



**Bahrain between the present and the future**

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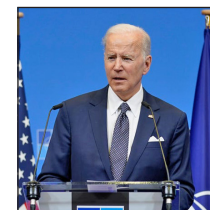
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## Saudi invests in Egypt and deposits \$5 billion in Egypt's central bank



King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi during his visit to Riyadh last month

Saudi Minister of State for Shura Council Affairs Essam bin Saeed had signed with the Egyptian Minister of Planning and Economic Development Dr Hala el-Sa'id an agreement about the establishment

of the Public Investment Fund. Under the directives of King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the KSA deposited on Wednesday \$5 billion in Egypt's central bank. That came after the

central bank announced the devaluation of the Egyptian pound against the dollar) currently equal to 18.28 pounds) in addition to raising the interest rates in banks by .1% "The PIF investments

would help attract foreign currencies, support the use of local labour, bring in modern technology and expertise and enhance trade between Egypt and Saudi Arabia", the Egyptian cabinet statement said.

## The Syrian regime criminalises torture ignoring the killing of thousands in prisons

Bashar al-Assad, President of the Syrian regime, passed a law regarding "the criminalisation of torture" despite reports confirming his regime's involvement in torturing thousands of detainees.

Law No 16/2022 defines torture as "any act that causes great physical or mental torture to obtain from someone or someone else information, a confession, punishing them for something they committed, intimidating or forcing them to do something".

The new law imposes life imprisonment if a child or someone with a disability inflicted torture or if torture caused a permanent disability. Moreover, the law imposes "execution" if a person was killed or raped during torture.

However, the Syrian regime has been involved in torturing thousands of detainees since the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011. Its security services resorted to using the most severe types of torture against weaponless civilians who demanded the overthrow of the regime.

## Tehran defies Washington ..

### There is no deal unless the sanctions on the IRGC are removed

Kamal Kharrazi, a senior advisor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, considered the nuclear deal imminent, but he believed that this could not happen unless the United States showed political will.

"Yes, it's imminent. It depends on the political will of the United States," Kharrazi told the Doha Forum international conference. He talked about the outstanding issues claiming that it is important for

Washington to remove the foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) designation against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). "IRGC is a national army and a national army being listed as a terrorist group certainly

is not acceptable," said Kharrazi. That was said after U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley confirmed that US sanctions against the IRGC will not be removed regardless of what is happening in Vienna.



Kamal Kharrazi

# Syrian regime shows absolute obedience to Russia by recruiting Syrian to fight in Ukraine

The Syrian regime has repeatedly expressed its support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The head of the regime, Bashar al-Assad, called Russian President Vladimir Putin to say, "Russia today is not only defending itself but the wider world and the principles of justice and humanity". "The enemy that the Syrian and Russian armies are facing is one, in Syria it is extremism and in Ukraine it is Nazism," he added. Meanwhile, local, Arab and international media outlets reported that the Syrian regime had sent militants to fight in Ukraine alongside the Russian forces. However, some sources denied that.

However, following a meeting of the Russian National Security Council led by President Putin, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu confirmed the deployment of Syrian fighters to Ukraine to fight alongside Russia, and that Russia was willing to transport fighters wishing to fight in Ukraine. He also confirmed that there are 16,000 volunteers from the Middle East ready to fight alongside Russian forces.

## Putin's statements

In a phone call with Levant News with political analyst Firas Borzan, who had recently been displaced from the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, said that Russian Defense Minister's and President Putin's statements were in retaliation to several Western governments' announcements about opening the door for volunteers, especially professionals, to fight for Ukraine.

Borzan ruled out the transportation of Syrian soldiers by the Russian authorities to Ukraine based on logical factors, namely the language barrier and weather conditions (temperature plummeting to -3° to -5°) which Middle Eastern fighters are not used to.

Borzan confirmed that the Russian mercenary group Wagner has been

fighting since the beginning, most of whom come from Serbia and the Baltic countries who usually wear black clothes and a white tie on their arms, which indicates that Russia has logistic and operational problems. Nevertheless, he did not deny that there were not enough trained soldiers among the Russian forces since most of the Russian fighters are contractor soldiers or conscripts.

## Russia is rapidly depleting its workforce

The Institute for the Study of War stated that Russia is rapidly depleting work force, which has been employed to generate additional combat power to maintain its combat efficacy in Ukraine, which has suffered heavy losses. "Theoretically, more people can be mobilised into the Russian army, but they are not likely to be well trained," it said.

"On the other hand, the number of ordinary citizens in Ukraine who apply for military recruitment to defend their country may increase if escalating sanctions and military support fails to stop President Putin's aggression," it added.

So far, this drive is weak, except within Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora, but more people around the world, as well as some political leaders, may want to join as they watch the

systematic and brutal destruction of Ukraine and the fragmentation of its society.

"Bombing the maternity and children's hospital in Mariupol and repeatedly targeting evacuation corridors are only the latest examples of how moral sensitivities can be shattered pushing the collective consciousness to shout: "Enough! Stop this!" said the institute.

Private sources told Levent News that there was a growing number of young people in the Ukrainian city of Odesa, who are ready to take arms, fight and participate in civil defence, organized by the Ukrainian government. The source added that there were mixed feelings of fear and enthusiasm. Civilians in Odesa are closely watching how the battles in Mykolaiv will progress.

## Syrian mercenaries to fight in Ukraine

Wall Street Journal reported that US officials believe that Russia is recruiting Syrian fighters experienced in urban combat as it ramps up its assault on Ukraine.

Four US officials told the journal that Moscow, which launched an invasion into its Eastern European neighbor on February 24, has been faced by unexpected resistance and has in recent days recruited fighters from Syria, hoping they can help capture

Kyiv.

One official told the Journal that some fighters are already in Russia preparing to join the fight in Ukraine, though it was not immediately clear how many combatants have been recruited; the sources would not provide further detail.

Chechnya strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov — a former rebel-turned-Kremlin-ally — has shared videos of Chechen fighters joining the attack on Ukraine and said some had been killed in the fighting.

## Ukrainian warning to those who want to fight in Ukraine

The famous Ukrainian journalist and TV presenter Dmitry Gordon warned in a video clip which was published on his Facebook page, the Syrian fighters against going to Ukraine. He said that the Russian military leaders, especially "Alexander Krinkevich" are working to recruit some Syrians to fight against Ukraine and the Russians are giving promises to the Syrian fighters "mercenaries" that their salaries will be about \$1,800 a month.

"The Russians are tempting Syrian men to join the fight in Ukraine with by telling them that Ukraine is 'full of beautiful women who will provide them with free sex'" he added. "Come to Ukraine and we will certainly honour you, as we did with the Russian soldiers when they attacked us," he warned.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported, based on well informed sources, that "the 25th Division of the Syrian regime's army, led by Suhail Al-Hassan, declared that it was ready to send mercenaries to fight alongside Russian troops. It also noted that it continues to accept application and register the names of those who wish to join the fight in Ukraine alongside Russia, within the so called "Wagner" forces, but no mercenaries have been sent so far".



# The Syrian revolution was hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood and foreign forces

Syrians deserve to live in freedom and dignity, restore their social and geographical cohesion and expel foreign forces out of their country after 11 years of displacement sacrifices. Since its beginning in mid-March 2011, the Syrian revolution has witnessed many developments and setbacks. It began with peaceful demonstrations and demands for freedom, dignity, human rights, justice and the release of political prisoners. A decade later, Syrians only demand the release of detainees from the de facto forces that have hijacked the revolution by means of violence and foreign support.

## Opposition forces exploited the detainees cause

Secretary of the SCD (Syrian Committee for Detainees), Marwan Al-Ush said that the total number of detainees in Syria is estimated at 1.2 million, including those who have been released after spending varied periods of time in detention, and those who have forcibly disappeared after being detained. The current number of detainees, according to information obtained by several organisations that have been working on documenting these cases, is about 300,000 detainees and enforced disappearances. "These organisations have documented lists of up to 154 thousand detainees. The lists include 13 specific items about the detainees (patronym, profession, education, address, and reason for the detention ...

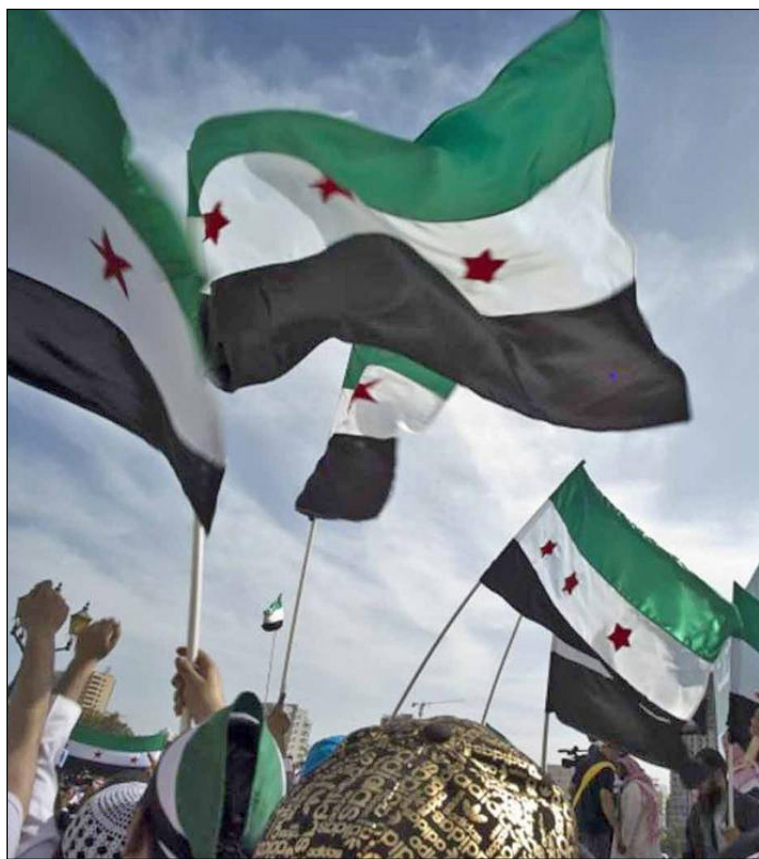
etc). Detainees are spread over various prisons; there are 18,000 in the infamous Sednaya prison, and 6,000 in Damascus Central Prison. The rest lie in prisons in other governorates, and in army camps, such as the barracks of the Fourth Division," he added.

"The regime adopts legislation 22/2012 of the Counterterrorism Court (an alternative to the notorious State Security Courts of the 1980s), and the Special Law of 1967, which authorised military courts to prosecute civilians who rebelled against the authoritarian regime in Syria in 2011.

Al-Ush expressed his regret for the failure of the revolutionary and opposition forces, such as the Syrian National Council, the Syrian Opposition Coalition and the High Negotiations Committee, to make any progress in regards to the detainees, or secure the release of any detainee. He even went as far as accusing the opposition forces of exploiting the detainees cause for their own benefit.

"All the Astana meetings have failed to secure the release of any detainee. We know the game behind this, the regime is very stubborn regarding this issue; it wants to use it as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the international community for a political solution or when effective international pressure pays off," he explained.

Commenting on the violations of the Turkish-backed opposition factions, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Hay'at



Tahrir Al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra), Marwan Al-Ush stated: "The SCD follows children and minors kidnap cases by the SDF for recruitment purposes. We have documented some cases of minor recruitment as fighters in the opposition military factions. Similar practices have been committed by ISIS targeting children and brainwashing them into radicalisation and using them as a weapon of war. Furthermore, there are cases of kidnapping and detaining media professionals, civilian journalists, and activists by the Autonomous Administration. Some SDF show trials have passed various sentences against activists and media professionals, but we have not documented any executions in the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration. Among all the political forces that have emerged since the beginning of the

crisis, the MB (Muslim Brotherhood) played a major role in the moral and political downfall of the opposition. They hijacked the peaceful demonstrations and legitimate demands of the Syrian people through Islamic radicalisation and militarisation, with the support of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government in Turkey.

"The MB exploited the Arab Spring revolutions to serve their own agendas", political researcher Abdel Aziz Matar told Levant News. "Who would believe that those young people who took to the streets demanding their freedom were associated with the MB or inspired by it?" He added. "MB's lies and hypocrisy over the past 11 years of the Syrian tragedy have been exposed. Do MB leaders genuinely believe that Syrians have forgotten about their initiatives to reconcile with the Syrian regime for

their own advantage? Was the MB really confronting authoritarian regimes? A question that requires more elaboration, but the answer is "No!" He explained.

"Everybody knows who initially assumed the political then the military leadership of the Syrian revolution. The Syrian freedom fighters had nothing to do with the MB organisation and, unfortunately, had no political experience or financial or media support. Therefore, they were easily brainwashed and manipulated by the MB who hijacked the revolution," he added.

"As a result of the manipulation and political games that have been committed by the MB against the Syrian people, the international community, or a large part of it, resigned to keeping the murderer Bashar al-Assad in power and accepting him as the lesser of two evils, in comparison with an opposition led by the MB.

## Red lines and bloodshed

The various speeches of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did not help prevent the regime from carrying out massacres in rebel held areas. He helped the MB assume the leadership of the political opposition, exploited the Syrian cause by profiting from refugees and made gains from the Russian and Iranian occupation. Thanks to the Astana military track, the Russians returned nearly 57 % of the areas, which had been under the control of rebel factions, to the regime.

# The war in Ukraine... What is the possibility of the use of biological and chemical weapons



Jassim Mohamad

Russia has claimed that biological weapons are being developed in laboratories in Ukraine with support from the United States. It says material is being destroyed to conceal the country's weapons programme, but the US says this is "total nonsense" and that Russia is inventing false narratives to justify its actions in Ukraine. Russia has accused the US and Ukraine of working with "pathogens of dangerous infections" in 30 laboratories across the country. Pathogens are microorganisms that can cause disease.

## Pressure on the world

Russia can use biological and chemical arms, if it does then this will put massive pressure on the rest of the world to act. It's generally said that the largest stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons were accrued during the Cold War. And the two largest players — known to have had (or still have) chemical weapons — were the United States and Soviet Russia. But beyond that it is hard to tell. The Arms Control Association, a political advisory body in the US, says that when the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) came into force in 1997, eight of its signatories declared stockpiles. Those countries included Albania, India, Iraq, Libya, Syria, the United States, Russia and one country that remained anonymous.

It has found in Ukraine and the blistering international reaction to its invasion, Syria was a relatively low-cost intervention for Moscow. "The scope of the Ukraine war is different," said Charles Lister, the director of the Syria and counter-terrorism programme at the Middle East Institute. "But some of the tactics were definitely learned and deployed in Syria.

There are increasing concerns that

Russia could be prepared to use chemical weapons to attack Ukraine, with Western officials and strategists warning the threat posed by Moscow and Russian President Vladimir Putin in this regard is credible and serious.

## United Nations awareness

The United Nations is aware of any biological weapons programmes, the High Representative of Disarmament Affairs told the Security Council at an emergency meeting on 11th March 2022 to address related concerns in Ukraine. "Situations such as this demonstrate the need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention," said Izumi Nakamitsu, referring to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, which entered into force in 1975.

Aware of media reports on allegations of biological weapons programmes, she encouraged States parties to the Convention — including the Russian Federation and Ukraine — to consider making use of the available procedures to resolve related issues. The United Nations on March 11 said

it was not aware of any biological weapons program in Ukraine, while Washington expressed concern that Russia was spreading the unproven claim in order to launch its own biological or chemical attacks.

## 2005 Agreement

Under a 2005 agreement, the Pentagon has assisted several Ukrainian public health laboratories with improving the security of dangerous pathogens and technology used in research. The U.S. envoy to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said on 11th March 2022 Washington was "deeply concerned" that Russia called the session as a "false flag effort" aimed at laying the groundwork for its own use of biological or chemical weapons in Ukraine.

In resolution 1540 (2004), the Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes. The resolution requires all States to adopt and enforce

appropriate laws to this effect as well as other effective measures to prevent the proliferation of these weapons and their means of delivery to non-State actors, in particular for terrorist purposes.

On 22 April 2021, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2572, which extended, until 28 February 2022, the mandate of the 1540 Committee and its group of experts. At the time, the Council opted for a straightforward renewal of the mandate to allow the Committee to complete the comprehensive review of the implementation of 1540. However, the review has yet to be finalised because the open consultations have not been held.

## What should be done

It has become necessary for there to be a role for the United Nations and a mechanism for implementing Security Council resolutions related to the follow-up to the implementation of Resolution 2572, and for the supervision and inspection teams to work by visiting laboratories and centers to ensure their safety, as this is considered a threat to international security.



# Bahrain between the present and the future...

## Age of development and modernisation

Since Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa became the King of Bahrain in February 2002, he amended the constitution to bring about political reforms, including the women's right to vote and run for political office, the establishment of an elected parliament and the release of political detainees, in addition to development projects that made Bahrain one of the strongest economies.

Bahrain is one of the richest countries in terms of per capita income. The Bahraini dinar is the second most expensive currency in the world. Bahrain has a diversified economy depending on tourism and banks. The capital city Manama has many major financial institutions. As well, Bahrain has developed a successful industrial sector since 2008 and it was the fastest-growing country in the world according to the Global Financial Centres Index. Bahrain's economy was once the tenth economy in the world and the World Bank ranked it among one of the top world economies.

Among the most popular industries in Bahrain was traditional shipbuilding which had been an occupation passed down from ancestors before it disappeared two decades ago. The shipbuilding industry was mainly in the cities of Muharraq & Manama, especially in Noaim and Ras Rumman neighbourhoods.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was famous for pearling which was a major source of the country's economy before the discovery of oil. "Over decades, pearl trade was very important in various occupations and businesses in the Arabian Gulf in general and Bahrain in particular but it significantly shrank after the discovery of oil," said Ibrahim Khalifa Matar, one of the most prominent pearl merchants.

### Bahrain in history

Bahrain was a part of the Dilmun civilisation. At that time, Bahrain was an important trading centre. According to some modern theories,



Bahrain king Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa

the Sumerians regarded Dilmun as a sacred place. Scholars Juris Zarins & Eduard Glaser proposed that the Garden of Eden was located in Eastern Arabia within the Dilmun civilization. In Western Bahrain, there is Dilmun Burial Mounds which is a serial property formed by 21 archaeological sites.

The 400-year-old tree of life is in the centre of the Kingdom of Bahrain, but there has been no information so far where it gets water from.

In 2019, the Dilmun tombs were inscribed on the World Heritage List, contrary to what is said that the Kingdom of Bahrain is a new country established after it became independent from the UK and joined the UN and the Arab League in 1971.

### Bahrain's diversified economy

Bahrain's diversified economy depends on exporting oil, textiles and aluminium, tourism and foreign investments. The kingdom contains large reserves of natural gas and fish stocks.

Despite Bahrain's long coasts, more than 5% of the beaches are for public use, while the rest are invested by the private sector as a support to the GDP.

The Bahrain World Trade Centre, which the first skyscraper in the world to integrate wind turbines into its design. These turbines provided the lighting for about 300 homes, 260 hospitals, 17 industrial plants. In 2006, the building won the LEAF award for best use of technology within a large scheme.

In 2005, the famous late singer Michael Jackson bought two villas on Amwaj Island for \$1.5 million with a marina. Jackson and his family lived there and he had many tours in the country and used to shop in the Seef Mall.

### Manama is one of the safest cities in the world

Manama has been classified for many years as one of the safest cities in the world, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, which relies on five indicators: "digital security" which studies the quality of digital security in the city and rates of penetration of personal data, "health security" which studies life expectancy and the ratio of beds in hospitals compared to the proportion of the population, "infrastructure security" which studies the quality of roads and the number of people who died

due to natural disasters, "personal security" which studies traditional safety standards, such as crime rates, the level of police intervention, the number of crime victims, and finally, "environmental security" which studies the protection of resources and the environment from all threats and risks that may negatively affect them. As well, Bahrain is one of the best countries in health care. The overall quality index for Bahrain is 119.05.

### Sustainable development in Bahrain

"Over the years, the Kingdom of Bahrain has been able to build a civilization dating back to more than 1000 BCE. It is the land of civilisations and the crossroads of ancient world trade," says His Highness PM Prince Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa. "The Kingdom has a rich experience of development in all fields, the thing that made it keep up with the global sustainable development movement. Bahrain has been a pioneer in this field through its development strategy and government programmes," he added. "Bahrain is today an internationally-appreciated model in the ability to mobilise and direct available capabilities and resources in the best way possible to achieve its citizens' aspirations so that none of them is excluded or left behind in the development process as the successive government work programmes included everyone and balance between all social, economic and environmental aspects, now and in the future," he continued.

Bahrain enjoys good relations with its Arab neighbours as well as the region's countries, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the big sister of Bahrain, as described by opinion leaders in Manama. As well, it has strategic relations with the United States of America and major world powers due to its position on the economic & political map.

# Turkey from being proud of Bayraktar drones in Libya to disowning them in Ukraine

“In-between!” That is what the Turkish position on the Russian invasion of Ukraine can be called. While Turkey supplies Ukraine with drones, it evades responsibility saying the drones were bought from a Turkish private company. This position contradicts Turkey’s constant brag about those drones which have been used in all Turkey’s conflicts in the region.

The Turkish regime usually threatens the region with its weapons. In late 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened Turkey would send more drones if necessary to the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

In Libya, Turkey supplied the Islamist National Government of Accord in western Libya with its Bayraktar drones, despite the UN arms embargo on supplying the parties to the conflict with weapons.

In Syria, Turkey used Bayraktar drones in March 2020 in a military operation in the Syrian province of Idlib against the Syrian regime which was trying to restore the province, but it sustained heavy losses and was forced to retreat and put the restoration off because Ankara mobilised thousands of vehicles and soldiers.

## Selling Bayraktar Drones to Ukraine

Unofficial information said Kyiv bought several Bayraktar TB2 in a \$69 million deal in 2019. In late March 2021, the Ukrainian armed forces held drill in the Black Sea to train to the use Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones.

“We urge all responsible countries that we communicate with – and Turkey is one of them – that we strongly recommend they analyse the situation and the Kyiv regime’s constant belligerent statements, and we also warn them against encouraging these militaristic aspirations,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned



in April 2021. However, Russia’s warnings were ignored as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed in July 2021 Ukraine will soon receive the Turkish Bayraktar drones and noted that the Ukrainian crews are completing their training in Turkey.

The Ukrainian government announced on July 15 that the navy received the first batch of Bayraktar TB2 attack drones from Turkey. Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Taran stated the Turkish drones are under the final stages at their ground control station. “These drones will enable the Ukrainian army to observe and cover the coasts and waters of the Black & Azov seas and hit the enemy’s land & sea targets with high-precision,” he added

Ankara cannot now play innocent with Russia as Kyiv many times announced the military drone contract it signed with Ankara is to deter Russia and Ukraine. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said Ankara sells those drones to Ukraine without preconditions claiming the deal was not intended to be against Russia.

## Turkey insists on supplying Ukraine with Bayraktar drones

Moscow’s warnings were not only ignored but also a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Bayraktar drone manufacturing company “Baykar”, which is owned

by Erdoğan’s son-in-law Selçuk Bayraktar, on the construction and technical provision of a joint training and testing centre for maintenance, repair, modernisation of UAVs and training personnel to use Bayraktar drones.

The press secretary for the Russian president Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow pays attention to the military cooperation of Kyiv and Ankara because it does not want Turkish weapons to be used against the people of Donbass in southeastern Ukraine.

## Ukraine uses Bayraktar drones for the first time

In late October 2021, the Ukrainian General Staff confirmed the Ukrainian army used the Turkish-made Bayraktar drone for the first time in Donbass, which prompted Andrey Kartapolov, a deputy of the State Duma, to say that the use of these drones will further escalate the Ukrainian crisis.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Kyiv had bought drones from Turkey to contain Russia and protect Ukraine. The Ukrainian Chief of General Staff Serhiy Shapoval, announced in early November that Ukrainian forces would use Turkish-made Bayraktar drones in case they sense any danger threatening Ukraine.

## Putin and Erdoğan face to face

Ukraine’s first-ever use of killer drones

in the Donbass conflict triggered an uproar and a strong reaction from the Kremlin. Kremlin said that President Vladimir Putin of Russia had expressed his dissatisfaction to his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during a phone call on December 3. While The Turkish Communications Directorate said that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin discussed in a phone call many regional issues especially the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Ukraine.

However, Turkey ignore Russia’s dissatisfaction as Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov announced about a week before the start of the Russian invasion that a factory for the production of Turkish Bayraktar attack drones would be built soon in Ukraine and its experts would be Ukrainians. “There will be more support because we are in constant dialogue with Turkey,” he said

After the Russian invasion on February 24, Turkey continued to provide Ukraine with drones. Ukrainian Defense Minister said on March 2, that new Bayraktar drones arrived in Ukraine and were put into service. In addition, the Ukrainian embassy in Ankara has posted on Twitter many pictures of explosions made by Bayraktar drones targeting convoys of Russian trucks. The photos were posted on Twitter with the annotations “mashallah” and many praise expressions.

## Bayraktar... Who is responsible?

After Ankara realised selling these drones to Ukraine might backfire, especially if the conflict took a toll on NATO, Ankara began to try to evade the responsibility of selling them by giving justifications. “Bayraktar drones are not help given to Ukraine from Turkey. These are products Ukraine bought from a private company,” Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Yavuz Selim Kıran told pro-government Sabah Newspaper on March 3.

# The strategic partnership between Riyadh and Beijing .. The Chinese president visits the KSA

The GCC states (Gulf Cooperation Council) in general, and the KSA in particular, want to diversify their security and economic relations with the world, including China, especially after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The GCC sees China as a main economic partner in the long term, while the GCC is a vital region to China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative).

This comes after the shifting geopolitics the world is going through since the USA wants to focus more attention and resources on Asia while China and Russia expand their influence in the ME (Middle East). The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance document, published 40 days after US President Joe Biden took office, says the strongest military presence will be most robust in the Indo-Pacific and Europe, while in the ME it will be right-sized to the level required. "We will not give our partners in the ME a blank check to pursue policies at odds with American interests and values. That's why we have withdrawn U.S. support for offensive military operations in Yemen," it added. As well, it said China & Russia pose a threat to Washington & the International order.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine had shown the changes of traditional alliances in the ME, the GCC needs now more than ever to diversify its alliances, especially with the Chinese economic giant the largest oil importer and the largest trading partner of the KSA the largest exporter of oil.

Amid the economic crisis the world is going through, especially the crude price fluctuations because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the WSJ (Wall Street Journal) reported the KSA has invited Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Riyadh in May after Ramadan as the kingdom looks to deepen ties with Beijing amid strained relations with Washington. A source told WSJ Riyadh is planning

to replicate the warm reception it gave to former President Donald Trump in 2017 when he visited the kingdom on his first trip abroad.

"The crown prince and Xi are close friends and both understand that there is huge potential for stronger ties," said a Saudi official. "It is not just 'They buy oil from us and we buy weapons from them'."

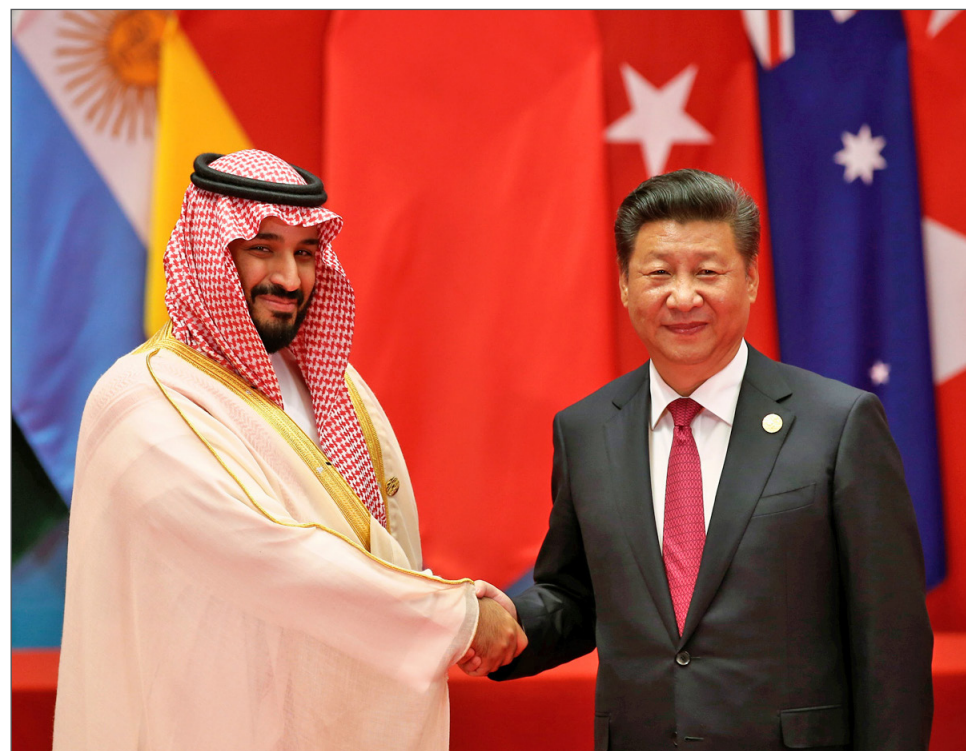
The GCC is very important to China's BRI which is being actively implemented by land and sea, in railways and seaports all the way to Ukraine.

The ME is located in a place where Africa, Asia and Europe meet and where the trade routes between China, India and Europe also do. China plays a major role in the KSA's economy which wants to build a more diversified economy. Analysts believe that there is much compatibility between China's BRI and the Saudi Vision 2030.

To strengthen relations, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, and the Secretary-General of the GCC visited China on January 10 for five days at the invitation of Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

## The war in Ukraine and Johnson's visit to the KSA

The Chinese president's visit coincides with crude prices fluctuations which motivate China to move more quickly, especially if the diplomatic move could be fruitful and is related to the Russian and Iranian allies. There has been a relative fall of more than 5% since March 15, (its lowest level in about two weeks) amid hopes of progress towards a diplomatic end to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Oil prices have seen strong rises (about 36% higher than their levels in early 2022) since the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine on February 24, and the USA's & the UK's ban on crude imports from Russia.



Russia has long resisted Ukraine's move towards the European Union and NATO. Announcing the military operation in Ukraine, Putin accused NATO of threatening Russia's historic future as a nation.

Negotiations are still held between Russia & Ukraine. Analysts believe there is a glimmer of hope, after the failure of the first three sessions of talks held in Belarus and then the meeting between Russian Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Turkey on March 10. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister said that sanctions on Russia are increasingly "outrageous". He noted China refuses to be impacted by the sanctions imposed on Moscow. All this coincides with the British PM Boris Johnson's expected visit to the KSA to persuade them to boost oil production to loosen the west's dependence on Russian energy and slow the massive crude price rise because of the sanctions on Russia. "Neither Saudi nor the UAE is keen to boost oil production since it would break up their oil pact with Russia known as Opec+," reported the Guardian.

The Guardian reported that Johnson

wants to persuade the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to help lessen the impacts of the sanctions on Russia after the UK and the USA announced a ban on Russian oil imports.

## Strategic partnership

To reduce dependence on oil as a major source of revenue, Mohammed bin Salman launched a broad programme of economic reforms to diversify the Saudi economy entitled "Vision 2030". For this plan, the KSA needs investors with technical expertise and the Chinese seem to be among them.

Economically, China is not only a huge and lucrative market for the GCC exports but is also a major driver of regional integration and infrastructure interdependence. Politically, China's strict policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries improves relations. Moreover, the successful Chinese model of balancing economic development and maintaining political stability has a reassuring appeal to the GCC which has similar aspirations.

# Luis Miguel Bueno: “Russia’s use of military force means we have entered a new stage in our history.”

*The exclusive interview of the London-based newspaper Levant News with Mr Luis Miguel Bueno, EU Arabic Spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa, about the EU vision of the war in Ukraine and its future impacts on the EU (European Union).*

*Here is the interview script:*

● **President Putin is using diplomacy and negotiations and threatening us. What are the EU expectations of the negotiations taking place on the Ukrainian-Belarusian borders?**

“We, the EU, believe in dialogue, talks, diplomacy and negotiation. Since the beginning of this crisis, we have told Russia that its concerns have to be addressed by dialogue and negotiations. For this, the French president and the German chancellor respectively paid a visit to Moscow, and there was a diplomatic move at all levels between us, our partners and Russia as well. Unfortunately, Russia chose the other way round launching a military invasion against an independent sovereign state.”

“We of course encourage negotiations between Russia and Ukraine to find the right solutions to this crisis, but these solutions cannot be at the expense of collective European security. We have also said since the beginning of the crisis that there are common principles which have to be respected by everyone, and these principles include, for example, the non-use of force and the right for any European country to be a member of any alliance, and I mean here NATO.”

● **The EU, the USA and Britain have begun to impose economic sanctions on Russia, and there are expectations that Russian banks will be removed from the SWIFT financial messaging system and of military cooperation against Russia. How do you view this cooperation,**



Luis Miguel Bueno

**and would there be new packages of sanctions if the war continued for a long time?**

“Those sanctions are the most severe ones in the EU history imposed on any country. This point is important because we are talking about very strict sanctions on Russia and on many Russian prominent individuals, entities and companies. We are talking, for example, about Russia’s access to the most important capital markets. We are now targeting 70% of the Russian banking market, but also key state-owned companies, including the field of defence. These sanctions will increase Russia’s borrowing costs, raise inflation and gradually erode Russia’s industrial base.”

“The energy sector is targeted too. Our export ban will hit the oil by making it impossible for Russia to upgrade its oil refineries. As well, we ban the sale of all aircraft, spare parts and equipment to Russian airlines and for the first time in EU history we are shutting down EU airspace for Russian aircraft.”

“There is also a ban on Russia’s access to advanced technology. There are important sanctions on Russian banks; the major ones were removed from the SWIFT system, and half of

the European Commission Mrs Ursula von der Leyen, President of the Council of the European Union Mr Charles Michel and President of the European Parliament Mr Roberta Metsola clearly stated that Ukraine’s demand to join the EU now is welcomed. There is great solidarity and agreement on this position.”

● **Belarus is greatly involved in the invasion. Why didn’t the EU mention it in the sanctions?**

“We consider Belarus directly involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, the EU imposed sanctions of asset freezes and travel bans on 22 prominent individuals in the Belarusian regime. In addition, there are economic sanctions affecting some sectors. The EU completely bans Belarus from exporting timber, potash and iron to the EU and importing advanced technology from the EU.”

● **Are there now European concerns for the outbreak of a large-scale war?**

“Russia’s attempt to rebuild the European security structure through the use of military force indicates that we have entered a new stage in our history. Of course! there are concerns, and the goal now is undoubtedly to find the right solutions to these crises, and we mean through talks and negotiations, but before dialogue, there must be a ceasefire in Ukraine, and Russia must withdraw their forces immediately.” “However, I think, even in these difficult times, there are always open diplomatic channels. Look at the recent contacts between Russia and France! Remember! France holds the presidency of the EU Council, and it has an important diplomatic role in this crisis. We hope Russia realize Military force cannot be used to carry out geopolitical changes and defend its interests in Europe.”

the reserves of the Russian central bank have been frozen. There is also a travel ban on Russian officials and diplomats to the EU including President Putin, Foreign Minister Lavrov and the so-called Russian ruling elite.”

“These sanctions are in fact the most severe ones in our history. As well, an important decision was taken, which is to provide weapons to Ukraine. We believe that these sanctions are very important and undoubtedly will have very negative impacts on the Russian authorities and economy, but these impacts will not be felt overnight. We have seen so far some indicators of the Russian stocks and currency meltdown and difficulties in finding buyers for oil and transporting it. Therefore, I think once again that these sanctions will have a severe impact on the Russian economy and the desired goal is to undermine Russia’s ability to finance military efforts.”

● **Ukrainian President Zelensky has submitted an official application to join the EU, and 8 EU leaders approved the application immediately. Is it possible for this application to be accepted now?** “Senior EU officials, President of



# War Crimes in Ukraine?



James Denselow

«I think he is a war criminal,” President Biden said after remarks at the White House earlier this month. The comments, that followed an emotional address to Congress from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Whilst the International Criminal Court at the Hague has opened an investigation into war crimes in Ukraine, it would seem that Biden’s comments were meant more in a colloquial rather than legal perspective.

It was met with a furious response from Moscow. The Russian government met with U.S. ambassador to Russia John Sullivan and said, in that conversation, ‘it was emphasized that remarks such as these by the American President, which are unworthy of a state figure of such a high rank, put Russian-American relations on the verge of a breach.’

So, are war crimes happening in the less than month long escalation in Ukraine? To the uninformed observer it would appear almost certainly so. Images of schools being destroyed along with a range of

other civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, shops and of course homes have dominated the headlines. The numbers of killed and injured civilians have steadily ticked up with a likely large gap between verified and actual figures.

Unlike other recent conflicts such as those in Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan; the fact that we’re witnessing a conventional battle between two ‘near peer’ State competitors means that the scale and intensity of fighting is unprecedented for the modern age. We’ve seen large scale formations of armour, artillery and the use of state-of-the-art weapons including hypersonic missiles and thermobaric weapons.

The damage to urban areas has been immense and has triggered a displacement crisis as almost a quarter of the Ukrainian population have been forced from their homes. A city in the east of Ukraine ‘no longer exists’ after being completely destroyed in Russian attacks. Volnovakha has been devastated amid the ongoing Russian invasion but fighting continues for territory to prevent an encirclement according to Donetsk governor Pavlo Kyrlyenko.

Mariupol is the worst-hit area of

Ukraine, facing almost constant shelling. Ukrainian authorities say about 90% of buildings in the city have been damaged or destroyed. Yet according to the laws of war a city can be destroyed legally as long as certain principles – such as distinction, proportionality and military necessity are observed. It is why the ICRC describe war in cities as a “deadly choice”. Other scholars have pointed to the fact that the largescale urbanisation of humanity in recent decades means that modern warfare requires significant changes in the regulation to adequately protect civilians.

The issue of verification is critical to establishing who did what in a warzone, even if the act itself is contested as a clear-cut war crime or not. Verification has always been difficult to establish as independent observers often struggle to access the site of the incident due to the intensity of fighting or having their access denied by one or more of the armed actors involved in the conflict. Currently, the rise of ‘false flag’ attacks and a highly contested information environment makes it even harder to shine the light of truth upon the darkness and chaos of some of the worst conflicts. Was a school getting hit, apparently

140 have been damaged already in Ukraine, the result of direct targeting of a civilian building? An accident? Incompetence? Or the result of one side assessing that the building was being used by its enemies?

Part of the debate around the legality of the conflict is rooted in its origins. Some argue that Russia committed a crime of aggression by launching an illegal war. Yet that doesn’t mean that all behaviour in an illegal war is itself illegal, although guilt by association is an understandable narrative from the public’s points of view across large parts of the world.

Russia’s sharp reaction to President Biden’s comments is possibly explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, it’s a reminder that Washington remains the predominant global power and even off the cuff comments from the White House land in Moscow. Secondly it shows that Putin is thinking beyond Ukraine and that carrying a ‘war criminal’ label may make any attempt to reconnect Russia into much of the world that much harder. Meanwhile events in Ukraine may well be defined by a series of war crimes. Yet at this stage the verification of these crimes, let alone accountability for them, remains more of a theory than a reality.



# Biden's symbolic visit to Europe



Ian Black

President Joe Biden's visit to Poland last week was both well-timed and symbolic. Well-timed because Poland had welcomed over 2 million refugees who had fled Ukraine after Vladimir Putin invaded his neighbour on February 24; symbolic because Biden represents the United States, the most powerful member of Nato, the Atlantic alliance set up at the start of the Cold War in 1949.

Air Force One landed on an airfield close to Poland's border with Ukraine and Biden met officials from both countries and American soldiers and Ukrainians fleeing their homes. The US president had previously attended Nato, EU and G7 emergency summits in Brussels, all emphasizing the significance of transatlantic ties. "The single most important thing we had to do in the west is to be united," he declared.

On Saturday in Warsaw he generated global headlines and frenzied posts on social media, by predicting that Putin "cannot remain in power" and described him as a "butcher." An American official clarified shortly afterwards that the president was not calling for "regime change". The Kremlin responded swiftly to say that it was a matter for the Russian people to choose their president.

The head of the Council for Foreign Relations, an elite Washington thinktank and veteran US diplomat, Richard Haas, criticized Biden on Twitter for having "made a difficult situation more difficult and a dangerous situation more dangerous."

It was not the first time that POTUS spoke off the cuff without having considered the implications. On Thursday in Brussels he said Nato "would respond" if Russia used chemical weapons in Ukraine. But he did not spell out what that might mean. Asked whether the use of chemical weapons by Putin would prompt a military response from Nato, Biden replied that it "would



trigger a response in kind».

Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, said it would be "catastrophic" if Putin used chemical weapons, while Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made clear it would result in severe consequences. The White House has set up a national security team to look at how the US and allies should react if Russia launched a chemical attack. But there is no suggestion Nato would respond by using chemical weapons as they are illegal under international law.

The key issue for Nato is to avoid imposing a no-fly-zone above Ukraine as demanded repeatedly by the country's impressively articulate and media-savvy president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, as that would risk aircraft from the Atlantic alliance being targeted by the Russian airforce, or vice versa, which would lead to a serious escalation.

"We repeat every day: Close the sky over Ukraine. Close for all Russian missiles, for Russian combat aircraft, for all their terrorists," Zelenskiy said shortly after Putin launched his "special military operation". Experts say setting up a NFZ would require destroying Russian air defences that

could reach Nato aircraft in Ukraine and threatening to shoot down Russian planes over the country. "It would be a pretty dramatic escalation by Nato" one said.

In the last few days Nato has been grappling with the question of whether the Kremlin has indeed changed its strategic goals in Ukraine to focus on consolidating control of the eastern Donbas region, where Moscow claims Russian-backed separatists are controlling 93% of Luhansk and 54% of Donetsk.

«The main objectives of the first stage of the operation have generally been accomplished," said Sergei Rudskoi, head of the Russian General Staff's Main Operational Directorate. "The combat potential of the armed forces of Ukraine has been considerably reduced, which makes it possible to focus our core efforts on achieving the main goal - the liberation of Donbas.»

Russia has previously pointed to far bigger ambitions - including the overthrow of what it calls the "neo-Nazi" Zelenskiy government and its replacement by a pro-Russian one. But stiff resistance from Ukraine forces, logistical problems and low morale may have made that unachievable.

Some analysts think that Putin has downgraded his aspirations with regard to Kyiv to convince the Russian people, while others assume that the public position is a smokescreen - or simply an outright lie - to deceive the Ukrainians and their allies. If the first scenario were true that might lead to permanent Russian control of Eastern Ukraine, echoing the split between North and South Korea.

But as the US-based Institute for the Study of War said in its latest assessment, "the increasingly static nature of fighting around Kyiv reflects the incapacity of Russian forces rather than any shift in Russian objectives of efforts at this time".

The first month of Russia's invasion was executed on Putin's assumption that Ukraine is a false entity that would collapse quickly.

The Kremlin believed that Kyiv would fall, the Ukrainian army lay down its arms and millions of citizens greet their Russian "liberators". None of those assumptions happened and Ukraine's soldiers and citizens do not look at this point even close to breaking.

Only one thing is certain for now: this unprecedented and alarming crisis is far from over

# The F-35 Diplomacy



Abdulla Aljenaïd

Can the issue of the US F-35 fighter deal with the UAE be raised without contemplating the special strategic relationship between both countries, or the Emirates' pivotal geopolitical role? A more important question is whether it is acceptable to politicize this deal by the Biden administration now. Therefore, it wasn't unexpected for the UAE to suspend the negotiations given the US choice to delay its completion.

This complication was described by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in joint press conference in Kuala Lumpur, "We remain prepared to move forward... if that is what the Emiratis are interested in doing... Washington wanted to ensure that Israel maintains its military advantage... We wanted to make ensure the security of any technologies that are sold or transferred to other partners in

the region." Secretary Blinken was implying that the technology revision was mainly Israel's superiority edge regionally, while guarding against any cyber infringement by China through the Chinese 5G infrastructure in the UAE. Washington has also demanded that the UAE provides unprecedented purchase guarantees that challenge the buyer's sovereign rights in use or deployment of these fighter.

Notably, the Pentagon and US State Department had previously went through a reargues approval process prior to approving the deal earlier. That had included the technical specifications from the power plants, radar and navigation, advanced communications and data sharing, missile guidance, and weapons bay payloads. The UAE requested specifications are unique to its needs, and another detail that Secretary Blinken have missed, was the fact that the Israeli armed forces has always applied its own modifications to any system the Israel acquires including the F-35's, as they had modified the Israeli Air Force F-15/16 fighter

in the past, and the specifications Dolphin class submarines that they had acquired and are acquiring from Germany. Furthermore, the current Israeli government did not express any objection to the deal to go through. Which lead us to conclude that Washington has other motives than the ones stated by StateSect Blinken.

Washington's decision to "complicate" this deal at this point in time could be linked to the faltering Vienna talks with Iran or is it expressing more than a verbal objection to some of the UAE recent regional FP policy steps that Washington disapprove, as have been expressed by several US officials after the UAE's Foreign Secretary Shaikh Abdulla bin Zayed Al-Nahyan's visit to Damascus, or maybe the direct talks with Iran.

Venturing further into US concerns over China's 5G network security risks to the F-35 program, one wonders whether a similar concern was overlooked by Washington when it supplied the UAE with the advanced THAAD air defense system, or has the US Air Force registered any



infringement or an attempt to any of highly advanced systems that the US Air Force fields and operate out of Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi?

There are implications to both the shunned UAE demands that Washington passes a verdict regarding the F-35 deal, and the unanswered calls by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud to include the Kingdom in the Iran talks in Vienna. The Biden administration should review its strategic integration and interdependence priorities with its regional allies, to serve the common strategic interests of all, instead of granting primacy to short-term political desires and goals.

## Why Is NATO Not United on The Ukraine Crisis?



Jwan Dibo

It is clear that there is a huge rift among NATO members over the Ukraine crisis. The US and UK are escalating against Russia. In contrast, France and Germany are de-escalating with Russia to stop the war and reach a settlement. This discrepancy, in turn, indicates another inconsistency between the EU, led by Germany and France, and NATO, led by the US. Geopolitics plays here a central role in crystallising attitudes towards the Russian war in Ukraine. EU and

Russia are neighbours, and this neighbourhood requires living together in peace and cooperation in a way that preserves the interests of both sides.

Furthermore, the economic relations and the volume of trade exchanges between Russia and EU are much more than those between Russia on the one hand and US and UK on the other hand. The EU imports almost 40 percent of its annual gas needs from Russia at competitive prices. According to The Guardian newspaper "Germany imported about 56 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Russia in 2020. Nearly 55% of its gas imports came from Russia».

EU uses 25 percent of Russian oil annually for its domestic needs. While the US was importing only 209 thousand barrels per day from Russia, out of about 20 million barrels of its daily consumption in 2020. As for Britain, it imports only 8 percent of Russian oil and 4 percent of natural gas. As a result, mutual economic interests between Russia and the EU are much more important than those between Russia and America and Britain. These common interests between EU and Russia, in addition to geopolitical factor, are stronger than the factor of values that links EU to US and UK regarding Ukraine

crisis.

The option of direct military confrontation with Russia is absolutely not welcome by the EU. But this option is not completely abolished neither by the US, nor by Russia. The reason is that in the event of a comprehensive war between Russia and the West, Europe alone will be scorched, not the US, as it was during the first and second world wars in the last century.

Therefore, the US and British military support for the Ukrainian army to resist Russia is much greater than the support of the EU, especially Germany and France. The EU, led by Berlin and Paris, is still seeking peace with Russia, while

Washington and London are inflaming the situation in Ukraine and escalating with Moscow. One of the repercussions of this war is to increase the European awakening, which may lead to the gradual elimination of American hegemony. The EU has no choice but to coexist with the Russian bear, despite its cruelty. This is possible by accepting some Russian conditions and discussing others in order to avoid a devastating war in which Europe will be the spearhead and no one will lose but Europe and Russia. At the same time, Europe will not be able to achieve this unless it gets rid of the US hegemony.

# Putin's Inevitable Failure in Ukraine

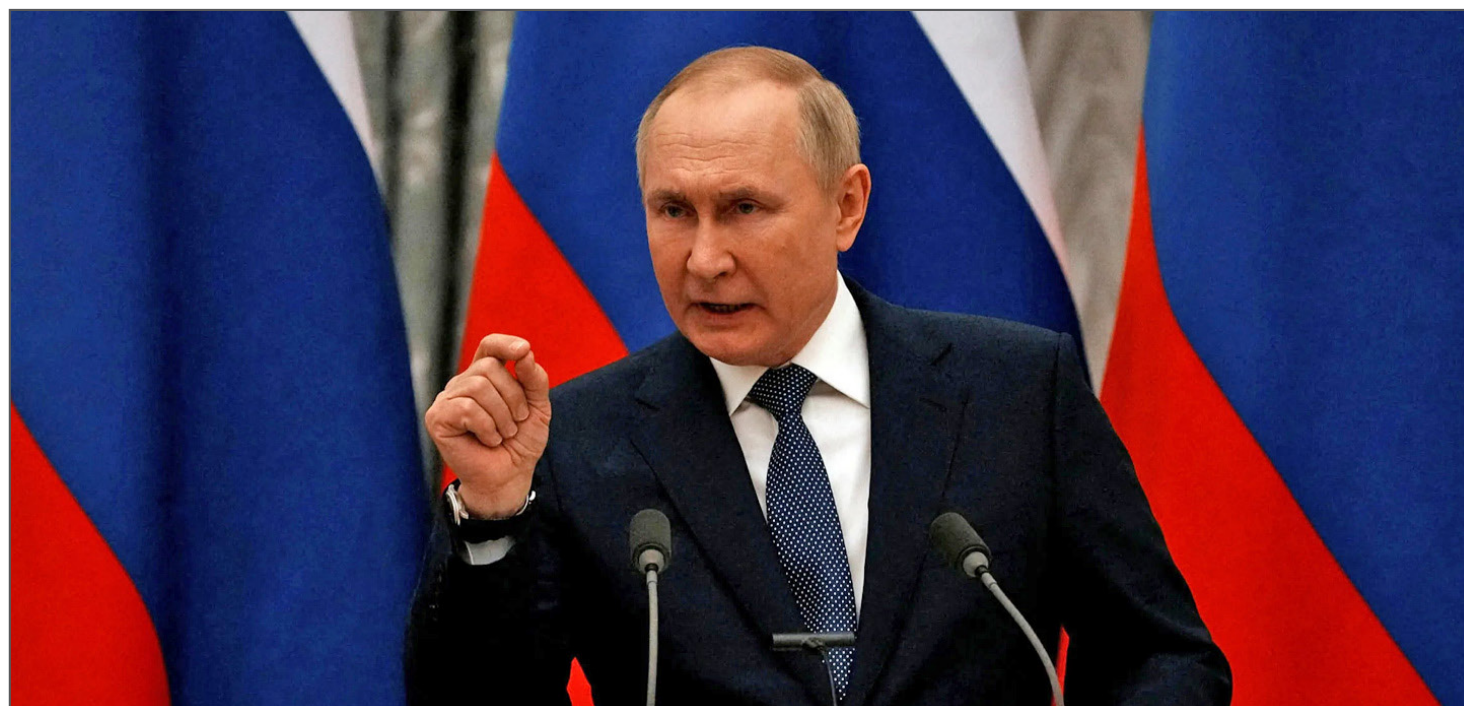


Dalia Ziada

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is entering a fourth week of fierce field combat, wherein varied formats of traditional, urban, and cyber warfare have been employed. In parallel, a cluster of frantic mediation efforts, and desperate talks about unrealistic proposals for peace, have failed in figuring out the specific strategic goals that the Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to achieve by killing tens of thousands of innocent civilians, including children, and forcing millions of Ukrainians to leave their homeland and seek refuge elsewhere.

However, we at least know that, so far, Putin has failed in realizing the objective that he deceitfully claimed, at the beginning of the war, to justify his unjustifiable assault on Ukraine. That is; pushing the NATO away from Russia's borders. Clearly, Putin's lie has backfired at him. By invading Ukraine, Putin forced the NATO allies to move too close to Russia's borders.

Ukraine, which had zero number of foreign or NATO military bases or support before the war, is now receiving billions of dollars in aid and advanced military equipment from Europe and the United States. Last week, the United States President, Biden, signed a bill to provide 13.6 billion dollars in emergency aid to Ukraine. The package is divided into three categories: a sum of 3.5 billion dollars is allocated to securing arms and other defense equipment for the Ukrainian military, including advanced American-made anti-missile systems, while 4 billion dollars are allocated for humanitarian aid, and 3 billion dollars will be used by the United States for deploying American troops to the NATO countries surrounding Ukraine. Needless to mention the Turkish-made TB-2 drones – Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – which the Ukrainian military has been skillfully using, since the beginning of the



war, to prevent Russia from gaining leverage by dominating the sky. The same drones were used in the Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Romania, in 2020, and played a tremendous role in Azerbaijan's victory. In a conversation between the Russian and Turkish presidents, a few months ago, Putin noted that he is concerned by the increasing use of Turkish-made drones in conflicts around Russia.

Even more, thanks to this war, the thirty allies of NATO are showing an unprecedented sense of unity, on policy and military levels, as they chose to put aside their internal disputes and rather focus, with full determination, on finishing Putin's tyranny. One main highlight of the growing cohesion among the NATO allies is the accelerated rapprochement between the two historical frenemies – Turkey and Greece. Both countries joined the NATO at the same time, in 1952. They are, literally, the gatekeepers of NATO's southeastern borders. However, the long decade of geopolitical disputes over maritime rights in the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea have kept them in a political and diplomatic standoff that reached a peak point of military harassment using jet fighters and naval forces, in the eastern Mediterranean, in the summer of 2020. However, thanks to the economic and security

global and regional crises resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there is a strong hope that the historical disputes between the two Mediterranean neighbors could be realistically resolved.

Meanwhile, Putin is drowning himself and his country further into the dark hole of his inflated ego. The Russian military, which had deployed to implement a short-term "special military operation" in Ukraine, has been awfully strained on six fronts at eastern, southern, and northern borders of Ukraine, for four weeks. The Ukrainian army, alongside urban fighters, are showing hell to the morally defeated Russian troops, who are struggling with the guilt of killing their cousins for reasons they cannot fully accept.

In a desperate move to put a limit to draining his military troops and equipment, and depleting Russia's economic resources, on a war that he should not have entered in the first place, Putin is now looking into recruiting mercenaries from Syria to help his army. According to Ukraine's Military Intelligence report, released last week, the Russia-owned Hamim military base in Syria, received orders from Moscow to prepare and deploy 300 fighters/ mercenaries per day to fight in Ukraine. However, on March 15th, which marked the beginning of the third week of the war, the Russian base in Syria could only send 150

mercenaries, two days after, 30 of these mercenaries got badly injured and had to return to Latakia, Syria. On March 8th, the British Minister of Defense, Ben Wallace, told media that the current war between Russia and Ukraine marks the end of Putin's legacy. "Whatever happens, President Putin is a spent force in the world and he is done, his army is done, and he needs to recognize that." Wallace, also, highlighted that Putin has become a burden on Russia. "He has exhausted his army, he is responsible for thousands of Russian soldiers being killed, responsible for innocent people being killed. He is reducing his economy to zero. He has to take responsibility for that."

As the war concluded a third week, Putin expressed that he got offended by U.S. President Biden describing him to journalists as a "war criminal." Ironically, on the morning of March 16th, the United Nation's International Court of Justice (IJC) ruled that Putin has committed a crime, in the definition of international law, by invading Ukraine and called upon to Russia to immediately end its intervention on Ukraine. Indeed, invading a sovereign state and killing innocent civilians is a grievous crime that Putin purposefully committed with cold blood.

Yet, the good news is that he has already started to pay for his irreversible failures in Ukraine.

# Meanings of Nowruz between mythology and reality



Zara Saleh

Nowruz, known as a new year for more than 300 million people across the world, has been celebrated for nearly 3,000 years [ 2722 years according to the Kurdish calendar or 612 B.C.]. The festival of Nowruz is the traditional celebration of the new year that marks the beginning of spring for a diverse range of nations, ethnic and religious communities. However, Nowruz or the new day in Kurdish has been associated with the Kurdish national identity and freedom and has become a symbol of Kurdish national identity and symbolises the end of tyranny. Arguably, Newroz has become the most important national, cultural festival and celebration of the Kurdish calendar in Kurdistan and diaspora as well which began on the twentieth and twenty-first of March. By going back to the Kurdish myths,

Nowruz has not only marked the first of spring, but it was an embodiment of revolution against oppression and the end of tyranny. According to the legend and the Zoroastrian myth, the Kurds with the other ethnic groups that been oppressed by the Assyrian tyranny of Zuhak (Dehak) began to rebel against him with the leadership of the blacksmith Kawa. When the king became ill, two serpents grew on his shoulders and started to feed them by the brain of two Kurdish youths each day in purpose to prevent eating him until Kawa led a revolution against him. Simultaneously with the killing and defeating of king Zuhak, the fire in the hills and mountains announced the victory and the end of the Zuhak kingdom. 612 B.C. was the end of the Assyrian kingdom and the beginning rule of the Kurdish kingdom of Medes.

For Kurdish people, Nowruz is a symbol of freedom, revolution and identity and has always connected to the politics of the day in all parts of Kurdistan under the oppressive

regimes of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. For example, in Syria and under Assad's regime, the celebration of the Kurdish new year was forbidden, and the Kurds were subject of arrest, killing and oppression by the Syrian security forces. In 1986 the Syrian intelligences and mukhabarat had opened fire against the Kurdish demonstration in Damascus to prevent people from celebrating Nowruz outdoors and banning the celebration. As a result, the first victim of the Syrian regime was Suleiman Addy who was killed by the Syrian police. Due to the political oppression of Kurds by Assad's regime and its discrimination policies, the Kurds led an uprising against the regime in March 2004 and they continued the struggles until today's day.

In 2019, just after two days of Nowruz, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces declared the defeat of the so-called ISIS in 23 of March, northeast Syria. Remembering the first Kurdish victory before 2722 years, were Kurds joint together under the rule of the



Medes Kingdom and has successfully defeated the tyranny. Today, such example and experience of unity can be the only way for Kurds as the world's largest ethnic group without state and they an estimated 50 million who live in between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The Levant  
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