



The KSA: No Intentions to restore relations with Assad regime

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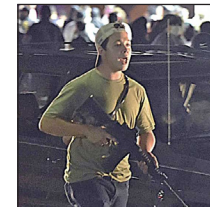
The alliance of the Houthis and the Muslim Brotherhood

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Banning Hamas won't help resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict

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Rittenhouse the Divider

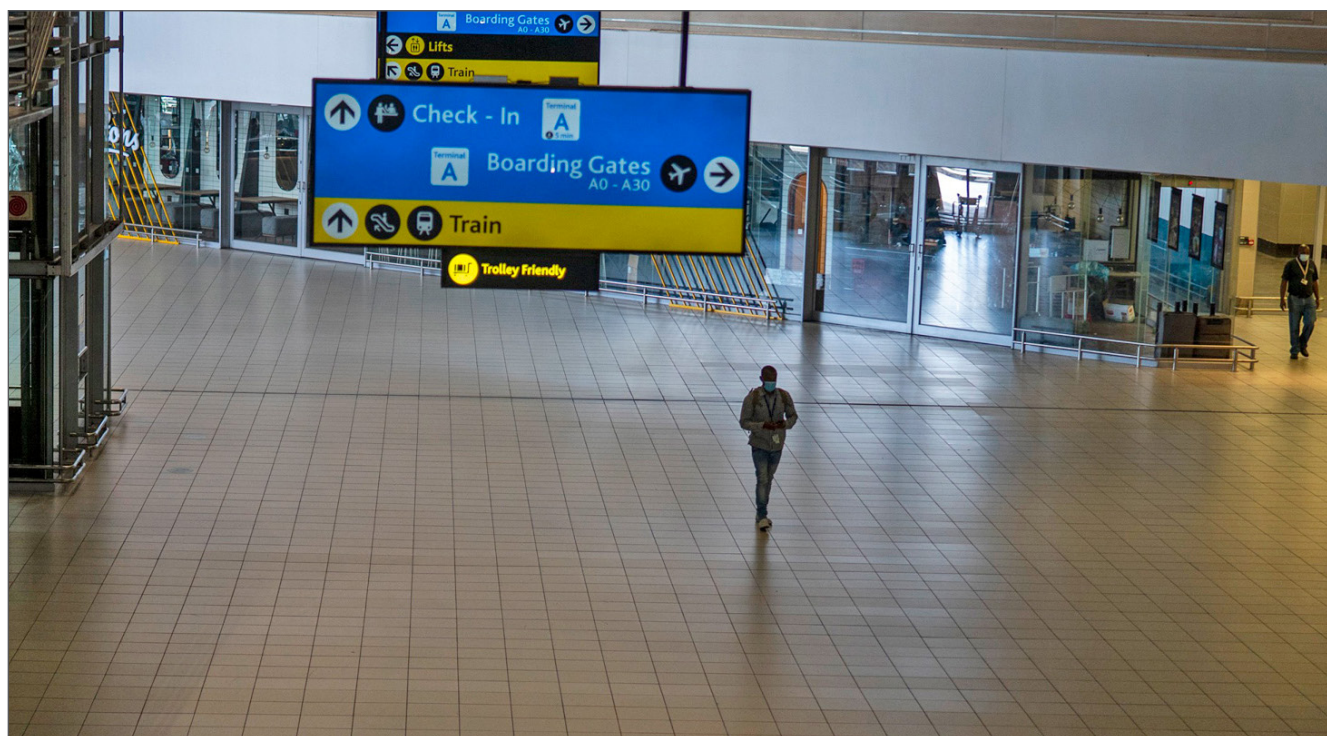
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The European Health Committee: the risk of the COVID-19 variant high or very high in Europe

The European Health Commission declared the risk of the COVID-19 variant high or very high in Europe. Mr Biden called the nations to meet the US challenge to waive intellectual property protections for Covid vaccines so these vaccines can be manufactured globally.

COVID-19 variant, which the World Health Organization officially named Omicron, prompted many countries to take new measures to reduce its risks. South Africa's president has condemned travel bans enacted against his country and its neighbours over the new coronavirus variant Omicron.

The new variant B.1.1.529 which was first discovered on November 11, 2021, in Botswana spread rapidly to South Africa. Scientists estimate that up to 90% of all new coronavirus cases may be linked to B.1.1.529 in the South African province Gauteng where the major cities Pretoria and Johannesburg are.



A man walks through a deserted part of O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa

Barbados is ditching the British monarchy

The British monarchy lost a new country commonwealth as Barbados announced it cut ties to it. Barbados is a Caribbean country of nearly 300,000 people and an area of 460 km². The former British colony gained its independence in 1966. Last September, it revived the plan to remove Queen Elizabeth II as head of state and become a republic. The Governor-General of Barbados Sandra Mason said: "The time has come to

fully leave our colonial past behind," said the Former Acting Governor-General of Barbados Sandra Mason. A royal source told CNN last year the decision was a matter for the government and people of Barbados, adding that it was not out of the blue and had been mooted and publicly talked about many times. The Queen is head of state of 16 other countries that were formerly under British rule including Australia, Canada.

The US is likely to place pressure on Iran to prevent it from using Vienna talks



The USA and its allies are likely to put pressure on Iran if it uses talks scheduled to resume in Vienna as a pretext to accelerate its nuclear programme. "If Iran thinks it can use this time to build more leverage and then come back and say they want something better it simply won't work. We and our partners won't go for it," envoy Robert Malley told BBC Sounds. Indirect talks between the US and Iran with the participation of major powers aim to push Iran and the US to commit to the 2015 nuclear deal. "We have two goals: the first is to gain a full, guaranteed and verifiable removal of the sanctions," the second to facilitate benefit from "peaceful nuclear knowledge," he wrote, adding that Iran was bracing for Western countries to demand more concessions.

The KSA has no intention to restore relations with the Syrian regime

Anonymous Twitter accounts spread fake news that the KSA will soon restore relations with the Syrian regime. These tweets also said that the regime resisted the conspiracy against Syria and the Syrian military resisted any attempt to destroy Syria's unity and territorial integrity. Others see that keeping Syria allied with Iran would not do any good and Arab governments should open up to Assad to keep him away from Iran as much as possible..

Fake accounts

After following up on* those accounts, it turned out that they belong to people having contacts with the intelligence of the Syrian regime and members of the Lebanese Hezbollah which are both backed by the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) and send the highly addictive narcotic Captagon to the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) through Jordan.

Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad's regime have made an enemy of* the GCC especially the KSA which supported the Syrian people and demanded the implementation of the UN Resolution 2254 which describes the roadmap for Syria's political transition and builds conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees. Bashar al-Assad's regime is against that, the thing that makes its security forces arrest everyone returning to Syria even if they have fourth-degree relatives opposing the regime and its allies.

The Saudi Foreign Minister denied the intention to restore relations

The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, told CNBC on October 31, that there is no intention to deal with Bashar al-Assad, and that a political process in Syria is needed. 'We have also to understand the current situation (Assad staying in power) will not last.* Therefore, I



Prince Faisal bin Farhan the Saudi Foreign Minister

think some countries have adopted a different approach in the hope of moving forward with the political process,' he said. About whether Riyadh would return to deal with the Syrian regime, Bin Farhan replied: "Currently we are not thinking of that."

Saudi politicians and academics reject normalization with Assad

In an interview on CNBC on September 11, the Saudi politician Prince Turki Al-Faisal said: 'The issue of failed states* will have to be addressed, including issues related to Syria.** For example, Syria was the scene of the first US retreat we witnessed i.e. the red line that Obama pulled away after the chemical attack on Syrian citizens. He will carry*** the burden of that all his life as we have carried it in the region.' Iyad al-Rifai, a Saudi academic specializing in political affairs, condemned on his Twitter account any step that would renormalize

relations with the Syrian regime, saying: 'Just a reminder! This running to renormalize relations with the Assad regime which killed the Syrian people is politically incomprehensible and humanitarian disrespectful.' 'Recycling* Mezzeh's butcher is not politically possible and will not benefit the region's future and development, not mentioning the nastiness of the idea in the first place and the decline of its moral repercussions.'

The Saudi writer and political analyst* Maher al-Bawardi said that: 'The political positions of the Saudi government have always been clear, for example, we withdrew our ambassador to Lebanon. This is applicable political protocol** and it has to do only with the government but Lebanese people are not part of it whether they live in the KSA or Lebanon. The same thing applies to Syria and the Syrian people. The KSA still hosts about 700,000 Syrians in addition to the expatriates before 2011. The Saudi government does not tar them with the same brush.'

'There are some anonymous Twitter accounts (i.e. their profile names and photos do not seem to be real) saying that the KSA wants to restore relations with the Syrian regime. This is not true and His Highness the Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed this. They might try to legitimize the Assad regime which destroyed Syria and sold it to Russia, Iran, the US and Turkey.'

The more the Syrian regime develops its relations with the Iranian regime, the more its relations with KSA deteriorates. The Iranian regime supports militias that have interests against the countries they are based in. These militias intensified their efforts to act against Saudi interests, the thing that leads the Kingdom to form a security alliance to deter all these militias and forces including its biggest supporter in Tehran.

It is worth noting that Bashar al-Assad's embassy has been closed in Riyadh so far, in addition to the Iranian one and most recently the Lebanese one.

Northern Syria... The political and military defeat of Erdoğan and the Muslim Brotherhood

Since October 11, the Turkish media and the MB (Muslim Brotherhood) media in Syria have praised and welcomed a new military operation in northern Syria. This operation was supposed to invade the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces)-controlled areas where the Syrian Kurds are one of its biggest ethnicities. *However, even though Turkey has weapons and mercenaries enough to invade countries as it did in Libya, Azerbaijan and northern Syria (Afrin, Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad) and it has been a long time since the first Turkish commitments, Turkey is still unable to attack northern Syria. Although it has been a long time since the first Turkish commitments, Ankara is still unable to attack northern Syria, even though* it has weapons and mercenaries enough to invade countries as it did in Libya, Azerbaijan and (Afrin, Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad) in northern Syria.

The beginning of the Turkish threats

On October 11, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to take the necessary measures to quickly eliminate the threats against Turkey after attacks on Marea town which is controlled by Ankara and its Syrian militias known as the Syrian National Army. 'We have no patience left regarding some regions in Syria which have the quality of being the source of attacks on our country,' he added.*

Erdoğan ignored that the attack against his army did not take place in Turkey but a Syrian region and that the attacking force is a Syrian one, regardless of Ankara and the MB's approval for it, especially since Turkish presence* in Syria is illegitimate and seen by most Syrians as an occupation.

Since the SDF is not officially present in Tell Rifat and its surrounding area known as Shahba, the SDF's media centre confirmed in a statement issued by the head of the SDF media

office Farhad Shami:* 'Our forces have nothing to do with the bombing of Jarablus city or the Turkish border. We believe it is a repeated Turkish intelligence game, planned through mercenaries supported by Erdogan regime, and the Turkish people know them well.'

Perhaps what supports* the hypothesis of 'intelligence game' is that the SDF know that they cannot fight Turkey because any military fight may make them lose new cities as they lost Afrin, Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad. Therefore, it does not make sense that the SDF, which has the less powerful military,** would have attacked Turkey which has the latest NATO military technology, not forgetting its mercenaries who are at the forefront of the Turkish army when it invades any Syrian land. It is worth mentioning the Arab media outlets that support Turkey were excited about this operation. They made many statements encouraging and blessing the Turkish military invasion and threatening the SDF with destruction.

The US rejects the operation

After the bad experience of Afrin in March 2018 and the experience of Ras al-Ayn and Tell Abyad in October 2019, the SDF and the ethnicities of the Autonomous Administration in North and East Syria are now aware that any Turkish attack on them needs US's or Russia's approval or at least to be winked at by them. It seems this is no longer approved by the administration of Joe Biden who criticized the Turkish president and promised to cooperate with the Turkish opposition to fail him in the 2023 elections

The first US statement about this issue was on October 12, a day after Erdoğan threatened the SDF. The State Department said that the US underscores the importance of maintaining ceasefire lines and halting cross-border attacks in northeastern Syria.* This clearly

shows that Washington refuses to allow Ankara to expand its areas of influence in northern Syria. Despite Ankara being** a NATO member, it has its own expansion project which has nothing to do with NATO's project in Syria.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu accused Russia and the US of failing to keep to their promise to restrain Syrian Kurdish militia from attacking Turkey.* He claimed that the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) intensified its attacks against Turkey and began firing missiles with a range of 30 km at Turkey and that the US and Russia bear responsibility for these attacks accusing them of not fulfilling their obligations to keep Kurdish fighters away from the Turkish border for a distance of no less than 30 km.

Turkish drone attacks

When Ankara failed to gain international approval for the invasion of northern Syria, it turned to carry out retaliatory attacks against the Autonomous Administration. The first one was against Kobane on October 20 during the last threats. The Internal Security Forces (locally known as Asayish) announced that a Turkish drone targeted the co-chair of the Social Justice Council of the Autonomous Administration and left him injured and killed two workers. On October 23, a Turkish drone targeted a car in Kobane and killed 3 people. The SDF said the victims were from their forces. The final attack was on November 9 on Qamishli city in northern Syria, it killed three people from one family including an eighty-year-old man.

Moscow surprises Turkey

*** Turkey's problem with the SDF is neither being separatist nor terrorist as it accuses it* because these allegations are easily refuted as the SDF allowed in 2019 the Syrian regime's forces to be deployed on

the official borders of Syria and the SDF was at the forefront of fighting ISIS. Ankara's problem is that it does not want to solve the Kurdish cause in Syria based on constitutional grounds that guarantee the rights of the Kurdish ethnicity because Turkey fears that this might spread to it since Kurds compose between 15% and 20% of the population of Turkey. Turkey's problem with the SDF is neither being separatist as it accuses it* because this allegation is easily refuted as the SDF allowed in 2019 the Syrian regime's forces to be deployed on the official borders of Syria, nor being terrorist as it also accuses it because this allegation is easily refuted too as the SDF was at the forefront of fighting ISIS.

Turkey does not want the Kurds even to get into dialogue with the Syrian regime, the US or Russia because it intensified its efforts to prevent the Kurds in Syria from getting their rights because if that happened, Turkey would be in very big trouble with its Kurdish ethnicity. That is why the last thing Turkey expected from Russia is what the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Mikhail Bogdanov announced on October 21. He said that Moscow is ready to act as an intermediary and refuses any new fights. He praised the very good communications between Moscow and the Kurdish forces. 'We are always ready to act as an intermediary between all concerned parties to avoid bloodshed and human casualties and to solve all problems within the framework of constructive political dialogue.'

In sum, not getting permission from the US and Russia to invade the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is a complete political failure for Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. That clearly shows how impotent and bankrupt they are and that all the areas under the control of Ankara and its Syrian militias are in danger and their presence there is just a matter of time.

After banning Hamas ... 60 Muslim Brotherhood organizations under the microscope in the UK?

The UK is strengthening efforts to combat terrorism... Why does the MB (Muslim Brotherhood) worry about the new measures? Less than two days after the British authorities announced that the country had raised the level of security alert to the highest level worrying terrorist attacks might take place after the Liverpool bomb attack, Home Secretary Priti Patel announced on November 19 that she had banned the Palestinian MB organisation Hamas.

Experts and observers expect that the UK will take unprecedented strict measures against the activities of extremist organizations and their investments and sources of finance. Observers see that the MB now is paralysed since it takes London as a political and economic base for decades.

Moner Adib, an Egyptian researcher specializing in political Islam, believes that the successive fall of the MB that began in Egypt in 2013 and spread to several other Arab countries, the most recent of which were in Tunisia and Morocco, greatly weakened and paralysed the organization and affected its international and regional branches especially Hamas.

Why did not the MB condemn the British decision?

Adib told Levant News that Britain's designation of Hamas as a terrorist organisation will greatly affect the MB, which is placed on the terrorist list in several countries, and will

complicate its current crisis.

Adib says that placing Hamas on the terrorist list will affect the central leadership of the MB in the rest of Europe. He added that Hamas is an MB branch as its actions and statements show and according to the MB's regulatory list.

Adib said that the UK decision affected the MB's huge financial, economic and media investments in Britain. He noted that the UK is a safe haven for the MB's media system especially after most of the MB channels and platforms in Turkey were closed. It is worth mentioning Al-Hiwar channel, headed by Azzam Tamimi, is one of the most important London-based MB channels.

Adib talks about an important thing that reflects how weak and fragile the MB is now. Even though Hamas condemned the UK decision to place it on the terrorist list (with both its political and military parts) and ban all its political and economic activities, the MB did not condemn the UK decision or comment on it despite Hamas being an MB branch Adib explained that Ibrahim Munir, the London-based Secretary-General and Acting General Guide, has not been able up to the moment to condemn this decision despite being completely rejected by all MB leaderships. He pointed out that there may be some coordination between the British government and London-based MB office to list Hamas as a terrorist group stressing that what is happening reflects the chaos



Moner Adib

in the organization.

Adib believes that there are questions over the British government's placement of Hamas on the lists of terrorism while it insists on not putting the MB on the terrorist list despite the close between Hamas and the MB, pointing out that if the British government had faced Hamas, it would have to face the mother movement of these organizations i.e. the MB.

Adib finished his interview referring to the historical support provided by Britain to the MB which was established by Hassan al-Banna in 1928 in Egypt. He referred to the British support provided by the British government back then to the first founder which is estimated at 500 pounds. This confirms there are close relationship between the MB and Britain which still supports the organizations.

60 MB organizations under the microscope

Hiba Gharbi said the terrorist MB owns about 60 organisations in Britain including charitable organizations and intellectual

institutions and even TV channels. The MB is still opening offices in the UK; it opened an office in the Cricklewood neighbourhood in northern London.

Research done by Hiba Gharbi and published by the European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies talks about the most prominent MB organisations. The research mentioned organisations like the Muslim Association of

Britain founded by Kamal al-Halbawi who later left the MB in 1997, and then was headed by Raghda Al-Tikriti of Iraqi origin. It also mentioned the Palestinian Fund for Relief and Development founded by Isam Yousef in the 1990s which has 11 branches in Britain. As well, there are the Cordoba Foundation TCF and the Islamic Relief Organization in Britain.

Another study published by the European Centre for Counterterrorism Studies mentioned that the most prominent extremist Islamist groups in Britain are:

- Ansar al-Sharia group. It is led by Mustafa Kamal Mustafa, known as Abu Hamza al-Masri, who came from Egypt to Britain in 1979, and took the Finsbury Park Mosque as a place for his khutbahs before he was expelled and arrested. He was removed from his position as imam of the mosque, on February 4, 2003, and then deported to the US for reasons related to investigations into his involvement in terrorism and extremism.

- The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. It is a branch of the global extremist Islamic

movement. It is based in southern Manchester. It takes ideas from al-Qaeda and some of its members are Abdelhakim Belhaj, Khaled al-Sharif (who fought with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan) and others.

- Al-Muhajiroun organisation. It is founded by Omar Bakri of Syrian origin in the early 1990s and it called for the application of Sharia in Britain. The organisation held regular meetings in East London and organized demonstrations from time to time to call the government to apply a strict interpretation of Sharia.

- Advice and Reform Committee. It is led by Khaled al-Fawwaz. The European security services said that he is one of the most important representatives of Bin Laden in Europe. He was assisted by Adel Abdel Magid and Ibrahim Abdel Hadi who were convicted of Islamist violence cases.

- Muslims Against the Crusades. It calls for the application of Sharia in Britain. Its long-term goal is to establish an Islamic emirate in the heart of Europe.

- The Muslim Brotherhood: Hassan al-Banna was the founder of the Secret Society of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928. He was a young religious father and very involved in religious societies. He expressed his strong belief in that the only way to liberate his country from the British cultural imprint (Egypt was then under the British mandate) was to develop social Islam. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood Doctrine was born to stand against Western culture and secularism.

Where is Yemen going?

The alliance of the Houthis and the Muslim Brotherhood escalates the conflict...

The terrorist Houthi militia has, recently, intensified its attacks against civilians in Yemen, especially in Marib and the capital city Sana'a. Observers interpreted this as an attempt by the Iranian-backed militia and the Yemeni branch of the MB (Muslim Brotherhood) to put pressure on the international community to control more areas in the country. The attacks coincided with the intensified international efforts to end the one-decade-old conflict and implement the Riyadh Agreement to bring peace and stability back to the country. International and regional actors, most notably, the UN have warned about the escalation of the Yemeni crisis because of the increased terrorist Houthi militia's attacks against civilians. It warned that what is happening undermines the peace process and prolong the conflict to serve certain agendas.

US sanctions

Following the Houthi militia's attack in Marib, which killed 39 Yemenis and injured dozens more, politicians and observers have called for measures to deter the Iranian-backed Houthi attacks. They have also confirmed that the MB was involved in those attacks, being an ally of the Houthi militia and sharing common interests. On Thursday, the US Department of Treasury announced it imposed sanctions on some Houthi militia leaders including Khaled Mesfer Alshaer, who leads a logistic and military support organization. The militia announced the loss of about 15,000 of its militants who were killed in the battles of Marib alone, which can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of defeat.

Secret meetings and new alliance

Informed Yemeni sources reported



that the Houthi militia and the MB have struck an agreement under which some of the areas controlled by MB, such as Shabwa governorate, will be completely handed to the Houthis while some other areas will be controlled by both; most of which are of economic and strategic importance such as Marib, Hudaydah and Sana'a.

Sources, who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons since they live in the conflict zones, told Levant News that the local authorities detected several meetings held in the last few months between the MB and the Houthi leaders during which an agreement was reached on how to share power in Yemen. They also pointed out that the MB had prior knowledge of the areas recently targeted by the Houthis and that some leaders provided accurate information on vital areas and government centres.

What is the link between Iran's nuclear programme and the recent escalation?

The sources stated that Iran wants to resume proxy conflicts in Yemen to put the region and international

community under pressure. The recent escalation has coincided with intensified international efforts to end the conflict in Yemen, in one hand, and the return of talks about resuming Iranian nuclear program negotiations, on the other, as Tehran continue to develop its nuclear program despite international warnings. The sources note that destabilising Yemen and the Arab region is a card that Iran regularly plays to alleviate international pressures exerted on it. Yemeni politicians and researchers denounced that the Yemeni MB branch "Al-Islah" for failing to condemn the Houthi massacres. Al-Islah declared that the MB group had signed an agreement with the Iranian-backed militia to share power in the country. The sources also reported recent coordination between the two groups, noting that the MB leaders have used their positions in several areas to facilitate Houthi attacks on vital centres.

Yemen pays for the old agreement between the Houthis and the MB

Yemeni politician Muhammad al-

Faqih says that the Houthi militia and the Yemeni MB branch have been allies and partners for a long time and that they have common agendas and ideology. Both operate to achieve to fulfil the same purposes, which have nothing to do with Yemen's interests rather, the agendas and interests of their backers.

Al-Faqih told Levant News that the Yemeni people are facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as a result of the war that has been going on in the country for years, with several sectors in vast areas suffering from a lack of basic resources such as food and medicine; in addition to bearing the brunt of the Houthi militia's attacks on residential areas and civilians which have resulted in hundreds of casualties.

Al-Faqih stresses that the solution to the Yemeni crisis requires stability to support the political process, enhance Yemen's sovereignty and meet the citizens' demands without foreign intervention. He highlighted the need to implement the Riyadh Agreement as an important starting point for achieving the country's political road map. However, he also pointed out that Iran is prompting its militias to prolong the conflict, which explains the increasing attacks by the Houthi militia to thwart any attempt to resolve the crisis.

Iran's project in the Middle East is dependent on its proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and its militias in Syria. Even though Iran managed to infiltrate Arab regimes and recruit Arab nationals to serve its expansionist agenda under the guise of religion and resistance against the West, its influence has gradually shrink since 2013 ; when people in the Arab World realised what role some regional powers had been playing in their countries and the extent of devastation they had cause.

Pakistan and the Taliban...

Military and political support

When the US withdrew from Afghanistan, in accordance with the Doha deal 2020 with the Taliban, all eyes were on bordering countries like Pakistan; since it has been historically supportive of the Taliban and has maintained good ties with it.

Pakistan's military support for the Taliban

When the Taliban was expanding in Afghanistan before the fall of Kabul on August 15, Pakistan was disconcerted by Kabul's fight with the Taliban. Afghan First Vice President, Amrullah Saleh, tweeted on 15 July that the PAF (Pakistan Air Force) had issued "an official warning" to both the Afghan army and air force that "any move to dislodge the Taliban" from the Spin Boldak-Chaman crossing would be "faced and repelled by the Pakistan Air Force". He accused the PAF of providing close air support to the Taliban in certain areas and said that he could provide evidence that Afghan aircraft, flying as far as 10 km from Spin Boldak were warned by Pakistan to "back off or face air-to-air missiles" when it was Afghan media outlet TOLONews reported that this happened as three Afghan Air Force (AAF) A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft were about to strike targets near the border area, but the AAF mission was aborted because the Pakistani military contacted Afghanistan and asked to keep Afghan aircraft to stay at least 18 km away from the borders.

Pakistan had regularly provided military support to the Taliban before the fall of Kabul; the thing that drove Afghanistan on 11 August to call on Pakistan to take serious measures regarding Taliban's shelters on its territory (it has been safe haven for the Taliban's members and their families). 'The Taliban is violating its international obligations by escalating violence

and not severing ties with regional and international terrorist groups. The Taliban terrorists are supported by regional terrorists,' said Afghan Foreign Ministry. 'They have a safe haven in Pakistan and from there they invaded and attacked Afghanistan constantly,' it added. 'The Afghan government always called, in the last two decades, Pakistani government to take serious measures against terrorists' shelters in Pakistan and cut the ways connecting the Taliban with its terrorist allies,' it pointed out.

The US is frustrated with Pakistan

It seems that Pakistan's violations and cooperation with the Taliban has infuriated upset the US. In an article published by the American 'National Interest' magazine on 13 August, columnist Michael Rubin, called for imposing sanctions on Pakistan, following the US military failure in Afghanistan.

'The American defeat to the Taliban and, by extension, Pakistan is a humiliation rooted not in a US military failure but the corrosiveness and short-sightedness of America's own political debate. It is a blow the United States might have avoided but should not take without a response. Simply put, it is time to sanction Pakistan,' said Rubin. 'The real reason behind Kabul's failure in war is not because of corruption but because Pakistan supported co-opted and controlled the Taliban,' he justified his call.

'The case against Pakistan is strong. Pakistan remains jihad central. It sustained the Taliban and sheltered Usama Bin and the 9/11 mastermind, Khalid Shaikh Muhammad,' he added. 'The current Taliban assault did not materialize out of thin air, but rather is a sign of deception: Pakistani officials deceived their American counterparts they were facilitating peace talks while in reality they were preparing the Taliban to

take over Afghanistan,' he said. He continues: 'That Pakistan receives US military training and gains access to US equipment is a paradox that the Biden administration should immediately end. United States could consider punishing Pakistan or cutting off its status as a major non-NATO ally. The United States and its allies should withdraw support for loans for Pakistan from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank. Lastly, it is time to impose targeted travel and banking sanctions on ISI and Pakistani army officers involved in supporting the Taliban and other terrorist groups.' He, furiously, added: 'Mr. President, for the honour of not only Afghanistan but also the United States, make Pakistan pay!' he finishes his call.

Pakistan promotes the Taliban to the world

Following the fall of Kabul, Pakistan tried to promote the Taliban to the world as an alternative to the fallen Afghan government. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on 23 August that his country wants the international community "to keep interacting with the Afghan Taliban".

Moreover, there are direct links between the Taliban and the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence); the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan). Reuters reported that Pakistan's spy chief Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed flew into Kabul on Saturday invited by Taliban. It is not clear what his agenda was, but a senior official in Pakistan said earlier in the week that Hameed, who heads the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency, could help the Taliban restructure the Afghan military.

It seems that Afghans are aware of Pakistan's role. Hundreds of people, mostly women, took to the streets of Kabul on 7 September in an anti-Pakistan rally. They chanted

slogans against Islamabad and ISI like "Long live the resistance" and "Death to Pakistan." As the protests intensified, the Taliban opened fire on the rally. According to news agency AFP, the Taliban fired shots in the air to disperse the anti-Pakistan protestors.

The Indian newspaper Daily Pioneer accused on 8 September the PAF of helping the Taliban in capturing Panjshir. It said the Pakistan Air Force loaned three pilots to the Taliban forces and four JF7 fighters to bomb the valley. It reported that the Pakistani jets carried out nearly 20 sorties. It added that the Pakistani military and special forces took part in the operation.

Political support

Despite all the accusations and pleas, Pakistan has continued to support the Taliban; moreover, it has extended political support to the group. Pakistan's prime minister stated on 18 September that he had initiated a dialogue with the Taliban to encourage them to form an inclusive government that would ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan and the wider region, claiming that Taliban rhetoric indicates that the group has probably changed.

Pakistan called on world powers to unblock billions of dollars in Afghan assets frozen after the Taliban takeover. Pakistan's prime minister urged the international community, on 24 September, to support the new Taliban leaders in Afghanistan; arguing that the country would be hit by a humanitarian crisis if the Taliban government were not supported. Finally, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited the Afghan capital Kabul on 21 October for the first time since the Taliban victory in August. Pakistan's foreign ministry claimed that Qureshi would focus, in his talks with Muttaqi and other Taliban leaders, "on ways and means to deepen cooperation in diverse areas".

Cracks in NATO:

Internal erosion and external blows

On 5 September, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that the establishment of a new common military force could divide Europe and weaken NATO. His statement clearly indicates that the organisation has seen better days, despite trying to show its new and old foes how united it is.

NATO's weakness in Afghanistan

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan exposed weaknesses in NATO. Stoltenberg stated on 11 September that the US allies in NATO could not maintain the military operation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US forces. This is a clear acknowledgement that NATO is existentially dependent on the US and that it will be divided without it. 'If the US allies in NATO stayed in Afghanistan, the military spending would absolutely increase. It is an unrealistic choice to stay. It would have been very difficult for European allies to persuade parliaments to allocate additional funds and increase military force in Afghanistan as part of a campaign that began to protect the US interests,' said Stoltenberg.

Europe seeks military independence

NATO's weakness in Afghanistan and the US withdrawal encouraged Europe to revisit the proposal to form a new European military force which had been opposed by the US in the past. The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell told the French *Le Monde* on 14 September that strengthening defence and achieving European strategic autonomy are good for NATO and the US. Josep Borrell told the French *Le Monde* on 14 September that strengthening defence and achieving European strategic autonomy are good for NATO and the US. 'It undeniably



sounded like a rude awakening and once again showed our vulnerability. We need an assessment report on the role of the European Union (EU) in Afghanistan and the dysfunctions that may have occurred over the past twenty years,' he said.

France wants to withdraw from NATO after AUKUS

France has long been known for being the most strongly critical member of NATO. In late 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron described NATO as "brain dead". It seems that provocations of some NATO countries have only encouraged France further to step away from the organisation. On 21 September, the American newspaper 'New York Times' reported that the trilateral security pact (AUKUS) between Australia, the USA and Britain prompted Paris to seek withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command structure. 'Macron chose to escalate in responding to the secretive U.S.-British move to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, a decision that the Australians used to nix the prior French deal,' the newspaper mentioned. This move came six months before the French presidential elections.

'One idea doing the rounds in France is for the country to withdraw from NATO's integrated military command structure, which it re-joined in 2009 after a 43-year absence,' the newspaper noted. 'Whatever Macron's view, expressed in 2019, that NATO is "brain dead", France's withdrawal is a radical step,' it pointed out. 'France feels humiliated and it will not readily forget what it sees as an American slap in the face, described by the minister as intolerable,' it added.

French Minister of the Armed Forces, Florence Parly, seems to agree with this analysis. She said on 22 September that NATO member states had agreed to review its strategic concept, after the Paris- Washington crisis with the US, Australia and Britain. "The behaviour of the United States in the situation with the submarine program is the new illustration of what we have been stating for months — is that there is no political dialogue within the Atlantic alliance," Parly said at a meeting of the French Senate. Parly said that, in the last few months, NATO witnessed tangible disturbances like Turkey's adventures in the Mediterranean Sea and the accelerated and uncoordinated withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan which brought sad repercussions. She wondered what

conclusions can be drawn from Australia's decision to cancel the submarine deal saying: "Should we withdraw from NATO and close the door? I don't think we should take that step."

NATO fails to convince Turkey

The S-400 deal which was signed between Moscow and Ankara 2017, amid disapproval from Turkey's allies in NATO, is still an ongoing issue. NATO has failed to convince Turkey to withdraw from the deal. Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on 5 October that NATO could not persuade Turkey to withdraw from the deal with Russia to buy S-400 air defence systems and replace them with systems made by Western countries.

'As I stated before, this is an important issue for NATO, the S-400 air defence systems have to be integrated into NATO systems but this cannot be,' he said from Washington DC. 'We are working on these issues as an alliance. I am aware that there are some problems and some members have been critical. We talk about this publicly and in NATO meetings,' he added

In addition, NATO is facing many external challenges. The Russian Foreign Minister said in late October that Russia's relations with NATO are now somewhere worse even than in the darkest days of the Cold War.* China is also expanding substantially and is competing with the West and NATO. 'We see the whole global balance of power is shifting because of the rise of China. we see China coming much closer to us. We see it in cyberspace, space, Africa and the Arctic,' said Jens Stoltenberg in late November.

In sum, the external and internal challenges NATO is facing are not sending reassuring signals about its future to its closest supporters and members; it seems to be fragmenting internally while receiving blows from the outside.

Banning Hamas won't help resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict



Ian Black

Like virtually everything else involving the Israel-Palestine conflict, Britain's decision to ban Hamas in its entirety has ignited controversy. Priti Patel, Boris Johnson's Home Secretary, announced the decision in a speech to the Heritage Foundation, a conservative thinktank, in Washington DC last Friday. The UK media, smelling a good story, reported it in advance, presumably on the basis of a government briefing or a deliberate, attention-grabbing leak. Patel let it be known that in the wake of this move, support for the Palestinian Islamist movement would be considered a criminal offence and punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Given the Conservative government's majority in parliament, it seems certain to become law by the end of November.

It was not actually that surprising. Previously the British position had been to formally distinguish between Hamas's military wing – the Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which was outlawed in 2001 – and the political movement which rules the Gaza Strip. Successive Israeli governments had long lobbied the UK, along with the US, to change its position and realign itself with Washington and Brussels, headquarters of the European Union. Over the years that “artificial” distinction, as Patel expressed it, came to be seen as meaningless. In its dealings with the Palestinians, the UK government presented itself as unwilling to talk directly to the political leaders of Hamas (the Arabic name means the Islamic Resistance Movement) preferring to deal solely with the Fatah-majority Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority (PA) led by Mahmoud Abbas in line with its pursuit of the Oslo Accords peace process.

That approach made sense, in that the PLO had recognized the state of Israel back in September 1993 when the



Accords were signed by Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. Israel, for its part, recognised the PLO as the “sole representative of the Palestinians.” Hamas, which was created in 1987, refused to do the same but signalled that it would still accept a de facto reality. The situation became more complicated when Israel, under Ariel Sharon, unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and Hamas took over from the PA two years later.

Over the years since there have been four all-out wars between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip as well as countless violent incidents – the last one being the 11-day flare-up in May 2021, which was provoked by tensions involving the planned eviction of Palestinians from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah by Israeli settlers.

Patel characterised Hamas as “rabidly anti-Semitic”, fuelling the position that any criticism of or hostility to Israel constitutes anti-Jewish racism. The UK home secretary said recently that when pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered peacefully outside a university gathering addressed by the Israel ambassador to London, that again was an expression of what she called “anti-Semitism.” This is also an extremely divisive issue in British politics. Jeremy Corbyn,

the previous leader of the Labour opposition, was regularly accused of being a leftist and an anti-Semite especially when he referred to his Hamas “friends”. Tony Blair, Labour's decade-long prime minister, and the former Quartet Middle East envoy, generated headlines when he revealed that he had conducted talks with Khaled Meshaal, the Qatar-based Hamas political leader.

Blair also admitted that he and other world leaders had been wrong to give in to Israeli pressure to boycott Hamas after its election victory in 2006. “In retrospect, I think we should have, right at the very beginning, tried to pull [Hamas] into a dialogue and shifted their positions... But obviously it was very difficult, the Israelis were very opposed to it. But you know we could have probably worked out a way whereby we did – which in fact we ended up doing anyway, informally.”

Israel was delighted at Boris Johnson's government change of heart. Israeli media revealed that Naftali Bennett, the prime minister, had raised the issue when the two leaders met at the COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow.

Hamas was understandably furious at the British change of direction. As was Iran, a keen supporter of both Hamas,

Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah. More surprisingly the British decision was condemned by the Palestine Mission in London (the UK representative of the PA) describing it as “a retrograde step that will make peace-making harder and diminish the UK's role.”

It added that the British government has “complicated Palestinian unity efforts and undermined Palestinian democracy” and that it will “do nothing for efforts to secure a peaceful two-state outcome, an outcome that is being undermined every day by Israeli war crimes, including its illegal colonial settlement project in occupied territory.”

The international ban on official contacts with Hamas has already diminished western leverage in the region, increased the isolation and suffering of the Gaza public, and helped to drive the Islamist group into the arms of Tehran – all without in any way dislodging it from its dominance of the coastal enclave. Looking at the big picture of resolving this most intractable of conflicts, the UK decision will have little positive effect unless the international community collectively decides to devote more effort to obtaining justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. Neither side is going to disappear any time soon.

Rittenhouse the Divider



James Denselow

Whilst Kyle Rittenhouse may have been acquitted of all charges laid against him the case has exposed and piled pressure on America's divides over firearms. There was no better evidence of this than President Biden's own response to the verdict; to say initially that people had to 'abide by' the jury's verdict, he then went on to say that he was "angry and concerned" about the Rittenhouse's acquittal for killing two men and wounding a third man.

The case has brought an intersection of major US issues together. Racism, gun control and the rise of extremist groups on both sides of the political spectrum. President Biden promised to heal the nation following four years of incendiary politics coming out of the Trump White House, but this case shows how far he's got to go as well as his own shortcomings in addressing them.

Looking beyond issues of guilt or innocence, Rittenhouse is a challenge to a wider view of what is a righteous American identity. To some he was a patriot taking up his right to bear

arms to support his fellow Americans lives and property at a time of civil unrest and potential criminal violence. To others he was a vigilante with a background potentially linked to white supremacist groups, taking advantages of the country's inability to control guns to take a weapon designed for the battlefield onto the streets of the country with predictable results.

Legal observers' reflections on the Rittenhouse verdict claim that the case could be there is now legal ground for you to use your weapon at protests if you "just claim fear". Fear is a central emotive theme running alongside much of this narrative. It is surely fear of being attacked that leads many Americans to arm themselves so comprehensively. The jury that acquitted Rittenhouse saw comprehensive video footage of the incidents that led to the deaths of Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber. One cannot watch that footage and describe Rittenhouse himself, despite being heavily armed, as someone acting out of nothing short than absolute terror. Yet the decisions to take himself and that weapon to that place was much more rational and should arguably come with consequence.

Whilst only a handful, it seems, of those involved in the January storming of the Capitol were armed with firearms, the notion that the country will see a trend towards more protest and counter protest is worth considering in detail. Essentially is the combination of more and more lax gun control which allows for people to open carry automatic weapons with more and more protests in terms of numbers and locals a recipe for violence? Especially when you layer on top of that the Rittenhouse verdict and a sense that could be felt by all sides that them taking a weapon to an area of unrest and being afraid will sanction their use of said weapon in self-defence.

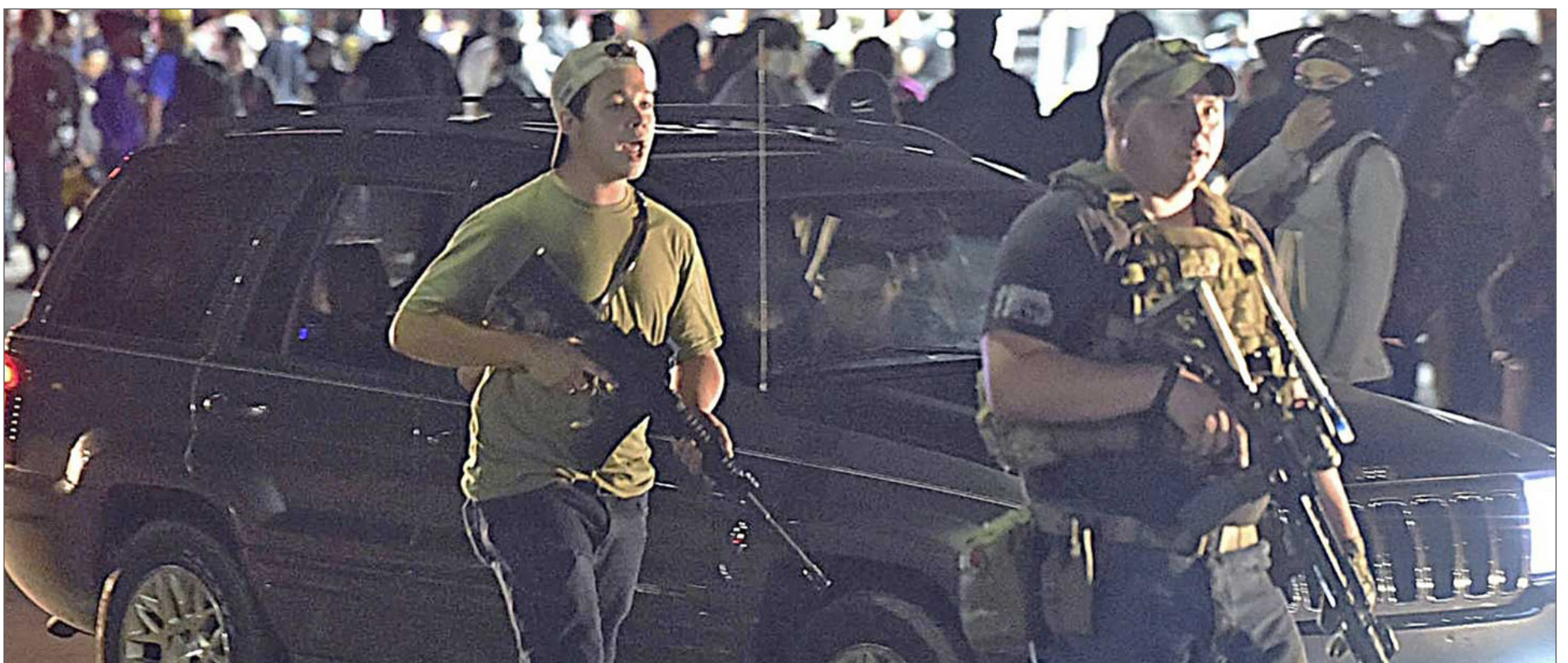
Unlike the other mass shooter events that have blighted America's recent history, most of which result in the shooter being killed and a consensus, however brief, that something should be done about gun control, the Rittenhouse verdict would seem to polarise sides further. Indeed, questions of double standards pose the ultimate hypothetical with many asking would a black protestor who shot a white protestor have resulted in the same acquittal.

Even before the verdict those advocating for further gun control

were worried that the Supreme Court is likely to strike down, or seriously weaken, a New York state law that imposes strict limits on carrying weapons outside the home.

More permissive gun laws in a more deeply divided country with legal precedent as to what people can get away with if they are afraid, is the current incendiary cocktail that America's politics has been left with following the Rittenhouse verdict. With the notion of gun controls a political impossibility America faces the test of better organising its policing of protests. Arguably the investment in policing manpower, training and associated infrastructure to help keep America's angry political tribes apart is worth the cost in the perspective of the societal harm that's at risk otherwise.

A more curious 'x-factor' in this narrative are the subsequent actions of Kyle Rittenhouse himself. He has already surprised some by proclaiming his support to the 'Black Lives Movement' in the first media interview following his acquittal. How he attempts to build bridges and consensus as opposed to pandering to one faction or the other will be the most immediate litmus test as to levels of division in the country.



Kyle Rittenhouse



People sign papers to recommend the candidacy of Libya's eastern commander Khalifa Haftar

Libya Elections and Candidates



Dalia Ziada

In less than one month, the world will be curiously watching about 2.5 million Libyan voters lined up at ballot stations to decide about their future political representatives in parliament and presidency. Whether the upcoming elections in Libya will be successfully implemented is still unlikely, despite huge pressures from the international community to make the elections happen on due time.

The main goal of the elections is to bring the long-aspired sense of security and stability to Libya, the North African country that has been suffering from civil war, armed militia, and terrorism for almost a decade. However, the indirect, but greater, goal of stabilizing Libya through a democratic process is to bring the regions influenced by Libya's turmoil back to sanity under

the international law and norms. That includes North Africa, central Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean.

Let's hope the voting scene will be as peaceful and democratic as the international community desires it to be. The success of this electoral process in installing a new stable system of governance will open the doors of a prosperous future for the Libyan people. This will consequently enhance the stability and security in north and central Africa, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean region. However, all these remain flowery wishes, as long as the deep divisions among the Libyan tribes and political factions, in eastern and western territories, has not been resolved, yet.

The initial list of potential presidential candidates, who registered themselves so far, is a clear indicator on that. The list includes the biggest troublemakers in Libya, from both Benghazi and Tripoli. On the top of the list is General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA),

who has a strong hold on eastern and southern territories. Haftar is already accused of planning mass killings of Libyan people in the past years. Despite that, the elastic election law did not prevent him from running. The same thing could be said about Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, who appeared at the candidates' registration station, wearing the iconic gown and turban of his father, former president Muammar Gaddafi, who was removed from power and killed by rebels during the Arab Spring years. Meanwhile, it is ironic to see Aguila Saleh, Parliament Speaker and a close ally to Haftar, decide to join the race for the presidential seat. Allegedly, Aguila Saleh tailored the Election Law, released in October, to fit Haftar.

With these types of candidates, we can hardly expect anything good to come out of these elections. The victory of any of them is going to be disastrous for Libya's future and will eventually lead to another state failure, that may be very difficult to

resolve this time. At the same time, there is not guarantee that they will accept the voting results without turning it into a fight that may recreate the civil war. I can hardly imagine that Haftar will, for example, accept losing in this election without trying to raise hell against Tripoli as he did before, in 2019 and beyond. In that sense, there is no guarantee that these elections, in that format, are going to achieve the main goal of the political process; that is, bringing long-term security and stability to Libya and the Libyan people.

Elections and voting are democratic practices that cannot stand still on the shaking ground of the extremely divided political scene in Libya. The type of democracy, which is dependent on ballot boxes, is a political practice that requires a tough ground of social unity and national security to flourish upon. Otherwise, it may fail in a way that destroys the whole political solution process and magnifies the many existing tragedies of Libya.

Once again.. the Lebanese people must choose: Justice and accountability or civil peace

Mark Magdy Sweha

For nearly two years now, Lebanon faced massive crises specifically, an economic and financial crisis, followed by the pandemic crisis and, the explosion at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 and lastly According to the World Bank document: “the Spring 2021 Lebanon Economic Monitor” found that Lebanon economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top three most severe the world has seen since the mid-19th century. Between a lack of foreign currency and extreme fuel shortages, residents are often receiving just two hours of electricity a day.

Lebanon was ranked 149 out of 180 in Transparency International's 2020 corruption index. The Lebanese regime has a long history with corruption, nepotism and an entrenched political class. Many leadership posts have been held by the same elite since the 1975-90 civil war. They seek power and dominance primary through bribery and other corrupt practices, winning their legitimacy through the promises of increasing the representation of their political/religious sects. For example, Nabih Berri, the leader of the shiia movement Amal and the speaker of the Lebanese parliament has been in office for well over 30 years. Hassan Nassrallah, the leader of the shiia party Hezbollah, has been the Secretary General of the party since the Civil War. Also the Christian leader, Samir Geagea has been the leader of the Lebanese Forces since the Civil War as well. Currently, Lebanon has 18 officially recognized religious sects, most of which belong to different dominations of Islam and Christianity. To explore the motivation that led to the fragility of the Lebanese state and the domination of the current Lebanese political elite, I review the historical conditions that led to the formation of the Lebanese population and the implementation of the

Lebanese nation-state.

Difference and Sameness theories played an important role to explain societal cohesion and political integration. In Europe, during the process of the formation of modern state-nations that attempted to create a homogenous nation by religious criteria the fact that led to several massacres, expulsions and forced conversions of many religious minorities. A higher degree of cultural sameness was one of the main requirements that characterized the formation of the modern nation-state. For example, the unification of the language was an important part of this project in which the integration of the people need a certain kind of sameness along important lines of classifications. In contrast to the nation-state, empires are always ethnically heterogeneous. Also, integration through difference that was developed under conditions in which ethnically heterogeneous societies and political factions have a certain kind of peaceful coexistence over long periods of time.

The Ottoman Empire had the millet system that defined differences along religious lines, maintaining a certain kind of interaction between different groups, in which the major distinction was between Muslims and non-Muslims, but the empire did not deny the ethnic identity of the local communities but in fact strengthened it. The millets were discrete unities, administrated and represented by their religious leaders which interacted with the state, each group had its own legal system for personal status law. While, the post-ottoman empire era experienced massive displacements, movements, and exchanges of people as a process of homogenization during the formation of the new state nations. After World War one, on April 28, 1920, the victorious Supreme Allied Council met in San Remo, and entrusted France with a mandate over present-day Lebanon and Syria. On September 1, 1920, the French High

Commissioner, General Gouraud officially declared the foundation of Greater Lebanon, which would include the towns of Beirut, Tripoli, Sur, and Saida, the territory of Mount Lebanon, the regions of the Biqā` and Ba`albak, and the districts of Hasbayya and Rashayya. The foundation of the new state changed the status of the local communities between majority and minority, for example, the Maronite Christians fell from 80 per cent of the population to a 51 percent majority of the Mount Lebanon province. Christian sects were mostly allegiance toward the French mandate while Muslim sects were against. The French mandate created a consultative council that was formed by 17 members who represented the different Lebanese religious sects.

The Republic of Lebanon was founded in 1943 after the withdrawal of the French mandate. With a population that had had no common history as a political unit that could introduce a common identity, an unwritten national pact was established between President Bishara al-Khuri and Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh, designing specific government leadership roles based on religious sect:

- President of the Republic: Maronite Catholic.
- Prime Minister: Sunni Muslim.
- Speaker of the Parliament: Shi'ā Muslim.

The National Pact established the ratio of Christian to Muslim representatives in Parliament at six to five, the number of seats per community being set by law. Political leaders used patronage and intimidation to secure the election of their lists. Candidates on the list were guaranteed support across their religious communities.

Lebanon is one of the few countries that faced high refugee influxes from its surrounding countries, but the main fears of the local population was the drastic demographic shift that can change the ethno-religious balance of the country. In other words, refugees were welcomed or rejected by the local population according to their

religious/political sect. The first mass exodus to the country was the Palestinian refugee influx in 1948 then 1967. In 2011, a new influx of Syrian Refugees who had escaped from the current Syrian civil war. The Christian sects in Lebanon have more fears toward refugee's influxes while Sunni Muslims are not opposed to refugee settlements in Lebanon. On 13 April 1975, the Lebanese civil war broke out. The Phalangists, a Christian militia, clashed with Palestinian groups over their armed struggle against Israel from Lebanese territories. Finally, the conflict turned into a fight over the Lebanese state and its political sectarian system. The war was ended by al Ta'if agreement in 1989 when members of the Lebanese Parliament met in Ta'if in Saudi Arabia. The Agreement maintained the same sectarian power-sharing system, but redistributed domestic political power among the major confessions Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shi'a Muslims. But the Sectarian political system remained under the older Civil War generation that with the eruption of any crisis each leader try to blame the leaders of the other political sects, accusing them with corruption, transforming the issue from cases of corruption to a sectarian conflict.

Once again, the Lebanese people must choose: justice and accountability, or civil peace. On Thursday, October 14th, the two Shiite parties, the militant Hezbollah party (backed by Iran) and the Amal Movement organized a protest demanding the removal of the judge leading the investigating the explosion that ripped through the city's port. Hezbollah accused the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea (as pro-American and pro-Saudi), of mounting the attack, which took place on the historical frontline of the 1975-90 civil war. Recently, Nassrallah has declared for the first time that Hezbollah has 100,000 trained fighters, commenting on a report that Samir Geagea had urged that his Lebanese Forces party currently has 15,000 fighters.

Khamis Khanjar.. a leader-in-waiting for Iraqi Sunnis



Sami Moubayed

When Rafik al-Hariri first emerged as a Saudi-sent mediator in the Lebanese civil war back in the 1980s, few imagined that he would one day become prime minister and leader of the country's Sunni Muslims. He had the ambition, however, and the financial means to make it happen. Pretty much that applies to Khamis Khanjar, the Sunni Muslim Iraqi businessman-turned politician, who just won 12 out of 329 seats in Iraq's latest parliamentary elections. He is still not the forerunner among Iraqi Sunnis, since the lion's share of seats was taken by his rival, Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Halbousi, but Khanjar is taking big steps towards leadership of the Iraqi Sunni Muslim community. Western media first took note of the man after he was sanctioned by the United States back in 2019, on accusations of corruption. Stories went viral about his dodgy relations with Saddam Hussein's son Uday, and how Khanjar made his wealth through their patronage by selling UAE-manufactured cigarettes in Iraq back in the 1990s. That relationship did not last long and came to an end in 1996, when Khanjar left Iraq to work in Dubai, expanding his business to include real estate development, financial services, and industry. In March 2003, he supported the US-led invasion of Iraq which toppled Saddam and led to his killing, along with



Khamis Khanjar

his two sons.

Accusations and controversy

Khanjar first graced the post-Saddam scene by financing the Sunni insurgency that erupted in his native Falluja, west of Baghdad. Ten years later, he was accused of harboring ISIS-sympathies, which prompted him to establish a 3,000-man army of Sunni tribal leaders to fight the Islamic State in Iraq. That did not clear his name, however, and in 2015 an Iraqi court ordered his arrest for ties with ISIS, an accusation that he continues to challenge. One year later, Khanjar raised eyebrows by calling for a three-way federation of Iraq between Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. The Sunni region, he argued, would become a hub for regional investment by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while the Shiite one would remain in Iran's orbit.

Khanjar's opponents, mainly rival Sunni Muslims, have tried to tarnish his reputation by saying that he was bankrolling his

political party—known as al-Mashrou' al-Arabi (The Arabic Project) from dirty money. They point to the fact that Khanjar's name appeared in the Pandora Papers, as having established offshore companies in the British Virgin Islands, reportedly for tax evasion. Although offshore registration is not illegal, tax evasion is but there is nothing to prove that Khanjar was involved in any illegal financial conduct, apart from bazaar gossip and rumors, which are always ripe in Baghdad. Opponents have also exaggerated his relationship with Saddam Hussein's family and with ISIS. To clean his name, Khanjar has hired the Washington DC-based Glover Park Group, a lobbying firm run by former Clinton White House officials, paying as much as \$65,000 USD/month. He has also established two satellite channels to promote himself, one named after his native Falluja and another UTV. Yes despite the character slaughter, Khamis Khanjar is one name to be consulted ahead of the forming of Iraq's

new government. Combined with Halbousi, he is dual leader of the Sunni bloc that includes 49 out of 329 seats. No prime minister can be appointed without their approval. Halbousi is considered close to Saudi Arabia and the UAE while Khanjar is usually looped with Turkey and Qatar. That is another common mistake often related to reports on Khamis Khanjar. He is very keen on staying out of Gulf disputes and taking with one Gulf state against the other. And yet despite his strong relations with the Gulf he is also on excellent terms with Iran and its Shiite parties in Iraq. Prior to the formation of Adel Abdul Mehdi's cabinet in 2018, he was often in the media meeting with Iran's proxies, Haidar al-Amiri of the Badr Organization and ex-Prime Minister Nouri al-Malki. Last April, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif even paid him a visit at his Baghdad residence. The lion's share of parliamentary seats remains in the hands of these Shiite parties, and Khanjar realizes that he needs to work with them to increase his

clout in Sunni politics.

The Lebanon comparison

That is what Rafik al-Hariri did when first becoming prime minister back in 1992. He reached out to Hezbollah, welcoming them as partners in post-war Lebanon while promising to protect their arms. In return, they supported his political rise until relations turned sour in 2004. Like Hariri before him, Khanjar is walking the tightrope by courting the Shiites to cement his grip on Sunni politics. Both owe their political careers to the massive wealth that is at their disposal, made through business deals in the Arab Gulf. When Hariri returned to Lebanon at the end of the civil war, traditional Sunni leaders were either too old, like ex-Prime Minister Saeb Salam, or too weak, like ex-premier Omar Karami, making his rise a relatively easy task. The same applies to Iraq, where no Sunni Muslim leader has emerged to replace Saddam Hussein, although it has been nearly nineteen years since his removal from power in 2003. The few names that did emerge, like Saleh al-Mutleq and Tarek Hashimi, lacked the money and charisma to establish themselves as pan-community leaders. Khanjar's only opponent now is Speaker Mohammad al-Halbousi, who has none of Khanjar's deep pockets. He is rising in open territory, among a headless community that is dying for both leadership and money.

Khanjar promises to provide both, and for that, he is one man to be watched and observed.

Withdrawing the British citizenship without warning and the fate of British families in northeast Syria



Zara Saleh

Recently, the UK government is preparing a draft bill that allows the Home Office to strip citizenship from someone without warning them under various circumstances. Such circumstances could be in the interests of "national security" or maybe for other "public interests" or because of the threats of terrorism. That means people who are holding British citizenship will not be notified that they have been stripped from their citizenship according to the new bill.

Activists and human rights organisations have been

alarmed that the new bill is now pushing for more power to do without notifying anyone. In other words, British citizenship is unsecure and in danger even to those born in the UK. Added to that, the UK government has been using their power to remove more than 100 citizenship in 2017. Andrew Mitchell, the Conservative MP who is a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) also has expressed his critics on such a new bill and said, "We need to take responsibility for these people and not use citizenship as a device". On the other hand, by drafting such a new bill, the UK government is seeking to tackle and prevent the radicalisation and extremism or people who had

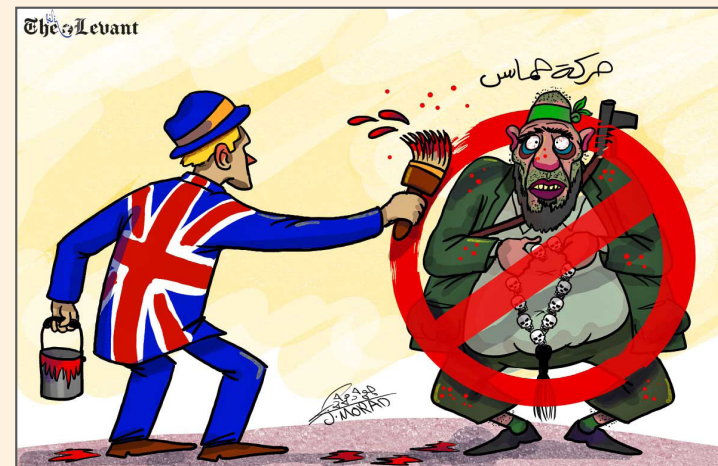
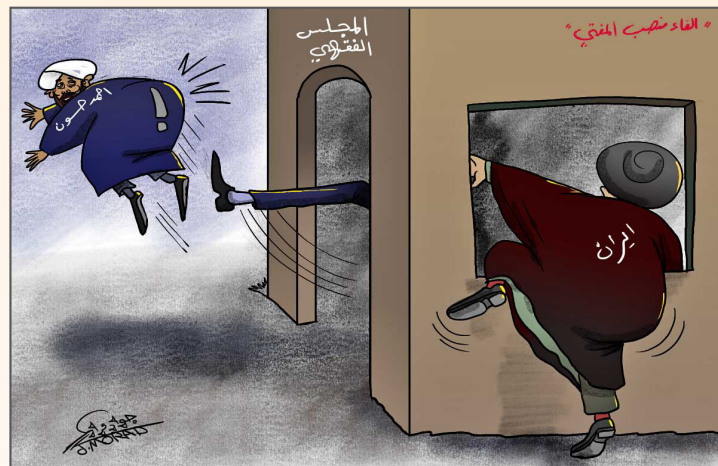
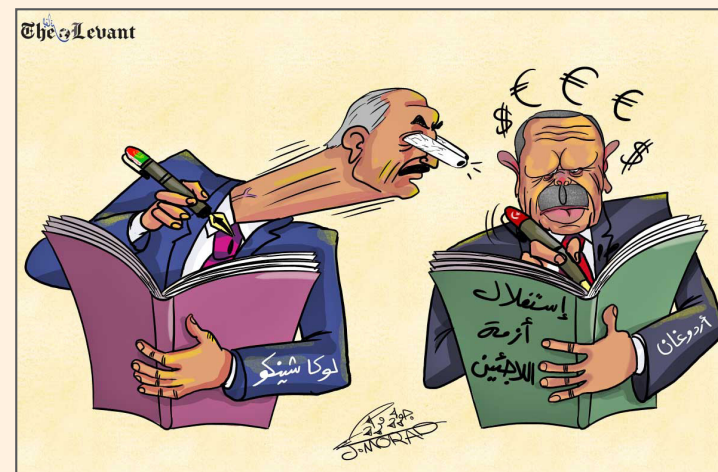
connections with ISIS and returned from Syria and Iraq. The new draft bill, definitely, will affect all British family's children, and women who live in northeast Syria and become stateless. For instance, the Home Office in the UK has already refused to recognise British people who had links with ISIS, like Shamima Begum. In February 2019, Shamima has lost her citizenship after she fled London and joined ISIS in Syria, and became IS bride; and now she still lives in Roj camp-prison in northeast Syria under the Kurdish authorities. The UK government refused to bring back these British citizens since they had joined ISIS like many other European countries. According to

official resources, nearly 900 UK citizens have been joining the so-called Islamic State in Syria, and some of them had returned back, while others have been killed, but there are about 20 British families still detained in Al-Hull and Roj camp in northeast Syria that controlled by the Kurdish authorities after defeating and smashing ISIS. However, the Kurdish forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were the only trustworthy ally on the ground with the international coalition against ISIS that has been behind the defeat of the so-called IS caliphate in Syria. Now, the Kurdish self-administration in northeast Syria is still taking all responsibility for more than 70,000 ISIS fighters and

families in the Al-Hull camp without any support, and even most of the European countries still refuse to return back their citizens and do not even ask about their citizens.

Added to that, ISIS family's children in both camps, Al-Hull and Roj, are living in very poor conditions with no medical care and schooling and consequently are a project brainwashed by radical IS mothers. In such an ideological and radical environment, these children will be definitely radicalised and become ISIS fighters in the future, and that is why the European countries including UK should take their responsibility to find out a right solution for their citizens in northeast Syria.

The Levant
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