque, the most important monument in the capital, with Turkish architecture. That matter had raised discontent among some intellectuals, but unfortunately, they did not try to do anything about it. Somali MP Muhammad Omar Talha, had warned against the political implications of the Turkish infiltration in the absence of an Arab role. He also accused Turkey of employing its soft power to expropriate the cultural identity of Somalia.

Replacing the names of some main streets and vital facilities in the country with Turkish names, has been the greatest evidence of the dangerous and destructive change in Somalia. Cultural influence can be very dangerous and risky because it affects a nation’s identity and heritage.

Kurdish leaders: Turkey is waging a genocide against Kurds

Day after day, Turkey continues to carry out merciless attacks and vicious crimes against Syrians in several parts of northern and eastern Syria. Many have been mainly aimed at exterminating Kurds and ethnically cleansing them; a crime Turkey has wielded before when it wiped out the Armenians and Assyrians several decades ago.

Shivan Al-Khabouri, representative of the Autonomous Administration in northern and eastern Syria, says that, in light of an ongoing international silence over crimes against humanity committed by Turkey against the Kurds in the regions of north and east Syria, the Turkish army and its mercenaries have unprecedentedly increased the frequency of violations, especially in the occupied areas of Afrin, Tal Abyad, Ras al-Ain, al-Bab, Azaz, Dabiq, and Jarablus.

Internationally prohibited weapons

In an interview with The Levant News, Al-Khabouri points out that Turkey has used all methods, in a flagrant violation of international law and human laws, to strip the Kurdish people of their identity, impose occupation and seize the resources of northern and eastern Syria. Documented evidence shows how Turkey has used various internationally prohibited weapons in many areas. Turkey has made demographical changes in Afrin, where 95% of Syrian Kurds reside. It has brought in residents of non-Syrian origin who are described as “immigrants,” when in fact they are “ISIS” members. They were resettled in those areas with the aim of creating a demographic change and an uprooting the Kurdish identity. This is “a blatant war crime that is punishable by international law,” he says. “Khabouri” says that the Turkish army and its mercenaries are committing



Thousand Kurds protest in Brussels against the Turkey's military action in Syria

crimes against humanity, daily and around the clock. “Syrians are living in constant terror” he added. Incidents of kidnapping and killing children in front of their families have occurred. There is brutal assault on women by the Turkish President’s soldiers, as well as tens of armed operations carried out by the Turkish occupation army against civilians daily.” He adds, “there are documented evidence which proves those crimes, some of which have been published in international reports.”

Bombing, destruction and genocide Syrian researcher and writer, Badrakhan Ali, says that the Turkish policy in northern Syria aims primarily at shattering and destroying the Kurdish Autonomous Administration in northern and eastern Syria with direct military occupation, and turning the entire Syrian north into Turkish-MB emirates through ethnic cleansing. The percentage of Kurds in the Kurdish mountain region (Afrin), in north-western Aleppo, has gone down from approximately 97% to below 25% after the occupation, and most Kurds who have been forcibly displaced from Ras al-Ain and Tal Abyad in north-eastern Syria, are not able to return because of the

systematic crimes, ranging from kidnapping to torture, murder in custody, and seizing civilian homes, properties and agricultural land, all committed by the Turkish army and its terrorist militias.

In an interview with The Levant News, Ali described one of the heinous crimes committed by the Turkish occupation army; the killing of Mahmoud Hassan Omri, a young man with special needs, under torture which lasted for about 8 months after his arrest in the city of Ras Al-Ain. Mahmoud had returned with his mother to check on their home which had been taken over by the terrorist «Hamza Division», a part of what Turkey, Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood call (the Syrian National Army). He was beaten severely in front of his mother when trying to ask about their home.

He continues, «His family repeatedly demanded his release, sent medical reports, and showed he was on medication to prove that he had special needs. They tried to contact the leadership of the terrorist division, they even sent out appeals via various media outlets, but to no avail.»

Ali also spoke about another example of violations in Ras al-Ain,

“the Turkish occupation has seized lands that belong to Muhyiddin Esau’s family, a friend of mine, in the countryside of Ras al-Ain. After his family was forced to flee due to the Turkish aggression, they took over the family’s home in the city, and turned it into a school for teaching the Holy Qur’an. It was officially opened in the presence of the Turkish governor of ‘Urfa’, in a clear reference to the subsidiarity of this Syrian region to the Turkish rule.”

Demographic changes

Kurdish researcher and journalist, Nurhat Hassan, says that Turkey is trying to implement the National Pact Scheme and control the areas between Kirkuk and Aleppo. Its occupation of Afrin, Jarablus, Azaz, Ras al-Ain, and Tal Abyad falls within this scheme.

In an interview with The Levant News, he explains that Turkey is trying, as part of this scheme, to change the demographics of Arab and non-Arab regions. It has placed thousands of Arabs in Afrin, and has expelled 350,000 Kurds from Afrin. The percentage of Kurds has gone down to 25%, after from 95%. Turkey is also trying to establish a Turkmen belt along the borders in areas under its control. “This is what we are witnessing in Afrin, dozens of Turkmen clans are placed in the border areas.” In the village of Qastal Miqdad, which the Turkish army calls Seljuk Obasi, approximately 50 Turkmen families have been placed there after expelling the Kurdish population.

“For more than two years now, Turkey and its factions have been kidnapping and killing Kurdish people in Afrin. There are 2,200 civilians from Afrin in prisons such as al-Rai, and Azaz, among others, in Afrin. In al-Ra’i prison alone, more than a thousand detainees are suffering amid an outbreak of asthma.”

Germany is concerned over the role of Muslim Brotherhood and warns of their danger

Political poles in Berlin sense an imminent danger following persistent international reports that highlight the threat of political Islam organisations seeking power through religion.

The Muslim Brotherhood, with its activities having been exposed to many in the Western and Arab world, is on top of the list.

Establishing an Islamic state

On 27 July, German parliamentarians warned of the booming influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany and their complex incursion into Western societies with the ambition of establishing an Islamic state, governed by Sharia law. According to German newspaper «Stuttgart Zeitung», a spokesman pointed out, that the Federal Office for the Protection of German Constitution has referred to “a persistent growth of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany.” He believes that there are currently «more than 1000 entities that follow the Muslim Brotherhood.» The «three-digit number of organisations and mosques» are linked to the secret Muslim Brotherhood network.

Even groups of constitutional protection offices consider the Muslim Brotherhood to be more dangerous than any other terrorist organisation. The constitutional protection report of Baden-Wuerttemberg states that the Muslim Brotherhood did not seek to achieve their goals by force, instead, they have «sneaked through institutions», which makes it harder to unmask their activities.

According to the German Federation Office, the group relies primarily on elites, «The problematic issue here is that the Muslim Brotherhood specifically wins academically trained people.»



Muslim Brotherhood supporters

The danger lies in the emergence of loyalists to the secret «Muslim Brotherhood», who are often seen in the eyes of politicians, the administration and social partners, such as churches, as serious and trustworthy interlocutors. Therefore, Pergol Akipnar, integration politician of the Christian Democratic Union, has called for confronting them by all means of the law, and cutting off their external funds, instead of seeking dialogue with such extremists in any shape or form. Political Islam expert Sigrid Hermann-Marshall warns that «people who act against society and despise and disregard the majority should not be integrated.»

According to «Qatar Papers», a book by Christian Chesnot and George Malbrunot, which will be released soon in Germany, Qatar has financed nearly 140 mosques and Islamic centres, through Qatari charities tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, to the tune of 72 million euros.

According to documents that have been seen by «Stuttgart Zeitung», mosques of Stuttgart and Ulm have also requested financial aid. However, Qatar's ambassador to Berlin, Muhammad Jahem Al-Kuwari, denied providing any assistance to extremists.

During the past two years, German

police has succeeded in thwarting several terrorist attacks. However, it did not put an end to the threat of extremist groups in Germany, instead it has increased, particularly the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood. On 11 July, Thomas Haldenweng, head of the Constitution Protection Office, warned «Internal Intelligence» against underestimating the threat posed by extremists, pointing out that the threat of terrorism is still high in the country.

ARD German TV channel quoted the Criminal Police Federal Office (German Police Authority), “members of the Muslim Brotherhood have dramatically increased in Germany.”

“In general, the number of members linked to all extremist Islamic groups in Germany has increased at a rate of 5.5%,” the Federal office added. As for the Muslim Brotherhood only, the number of members in Germany increased from 1040 in 2017/2018 to 1350 at present.

According to the Federal Office, external support for extremist groups declined in 2019, however, their structure and activities were not affected.

The Constitution Protection Authority report, issued a while ago, stated that terrorist groups

are increasingly using the internet, at present, to spread propaganda and recruit followers and fighters.

The most dangerous part in this context, is the involvement of women in those activities. For example, women would form private networks online to collect money in Germany for «ISIS», according to the same report.

Reinhard Schulz, researcher on extremist groups, said that the position of women and their roles in terrorist groups have changed. They are no longer in charge of household chores only, but

are also involved in logistic support and recruitment.

In light of the evolving role of women in terrorist groups, especially ISIS, in relation to recruitment and spreading propaganda on the internet, Irene Milic, a politician in the Green Party, has called on the authorities to monitor terrorists' cyber activities.

According to the Constitution Protection Authority report, the Turkish attack on northern Syria last October has contributed to the release of many ISIS militants, who were being held by the Syrian Democratic Forces. The Turkish intervention has also led to the return of a number of German ISIS militants to Germany. Ankara itself has deported 9 German women linked to ISIS to Berlin. Those extremists, returning to Germany, pose a major national security risk.

According to ARD TV, Thomas Haldenweng, head of the Constitution Protection Authority (Internal Intelligence) in Germany, said that the authority is seeking to employ more people to work in the field of monitoring cyber activities of terrorist groups, pointing out that the extremist scene has become more vivid in Berlin.

Disarray and curtailment in the Muslim Brotherhood

After years of heated debates analysing the role of Muslim Brotherhood in various Arab countries, which was founded in 1928, ten years after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate and the subsequent emergence of modern Turkey, it has become obvious that the group, has remained loyal, since its first emergence, to the restoration of the Ottoman Empire, masked under the banner of religious brotherhood. It has adopted an ideology that rejects patriotism and nationalism, but in reality serves the interests of the Turks, who had for several centuries used religious ties to dominate the people of the region.

A Disarray in the group

On 29 July, Muhammad Nasser, a journalist and an anchor at the Muslim Brotherhood's "Mekameleen" channel, which broadcasts from Turkey, opened fire on controversial Azmi Bishara, who presents himself as a "Palestinian thinker". Nasser described Bishara as "a spy" and "agent of Zionists."

During a live broadcast on his YouTube channel, Nasser examined the content of "Al-Araby Al-Jadid" newspaper, chaired by Azmi Bishara, denouncing some opinion articles, recently published, criticizing the transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

"Azmi Bishara was brought up in the arms of Zionists, then he went out into the arms of Prince Tamim of Qatar who generously showers him with money." Nasser claimed.

After referring to recurrent disputes between them, Nasser said, "Azmi Bishara hates our channels (Al-Sharq, Mekameleen and Watan which are linked to the Muslim Brotherhood) because our budget is far less than any of his open budget."

In the context of this surprising attack, which Nasser decided to post on YouTube instead of his usual appearance on «Mekameleen», he disclosed «an embezzlement scam of

about £350,000 with the institution chaired by Azmi Bishara,». He then went on to attack author and screenwriter Bilal Fadl, in response to his article in which he opposed converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

In Tunisia ... Attempts to clip wings

As for Tunisia, there was a serious and important attempt to pull the rug from under the group. Even though the attempt failed, back in July, there is little doubt it will be the last. The Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia is assigned to the same policy; seeking to restore the Ottoman Empire, through loyalty to Ankara and its agenda. The wishful thinking of a single caliphate that unites various nations with "justice and equality" is almost a fantasy of a utopia that only exists in books and the imagination of some deluded people who seek power through religion. It is similar to what Iran has been pursuing, but the rituals and labels are different. Following an extraordinary stormy session, the Tunisian parliament's attempt to withdraw confidence from Rached Ghannouchi, the speaker of parliament, has failed despite gaining 97 votes in favour of it.

Abeer Moussa, head of the Free Constitutional Bloc commented on the fall of the list of "withdrawal of confidence" from the president of the Tunisian parliament, Rashid Ghannouchi, "The man has fallen politically, because no one renewed confidence in him. However, a game has been played to find cancelled cards, and 18 votes were cancelled, and some were deliberately fiddled with to drop the list." She stressed that the majority in the parliament does not want Ghannouchi, and that he cannot preside the parliament except by treason.

In Libya...plundering resources

As for Libya, On 1st August, Zaman,

a Turkish newspaper reported that the consequences of the agreement between the head of the Libyan «National Accord» government, Fayeze al-Sarraj, and the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have unfolded, stressing that the latter is using al-Sarraj to serve his country's economic interests.

The Turkish newspaper quoted an official in the Libyan Government of National Accord, that "Turkey's exploitation of militants in Libya to put pressure on al-Sarraj to submit to Ankara's financial demands confirms Turkey's policy of exploitation even against its closest allies." Regarding the agreement between Erdogan and Al-Sarraj, the Turkish newspaper considers «The agreement, as announced, aims to provide support for al-Sarraj government, but in fact it effectively gives Ankara a foothold in the southern Mediterranean, and a new position of influence and authority.»

A high-ranking Turkish official stated that Turkey has been discussing with the Tripoli government the possibility of using Al-Wattayah Air Force Base and Misrata Port. "Leaked documents

have revealed money trails of billions of euros from Libyan Central Bank to Turkey," stated the Turkish newspaper. "As the Middle East and North Africa Media Observatory (MENA) revealed, Al-Sarraj has paid 12 billion dollars to the Turkish government, distributed between 8 billion dollars as a deposit in the Turkish Central Bank, and 4 billion in cash to Ankara," the newspaper concluded.

In the end, the examples of the Muslim Brotherhood influence in Libya or partially in Tunisia, in addition to suspicious positions among the group leaders themselves, can only be a vivid example of the bleak fate to any country that is led by such group. It will only breed chaos, corruption, selling land and handing over the country to regional projects that do nothing but plunder more resources, in the name of God and religion. It is no longer surprising that some Turkish researchers have started calling for the revival of the Ottoman Caliphate, which the Turkish leadership is actively pursuing behind closed doors, while publicly rejecting it.



Richard Abitbol: Peace between the UAE and Israel is an important step of trust

Richard C. Abitbol, President of the Federation of Jews of France and Friends of Israel, Consultant of International Relations, told The Levant News that the joint agreement signed by the United Arab Emirates and Israel is an important step towards peace, as peace in the region is conditioned, first and foremost, on trust. It is a bit like in everyday life, when you want to sign a contract you need to trust your co-contractor, otherwise you will always find an excuse not to sign.

The Levant News has met Mr Richard C. Abitbol, President of the Federation of Jews of France and Friends of Israel, Consultant of International Relations, and asked him several questions related to the new joint agreement announced by both the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

■ **The tripartite joint statement of the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Israel states: The joint agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel advances peace in the Middle East ... How does Israel see the opportunities for advancing peace in the region?**

Peace in the region is conditioned first and foremost by trust. It is a bit like in ordinary life, when you want to sign a contract, you need to trust your co-contractor otherwise you will always find an excuse not to sign. So, anything that can build trust is a big step forward. After the Oslo Accords, great hopes were born and many Israelis really believed in the end of the conflict, but what happened? An unrepresented terrorist wave broke out and confidence collapsed. Subsequently, Israel withdrew unconditionally from Gaza, it did so by attacking many of its fellow citizens who had settled there. It was heart-breaking for many Israelis, but Israel thought it was the price to pay for peace with the Palestinians. And what Israel



Richard C. Abitbol

got in return: rockets and daily attacks! So yes, it is particularly important to establish a climate of trust between Israelis and their Arab neighbours. I have always believed that this conflict should not be. Contrary to what one thinks, Jews and Muslims are remarkably close, many Sephardic Israelis came from Arab countries. Jews had settled in the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, or North Africa for millennia. They were driven out and settled in Europe, America or Israel and rebuilt their life. The Palestinians who left in 1948 found themselves in brotherly countries where they could easily integrate, but this was not the case for political reasons, and they have lived in exceedingly difficult situations to this day. So yes, anything that can restore trust or even friendship between the Arab people and Israel is a great opportunity. I would like to thank His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, for his newfound trust and even a new friendship between not only Israelis and Arabs but also between Jews and Muslims. This is certainly the reason why this agreement was named the «Abraham Accord»!

■ **Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al**

Nahyan said that during the tripartite phone call, it was agreed to halt the Israeli government's plans to annex lands from the West Bank ... To what extent did the agreement preserve the Palestinian-Israeli peace process?

I cannot say to what extent the agreement contributes to the preservation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. What I do know is that Israel has tried everything to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The concessions made by Barak or Olmert were considerable but this was not enough. The Palestinian Authority uses binary thinking: all or nothing - in doing so, it has lost opportunities that will never come back because the situation on the ground has changed! In geopolitics only facts matter, not words or fantasies. Personally, I think Trump's American diplomacy is about lobbying not by words or threats but by realities. By threatening to annex the whole swathes of the Judean-Samaria territories, the Americans and Israelis wanted to put the Palestinians face to face with reality! Basically, they told the Palestinians that things were moving forward and will continue to move forward with or without them! Either you are on

the bandwagon, or you'll just see it pass by. For decades, international diplomacy has put pressure on Israel, which has led the Palestinians to demand more and more! The result was catastrophic... for The Palestinians. Arab countries have understood this. They understood that if they want to save a two-state solution, it is imperative that the Palestinians understand that the time for compromise has come. Contrary to what the Palestinians think, time does not work in their favour. So, yes, by acting as he did, His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, worked for the good of the region, the Israelis, and the Palestinian people! Referring to Abraham, the time has come to hear the Shofar, the sound of the call for peace!

■ **The Arab initiative, presented by Saudi Arabia in 2002, proposed the two-state solution (an Israeli state - a Palestinian state) Is the idea of a two-state solution still acceptable to Israel?**

As I have outlined in the previous questions, no one has questioned a two-state solution, not even Benjamin Netanyahu! The question is which Palestinian state. The Palestinians have not understood that the more confidence they inspire, the more concessions will be made. The first step is trust! And as a friend, a well-known Palestinian journalist, has often told me, if incitement to hatred of Israelis and Jews is promoted by the Palestinian Authority, this trust will be impossible to restore. By raising the image of an anti-Semitic population, Palestinian officials are not only damaging the image of their people but the image of Muslims! The Arab initiative presented by Saudi Arabia was the beginning of hope. Today, the Arab nations neighbouring Israel have understood that they have nothing to fear from Israel, quite the contrary. Israel wants to be a serious,

strong, and loyal ally in the face of the terrorist and Iranian threat. Trump has not harmed peace, he has helped promote peace by promoting the convergence of interests among the actors of the Region. This region will be an island of prosperity if peace is established there.

■ **President Trump emphasized that the Emirati-Israeli peace agreement was a first step towards various agreements with other countries in the region ... What are the potential countries for such an agreement?**

Of course, what is happening today is a first step. Personally, I have forged strong, warm, and friendly ties with the leaders of the main countries of the region and even with the Palestinians, without ever denying my absolute support for Israel! Supporting Israel does not mean wishing the Palestinians suffering, quite the contrary. Yes, I am convinced that all the states in the region have understood that the future of this region depends on peace with Israel and perhaps one day with Iran! I sincerely hope that Saudi Arabia will be the next country to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The Gulf countries have never had conflicts with Israel. Saudi Arabia has shown a great deal of interest in a peaceful situation for the region, it is highly significant in geopolitical, economic, and religious terms! His Excellency Al Issa's has visited Auschwitz, his statements on the Holocaust, were particularly important in establishing a newfound confidence. I call on King Salman to take this huge step to honour the great men of our history and end a lethal and needless conflict. Yes, I believe that all the countries in the region are ready today to initiate a period of peace and prosperity for the best of all. Certainly, Bahrain will be the next one. Only Lebanon and Syria still seem reluctant to move forward, even though they need it the most!

■ **The White House calling the joint agreement (Abraham Accord) is a religious concept ... Is the Arab-Israeli conflict that began at the end of the 1960s religious or political? And why did the White House give such a name**



to the agreement?

Indeed, the question is often asked: is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict religious or political? At first it was essentially political! Most Arab regimes in 1948 surfed this conflict to divert the attention of their populations who questioned their legitimacy and opposed their authoritarianism. They also paid a harsh price for the defeat of 1948 when almost all of them suffered defeat. Oddly, it was secular and often socialist regimes that took power. One would have thought that these regimes would have got along relatively well with the Israeli rulers themselves on the left side of the political spectrum! But that was not the case! Those regimes have also exploited the conflict for political purposes. Even the Palestinian leaders themselves were secular at that time! Then in the 1980s, with the Iranian revolution, conflicts in the Middle East took a religious turn. The FIS in Algeria, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Mullahs in Iran have put religion at the heart of the debate, reviving the Muslim Brotherhood in all countries across the region. The so-called Arab Spring, initially seen as hope, quickly turned into nightmares for the peoples concerned. Islamist regimes were set up almost everywhere! The conflict was exported everywhere, especially

in Europe, as a fight against the Jews, a religious and anti-Semitic struggle with all the deadly attacks that we know! Furthermore, there was a Sunni-Shiite conflict, which was initially quiet before it turned violent! Multiple wars broke out, starting with the war between Iraq and Iran, which lasted for years! So yes, the conflict has turned into a religious conflict and it is this conflict which urgently needs to be extinguished! It is time to act so that a war of religion does not take place in an extremely dangerous way. That is certainly why the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates has been named the «Abraham Accords»! To remind us that we are all descendants of Abraham, that we are all brothers, or at least cousins, and that this fratricidal war must end. It is a message of hope!

■ **The joint agreement has received many Arab and international welcoming responses ... Do you see normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours viable in the near future?**

Yes, this peace treaty has been well received, particularly in most of Israel's neighbouring countries. It is not easy for leaders of countries that have exploited the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for decades to develop a new paradigm in the

region. They need to explain to their public and get tangible results. But I think that, both in Israel and in neighbouring countries, people are tired of these endless wars that obstruct the prosperity and well-being of these people. The disaster that occurred in Beirut was a reminder of that. The time has come for the peace of the brave, the time has come for a peaceful and prosperous future where everyone can live and practice their religion and traditions without fear. Yes, I am convinced that Israel's neighbours, like Israel, crave peace and tranquillity. These peoples, the cradle of civilization, must stop this fratricidal war to open an era of warm, friendly, and fraternal relations for the good of all. This is does not only serve the interests of the region but the interest of the wider world too. Peace between Israel and Egypt or Jordan was cold peace. However, I believe that the peace signed by Israel and the United Arab Emirates will be a warm one, a peace for cooperation and exchange and that it will serve as an example for the future relations in the region. I am sure that the Gulf countries will follow suit, maybe North African countries too. In any case, this is what we can hope for, this region needs it desperately. Peace and prosperity are what we can wish them!

What will be the impact of the UAE-Israel peace deal?



Ian Black

Every so often something happens which marks a shift in traditional approaches to long-standing conflicts. Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel in November 1977 was one of those events – leading to the Camp David Accords the following year and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, which is still being respected over four decades later. UAE-Israel peace deal

On August 13, the dramatic announcement by President Donald Trump of a US-brokered agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel was another of those landmarks – with the potential to be followed by other Arab states. The “Abraham Accord” between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu brings together two of the most advanced and powerful countries in the Middle East – despite their small size. Both leaders are eager to maintain good relations with Washington – whether or not Trump wins a second term in the White House.

The agreement serves the interests of both parties but the Emirati side had a motive it could use to justify the move to critics: preventing unilateral Israeli annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank that the Likud leader had



President Donald Trump welcomes Crown Prince Shaikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan

promised to implement after July 1st.

It is no secret that the two countries had already forged increasingly close and visible links in recent years. Security, technological and economic cooperation has reached unprecedented levels, driven in large part by shared hostility to Iran's regional ambitions. Other Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, are more discreet. But the trend is clear.

The UAE's influential ambassador to the US, Yousef Al-Otaiba, wrote an article in a mass-circulation Hebrew newspaper in mid-June warning that annexation would prevent further normalization – providing an early clue to what happened just a few weeks later.

Interpretations of what exactly has been agreed nevertheless differ. Trump stated flatly that annexation, approved in principle in his own “deal of the century,” was now off the table. UAE official statements and media coverage emphasized that point. Netanyahu insisted, however, that the

domestically divisive and diplomatically damaging Israeli move had simply been postponed.

Israelis were delighted at the news of their acceptance into the Middle East for the first time since 1994, when Jordan became the second Arab country to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish state. Criticism focused on their prime minister's own motives: he is increasingly unpopular because of his handling of the Covid pandemic. He is also facing trial on corruption charges and is accused of manoeuvring for a fourth general election after three inconclusive ones over the past 18 months. UAE-Israel peace deal

Questions were also asked about whether the accord was intended to pave the way for the US sale of advanced F35 Stealth warplanes and drones to the UAE, over which Israel and its Congressional allies had hitherto exercised the right of veto. The issue there is that would undermine the hallowed principle of maintaining

Israel's “qualitative military edge.” (Israel got its own first F35s in late 2016).

Palestinians were angry and dismayed, portraying normalization as a betrayal of their cause. The Palestinian Authority recalled its ambassador to Abu Dhabi. The key to their negative response was the sense of being abandoned by an influential Arab state, plus the implications for the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 (API), which conditioned recognition of Israel on its agreement to a viable and sovereign Palestinian state and a “just solution” of the refugee issue.

In the view of some observers, however, the Emirati move may have a positive impact in making Palestinians more realistic about their future. Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, has long been discredited as a “subcontractor” of Israel's 53-year occupation. People in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – especially the younger generation – are keen to see a change of strategy, including

embracing the idea of one state with equal rights for the Jews and Arabs who inhabit the land “between the river and the sea.”

Iran, along with its Lebanese proxy Hizbullah, was characteristically furious about the agreement, threatening retaliation against Abu Dhabi. Turkey – which enjoys the benefits of full diplomatic and economic relations with Israel – issued condemnatory statements that it was hard to see as anything other than hypocritical.

Saudi Arabia made clear that it would stand by the API. But a significant taboo has still been broken and an important precedent set. Bahrain, Oman, Sudan and Morocco are all thought likely to follow the Emirati lead.

Anwar Gargash, the impressively articulate UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, struck an optimistic tone when he expressed the hope that his country, which has never been to war with Israel, would achieve a “warm peace” with the Jewish state – compared to what is often characterized as “cold peace” with Egypt and Jordan.

But whether Israel will give up on annexation permanently or become genuinely committed to a viable two-state solution is another matter. Even if other Arab or Gulf states were to follow the Emirati example, Israelis and Palestinians would still need to fulfil the difficult task of coming to terms with each other. And that remains extremely challenging.

UAE-Israel Deal Should be Welcomed



James Denselow

Whilst it cannot claim to be the ‘deal of the century’ that President Trump promised in bringing about a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the agreement between the UAE and Israel to normalise relations is both historic and a step in the right direction for a region that often appears to take so many steps in the wrong one.

It is the first peace treaty signed in decades between an Arab nation and Israel, with the last enacted with Jordan in 1994 and the first treaty ever to be signed between Israel and a Gulf Arab nation. In many respects, however, it is not great surprise as the UAE and Israel had economic and strategic ties before. So, it cannot be put in the same ‘historic’ category as Nixon going to China or Sadat going to Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, it is a piece of good political news after a long stretch of only bad news. The UAE gets bragging rights for halting Israeli annexation of the West Bank. The Israeli government gets an escape

ramp from the election promises around annexation that were so widely condemned around the world whilst insuring itself by saying the halt on the move is ‘temporary’. Presumably the UAE would reserve the right to cancel the deal if a future annexation were to occur which could guarantee the UAE as guardian of this central plank of regional diplomacy. Trump is of course a past master at withdrawing from deals and should be aware of this scenario although his primary interest was to score a rare foreign policy ‘win’ ahead of the upcoming election.

Arguably the US and Israel needed this good news more than the UAE that comes out of the announcement with closer strategic ties to the US than ever before. What’s more the UAE, unlike the US and Israel, stressed that they were merely “setting a roadmap towards establishing a bilateral relationship”. The UAE ambassador to the US stated that the agreement “is a significant advance for the region and for diplomacy.” The nuance from the UAE side is somewhat in contrast to the rhetoric from the US, with Secretary of State Pompeo talking of a “shared regional vision of an economically integrated region” and a “promise for a better

day for the entire region”.

All sides may be overusing the term ‘historic’ – Trump described his vision that now “the ice has been broken” more similar deals could occur – which is not hugely likely especially as the US ends into a lame duck period of politics before the November election. U.A.E. Ambassador to the U.S. Youssef Otaiba described the deal as “a significant advance in Arab-Israeli relations that lowers tensions and creates new energy for positive change across the region.” Anwar Gargash, the U.A.E.’s minister of state for foreign affairs, told reporters that Washington’s involvement provided assurances of Israel’s commitment to suspending annexation, but said it was ultimately up to the Israelis and Palestinians to reach a final settlement.

“The U.A.E. today is really using its gravitas, it’s using its promise of a relationship to try really to unscrew a time bomb that is threatening a two-state solution,” Mr. Gargash said. “The region does need bold and imaginative steps.” If annexation was to kill the 2-state solution, averting it simply puts it back in the status-quo pre-ante of a process in a coma and creeping annexation

through settlement construction and other ‘facts on the ground’.

Then comes the tantalising prospect of the ‘bold and imaginative steps’ coming next. At present the response from the Palestinian leadership has been largely negative. The UAE will have its work cut out to bring them around but the prospect of another format of bringing together the two sides in talks shouldn’t be ruled out. If that is overly ambitious then what is not is early work by the UAE to leverage their heightened influence to tackle some of the outstanding issues faced by the Palestinians, whether that is the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza or the state of livelihoods for Palestinians in the West Bank.

Much of focus in the next period may be on airlines flying directly between the countries and embassies opening, however the new deal also outlines plans for cooperation between Israel and the UAE in combatting the coronavirus pandemic, including working together on treatment and vaccine development.

It is vital that the Palestinians enjoy the benefits of this cooperation in regard to tackling COVID as evidence that the deal can be a positive catalyst for them too.



France sends a strong signal to the Muslim Brotherhood



Olivier Guitta

After a long eight-month investigation process, including interviewing over 60 experts on the penetration of Islamism in French society, the French Senate has produced a 244-page very laudable report that will be remembered. Indeed, for the first time in the West, a very important body of the State has deemed the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) a dangerous organisation, whose leaders should be banned from French territory.

In the report, the Commission underlines the growing influence of Islamists over the French Muslim community in the past 20 years. Logically, a large portion of the report is concentrated on the Muslim Brotherhood, that is ranked as the number one Islamist enemy of France. The Commission correctly points out first that Turkey and Qatar are the two main supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and does mention the dangerous nature of the organisation. While this is far from revolutionary for anyone having looked into the Islamist group born in Egypt in 1928, it is nonetheless extremely important for a western country to writing it officially.

The Commission came up with 44 proposals to remedy the current situation in France and fight off Islamism. The second one is that to combat the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in France, rather than a blanket ban of the organisation, the Commission proposes a ban of leaders of the MB from France, including global MB leader Yusuf al-Qaradawi. This does not only concern the ones travelling to France from abroad but also the MB leaders living in France. The Commission also hints at banning Qaradawi's books by stating that it doesn't understand why its main book "The



"Musulmans de France" Supporters

Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam" is still freely for sale in France while it calls for jihad and preaches rabid antisemitism and antigay sentiment. The Muslim Brotherhood controls 147 mosques in France, so about 10% of all the mosques in the country. It also controls at least 600 associations. Thus, the Commission recommends not only closing down radical mosques but also the organisations linked to them including charities, sports clubs, cultural centres...

The main problem for French authorities is that the leading institutional interlocutor they have in the Muslim community is the Muslim Brotherhood. The person to blame for this is then French Interior Minister and future President Nicolas Sarkozy who had that grand idea of founding the CFCM (French Muslim Council) in 2003. This basically handed a huge victory to the MB that got a respectable veneer and became overnight the organisation representing all Muslims in France while only a small minority adheres to the Islamist movement. Despite that almost institutional status, the

Muslim Brotherhood branch in France, now called the "Musulmans de France", repeatedly refused to be interviewed by the Commission. Importantly the Commission recommends not renewing the current agreements with foreign countries concerning the training and import of foreign imams to France. In fact, out of the 300 imams sent to work in France by foreign countries, half of them hail from Turkey while the Turkish population represents only about 5% of the total Muslim population in France.

The Commission also stresses the importance of the infiltration process of the MB in the political realm. French President Emmanuel Macron stated back in February, pre Covid-19, that he wanted to make the fight against Islamism a priority of the second half of his mandate. Let's not take that as a face value since indeed during his presidential campaign back in 2017, Macron had promised he would tackle that issue in his first 100 days. Now three years in, no concrete steps have been taken by his administration to deal with Islamism and the Commission

strongly suggests it should happen now rather than later.

However, Macron has just named a new Interior Minister that is supposedly motivated to tackle Islamism and has an interesting background: Gerald Darmanin's grandfather was an Algerian soldier that fought along the French Free Forces against Hitler's Germany. Also, the new PM Jean Castex announced in Parliament on July 15th that a bill would be introduced in September to deal with Islamism but no details are available yet. Don't hold your breath just yet.

While the report is a big step for a western country, affirming on paper the nefarious influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on the French Muslim community, as two wise Senators remarked it is though still not enough to combat the Islamist organisation. Nonetheless, compared for example to the 2014 UK's Review on the Muslim Brotherhood that was not even published because of political reasons, the French Senate needs to be commended for this first effort.

Stop Executions in Iran



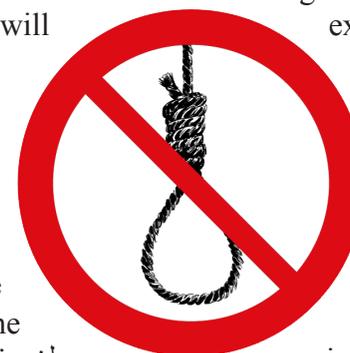
Ali Reza

A recent social media campaign demanded to stop the execution of three young Iranians, Amirhossein Moradi, Mohammad Rajabi and Saeed Tamjidi, who were arrested during the November 2019 protests in Iran. The Farsi hashtag “Do not execute” #اعدام_نکنید and the English equivalent #StopExecutionsInIran went viral in an act of solidarity among all Iranians who supported the Iran Protests throughout the years. The regime finally retreated due to international pressure and halted the execution of these three young men and accepted a request for retrial. The solidarity across social media platforms saved the lives of the three protesters who took to the streets to protest a 200% increase of gas price in November 2019. Soon after, the Iranian regime decided to take revenge from some

other protesters who have been in prison since 2018. Five young protesters from Khomeni Shahr (also known as Homayoon Shahr) in Isfahan Province, who were arrested during the December 2017 and January 2018 protests in Iran, are facing imminent execution. Khomeni Shahr was one of the hotspots during the protests back in December 2017. Mohammad Bastami, Hadi Keyani (Kiani), Abbas Mohammadi, Majid Nazari Kondori, and Mehdi Salehi-Qaleh Shahrokhi, received “two death sentences” each for “waging war against God” and “taking up arms against the state”. The five men, all in their 20s told the court they had been forced to confess under severe torture. They are among a group of 14 from the same low-income neighborhoods, who were arrested in the aftermath of the protests three years ago. The other nine were convicted to long term prison and torture. Contacts of the five have been cut off with their families suddenly.

Security forces also appeared in a heavy presence in their neighborhoods to prevent any unrest after their execution. Their families protested outside the local prosecutor’s office on July 29, but the protest was quickly dispersed by security forces. Authorities threatened the families to remain silent and told them “it will cost you!” The news about the possible executions have led to a storm on social media platforms, demanding urgent halt of the executions with the Farsi hashtag #لغو_فوری_اعدام against the death penalty. The regime has a dark history of secret executions. Receiving a phone call from prison authorities or being notified about the execution of your loved ones during a prison visit has been a common practice since the beginning of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Many parents have been kept in dark for weeks and months and in

many cases, the execution was never officially confirmed. Imposing pressure on families of political prisoners have always been part of the torture both before and after the executions. In some cases, families are even asked to pay for the bullet that killed their child, in an act of humiliation. Signs indicating the imminent execution of the five Iranian protesters are crystal clear; from disconnecting the phone calls with their families, no information about their whereabouts, and heavy security presence in their neighborhood to oppress any potential outrage following their death sentence. The regime is clearly seeking to revenge from protesters who took to the street during the past years. Despite global outrage and demands to stop executions in Iran, it seems like the regime is too weak to survive without creating an atmosphere of fear among its citizens.



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