
Vol. 2

July / August 2021

No.2

CMER Middle East Report

The Council on Middle East Relations
Canberra, ACT, Australia

Aims and Scope

The *CMER Middle East Report* (ISBN 978-1-921492-39-6) is an electronic journal (e-journal) published by the Council of Middle East Relations, designed towards fulfilling one of the principal missions of the Council, namely the dissemination of academic research and other scholarly works. With all its inherent advantages, an e-journal serves as the best vehicle to carry CMER to the forefront of the global Middle East scholarly community.

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ISBN: 978-1-921492-39-6 (Online)

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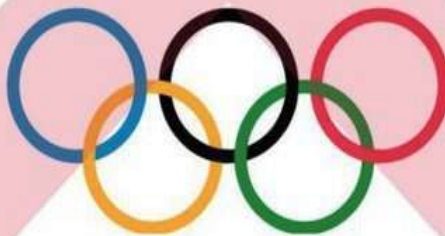
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BEIJING 2022



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Say no to concentration camps in China

The Xinjiang re-education camps, officially called Vocational Education and Training Centers by the government of the People's Republic of China, are concentration camps that have been operated by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional government for the purpose of interning Uyghur Muslims since 2014. The camps were established under General Secretary Xi Jinping's administration.

Editorial: The cost of Biden's Cowardice will be measured in rivers of blood!

By Arthur Tane
TCMER Executive Director



What will become of them?

The horror of President Joseph Biden's deliberate military retreat from Afghanistan is so immense and its geopolitical impact so severe, we have yet to fully comprehend the extent of this blood-soaked disaster. For those old enough to remember the images of the last days of South Vietnam, recent events in Afghanistan are shockingly familiar.

In insisting on an immediate military withdrawal Biden apparently rejected the advice of all of the US Armed Forces leadership. According to the New York Times: "Even as the number of American forces in Afghanistan steadily decreased to the 2,500 who still remained, Defence Department leaders still cobbled together a military effort that managed to protect the United States from terrorist attacks...."

Director of Central Intelligence William Burns even warned the U.S. Senate that a withdrawal would forfeit the ability to have human intelligence in the area to pick up what the Taliban, Al-Qaeda or Isis might be planning in their ongoing assault on the West.

Globally, there is not a friend or foe who doesn't see that America's credibility and reliability as an ally has been utterly demolished. Great Britain, which has troops in Afghanistan, was not even consulted.

What must allies such as Taiwan or Israel be thinking now after watching poorly armed tribesmen sweep aside an American ally we resolutely vowed to assist? Worse, what must America's adversaries, such as China, Russia, Iran or North Korea be thinking now? That such cut-and-run behaviour signals the perfect opportunity to strike the Ukraine, the Baltic States or Taiwan?

Communist China can see what America and the West did in response to its seizure of Hong Kong, its deceitful build-up of fake islands as military bases in the South China

Sea, its attacks on northern India, its threats of a nuclear attack on Japan, its threats to attack Australia and its lies about the human-to-human transmissibility of its Covid-19 virus that have so far caused the deaths of more than 12,000,000 people worldwide and the devastation of countless economies - exactly nothing.

A strong argument was made for not pulling out at all. The objective was to ensure that America was never again attacked by a 9/11 type of terrorist group. To that end, the U.S. had a modest military footprint, like a small insurance premium, in Afghanistan of 2,500 troops, six airbases including the largest, Bagram; and from its runways the ability to reach adversaries such as China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and other points in or near Central Asia. Those airbases are now in the hands of the Taliban.

To reach much of Eastern or Central Asia now, the U.S. would first have to fly around eight hours from the Gulf States, or perhaps from Pakistan - not the most practical approach, although the US has reportedly been looking for other airbases in Central Asia. The U.S. has, after all, had troops in Germany and South Korea for decades, and no one has been calling for their removal.

There are fears as well that after the Americans have gone, the treatment of women and girls will be beyond description. MSNBC reports:

"According to Human Rights Watch, the Taliban have been summarily executing Afghan civilians linked to the government - a development Secretary of State Antony Blinken meekly said was 'troubling.' Already, the Afghans who put their lives on the line to assist the U.S. Army over the last decades are reported to have been beheaded, a grotesque dereliction of our duty to the Afghans who foolishly believed in the U.S."

The new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will now be the centre for a resurgent terrorism, a haven for terrorists. Terrorists in Europe, now emboldened, will have a command-and-control headquarters to draw on. Jihadists from Australia will flock to Kabul! Moreover, what is to stop them, and the thousands of terrorists, including senior Al-Qaeda operatives, released from Afghan prisons, from crossing into the U.S. through its newly open, non-existent southern border, or by boat to Europe?

How many more tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children will die worldwide in the quest for a world ruled by Sharia Law?

In June, President Biden announced that the Afghan army, 300,000 strong, was armed with "all the tools... and equipment of any modern military. We provided advanced weaponry." Much of this weaponry - "massive amounts of US-supplied firepower" - is now in the possession of the Taliban, potentially to be used against the U.S., our allies throughout Europe and Asia, and Australia.

Even more unforgivable, by agreeing to the Taliban's demand that he stick to his own initial deadline of Aug. 31 for the withdrawal of all troops, Biden shows he is willing to strand thousands of Americans, Europeans and Afghan interpreters and their families behind enemy lines.

This is extraordinarily callous, the actions of a dark-hearted senile bastard.

Thousands are said to have been waiting on instructions and are still trapped inside Afghanistan with no way to get to Kabul airport. Pathetically, they are being told to "shelter in place.", Reports are that members of the Taliban with "lists of names" are going door to door looking for allies of the U.S. and NATO military. These same reports

speak of beheadings and the Taliban also going door to door and dragging out girls, some as young as 12, to make them "fighters' sex slaves" or for forced marriages.

The cost of Biden's Cowardice will be measured in rivers of blood.

Instead of taking responsibility for what any reasonable person can see as a complete brain-dead failure, Biden blamed the Afghan government, he blamed the Afghan army, and he blamed the Afghan people. For four days, while Afghanistan was collapsing, Biden disappeared from public view. Then he gave a speech on Aug. 16, took no questions, and retreated again - under instructions from his wife.

What we are seeing unfold in Afghanistan amounts to the most shameful and cowardly betrayal of friends in living memory. Biden's stupidity has done irreparable damage to America's international standing and therefore to the West's security. This self-inflicted humiliation is also a disaster for Afghan families and will have long-term ramifications for American leadership in the world.

Biden didn't just blink in the face of terror. He grovelled before the Taliban, acknowledging their victory and laying the groundwork for their legitimacy as the rulers of Afghanistan. Who else but a Biden would allow murderous thugs to set the terms for America and her allies' withdrawal?

This Biden will have much to answer for as history records his catastrophic failure in how we left Afghanistan. The coming summary executions, the destruction of women's rights, where even the joy of dancing is forbidden, will be as much part of the Biden legacy as the billions in sophisticated American military equipment now part of the Taliban arsenal.

But Biden will not stand alone in that coming judgment. His circle of apologists and enablers, including Vice President Harris, Washington's shadow figures who are close to power but avoid disclosure, and the Progressive/socialists now strangely quiet in Congress will likely be viewed by historians as co-conspirators in allowing a global cancer to metastasize once more in Afghanistan, becoming far more powerful, more malignant and more deadly than before.

The Dreadful Consequences of the Biden Disaster in Afghanistan

By Guy Milliere



The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is a debacle for the United States; the consequences will take shape fast. The Biden administration and President Joe Biden himself have an overwhelming responsibility for what is taking place and what will follow. Pictured: Biden speaks about the evacuations of US citizens and vulnerable Afghans, in the White House on August 20, 2021. (Photo by Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP via Getty Images)

The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is a debacle for the United States; the consequences will take shape fast. The Biden administration and President Joe Biden himself have an overwhelming responsibility for what is taking place and what will follow; they have shown a degree of incompetence unseen in the United States since the calamitous Carter years.

On July 8, President Biden said, "the Afghan troops have 300,000 well equipped — as well equipped as any army in the world — and an air force against something like 75,000 Taliban". A Taliban takeover of the country, he added, was "not inevitable". He was wrong. Most of the Afghan army, probably after they saw the American military pulling out of the Bagram air base, understandably decided not even to try to fight.

The "trillion dollars spent training and equipping hundreds of thousands of Afghan National Security and Defence Forces" with "advanced weaponry" has led to that US-provided "advanced weaponry" falling into the hands of terrorists it was meant to fight - a donation from US taxpayers to what is now the world's best-armed terrorist state.

Contrary to the latest fabrication endlessly repeated in an apparent effort to make it true - that "after 20 years, everyone wanted the US out of Afghanistan" - the US has had troops in Germany and South Korea for about 70 years - a relatively modest

"insurance policy" that never seemed "forever." Ironically, by handing over Afghanistan to the same Taliban that hosted Al Qaeda, which murdered nearly 3,000 people on 9/11, the US is not only making a mockery of these victims; it will soon find itself having to fight at an even greater cost in life and treasure as countries trying to eliminate America can now do it without American troops nearby, and with America's military equipment.

On August 15, on CNN's "State of the Union," host Jake Tapper asked Secretary of State Antony Blinken if the Biden administration was in a "Saigon moment" - the hasty 1975 evacuation by helicopter of the American Embassy in Saigon, when the city fell to communist North Vietnamese troops. "This is not Saigon", Blinken replied. It was worse. The only difference was that the embassy was in Kabul, not Saigon, and those who took the city were Islamists, not communists. At Kabul airport, for days, thousands of Afghans have been trying to board American planes leaving the country. Some who clung to them while taking off fell to their death. "We've succeeded in achieving our objectives", Blinken said.

Available intelligence indicates that al-Qaeda has, in fact, never left Afghan territory; now that the country is held by their jihadist allies, its members are already reorganizing.

President Biden and Secretary Blinken claimed that the US Intelligence community did not inform them that the Taliban could gain power in a few weeks and that the Afghan government would quickly collapse. Six months ago, however, on February 3, a report from a Congressionally-commissioned report stated that the Biden administration would have to change its plans: "withdrawing U.S. troops irresponsibly would likely lead to a new civil war in Afghanistan, inviting the reconstitution of anti-U.S. terrorist groups that could threaten our homeland, and providing them with a narrative of victory". More warnings followed. The Biden administration went ahead anyhow.

Even though Kabul's downfall was foreseeable long before August 15, the US Embassy in Kabul seemed caught off guard. After the Taliban arrived at the gates of the city, embassy personnel began destroying documents and were transported to the airport at the last minute. The embassy is now in the hands of the Taliban.

Afghans trying to flee the Taliban overran the runway, Kabul airport was plunged into chaos, and American soldiers took control of the airport. 7,000 US troops were sent back into Afghanistan in an environment more dangerous than the one the US had abandoned, one entirely controlled by the Taliban. Up to 40,000 Americans remained stranded in Afghanistan. Those requesting the embassy's help first received a message telling them to proceed to Kabul airport, but with a warning: "THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT CANNOT ENSURE SAFE PASSAGE TO THE HAMID KARZAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT", followed by a warning *not* to go the airport, at least before receiving instructions.

Meanwhile, the Taliban, despite claims by President Biden, have been blocking access to it. Americans trying to reach it have been beaten by the Taliban and their passports taken. There are reports of the Taliban "with lists" going door-to-door, killing people who had worked with the US.

Americans left to their fate in Kabul run the risk of being taken hostage by the Taliban or other Islamist groups; they have every reason to feel abandoned by their

government and terrified for their lives. The French, British, Germans, Australians and Czechs have been venturing behind enemy lines to rescue their stranded citizens hiding there; Americans have not. The Pentagon and the State Department have admitted that they do not even know how many Americans are in the country; how could they know where they are?

Women in Afghanistan are being raped, beaten to death, murdered for not wearing a burka, and had their eyes gouged out. "Hit lists" are being drawn up for women and children to be hunted as sex slaves or for forced marriages to "fighters".

President Biden and Secretary Blinken, as usual, blamed what is happening on former President Donald J. Trump, who had wanted the United States to leave Afghanistan, but not this way. Trump reportedly expected to leave a residual troop force in place, and apparently had a plan for an orderly military withdrawal - based strictly on conditions on the ground. These presumably included not departing in the middle of the Taliban's summer fighting season, but in winter, when they shelter in Pakistan; not neglecting to consult with America's European allies, and not surrendering the main US air base, Bagram, before evacuating Americans and their allies, whom they had promised to rescue should plans not work out.

Trump seems to have understood what the Biden administration has ignored: that terrorists may not be all that susceptible to diplomacy, but to strength - as Osama bin Laden put it, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse." Trump recently recounted what he had said on the phone - in front of witnesses - to Hibatullah Akhundzada, Supreme Commander of the Taliban, to help him understand what would happen if the Taliban did not honour their agreements:

"We're going to come back and hit you harder than any country has ever been hit. And your village, where I know you are and where you have everybody, that's going to be the point at which the first bomb is dropped".

Shortly after Trump hung up, the Taliban attacked Afghan forces; US jets immediately responded with an air strike, and Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen posted a Twitter message saying that the group "plans to implement all parts of the agreement one after another to prevent conflict escalation".

After Biden's inauguration, everything was different. Lieutenant General Gregory Guillot, commander of the Ninth Air Force (Air Forces Central), Southwest Asia, said that from the moment the Biden administration took control, there had been a steep decline in air strikes. Trump maintained fighter jets and armed drones at Bagram airbase; Biden, on July 5, and without notifying the Afghan military, ordered the base evacuated. Immediately after the Americans departed, the Taliban not only looted the base and recovered US military equipment that had been abandoned, they also freed thousands of Taliban and al-Qaeda members that the US military had imprisoned there.

When members of the Biden administration saw that the president's disappearance was drawing horrified reactions even from the previously slavish mainstream, they announced on the morning of August 16 that Biden would hold a press conference in the afternoon. So, on August 16, after days of silence, Biden read a 19-minute speech saying that he stood behind his decision to leave Afghanistan, and even accused the Afghan security forces, which had sacrificed an estimated 66,000 men.

Biden left the press conference without answering questions and returned to Camp David where he resumed his vacation". Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi praised his "strong leadership".

On August 11, when it became clear that the Taliban would take power, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said, "The Taliban also has to make an assessment about what they want their role to be in the international community".

The reply arrived on August 15, the day of the capture of Kabul. Taliban commander, Muhammed Arif Mustafa told a journalist:

"One day mujahedeen will have victory and Islamic law will come not just to Afghanistan, but all over the world. We are not in a hurry. We believe it will come one day. Jihad will not end until the last day."

What caused the administration of George W. Bush to destroy the rear bases of al-Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban regime was the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US. They had been organized on Afghan soil by the leaders of al-Qaeda when the Taliban were in power. Twenty years later, there seems no reason why the Taliban would drive out the members of al-Qaeda and ISIS present in the country. Rather, Afghanistan seems poised to become a safe haven for Islamist terrorist groups, already rejoicing to see the weakness of the United States and doubtless perceiving it as encouragement to escalate. The risk of Islamic terrorist attacks across the globe has increased sharply.

Other consequences are taking shape.

Iran, two decades ago, had bad relations with the Taliban, who were hostile to Shiites and Shiism. In 1998, when the Taliban murdered nine Iranians at its consulate in Mazar-e Sharif, Iran nearly declared war on the Taliban. That has changed. In November 2019, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior leader of the Taliban, met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran to "help Afghan peace and security" and again met in January 2021. Now that the Taliban have regained power in Kabul, Iran is likely ready to cooperate with them. Iran, which supports Sunni Islamist organizations if they serve its aims, has been a home to al Qaeda leaders for years, and has apparently understood for at least ten years that funding and arming the Taliban might not only allow closer relations, but also drive the United States out of Afghanistan. "We always wanted to establish relations with Iran," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on July 31, "because Iran has an Islamic system, and we want an Islamic system. We asked them to recognize us officially". Afghans might seek refuge in Iran; many are already present there. Iran may try to limit the amount.

Russia, for its part, probably intends to make sure that the Taliban will not try to destabilize Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (Russia recently completed joint military exercises with troops from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), but seems satisfied to see an American defeat (adviser to Vladimir Putin Fyodor Lukyanov said: "You can't blame Russia for feeling a little smug about what is happening in Kabul") and may well want to forge economic and strategic links with an enemy of the United States. "I have long since decided that the Taliban is much more able to reach agreements than the puppet government in Kabul", Russia's presidential envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said.

Russia happens to be an ally of both Iran and China, which signed a 25-year economic and military agreement with Iran in March 2021. China's communist regime has already announced that it is looking forward to "friendship and cooperation with the Taliban". "Afghanistan's Taliban," China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying added, "has expressed many times a desire for good relations with China.... with an expectation that China will take part in Afghanistan's rebuilding and development process." Afghanistan has abundant natural resources, including a rare earth metals estimated to be worth more than \$3 trillion, but has no mining infrastructure.

China doubtless stands ready to make Afghanistan into a Chinese economic colony, so long as the Taliban do not attack China and its allies, or create trouble with the Muslim Uyghur people whom China has been brutally suppressing in Xinjiang province. The Taliban already seem to have shown their "goodwill" towards China by giving it the means to identify Uyghurs present in Afghanistan and by helping to deport them back to China.

The Taliban victory is also a victory for China, which in the near future will most likely be the dominant country in Afghanistan as it continues to move towards the global hegemony it wants.

The Taliban victory is also a victory for Pakistan, Russia and Iran, which no doubt intend to take advantage of the recent turn of events.

According to the *Washington Post*, Pakistan is more deeply linked to the Taliban's victory than the United States might care to admit. Pakistan's border with Afghanistan is "notoriously porous;" also, according to Human Rights Watch:

"Of all the foreign powers involved in efforts to sustain and manipulate the ongoing fighting, Pakistan is distinguished both by the sweep of its objectives and the scale of its efforts, which include soliciting funding for the Taliban, bankrolling Taliban operations, providing diplomatic support as the Taliban's virtual emissaries abroad, arranging training for Taliban fighters, recruiting skilled and unskilled manpower to serve in Taliban armies, planning and directing offensives, providing and facilitating shipments of ammunition and fuel, and on several occasions apparently directly providing combat support."

Pakistan has not only historically helped the Taliban militarily and strategically, it also has increasing economic, military and strategic ties with China. China, which has done nothing to curb Pakistan's support for the Taliban, can only benefit from this support.

China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and the Taliban have different worldviews, but do possess three things in common: they are enemies of the United States and the Western world, they want to see the United States humiliated and defeated, and they want to eliminate the United States from the region. The United States has been humiliated, defeated and eliminated from the region. Its enemies have won.

For months, Western European leaders did not criticize the Biden administration: they appeared to enjoy seeing a weak, incompetent and destructive administration at the head of the United States. Now, though, they are worried about an additional influx of migrants sweeping into Europe and the consequent heightened terrorist risks.

The people of Taiwan have every reason to be anxious. An article on August 16 in the Communist Chinese *Global Times*, an organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CPP), said:

"The DPP authorities [the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on the island of Taiwan] need to keep a sober head, and the secessionist forces should reserve the ability to wake up from their dreams. From what happened in Afghanistan, they should perceive that once a war breaks out in the Straits, the island's defence will collapse in hours and the US military won't come to help."

President Trump appears to have seen that trying to transform a tribal country - ruled for centuries by warlords and mired in strict Islam - into Western democracy was most likely a doomed undertaking, and that hundreds of billions of dollars had been spent to the great benefit of freedom and opportunity for women, but that much of the of the US investment might have been in vain.

The enemies of the United States and the West doubtless see the defeat of the United States as an entirely self-inflicted one, resulting from inept decisions by American leaders unable to lead and who seem deliberately to choose incompetence.

Those who love the United States, however, believe that without its strength and power, American liberty and freedom would quickly vanish from creation. Seeing what the Biden administration has done in just seven months to weaken America and strengthen its enemies has been nothing short of shattering. One can only hope for a change of course, a return to real leadership, before more damage is done.

Dr. Guy Millière, a professor at the University of Paris, is the author of 27 books on France and Europe.

Biden's Afghanistan Disaster Has Left the West Defenceless against Islamist Terrorists

By Con Coughlin



The ability of U.S. security officials to monitor and disrupt the activities of Islamist terror groups will be severely diminished as a consequence of the Biden administration's catastrophic decision to end America's military involvement in Afghanistan. Pictured: A Taliban patrol on a street in Kabul on August 17, 2021. (Photo by Wakil Kohsar/AFP via Getty Images)

The ability of U.S. security officials to monitor and disrupt the activities of Islamist terror groups will be severely diminished as a consequence of the Biden administration's catastrophic decision to end America's military involvement in Afghanistan.

One of the most notable achievements of the US-led coalition's presence in Afghanistan during the past two decades has been its relentless campaign to destroy the terrorist infrastructure of Islamist terror groups such as Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organisation.

In the years immediately following the September 11th attacks in 2001, American and other intelligence agencies estimated that around 80 percent of Islamist-inspired terror plots against the West originated from Afghanistan or the lawless tribal territories on the Pakistani border.

Today that figure has been reduced to almost zero, as the highly successful counter-terrorism campaign mounted by the U.S. and key allies like Britain against Afghan-

based Islamist terror cells has seen their infrastructure destroyed, and their ability to wreak havoc against the West curtailed.

The success of the American-led campaign has resulted in groups like al-Qaeda, as well as more recent Islamist organisations like ISIS, being forced to locate their operations to other failed states, such as Syria and Libya.

Following this week's dramatic collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani and its replacement by the Taliban, senior Western intelligence officials are becoming increasingly concerned about their ability to continue monitoring the activities of Islamist terror cells in Afghanistan, as well as neighbouring countries.

Reports have already surfaced in recent days of al-Qaeda supporters flocking to join the Taliban as it intensified its campaign to seize control of the country through force of arms.

ISIS terror cells are also known to be actively involved in Afghanistan and have been accused of carrying out some of the most deadly attacks against civilian targets, including the 2020 joint attack on a hospital maternity ward and funeral procession in Kabul that left 56 dead and more than 100 wounded.

The fear now is that, as Western intelligence agencies are no longer able to monitor the activities of Islamist extremists both in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran, the West will find itself increasingly vulnerable to high profile terror attacks as a direct consequence of Mr Biden's disastrous withdrawal plan.

Of particular concern for Western intelligence and security officials is the fate of Afghanistan's highly respected intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), whose officers have played a central role in the U.S.-led coalition's long-running campaign against the Taliban and its terrorist affiliates.

Unlike Pakistan's ISI intelligence service, which has actively supported the Taliban and famously provided al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden with a safe house, the NDS has won many plaudits from American and other Western intelligence agencies for the bravery and courage they have displayed in taking the fight to the Taliban during the past two decades.

But now that the Islamist militants control the entire machinery of the Afghan government, NDS officers and their families have been abandoned to an uncertain fate by the Biden administration, one where their lives are at risk of reprisals by the Taliban.

As one senior Western intelligence officer remarks that after the Taliban seized power intelligence circles at the way their erstwhile Afghan allies have been abandoned to their fate. "These guys risked their lives on a daily basis for the coalition cause, and now the Biden administration is treating them as though they did not exist.

"The fact that we will no longer be able to work with our former Afghan colleagues to monitor the activities of the Taliban and Islamist terror groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda leaves the West wide open to attack from terror cells based in Afghanistan and surrounding countries."

An important first step for the security of the United States would be immediately to shut its southern border.

The Taliban's dramatic seizure of power this week has certainly been a cause for celebration among jihadi extremists if their reaction to the power grab on social media is anything to go by.

Social media accounts sympathetic to al-Qaeda, for example, published an unsigned message shortly after the Taliban takeover congratulating "the brothers" in the movement on their victory. "Afghanistan is Conquered and Islam has won", read the message which was translated by the SITE intelligence group, which monitors extremist media.

Western counter-terrorism officials are also concerned that militant groups like al-Qaeda will be boosted after the Taliban released thousands of prisoners held at Kabul's Bagram Air Base, once the nerve centre of the coalition war effort, as well as Pul-e-Charkhi, another Afghan prison on the outskirts of Kabul.

The alarming implications, in terms of Western security, of a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan are clearly an issue the Biden administration failed to take into consideration when deciding to abandon Afghanistan to its fate. It is an oversight that adds to the scale of the disaster that Mr Biden has just inflicted on the security of the Western alliance.

Con Coughlin is the Telegraph's Defence and Foreign Affairs Editor

US withdrawal from Afghanistan empowers international terrorism

By Dore Gold



In a stunning statement last Friday in which he defended his withdrawal decision, President Joe Biden claimed that Al-Qaeda was “gone” from Afghanistan. The glaring problem with that claim is that Biden did not have the backing of the American security establishment to make it. An hour after Biden spoke, Defence Department Press Secretary John Kirby stated, “We know Al-Qaeda is a presence in Afghanistan.”

A Defence Department report to Congress issued on Aug. 17 plainly states, “The Taliban continued to maintain its relationship with al-Qaeda, providing safe haven for the terrorist group in Afghanistan.” Roughly at the same time, the Taliban released 5,000 prisoners from Bagram airbase, which included Al-Qaeda and Islamic State operatives.

Nor was there a consensus on this issue within what had been the Western alliance. U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that Western states needed to unite to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a sanctuary for international terrorist organizations. There were regular reports from the United Nations Security Council that looked at this question as well. In the twelfth report of its monitoring team, it is established that “a significant part of the leadership of al-Qaeda resides in the Afghanistan and Pakistan border region.”

The Al-Qaeda presence was not confined to the borders alone. The report continues: “Large numbers of al-Qaeda fighters and other foreign extremist elements aligned with the Taliban are located in various parts of Afghanistan.” It also makes clear that these were not peripheral elements of Al-Qaeda but rather its “core leadership.”

Britain's defence minister, Ben Wallace, also asserted that Al-Qaeda "will probably come back." He makes reference to a U.N. report that states Al-Qaeda is present in 15 of Afghanistan's provinces. He also is aware of the fact that many in the West see Afghanistan as a "failed state," and notes that failed states have a propensity to become headquarters for terrorist groups.

The director of Britain's domestic intelligence agency, MI5, warned in July that Al-Qaeda would seek to re-establish its training facilities in Afghanistan if the opportunity opened up. Allies of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the Bundestag condemned Biden's decision to rapidly withdraw from Afghanistan.

So what was motivating the new U.S. drive to accelerate the military withdrawal? Many in Washington made reference to the agreement between the Taliban and the Trump administration from February 2020 on the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

However, the agreement made the withdrawal dependent upon the implementation by the Taliban of its commitment to not allow Al-Qaeda to use Afghan territory against American forces. Part Two of the agreement contains a commitment by the Taliban "to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States or its allies."

There also was an underlying assumption, common in the West, that withdrawal would reduce the hostility of the Taliban and their allies. But this thinking represents a misunderstanding of what motivates jihadist groups; Al-Qaeda formally came into existence after the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan. Across the Middle East, withdrawals have only strengthened the motivation of these groups.

The Israeli experience has been identical: When the Israel Defence Forces unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Hamas went on to win the Palestinian elections and then take over the Gaza Strip from Fatah. To defeat the jihadist forces it is necessary to accompany withdrawal with actions that leave no doubt as to that defeat. But it does not seem that President Biden will pursue such a strategy, leaving the West with an empowered Al-Qaeda to fight against in the years ahead.

Dore Gold is the former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations and the current president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

This article was first published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Mapping the advance of the Taliban

By the **BBC Visual Journalism Team**

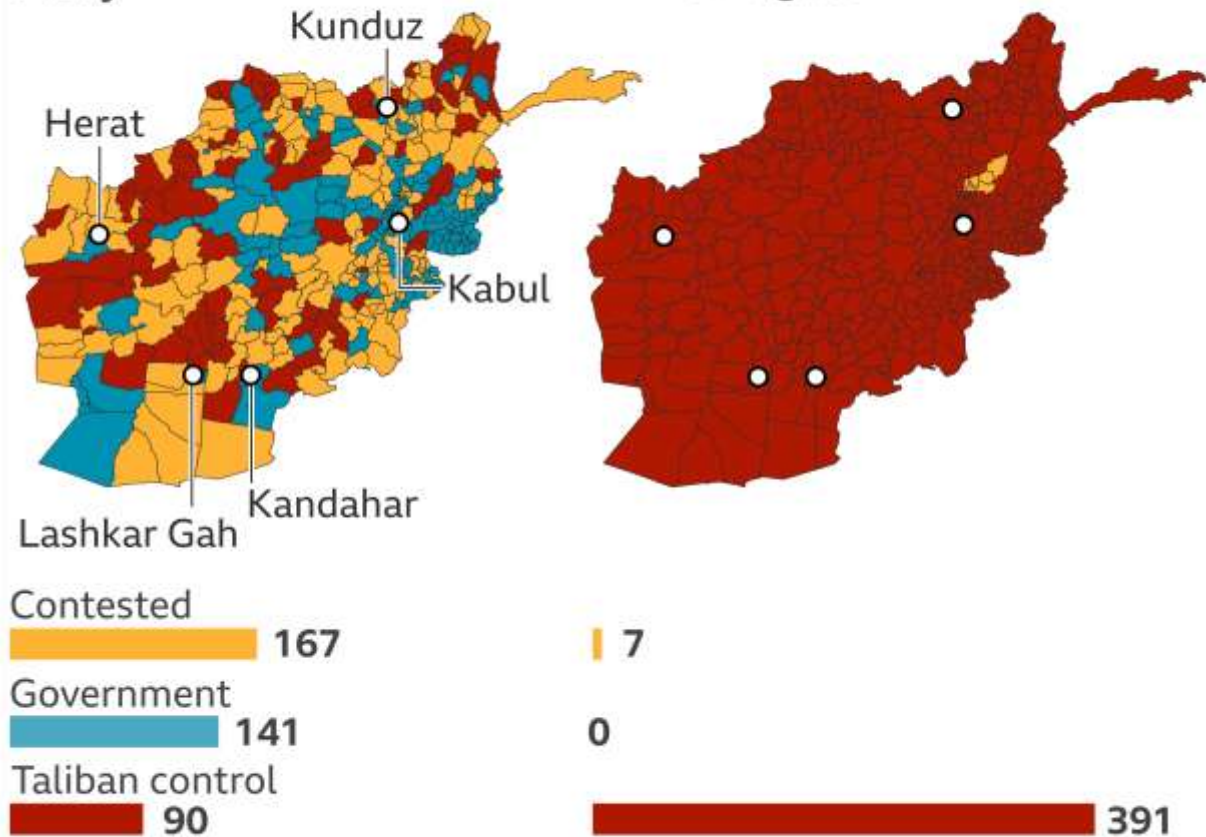
The Taliban have taken control of Afghanistan, almost 20 years after being ousted by a US-led military coalition. Emboldened by the withdrawal of US troops, they now control all key cities in the country, including Kabul.

Taliban now control nearly all of the country

Militants made huge gains in just over a month of fighting

9 July

16 August



*Contested is where fighting is ongoing or strong Taliban presence

Source: BBC Research. Districts according to 2005 government boundaries



Rapid advance in recent days

The Taliban took some areas from government by force. In other areas, the Afghan National Army withdrew without a shot being fired. Although renewed clashes had been going on for several weeks, from 6 August the Taliban made a more rapid advance across the country, as they took control of provincial cities.

The maps below start in early July and show the 400 or so government districts as they fell to the Taliban.

Although most US troops left in July, several thousand returned to Kabul at the weekend to help evacuate American and allied personnel from the capital. The airport in the capital was the only official route out of the country after the Taliban took control of all the major border crossings.

Joe Biden's Catastrophic Judgment

By Caroline Glick



As Taliban forces seized control of one Afghan province after another, and everyone who was paying attention recognized that the capital would soon follow, Biden went on a two-week vacation.

The footage of the Taliban takeover of Kabul stunned the American public. The scenes of dozens of Afghans hanging off a U.S. military C-17 already wheeling down the runway at the Kabul airport, hoping desperately to be let inside, or of people being taken out of their homes and shot by Taliban gunmen, provoked a bipartisan outcry against Biden and his withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. So Monday, Biden took a break from his vacation.

He flew to the White House. He gave a speech. And he flew back to his vacation.

Biden spoke with undisguised irritation. He blamed his predecessor, Donald Trump, for signing a deal with the Taliban to remove the residual U.S. forces from the country. He blamed the Afghan military and government, which collapsed after the U.S. retreat. And he blamed U.S. intelligence agencies, which he said had not anticipated the Taliban's swift takeover.

And he praised himself for having the gumption to remove U.S. forces from the country.

Biden bragged, "I've argued for many years that our mission [in Afghanistan] should be narrowly focused on counter terrorism, not counterinsurgency or nation building. That's why I opposed the surge when it was proposed in 2009 when I was vice-president. And that's why as president I'm adamant we focus on the threats we face today in 2021, not yesterday's threats."

Cursory fact checks expose Biden's disingenuousness. The parties he blamed were not responsible for the catastrophic blow the events in Afghanistan dealt to US credibility. And his decision to remove U.S. forces from the country did not make the United States safer or better placed to "focus on the threats we face today in 2021."

Biden's accusation that the Trump administration was responsible for the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is wrong on several counts. As former President Trump and his secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, explained last Sunday and Monday, the agreement Trump reached with the Taliban was conditions-based. Since the Taliban breached the conditions, there is little reason to believe that Trump would have implemented the troop pullout.

Moreover, Trump intended to evacuate civilians—both U.S. citizens and Afghan nationals who worked with the Americans along with their families—before pulling out U.S. military forces.

In the last two years of the Trump administration, Trump reduced the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan from 15,000 to 2,500, without inducing panic or emboldening the Taliban. He quietly evacuated U.S. civilians—again, without inducing panic or demoralization.

Biden, in contrast, removed the military forces without giving the Afghan government or military a heads-up, demoralizing them. He and his advisers repeatedly said that there was no reason to fear a Taliban takeover, so at-risk civilians had little sense of the urgency of the situation or the need to leave the country as quickly as possible.

In a conversation with Israel Hayom, a former senior Trump administration official noted as well that unlike Biden, Trump was willing to listen to argument and change his positions to align them with the situation on the ground when necessary.

"After Trump ordered the removal of all U.S. forces from Syria in 2018, several people from both inside and outside the administration warned him that a full withdrawal would be dangerous. So he changed his plans. He withdrew most of the U.S. forces but left a few hundred in key locations and gave them the wherewithal to secure U.S. goals in the country," the official said.

By the same token, the official argued, Trump would likely have kept a residual force in Afghanistan.

Indeed, that was the only force that remained in Afghanistan. And just as a skeletal U.S. footprint in Syria suffices to secure U.S. interests in the country, so the 2,500 non-combatant U.S. forces Biden removed from the country were able to work with Afghan and NATO forces to keep Afghanistan stable and keep the Taliban at bay.

Perhaps the oddest aspect of Biden's indictment of Trump is that he treated Trump's deal with the Taliban as immutable. Yet, as Pompeo noted, just as Trump abandoned Obama's nuclear deal with Iran, so Biden was free to walk away from Trump's deal with the Taliban. Biden's protestations regarding the deal are particularly ridiculous given that in his seven months in office, he has taken a cleaver to nearly all of Trump's domestic and foreign policies. Biden didn't remove U.S. forces from Afghanistan because he had to keep Trump's deal. He removed them because he wanted to.

This brings us to Biden's devastating critique of the Afghan military, which he claimed was unwilling to defend the country. Over the past 20 years, 2,448 U.S. servicemen and

women were killed in Afghanistan. Over the same period, 69,000 Afghan forces died defending their country from the Taliban. Biden's statement amounted to malicious slander.

One of the main functions of the U.S. forces and contractors Biden removed was to serve as military air traffic controllers for Afghan forces. Their departure meant the Afghan military lost its close air support. And since the U.S. built the Afghan military as its "mini-me," like the U.S. forces, Afghan forces were dependent on close air support to conduct land operations.

In other words, Biden is more responsible than anyone else for the Afghans' post-American collapse. If he expected them to fight, he shouldn't have left them dependent on U.S. traffic controllers which he withdrew without coordination or warning of any kind.

It is entirely reasonable for Americans to demand the return of their forces from Afghanistan. But on Monday, Biden presented the American people with a choice between fighting a major war against the Taliban which would see untold numbers of servicemen killed, or bringing the boys home in total defeat, as he opted to do.

Biden's presentation was a gross distortion of the facts. The U.S. suffered no losses over the past 18 months. The choice was between more of that, and squandering everything U.S. forces in Afghanistan accomplished over the past 20 years.

This brings us to the intelligence community. Since April, Biden, his advisers and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley have been insisting, presumably based on intelligence reports, that there was little reason to be concerned that a U.S. pullout would precipitate a Taliban takeover of the country. As one provincial capital after another fell to the Taliban, Biden and his advisers insisted it would take a long time for the Taliban to arrive in Kabul. And on Monday, after the Taliban had taken Kabul and the Afghan president and the U.S. ambassador had fled the city, Biden claimed that the Taliban's takeover "did unfold more quickly than we had expected."

But here too, Biden did not tell the truth. ABC News reported last Monday that U.S. intelligence officials are insisting they provided Biden with clear and detailed reports over the past several months which made clear that if he withdrew U.S. forces as he intended, the Afghan army and government would collapse and the Taliban would quickly retake control of the country. The regional military commanders similarly warned this would happen.

Taken as a whole then, the most notable aspect of the fiasco in Afghanistan is that to a large degree, Biden is its sole author. He was warned of the consequences. He chose to disregard the warnings. His party didn't demand the pullout. The Washington establishment opposed it. Biden took his own counsel. This was his policy.

If Biden had been right, he would rightly be the toast of the town right now. But reality is a harsh judge. The facts were never on his side. Reason was never on his side. His judgement was never reasoned or fact-based. And as was eminently predictable, Biden was catastrophically wrong.

While dooming tens of thousands of Afghans to death and millions more to utter misery, Biden's misjudgment is quickly multiplying the threats the U.S. faces. The Taliban have seized U.S. aircraft abandoned at Bagram air base. Milley acknowledged that the terror threat to the U.S. has grown since the pullout. And thanks to Biden, the

United States' southern border remains open to all. Forces of jihad worldwide have received an unprecedented tailwind from the U.S. defeat. Hamas, Iran and others hurried to embrace the Taliban.

Biden's policy also emboldened U.S. superpower rivals China and Russia. They responded to America's humiliation by bringing Iran into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. U.S. allies are furious and alarmed as they see the collapse of U.S. credibility and strategic rationality.

And this brings us to Bennett's meeting with Biden.

Biden's decision to stick to his guns on Afghanistan shows that once he has made up his mind about something, he is unwilling to listen to counterargument. And the only other major position that Biden has held consistently over the years is his position on Iran.

Whereas for 15 years Biden was an outspoken critic of the war in Afghanistan and demanded a swift U.S. withdrawal, since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, he has been among the regime's most stalwart supporters in Washington. Biden's policy towards the ayatollahs in Tehran has been appeasement for the past 42 years, even when he stood alone on the issue.

For instance, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in 2001, Biden responded to the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States by calling for the Bush administration to give Iran \$100 million in foreign aid.

It was reported that ahead of Bennett's visit with Biden on August 26-27, government officials are hoping to convince him that given the failure of the nuclear talks in Vienna, the time has come for the United States and Israel to jointly attack Iran's nuclear installations. If Biden weren't impermeable to reason, Israel's argument might have had a shot. After all, in 1983, Ronald Reagan responded to the Hezbollah bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut by invading Grenada.

But as Biden showed on Monday, and in an interview with ABC's George Stephanopoulos Wednesday, he will not rethink his choices or positions, even after they have failed. As Biden rejects all criticism of his personal failure in Afghanistan, there is effectively zero chance he will reconsider his policy of 42 years on Iran. Moreover, unlike his policy on Afghanistan, his Iran policy is now shared by the U.S. intelligence community and military, the Washington establishment and the Democrat Party.

Whether Bennett would be better off postponing the trip until the smoke begins to settle remains to be seen. But what is clear enough is that with Iran sprinting towards the nuclear finish line and U.S. credibility in a state of unprecedented collapse, if Israel wants to prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities, Biden is not the man to see.

Caroline Glick is an award-winning columnist and author of "The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East."

This article first appeared in Israel Hayom.

Biden's Long History of Betrayals in Afghanistan

By Daniel Greenfield



During the 2007 Dem primaries, Biden attacked Obama for adopting his position on Afghanistan.

The flailing Biden campaign put out a press release accusing Obama of being a “johnny-come-lately” who had belatedly adopted Biden’s push for “significantly increasing reconstruction assistance” and sending more American soldiers to Afghanistan.

While running for president, Biden had based his entire foreign policy around sending more troops to Afghanistan. He had memorized one line, “if we’re surging troops anywhere, it should be in Afghanistan”, and repeated it in the Senate, in interviews, and on the campaign trail.

Sending more troops to Afghanistan, he argued would give America “the moral high ground”.

“The next president of the United States will have to rally the American people and the world to fight them over there, unless we want to fight them over here. But the over there is not, as President Bush has falsely and repeatedly claimed, in Iraq, but it’s rather in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan,” he insisted at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Biden attacked not only Democrat rivals like Obama, but also President Bush, for not wanting to send more troops to Afghanistan. “I asked the commander of British forces how long his people would allow him to stay in Afghanistan. And he said, ‘Senator, we Brits have an expression. As long as the big dog is in the pen, the small dogs will stay. When the big dog leaves, the small dogs leave as well.’ Well, guess what? The big dog left in 2002.”

He was only off by 19 years. Biden was pre-emptively accusing Bush of his own sins.

By the 2020 primaries, Biden had completely reinvented his entire history with Afghanistan.

"I'm the guy from the beginning who argued that it was a big, big mistake to surge forces to Afghanistan. Period. We should not have done it. And I argued against it constantly," he falsely claimed.

Biden had gone from attacking Obama for ripping off his idea of surging forces to Afghanistan to being the guy who "from the beginning" had opposed the idea.

The idea that Biden opposed "from the beginning" was the one he originally claimed credit for. That was quite a turnaround for the fraudster who had spent his previous presidential campaign declaring, "If we're surging troops anywhere, it should be in Afghanistan."

Biden, one of the co-sponsors of the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, which began the nation-building push in that country, also claimed that he was against nation-building.

"Our mission in Afghanistan was never supposed to be nation-building," Biden claimed in his recent failed speech after Kabul turned into Saigon.

Afghanistan should not have been about nation-building, but Biden was the loudest voice in support of turning the mission into nation-building. At one hearing he even complained that, "The original Marshall Plan cost \$90 billion in today's dollars. Our total pledge for Afghan reconstruction is less than 1 percent of that, and we've only delivered a fraction of this pledge."

He attacked Bush, whining that his "follow-through commitment to Afghanistan, Afghanistan's security and reconstruction has fallen very short."

Back in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden had insisted that, "We have to get moving on reconstruction. We need more funds, and we need to use them better. The Afghans are patient, but they're not seeing reconstruction worthy of a superpower."

After Biden failed miserably in the primaries, Obama picked his most inept rival to pad out his ticket with an old confused white man. And Biden tried to out-hawk John McCain on Afghanistan. When that failed miserably, he turned to making up stories of his own heroism in Afghanistan. The stories were as true as anything else that came out of his mouth.

"If you want to know where al Qaeda lives, you want to know where bin Laden is, come back to Afghanistan with me," he boasted. "Come back to the area where my helicopter was forced down with a three-star general and three senators at 10,500 feet in the middle of those mountains. I can tell you where they are."

Despite having this intimate knowledge of where bin Laden and Al Qaeda were, Biden never went back to Afghanistan to hunt them down. That's probably because Osama bin Laden was safe in a Pakistani military town. Biden's helicopter, which also carried his Senate colleagues, future Secretary of State John Kerry and future Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel, landed because of a snowstorm. "Other than getting a little cold, it was fine," Kerry later said. "We were going to send Biden out to fight the Taliban with snowballs."

The joke, as usual, was on Joe Biden.

“The superhighway of terror between Pakistan and Afghanistan where my helicopter was forced down. John McCain wants to know where bin Laden and the gates of Hell are? I can tell him where. That’s where Al Qaida is. That’s where bin Laden is,” Biden claimed at a fundraiser.

Biden and the other Senate members were not in Taliban territory. Heavily guarded and in airspace protected by a F-16 fighter, they waited while a convoy took them to Bagram Air Base. That’s the same base that Biden would irresponsibly abandon, cutting off Americans trapped in Afghanistan from being able to get out without the permission of the Taliban.

Biden could have given credit to the men of the Arizona National Guard’s 1st Battalion who travelled through the “bitter winds, freezing rain and snow for more than 15 hours” to transport him out. Instead he pretended that he was some sort of hero for sitting in a warm chopper.

And now, Biden could have considered the thousands of Americans trapped in Afghanistan, when he gave the fatal order to pull out military forces without evacuating them. When he was on that mountain, American soldiers travelled through difficult weather to get him out. But when Americans, some of them veterans, are trapped in Afghanistan, he turned his back on them.

Obama adopted Biden’s proposal for an Afghan troop surge with disastrous results. American forces in Afghanistan were quadrupled to 100,000 while preventing them from fighting back so as not to alienate Muslims. 1,200 American soldiers died during the disastrous Afghanistan surge. And Biden, who had pushed the whole thing, ran the other way.

After taking credit for selling Obama on an Afghan surge, Biden rebranded as a skeptic of sending more troops to Afghanistan. By the 2012 election, Biden was running against his own Afghanistan position, and castigating Rep. Paul Ryan for wanting a conditions-based withdrawal. Meanwhile, Biden kept bragging about his expertise on Afghanistan.

“I’ve been up in the Kunar Valley. I’ve been throughout that whole country, mostly in a helicopter, and sometimes in a vehicle,” he claimed.

“What we also want it do is make sure that we’re not projecting weakness abroad, and that’s what’s happening here,” Ryan warned. Biden dismissed any such notion.

Obama and Biden promised a withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. It did not happen.

That’s been true of the vast majority of Biden’s promises.

When it comes to Afghanistan, Biden was usually for most things before then turning around and being against them. Biden had sold the D.C. political class on the idea that he was some sort of foreign policy expert based on Afghanistan when he actually had no idea what he was doing. He had jumped on the Afghanistan bandwagon after September 11 while scrambling for an approach that would build up his presidential credentials.

His initial response was, “This would be a good time to send, no strings attached, a check for \$200 million to Iran.” But after that disastrous idea, Biden zeroed in on Afghanistan.

He constantly championed more troops and funding for Afghanistan.

“If we fail in Afghanistan, we are going to be talking about, in my view, a country seven times as big, with nuclear weapons sitting on one border, and a country that is, in its present security leadership, hostile to the United States on another border, with more than seven times, probably—I guess it’s probably 14 to 15 times the population, seeking nuclear weapons,” Biden argued at one Senate hearing in favor of expanding military forces in Afghanistan.

“We’re in for, as they say on the east side of Wilmington, Delaware, a world of hurt that has nothing to do with terrorism, that goes far beyond terror, far beyond terror. So I hope you’re here to tell us the good news about your overwhelming enthusiasm supporting expanding ISAF.”

Even completely dishonest politicians have the right to change their minds. Or at least pretend to have changed them. But Biden adopted the opposite position of the one he ran on while claiming that he had always “from the beginning” opposed the things he supported.

This behaviour was not the mark of a responsible leader, but a clueless con artist. That’s exactly what Biden always was. And it’s what his disaster in Afghanistan has plainly revealed him to be even to his passionate supporters in media.

Biden claimed to know all about Afghanistan. In reality he knew nothing. He leaped from one radical position, surging troops to Afghanistan, to the opposite extreme, withdrawing the troops before evacuating the civilians. The result was a horrifying national security disaster.

And the same media which has temporarily turned on Biden let it happen.

Biden’s dishonesty and ignorance were well known to the press corps. They chose to cover it up and lie about it because they wanted him to win. Now some of them are feigning outrage that the lying hack they championed could have unleashed such an inexplicable disaster.

Biden had contradicted himself again and again on Afghanistan because he didn’t believe anything coming out of his own mouth. That’s how the politician who once predicted, “If Afghanistan falls, I’m not sure how far behind NATO will be” was the one who fell.

The problem wasn’t that Biden had the wrong views, it’s that he was the typical case of a D.C. echo chamber politician who repeated whatever slogan he thought would get him ahead. He had no plan for carrying any of his proposals out. All he could do was indict himself.

“Ousting the Taliban is only the first step in a long process. Everyone knows we can remove an evil regime. The question is, are we willing to expend the security, financial, diplomatic, and political resources to make the successor regime a success?” Biden once asked at a hearing. “The U.S. has power—but do we have staying power?”

Biden has since answered his own question.

Daniel Greenfield, a Shillman Journalism Fellow at the Freedom Center, is an investigative journalist and writer focusing on the radical Left and Islamic terrorism.

Taliban Demands Sex Slaves

By Zara Dawoud
TCMER Board Member



Having captured key districts and border posts with Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the Taliban are now hunting for women in these areas. “All imams and mullahs in captured areas should provide the Taliban with a list of girls above 15 and widows under 45 to be married to Taliban fighters,” read a letter issued in the name of the Taliban’s Cultural Commission for Islamic preachers in the region. The Taliban has promised to marry these women to their fighters and take them to Pakistan’s Waziristan. There, these women will be converted to Islam and reintegrated.

Is anyone talking about the consent of the women involved? No. They are just getting a list of women who belong to the preferred age bracket – the reproductive age bracket, to be precise – and will take them as “wives,” or so they say.

The marriage is eyewash. The Islamic jihadis are only claiming women as war booty from their captured regions. These women will then be treated as sex slaves to satiate the Taliban men and reproduce a fresh crop of Islamic jihadis. It is concerning that despite the demand of the Taliban being published by newspapers all over the world, no feminist pop culture figure or woke society icon has taken to social media to condemn this demand for women in the captured and controlled areas poised by the Islamic group. Do they not see pernicious patriarchy in this monstrous ritual of taking clusters of women as war booty? This debauched act, continuing for the past 1400 years, is making inroads in the modern and woke 2021. Congratulations.

During the Taliban rule in Afghanistan before 2002, girls were banned from going to school, women were barred from working outside, and were not allowed to step out of the home without a male relative. Violators were penalized publicly and often lashed by their religious police.

Elderly Afghanis fear that the Taliban will again take away their daughters and turn them into slaves. “Since the Taliban took over, we feel depressed. At home, we can’t speak loudly, can’t listen to music and can’t send women to the Friday market. They are asking about family members. The [Taliban] sub-commander said you should not keep girls over the age of 18; it’s sinful, they must get married, “cries Haji Rozi Baig, fearing that her daughters, aged 23 and 24, will be the next victims of the Taliban.

It is customary for Islamic jihadis to hoard sex slaves, and the Taliban are not doing anything contradictory to the ideology they follow and are striving to globalize. Child brides and windows trapped as sex slaves are common in their world. Half of all girls in these regions are married by the age of 15, many are sold to the Taliban by their parents to make a quick buck. Taliban have also routinely abducted women from Uzbek, Tajik, Hazara and other ethnic minorities, to be traded and taken as sex slaves. Some women are also sold to wealthy clients in or outside Afghanistan, some are sent to Pakistan to be sold to brothels, and others are kept at al Qaeda training camps. There’s another section of women who are married off to Taliban fighters, but the pseudo-marriage does not negate their status of being sex slaves; they are left entirely helpless to be dishonoured and then discarded.

It gets worse for these young brides after their jihadi husbands are killed in terrorist activities or clashes with the forces. Abandoned by society, these widows are forced to marry the next Taliban fighter in line, or just left to be raped regularly and repeatedly by the cousins, brothers or companions of the dead husband.

The children from the previous marriage are not spared, either. The girls, as young as four years old, are sold off to other jihadis to carry the legacy of her sex slave mother. Young boys are trained in operating weapons, taking off heads, and grow up as they succeed this generation of jihadis.

Speaking to Reuters, a 26-year-old widowed sex slave said, “They (Taliban) plan to send both of my sons to Pakistan to participate in jihad... They take my elder son for religious indoctrination and training to become a militant like his father.” The local government extends no help to rescue these sex slaves caught in a precarious position and compelled to spend their lives as sex slaves. Their children have no way out of this vicious trap, either. And that’s how jihad begets jihad.

Taliban Hunting Down Christians

By Kelsey Zorzi



With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, governments around the world are frantically making plans to rescue as many at risk Afghans as they can. Germany, which has vowed to evacuate as many as 10,000, and the United Kingdom are currently coordinating with civil society partners to and how they can be located and evacuated.

India announced that it will prioritize evacuating Hindus and Sikhs, two religious minorities that have already neared extinction in Afghanistan due to the Taliban's brutal rule 20 years ago.

Canada has expressed willingness to minorities whose lives are presumed endangered under the Taliban. Among the country's. But the Christian community is becoming increasingly difficult to track down. And fears are growing that, for many, it's too late and there's no way out.

Afghanistan's Christians are estimated to number between 10,000 and 12,000. The vast majority of them are converts from Islam to Christianity. For decades they have largely practiced their faith underground, as conversion is considered a crime punishable by death under Sharia Law.

Yet, since the Taliban's fall in 2001, the Christian community has not only been growing, it has become emboldened, in part because of the modicum of security leant by the U.S. presence on the ground. In 2019, as the number of children born to converts grew, dozens of Afghan Christians decided to include their religious affiliation on their national identity cards so that future generations wouldn't have to hide their faith. Only about 30 Christians successfully made this change before the Taliban's takeover this week.

Now the United States' highly criticized withdrawal has left Afghan Christians with no choice but to join those who cooperated with the U.S. and Afghan governments in attempting to hide. The memories of public executions, floggings and amputations of Christians and other religious minorities under the Taliban's previous rule remain vivid. As the Taliban is reportedly already working to track down the known Christians on its list, some local church leaders are counselling their communities to stay inside their homes, even though they know the best and perhaps only long-term hope is to somehow flee the country. Other Christians are reportedly escaping to the hills in attempts to find safety.

Some Christians on the ground have expressed that, with the takeover of Kabul, they expect to be killed, mafia-style. Although some reports say that the Taliban is already conducting targeted killings of Christians and other minorities found using public transportation, as well as executing anyone found with Bible software installed on their cell phones.

Christians also fear for the safety of their children, with the Taliban already publicizing plans to "eradicate the ignorance of irreligion" by taking non-Muslim women and girls as sex slaves and forcing boys to serve as soldiers.

Without any clear plan from the United States to evacuate Afghans under special threat, not to mention the remaining thousands of American citizens, Afghan Christians and many other religious minority groups are stranded. They know the Taliban is seeking them. Christians in hiding have already reported receiving threatening letters or phone calls saying, "We know where you are and what you are doing." Without knowing how sophisticated the Taliban's tracking capabilities are, Christians are turning off their phones to avoid surveillance and have started moving to undisclosed locations.

Further complicating any plans to rescue Afghanistan's vulnerable minorities is the fact that many of them are without passports. It is estimated by locals that only 20-30 percent of the known Christian community have passports. Without passports, it is currently unclear whether any foreign country would accept them, were they able to get out.

Several European government officials are currently discussing the possibility of overlooking immigration documentation requirements for those individuals whose identities and vulnerability status can be verified by civil society groups. But until countries confirm and announce that they are willing to waive passport and visa requirements, many Afghan Christians are unwilling to risk the increasingly perilous journey through Taliban checkpoints to the airport. And, currently, a passport and safe arrival at the airport aren't even enough; the few passport holding Christians who have reached the airport have not yet been able to leave the country.

With phones off, many Christians will be difficult to contact or locate for rescue, in the event that the American government finally takes direct action to correct some of the worst fallout from its disastrous withdrawal. While the U.S. and the international community must start doing everything in their power to help the most vulnerable, time is quickly running out.

Kelsey Zorzi is president of the U.N.'s NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief

From Biden to the Taliban with Love

By Burak Bekdil



Afghans are facing possibly the world's most brutal army of radical Muslims, armed with what US President Joe Biden said were "all the tools... and equipment of any modern military. We provided advanced weaponry," which the Taliban has captured from the disintegrating Afghan National Army. Biden has, in fact, bestowed "advanced weaponry," courtesy of US taxpayers, not only on the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS, but also on Russia, China and Iran, who will doubtless now reverse-engineer the abandoned materiel. Pictured: Taliban fighters stand on a US-supplied Humvee military vehicle that they captured in Herat, Afghanistan on August 13, 2021. (Photo by AFP via Getty Images)

Locals in Istanbul were recently shocked to see hordes of young Afghan men in worn out uniforms, strolling aimlessly down neighbourhoods that were already home to thousands of Syrian refugees. Later, Turkish police detained and expelled nine of the men. Hundreds of others are communicating with their relatives and friends in Afghanistan and Iran and most likely updating them on the illegal migration routes into Turkey - Afghans would typically pay smugglers \$1,000 for the trip from Kabul to Van in eastern Turkey. With the victory of the Taliban and the collapse of the Afghan government, hundreds of thousands may be crossing via Iran into eastern Turkey, finally seeking the least dangerous (and least costly) route into European Union soil.

After the United States fully pulls out of Afghanistan, Turkey's border with Iran will be packed with people trying to get into Turkey. But once in Turkey, there is no clear path to establishing legal status and no organizations at all to support families in need of food and shelter. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) no longer processes asylum claims in Turkey.

Turkey is facing this new wave of illegal immigrants when it is already hosting 3.6 million registered Syrian migrants, already 4.37% of Turkey's total population. Today, more than a million Syrian children, aged 5-17, or 63% of total, are attending Turkish

schools. In the past three years, 120,000 Syrians became Turkish citizens. They own shops, run businesses and live in predominantly Syrian ghettos in Ankara and Istanbul.

Turks, with a poor per capita income of \$8,000, are already weary of cheap, illegal Syrian workers taking their jobs. Now that the Afghan migrant threat is so visible on Turkish streets, Turks are discovering the virtues of a fresh surge of nativism. There are already signs that this nativism can turn violent.

On August 12, police in Ankara detained 76 people in connection with attacks on homes and businesses believed to be owned by Syrians, after a Turkish teenager was killed in a fight with a group of migrants from Syria. A mob, hundreds-strong, took to the streets of the Altındağ neighbourhood.

The first 10 years of Syria's civil war created 6.5 million asylum-seeking migrants from a population of 22 million. Afghanistan's population is 75% larger than Syria's at the start of its war. And Afghans are facing possibly the world's most brutal army of radical Muslims, now installed in Kabul, and armed with what US President Joe Biden said were "all the tools... and equipment of any modern military. We provided advanced weaponry," which the Taliban has captured from the disintegrating Afghan National Army.

Biden has, in fact, bestowed "advanced weaponry," courtesy of US taxpayers, not only on the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS, but also on Russia, China and Iran, who will doubtless now reverse-engineer the abandoned materiel.

Afghans have good reasons to flee their country by the millions. Iran is their typical first stop.

Once in Iran, they are given easy and safe passage to Turkey - that is Iran's gift to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Turkey is already home to nearly five million migrants. The arrival, over years, of another five million would paralysed Turkey, its economy, politics and relative safety. But Afghan migrants will not be only Turkey's problem.

At the peak of the Syrian crisis, 1.3 million Syrians requested asylum in Europe. By nationality, in 2015, they were the biggest group among migrants of different nationalities arriving from Turkey into Greek territory. Five years later, Afghans have taken the lead. And this is before the biggest Afghan wave has even started.

In 2020, Erdoğan threatened to flood EU countries with millions of Syrians. His government transported thousands of Syrians to Turkey's border with Greece in Thrace, opened the gates and pushed them into the no man's land. Within the first week, the Turkish government claimed, nearly 200,000 Syrians had entered Greece. The real number was just a couple of thousand. Erdoğan's bluff had failed. Since then, he has not tried another Turkish government-sponsored migrant dump onto Greek territory.

All the same, if the Greek and EU border agencies do not want to relive the 2015 migrant crisis, they should review their blueprints to protect Greek territory from migrants and get ready for another inflow this year.

Burak Bekdil, one of Turkey's leading journalists.

Russia May Live to Regret Betting on the Taliban

By Kirill Krivosheev



A Taliban fighter patrols along a street in Kabul. Wakil KOHSAR / AFP

The events currently unfolding in Afghanistan bear little resemblance to plans made ahead of the U.S. withdrawal, which was not supposed to be completed until Aug. 31.

The Afghan government under President Ashraf Ghani was at first expected to hang on for another six months, then — after the Taliban began their rout of the country's cities—at least another one to three months. These were the forecasts being made not only in Washington, but in Moscow too. Just last week — days before the Taliban entered the capital Kabul — Russia's presidential envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, was insisting that their seizure of the city of Kandahar was no indication that they could take control of the capital any time soon.

By the end of July, nearly all rural areas were under Taliban control, and it remained for the militants to capture several large cities: Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif. On Saturday, all the forecasts went out the window when the Afghan army, trained to fight the Taliban until the bitter end, simply abandoned Mazar-e Sharif and headed for the border with Uzbekistan. It was all too reminiscent of the withdrawal of Soviet troops over the same bridge from Hairaton in Afghanistan to Termez in Uzbekistan back in 1989.

On Aug. 15, the world watched scenes of desperate Afghans clinging to planes carrying foreign diplomats out of Kabul airport.

In the meantime, the Taliban encircled Kabul and laid down their conditions to the Afghan government for a “peaceful transition of power.” The authorities promptly agreed, and President Ghani fled by plane to an unknown destination.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation and effectively the country's second-in-command, flew to Doha with Taliban representatives for talks on forming a new government.

The Taliban agreed to the talks, despite being one step away from victory, in order to take Kabul with no bloodshed: most likely because they wish to avoid scenes of violence being broadcast by the world's media.

They also took other measures to belie their dismal reputation. They offered security guarantees to all foreign embassies (going as far as to put the Russian embassy under armed guard), forbade their fighters from looting, promised amnesty to all those who had fought against them, and said they would not stop anyone from leaving.

It's hard to make any predictions about the future of Afghanistan right now: there's no authority in the country except the Taliban. But it's telling that many leading representatives of the Afghan elite are rushing to integrate into the new political system.

Former president Hamid Karzai, High Council for National Reconciliation head Abdullah, and the Islamic Party leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have formed a council charged with overseeing the transition of power.

There is no love lost between any of those men and the ousted president Ghani, and they have all previously met with the Taliban on more than one occasion, including in Moscow. Now they hope that the Taliban will employ their services to make their rule appear more civilized, and to accelerate international recognition.

Moscow had always had a complicated relationship with Ghani, so his departure did not come as a blow to the Kremlin.

On the contrary, Russian embassy staff in Kabul told journalists that the Afghan president had fled "with cars full of money," while Kabulov made it clear that the Taliban had long been considered easier to negotiate with by Moscow than the Afghan government.

For Russia, the formation of an interim government featuring other participants of the Moscow meetings would be one of the best possible outcomes.

It would enable Moscow not to directly recognize the authority of the Taliban, which it has officially designated a terrorist organization, without burning its bridges with the militant group. It would also show that Russia's diplomatic efforts on the eve of the U.S. withdrawal were highly effective.

Russia is not the only country to remain unperturbed by events unfolding in Afghanistan. Other regional neighbours — China, Iran, and Uzbekistan — all established contact with the Taliban long ago, and their diplomats are still working in the country right now, including in the cities that came under Taliban control before Kabul did.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman stated on Aug. 16 that the Taliban has repeatedly said that they want to develop a good relationship with China and hope that Beijing will take part in the reconstruction and development of the nation. The group has also said it will never allow any forces to use the country to harm China, she added.

Russia, China, Iran, and Uzbekistan may have bet on the Taliban coming to power, but their current confidence in the Islamic militant group may well be short-lived.

Nothing remotely resembling the “inclusive government” that the Taliban have promised is likely to appear, while drug trafficking and religious extremism will mushroom. But that doesn’t negate the fact that all the efforts of the United States and NATO to create a relatively stable state in Afghanistan fell apart in the space of just one week.

And their global opponents can afford to gloat right now, because even the most obvious problem — that of refugees — isn’t yet fully apparent: Afghanistan’s land borders are controlled by the Taliban, and for now, people quite simply do not dare to try their luck at the checkpoints.

Kirill Krivosheev is a journalist with Kommersant newspaper.

Resistance to the Taliban Grows

By Peter Rawlings
TCMER Board Member

In a mountain valley north of Kabul, the remnants of Afghanistan's security forces have vowed to resist the Taliban in a remote region that has defied conquerors before. But any attempt to re-enact that history could end in tragedy — or farce.

Nestled in the towering Hindu Kush, the Panjshir Valley has a single narrow entrance and is the last region not under Taliban control following their stunning blitz across Afghanistan. Local fighters held off the Soviets in the 1980s and the Taliban a decade later under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud, a guerrilla fighter who attained near-mythic status before he was killed in a suicide bombing.

His 32-year-old foreign-educated son, Ahmad Massoud, and several top officials from the ousted Western-backed government have gathered in the valley. They include Vice President Amrullah Saleh, who claims to be the caretaker leader after President Ashraf Ghani fled the country.



Ahmad Massoud, son of Afghanistan's slain anti-Soviet resistance hero Ahmad Shah Massoud. (Reuters/File)

They have vowed to resist the Taliban and are calling for Western aid to help roll them back.

"I write from the Panjshir Valley today, ready to follow in my father's footsteps, with mujahideen fighters who are prepared to once again take on the Taliban," Massoud wrote in an op-ed for the Washington Post. "We have stores of ammunition and arms that we have patiently collected since my father's time, because we knew this day might come."

But experts say a successful resistance is highly unlikely — and could potentially aggravate Afghanistan's already considerable problems.

While the Panjshir Valley remains as impregnable as ever, it's unclear how long its residents can hold out if the Taliban besiege the area or attack it using the U.S.-supplied armaments they have seized in recent weeks. Western countries, stunned by the collapse of a costly, two-decade attempt at remaking Afghanistan, are unlikely to invest in another proxy war.

Ahmad Shah Massoud, nicknamed the "Lion of Panjshir," was one of the main leaders of the Afghan mujahedeen, self-styled holy warriors who defeated the Soviets in 1989. His Northern Alliance included fellow Tajiks as well as fighters from other ethnic groups, in keeping with his vision of an independent, multi-ethnic Afghanistan under a moderate form of Islamic rule.

But as the country slid into war in the early 1990s, he found himself battling rival warlords and eventually the Taliban, who seized power in 1996. During their five-year rule his forces were confined to Panjshir and other remote areas in northeastern Afghanistan.

Two days before the September 11, 2001, attacks, al-Qaida militants disguised as Arab journalists who had come to interview Massoud killed the commander in a suicide bombing.

His forces remained intact, however, and partnered with the U.S. when it invaded Afghanistan weeks later, scattering al-Qaida, which orchestrated the 9/11 attacks, and driving the Taliban from power. Along with other former warlords, they went on to form the core of the government and security forces that the U.S. and its allies would spend the next two decades arming and training, at a cost of billions of dollars.

Those forces, which from the beginning were rife with corruption, collapsed in a matter of days earlier this month, as the Taliban captured most of the country less than three weeks before the U.S. was set to withdraw its last troops.

The younger Massoud, who was just 12 when his father was killed, trained at the British military academy at Sandhurst and also earned a master's degree in international politics from the City University of London.

Afghanistan: Panjshir, stronghold of Taliban resistance



He has little, if any, combat experience. Sandy Gall, a veteran foreign correspondent who wrote “Afghan Napoleon: The Life of Ahmad Shah Massoud,” described his son as “a very personable young man with political ambitions.”

Massoud says he has been joined by highly-trained Afghan special forces and other soldiers “disgusted by the surrender of their commanders,” but neither proved to be any match for the Taliban elsewhere in the country.

Torek Farhadi, an Afghan analyst and former government adviser, said the group poses little threat to the Taliban, and he cast doubt on Saleh’s claims that he could lead a resistance, calling him a “social media person.”

“If he was a real threat he should have stayed the day Ghani fled and defended the palace. He was the vice president and soldiers were under his order,” said Farhadi.

But even the specter of such a standoff, he said, risks plunging the country into another period of violence and turmoil, with dire consequences for ordinary Afghans.

The Associated Press contacted several people close to both Massoud and Saleh in order to seek comment, but was unable to reach them. Many Afghans with ties to the ousted government have fled the country or gone into hiding.

The ousted leaders holed up in Panjshir may end up joining the negotiations that the Taliban are holding with other former Afghan officials. The Taliban have said they want an “inclusive, Islamic government” but will hold off on forming one until the U.S. completes its withdrawal.

“We must use our weight with the international community to get guarantees from the Taliban for an all-encompassing government that includes women and non-Taliban,” said Farhadi.

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, a senior Taliban official, said their forces have surrounded Panjshir. “We are doing our best to solve the issue through negotiations, but if they don’t accept the talks, we are ready to fight,” he said.

In an interview with the Al-Arabiya news network, Massoud said he would not surrender territory but could support a broad-based government.

A resident of Panjshir reached by phone said Massoud had warned people that the Taliban might attack and said families could leave if they wished. Those who stayed would prefer a negotiated solution but are loyal to Massoud and prepared to fight if necessary, the man said on condition of anonymity because of security concerns.

“Panjshir people are used to this,” he said. “They have gone through these situations several times and they are ready for it once again.”

Marine Battalion Commander Relieved of Duties

By Don Gibbons
TCMER Board Member



In a video published on 9am on Friday August 27, one day after the bombing attacks in Kabul that killed 13 U.S. service members and hundreds of Afghan civilians, Marine battalion commander Stuart Scheller voiced his dissatisfaction with the conduct of the U.S. military's exit from Afghanistan, rebuking the senior officers who oversaw the mission.

"I'm making this video because I have a growing discontent and contempt for my perceived ineptitude at the foreign policy level and I want to specifically ask some questions to some of my senior leaders," he said.

Lieutenant Colonel Scheller posted on Facebook that he has been relieved of duty and will leave the Marine Corps for "cause based on lack of trust and confidence as of 14:30 today."

"My chain of command is doing exactly what I would do...if I were in their shoes. I appreciate the opportunities AITB command provided," he said.

Scheller said he considered the potential consequences of speaking out, since public criticism of leadership violates protocol and could result in his being demoted or discharged. He also acknowledged that the video would likely be shared widely online. As of that Friday afternoon, it had racked up 15,000 likes and had been viewed 168,000 times on Facebook.

He said he knew personally one of the men who died in the blasts by the Kabul airport, which killed 12 Marines and one Navy medic, but did not share the soldier's identity. A veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Scheller commands the Advanced Infantry

Training Battalion at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, according to his bio on the U.S. Marines website. He has another personal connection to the current situation in Afghanistan, as his first assignment in 2005 was with the 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, one of the units deployed to Kabul to facilitate the evacuation of U.S. citizens and Afghan refugees.

“What you believe in can only be defined by what you’re willing to risk. So if I’m willing to risk my current battalion commander seat, my retirement, my family’s stability to say some of the things I want to say, I think it gives me some moral high ground to demand the same honesty, integrity, and accountability from my senior leaders,” he continued.

The outrage that enlisted Marines feel over the bloodshed and chaos of the evacuation, he said, is not directed at their fellow soldiers on the battlefield but at the senior military leaders who led the operation. None of the senior officers are “raising their hands and accepting accountability and saying ‘we messed this up,’” Scheller complained.

“We have a secretary of defence who testified to Congress in May that the Afghan National Security Force could withstand the Taliban advance. We have chairmen of the Joint Chiefs [of Staff]...were supposed to advise on military policy. We have a Marine combatant commander. All of these people were supposed to advise. I’m not saying we’ve got to be in Afghanistan forever. But I am saying, did any of you throw your rank on the table and say ‘hey, it’s a bad idea to evacuate Bagram Airfield strategic airbase before we evacuate everyone,’” he said.

After the carnage in Kabul Thursday, August 26 Republican lawmakers demanded President Biden’s resignation or impeachment. Many Democratic legislators have agreed with their Republican colleagues that the execution of the pull-out was an unmitigated disaster, while claiming that withdrawal was generally the right choice. Some members have called for a formal investigation into the events preceding and surrounding the exit.

House minority leader Kevin McCarthy promised that President Biden would face a “reckoning” for his handling of the U.S. departure from Afghanistan but did not call for him to step down.

Later in the recording, Scheller read a letter issued to the Marine Corps that specifically advised service members battered by recent events to seek counselling, suggesting some may be struggling with mental health issues amid the crisis. While the letter insisted that the Marines’ fellow comrades in arms did not fight or die in vain, Scheller questioned whether that is true, given the botched withdrawal and haphazard evacuation that left a steep American death toll and an even steeper Afghan death toll.

“From my position, potentially all those people did die in vain if we don’t have senior leaders that own up and raise their hand and say ‘we did not do this well,’” Scheller concluded.

“Without that, the ... higher military ranks are not holding up their end of the bargain,” he said. “I have been fighting for 17 years. I am willing to throw it all away to say to my senior leaders, ‘I demand accountability.’”



Flag Officers 4 America

Press Release: For Immediate Release

August 30, 2021

For further information, contact:
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A growing number of retired Flag Officers call for top military resignations

Nearly 90 retired generals and admirals (Flag Officers) signed a letter calling for the resignation of the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) based on their key roles involving events surrounding the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. The hasty retreat has left an unknown number of Americans stranded in dangerous areas controlled by a brutal enemy along with Afghans who supported American forces.

As the principal military advisors to the Commander in Chief (CINC)/President, the SECDEF and CJCS were the two top military officials in a position to recommend against the dangerous withdrawal in the strongest possible terms. If they did everything within their authority to stop the hasty withdrawal and the President did not accept their recommendations, then knowing the disastrous consequences looming, the retired flag officer signers believe these top military advisors should have resigned as a matter of conscience and public statement.

The consequences of this disaster are enormous and will reverberate for decades beginning with the safety of Americans and Afghans who are unable to move safely to evacuation points; therefore, being de facto hostages of the Taliban. The death and torture of Afghans has already begun and will result in a human tragedy of major proportions. In addition, the loss of billions of dollars in our advanced military equipment and supplies falling into the hands of our enemies is catastrophic. The damage to the reputation of the United States is indescribable. We will be seen for many years as an unreliable partner in any multinational agreement or operation. Trust in the United States is irreparably damaged.

Moreover, now our adversaries are emboldened to move against America due to the weakness displayed in Afghanistan. China benefits the most followed by Russia, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and others. Terrorists around the world are energized and can pass freely into our Country through our open border with Mexico and among the inadequately vetted Afghan refugees.

For these reasons the letter calls on the SECDEF General Austin and the CJCS General Milley to resign. **A fundamental principle in the military is holding those in charge responsible and accountable for their actions or inactions. There must be accountability at all levels for this tragic and avoidable debacle.**

The entire letter calling for resignations and the growing list of signers can be found at www.FlagOfficers4America.com

Europe Braces for Tsunami of Afghan Migrants

By Soeren Kern



The Taliban conquest of Afghanistan is poised to trigger an unprecedented wave of Afghan migration to Europe. Pictured: Afghan asylum seekers disembark from an evacuation flight from Afghanistan, at the Torrejon de Ardoz air base in Spain, on August 24, 2021. (Photo by Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP via Getty Images)

The Taliban conquest of Afghanistan is poised to trigger an unprecedented wave of Afghan migration to Europe, which is bracing for the arrival of potentially hundreds of thousands — possibly even millions — of refugees and migrants from the war-torn country.

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, expressing an ominous sense of foreboding, has estimated that up to five million people will try to leave Afghanistan for Europe. Such migration numbers, if they materialize, would make the previous migration crisis of 2015 — when more than a million people from Africa, Asia and the Middle East made their way to Europe — pale by comparison.

Since 2015, around 570,000 Afghans — almost exclusively young men — have requested asylum in the European Union, according to EU estimates. In 2020, Afghanistan was the EU's second-biggest source of asylum applicants after those from Syria.

Afghan males, many of whom have been especially difficult to assimilate or integrate into European society, have been responsible for hundreds — possibly thousands — of sexual assaults against local European women and girls in recent years. The arrival in Europe of millions more Afghans portends considerable future societal upheaval.

The 27 member states of the European Union are, as usual, divided on how to prepare for the coming migratory deluge. The leaders of some countries say they have a humanitarian obligation to accept large numbers of Afghan migrants. Others argue that it is time for Islamic countries to shoulder the burden.

Ursula von der Leyen, head of the European Commission, the administrative arm of the European Union, said that the EU has a "moral responsibility" to take in those who are fleeing the Taliban. The leaders of many EU member states disagree.

In Austria, which in recent years has taken in over 40,000 Afghans (the second highest number in Europe after Germany, which has taken in 148,000 Afghans), Chancellor Sebastian Kurz vowed that his country will not be accepting any more. In an interview with Austrian broadcaster Puls 24, he said that Austria had already made a "disproportionately large contribution" to Afghanistan:

"I am clearly opposed to us now taking in more people. That will not happen under my chancellorship. Taking in people who then cannot be integrated is a huge problem for us as a country."

Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer, in a joint statement with Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg, called for Afghans illegally in Austria to be deported to Islamic countries, now that they cannot, according to EU law, be deported back to Afghanistan:

"If deportations are no longer possible because of the restrictions imposed on us by the European Convention on Human Rights, alternatives must be considered. Deportation centers in the region around Afghanistan would be one possibility. That requires the strength and support of the European Commission."

Nehammer, in an interview with the APA news agency, insisted that deportations should be viewed as a security issue rather than as a humanitarian matter:

"It is easy to call for a general ban on deportations to Afghanistan, while on the other hand ignoring the expected migration movements. Those who need protection must receive it as close as possible to their country of origin.

"A general ban on deportation is a pull factor for illegal migration and only fuels the inconsiderate and cynical business of smugglers and thus organized crime.

"As minister of the interior, I am primarily responsible for the people living in Austria. Above all, this means protecting social peace and the welfare state over the long term."

Schallenberg added:

"The crisis in Afghanistan is not unfolding in a vacuum. Conflict and instability in the region will sooner or later spill over to Europe and thus to Austria."

An opinion poll published by *Österreich 24* showed that nearly three-fourths of respondents back the Austrian government's hard line Afghan migration. The poll linked the support to a high-profile criminal case in which four Afghans in Vienna drugged and raped a 13-year-old girl who was strangled, lost consciousness and died.

In Germany, migration from Afghanistan has emerged as a major issue ahead of federal elections scheduled for September 26. Paul Ziemeck, general secretary of

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, said that Germany should not adopt the open-door migration policy it pursued in 2015, when Merkel allowed into the country more than a million migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In an interview with German broadcaster n-tv, he said:

"It is clear to us that 2015 must not be repeated. We will not be able to solve the Afghanistan issue by migration to Germany."

CDU chancellor candidate Armin Laschet has remained silent on the Afghan issue, as has the chancellor candidate for the Social Democrats (SPD) Olaf Scholz. By contrast, the chancellor candidate for the Greens party, Annalena Baerbock, called for Germany to take in well over 50,000 Afghans. "We have to come to terms with this," she said in an interview with ARD television.

Meanwhile, Afghan criminals, including rapists and drug traffickers, who previously had been deported to Afghanistan, have now returned to Germany on evacuation flights. Upon arrival in Germany, they immediately submitted new asylum applications. "It is not a completely new scenario that people come to Germany who previously had been deported," said an interior ministry spokesman.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron has called for a coordinated European response to prevent mass migration from Afghanistan:

"The destabilization of Afghanistan will likely increase the flow of irregular migration to Europe.... Europe alone will not be able to assume the consequences of the current situation. We must plan and protect ourselves against large irregular migratory flows that endanger those who are part of them and fuel trafficking of all kinds."

Marine Le Pen, who is running neck and neck in the polls with Macron ahead of French presidential elections set for April 2022, said that France should say "no" to massive migration of Afghan refugees. A petition on her party's website — "Afghanistan: NO to a new migratory highway!" — stated:

"We are fully aware of the human tragedies and the obvious distress of some of the legitimate refugees. But the right of asylum must not continue to be, as it is now, the Trojan horse of massive, uncontrolled and imposed immigration, of Islamism, and in some cases of terrorism, as was the case with certain jihadists involved in the attacks of November 13, 2015 [date on which a series of coordinated jihadist attacks took place in Paris in which more than 130 people were killed and more than 400 were injured.]

"The mayors of certain large cities have already announced their intention to welcome refugees. It is in our opinion an obvious risk to their fellow citizens.

"What matters to us first and foremost is the protection of our compatriots."

Meanwhile, five Afghans who were airlifted to France have been placed under counter-terrorism surveillance for suspected ties to the Taliban, according to the French Interior Ministry. One of the men, who worked for the French embassy in Kabul, admitted, under questioning, to have previously managed a Taliban checkpoint. Another 20 Afghans taken to France are being investigated for asylum fraud.

In Greece, the government, fearing a repeat of the 2015 migration crisis, has erected a 40-km (25-mile) fence and installed a new surveillance system on its border with Turkey to deter Afghan migrants from trying to reach Europe. In recent years, Greece has been a key gateway to Europe for migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Public Order Minister Michalis Chrisochoidis said:

"We cannot wait, passively, for the possible impact. Our borders will remain safe and inviolable."

Greek Minister for Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi, added that the EU needs to send "the right messages" in order to avoid a new migration crisis "which Europe is unable to shoulder." He stressed: "Our country will not be a gateway to Europe for illegal Afghan migrants."

In Italy, Prime Minister Mario Draghi called for the Group of 20 major economies to hold a summit on the situation in Afghanistan. The Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* noted:

"The G20, for Draghi, has a strategic value: it is in that forum that one can and must reach a commitment that binds not only the forces of a West that has come out battered from its twenty-year mission in Afghanistan, but also and above all those countries such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey which have interests and influence on the self-proclaimed Islamic state."

In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in a statement to Parliament, announced a plan to take in 20,000 Afghan migrants:

"We must deal with the world as it is, accepting what we have achieved and what we have not achieved...."

"We will not be sending people back to Afghanistan and nor by the way will we be allowing people to come from Afghanistan to this country in an indiscriminate way.

"We want to be generous, but we must make sure we look after our own security."

In Turkey, the government is building a 295-km (180-mile) wall along its border with Iran to prevent a new influx of migrants from Afghanistan. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that a new wave of migration is "inevitable" if Afghanistan and Iran fail to secure their borders. He added that Turkey will not become a "refugee warehouse" for fleeing Afghans:

"We need to remind our European friends of this fact: Europe — which has become the center of attraction for millions of people — cannot stay out of the Afghan refugee problem by harshly sealing its borders to protect the safety and wellbeing of its citizens. Turkey has no duty, responsibility or obligation to be Europe's refugee warehouse."

Meanwhile, thousands of Afghan migrants are arriving in countries across Europe.

Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo agreed to temporarily shelter hundreds of Afghans who worked with Western peacekeeping military forces and are now threatened by the Taliban.

Spain said that it would temporarily host up to 4,000 Afghan migrants at two military bases used by the United States.

Slovenia, which currently holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency, said that the European Union will not allow a surge in Afghan migration. Prime Minister Janez Janša tweeted:

"The #EU will not open any European 'humanitarian' or migration corridors for #Afghanistan. We will not allow the strategic mistake from 2015 to be repeated. We

will only help individuals who helped us during the #NATO Operation. And to the EU members who protect our external border."

Meanwhile, dozens of Afghan migrants are trapped along the border between Poland and Belarus. Poland and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania said that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's practice of sending migrants across their borders is an act of "hybrid warfare." Lukashenko is accused of seeking revenge for sanctions the EU imposed over his disputed re-election and a crackdown on dissent.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said that although he sympathized with the Afghan migrants, he said that they were "a tool in the hands of Mr. Lukashenko" and that Poland would not succumb to "this type of blackmail."

Soeren Kern is a Senior Fellow at the New York-based Gatestone Institute.

Muslims from Australia will be travelling to join the Taliban

By Arthur Tane
TCMER Executive Director



Foreign fighters bolster the Taliban

Recent reports from the United Kingdom highlight that intercepted phone calls by military intelligence reveal British men talking openly with Taliban controlled Afghanistan. A security source said there was 'intermittent intelligence' showing Britons fighting for the Taliban. British jihadis are travelling to Afghanistan via Pakistan to join Taliban in fight for control of the country.

Inevitably Jihadists from Australia will be seeking to travel to Afghanistan now that Kabul has fallen.

We all remember David Hicks, a 26-year-old Australian drifter who had been fighting alongside the Taliban before being captured by Northern Alliance. Hicks, a high school dropout, rodeo rider and international drifter who converted to Islam, also fought in Kosovo and Kashmir. While in Kosovo he took the name Muhammad Dawood.

The number of Australians who travelled to Iraq and Syria to join ISIS and al Qaeda has been reported to be 230. ISIS attracted unprecedented numbers of foreigners who came to join the organisation or live in territory under its rule. Estimates place the total number at 40,000 people from 80 countries. In March 2019 the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) was ousted from the last of the territory it had seized across Syria and Iraq. Many of those who survived moved on to Afghanistan. In this group would be several Muslim Australians.

Like the Islamic State, Taliban propaganda campaigns exposed susceptible Australians to an extremist ideology and influenced some toward radicalisation.

Australians who fought with Islamic State were involved in acts of violence including suicide bombings, murders, beheadings, rapes and paedophilia.

In addition to those who have travelled or who are thinking of travelling, Australia-based individuals can pledge allegiance to the Taliban, affirming their support for the group without the need to travel to Afghanistan, and their intent to be a member of the group.

Jihadis have openly called for attacks against Australia and its interests, both because of Australia's support to military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, as well as against the Taliban in Afghanistan. In what will be of grave concern to all Australians is that less than 10 per cent of captured jihadis have displayed genuine contrition.

In light of fall of Kabul, it has become imperative that ASIO and ASIS become more involved in a strategic vision to recognize, prepare for, and—if possible—prevent people joining up with the Taliban, in addition to closing down its local sympathizers network.

Some 60% of Jews in Queensland have experienced anti-Semitism

By Lina Zaidi
TCMER Board Member



Six in 10 members of the Queensland Jewish community said in a recent survey conducted by the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies that they have experienced anti-Semitism.

“Of those Jews in Queensland who experienced anti-Semitism, half were either abused, harassed, intimidated or bullied simply because they are Jewish and, distressingly, many of these incidents occur in the workplace,” said Jason Steinberg, vice president of the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies. “Fifteen percent of Queensland Jews also reported hate-fuelled incidents that related to Israel and/or Zionism. We have also seen an increase in activity as well as anti-Israel activists targeting local Jews.”

He called on Queensland to make it a criminal offence if someone’s behaviour or published material was likely to intimidate others or incite harassment based on race, religion, sexuality or gender. He proposed penalties of up to 14 years in jail.

“The current law is 30 years old and is outdated,” he said. “We are also calling on the state government to ban the public display and sale of items that include symbols, such as the swastika, which are used by racists with impunity. This will empower the police to remove and confiscate these items and be a useful tool in countering the proliferation of extremist ideologies.”

Data gathered by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry showed that the number of anti-Semitic abuses reported in Queensland this year has already matched the total number of incidents from 2020, according to the *Brisbane Times*.

US\$1.3 Trillion and Counting: The Cost That Keeps Muslim Countries Mum on China's Uyghur Genocide

By Chan Ling
TCMER Board Member



Ethnic Uyghur demonstrators take part in a protest against China in Istanbul, Turkey on October 1, 2020
(File photo: Reuters)

China has been calling the mass detention camps where Uyghur and other ethnic minorities are transferred as “vocational education and training centres”.

Recently, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said he “accepted” China's version regarding the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province. Khan, a fierce critic of Islamophobia, said China's version of bringing “improvement in the society” was much better than the model followed by the western democracies. He, in fact, hailed the Chinese Communist Party for it.

China has been calling the mass detention camps where Uyghur and other ethnic minorities are transferred as “vocational education and training centres”. However, the US, the European Union and the United Nations have called these centres as detention camps, which have almost two million Uyghur Muslims, according to different research reports, and accuse China of committing genocide and forcefully assimilating Uyghurs by banning its religious practices and restricting its population growth.

China is also accused of using forced sterilisation techniques on Uyghur women and separating Uyghur children from their families. They are forced to learn Mandarin and are kept away from practicing religious practices. Many investigative reports using satellite imagery have also found that China is destroying Uyghur mosques.

China is also accused of using forced sterilisation techniques on Uyghur women and separating Uyghur children from their families. They are forced to learn Mandarin and are kept away from practicing religious practices. Many investigative reports using satellite imagery have also found that China is destroying Uyghur mosques.

Also, as detailed in many reports, China has been using Uyghur Muslims as forced labour. Yet, the Pakistani PM and other Muslim countries laud this model.

In 2019, nearly 37 nations, in a letter sent to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, defended the China's Xinjiang policy. The letter charged the Uyghur Muslims with spreading terror and extremism and justified China's actions as counter-terrorism measures aimed at deracializing Uyghur Muslims.

Notably, 16 of the 37 countries have large Muslim population, including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Turkmenistan, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Kuwait, Somalia and Sudan. The countries are also the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), representing 1.9 billion Muslim people. That explains why even OIC is silent on the Uyghur genocide.

Malaysia in the past has defied requests to extradite Uyghurs back to China and promises to continue with the policy but the government there has seldom been vocal about the Uyghur genocide happening in China. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, again a 'fierce' Islamophobia critic, has avoided criticising China on the issue.

Turkey, that has around 50,000 Uyghurs from China has over the years, has changed its Uyghur policy to become pro-China. According to the Stockholm Center for Freedom, Turkey was a safe haven for Uyghur refugees in the past but not anymore. Though Turkey's extradition treaty signed with China is awaiting a final approval, it has already started detaining Uyghurs and putting them under strict surveillance. It has allegedly started deporting Uyghur refugees to China via third countries like Tajikistan – a Muslim majority nation.

But why are these Islamic nations silent on China's repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang? It is perhaps due to Chinese investments and loans into those countries.

China has roughly invested \$1.3 trillion in Muslim majority countries if we add up the investments done in the last 15 years and the current and future economic deals. Also, the calculation here does not include secret loans given by China which borrowers are forced not to reveal, obviously by a confidentiality clause, as shown in a study from Georgetown University.

How does \$1.3 Trillion add up?

Past investments: According to the statistics available from investment tracker of the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, countries with over 50% of Muslim population have seen \$575 billion investment from China between 2005 and 2020.

Most of the investments have been made to several economically poor countries such as Pakistan, Maldives and Sudan and central Asian countries in the form of loans, sometimes paid at higher interest rate, as revealed by different research studies. This also mean the country receiving Chinese investments has to give contracts to the Chinese enterprises only if loans and funds involve infrastructural development.

Muslim nations, such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bangladesh, Iran, Egypt and Turkey have cornered a huge chunk of the \$575 billion investment that is, nearly \$422 billion. Chinese investments and loans in five central Asian Muslim countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are worth \$26.4 billion.

Chinese investments in Muslim countries

Chinese investment in all Gulf countries was worth \$83 billion while overall investments in the same period in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, that is dominated again by the Muslim majority nations, was worth \$197 billion.

Present, future Chinese investments in Muslim countries: Country-specific media reports reveal China has signed separate bilateral economic deals with Muslim countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and Egypt worth \$736 billion. And like earlier said, even that list was not comprehensive.

Current and future deals with China

If the past, present and future economic deals in Muslim majority nations are added, China's investments touch a massive \$1,311 billion or \$1.311 trillion. China is using the economic leverage to propitiate Muslim majority countries to uphold its stand on Uyghur Muslims. Most Muslim nations look more than willing to comply, even if it means gross human rights violations and repressions of their own community and suppression of their own religion.

UK Foreign Affairs Committee report: Never Again: The Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond

**By Peter Rawlings
TCMER Board Member**



The July 2021 report provides solutions, setting out the response required of the UK Government to stop the atrocities that the Chinese government is committing against the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Committee recommends a range of measures that, together, will pressure the Chinese government to end its persecution of Uyghurs.

The Committee calls on the UK Government to respect the view of the House of Commons that crimes against humanity and genocide are taking place, and take a much stronger response. The summary:

Crimes against Uyghurs

The evidence of serious human rights abuses — all endorsed by the Chinese government's central leadership and perpetrated against the Uyghur people — is irrefutable. These crimes include forced labour programmes, arbitrary detention in internment camps, cultural erasure, systematic rape, forced sterilisations, separation of children from families and a high-technology surveillance system.

Boycotts and sanctions

The report calls on the Government to explore a ban on the import of all cotton products known to be produced in whole or in part in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. This ban should be extended to other industries.

The UK Government should ensure that the Chinese government faces consequences at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics for its crimes in Xinjiang by: not participating in the opening or closing ceremonies, strongly discouraging UK businesses from sponsoring or advertising at the Olympics, encouraging fans and tourists to stay away, and discouraging athletes from supporting or accepting the Chinese government's propaganda efforts while in the country.

The Committee recommends that the Government forbids surveillance companies like Hikvision – which provide surveillance equipment to the detention camps – from operating in the UK. Hikvision cameras currently operate throughout the UK, in leisure centres and even schools.

Support for Uyghurs

The report urges the Government to implement an asylum fast track for Uyghurs and members of other minority ethnic groups who are fleeing from persecution in China. The UK should form a coalition of 'sanctuary states' that will publicly recommit to the principle of non-refoulement.

For Uyghurs living in the UK, the Government should conduct an urgent consultation to determine the extent of harassment they are facing from Chinese Communist Party officials and the type of support they require, offering support and protection as appropriate.

The UK should fight back against the destruction of Uyghur culture with funding for the preservation and promotion of Uyghur tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The BBC World Service should broadcast in Uyghur in areas where substantial Uyghur communities live.

Mobilising multilaterals

The UK Government should increase pressure on the Chinese government to allow international observers access to Xinjiang, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. As an alternative, the Committee recommends a UN investigation taking place from outside of China.

The Government should use every opportunity it has at the UN organs, summits and treaty bodies to call for the immediate disbandment of the camps. To do this, the UK should engage more closely with partners and those nations not currently taking action to ensure support on UN votes and statements.

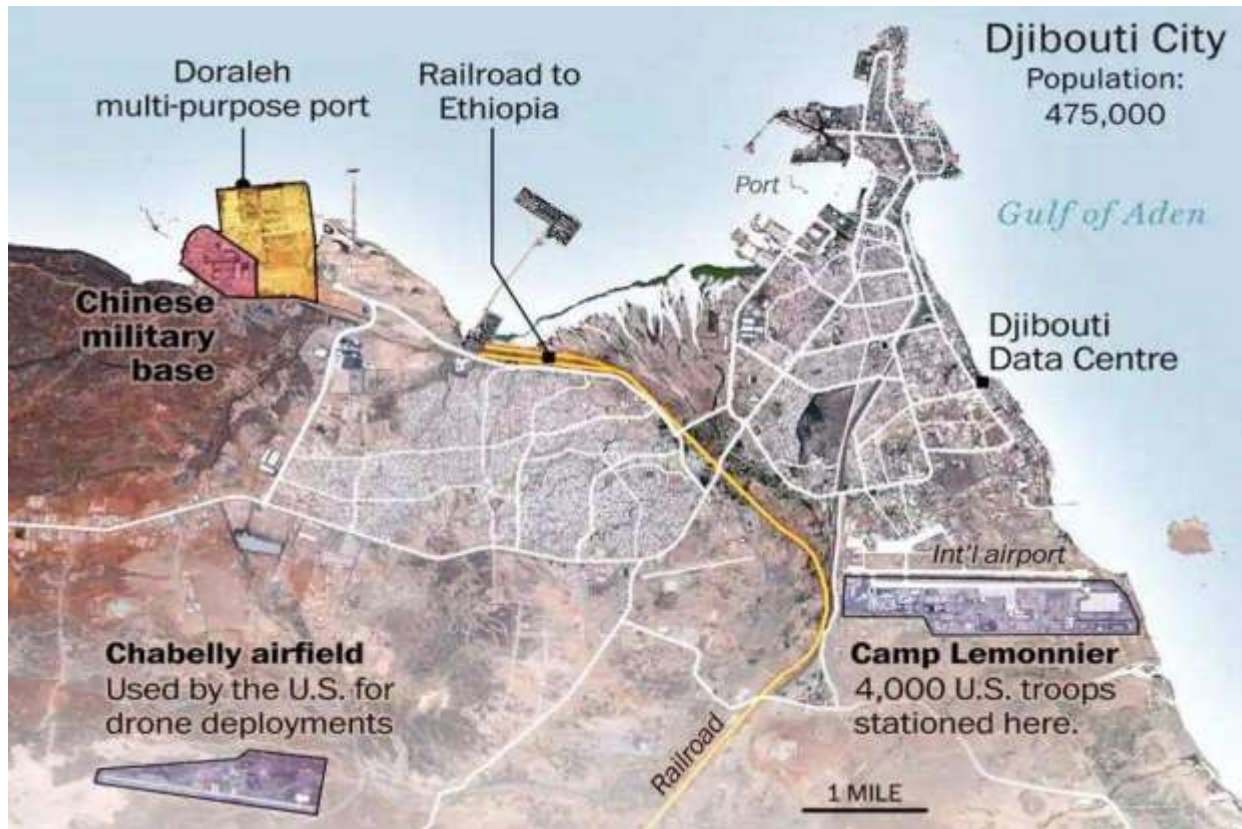
The Government should also explore the prospect of a Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry. The Committee recommends that the Government urgently raise a complaint against China to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The report urges the Government to engage in dialogue with the International Criminal Court about the feasibility of an investigation into crimes committed against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and beyond.

UNESCO is failing to act on widespread cultural destruction in Xinjiang. The UK Government should push for an urgent, independent review of UNESCO's investigatory powers and processes, and formally request that the organisation pursue its mandate with determination and commitment.

Djibouti Military Base Is a New Step in China's Maritime Footprint

By Rajaram Panda



China seems in a rush to increase its strategic space through aggressive use of its economic, strategic and cultural influence, with the long-term goal of projecting power and contending with the United States to be the world's No.1 power. It is trying to expand its reach territorially, increase its influence over other countries, create new institutions, rewrite the rules of existing institutions and establish new behavioural norms. In the economic sphere, its massive "One Belt, One Road" infrastructure initiative aims to connect China and its products with Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, in the process violating the sovereignty of other nations, as demonstrated by its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which runs through disputed Kashmir. It is also using liberal financial aid to woo small and underdeveloped countries into its fold. In the strategic domain, it is building ports across Asia, seemingly with a view to strangling India, which it sees as a competitor, in what is now called China's "string of pearls" strategy.

In the process, it is expanding its maritime footprint across Asia and beyond. Its sovereignty claims over the South China Sea have raised concerns about the region's security, because there are other claimants to some parts of the same maritime space, thereby violating global rules governing maritime commerce. In the cultural sphere, it has launched an aggressive move to open Confucius Institutes in many countries with a view to propagating its soft power. It is also invoking old and even ancient history to expand its territorial claims, as was the case with the recent standoff with India on the Doklam Plateau in Bhutan.

A Strategic Outpost

In the latest expansion, on July 11, an undisclosed number of Chinese troops shipped out of the port city of Zhanjiang, in the southern province of Guangdong, to occupy China's first overseas military base in Djibouti. The strategic location of this tiny country on the Horn of Africa — across from Yemen, near the Middle East, touching both the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden — is along the Babel-Mandeb Strait, one of the world's busiest and most important shipping corridors, which is why the US, France and Japan also have bases there. Millions of barrels of oil and petroleum products pass through the strait daily.

The tiny, barren nation, home to about 900,000 people, is a gateway to Egypt's Suez Canal and is thus strategically important. The new Chinese base is just a few miles from Camp Lemonnier, a major US special operations outpost, where 4,000 US troops are stationed. Being a stable country in a volatile region that factors heavily in global energy supplies makes Djibouti attractive for maritime stakeholders. As a rising power without any overseas bases, China felt it could not be left behind. Besides securing maritime commerce, the larger aim is to expand its maritime footprint.

Reading China's Intentions

This maritime expansionism has sent shivers through world capitals, including New Delhi. What are China's intentions, interests and objectives?

Clearly, China wants to use the base for military exercises, to maintain seaway security and evacuate overseas Chinese in emergencies, as well as humanitarian aid and peacekeeping in Africa and West Asia. China bases its decision on past experiences. For example, in April 2015, the Chinese Navy evacuated 50-plus nationals from strife-torn Yemen. When more than 200 foreigners, including some from Europe, Pakistan and Singapore, escaped to safety, China's hand was visible.

China also has experience in peacekeeping missions, such as in South Sudan in 2015. But the deeper agenda there includes China's oil interests and a market for its weapons. On a larger scale, China's stake in Africa is huge. Chinese companies are heavily invested in extracting the continent's enormous resources, building infrastructure and manufacturing. Some 10,000 Chinese firms are involved in various projects in Africa, and this has given rise to accusations that China is the biggest colonizer of modern times, with fears rising over Chinese domination and control over the economies of some African countries.

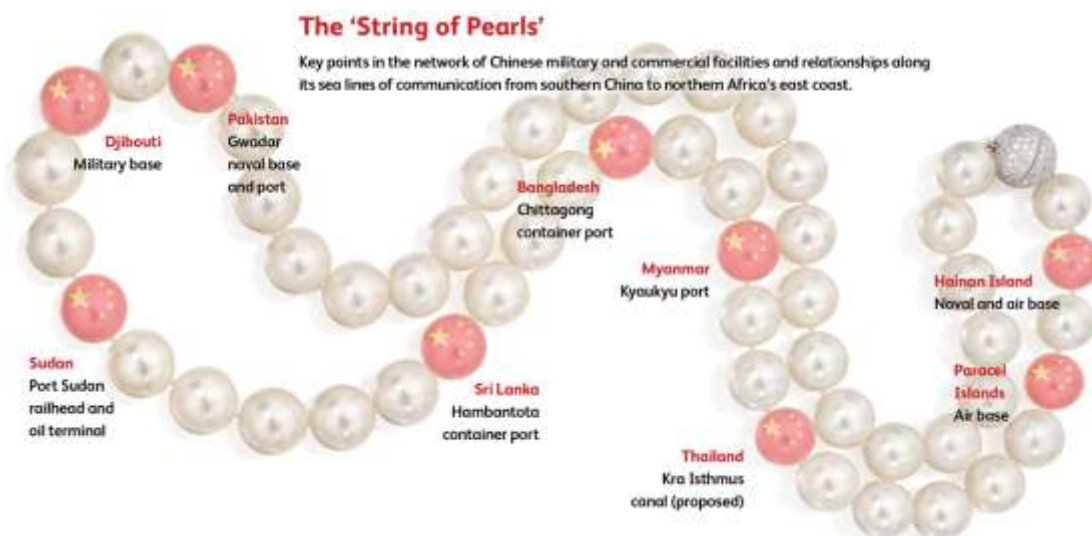
Interestingly, with the US already present in Djibouti at Camp Lemonnier, the only permanent American military installation in Africa, one must ask whether the US and Chinese forces can co-exist as neighbours without conflict. Camp Lemonnier is strategically located between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, and the presence of Chinese forces with a potential surveillance capacity is likely to worry the US. For Djibouti, leasing the base is a windfall, because it earns over US\$60 million annually from the US and will now earn closer to US\$100 million from China. In 2014, Djibouti signed a 10-year, US\$630 million lease of the 100-acre Camp Lemonnier with the US. Similarly, Japan has stationed 170 troops at its 30-acre outpost in Djibouti and spends about US\$9 million a year to operate it. The terms of that lease have not been disclosed. So, while China is expanding its influence, for Djibouti it is just a fantastic get-rich-quick scheme to rent bits of desert to foreign powers without bothering about potential rivalries.

We've Been Here Before

China's expansion of its maritime footprint into the African continent has historical roots. In the first quarter of the 15th century, the great Chinese Admiral Zheng He sailed the Indian Ocean and led seven expeditions to Indonesia, Southeast Asia, India and as far out as the Horn of Africa. Medieval Chinese records show Zheng's expedition — much larger than that of Christopher Columbus, for example — consisted of 27,800 men and a fleet of 62 treasure ships and was supported by approximately 190 smaller ships. The rise of pirates in the South China Sea subsequently led to the suspension of this maritime tradition, as China's imperial rulers imposed a ban on sea voyages and looked inward. China now justifies its military outpost in Africa as merely a revival of its past engagement with the continent. But the decision has larger implications as part of a policy of aggrandizement, which China does not want to admit. If one joins the dots, the conclusion is that China's intentions are not at all benign, but rather have a deep hidden agenda.

It is with such an objective that Chinese authorities have begun systematically to promote a "sense of ocean" in the country. This is posited in a new concept of "blue culture" (ocean culture), a clear departure from, or abandonment of, the traditional view of "yellow culture" (earth culture) that glorified China's history. This argument emerges clearly in You Ji's essay, "A Blue Water Navy, Does it Matter?" Ji argues that if China had developed a sense of ocean 600 years ago, it would have been a superpower. "If China still sticks to its yellow earth policy, it will never acquire its rightful place in the world," Ji observes.

So, when those Chinese warships left Zhanjiang for Djibouti, the state-run *Global Times* was quick to emphasize the strategic importance of this new facility at the mouth of the Red Sea. The newspaper stressed that the base is not going to be a "commercial supply point," but can "support the Chinese Navy to go farther." Such an observation clearly demonstrates that China is no longer shy about projecting power. At the same time, to allay any apprehensions that could emerge, the newspaper said the main role of the base would be to support Chinese warships on anti-piracy and humanitarian missions in the region. "It's not about seeking to control the world."



A String of Pearls to Choke India

China sees India as a rival in the maritime domain. Over the past decade, Beijing has been making concerted efforts to build its maritime infrastructure in the Indian Ocean by offering to build ports and other infrastructure in pliant states. Such initiatives have come in the form of financing maritime projects through grants, long-term soft loans and other concessions that less developed economies find too tempting to reject. First, Pakistan clinched a deal to develop the Gwadar port, which will have immense strategic significance for China. This was followed by the Hambantota Colombo South Port in Sri Lanka, a number of East African ports, and a couple of terminals in Bangladesh (Chittagong) and Myanmar (Sittwe).

China's grand strategy to weave a "string of pearls" from the Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean was first mentioned as a new hypothesis by US consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton in 2005 and later in an internal US Department of Defence report, "Energy Futures in Asia," the same year. In the Chinese paradigm, with most of the "pearls" being in the Indian Ocean, this strategy was seen as a clever way of using excess money and excess capacity in China to "win" friends for a give-and-take game, where the "take" would translate into the use of ports and other infrastructure for the Chinese Navy, as well as for Chinese trade under "special arrangements."

As concerns in some Asian capitals about China's geopolitical aims developed, Beijing quickly rebranded the "string of pearls" as the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" initiative. But this has not allayed the suspicions of neighbouring nations about China's true goal of regional domination. China is seeking to project the Maritime Silk Road initiative as one designed to make China the hub of a new order in Asia and the Indian Ocean region. This initiative passes through many littoral states in strategic locations and choke points, control of which is China's primary aim. By selling trade connectivity, small and internationally neglected states are vulnerable to Chinese offers because they find them a win-win attraction. By doing this, China not only aims at strategic penetration but also to build an image as a strong but benevolent power. Thus, one can see its soft power on display, while beneath it is a long-term strategic design.

Sri Lanka's strategic location is attractive to Beijing because of its proximity to the world's busiest sea lanes. With a view to establishing its strategic footprint, China has built a container terminal at Colombo Harbor. In this US\$500 million project, the majority share is held by Chinese state companies. Also, after the Hambantota port project was completed, China began construction of a city roughly the size of Monaco on reclaimed land off Colombo with an investment of US\$1.4 billion.

China's involvement in the Gwadar port near Pakistan's border with Iran is worrying for India because the presence of the Chinese Navy would be unwelcome. Located strategically at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, a gateway for a third of the world's traded oil, the deep-water port epitomizes a muscular China's intention to choke India by strategic design. In order to counter this, India has entered into a deal with Iran's port of Chabahar to neutralize some of the advantages that China would enjoy from using Gwadar. Even Japan has evinced interest in becoming involved in the development of Chabahar port. India cannot overlook the strategic dimension of Gwadar, because Pakistan has granted China 40-year rights to operate the port. As in Sri Lanka, China is investing another US\$1.62 billion in new infrastructure, including a container terminal, an international airport, and an expressway linking the harbour with the coastline.

Closer to home, China's aggressive maritime strategy is the biggest challenge for India in the Indo-Pacific region. This has inevitably led important players in the region such as Japan, Vietnam, Singapore and others to think in terms of establishing a strategic constellation with the aim of checking China's maritime advance. Writing in *The Hindustan Times*, India's leading strategic analyst Brahma Chellaney says: "For India, whose energy and strategic infrastructure is concentrated along a vulnerable, 7,600km coastline, this represents a tectonic shift in its threat calculus." He further writes that while India continues to repeat the same old platitudes about conciliation and co-operation, China reminds India that there cannot be "two suns in the sky," or that "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers," implying that China wants to be Asia's sole tiger.

Expanding Strategic Horizons

The Djibouti base is the latest development in China's grand strategy and marks a fundamental shift in Beijing's stated policy of no "forward deployment." For India, the Chinese military presence in Gwadar and Djibouti is discomfiting despite its own presence in nearby Chabahar, because Djibouti is only about 1,525 nautical miles from Gwadar, a distance that can be covered in about six days at sea. China would lose no time in converting the posts it has developed in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar into military facilities to increase its strategic leverage over potential competitors. India needs to respond by building its own strong naval capabilities and expanding its maritime space in the Indian Ocean and beyond so that peace and tranquillity, as well as unimpeded commerce, are maintained. The annual bilateral naval exercises with Australia and trilateral naval drills with Japan and the US should send a message to China that its adventurism at sea will be met with equal, appropriate responses when the situation warrants.

India has not reacted to China's outreach in Djibouti, but the move fuels worries about China's military alliances. China began building the base in February 2016, with the declared aim of using it to resupply naval vessels taking part in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions off the coast of Yemen and Somalia, in particular. While Djibouti is China's first overseas naval base, Beijing officially describes it as a logistics facility – but the world is not so naïve as to believe that claim.

Interestingly, Beijing's state-run *Global Times* said categorically in an editorial that there could be no mistake that this was a military base. It observed: "Certainly, this is the People's Liberation Army's first overseas base and we will base troops there. It's not a commercial resupply point. It makes sense that there is attention on this from foreign public opinion." At the same time, it said that China's military development was about its own security and "not about seeking to control the world." There is nevertheless speculation in diplomatic circles that China will build other such bases like it in Gwadar and Hambantota.

In addition to worrying India, the Chinese military base in Djibouti poses very significant operational security concerns for the US. It is just one among many Chinese projects in Djibouti. For example, Chinese banks have funded at least 14 infrastructure projects, including a railway connecting Djibouti and Ethiopia, valued at US\$14.4 billion. There are similar investments across the continent. These stoke concerns for the US.

Feeling the Pressure

India sees the Djibouti base as a potential hub for Chinese surveillance operations and has objected to China's planned shipping network with Pakistan because it cuts through disputed parts of Kashmir. China's objective to develop civilian ports in Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is seen as a first step toward allowing naval vessels to visit. For the past few years, China has been deploying its submarines, warships and tankers in the Indian Ocean on the pretext of anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden. India has tracked Chinese submarines entering the Indian Ocean since 2013. In 2015, the US Defence Department confirmed this as well. It is baffling what role submarines could play against pirates and their dhows, so Chinese explanations for their presence fall short.

The logical response from countries in the region is to seek ways to balance China's growing influence. This has led to countries such as India, Australia, Japan and Vietnam sharing a common view of the situation and considering informal alliances to bolster regional security. The urgency of such an initiative became greater after the unpredictable Donald Trump moved into the White House, raising doubts in Asia about the US commitment to regional security. The larger number of naval warships that took part in the recently concluded India-Japan-US trilateral Malabar 2017 naval exercises may be seen as a sign of enhanced preparedness. China, however, has criticized such military balancing and insisted that it does "not seek a sphere of influence."

However, the contrary is the case. The truism is that China has crafted a deliberate policy to deepen economic and security relationships with Africa, which is now an explicit part of Beijing's foreign policy. In 2015, President Xi Jinping pledged US\$100 million to the African Union standby force for UN peacekeeping and US\$1 billion to establish the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund. An estimated one million Chinese nationals are spread over the African continent, with many employed in China-backed infrastructure projects. China's involvement in African security is the product of a wider transformation of its defence policy, which incorporates new concepts such as the protection of overseas interests and protection of the open seas.

Thus China's burgeoning partnership with Africa and deep economic penetration gives rise to the specter of China becoming the new colonial power, with its hidden objectives camouflaged in various economic and strategic projects. We are likely to witness a situation that recalls the days of the old European colonial rulers as China seems destined to strangle the economies of poor African nations through economic handouts and selling projects in the name of economic development, thereby taking total control of their economies. The military base in Djibouti is just the latest chapter in this developing narrative.

Rajaram Panda is the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) India Chair Visiting Professor at Reitaku University in Japan.

The Taliban Are 'Hostile To Life

By Dr. Khaled Montaser



In an August 16, 2021 article in the Egyptian daily Al-Watan, Dr. Khaled Montaser a physician and media figure, castigates those who rejoiced at the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan and saw it as a victory for Islam and the Muslims. The Taliban, he says, is a fascist religious movement that seeks to kill joy and is hostile to life and humanity themselves, as evident from its ban on Covid and polio vaccines. This movement is incapable of establishing a modern state, he concludes.

The following are translated excerpts from his article:

"I started expecting the Taliban to advance towards any part of Afghanistan the day they killed Afghan comedian Nazar Mohammad and mutilated his body to intimidate [others]. Horror indeed intensified, and the murderers won. Nazar, known as Khasha Zwan, was known to his friends as a lover of comedy who posted funny videos on Youtube. He lived in Kandahar, a Taliban stronghold. He was surprised [in his home], abducted, tied and [forced into] a vehicle. A video circulated later shows Taliban soldiers slapping him and laughing, and another video showed them mutilating his body!

"The killing of humor marks the beginning of the path of deterioration and destruction... The Taliban's first and most important decision was to remove pictures of women from billboards, smash store windows mannikins and of course mandate the wearing of the chador, the Afghanniqab. Religious fascism intensified, until they reached the point of killing joy and then proceeded to kill life itself by forbidding Afghans to get vaccinated for Covid-19.

"In March, [2021, Afghan] officials reported that Taliban gunmen had killed three women in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan who worked vaccinating [the populace] against polio... In June [2021], five members of the polio vaccination teams were killed

and four were wounded in a series of coordinated attacks in three different places in eastern Afghanistan.

"The Afghan media reports that the Taliban in Paktia in the east of the country has [now] banned the Covid-19 vaccine as well. The Afghan Shamshad television channel quoted Wilayat Khan Ahmadzai, head of the local public health department, as saying that, since taking over the area last week, the Taliban has banned getting the vaccine at the local hospital. The unit in charge of vaccines has been closed down for at least three days, and people are told that the vaccine is forbidden...

"Is this unreasonable behaviour the Taliban's way of becoming more liberated and civilized? Can those who are hostile to humanity and life be part of the modern [world]?"

"The disaster is that some of our young people are writing [with admiration] of the Taliban's great victory, their takeover of Kabul and their invasion of Kandahar! Do they think that [the acts of] exiling people, stoning them, killing and perpetrating massacres herald the establishment of a [modern] state, the building of a nation and the revival of the homeland?!"

"Whoever believes that what is happening in Afghanistan is a victory for Islam and the Muslims needs to have his head and his intelligence examined."

Dr. Kaled Montaser is an Egyptian journalist, author and TV presenter.

Egypt and Israel seek to strengthen border security

**By Don Gibbons
TCMER Board Member**



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi invited Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for an official visit in the coming weeks, which would be the first state visit by an Israeli leader in nearly a decade. The invitation comes amid the backdrop of ongoing violence emanating from the Gaza Strip, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the ongoing Iran nuclear threat, which Israel and its Arab regional partners perceive with alarm.

Zvi Mazel, Israel's former ambassador to Egypt and a senior analyst with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, states that he views the state visit as a possible sign of warming relations between the two countries. "It's good news, especially that the invitation is for an official visit, which means an honour guard at the airport and lots of journalists present—a message to the Egyptian people that the government favours business with Israel," he said.

While Israel and Egypt have maintained a cold peace since the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978, their mutual ties are largely limited to top government officials and secretive visits. They also both actively work to keep the volatile enclave that is Gaza and the Hamas terror organization that runs it in check.

Samuel Tadros, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and author of *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity and Reflection on the Revolution in Egypt*, told JNS that the visit is a positive step, and that "Egypt has always shied away from an open relationship with Israel and discouraged its own citizens from normal relations, as well as fomenting anti-Semitism in its own state media."

“Egypt has not invited an Israeli prime minister to visit despite increased intelligence cooperation since Sisi came to power in 2013,” noted Tadros. The decision shows that the Egyptian government is more welcoming of working with this Israeli government, despite its possible reservations about Bennett’s ideological background, he assessed.

However, Mazel said that interest in Egyptian relations with Israel is narrowly based, with one main goal being the selling and buying of gas. He said this is not normalization in the plain sense of the term but a move based on commercial interests.

‘A mediator in the conflict’

The announcement of the Egyptian invitation comes as Bennett meets with U.S. President Joe Biden at the White House. Egypt and Israel, close allies of America, certainly view power changes in the Middle East with concern, and the perceived success of the Taliban in the eyes of terror groups affects regional stability.



At the same time, the Biden administration has prioritized human-rights concerns as part of its foreign policy, a matter that Egypt has long been accused of violating by outside groups. The Israeli media has reported that el-Sisi seeks Bennett’s help in making its case to Biden this week, said Mazel, which has been part of a working system that has gone on for years.

According to Tadros, the Egyptian invitation signifies “a realization in Egypt after the last Gaza war that its historical role as a mediator in the conflict is highly beneficial to its position and relations with Washington.” He added that “Egypt may thus see its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict as again useful in overcoming criticism of its human rights record, especially with the Biden administration.”

Biden Gives Iran's Mullahs Another Victory: Taliban Takeover

By Dr. Majid Rafizadeh



The assumption that Iran and the Taliban are not allies because one is Shia and the other is Sunni, is woefully inaccurate. In the past, the Iranian regime used to hide its ties with Taliban; not anymore. The Iranian regime seems happy to build alliances with any government or terror group that shares Tehran's hatred towards Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, Israel or the US. Pictured: Iran's then Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (right) hosts Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar (center-left) in Tehran, Iran on January 31, 2021. (Photo by Tasnim News/AFP via Getty Images)

Among the many winners of the Biden administration's failure in Afghanistan and takeover of the country by the Taliban, are the mullahs of Iran's regime. The assumption that Iran and the Taliban are not allies because one is Shia and the other is Sunni, is woefully inaccurate.

Iran's leaders have long been waiting for this takeover - at least one of the reasons they have been cheering America's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Even before the American surrender, the Iranian regime had been meeting with the leaders of the Taliban. In January, a delegation from the Taliban was already publicly consulting with senior Iranian officials, including then Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. According to him, both parties held productive talks, and discussed their ties and the future of Afghanistan.

As Zarif pointed out during his discussions with the Taliban delegation, the Iranian regime was lobbying for the Taliban and stating that:

"political decisions cannot be made in a vacuum and an inclusive government must be formed in a participatory process and needs to consider all fundamental structures, institutions, and laws, such as the constitution."

In addition, in late January, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, tweeted:

"In today's meeting with the Taliban political delegation, I found that the leaders of this group are determined to fight the United States."

As the Afghan government and President Ashraf Ghani were still in control, the event apparently enraged the Afghan government. Chief of the General Staff of the Afghanistan National Army, Yasin Zia, responded to Shamkhani by tweeting:

"Unfortunately, your understanding, @aliskamkhani_ir, as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council of the ongoing war in Afghanistan is inaccurate. The Taliban is not against the US, but it is against the people of Afghanistan. We act decisively against any group which is the enemy of people of Afghanistan."

Iran, as well as Pakistan, has long provided shelter to Taliban leaders. Taliban leaders have been traveling back and forth to Iran since 1996, when the Taliban first captured Kabul. For example, *Foreign Policy* magazine reported in 2016 that:

"Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour was killed in Pakistan by an American drone last weekend after leaving Iran, where his family lives. U.S. officials say that Mullah Mansour regularly and freely traveled into and out of Iran."

The Iranian regime, like Pakistan, has long been providing Taliban with weapons and cash. In 2017, Rahmatullah Nabil, the former head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security, accused the Iranian regime of providing the Taliban with arms and financial aid. In addition, two unnamed Western officials told *Foreign Policy* magazine in 2016 that the Iranian government was "providing Taliban forces along its border with money and small amounts of relatively low-grade weaponry like machine guns, ammunition, and rocket-propelled grenades."

In the past, the Iranian regime used to hide its ties with Taliban; not anymore. *Kayhan*, a newspaper funded by the Office of Supreme Leader of Iran and considered a mouthpiece of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been attempting to change public opinion about the Taliban. "The Taliban today," *Kayhan* wrote recently, "is different from the Taliban that used to behead people." So far, there seems insufficient evidence if that is true. At the moment, it does not look that way. Reports keep surfacing about people inside Afghanistan being beheaded, women having their eyes gouged out for having a job, and children as young as 12 being "dragged out of their homes" to be used as sex slaves or for forced marriages to fighters.

The Iranian leaders' attempt to create a good picture of Taliban evidently created outrage among some Iranian people who do not hold such positive views about Taliban. Former Iranian diplomat Ali Khorram, for instance, warned the regime:

"Thinking that the Taliban will come under Tehran's command is tantamount to growing a snake up your sleeve. As far as Iran's national interests are concerned, the liberal government of Ashraf Ghani is a hundred times better than a radical ISIS-Taliban government."

While many countries - including the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland - are evacuating their citizens from behind enemy lines and shutting their embassies in Kabul, the Iranian regime is celebrating the Taliban's takeover. Iran has kept its embassy as it was. As stated by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh, quoted by the official news agency IRNA:

"The embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kabul is fully open and active. Iran's consulate general in Herat is also open and active".

The Iranian regime seems happy to build alliances with any government or terror group that shares Tehran's hatred towards Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, Israel or the US.

One of the critical opportunities that the Iranian regime sees in Taliban's takeover is that the group can once again become a safe haven for terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, or the Islamic State - called effectively identical" Pepsis - that attack the United States.

In 2017, a trove of 470,000 documents released by the CIA also revealed close ties between Osama Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and the Iranian regime. A federal court ruling, found that "Iran furnished material and direct support for the 9/11 terrorists." At least eight of the hijackers passed through Iran before heading to the US. A US Federal District court ordered Iran, for its role in 9/11, to pay some of its victims more than \$10 billion, although there may be no way to force Iran to comply. US Federal courts have also ruled that Iran still owes Americans \$53 billion for Iran having bombed the US Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983 and other assaults.

As the Taliban's takeover has caused many people from Afghanistan to flee the country, while the Iranian regime claims that it has good relationships with Afghanistan, it has closed its borders to the refugees. According to Iran's Red Crescent (IIRC), Iran's interior ministry and the regime's guards at the border were detaining Afghan refugees and returning them back across the border to Afghanistan.

What we are seeing is that the Biden administration just handed the mullahs of Iran - as well as the Chinese, the Russians, the North Koreans and the Turks - yet another victory as they all cheer the US failure in Afghanistan and celebrate the takeover of Central Asia by terrorists.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is president of the International American Council on the Middle East. He has authored several books on Islam and US foreign policy.

Iran Close to Obtaining Nuclear Weapons

By Lina Zaidi
TCMER Board Member



The Iranian regime appears just a few months away from obtaining nuclear weapons, all while the Biden administration is completely silent and has not articulated any clear policy for preventing this dangerous and predatory regime from becoming a nuclear state like North Korea.

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz told ambassadors from countries on the United Nations Security Council during a briefing at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem on August 4, 2021:

"Iran has violated all of the guidelines set in the JCPOA and is only around 10 weeks away from acquiring weapons-grade materials necessary for a nuclear weapon... Now is the time for deeds – words are not enough. It is time for diplomatic, economic and even military deeds, otherwise the attacks will continue."

The Biden administration has been insisting on reviving the disastrous Obama nuclear deal and the theocratic establishment of Iran has evidently seen this as a perfect opportunity to buy time and inch closer to acquiring nuclear weapons.

The Biden administration first showed its desperation by making it clear to the Iranian leaders that the US wanted to return to the nuclear deal and was willing to lift all sanctions re-imposed by the Trump administration.

As nuclear talks began, the Iranian regime began advancing its nuclear program at a faster pace as the negotiations went on. The Biden administration not only remained silent in the face of Iran's violations, it also started offering even more concessions to the mullahs. The Biden administration, for instance, announced not only that it was willing to lift nuclear-related sanctions, but also that it was considering lifting non-nuclear related sanctions.

Iran first began increasing uranium enrichment to 20% in January 2021. On January 9, the Iranian parliament passed a law requiring the government to expel the

International Atomic Energy Agency's nuclear inspectors. In April, the regime raised its uranium enrichment level to 60%, edging closer to weapons-grade levels. While his government was holding indirect nuclear talks with the Biden administration, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, speaker of Iran's parliament, bragged:

"The young and God-believing Iranian scientists managed to achieve a 60% enriched uranium product. I congratulate the brave nation of Islamic Iran on this success. The Iranian nation's willpower is miraculous and can defuse any conspiracy."

On July 6, while the Geneva nuclear talks were ongoing, the regime began producing enriched uranium metal. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog group, warned:

"Today, Iran informed the Agency that UO₂ (uranium oxide) enriched up to 20 percent U-235 would be shipped to the R&D laboratory at the Fuel Fabrication Plant in Esfahan, where it would be converted to UF₄ (uranium tetrafluoride) and then to uranium metal enriched to 20 percent U-235, before using it to manufacture the fuel."

A joint statement issued by the UK, France and Germany agreed that the Iranian regime "has no credible civilian need for uranium metal R&D and production, which are a key step in the development of a nuclear weapon."

The Biden administration, in addition, has made no efforts to pressure the Iranian regime into answering the International Atomic Energy Agency's questions about three undeclared clandestine nuclear sites found in Iran. IAEA Director General General Rafael Mariano Grossi stated:

"Iran must decide to cooperate in a clearer manner with the agency to give the necessary clarifications. The fact that we found traces (of uranium) is very important. That means there is the possibility of nuclear activities and material that are not under international supervision and about which we know not the origin or the intent. That worries me."

Grossi also warned:

"The lack of progress in clarifying the agency's questions concerning the correctness and completeness of Iran's safeguards declarations seriously affects the ability of the agency to provide assurance of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. For objectivity's sake, I should say that the Iranian government has reiterated its will to engage and to cooperate and to provide answers, but they haven't done that so far. So I hope this may change, but as we speak, we haven't had any concrete progress."

It seems - worryingly, especially after failures of both intelligence and planning in the Afghanistan debacle - that the Biden administration is again standing idly by while the mullahs of Iran comfortably keep enriching uranium to acquire a nuclear weapons arsenal.

We have seen what the ruling mullahs do to their own people and the region even before they have nuclear weapons. Just take a look at what the country called "the world's greatest sponsor of state terrorism" has already done both domestically to their own people, and internationally to Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian territories and even Venezuela and larger South America - not to mention a recent deadly attack on a commercial oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman. What then is the Free World expecting the mullahs to do after they have nuclear weapons?

The Mullahs' Deadly War at Sea

By Zara Dawood
TCMER Board Member



On July 30, 2021, the oil tanker MV Mercer Street was attacked by an armed drone 280km from the port of Al-Daqam in the Sea of Oman. Two crew members, one British and one Romanian, were killed in the attack. The ship is Japanese-owned and Liberian-flagged, and is managed by Zodiac Maritime, a British company that is one of Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer's businesses.

Many countries - including the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and Israel - concluded that the Iranian regime was behind the deadly attack. Following an investigation by an expert team from the US Defence Department, which inspected the MV Mercer Street following the attack, the US Central Command wrote in a statement:

"The use of Iranian designed and produced one way attack 'kamikaze' UAVs is a growing trend in the region. They are actively used by Iran and their proxies against coalition forces in the region, to include targets in Saudi Arabia and Iraq."

A few days after the attack, instead of taking appropriate action against the Iranian regime, the European Union stated it is optimistic view that it could revive the nuclear deal with Iran. In spite of the deadly attack and in spite of the fact that the Iranian regime made a mass murderer its new president, a senior EU official pointed out that:

"We still think that the most likely scenario is an agreement. What I cannot tell you is when and [under] what conditions. They [the Iranian leaders] will come back the moment they have completed all the different steps in the new administration. So my understanding is [that] we are talking about sometime at the beginning of September".

If it were Israel that carried out such a deadly attack, the international community would be up in arms trying to take tough actions against the tiny state.

This is not the first time that the Iranian regime has been implicated in attacking commercial oil tankers in the recent years. In May of 2019, for example, four tankers were targeted close to the port of Fujairah, off the coast of the United Arab Emirates. A month later, on June 13, 2019, two tankers - the Japanese Kokuka Courageous and the Norwegian Front Altair - crossing the Gulf of Oman were also sabotaged with explosives. One tanker went up in flames and both were left adrift. A few weeks later, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), emboldened, broadcast a video boasting about how its commandos, wearing black ski masks and military fatigues, descended from a helicopter onto a British oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz and victoriously seized the ship.

While the Iranian mullahs have been busy breaching two critical international laws, the international community - especially the United States, EU and UN Security Council - have remained silent. The Iranian regime is violating the internationally agreed UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under part three of UNCLOS, "Straits Used For International Navigation," Article 44, the agreement stipulates:

"States bordering straits shall not hamper transit passage and shall give appropriate publicity to any danger to navigation or over flight within or over the strait of which they have knowledge. There shall be no suspension of transit passage."

UNCLOS also clarifies:

"Transit passage means the exercise in accordance with this Part of the freedom of navigation and over flight solely for the purpose of continuous and expeditious transit of the strait between one part of the high seas or an exclusive economic zone and another part of the high seas or an exclusive economic zone."

Second, Iran's aggressive behaviour and its assaults are a blatant violation of the UN General Assembly's "Definition of Aggression," which "calls upon all states to refrain from all acts of aggression and other uses of force contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among states in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations." This resolution clarifies that the following can be classed as acts of aggression: "The blockade of the ports or coasts of a state by the armed forces of another state," and "an attack by the armed forces of a state on the land, sea or air forces, or marine and air fleets of another state."

In short, Iran's regime has been attacking commercial oil tankers at sea, killing crew members and blatantly violating international law while the Biden administration, the European Union, and the UN Security Council say not a word. Worse, the Biden administration and the EU probably still want to revive the catastrophic nuclear deal and lift sanctions against Iran's lawless and predatory regime.

The West must counter Iran's maritime terrorism

By Eliezer Marom



Commercial shipping activity in the Gulf of Oman near the port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates was disrupted on Tuesday after several ships in the area reported difficulties operating their GPS-based navigational systems.

Meanwhile, another report came in that a ship named Asphalt Princess had been hijacked by armed assailants. The entire story can be traced to an incident in the Arabian Sea last week, in which the Iranians attacked the MV Mercer Street vessel with a suicide drone, killing the ship's Romanian captain and a British crew member.

After the world realized, based on Israeli intelligence, that Iran was behind the attack, senior U.K. and U.S. diplomats openly accused the Islamic Republic and threatened retaliation without saying whether it would be diplomatic or military in nature. The U.S. Pentagon said all options were on the table.

The Iranians, who apparently didn't intend on killing any of the crew, were caught in this crisis rather off-guard.

The ensuing condemnations from all directions, along with the numerous threats, it seems, sparked considerable anxiety in Tehran, and the Iranian leadership, seeking to nip matters in the bud, delivered a message that any action against Iran would be met with a response, which would most likely severely disrupt oil shipments from the Persian Gulf.

It's worth noting that some 30 percent of all of the world's oil is passes through this highly sensitive waterway, such that any disarray could cause a global crisis even to the point of war with Iran.

The Iranians are adept at pushing boundaries. In any crisis, they pull the rope to its absolute limit, right to the point before it snaps, in order to gauge the West's response. When the Iranian tanker Grace1 was stopped by British forces in Gibraltar in the

summer of 2019, the Iranians hijacked the British-flagged tanker Stena Impero. Ultimately, the British released the Iranian vessel and the Iranians released the British tanker, ending that particular crisis.

In the latest incident, the Iranians, it appears, activated GPS jammers that disrupted several ships' navigation systems, and armed assailants who didn't identify as Iranian to hijack a vessel. The Iranians apparently want to show the West that they possess a variety of capabilities in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and that if the West decides to act, as its leaders have suggested, Tehran has a diverse array of responses at its disposal.

There's no doubt whatsoever that this crisis with Iran necessitates a Western response. Iran's actions are maritime terrorism for all intents and purposes, and contravene international law. The West has more than a few diplomatic tools at its disposal for deterring the Iranians, which must now be implemented.

In the background, meanwhile, the Biden administration and the other signatory countries (P5+1) want to bring Iran back to the negotiating table and renew the original Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal.

The talks in Vienna were paused to allow the Iranians to finish the process of replacing their president, and are supposed to recommence in the coming days. Will Iran's actions and the West's interests prevent Western countries, spearheaded by the United Kingdom, from retaliating against Tehran's terroristic activities? Time will tell.

Vice Adm. (ret.) Eliezer Marom served as commander of the Israeli Navy from 2007-2011. This article first appeared in Israel Hayom.

Iranian protests spread again

By Anastasia Kravtsov
TCMER Board Member



In recent weeks, mass demonstrations have taken place in three peripheral provinces of Iran populated by non-Persian ethnic groups. The most prominent is the Arab-inhabited Ahwaz province, located on the banks of the Persian Gulf. Mass demonstrations were also conducted in the Kurdish and Azeri regions in the north of the country.

Iran's economic crisis has resulted in a lack of investment in, among other things, water infrastructure. The Persian region of Iran has suffered severe drought for years. To address that problem, the Islamic regime diverted streams from the province of Ahwaz to the Persian region. This resulted in thousands of cows, sheep, and goats in Ahwaz dying of thirst. Because those animals are the source of many of their livelihoods, the people of Ahwaz consider the water diversion a theft...

Iranian leaders made their choice: they have spent, and continue to spend, billions of dollars on their nuclear project, the care and feeding of the IRGC, and on proxies and allies from Yemen to Lebanon — money that has not been spent on infrastructure to conserve water resources, on desalination plants, on the production of water from the air (a method now perfected by Israel's Watergen company), and on drip irrigation.

During the last few years, there has been a severe drought in the Persian-populated parts of central Iran. In response, the government has chosen to divert water from Arab-populated Ahwaz in the south to central Iran. Ahwaz farmers paid the price: their livestock – cows, sheep, and goats – have died of thirst, impoverishing many of the Arab farmers. They naturally have been angered by Teheran's water policy, its diversion of water to the north seen as one more example of the Persian-dominated central government's inattention to their plight.

The Iranian government has not invested in “smokestack scrubbers” that could greatly decrease the amount of toxic emissions; it appears indifferent to the health of the Ahwazi Arabs. Since all the oil and gas in Iran comes from the Ahwaz region, it is the Ahwazi Arabs alone who continue to suffer the consequences of the toxic substances emitted by the oil and gas industry. The “uncaptured” toxic substances enter the soil, where they poison the fruits and vegetables that the Ahwazis produce, and poison, too, the waters of the Gulf, and thus the fish that the Ahwazis rely on for food. This exposure to such poisons through their diet causes many Ahwazi women to give birth to deformed babies. Yet the Tehran government continues to ignore the need to clean up the oil-and-gas toxins emitted into the atmosphere that could be “captured” at the source through a “smokestack scrubbers” policy.

The Ahwazi charge – that the Persian rulers wanted to situate the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in Ahwaz, where in case of any accident or meltdown, it will not be Persians but the local Arabs who will be harmed – is entirely consonant with Persian policy toward the Ahwazi Arabs, one of criminal indifference to their health and wellbeing.

The Ahwazis began protesting over the issue of water being “stolen” by the Persians – i.e., diverted from Ahwaz to the north – and metamorphosed into a demand that Ahwaz become independent from “Iranian occupation.” The Iranian government will never agree to that, for it would mean losing all of its oil-and-gas production, but the very fact that such a demand for Ahwazi independence is now being made is terrifying to Tehran. It must wonder who else is behind that demand? Is it Sunni Arab states in the Gulf, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, who want to tear away from Iran its main source of wealth, and are offering Ahwazi separatists financial and military support? Or could Israel itself be promising to supply the Ahwazis with weaponry and training to help them withstand, by force, any attempt by Tehran to crush the Arab separatists? Most likely, both the Sunni Arab states and Israel will be offering support, should the Ahwazi Arabs manage to break out in a large-scale open revolt that the Iranians are unable to suppress, for Israel and its Gulf allies want to encourage the Ahwazi separatist movement, as a simple way to threaten the economy, and undermine the security, of the Iranian state, and to keep it preoccupied with suppressing that revolt in the country’s oil-and-gas bearing south. It’s not only the Ahwazi revolt that in itself threatens the security of the state, but the effect of such a revolt on other ethnic minorities, including the Azeris, the Kurds, and the Balochis, who would be heartened by, and want to emulate, the Ahwazi example.

In response to the Ahwazis’ demand for independence, the regime cut off the Internet in the province. People from the area now have to film events in Ahwaz and travel to other areas to get the images out to the world.

Concurrently with the outbreak of demonstrations in Ahwaz, demonstrations broke out in support of the Kurdish and Azeri regions in northern Iran, as well as in Tehran, where slogans like “Death to the dictator” [the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei] and “Not Gaza, not Lebanon, the money for Iranians” were chanted.

The 20 million Azeris in Iran constitute about one-quarter of the country’s population, and right next door to the Azeri-populated parts of western Iran is the state of Azerbaijan, which has 10 million Azeris and a well-trained and well-supplied army. Azerbaijan could serve as a conduit for arms and money to the Azeri separatists – whose goal is not a separate state, like that desired by the Ahwazi Arabs – but rather, the incorporation of the Azeri-populated areas of Iran into an enlarged Azerbaijan.

Were that effort to succeed, it would dramatically decrease Iran's size, and strengthen its neighbour Azerbaijan, which just happens to be a close ally of Israel. Israel has long been a major supplier of weaponry to Azerbaijan. And Azerbaijan, in turn, has been mentioned as a possible site for an Israeli forward operating base in any future conflict with Iran. It's a lot easier to bomb Iranian sites from Azerbaijan than from Israel. No wonder the Iranians will move heaven and earth to keep the Azeri separatist effort from succeeding.

It is important to note that despite widespread opposition to the Islamist regime among Iranians of Persian descent, they oppose the demand of ethnic minorities for disengagement from Iran. Indeed, when I [the author and former IDF intelligence analyst, Mordechai Kedar] raised in meetings with Persian-Iranian exiles the possibility that Iran would be partitioned into ethnic/national states (Persians, Arabs, Baluchs, Kurds, Turkmen, etc.) similar to what happened in the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, their response was always completely negative. They aspire to remove the ayatollahs from power, and some even speak of the return of the Shah's son and the renewal of the monarchy, but they unequivocally support Iran's continued existence in its current form, which perpetuates Persian control of the country's many ethnic minorities....

Persian Iranians in exile, though ferocious enemies of the Islamic regime, are also, however, proud Persian nationalists, who oppose the separatist movements – by Arabs, Azeris, Kurds, and Balochis – that would reduce Persia's power and size. They want a change of regime, not a much diminished homeland.

Arabs, Azeris, Kurds, and Balochis, who for years have been conducting their own unconnected campaigns for greater rights, have been – according to the senior Israeli intelligence analyst Mordechai Kedar – more recently collaborating with each other, keenly aware that if they were to simultaneously rise in revolt, the Iranian army would have a hard time suppressing four distinct separatist groups “on the edges of Iran.” These include the two million Ahwazi Arabs in the south, on the Gulf, whom Sunni Arabs might be eager to aid, not just out of ethnic solidarity, but to deprive the Islamic Republic of the oil and gas production on which its wellbeing is completely dependent; the three million Balochis – Sunnis persecuted by the Shi'a Persians – in the far east, who could obtain reinforcements and weapons from the eight million Balochis right across the border in Pakistan; the 20 million Azeris in Iran who can count on the support of the 10 million of their fellows in Azerbaijan, well-armed and battle-hardened from the war in Nagorno-Karabakh; and the twelve million Kurds in north-western Iraq, who can receive various kinds of aid (weapons, money, and volunteers) from the twenty-five million Kurds who live in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

An end to the current Iranian regime, and the replacement of the ruling Islamists by secular democrats, would put an end to Iran's regional aggression, that had been undertaken by the Islamic Republic to help other Islamist groups, from the Houthis to Hezbollah, in order to spread the Iranian revolution, and Iran's power, across the Middle East.

Along with a change in its regime, the disintegration of Iran, through the success of separatist movements among the Arabs, Kurds, Azeris, and Balochis, would ensure that even were Iran, most implausibly, to again revert to Islamism, it would be so reduced in size and wealth as to no longer constitute a threat to Israel, or to the Sunni states of the Gulf, or to the mullahs' “Great Satan,” America.

The international community must therefore vigorously support the struggle of the ethnic/national minorities in Iran against the Islamist regime (as well as the struggle of the Persian majority against this regime) and their efforts to dismantle the Iranian state. President Biden must immediately abandon any intention to return to the nuclear deal or to remove sanctions from the regime, and instead invest significant resources — overt and covert, civilian and military — in helping the Iranian minorities free themselves from Persian suffocation.

An excellent idea from Mordechai Kedar, with his 25 years of experience as a senior intelligence officer for the IDF. The Bidenites should stop their policy of capitulation to the Iranians, forget about a return to the disastrous 2015 Iran deal that Iran, whatever it promises, has no intention of observing, keep in place those most effective sanctions, that have been wreaking havoc with Iran's economy, and instead, direct American efforts to supporting the various separatist movements inside Iran — with weapons, with training, with money — whose success will put paid to any further dreams of geopolitical glory by a diminished, even dimidiated, Iran.

After Afghanistan Collapse, Iraqis Fear They Could Be Next

By Bilal Wahab

Perhaps no one is more shocked by the debacle in Afghanistan than the people of Iraq. More than anyone else, they worry their country could face a similar fate.

Even before the U.S. withdrawal morphed into the Afghan state's total collapse and complete Taliban takeover, many Iraqis I talked to during a visit there in July and August were deeply wary of what the impending U.S. pullout would mean for Iraq. Would the United States end its 2,500-troop presence in Iraq too? If it did, would it lead to an Iranian militia takeover, a resurgence of the Islamic State, or a possible civil war?

It reminded them of how, in 2014, the U.S.-trained and equipped Iraqi military and police melted down and lost three provinces to the Islamic State. The United States had withdrawn in 2011 but had to return to Iraq to stop the Islamic State's onslaught and slaughter of Iraqis. Iraqis also fear renewed discussions in Washington and Baghdad over a complete U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. As in 2011, Iran is pressuring the Iraqi government to ask U.S. forces to leave. Just as it was then, Washington may be more than willing to comply.

The parallels between Iraq and Afghanistan are easy to list. Like Afghanistan, Iraq has a divided government that prioritizes patronage politics over competent security force governance and other government services. If anything, the Iraqi government and the collapsed Afghan one competed over which was more corrupt. Like in Afghanistan, the Iraqi government and military are unwilling to stand up to unruly militias threatening Iraq's sovereignty and stability and attacking Iraqis. As in Afghanistan, it's not a matter of ability but of political will—U.S. officials complain Baghdad commands the region's premier counterterrorism service but deploys it only against the Islamic State, not the militias. Like the Taliban, these thuggish militias, despite public and international pressure, are more than willing to patiently strive for power. They're playing the long game with Iran at their backs—while Iraqis doubt the United States will be as steadfast.

Many also fear the withdrawal debate in Baghdad—egged on by Iran—will find an open door in Washington, not least because the team that withdrew from Iraq in 2011 is back in the White House. Iraqis worry the Biden administration could live with an Iraqi government led by militias if they cease attacks on U.S. interests. Many Iraqis fear the implications of the administration's deadline to withdraw U.S. combat forces from Iraq by the end of 2021. To be sure, Washington's shifting priorities and fatigue with Iraq are not just a Democratic position. It was the Trump administration that threatened to shutter the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad after militia attacks on U.S. military and diplomatic personnel increased. Further, the sharp political and policy swings in Washington confuse its friends and partners in Iraq, many of whom have begun looking for alternative foreign patrons—say, Ankara or Abu Dhabi—to counter Tehran's influence.

Despite such real and perceived similarities, Iraq is, of course, a very different country, which gives it a chance to avoid Afghanistan's fate. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq has a

history of robust national institutions. There is U.S. bipartisan support for staying the course in Iraq, leading the anti-Islamic State coalition to keep the terrorist group from resurging and advancing economic relations. Moreover, the United States cannot afford to ignore the threat to the region posed by Iran's expansionist agenda in Iraq. And U.S. interests aside, Iraq has a better chance at curbing militia rule given local antidotes to Iranian influence—including a popular protest movement; outspoken Iraqi Shiite leadership in Najaf wary of losing religious authority to the clerics in the Iranian religious capital, Qom; and Kurdistan leaders who fear they are the militias' next target after the Sunni provinces. Unlike the Taliban, Iraq's diverse militias lack unified leadership and nationwide acceptance. Moreover, the success of the U.S. mission against the Islamic State and al Qaeda in Syria depends on the United States' presence in Iraq.

Still, Iraq could go Afghanistan's way unless both Iraq and the United States recalibrate their relationship. The first order of business is to maintain but also diversify the counterterrorism profile of U.S. commitments in Iraq. As long as U.S.-Iraqi ties hinge on the number of U.S. military personnel, Iran and its proxies will aspire to end the relationship by forcing those troops out. The militias have demonstrated their wherewithal and will maintain their attacks on the U.S. presence, knowing the United States lacks both patience and deterrence.

For the U.S.-Iraqi relationship to endure, it needs to shift its focus toward investing in building Iraqi security forces' military and institutional capacity for counterterrorism and other purposes. Capacity rather than a timeline should be the benchmark for progress. To sustain such a mission, moreover, the U.S. presence in Iraq needs to be depoliticized. Washington needs to clearly communicate that redesignating its military presence in Iraq as an advise-and-assist mission will not mean abandoning Iraq. Crucially, the Iraqi people need to feel the benefits of the relationship in areas like trade, health care, and education. A series of U.S.-Iraqi strategic dialogues have attempted to arrive at such a goal.

Moreover, Washington must not let the Iraqi government off the hook. Iraqis may find solace that Biden seems unwilling to risk images from Baghdad International Airport similar to those we've seen from Kabul. However, U.S. priorities are indeed shifting away from the greater Middle East, and the onus lies first and foremost with the Iraqi government to take responsibility and invest in a robust relationship with the United States. Counterterrorism alone won't sustain the relationship. U.S. messaging should be clear: The transition of its mission from a combat role to an advising one does not mean the withdrawal of U.S. commitments to Iraq or abandoning the anti-Islamic State campaign.

After Afghanistan, Iraqi leaders may complain that the United States has become an unreliable partner. However, seeking to replace it with other patrons—be it Iran, Turkey, or another country—would only deepen Iraqi dependencies on even more unreliable partners. Instead, Iraqis must look to Baghdad for fixes to the government. Finally, the debacle in Afghanistan is a reminder that Washington, Baghdad, and Erbil should recognize pervasive Iraqi corruption as a true national security challenge—and not just some negative side effect of a democratic transition. Washington must therefore demand accountability for the funds and equipment it provides to Iraqi security and Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

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Afghanistan's collapse tells Israel it must defend itself

By James Sinkinson



Every concession Israel has made for peace since the Oslo Accords in 1993 has been based on international assurances that such actions would bolster the Jewish state's security—and that the international community would ensure nothing was permitted to harm the safety of Israelis.

History, however, provides a harder, more sobering lesson.

From the Oslo Accords, which brought Yasser Arafat and tens of thousands of his terrorist friends to Israel, to released Palestinian terrorists who carried out more murderous attacks, and finally, to Israel's Gaza disengagement in 2005, which provoked thousands of rockets attacks, few if any of Israel's concessions—all "guaranteed" by the international community—have increased Israel's security.

The scenes the world witnessed in Kabul as the west, led by the United States, abandoned Afghanistan, allowing the Taliban to sweep across the country, should serve as a refresher course.

During Israel's early years, especially with its stunning victories in 1948 and 1967, the Jewish state was largely abandoned by much of the world to fight its own battles. For many of these years, Israel suffered from an American arms embargo.

The United States tried to remain neutral between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations, all of which preached and sought genocide against the nascent Jewish nation. Intelligence and security experts in the West assumed that Israel would not survive, but were proven dramatically wrong.

After the Six-Day War in 1967, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 242, which became the foundational pillar for the concept of “peace for withdrawal.” The idea, led by the United States and the United Kingdom, was that Israel would retreat from territory gained in its defensive wars against invaders such as Jordan in exchange for some amorphous peace.

Since that time, Israel has retreated from territories many times its own size—from the Sinai, Lebanon, Gaza, and large parts of Judea and Samaria. Following each withdrawal, no border could be described as peaceful. Rocket attacks have regularly emanated from Lebanon and Gaza, and hundreds of Israelis were murdered in terror attacks originating in Judea and Samaria—formerly controlled by Israel but handed over to Palestinian Authority control in the 1990s.

Israel's Gaza disengagement is a good example of American security assurances that never came to pass. As then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said on multiple occasions in the lead-up to the withdrawal, he predicated the plan on promises made by President George W. Bush.

Sharon and other Israeli officials were told that removing all Israelis from Gaza would ensure that it became peaceful and secure, and that should any attacks emanate from there, the United States and its allies would give Israel a free hand to respond as forcefully as necessary. Of course, neither promise materialized, and to this day the Israeli military is hog-tied by hysterical international condemnation every time it tries to defend itself from Hamas terror.

The recent collapse of Afghanistan should be a wake-up call for major allies of the United States, and especially Israel. While the United States and Israel are inseparable allies with strong relations based on shared values and mutual interests, it only goes so far. As former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once famously said: “America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.” In other words, while the United States has strong alliances around the world, its interests trump everything else. This is how every nation should and does act.

The State of Israel should bear this in mind the next time it is pressed to make a concession.

Israel has always taken pride in the fact that it has never asked any foreign army to fight its battles. It understands it must defend itself, by itself. Unfortunately, on far too many occasions Israel has agreed to international forces, who are supposed to impose ceasefires and ensure security for Israel.

First, it was EUBAM—a multinational European force meant to stop arms coming into the Gaza Strip from the Sinai after the disengagement, which ran away at the first sign of threats by Palestinians. In addition, there is UNIFIL—the peacekeeping force in Lebanon which to this day stands by and watches as Hezbollah fields and launches rockets and ground attacks into Israel.

In fact, there are *zero* examples of non-Israeli forces who have helped ensure the safety of Israelis.

Truth is, the United States itself has often been a tentative or unreliable protector. It did nothing to stop Saddam Hussein's development of nuclear weapons in Iraq. Thankfully, Israel took out the Iraqi reactor at Osirak on its own in 1981.

Nor did the United States do anything to stop Iran from massive military build-ups in Syria and Lebanon. Fortunately, Israel has conducted more than 1,000 missile strikes in recent years against Iran and its allies in Syria. Israel is also the only obstacle to the Iran-funded Lebanese Hezbollah army.

No wonder the scenes in Kabul do not shock Israelis, who remember the failed promises from their territorial retreats from Gaza and Lebanon. They have seen how quickly Islamic fundamentalists fill the gap once the West has had enough. This latest example should make them clear-eyed and determined not to rely on the aid and assistance of others—not even their greatest ally, the United States.

As former Israeli ambassador Arthur Lenk tweeted after the fall of Kabul: “The USA is our closest ally. They have been there for Israel time & again over the years. But the horrific events in Afghanistan must be a hard, scary lesson about changing interests & cold, hard calculations. Dangerously, in 2021, self-reliance is more important than ever.”

Israel must return to something approaching total self-reliance. It should maintain its strong alliances with nations around the world, above all, the United States. However, Israel should take definitive steps that ensure its own safety, security and independence.

Israel should be especially sceptical when being pressed by Western powers into further concessions towards the Palestinians. It is certain that no Western nation will raise its fist when Palestinian terrorist groups start launching missiles at Israeli civilians from the West Bank.

Zionism’s mission for the Jewish people—after 2,000 years of dispossession and oppression—is to be completely sovereign in their own ancestral, indigenous homeland. This means taking control of their own future and not relying on anyone else to secure it. It’s a hard lesson, but one we must embrace. The collapse of Afghanistan provides a new dose of reality.

James Sinkinson is president of Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

Iran is racing toward a nuclear bomb, and the Lapid-Bennett government is silent

By Benjamin Netanyahu



Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid have handcuffed Israel to a policy of “no surprises” with the Biden administration and have abandoned the fight for global public opinion.

At the recent commemoration of the anniversary of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's death, representatives of Israel's current government claimed they were following in his footsteps. There is no greater absurdity.

Jabotinsky's diplomatic doctrine focused on two points: The “iron wall” and the “doctrine of pressure.” The governments under my leadership adhered to these two principles for years, while the current government has abandoned them in just four weeks.

First, the “iron wall.” Jabotinsky believed that aggressive and independent projection of Hebrew strength was the only way to stunt our enemies' desire to destroy us until they one day come to terms with our existence.

Sometimes the United States knew about these actions and other times we carried them out without its knowledge and approval. Various American administrations, including the Biden administration most recently, repeatedly asked me “not to surprise them” with actions against Iran. I always refused to make this promise. I always maintained our freedom of action.

I also publicly stated that we would continue doing anything necessary to ensure Israel's security—with or without a nuclear deal between the United States and Iran. Yet, within a week of this government's formation, prime minister-in-actuality Yair Lapid discarded this policy wholesale. He dealt a mortal blow to Israel's freedom of action when he stunningly promised the Americans “no surprises.”

I ask: What will happen if and when the United States returns to the nuclear deal—does anyone think the United States will agree to Israeli military actions that could endanger this deal?

And when Lapid and Bennett inform the United States in advance of a planned military operation and Washington objects, does anyone really believe that Lapid, Bennett, or their friends will green light such an operation regardless?

Thus, on one of the more fateful matters of our existence, Bennett and Lapid turned Israel's iron wall into drywall full of holes.

In terms of the "doctrine of pressure," meanwhile, Jabotinsky espoused a determined and consistent effort across the globe to influence public opinion about Israel, as a means of pressuring Western leaders to support Zionism.

In accordance with this principle, we endeavoured for years to sway American public opinion and persuade important leaders in the United States to oppose the Iranian nuclear program and to impose paralyzing sanctions on Iran.

We did this through countless American media interviews, speeches at the United Nations, and, of course, the U.S. Congress. Our efforts played a role in the previous American administration's withdrawal from the dangerous nuclear deal with Iran and the even harsher sanctions it imposed.

In recent days, my friends in the United States have asked me: Why aren't we hearing the voice of the Israeli government, here in the United States, against the race back to the nuclear deal with Iran? The answer is simple. The government of concession says it plainly: "We will resolve the problems with the United States behind closed doors."

Instead of speaking out publicly and clearly to sway American public opinion in Israel's favour and against returning to the nuclear deal, the current government is doing nothing.

Does the government really think it will be able to convince anyone behind closed doors, or with an occasional tweet? Based on 40 years of experience, I can testify that such things are completely ineffective if unaccompanied by a public, aggressive and prolonged campaign targeting American public opinion.

Only by speaking powerfully publicly will they listen to you seriously privately.

This is what we did when private meetings with world leaders didn't suffice; we supplemented them with global media campaigns and exhausting every important international stage. Across the world—in Washington, Moscow, Beijing, New Delhi and Tokyo, along with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi—Jerusalem's position was heard loud and clear.

And yes, it was heard in Iran as well. Particularly in Iran.

This is the core of Jabotinsky's doctrine of pressure, and it's only taken this government a few days to throw this in the garbage, too. It stems from a lack of understanding or a lack of ability or a lethal combination of the two. No one can hear this government's voice. It has nothing to say, and no one is listening anyway. Like a tree falling in the forest that no one sees, or hears, or cares about.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is the head of the Likud Party and the leader of Israel's opposition. This article first appeared in Israel Hayom.

Israel and Jordan mending relations?

By Israel Kasnett



Jordan's King Abdullah II has often described his country as being wedged between a "rock and a hard place," referring to war-torn Iraq and the Israeli-controlled areas west of the Jordan River. And that may certainly have been true for many years, but now that the United States is withdrawing its troops from Iraq and Israel has a new government, Jordan finds itself facing changed realities along its borders.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid in July met with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi at the King Hussein Bridge, where they announced new agreements on water and trade. It came as news leaked that Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met secretly with Abdullah in Amman beforehand.

Efraim Inbar, president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, believes that while Jordan and Israel could see an improvement in relations with the installation of Israel's new government, "it is not realistic to expect drastic changes," and the relationship "will improve slowly," he says.

He notes that Israel and Jordan are bound by common enemies, such as the Palestinian national movement and fundamentalist terror groups from the east. The two countries are also bound by common interests, such as maintaining a secure and stable border, and adhering to the 1994 joint peace agreement.

For a number of years now, Jordan has been entrenched in crises ranging from a collapsing economy, water scarcity, political instability and even an alleged attempted coup. The king appears to be caught in a Catch-22. If he moves to improve relations with Israel, then he alienates his Palestinian citizens, who make up 70 percent of the country's population, and risks further political strife. If he distances himself from Israel, he invites Iranian influence and risks compromising the security, economic and intelligence ties on which Jordan and Israel cooperate.

According to Inbar, Jordan provides Israel with strategic depth, and Israel provides Jordan with a security umbrella. As such, while Jordan maintains a quiet eastern front for Israel and cooperates on security issues among others, Israel assists Jordan in many ways, including maintaining stability and providing it with water.

Under the newly signed deal, Israel will supply Jordan with an additional 65 million cubic yards of water in 2021, according to Israel's Foreign Ministry. The two countries

also agreed to increase Jordanian exports to the Palestinian Authority from \$160 million to \$700 million.

Bilateral ties are not without problems

Opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu slammed Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett over the deal, saying Bennett “didn’t understand that when he gives him water, Abdullah is giving gas to Iran.”

But Bennett fired back, saying, “You say a leader of Israel must sometimes confront other nations for Israel’s interest. What is the Israeli interest for which MK Bibi Netanyahu destroyed our relationship with Jordan?”

Indeed, the bilateral relationship between Israel and Jordan is not without its problems.

The relationship between Netanyahu and Abdullah grew frosty in recent years, especially during the Trump administration when talk arose of Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and Israel’s ties with Arab Gulf states improved with the Abraham Accords. As recently as March, Abdullah’s son, Prince Hussein bin Abdullah, cancelled his scheduled visit to the Temple Mount due to a disagreement with Israeli authorities over his security detail.

The United States also appears poised to reset its relationship with Jordan. Abdullah is scheduled to visit the White House on July 19, which the Biden administration hopes will “highlight the enduring and strategic partnership between the United States and Jordan.”

Inbar believes that Jordan is “playing a game, and we should learn to live with this game the way we did with Egypt. We need to be fully realistic about the limits of peace with Arab countries.”

Iranian influence into Jordan is ‘radical and shocking change’

According to Edy Cohen, a researcher in inter-Arab relations at the BESA Center at Bar-Ilan University, Jordan seems to be turning away from the Gulf states and towards Iran, which is not a good sign for Israel.

Cohen says Abdullah seems to believe that opening the door to Iran will rescue Jordan from its problems.

As proof, Cohen pointed to the June summit between Abdullah, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhimi and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Baghdad, where they announced an agreement to cooperate on transporting Iraqi oil through pipelines from Iraq through Jordan to Egypt, from where it will be exported to Europe.

According to Cohen, this agreement is simply a fig leaf for Iranian influence. “Iraq is irrelevant, as it is controlled by Iran, so we are talking about Iranian oil,” he says.

In his view, the fact that Abdullah is bringing Iranian influence into Jordan is “a radical and shocking change.”

He also noted that Abdullah visited the grave of Jaffar Ibn Abu Taleb.

Taleb was Muhammad’s cousin, and his shrine is considered holy by the Shi’ite faith. But because the Sunni faith frowns upon visits to gravesites for worship, the practice is banned. King Abdullah’s visit is thus seen as an overture to Iran, according to Cohen.

Like Inbar, Cohen also referred to the “game” that Jordan plays. “Maybe it is just a game in order to blackmail the Gulf countries,” he states. The Jordanians are saying, ‘If you don’t give me what I want, I will turn to the Iranians.’ ”

“This is what happened,” adds Cohen. “Let’s wait a month and see if it actually happens.”

‘Anything that happens in Jerusalem affects Jordan’

Moshe Albo, an expert on the Middle East at the IDC Institute for Policy and Strategy in Herzliya, tells that Jordan “understands that its stability is a strategic asset for Israel, and the last thing Israel wants is Iranian militias or Palestinian terror organizations on the border.”

Albo says the main sticking point between Israel and Jordan is the Palestinian issue: “Anything that happens in Jerusalem affects Jordan. Abdullah’s power derives from his Islamic heritage as a Hashemite and Jerusalem is part of it.”

Albo seems to agree with Inbar and Cohen that Jordan “plays a game” by which it feels it needs to criticize Israel to appease public opinion. “This criticism doesn’t always affect the strategic ties,” he says, noting that the Israel-Jordan relationship is a complicated game of joint interests, appeasing the Jordanian and Palestinian public, with Jordan posturing as the protector of the Palestinians and of the mosques on the Temple Mount.

Albo believes that the new Israeli government is “an opportunity to return to the strategic ties” with Jordan. “It’s important for the leaders to meet,” he says of Bennett’s recent secret meeting with Abdullah in Amman. “It’s important for the leadership to coordinate.”

He says the water deal “is an act of goodwill” on Israel’s part and a message to Jordanians that Israel is ready to improve ties “because we have joint interests, and we want to see the kingdom stable.”

The agreement, he concludes, “is good for Jordan, good for the Palestinians and good for Israel.”

Israel Kasnett is a freelance writer

Lebanon stands at the abyss

By Jacques Neriah



For months, Lebanon has been enduring a dire economic situation; Lebanon's middle class has been wiped out. The country finds itself in extreme poverty, with the former middle class making up part of the 50 percent of Lebanese who have fallen into poverty in the last year. Today, Lebanon experiences shortages in every field of life: empty gasoline stations, barely a few hours of electricity a day, no baby formula, cancellation of night landings at the Beirut International Airport for lack of electricity on the runways, and no medical supplies, forcing hospitals to refuse admissions and close clinics. Physicians are leaving the country by the hundreds, as are all those who can afford to flee.

With formidable inflation accompanied by an almost 100 percent depreciation of the Lebanese lira in relation to the U.S. dollar, the army has been raising funds by providing tourists with \$150 10-minute rides in army helicopters! Campaigns to raise money from donor countries brought little assistance, other than 150 tons of fish from Senegal, which was distributed solely to the presidential guard.

Oil products imported by Lebanon's government find their way to Syria where they are sold, and the monies land in the coffers of Hezbollah. Medicines are imported by Hezbollah from Syria and Iran and sold on the black market without any quality control or supervision. Hezbollah enjoys the porous borders, sending pomegranates to Saudi Arabia filled with amphetamines and other drugs.

Lebanon's central bank is out of reserves, which prevents the importation of goods and subsidization of basic food products. Lebanese are allowed, under very severe restrictions, to draw U.S. dollars from their bank accounts. Withdrawals are limited to \$100 per week.

Lebanon has reached the precipice, and at present, there is no safety net to prevent the fall.

The only political body able to float above this dangerous wave is Hezbollah, because of the financial backing it receives from Iran. Its institutions have transformed into a parallel state that provides food, medicine, hospitals, education and gasoline for its followers. With undisputable powers in the Lebanese political system, Hezbollah, since August 2020, has managed to block all the attempts by Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri to form a government. Hezbollah is preparing for a takeover of the political system.

Israel's Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, proposed on July 6, 2021, the extension of humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. "As an Israeli, as a Jew, and as a human being, my heart aches seeing the images of people going hungry on the streets of Lebanon," said Gantz.

No answer has come yet from across the border.

It is obvious that Israel cannot offer a major assistance package to Lebanon; doing so is beyond its capabilities. However, as it did in Lebanon in the 1970s and at the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Israel can open the "Good Fence," nicknamed the "Fatma Gate," near Metula and offer medical assistance through a field hospital and allow humanitarian goods to flow into Lebanon through the conduit of UNIFIL. In addition to the public relations value of such a move, it would also allow Israel to revive its historic contact with the population of South Lebanon, who may dare to challenge Hezbollah and accept Israeli assistance because of the dire economic and humanitarian circumstances.

Israel is not enough

The solution is not to be found in a small gesture presented by Lebanon's southern neighbour. Lebanon is facing (especially in its northern part) a state of insurgency and civil war. Militias have taken to the streets, and the army has been chased from the streets of Tripoli. All over Lebanon, roadblocks have been established, and demonstrations and angry protests express the Lebanese despair and powerlessness to survive this unprecedented crisis. Lebanon's body politic has proven to be incapable of finding a solution.

The Lebanese confessional (consociational) political formula has failed: first created in 1958, amended after 15 years of civil war in 1990, and today, obsolete. The system must be refurbished, renovated, replaced by something new, innovative and adapted to the reality of the 21st century. The Lebanese politicians, who are, in fact, chiefs of ethnic and religious tribes, have to leave the political scene and allow a massive reform in the body politic.

If Lebanon is to be saved before it sinks in an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, the international community must step in. Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Hassan Diab, appealed to the international community and the United Nations on July 6 to do just that. The powers of the present Lebanese government and president should be commandeered and replaced with the power vested in a U.N.

Security Council resolution for a High Commissioner to rule Lebanon for a set period. This will allow the establishment of a different technocratic government and system of governance and enable the world community to extend economic and financial assistance.

This High Commissioner would be assisted by a massive military presence that would impose—at the price of a military confrontation—the disarmament of all militias—first and foremost, Hezbollah. Without the neutralization of the Hezbollah military machine, it is doubtful that such a reform can be implemented.

Such a precedent occurred in Kosovo, where peace finally was established after the military intervention of NATO forces. For those who doubt the capability to confront Hezbollah, one has to remember that Hezbollah is not the Taliban, and Lebanon, with all due respect, is not Iraq or Afghanistan. All in all, it is a land of 10,452 square kilometers, half the size of Israel, Wales, or New Hampshire.

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Hezbollah-Israel conflict is close

By Brig. Gen. (Res.) Zvika Haimovich



Hezbollah fired 19 rockets at northern Israel on Aug. 6, and IDF artillery units returned fire into Southern Lebanon. The situation has been quiet since, but the idea that the escalation is “behind us” is deceptively misleading.

A more sober assessment of the situation leads to the conclusion that the countdown to a direct Israel-Hezbollah clash has begun, and the Aug. 6 incident has brought us one step closer to that confrontation.

Until now, an unwritten agreement has been in place between Israel and Hezbollah, according to which Lebanon is left outside of hostilities between the sides. Israel reportedly conducts regularly operations in Syria, targeting the transfer of weapons, and those operations harm Hezbollah. When Hezbollah personnel have been killed in Syria, the Lebanese terror organization responded in ways that ranged from laconic to irrelevant.

Yet the August rocket fire is a different case altogether. It began with rockets launched on Aug. 4 targeting northern Israel, by a so-called “rebellious” armed Palestinian group in Lebanon. Israel responded with air strikes in Southern Lebanon—for the first time in many years—and Hezbollah then fired its salvo, claiming formal responsibility for the attack.

This represents a shift, both conceptual and physical, in which operational friction between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon is becoming overt and at a higher intensity than in the past.

This development is being fuelled by four key components that form the larger picture. The first is the presidential changeover in Iran. The installation of Iranian President

Ebrahim Raisi to power forms a new opportunity for the Islamic Republic to signal its intentions in the region.

Secondly, the internal political and economic situation in Lebanon is an inseparable influencing factor. While it is impossible to determine whether Lebanon is collapsing or not, it's clear that events such as the resignation of the Lebanese prime minister, the ever-worsening economic crisis and the failure of Beirut to recover from the August 2020 port blast are increasing pressure on Hezbollah. And when Hezbollah feels that the flames within Lebanon get too hot, it can be expected to redirect them towards Israel to take the pressure off itself.

The third key influencing factor is Iran's ongoing entrenchment program in Syria. The Islamic Republic remains determined to use Syria as a launch pad for pursuing its destabilizing interests and objectives, as well as those of Hezbollah. This creates a constant source of friction between the Iranian axis and the Israel Defense Forces.

Finally, the situation in Gaza is projecting onto events in Lebanon as well. After the May conflict between Israel and Hamas, several key issues remain in dispute, such as the entry of Qatari funds and Hamas's demands for an increased flow of goods into the Strip that it rules. Now, Hamas has a new way of pressuring Israel, without endangering Gaza, by operating from Lebanon with Hezbollah's consent.

Thus, looking at the rocket fire as an isolated incident leads to an inaccurate conclusion. The full strategic picture involves linking all four factors together. Blaming the escalation on "rebellious groups" serves an Israeli interest of playing down the incident, by clearing Hezbollah of responsibility, meaning that Israel does not need to respond more seriously.

Yet rocket attacks cannot happen without the approval of Hezbollah.

Rejecting Hezbollah's equations

The recent developments represent a troublesome attempt by Hezbollah to force its "equations" on Israel, according to which, any Israeli air strikes in Lebanon result in immediate Hezbollah retaliation.

If Israel refrains from launching air strikes in response to future rocket attacks from Lebanon, it will mean that Hezbollah has been able to deter Israel. The need to reject this equation is extremely significant for Israel, which sent the wrong signal after the Aug. 6 rockets by responding only with artillery shells.

If Israel does not nip this equation in the bud, it will enter a tailspin in which Hezbollah, rather than Israel, dictates the rules of the game in the region.

The fact that Hezbollah now possesses some 150,000 rockets and missiles is a fait accompli. The main challenge now for Israel is to prevent the Hezbollah-Iranian program to create precision-guided missile (PGM) production sites across Lebanon, under buildings, near stadiums and next to medical clinics.

Israel has in recent years publicly exposed a number of such PGM sites in order to raise international attention to this dangerous activity, as well as to let Hezbollah know that it is exposed and vulnerable, and to call on it to stop producing PGMs.

Israel's campaign between the wars against PGM activity in Syria is not foolproof, and transfers of such technology to Lebanon continue. Hence, the day where Israel will

have to take action against the Hezbollah-Iran PGM program in Lebanon is drawing closer.

Israel must now prepare for the possibility that a new clash with Hezbollah is closer than ever and to place itself in the position of being able to take advantage of such a clash to target the PGM threat in Lebanon.

The Israeli government must prepare its public for this eventuality, and the military must prepare itself. However, it's also important for Israel to choose its own timing for such an event, rather than be dragged into Hezbollah's preferences.

Such a clash does not automatically mean all-out war, and could take the form of a number of "battle days." Yet even those will not be similar to the recent escalation with Gaza.

While Hezbollah is unlikely to go for its all-out offensive capabilities and flood Tel Aviv with rockets during "battle days," it could fire hundreds or thousands of rockets at northern Israel at ranges that go far beyond the Aug. 6 attack (around 20 kilometers, or 12.5 miles).

In such a scenario, Haifa could become the "Ashkelon" of the north and come under heavy fire. Such a scenario is realistic and not far-fetched.

The time has therefore come for Israel to internalize the new reality taking shape. Sweeping the latest incidents under the carpet as "isolated events" is a strategic mistake that promotes a false narrative.

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Will Lebanon Fall into the Hands of Iran?

By Khaled Abu Toameh



There is growing concern among the Lebanese and other Arabs that Iran is planning to exploit the severe political, economic and financial crisis in Lebanon to complete its takeover of the country. Iran already has a political and military presence in Lebanon through its terrorist proxy, Hezbollah. Pictured: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meets with Hassan Nasrallah, head of Hezbollah. (Image source: khamenei.ir)

There is growing concern among the Lebanese and other Arabs that Iran is planning to exploit the severe political, economic and financial crisis in Lebanon to complete its takeover of the country.

Iran already has a political and military presence in Lebanon through its terrorist proxy, Hezbollah. The current crisis, however, is likely to facilitate Iran's mission of adding Lebanon to the list of countries it already occupies: Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

For several weeks now, the hashtag "# Lebanon is Collapsing" has been trending on various social media platforms, including Twitter. Many Lebanese and Arabs are using this hashtag to describe the dire economic and financial situation in Lebanon and warn of Iran's ongoing meddling in the internal affairs of the country. They seem to fear that that Iran's mullahs are about to instigate instability and chaos in Lebanon as they have done in Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

"The Lebanese people are dying," commented Lebanese social media user Marianne Mouzaya. "No medicine, no hospitals, no electricity, no water, and an almost non-existent purchasing power."

"Lebanese people feel despair about this situation, and they do not believe that anything good will happen soon," according to Ferhat Tutkal, an international affairs

graduate student at the Lebanese American University. "The country suffers from a brain drain, and qualified people leave Lebanon for developed countries that offer a better life. Mass migration is also possible in the future if the crisis continues as it has. Such a situation may affect the balances in the region and cause other problems."

Egyptian writer Ali Masoud believes that the Lebanese have finally realized that Iran and its Hezbollah proxy terrorist group are leading Lebanon toward "humiliation, starvation and an unknown future."

Iraqi political analyst and columnist Farouk Yusef pointed out that "Lebanon today is in its worst phase. For many, there is no Lebanon. A large part of the international community is no longer able to deal with Lebanon as an independent, sovereign state. It is an Iranian protectorate. But Hezbollah sarcastically calls on the world to save Lebanon."

Yusef scoffed at the appeal of some Lebanese leaders to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to rescue Lebanon and said that the request for help should instead be directed to Iran, which is directly responsible for the country's crisis.

"Lebanon will remain deprived of the means of life because Iran, which has tightened its control over the country, is determined to drive it toward annihilation," Yusef wrote. He said that if the Lebanese were aware that Hezbollah was using Lebanon as a launching pad to attack Israel and that they would end up without electricity, water or medicine, they would have preferred that Israel remain in their country.

Roger Edde, a Lebanese lawyer and president of the Lebanese Peace Party, warned that Lebanon will remain a "failed state" as long as it is "occupied" by Iran.

"There is no glimmer of hope in the horizon unless the Security Council declares Lebanon a failed state that is occupied by Iran and its tools," Edde stated.

Echoing the same sentiment, Lebanese social media user Rita Ballan accused Hezbollah of working to "perpetuate the [Iranian] occupation." According to Ballan, Iran and Hezbollah have taken Lebanon back to the stone age, and the Lebanese are now suffering from "isolation, deprivation and humiliation."

Abdel Wahab Badrakhan, a prominent writer and political analyst who previously served as deputy editor of the London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat*, said that Lebanon has "entered the stage of grave imminent danger, not only because the comprehensive collapse continues politically, economically and socially, but especially because the features of the Iranian takeover of the country are becoming clear and confirmed."

Badrakhan too believes that Iran and its Lebanese supporters have chosen "to prolong the financial-economic crisis to facilitate the handover of Lebanon to Iran."

The international community, he noted, has failed to realize that that Lebanon is about to fall into the hands of Iran.

Saudi writer Mishary Dhayidi holds Iran responsible for the unrest and instability in a number of Arab countries, including Lebanon. "What is happening in Iraq and Lebanon and the decline in public services and infrastructure - electricity, fuel, food, medicine, security, and the dominance of the militias over the state, is because of the Iranian Khomeinist regime," he wrote.

He warned that the Biden administration needs to take note that the threat of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons was not the only problem.

"Iran is already very dangerous without a nuclear bomb," he argued. "The region is witnessing a state of chaos and agitation by fundamentalist forces, which threaten all Arab countries without exception."

Lebanese journalist Khairallah Khairallah said that Iran is using Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq as "regional cards" to pressure the Biden administration to return to the 2005 Iran nuclear deal and lift the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic by former US President Donald Trump's administration.

"Iran believes that it has its pressure cards and that the US administration should yield to it," Khairallah cautioned. "The question remains how the international community will deal with the Lebanese situation."

When Khairallah and other Arabs talk about the international community, they are specifically referring to the Biden administration.

The Arabs appear clearly worried about the perceived apathy of the US and other Western powers towards Iran's scheme to extend its control to Lebanon. They seem particularly alarmed that Lebanon will meet the same fate as Iraq, Syria and Yemen - countries that have been riven by years of civil war thanks to Iran's continuous efforts to export terrorism and the "Islamic Revolution" to the Arab countries.

Judging from the remarks of many Arab political analysts and columnists, the message they are sending to the Biden administration is that the mullahs in Tehran are doubly dangerous: they aspire not only to develop nuclear weapons, but also to occupy Arab states.

Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning journalist based in Jerusalem.

Wagner: Scale of Russian mercenary mission in Libya exposed

By Ilya Barabanov & Nader Ibrahim

A BBC investigation has revealed the scale of operations by a shadowy Russian mercenary group in Libya's civil war, which includes links to war crimes and the Russian military.

A Samsung tablet left by a fighter for the Wagner group exposes its key role - as well as traceable fighter codenames. And the BBC has a "shopping list" for state-of-the-art military equipment which expert witnesses say could only have come from Russian army supplies.

Russia denies any links to Wagner.

The group was first identified in 2014 when it was backing pro-Russian separatists in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Since then, it has been involved in regions including Syria, Mozambique, Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

Wagner's fighters appeared in Libya in April 2019 when they joined the forces of a rebel general, Khalifa Haftar, after he launched an attack on the UN-backed government in the capital, Tripoli. The conflict ended in a ceasefire in October 2020.

The group is notoriously secretive, but the BBC has managed to gain rare access to two former fighters. They revealed what type of person was joining Wagner - and its lack of any code of conduct. There is little doubt that they kill prisoners - something one ex-fighter freely admits. "No-one wants an extra mouth to feed."



A Libyan villager shows images of a relative who was killed. The villager says he survived himself by playing dead

This supports other parts of the TV documentary - Haftar's Russian Mercenaries: Inside the Wagner Group - by BBC News Arabic and BBC News Russian. Its other revelations include evidence of suspected war crimes, including the intentional killing of civilians.

One Libyan villager describes how he played dead as his relatives were killed. His testimony helped the BBC team identify a suspected killer.

Describing another possible war crime, a Libyan government soldier also recalls how a comrade, his friend, surrendered to Wagner fighters but was shot twice in the stomach. The soldier has not seen him since, nor three other friends taken away at the same time.

The Samsung computer tablet also provides evidence of the mercenaries' involvement in the mining and booby-trapping of civilian areas.

Placing landmines without marking them is a war crime.

Just hours after the release of the BBC's report into Wagner's activities in Libya, the deputy public prosecutor at the Libyan Military Prosecutor's Office, Mohamed Gharouda, announced that an arrest warrant had been issued for the son of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

According to the order, which was released internally last week, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi is wanted on charges of war crimes committed by the group during Gen Haftar's offensive against the capital Tripoli.

He was arrested during the 2011 uprising in Libya and later sentenced to death in absentia over violence against protesters. In 2017, however, he was released by the militia holding him.

Saif al-Islam has long been suspected of having connections to Russia and the Wagner group, and is believed to be Moscow's favourite candidate to rule Libya.



The revealing Samsung tablet

The tablet was left behind by an unknown Wagner fighter after the group's fighters retreated from areas south of Tripoli in spring 2020.

Its contents include maps in Russian of the frontline, giving confirmation of Wagner's significant presence and an unprecedented insight into the group's operations.

There is drone footage and codenames of Wagner fighters, at least one of whom the BBC believes it has identified. The tablet is now in a secure location.



Military maps in Russian on the Samsung tablet

The 'shopping list'

A comprehensive list of weapons and military equipment is included in a 10-page document dated 19 January 2020, given to the BBC by a Libyan intelligence source and probably recovered from a Wagner location.

The document indicates who may be funding and backing the operation. It lists materiel needed for the "completion of military objectives" - including four tanks, hundreds of Kalashnikov rifles and a state-of-the-art radar system.

A military analyst told the BBC that some of the weapons technology would only be available from the Russian military. Another expert, a specialist on the Wagner group, said the list pointed to the involvement of Dmitry Utkin.

He is the ex-Russian military intelligence man believed to have founded Wagner and given it its name (his own former call-sign). The BBC tried to contact Dmitry Utkin but has received no reply.

And in our visual breakdown of the "shopping list" and another document, the expert says the words Evro Polis and General Director suggest the involvement of Yevgeny Prigozhin, a rich businessman close to President Vladimir Putin.

The US Treasury sanctioned Evro Polis in 2018, calling it a Russian company contracted to "protect" Syrian oil fields that were "owned or controlled" by Mr Prigozhin.

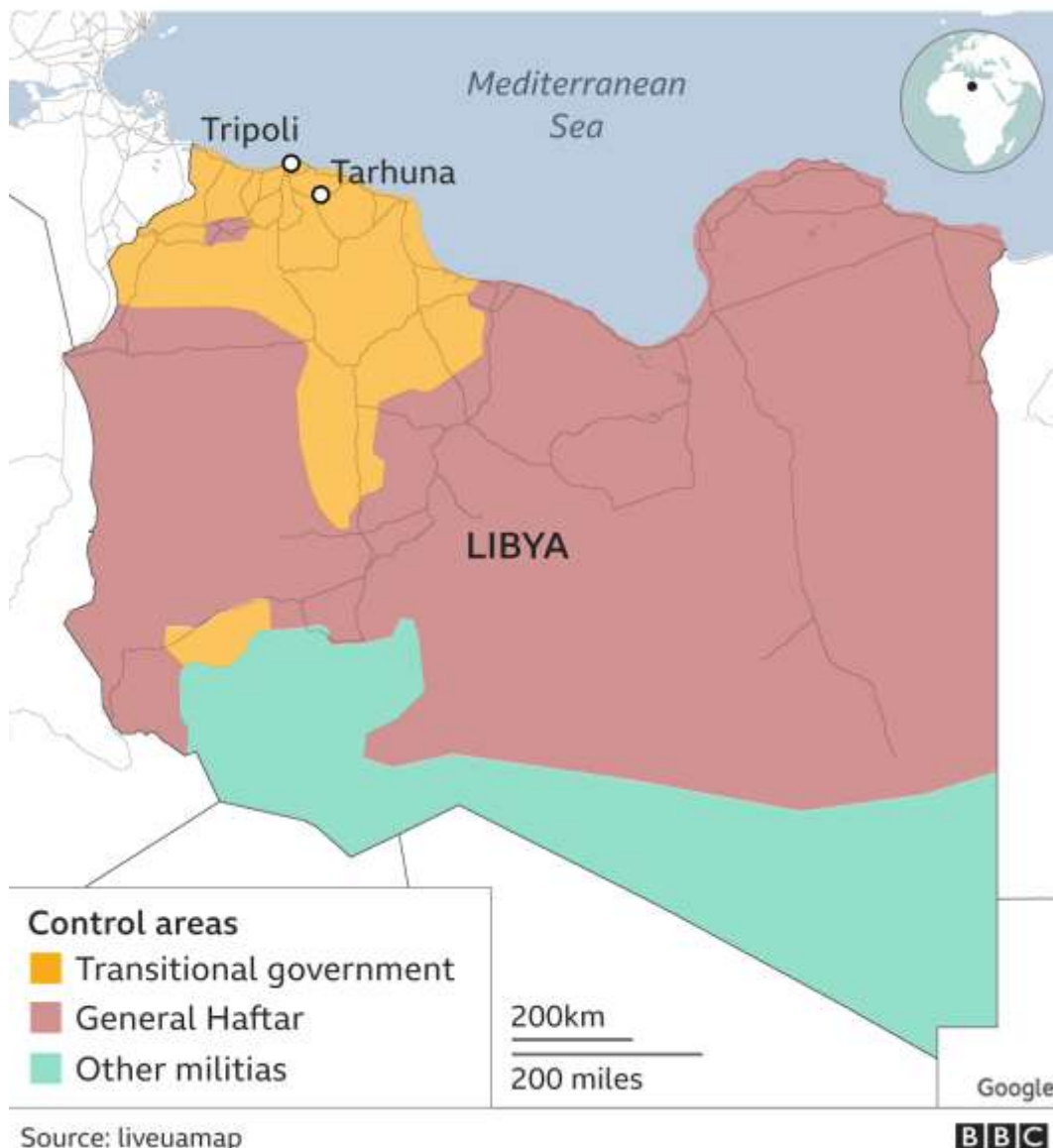
Investigations by Western journalists have linked Mr Prigozhin to Wagner. He has always denied any link to Evro Polis or Wagner.

A spokesperson told the BBC that Yevgeny Prigozhin has nothing to do with Evro Polis or Wagner. Mr Prigozhin commented that he had not heard anything on the violation of human rights in Libya by Russians: "I am sure that this is an absolute lie."

Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the BBC it is doing "its utmost to promote a ceasefire and a political settlement to the crisis in Libya."

The ministry added that details about Wagner in Libya are mostly based on "rigged data" and were aimed at "discrediting Russia's policy" in Libya.

Libya control areas, August 2021



What is Wagner? Its ex-fighters speak

Officially, it does not exist - but up to 10,000 people are believed to have taken at least one contract with Wagner since it emerged fighting alongside pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

About 1,000 Wagner men are estimated to have fought with Gen Khalifa Haftar in Libya from 2019 to 2020.

The BBC in Russia asked one of the ex-fighters to describe Wagner. He replied: "It is a structure, aimed at promoting the interests of the state beyond our country's borders."

As for its fighters, he said they were either "professionals of war", people looking for a job, or romantics looking to serve their country.

The other ex-fighter told the BBC there were no clear rules of conduct. If a captured prisoner had no knowledge to pass on, or could not work as a "slave", then "the result is obvious".

Andrey Chuprygin, an expert working with the Russia International Council, said the stance of the Russian government was - "let them join this thing, and we'll see what the result is. If it works out well, we can use it to our advantage. If it turns out badly, then we had nothing to do with it".

Ilya Barabanov & Nader Ibrahim are journalists working for the BBC.

The Turkey-Qatar axis from the Caucasus to Libya

By Giancarlo Elia Valori



“Turkey has deep ties of friendship and fraternity with Qatar and the relations between the two countries have rapidly improved in all fields... Both countries are actively cooperating in solving regional problems.”

With these words the official website of the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs briefly describes the status of relations between Qatar and Turkey. These relations have influenced and will continue to deeply influence the evolution (or involution) of international relations in a wide region that goes beyond the classic borders of the geopolitical Middle East and stretches from Libya to the Caucasus, passing through Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean basin.

“Friends of hard times”: this is how the Turkish President, Tayyip Recep Erdogan, and the Emir of Qatar, the unscrupulous 40-year-old Tamin bin Hamad al-Thani, define themselves.

In fact, they must be good friends, considering that in 2018 the Turkish President accepted, without blinking an eye, the “personal” gift of a private jet plane worth 400 million dollars generously provided by his young and very rich ally, with whom he has maintained very close relations over the last decade, with face to face meetings on a monthly if not weekly basis.

The liaison between Turkey and Qatar has two very precise dates of reference: December 2010 and June 2017.

After the initial and limited unrest that broke out in Tunisia on the wave of protests against the rising cost of living and for greater democracy, also thanks to the sophisticated and incessant information (and disinformation) strategy of the TV station

Al Jazeera, owned by the Emir of Qatar, the protests spread rapidly to Libya, Egypt and Syria producing upheavals and disruptions that still persist today.

The myth of the “Arab Springs” started thanks to *Al Jazeera*, and to the political short-sightedness and analytical superficiality of the U.S Department of State, led at the time by the “vestal” of politically correct, Hillary Clinton.

It was *Al Jazeera* who inflamed the squares, streets and minds of the whole Arab and Muslim world, calling for rebellion against the “despots” and instilling in the West and in the Euro-American mainstream media the idea that behind the insurgency there was a genuine demand for democracy.

We realised (with difficulty) that things were not as the Qatari broadcaster reported, after a decade of bloody clashes, civil wars and authoritarian coups – all events that showed that the “Arab Springs” were nothing more than the attempt of the most backward part of Islam, gathered around the “Muslim Brotherhood”, to finally take power by overthrowing more or less authoritarian secular regimes, and to replace them with governments based exclusively on the *Sharia*, the Islamic law requiring the strictest compliance with the Qur’an precepts.

It was in that context that the special liaison between Erdogan and al-Thani developed and strengthened. Both of them realised that if they managed to take over the political leadership of the “Muslim Brotherhood” -which was disliked by the more moderate Arab governments in the Persian Gulf – they could become the new key players of Middle East geopolitics.

That prospect led Turkey and Qatar to support the short-lived rise of the “Muslim Brother”, Mohammed al-Morsi, to Egypt’s Presidency in 2012 and to intervene heavily in the Syrian crisis, with economic and military aid, as well as the support of propaganda (always with *Al Jazeera* at work) against the rebel forces opposing Assad’s regime that were rapidly hegemonized and dominated by the Syrian jihadist militiamen of *Jabat Al Nusra* and the Iraqi cutthroats of “Caliph” Al Baghdadi’s Isis.

Turkey and Qatar bet on Assad’s fall and the turning of Syria into an Islamic Republic that could support Turkey’s new hegemonic role in the region, financially backed by the very rich Qatar – a State that with its 300,000 inhabitants was unable to stand out faced with the hegemonic country of the Gulf, namely Saudi Arabia.

Things did not go as desired by the two “friends of hard times”. In Egypt the dreams of Morsi and the “Muslim Brotherhood” were shattered in 2013, faced with the reaction of the military led by General al-Sisi, while in Syria – thanks to Russia’s intervention – Assad still “reigned” even if only on the ruins of a country destroyed by a senseless and ferocious civil war that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths among civilians and the flight of over a million refugees.

The role played by Turkey and Qatar in the Middle East turmoil and the ambitions of the two allies to take the leadership and excel in the most sensitive region of the world, lead us to the second significant date in the relations between Erdogan and al-Thani, namely June 5, 2017. It was the day on which Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt broke diplomatic relations with Qatar. A few days later they gave a very harsh ultimatum to Qatar imposing to minimize relations with the “Muslim Brotherhood” and close the military base of Tariq Bin Ziyad, occupied since 2014 by a contingent of Turkish armed forces. Otherwise very harsh sanctions would be imposed.

With a view to strengthening pressure, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates sent troops to the border with Qatar, stopped flights and land communications while, by decision of the Turkish Parliament, the Turkish contingent was further strengthened.

The sanctions against Qatar were very harsh and only a Turkish airlift could avert a severe food crisis for a rich but powerless people, faced with its neighbours' siege.

The support provided by Erdogan to Qatar, during what was called the "Gulf crisis", negatively and definitively marked relations between Turkey, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, with strong repercussions on trade (a general boycott of Turkish goods was called for) and on the Turkish economy in general, which was negatively affected by the drop in exports throughout the region.

The unscrupulous activism of the Turkish leader, the profligate spending to back the airlift to Qatar and the military engagement in Syria put Ankara's economy into crisis long before the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt in Turkey, with devastating effects on its people's living standards.

Nevertheless, a boycott from the Gulf countries, threats of sanctions from Europe and substantial international isolation have not yet limited the adventurism of the Turkish President who, like an avid gambler, is raising the stakes on several tables in the hope of making up for his losses.

From Libya to Armenia, from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, the Turkish leader keeps on trying to play a leading role, with the support of his friends in Doha.

In Libya he sent his own *Jabat Al Nusra* Syrian soldiers and militiamen to fight alongside the forces loyal to President al-Sarraj, thus forcing his opponent, namely General Haftar, to stop last spring-summer's offensive on Tripoli.

In Libya, Turkish interference caused the harsh reaction of the Egyptian President, al-Sisi, who warned Turks and loyalists not to cross the "red line" west of Sirte, threatening to send ground troops.

In the Mediterranean the crisis is open and far from a solution.

Turkey's designs on the exclusive economic zones off the Turkish part of Cyprus and the Eastern Aegean islands for the exploration and exploitation of underwater gas are harshly and formally contested by Greece and France, while Al Sisi's Egypt has even involved Israel in exploration projects off the Egyptian coast.

In the debate on the borders of gas exploration and extraction areas in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean basin, there is no clear position and commitment by Italy, despite the active presence of ENI in the area, left alone in the difficult Libyan and Mediterranean situation.

While the dossier on the independence of Syrian Kurds – strongly opposed by Turkey but supported by the United States – is still open, the only partial strategic success achieved by President Erdogan's activism has been in Nagorno-Karabakh where, with Turkish military support, the Azerbaijani Muslims have defeated the Armenians on the ground, thus forcing them to surrender portions of territory inhabited by Christians.

However, the Turkish-Azerbaijani success has not been complete, as troops from the Russian Federation have been deployed on the ground, with the belligerents' consent, to guarantee the truce. Hence a Pyrrhic victory, which still enables Vladimir Putin to

control the disputed territory and keep on protecting the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh not only with diplomacy but also with his armed forces.

With Israel in the background, politically strengthened by the opening of diplomatic relations with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, forged under Saudi Arabia's benevolent eye, the power relations from the Black Sea to Libya are taking shape and see the two "friends of hard times" becoming increasingly aggressive but probably even weaker.

Turkey imports 60% of the gas from Russia via Azerbaijan and, until it can exploit the deposits being explored on the Turkish shores of the Black Sea, it will not be able to push too hard with Russia, which has so far not responded to Turkish provocations harshly, but has certainly demonstrated with a Foreign Minister such as Sergey Lavrov that it does close its eyes or bow its head in front of a new Islamist crescent.

With America distracted by the paradoxical outcome of the Presidential elections and Europe prostrated by the health, economic and social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is not surprising that international political adventurers such as Erdogan and al-Thany – who have not hesitated to support the worst representatives of Islamic extremism in the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus and even Europe – and the Qatar-Turkey axis have so far substantially held out despite the many debacles of their allies, due to the common front erected by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.

What is surprising is that these countries have anyway been left alone, with the exception of Russia, France, Egypt and Israel, to face an Islamist axis that would expect to continue to act undisturbed to the Southern borders of Europe and Italy.

Professor Giancarlo Elia Valori is an eminent Italian economist and businessman.

How Abraham Accords have already impacted the Mideast

By Israel Kasnett



One year since the establishment of the Abraham Accords—agreed to by Israel and the United Arab Emirates on Aug. 13, 2020 and then officially signed on the White House lawn on Sept. 15—the Middle East is business as usual, but now greatly improved. The accords established normalized ties between Israel and the UAE, followed soon after by Muslim-majority countries of Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

There was no catastrophic backlash from extremists, as predicted by so-called experts, and the Palestinian issue is still somewhat on the regional backburner. And in the time since, trade between Israel and the UAE alone has reached nearly \$600 million; it's expected to reach \$1 billion by the end of the year. For many observers, the accords are an example of leaders in the Middle East establishing a new reality based on peace and prosperity.

Asher Fredman, CEO of Gulf-Israel Green Ventures (GIGV), has invested his energies in bridging the greentech leadership in Israel with the robust development in Gulf countries to further sustainable development in the region. As the UAE and Bahrain are transitioning from traditional sources of greentech and cleantech, Fredman and GIGV are working to pair interested users with innovative technologies and expertise. Fredman told JNS his goal is “to connect between the green tech and cleantech ecosystems because these are areas in which both countries are focused.”

He said the Emirati leadership adopted a vision “to transform the country into a leader in sustainability and innovation, and obviously, there are lots of exciting Israeli companies in that space.”

He noted that “there are some differences” that exist between the two countries. For example, the Emiratis are more used to dealing with large multinational corporations and not small Israeli start-ups.

“We are very active with our Emirati partners to overcome those barriers so that we can realize the full potential of this cooperation,” he said, adding that the Emiratis “are great people; it’s fun to work with them.”

Fredman also pointed out that Emirati business people “are smart,” but they “also prioritize trust and personal relationships.”

Alongside his work with GIGV, Fredman also established the Israel-Emirates Forum, a grassroots organization for people from different backgrounds to encourage dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

Just this past week, a number of developments highlighted the success the Abraham Accords have brought to the Middle East and North Africa.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid met on Wednesday with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita in Rabat, where he inaugurated Israel’s mission the following day. Lapid’s was the first visit by an Israeli foreign minister since 2003.

Earlier this week, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs signed a historic agreement for cooperation between the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat) headed by Bahrain’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Dr. Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Khalifa, and the Jerusalem Center President, former director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Dore Gold.

Before the signing, Gold said his think-tank decided to “create a network of research institutes in the Persian Gulf region and in other countries.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and Moroccan Deputy Foreign Minister Mohcine Jazouli at a ceremony heralding renewed relations between the two countries in concrete and future ways, Aug. 12, 2021. Credit: GPO/Shlomi Amsalem.

“Our goal is to create an array of cooperation agreements with the countries of the Abraham Accords and to convey a message to the United States, Europe and other countries of a realistic understanding of the challenges that we share—the danger of Iran’s policies in the region and in the world,” he said.

On Thursday, the Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy at the IDC Herzliya also signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation with the Derasat Institute.

‘We created something new here’

Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahum said she was involved in some under-the-radar joint projects with the UAE and decided to set up the UAE-Israel Business Council (of which Fredman is also among the founding members), which according to its website, aims “to build mutually beneficial relationships between Emiratis and Israelis that advance business ties, investment, and understanding.”

Hassan-Nahum said she didn’t even realize the true value of webinars she conducted between Israelis and Emiratis until an Arab from eastern Jerusalem told her he was in a webinar and met Emirati and Israeli partners with whom he plans to build a business.

“People were thirsty for it,” Hassan-Nahum said of the connection between Israelis and Emiratis. “People needed it; it filled a very important need.”

If the past year was any indication, Israel could be looking at a very lucrative future together with its newfound business trading partners.

The coronavirus got in the way of incoming tourism and a defence trade show usually held in the Gulf. If Israel can succeed in overcoming the challenges posed by the global pandemic, the country could see billions more in trade and revenue.

Hassan-Nahum is also responsible for tourism in Jerusalem, and she said she has started to create the infrastructure for “a new type of tourist” Israel has rarely seen, meaning visitors from Gulf countries.

“If we managed to create so many relationships during a global pandemic,” she said of the last year, “I think it bodes well for a future of mutual prosperity.”

“We created something new here,” she said. “We are creating the model for a new type of peace.”

Israel Kasnett is a freelance writer

History Lesson - Biden is Obama 3.0 on Embracing Jihadists

By Pete Hoekstra



President Joe Biden is following in Barack Obama's ill-fated footsteps. In fact, Biden's foreign policy is so unoriginal that you could almost describe the "Biden Doctrine" - as more and more left-wing pundits are calling it - as "Obama on steroids." (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

"Rommel, you magnificent bastard, I read your book!" An unforgettable line from the classic movie *Patton*. George C. Scott, in the title role as the legendary General George Patton, is surveying the battlefield from his command post. He senses that his U.S. forces will rout the Germans, led by the brilliant Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, in this pivotal World War II tank battle in Tunisia. Why would the Americans be blessed with victory? In large part because Patton, himself a military genius, took the time to thoroughly study Rommel's book on battlefield tactics and strategy during the previous war, World War I. Patton believed in the value of knowing his history, learning from his adversaries and avoiding the mistakes of his predecessors.

I truly wish President Joe Biden were interested in learning from history. Tragically, however, the pattern is becoming more pronounced every day: instead of learning from the mistakes of the Obama administration, many of them, by the way, his own mistakes as Obama's vice president, Biden is following in Obama's ill-fated footsteps. In fact, Biden's foreign policy is so unoriginal that you could almost describe the "Biden Doctrine" - as more and more left-wing pundits are calling it - as "Obama on steroids."

As the disaster in Afghanistan sadly illustrates, it is especially Biden's "doctrine" in the Middle East that is nothing other than Obama on steroids, more like a super-charged Obama 3.0 than even Obama 2.0.

Upon taking office approximately seven years after 9/11, Obama wanted to forget the lessons of that terrible September day. He fundamentally changed America's perspective on the challenges and threats to our national security, especially in the Middle East and North Africa region. He embraced many groups and individuals that the U.S. had previously shunned because of their links to radical jihadist movements and theology.

In June 2009, during his first visit to the Middle East, Obama gave a major speech in Cairo. Many may not remember what he said, but they will never forget the symbolism of having leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in the audience sitting in prominent positions. Many governments in the region consider the MB to be a terrorist organization. At the very least, the MB has a history of engaging in violent activities. It is decidedly anti-Western and anti-American. Many MB members are known terrorist leaders, and radical Islamist ideology is widespread in the MB.

Less than two years later, the Obama administration supported the Arab Spring as it rocked the Middle East. As part of its naïve - and ahistorical - utopianism, the Obama administration tolerated the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, because he was an autocrat. Mubarak was certainly far from an ideal ruler, but he was an ally of the U.S. and a powerful force against radical Islamism and jihadist terrorism. In a region full of sworn enemies of Israel and the United States, Mubarak maintained full diplomatic relations with Israel.

When Mubarak fell, Egypt came under the control of the Muslim Brotherhood. It didn't turn out well. Roughly two years later the MB-backed government, which was rapidly proving to be fully as authoritarian and anti-democratic as its worst enemies feared, was itself overthrown.

This scenario repeated itself in Libya when Obama allied with the radical groups that wanted to overthrow Gaddafi. I had met with Gaddafi three times. His history of totalitarian leanings, support of terrorism and government-sponsored terrorist acts was awful. By 2004, however, he was willing to come in from the cold. Realizing it was in his own best interests, Gaddafi credibly told me and other American officials that he would pay reparations to those who died in the downing of Pan Am 103, dismantle his entire nuclear weapons program, and work with the U.S. to fight the threat from radical jihadists. After the U.S., under George W. Bush, renewed diplomatic ties with Libya in June 2004, Gaddafi set about fulfilling the pledges he'd made.

Under Obama that all changed. Ignoring the hard lessons of recent Middle East history again, Obama supported the efforts of radical groups to overthrow Gaddafi. By August of 2011 Gaddafi was gone.

And we all know what happened then. In 2012, U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and two other Americans were killed in Benghazi by the Libyan terrorist group Ansar al-Sharia. Also, secret shipments of arms were sent from Libya to the rebels in Syria who were attempting to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad. Some of the groups receiving arms from Libya, with at least the tacit support of the Obama administration, became the core of what the world would come to know as ISIS.

As if all that weren't enough, Libya lacks a functioning government to this day, ten years after Gaddafi was toppled with Obama's help.

Obama's record in Iran is arguably worst of all. In pursuit of a flawed nuclear deal, Obama lifted sanctions on the radical regime of the mullahs, the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world, with proxies wreaking havoc in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, to name just the most blatant examples. As I write this, Lebanon has sunk into chaos, a failed state. Hezbollah continues to threaten Israel. A devastating war drags on in Yemen. A revitalized, violently anti-American Iran is the dominant power in Iraq. And Biden wants to revive Obama's foolish nuclear deal.

We see it now most clearly in Afghanistan: like Obama, Biden is effectively siding with the jihadists. The results are predictably the same: disaster. We may never know if Biden made some sort of implicit deal with the Taliban. Personally, I believe that the administration had at least an understanding with the Taliban. Biden probably thought he could limit the damage, but was then double-crossed by his jihadist negotiating partners. The people of Afghanistan, as we are seeing, will suffer significantly. The U.S. will be at greater risk from reinvigorated radical jihadist movements, not only the Taliban itself but also al-Qaeda and ISIS, who might well now have a new home base in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

I don't know if Biden cares about history, but he certainly doesn't understand it. How can he change course? Here are three must-do steps to implement right now. The Biden administration must:

1. Refuse with absolute consistency to work with radical Islamist groups. Exceptions to this rule must be limited to cases of absolute and immediate necessity. Never trust and always verify, verify, and verify.
2. Step up personal engagement with our allies at the highest level. This must be done by the president himself, not just by the secretary of state or the vice president. Our allies' confidence in America, and specifically this president, has been shaken severely.
3. Send powerful messages of support to Taiwan, Ukraine, Israel and our allies in Asia such as Japan and Australia especially. These are the partners most at risk because of Biden's failure in Afghanistan, and his inadequate responses to China and Russia, our other greatest adversaries.
4. Make it clear, now that the U.S. is at a much greater risk than just a few weeks ago, that any attack against the U.S. will be met with the harshest response.

To take these steps in a noticeable and credible manner will not be easy, especially given the skewed worldview of the Biden administration and its progressive base. But it must try.

The alternative is not pretty, as we are already seeing. To paraphrase Patton, we've already read the Obama playbook that Biden has been following so far. America didn't like it then, and it won't like it now.

Pete Hoekstra is a former Representative in Congress from Michigan. He served as the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. More recently he was U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Biden Brings Extremism, Terrorism Back to Life

By Khaled Abu Toameh



As the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas is celebrating the "defeat" of the United States in Afghanistan, the Arabs seem worried that they will be the ones to pay the price by being targeted by terrorist groups, including Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.

Commenting on the withdrawal of US troops and the speedy Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, various Arab political analysts, writers and journalists said that they have no doubt that the region is headed toward a new era of extremism and terrorism.

The Iranian-backed Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) said that they were emboldened by the "defeat" of the US and have called for stepping up the fight against Israel. "The demise of the American occupation of Afghanistan is a prelude for the demise of all the forces of oppression, first and foremost the Israeli occupation of the land of Palestine," Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said during a phone call to Taliban leader Mullah Baradar to "congratulate him on the alleged victory against the US."

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the second largest terrorist group in the Gaza Strip after Hamas, also issued a statement "congratulating the dear Afghan people on the liberation of the Afghan lands from the American and Western occupation." PIJ expressed hope that all Muslims would one day be united "under the banner of Islam to liberate Palestine and the Al-Aqsa Mosque."

The two Palestinian terrorist groups are happy to see the US weak, humiliated and retreating. They despise the US because of its long-standing and traditional support for Israel. As far as the Palestinians are concerned, "the friend of my enemy is my enemy". This view also appears the reason Hamas and PIJ do not differentiate between Israel and the US. Hamas and PIJ are also now probably hoping that all the jihadi groups will get together to help the Palestinians eliminate Israel.

For the first time in several years, the jihadis sense US weakness, confusion and lack of vision under the Biden administration. The Arabs are warning that this weakness and uncertainty will plunge Afghanistan and the whole Middle East into a bloodbath.

"We are witnessing the creation of a malicious momentum to revive the extremist Islamists again, and no party will be spared from this momentum, and we, the Arabs in particular, the Gulf States, will be targeted," wrote Saudi writer Mishary Dhayidi. "Who released the beast from its cage and for what purpose? We have returned to square one."

Saudi political analyst Abdullah Bin Bijad Al Otaibi predicted that the Biden administration's steps in Afghanistan will lead to the revival of terrorism and the drug trade, as well as strengthening the extremist ideology of the terrorist groups in the Middle East.

"The revival of terrorism will be an important part of the fundamentalist era not only in Afghanistan, but throughout the Islamic world," Otaibi cautioned. "Afghanistan will once again become a safe haven for all fundamentalists and terrorists, from the Muslim Brotherhood to Al-Qaeda."

The Arab and Islamic countries, he said, "must prepare for the worst in the near future, and any complacency with Islamist groups, organizations, activities, discourse and ideology will have dire consequences." Otaibi further warned that social media will become an even greater hotbed of incitement and recruitment, and new mechanisms will be established to raise funds for the terror organizations.

"Some Arab and Islamic countries will be targeted if the terrorist groups start mobilizing their members and tools across the world," Otaibi noted.

Jameel Al-Theyabi, a Saudi journalist and political analyst, pointed out that American security experts believed the Taliban would not be able to enter Kabul for at least a month. Theyabi warned that the Biden administration's actions in Afghanistan will open the door for a new global security crisis.

"Let us recall scenes of hesitation and fluidity in the positions of President Barack Obama, which ended with the handing over of Iraq and Syria to Iran," he wrote.

"Today, it can be said that the administration of US President Joe Biden took a weapon and shot itself in the foot. Afghanistan is now again in the grip of the Taliban because of the recklessness of the US withdrawal, which means a threat to the security of the whole world because of the Taliban's support for extremist and terrorist movements and groups. Who can forget that the Taliban used to host Al-Qaeda and its former leader, Osama bin Laden, and is still allying with it and hosting its elements?"

According to Theyabi, in addition to concern that Afghanistan will be plunged into a violent civil war, the fear is growing that Afghanistan will return to what it was - a stronghold of extremism and terrorism, and a haven for jihadist movements. "These are grave dangers that the United States and the world will not be able to ignore, no matter what," he said.

"What is happening in Afghanistan, which is currently under the control of the Taliban, presents a serious challenge to the entire world. The United States withdrew from it to open the door for its enemies and opponents to fill the vacuum, with all that this implies of influence, hegemony, and a threat to the region and the world. If we assess

the situation, we will find that the forces that will replace the US there are: Russia, China, Pakistan, and of course Iran. Russia and China are driven by the desire to exploit the vast mineral wealth of Afghanistan. As for Pakistan, it is searching for strategic depth along its long border with Afghanistan. This strategic depth would block the way for India to reach any alliance with Afghanistan."

The Saudi analyst added that "it is certain that the world is entering a dark tunnel and an insecure future with the return of Afghanistan as a gathering point for terrorist groups."

Monir Adib, an Egyptian expert on Islamic movements and global terrorism, said that many countries had turned a blind eye to the Taliban's cooperation with Al-Qaeda.

"Afghanistan has become a haven for Islamist organizations, and international behaviour in general, and reflects the extent of the crisis in dealing with the escalating danger from Afghanistan and its impact on world security... The escalating threat of terrorism from Afghanistan appears to be taking place with the support and patronage of major countries, or at least by turning a blind eye to the activities of violent and terrorist organizations, which requires Arab and international solidarity to confront the threat of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda together."

Adib called for a "strategy to confront violent groups and extremism, and also to confront the countries that support these organizations, despite the complexity and difficulty involved."

Another prominent Egyptian writer, Ahmed Al-Shamy, pointed out that while the Taliban and their friends are "dancing with joy," the world is "crying in fear of the possible terrorism" that would come from Afghanistan.

"The Taliban has gained the kiss of life from the Americans, and everyone is now engaged with it and ready to deal with it," Shamy wrote.

"Will the Taliban stop adopting terrorism? I am certain that this is impossible in light of the movement's endorsement of terrorist organizations in the world, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra after they have become a safe haven for them. Rather, the Taliban will provide all support to these organizations during the coming period to reproduce more extremist organizations and terrorists who terrorize all countries of the world under the pretext of establishing the Islamic state. Therefore, all countries of the world, especially in the Middle East, must search for new scenarios to stop the possible terrorism that has begun to appear in Afghanistan."

The initial reaction of the Arabs to the last US debacle in Afghanistan shows that the Arab and Islamic countries are extremely worried about the Biden administration's empowerment of Islamist terrorist groups. Thanks to the Biden administration, say the Arabs and Muslims, terrorist groups that want to wage jihad (holy war) against the US and Israel and threaten the security and stability of many Arab countries have firmly increased their foothold in the Middle East.

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The Taliban's Careful Cheerleaders: Pakistan's Statements on the Fall of Kabul

By Krzysztof Iwanek



As the tragedy of the Taliban onslaught in Afghanistan unfolded over the past few weeks, culminating with their entrance into Kabul on August 15, some could have asked how the group achieved such success on its own. One of the many reasons is that the Taliban were never alone. They have always been supported by Pakistan – the country's successive governments, its armed forces, its military intelligence. The Taliban leadership has long been based in Pakistan, even when Islamabad was receiving U.S. money and weapon systems for helping Washington fight the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The evidence to prove this collusion is strong and one does not have to reach far into recent history to find instances of it. In July 2021, a famous Pakistani journalist and expert on the Taliban, Ahmed Rashid, declared that Taliban fighters not only had sanctuary in Pakistan, but even recuperated in Pakistani hospitals. And as Aqil Shah wrote a few days ago for Carnegie:

The Taliban can freely move men and materiel into Afghanistan [from Pakistan][...] and communicate with their operational commanders in Afghanistan; in some instances, they have even used Pakistani passports to travel abroad. They also reportedly own lucrative real estate holdings and have significant business interests in the Pakistani cities of Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta.

Now, as it appears that the Taliban are taking full power in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government will no longer have to pretend. It is thus worth following its changing rhetoric to hold the establishment in Islamabad accountable. As the Taliban marched across Afghanistan in recent weeks, Pakistani establishment figures made various

comments that put on display Islamabad's diplomatic end goals, and the narrative it dressed its politics in.

It should be stressed that Pakistani politicians and officials did not directly defend the Taliban. Unsurprisingly, both Pakistan's national security adviser and foreign minister stressed that their government supported a peaceful resolution to the war in Afghanistan, and added that the process should be "Afghan-owned and Afghan-led." These were noble-sounding words, and statements on which all stakeholders for years have agreed, including other foreign powers. Both Pakistani officials also stressed that they would accept any agreement that the Afghans work out between themselves. Moreover, a statement issued by Pakistan's National Security Committee after the fall of Kabul (and described by Umair Jamal in an article for Business Recorder) confirmed Pakistan's position of non-interference in Afghan affairs.

But what seemed to be a gold coating of splendid neutrality falls away on further examination, shattered by other statements made.

When questioned more directly about their attitude toward both the Taliban and Ashraf Ghani's government, the comments by Pakistani politicians turned out to be built on suggestions and evasions. Together, these formed a mist-covered narrative that redirected part of the blame and diluted responsibility. The scattered remarks may be generally grouped into two categories:

(1) Attempts to weaken global criticism of the Taliban. One case of this were comments made suggesting that Taliban were not the only force responsible for the rising levels of violence – a statement made by Pakistan's foreign minister in June (in an interview with Lotfullah Najafizada for TOLO News). Another was the claim that during the current offensive the Afghan population welcomed the Taliban, rather than opposed them – a declaration uttered by the Pakistani prime minister's national security adviser, Moeed Yusuf (in an interview with Becky Anderson for CNN). Similar statements put a part of the blame for rising violence on the Islamic State or India.

(2) Attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the Kabul government. These were much more vocal than the hazy statements on the Taliban. Yusuf questioned Ghani's mandate to rule in the same interview mentioned above. Two days later, Pakistan's Minister of State for Climate Change Zartaj Gul Wazir went much further by cheering the fall of the Kabul government as soon as the Taliban entered the capital. Even though Gul Wazir deleted her tweet within an hour, the next day the choir was joined by the chief conductor himself: Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan. In a speech on a seemingly unrelated subject, recorded by Samaa TV less than 24 hours after the Taliban sat down in Kabul's presidential palace, Khan declared that "just now they have broken the chains of slavery in Afghanistan."

As usual, former Pakistani military officers were even more direct and radical in their statements than the country's politicians. Abdul Qayyum, a retired lieutenant general, declared that it was the U.S. which was responsible for breaking international law and having a "rogue army," and that Islamabad should be "the first country in the world to recognize the new government in Afghanistan." (The statement was published after Ghani's government capitulated, as quoted in an article by Shakeel Ahmed for Dawn.) Another former general, Naeem Khalid Lodhi, tweeted that:

Taliban Victories are not Military [...] but Political. [...] There is little bloodshed. Afghan Taliban apparently enjoying local support. People seem to be fed up of Occupation Forces and corrupt puppet regime.

Considering these two approaches together allows us to see the crux of the matter, and to predict what ground Islamabad is laying for future steps. If Pakistani politicians expressed doubts about Ghani's mandate to rule, if they were openly glad to see his government collapse, and if they hinted at the Taliban's mandate by way of their relatively easy military success, they have no right to claim neutrality; their statements contradict the promise that they would accept any decision the Afghan people would make.

Ghani's position has indeed been shaky and questioned by many (not just in Pakistan), and his electoral success had been contested. But with regards to the peace process the essential factor was that for years the Taliban refused to negotiate directly with the Kabul government, which they declared to be a puppet installed by a foreign power. Thus, Pakistan's attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the Kabul government played into the hands of the Taliban. In other words: Pakistan indeed supported an "Afghan-led" process, but provided it would be led that by *their* Afghans.

That the Islamabad government is still calling for a peaceful solution, even though the war seems to be over, is also a cunning approach. Having so long pretended not to support the Taliban, Pakistan's government as a whole now wisely chooses not to simply say: "These are our people, we are happy to see them win, and we will endorse their government."

What happened in Kabul on August 15 appears to have been much more of a one-sided capitulation than a peace settlement, but Pakistan will present it as the latter. For this to happen, it was essential for the Taliban not to simply storm the capital and physically eliminate the government (this they have also avoided for other reasons, of course) but to sit down for final talks in Ghani's palace, or something like that. Since the Taliban had the capital surrounded, it was perhaps nothing more than an acceptance of Ghani's giving up and stepping down. But for the sake of Pakistan's narrative this will be enough to declare that the peaceful transition of power has been initiated.

Moreover, as a few military commanders and warlords did stand down and negotiate surrenders, the Taliban may offer them positions. This will allow Pakistan to declare of the future regime that it is the inclusive government they wished for Afghanistan to have, a representation of various stakeholders. The process of accommodating a few turncoats to the victors' new administration may be presented by Pakistan as a national unity government, or in similar terms. In the end, Islamabad is more than likely to recognize Taliban rule in Kabul as legitimate, and to establish diplomatic relations with it (as it did in the past). But Pakistan will also claim the government was formed thanks to peaceful negotiations and that it represents more than just the Taliban. This, in turn, will be Pakistan's line of defence against international repercussions, such as diplomatic criticism or the prospect of being sanctioned by multilateral financial institutions for supporting a terrorist organization.

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The West must Sanction Pakistan for its Support of the Taliban

By Hugh FitzGerald



As Taliban insurgents swept through Afghanistan this month on their brutal quest to return that country to the seventh century, ceremonies were held in neighboring Pakistan to commemorate the 6th anniversary of the death of a man dubbed “the father of the Taliban.”

Gen. Hamid Gul, who died in 2015, was the former head of Pakistan’s terror-soaked spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Much of his career was spent fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s when the ISI worked closely with the American CIA. With the collapse of the Soviet occupation, swiftly followed by the collapse of the actual Soviet Union, the ISI began backing Islamist groups across the region, from Kashmir to Afghanistan, where the Taliban first came to power in 1996, about two years after they were fostered by the ISI’s secret Directorate “S” with funding, weapons, and military training.

The Pakistani ISI began in the 1980s to recruit and train jihadis among the Afghan refugees who had fled to Pakistan to escape the Soviets. Given weapons by Pakistan, these refugees – called the “Taliban” after the word “Talib” or “student,” for many of its recruits were found studying in madrasas – went back to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Infidels who had invaded Afghanistan. At this point, the ISI was a collaborator with the CIA, in a shared attempt to push the Soviets out of Afghanistan. The Americans failed to grasp that these Islamic groups were just as hostile to American infidels as they were to the Russians. The Taliban were supplied with weapons, military training, and money by the ISI. And after launching attacks inside Afghanistan, they could always return to the safety of Pakistan, to regroup and replenish their supply of weapons.

The tributes to Gul in Pakistan last week cantered on a television interview he gave just more than a year before he died,[that is, in 2015] in which he predicted the humiliation of the U.S. military and its Afghan government allies at the hands of the ISI's Taliban proxies. "When history will be written, it will be said that ISI defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan with America's help," Gul remarked. "But it will also be added that ISI defeated America (in Afghanistan) with America's help."

That comment that General Gul made in a television interview should have been given close attention in the Pentagon, and caused alarms to be sounded in official Washington, for here was a leading general gleefully foreseeing the defeat – by the Pakistani ISI, working through its proxy, and ally, the Taliban – of the Americans in Afghanistan. But instead, it was ignored. And Pakistan continued to be regarded, despite all the evidence to the contrary, as an American ally.

Gul's devotion to the Taliban exemplified the divide within Pakistan's intelligence establishment over its relationship with U.S. agencies. "Pakistan's alliance with the U.S. against the Taliban irked many former army generals who had supported the Islamists," Farooq Sulehria, a Pakistani expert on the Taliban, explained to the German broadcaster DW shortly after Gul's death from a brain hemorrhage. "These divisions within the army still persist. While some military generals think that a 'double game' with the West—kill some Taliban and save some—is a good strategy, people like Gul wanted Islamabad to support Islamists wholeheartedly.

Pakistan has always been on the side of the Taliban. The only difference that arose was between those ISI generals who thought it wise to pretend to be against the Taliban, feigning an alliance with the U.S. against the Taliban – even killing some, so as to satisfy the West – and keep American money and weapons flowing to Islamabad, and those generals who felt they needn't dissimulate, but could support the Taliban and still receive American military aid.

By 2021, it was clear that Gul's position had won out, as evidenced by the horror of the revived Taliban conquering cities like Faizabad, Kandahar, Mazar e Sharif and finally Kabul, 20 years after they were banished from the Afghan capital. That fact should stick in the craw of most Americans, because we've been pouring aid money into Pakistan year upon year, despite the nefarious role played in Afghanistan by its military and espionage services. In 2020, the U.S. was once again the top donor country to Pakistan of financial assistance that always takes the form of a grant, so as not to add to Pakistan's debt burden or balance of payments struggles.

Yet from our point of view, this was hardly money well-spent.

According to Chris Alexander, who spent six years as Canada's Ambassador to Afghanistan followed by a stint as a U.N. envoy, the Taliban's return represents a Pakistani invasion. "Apart from being Pakistan's mercenaries, the Taliban are U.N.-listed terrorists," Alexander recently told an Indian newspaper. "Anyone cozing up to them is playing a dangerous game."

Having spent six years in Afghanistan as the Canadian ambassador, Chris Alexander was well aware of Pakistan's duplicitous support of the Taliban – "cozing up to them" is how he put it – and warned that this was a "dangerous game." Presumably he meant that a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan could lead to a similar victory in Pakistan by that country's most fanatical Muslims.

Large and growing segments of public opinion have grasped this reality. In an interview with Foreign Policy magazine, Pakistani Ambassador to the United States Asad Majeed Khan flatly denied that Islamabad was still supporting the Taliban, going on to make the laughable claim that Pakistan is “a free and democratic country, and there are a whole range of views for and against the policies of the government. But when asked what exactly Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan had meant when he gushed that the Taliban had “broken the shackles of slavery,” the good ambassador answered only that it was “really hard to keep track” of what gets reported on social media, before offering the reassurance that Pakistan wants “inclusive” government in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. denies that Pakistan any longer supports the Taliban, and even more absurdly, claims that Pakistan is a “free and democratic country,” when everyone knows there is no freedom of the press, no freedom of speech, nor of assembly, and no freedom of religion, as those freedoms are understood in the “free and democratic” countries of the West.

While the civilized world is appalled at the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban fanatics, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan has described the Taliban as having “broken the shackles of slavery.” Asked about this astonishing remark, the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. sidestepped the question, saying only that it was “really hard to keep track” of what is reported on social media – meaning “you mustn’t believe everything that is claimed to come out of Pakistan” and then said that Pakistan wants “inclusive” government in Afghanistan, which must be an allusion to the Shi’a Hazara, whom Pakistan presumably hopes will be represented in Islamabad, rather than being massacred at the hands of the Taliban, as happened before the Americans arrived in 2001.

Nobody should be fooled by these rather amateur attempts to prettify the historically destructive role played by Pakistan in Afghanistan. To many Americans, the events of the last month suggest that we sacrificed troops and spent billions of dollars on a country that is no more united in purpose now than it was 20 years ago, in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda, the Taliban’s partner in crime. But from the perspective of ordinary Afghans, that is a harsh judgment on the quiet progress they have made.

That “quiet progress” is, however, easily undone. Life expectancy rose by ten years between 2001 and 2021 mainly because there was relative peace for 20 years when the Western allies kept control of the country. Now that the Taliban’s bloodletting – despite its protestations of being more tolerant and less bloodthirsty than when it last held power, in 2001 – has resumed, expect more conflict, and earlier deaths. And the army of Western medical personnel who descended on Afghanistan during the past two decades and helped lengthen the life expectancies of Afghans, have now fled the country, along with many of the Afghan doctors they trained, which will cause a reversal of that trend.

Life expectancy has risen by 10 years, to the age of 65—still woeful, by international standards. When the United States invaded, little more than 20 percent of Afghan children were enrolled in primary school, a figure that now stands at 100 percent. Literacy among female adults has risen from 17 percent to 30 percent and will likely recede once again as soon as the Taliban reimposes gender apartheid by excluding girls from school.

Here, too, progress achieved can be easily undone. The Taliban is likely to spend less on regular schools and spend more on a network of madrasas; adult women, inferior creatures according to Islam, will no longer be the object of special literacy campaigns; they will again be condemned to being largely unlettered mothers and wives; the offices where women had worked, even unhijabbed, will now be closed to them as they return to their traditional functions. As for higher education, expect the Taliban to again make it inaccessible to women.

Most of all, Afghans overwhelmingly reject the regime that has effectively been imposed upon them by the U.S. withdrawal on the one hand, and Pakistani support for the Taliban, backed politically by Russia and China, on the other. "While generally conservative in their Muslim faith, Afghans have consistently demonstrated in poll after poll that they want nothing to do with the pathological pseudo-theology the Taliban continue to enforce wherever they gain ground," the Canadian commentator Terry Glavin, a frequent visitor to Afghanistan, observed in the National Post. "The latest Asia Foundation polling shows that 82 percent of Afghans say they have 'no sympathy' whatsoever for the Taliban."...

82 percent of Afghans now say that they have "no sympathy" for the Taliban, but that will not stop the violent and fanatical group from holding the country firmly in its grip, just as it did before 2001. The Taliban will not hesitate to rule by extreme violence; some may remember the stadiums in Kabul and Kandahar that were full of people who were forced to watch the mass executions, both by stoning and by gunfire, of those deemed to be "enemies of Islam" by the Taliban. Others who were convicted of theft had their limbs cut off in front of the crowds; their arms and legs were then hung up in the stadium as a stark warning to the people in the stands.

It is time to recognize Pakistan's long and duplicitous role in supporting the Taliban with money, weapons, and secure training camps. And having finally done so, the Americans should give up any remaining illusions about Islamabad ever being a "friend." Instead, Washington has to apply pressure to Pakistan. First, it should put sanctions on the Pakistani elite, preventing them from sending assets abroad, to buy homes in Europe and North America or to send their children to be educated abroad. All of their assets in the West could be frozen. That should get their attention. Second, along with those sanctions directed at individuals, the U.S., which is "the largest export destination for Pakistani goods," could refuse to buy Pakistani goods. Third, the American government can make it difficult, even impossible, for Pakistani-Americans to send money back to relatives in Pakistan; those remittances are an economic lifeline to many of those family members. Americans can be prevented by law from investing in Pakistan. Such measures, combined with a halt to the nearly \$3 billion in annual economic and military aid that the U.S. has continued to lavish on Pakistan, should bring Pakistan quickly to its knees. And that, in turn, should persuade the Pakistanis to pressure the Taliban, so that it does not engage in a reign of terror against its perceived enemies, and even more importantly, so that it does not again give other Islamist groups, such as ISIS and Al Qaeda, refuge in Afghanistan.

It just might work. And it all begins with the Americans understanding that Pakistan is not now and never has been our friend, and that the only way to change its behaviour, so that is through financial pressure.

Americans don't want to be in Afghanistan. They are sick of the whole business and know they should have left the country long ago. Still, they would like to ensure that the Taliban does not institute a reign of terror, and what is even more important, that

the Islamic groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS are not again given shelter and a base of operations in Afghanistan.

The only country that can pressure the Taliban is its oldest ally, Pakistan. And America can make life very difficult for Islamabad. It can end over \$3 billion in annual economic and military aid. It can end remittance payments from Pakistani-Americans. It can prohibit American investments in Pakistan. It can place economic sanctions on members of the Pakistani elite, making life very difficult for them.

All of this just might work. But it can only happen with the recognition that Pakistan is our enemy. Can the American foreign policy establishment now admit it has been wrong about that country for the past seventy years?

Hugh FitzGerald is a foreign affairs commentator.

Marxist, Extremist Support for Palestinian Terrorism Leads to Jew-Hated

By Guy Millière



Recent anti-Israel protests all over the Western world indicate that those imbued with Jew-hate no longer hesitate to make false and delusional accusations against Israel and Jews - sadly, a long tradition in Europe. Jew-hate is out in the open now, along with a readiness to physically attack Jews. Pictured: Policemen guard the synagogue in Gelsenkirchen, Germany during a vigil of the Initiative against Anti-Semitism Gelsenkirchen on May 14, 2021, the day after a highly aggressive group of at least 200 people brandishing Palestinian and Turkish flags and shouting anti-Semitic slurs gathered in front of the house of worship. Police were deployed to prevent the mob from entering the building. (Photo by Ina Fassbender/AFP via Getty Images)

An organization called The Palestinian Solidarity Campaign organized a protest against Israel. 180,000 people turned up. Placards compared Israelis to the Nazis, and black flags of jihadist movements, accompanied by cries of "Allahu Akbar", fluttered alongside the Palestinian flags. "Israel, the new Nazi state", some read; and "Nazis are still around, now they call themselves Zionists". This kind of comparison is now common among many in Europe who also seem sympathetic to Marxism, in which there always has to be an "oppressor" and "oppressed", never a "win-win" or a "making the pie bigger." Do these new Marxists, who compare Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, to the Third Reich and the Zionists to the Nazis, really not know what the Nazis did to six million Jews, or what Communists and Marxists today, in China, Russia, Cuba, or Venezuela, are still doing to their own citizens?

The protesters in London shouted openly anti-Semitic slogans. One demonstrator, Tariq Ali, a member of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review*, addressing the crowd, implied that the Jews deserve a second Holocaust: "They have learned nothing from what happened to them in Europe. Nothing". Another man exhibited a drawing of

Christ carrying the cross, along with the words: "Do not let them do the same thing again". A few days earlier, when a convoy adorned with Palestinian flags drove through a Jewish area in North London, shouts from loudspeakers included "Free Palestine", "F**k the Jews", "F**k their daughters", "F**k their mothers" and "Rape their daughters".

In Paris, the same day, protesters shouted similar slurs. Since the French government had banned the demonstration and had asked the police to disperse all groups carrying Palestinian flags, the demonstrators numbered "only" a few thousand. The French interior ministry said the ban was necessary to avoid "ugly incidents", as when, in 2014, in the heart of Paris's Jewish district, kosher restaurants and a synagogue were attacked.

In Berlin, a demonstration had been organized a few days earlier, on May 16. As in London and Paris, protesters also denounced Israel - and Jews. Antonia Yamin, an Israeli television journalist reporting on the protest, was assaulted with firecrackers by demonstrators who heard her speak in Hebrew.

Similar protests - in Stockholm, Brussels, Rome, Madrid, Warsaw, Los Angeles and New York - indicate that all over the Western world, those imbued with Jew-hate no longer hesitate to make false and delusional accusations against Israel and Jews - sadly, a long tradition in Europe. They no longer bother to hide it. Jew-hate is out in the open now, along with a readiness to physically attack Jews.

Although the organizers of these protests described them as "pro-Palestinian", they soon became more pro-terrorism. When, on May 11 and for the next 10 days, Hamas - on the list of terrorist organizations in the European Union, the United States, and other nations - began firing more than 4,000 rockets and missiles at Israel, a country the size of Vancouver Island, and Israel defended itself, most demonstrators sided with Hamas.

For those who may not know, Hamas's charter in its preamble states: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it." It adds in its Article 7: "The day of judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (kill the Jews), when the Jews will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdullah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him."

The protesters were supporting and making common cause with an anti-Semitic Islamic terrorist organization with a genocide aim.

Journalists from major European and American media could have pointed out these comparisons, as well as the incitement to hatred of Israel and Jews; most did not. Nearly all of the articles published in Europe and the United States nonchalantly described the protests and the hatred shouted by protestors, without drawing any connection between the protests and the subsequent assaults.

For decades, most articles on the Middle East have portrayed Israel in a negative light, not as a democracy under constant threat. Wilfully or not, they promote Jew-hate. Hamas is often described as a "Palestinian militant group," almost never as a terrorist organization. Instead, Palestinian propaganda is repeated: the Gaza Strip is described as an "open air prison" - which it is - but imposed by its own leadership, not by Israel. Israel completely withdrew from Gaza in 2005. All the same, Israel is accused of imposing a "blockade" on the coastal strip - without a mention that everything necessary for the residents of Gaza is allowed, or that what is being blockaded are

deadly weapons. Also never mentioned is the extreme brutality of Hamas operatives towards their own residents of Gaza, who are all Arabs, or that the Palestinian Authority still supports and finances terrorism.

The Palestinian Authority's rewards and incentives for murdering Jews are also always left out.

Judea and Samaria are usually referred to as the West Bank, but recently the United States, instead, resumed using the tainted "occupied territories". Although Jews have inhabited the area for nearly 4,000 years - Judea is named for Jews - Israel is portrayed as occupying territory not its own. In April 2018, the major French magazine *Paris Match* published on its front page a portrait of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, smiling, in front of a large photo of Jerusalem's al Aqsa mosque. The caption described him not as the head of a terrorist organization but as a "political leader" - you know, like Churchill. Inside the magazine, in an interview, Haniyeh falsely accused Israel of "war crimes". "The Palestinians", he added, "want to regain the land that the Jews have stolen from them". For the record, Palestinians, meaning Arabs who claim the land now home to Israel, did not even exist until the twentieth century. Yet no article correcting Haniyeh's lies accompanied the interview.

In addition, on May 21, *Newsweek* published an article in which the most deceptive elements of anti-Israel propaganda are gathered and Israel is defined, incorrectly, as "the initiator of violence". On May 28, *The New York Times* published on its front page photographs of Palestinian Arab children killed in Gaza. "They were only children... they wanted to be doctors artists, leaders", the paper stressed. The accompanying article did not mention that it was the rulers of these children who began the bombardment. The article did not even discuss Hamas - or that when Israel turned over all of the Gaza Strip to the Arabs in 2005, they could easily have made it into a "Singapore on the Mediterranean". Instead, the article falsely claimed that the Arabs in Gaza were victims of Israeli violence. The former national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham Foxman, wrote in a tweet: "I am cancelling my subscription to NY Times ... Today's blood libel of Israel and the Jewish people on the front page is enough." One wonders what took him so long.

On June 24, *The New York Times* published yet another biased report: "Gaza's Deadly Night: How Israeli Airstrikes Killed 44 People". *The Times* stated that "on May 16, Israeli air strikes destroyed three apartment buildings, decimating several families". It never noted that Hamas had attacked Israel, that Hamas uses civilians as human shields, or that Israel invariably warns residents in advance about buildings set to be destroyed (for instance here and here), to provide time for the residents to leave rather than be injured or killed.

Europe's political leaders could have denounced the protests and incitement to hatred; instead, they spoke about Israel and the Palestinian terror organizations in the same breath, as if there were no difference between the fire-fighter and the arsonist. Europe's leaders rarely spoke of Palestinian terrorism - instead, many accused Israel of "violence against the Palestinian populations".

Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, recently spoke of the "warlike arrogance" of Israeli politicians, of "the dehumanization of the Palestinians by a large part of the Israeli political class and society". His apparently uninformed - or malicious - positions are those of the great majority of leaders of European countries. French Foreign Minister Jean Yves Le Drian went even further. On

May 23, he described Israel as an "apartheid" country, thereby choosing to ignore what he must know: that Israel is home to a population of 1.8 million Arab citizens who enjoy the same rights as Jews. Israel's government replied that Le Drian had not told the truth and had promoted anti-semitic hatred.

A few days earlier, on May 18, when Israel was being subjected to some of the 4,000 missiles fired at it by Hamas, French Prime Minister Jean Castex first accused the state of "colonizing Jerusalem", then announced that he was "worried about the fate of the civilian populations in Gaza". He did not even touch on what Hamas and Iran are planning for Israel's population.

American leaders, unlike many European politicians, generally show respect for the core values of democratic societies and Western civilization. Now, however, when some American politicians repeat openly anti-Semitic statements, their political party refuses to reprimand them or even remove them from committees that might lead them to further misrepresentations. After U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar made allegations that Jews buy influence with money ("It's all about the Benjamins"), Congress passed a resolution condemning anti-Semitism in a vague and general manner. It condemned discrimination in just about everything. On June 7, Omar sent out a tweet saying:

"We must have the same level of accountability and justice for all victims of crimes against humanity.

"We have seen unthinkable atrocities committed by the U.S., Hamas, Israel, Afghanistan, and the Taliban."

The tweet prompted 12 Jewish Democrats in the House of Representatives to send a letter maintaining that "there is no moral equivalency between the US and Israel and Hamas and the Taliban" and asking Omar to "clarify" her position. Her answer was a denial of the evidence, along with an arguable, "I was in no way equating terrorist organizations with democratic countries".

House leaders then issued a joint statement, saying they "welcome[d] the clarification" from Omar and that the incident was over.

"It takes considerable skill," Attorney Stephen M. Flatow commented, "to come up with the words to sound just apologetic enough to get your critics off your back, but without actually apologizing."

Then, on June 29, Omar declared that her Jewish Democratic colleagues who say that she is anti-Semitic "haven't been partners in justice" and "haven't been equally engaging in seeking justice around the world".

Another politician, U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, has also been repeating, falsely, that "Israel is a racist state". On June 15, she published a tweet saying, "Israel's government doesn't value Palestinian lives. It has managed a decades-long ethnic cleansing project, funded by the U.S." On June 30, she sent another tweet about Israel: "This is not democracy, this is apartheid." As of this writing, there has been no reaction from the leaders of her party.

In Europe, for years, most of the leading politicians have chosen to support the "Palestinian cause" while staying blind to the viciousness of Palestinian terrorism, the killing of Israeli Jews and the repeated thirst of Palestinian leaders for Jewish blood. These European leaders fund non-governmental organizations that - again dishonestly

- accuse Israel of "war crimes" and other atrocities. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, now in the 16th year of his four year term, is received in Paris and Berlin with all the respect due a lawful head of state. During each of their visits, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron maintained that they support the creation of a Palestinian state - without ever addressing the lethal statements of Abbas or the support and incentivization the Palestinian Authority gives to murder, terrorism, and other breaches of human rights. When Israel is attacked, if they denounce the attacks at all, they immediately add that the Israel's response must not be "disproportionate" and, from the U.N., that the "fighting must stop". They never talk about the relationship between the hatred of Israel - to which they contribute - that is rising in Europe or the Jew-hate that follows Israel-hate.

The United States under the presidency of President Donald J. Trump was an unconflicted friend of Israel. Trump unequivocally denounced the Palestinian Authority's ties to terrorism and quickly ceased regarding Abbas as a legitimate interlocutor. Trump stressed that Israel is a democracy under attack, which deserves to live in peace.

The Biden administration has been following a different path; it has promoted and funded the Palestinian Authority, without so much as a murmur on its continuing support for terrorism. Biden, rather, seems to be promising to reward terrorism. His administration has already given Abbas, who has who has not stopped calling for Israel's destruction, \$75 million and allocated an additional \$100 million for aid, apparently with no guarantees that it would arrive where it was intended. The United States has additionally pledged that it will rebuild Gaza, still ruled by a genocidal Hamas, and open a consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem.

When anti-Semites attacked Jews in New York and Los Angeles a few weeks ago, Biden said nothing. On May 21, probably regarding his silence as unacceptable, several Jewish groups sent him a letter asking for a response. Three days later, he posted a simple tweet: "The recent attacks on the Jewish community are despicable, and they must stop." Aaron Keyak, who was the "Jewish engagement director" of the 2020 Biden presidential campaign, offered advice - but to Jews. His "solution"? "It pains me to say this, but if you fear for your life or physical safety take off your kippah and hide your Magen David. [star of David]..."

With the exception of a few Central European countries, Europe has become an anti-Israel continent. It is now unsafe for Jews - especially those who support Israel or do not see why they should hide that they are Jews. A 2018 poll carried out in the seven main European countries showed that only 22.6% of people in Western Europe had a favourable opinion of Israel. The poll indicated that older people were more sympathetic towards Israel than younger people. A 2019 study, conducted by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights, found that 44% of European Jews between the ages of 16 and 34 have experienced anti-Semitic harassment; 85% reported "that people in their countries accuse or blame them for anything done by the Israeli government", and 41% said they have considered emigration. Since 2019, the situation has not improved.

Most people in the United States are still pro-Israel. A recent poll shows that 75% of Americans have a favourable view of Israel. Although America today is also a far safer country for Jews than Europe, the recent anti-Israel demonstrations, and the physical assaults on Jews in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere, and especially the

presence of outspoken anti-Semites in Congress, suggest that changes could easily take place. One hopes that Americans committed to the Judeo-Christian values of the Free World will react before it is too late.

On May 25, Senate and House Republicans joined together to introduce the "Preventing Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes Act". Senator Ted Cruz stated:

"Anti-Semitism is a unique prejudice with a unique history, which has resulted in unique horrors throughout history... This wave of abhorrent violence is directed at Jews for being Jewish, just like Hamas is firing rockets into Israel because they want to murder Jews and eliminate the Jewish state."

On June 15, the U.S. Senate, passed a resolution asserting that "Anti-Semitism remains a serious and growing danger for Jews in the United States and around the world." It is, however, merely a resolution. It does not point to the causes of the danger - presumably 2,500 years of Jew-hate combined with the newly-imported Islamic kind - or offer any means to fight it.

Dr. Guy Millière, a professor at the University of Paris, is the author of 27 books on France and Europe.

How Palestinian Leaders Are Deceiving Americans

By Bassam Tawil



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has no problem telling the Biden administration and members of the Congress what they like to hear in order to receive US financial aid. Abbas will take the money while at the same time his security forces are chasing Palestinians who do business with Jews. Pictured: Abbas consults a card with a written statement during a visit from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Ramallah, on May 25, 2021. (Photo by Alex Brandon/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)

A Palestinian man was sentenced on June 30 to seven years in prison with hard labour after he was convicted of attempting to sell land to Israeli Jews. The man, whose identity was not revealed, was sentenced by a Palestinian Authority (PA) court in the West Bank city of Ramallah, the de facto capital of the Palestinians.

"The Ramallah Court of First Instance, represented by Judges Ramez Jamhour, Ramez Musleh and Amjad al-Sha'ar, issued a ruling convicting the defendant of attempting to carve out part of the land of the State of Palestine in favour of the enemy," the PA's official news agency Wafa reported. "He was sentenced to 7 years in prison with hard labour."

"Carve out" is the term the PA uses to describe the transfer of ownership of real estate from a Palestinian to an Israeli Jew. The "enemy," needless to say, refers to Israel.

The PA resorts to this kind of vague terminology to avoid criticism from the international community over its policy of punishing any Palestinian who sell his land

or house to an Israeli Jew. The PA does not want the world to know that it has a law that prohibits the sale of property to the Israeli "enemy."

In 2014, PA President Mahmoud Abbas amended Article 114 of the Jordanian Criminal Code (1960), which is in effect in the PA-controlled areas in the West Bank. According to the Jordanian law, a person who attempts to sever any part of the Jordanian territory to annex it to a foreign state will be subject to at least five years in prison with hard labour.

Abbas raised the maximum punishment to life imprisonment with hard labour for any Palestinian who is found guilty of selling or leasing "part of the Palestinian lands to a foreign country or a hostile state or any of its citizens."

In 2018, a PA court sentenced an American-Palestinian to life imprisonment for violating the law. The defendant, Issam Akel, who holds an Israeli ID card in his capacity as a resident of Jerusalem, was accused of attempting to sell property in Jerusalem to Israeli Jews.

He was sentenced in spite of protests from Israel and the US. Then US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman said that Akel's incarceration was "antithetical to the values of the US and all those who advocate the cause of peaceful coexistence." The PA was eventually forced to release Akel in January 2019 under pressure from the US government.

Akel was lucky to be released because he held an American passport. Other Palestinians who have faced the same charges, however, remain in PA prisons because they are not US citizens.

The June 30 court ruling shows that the PA is determined to continue punishing Palestinians who are caught selling property to Israeli Jews. The verdict also aims to send a warning to Palestinians that anyone who even tries to engage in real estate transactions with Israeli Jews will be thrown into prison.

The PA's war on Palestinians suspected of selling property to Israeli Jews is not only limited to legal measures. In the past few years, the Palestinian religious authorities have issued a number of edicts banning Muslims from engaging in such deals.

In 2018, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein, the Palestinian mufti of Jerusalem, issued a fatwa (Islamic ruling) calling the "land of Palestine" an inalienable religious endowment that cannot be sold to "the enemies." The fatwa bans Muslims from "facilitating the transfer of ownership of any part of Jerusalem or the land of Palestine to the [Israeli] enemy." It also calls on Muslims to boycott those who violate the fatwa and prevent them from being buried in Muslim cemeteries.

In 1996, Dar al-Ifta, the Palestinians' Islamic advisory body responsible for issuing religious guidelines, ruled that it is forbidden for a Muslim to sell land to Jews. It too urged Muslims to boycott anyone involved in such deals: they are considered "heretics and traitors."

Since the ruling, several Palestinians have been killed for allegedly brokering land sales to Israeli Jews. Dozens of others have been arrested by the various branches of the PA security forces. Three suspects, who were not identified, have been sentenced to 15 years in prison, with hard labour.

According to the PA's Preventive Security Service (PSS), the crackdown on suspected land dealers is being carried out in accordance with instructions from the Palestinian political leadership. "The sale of properties [to Jews] poses a dangerous threat to [Palestinian] national security," the PSS said in a statement.

When the PSS talks about the Palestinian leadership, it is referring to Abbas and the PA government in the West Bank. The PSS is actually admitting that Abbas and the PA leadership ordered the Palestinian security forces to arrest any Palestinian suspected of selling properties to Jews.

This is the same Palestinian leadership that is now telling the Biden administration that it is keen on resuming the peace process with Israel.

While the PA security forces were continuing to hunt down Palestinians on suspicion of engaging in real estate transactions with Jews, Abbas told visiting US Congressmen on July 8 that he is committed to a "just and comprehensive peace through negotiations [with Israel] under the auspices of the Quartet members," the US, European Union, Russia, and United Nations.

The members of Congress are undoubtedly unaware that Abbas's law punishes Palestinians for allegedly selling lands to Jews. It is also safe to assume that the Congressmen are not aware of the Islamic religious decrees banning Muslims from even attempting to engage in such deals. The Congressmen do not know about these matters because the mainstream media in the West rarely reports about the apartheid policies of the PA leadership, including the ban on selling properties to Jews.

Even if Abbas returns to the negotiating table with Israel, he will not be able to make any territorial concessions to Israel because of the Palestinian law and edicts.

Abbas knows that if he makes such concessions, he will never enjoy the privilege of being buried in a Muslim cemetery, according to the ruling of his mufti and Islamic religious bodies.

In the meantime, Abbas has no problem telling the Biden administration and members of the Congress what they like to hear (about a peace process with Israel and the so-called two state solution) in order to receive US financial aid.

Abbas will take the money while at the same time his security forces are chasing Palestinians who do business with Jews.

Bassam Tawil is a Muslim Arab journalist based in the Middle East.

Malaysian 'Troll Army' Targeted Israel

By Adam Kredo and Alana Goodman



A series of cyber attacks aimed at shutting down pro-Israel social media accounts and spamming Israelis with abusive messages during the military conflict with Hamas was coordinated by a Malaysian "troll army," according to researchers who have been tracking the network's activities.

The campaign was "organized and led by a network of Malaysian anti-Israel and extremely influential organizations and groups, with hundreds of thousands of combined views and followers," according to research published by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. Thousands of Israelis and pro-Israel leaders were targeted, including high-profile officials such as former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The "military-grade" attacks—which shut down the WhatsApp number for Israel Defense Force spokesman Avichay Adraee and flooded Israeli actress Gal Gadot's social media with harassing messages—show how anti-Israel activists are increasingly manipulating social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to crush support for Israel and intimidate the Jewish state's defenders. As anti-Semitism spikes across the globe in the wake of Israel's most recent conflict, there is concern that online vitriol is fuelling real world violence—especially when these hacker groups publish personal information.

"The attacks illustrate once again the lack of responsibility by social media platforms to ensure that their users are able to freely express legitimate opinions and to facilitate public debate that does not hinder or silence one side or another of the discourse," the centre's research says. "The attacks also illustrate an urgent need among social media platforms to take a more proactive and comprehensive response to ensure that their forums are used appropriately and safely."

Postings tied to the Malaysian activists first appeared in mid-May, when Iranian-backed Hamas terrorists fired thousands of missiles at Israel. One Twitter message

from that time offered harassment instructions to what it described as a "Malaysian troll army" and a "guerrilla army activity for Palestine."

A picture posted along with the Malay-language tweet instructed viewers on how to specifically harass prominent pro-Israel leaders and block their social media accounts. That initial message, sent from a Twitter account with 831 followers, racked up more than 15,000 retweets.

To avoid getting banned on Twitter for spam, the infographic instructed supporters to start sending the harassing messages at 10 a.m. and continue every 5-to-10 minutes for two hours, using phrases that would fly under the radar of Twitter's anti-abuse policy, such as "Israhell," "Filastini," and "zio_nis."

Prominent Malaysian hacking groups also joined the fight, launching cyberattacks on Israelis and pro-Israel leaders. One group, known as DragonForce Malaysia, leaked personal, identifying information, including phone numbers, of Israeli doctors, artists, police officers, and soldiers. This leak led to a massive campaign of harassment on messaging apps like WhatsApp.

The hacking group instructed its followers to "spam" the Israeli phone numbers with just under 10 messages a day "to avoid you being banned by WhatsApp ... Goodluck and have fun!"

A group called Tentera Netizen Malaysia, translated as the "Malaysian Army of Internet Citizens," took credit for getting the phone number of IDF spokesman Avichay Adraee banned on WhatsApp by repeatedly reporting it and targeting it with spam. Other trolls posted screenshots of harassing messages they sent to random Israeli WhatsApp accounts, including "You gonna die" and "The world with Palestine!"

Around the same time, a Telegram user identified as Nadir Al-Nuri posted a list of pro-Israel Facebook pages that he said should be targeted. "The intention is to keep them busy with other matters besides hitting our brothers," Al-Nuri wrote on May 14 to his 256,000 followers. That post was viewed at least 138,000 times.

A similar list of pro-Israel Twitter accounts was also posted and reposted across Twitter. Users identified Al-Nuri as the list's creator. These lists were posted along with "instructions on how to block the pro-Israel influencers' Twitter accounts by entering incorrect passwords with the influencers' username multiple times."

"These Malaysian groups designed and disseminated among their followers detailed instructions on how to attack, whom to attack and what content to use," according to the research.

Activists associated with the anti-Israel network also used coded hashtags to amplify their messages. In some cases, these postings were mentioned more than half a million times, with a total reach of more than 250 million users.

Such hacking attacks are not new. The New York Times reported that Iranian agents infiltrated groups on social media and messaging applications as part of a disinformation campaign against Israel.

Adam Kredo and Alana Goodman are senior investigative reporters for the Washington Free Beacon

US investigates Qatar over claims that it finances Iran's Revolutionary Guards

By Benjamin Weinthal and Jonathan Spyer



The State Department has opened an inquiry into an Israeli government report that Qatar's monarchy funded Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization.

"We are looking into the allegations," a State Department spokesman told the Washington Examiner earlier this month, adding that "Qatar and the United States have a robust strategic, security, and counterterrorism partnership. Qatar is one of the United States's closest military allies in the region. U.S.-Qatar military and security cooperation contributes to the safety and stability of the region."

The alleged terror finance activities of the Islamic regime in Doha surfaced during last month's Oval Office meeting between President Joe Biden and outgoing Israeli President Reuven Rivlin.

Rivlin furnished the White House with intelligence regarding "recent funding that Qatar provided to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps," the Times of Israel reported, citing an Israel diplomatic official speaking on the condition of anonymity. The person also added that the information alarmed the U.S. officials at the meeting.

The Washington Examiner contacted multiple Israeli government ministries, including the foreign ministry, that all remained quiet on the issue. Israeli governments, as a general rule, summarily dismiss false news reports. The lack of a denial suggests that the intelligence is serious and was indeed forwarded to the Biden administration.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday met with Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani and discussed the crises

affecting Afghanistan, Yemen, and Lebanon. The Qatari foreign minister supported U.S. calls to promote “peace and security.”

The Persian language service of the U.S.-operated Voice of America news organization confirmed via a second source that Israel submitted intelligence to Biden about Qatar’s financing of the IRGC.

The Quds Force, a branch of the IRGC largely responsible for terrorist operations outside Iran, has killed over 600 American military personnel in the Middle East.

Its leader, Qasem Soleimani, was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Iraq in January 2020. Esmail Qaani was appointed to lead the organization following Soleimani’s death.

Rivlin’s White House meeting coincided with a U.S. Army statement, reported Stars and Stripes, that “the U.S. has closed sprawling bases in Qatar that once stored warehouses full of weaponry and transferred the remaining supplies to Jordan, in a move that analysts say positions Washington to deal better with Iran and reflects the military’s changing priorities in the region.”

The tiny monarchy of Qatar, rich from natural gas and oil, has been embroiled in allegations that it has financed a wide range of Sunni and Shia terrorist states and movements, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Islamic State.

The fresh allegations from Rivlin may create new tensions between Qatar and the U.S., which has nearly 10,000 military personnel stationed at the Gulf state’s al Udeid Air Base.

The Biden administration is once again confronted with a crisis with Qatar because the monarchy ruled by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani has been repeatedly alleged to finance Islamic-animating terrorist movements that seek to kill Americans.

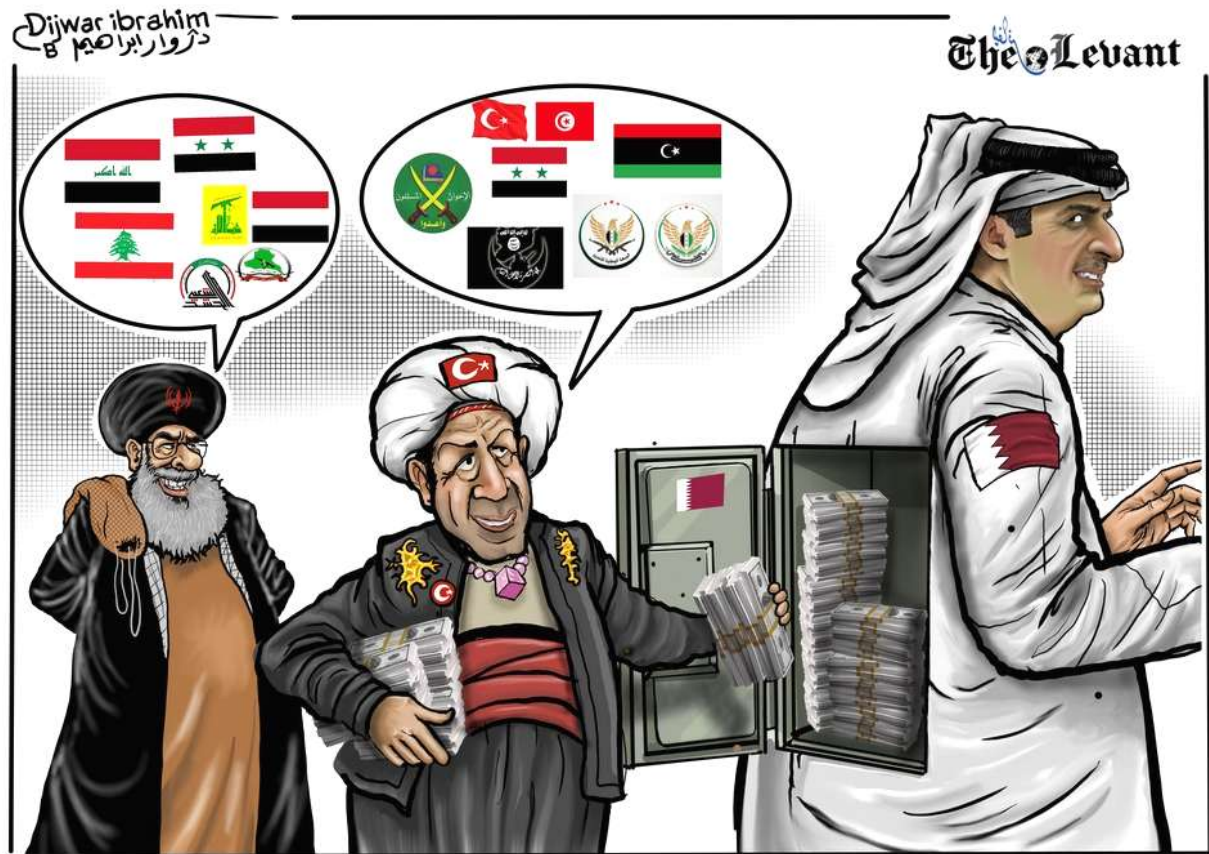
Qatar’s status as an alleged leading state sponsor of international terrorism might also complicate its role in hosting the World Cup in 2022.

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Qatar: The 'Stealth' Pro-Islamist Subverter

By Yigal Carmon



In the inner sancta of their palaces, the Qatari royal family may soon celebrate the successful overthrow of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan by the Taliban, whom the Qatari royal family have supported for many years. Qatar has played this stealth role while masquerading over the past two years as a mediator between the democratically elected government of Afghanistan and the Taliban which, thanks to Qatari support, has always had money enough to pay the Taliban fighters better than the U.S.-supported Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). A 2009 cable signed by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton read: "Qatar's overall level of [counter-terrorism] cooperation with the U.S. is considered the worst in the region."

Former U.S. President Donald Trump was the one who allowed Qatar to play the role of mediator and to broker the February 29, 2020 agreement. But this agreement, ironically enough, was not at all between the two Afghan parties – the democratically elected government and the Taliban – it was an agreement between the Taliban and the United States, while the legitimate government of Afghanistan was excluded from this agreement by the Taliban and the United States together, both pressuring President Ghani to share power in the position that he had won in democratic elections, which the Taliban tried and failed to subvert by violence.

The Biden administration has endorsed fully Trump's policy of embracing Qatar as the major mediator and pressuring President Ghani to surrender the authority he won in the elections, as shown in a letter from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to

President Ghani that Afghan news outlet Tolo News published on March 8. The Biden administration further endorsed Trump's Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad as a non-partisan mediator even though he was known for his long-time forthcoming approach to the Taliban. In the past, Khalilzad has been more involved with the Taliban, meeting with them in luxury hotels in the late 1990s to discuss matters including "their shared enthusiasm for a proposed multibillion-dollar pipeline deal" and presenting them as a palatable alternative to Iran in a 1996 editorial. Furthermore, the Biden administration copied the Trump administration's self-defeating tactic of demanding only a "reduction of violence" for a short period instead of demanding a ceasefire.

It has been known for years that Qatar supports Islamist and jihadi terrorist organizations and movements even as it simultaneously hosts the American CENTCOM base for its own survival interests. As Richard Clarke, counter-terrorism advisor to Presidents Clinton and H.W. Bush, put it, "We always knew Qatar was trouble," but little did the American administrations know, because Qatar was directly involved in enabling the 9/11 attacks. Yet both the Trump and Biden administrations prefer to ignore this.

Qatar gave sanctuary and protection to Khalid Sheikh Muhammad (KSM) in the Water Department of the Doha municipality. KSM was the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, was involved in planning what is now called the "Bojinka" plot to bomb 11 U.S. commercial airliners over the Pacific Ocean in 1994-1995, in planning to assassinate the pope as well as former presidents Carter and Clinton, and was connected to the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing. According to Richard Clarke, when the U.S. government went to arrest KSM in Qatar in 1996, and gave advance notice to the Qatari emir alone, KSM vanished within hours, only to reappear within five years as the mastermind of 9/11. As Clarke himself wrote: "Had the Qataris handed [KSM] over to us as requested in 1996, the world might have been a very different place."

According to testimony before a March 11, 2003 hearing before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee On Financial Services, the Qatar Charitable Society (QCS), a major Qatari charity with access to the top levels of the Qatari government, has played a major role in funding jihadi groups including Al-Qaeda. In September 2001, the month of the 9/11 attacks, QCS's official newsletter ran an article titled "Jihad Is The Solution!" quoting Quran 9:41, which reads: "You shall readily mobilize, light or heavy, and strive with your money and your lives in the cause of Allah. This is better for you, if you only knew."

QCS was first named as a major financial conduit for Al-Qaeda in trial proceedings surrounding the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Former Al-Qaeda member and government witness Jamal Al-Fadl testified how he had worked closely with QCS in 1993 and said of QCS director Dr. Abdullah Mohamd Yousef: "The guy [Yousef], he runs a group, he is one of our membership, one of the Al-Qaeda group membership, and also he is [Sudanese] Islamic National Front membership, and he was in Afghanistan. So he helped our people for the travel documents, and also if some money come from the Gulf area to the organization, he gives the group some money from that money."

A more recent posting on the website of QCS, which has since changed its name to Qatar Charity, reads: "Sadaqa [charity] for the public interest of Muslims, such as building mosques where they are needed, and spending in the field of jihad for the sake of Allah Almighty, is rewarded in a way that no one knows but Allah Almighty,

who said [in Quran 61:10-11]: 'Oh believers! Shall I guide you to an exchange which will save you from a painful punishment? [It is to] have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and perform jihad for the sake of Allah with your wealth and your lives. That is best for you, if only you knew.'

In Gaza, Qatar has played the same role it did with the Taliban in Afghanistan. With the government of Israel playing the role of the United States, allowing Qatar to push, according to official Qatari sources, over \$1.5 billion to Hamas, ostensibly for the welfare of the population, but in reality to build itself up as a military power with 15,000 missiles and an elaborate network of underground tunnels. Here again, Qatar played the role of the counterfeit mediator to bring about some kind of temporary peace after the two sides had exhausted themselves in an exchange of bombings and missile strikes. After the war, the new government of Israel had cut the Qataris out of the process for some time. Qatar, a major supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, was even ready to turn a blind eye to Egypt's fight against the Muslim Brotherhood in order to earn Egypt's goodwill so that Qatar could continue to support Hamas through the Egypt-Gaza crossing.

In Sudan, the Qatari government channel Al-Jazeera, which serves the Muslim Brotherhood organization as a propaganda mouthpiece, tried recently to incite huge demonstrations against the new pro-Western democratic government in favour of the Islamists headed by Islamist dictator Omar Al-Bashir, who is now on his way to trial at the ICC. This is just one of the instances in which Qatar has played this stealth role of pro-Islamist subversion. This time they failed – but they will continue to support the Islamists wherever they can.

Al-Jazeera, the official Qatari-owned TV channel, functions as an organizing and recruitment tool for jihadi terror organizations. In addition to broadcasting Osama bin Laden's speeches, on July 10, 2001, two months before 9/11, Al-Jazeera aired a special program about bin Laden on which the show's host and a majority of callers praised bin Laden. Further, Al-Qaeda spokesman Suleiman Abu-Gheith was allowed to call in and give a long speech, presenting six points and calling for thousands of Muslims to join Al-Qaeda, saying: "I would like to say that today the nation needs, first of all, 12,000 young Mujahideen recruited to defend the religion." Al-Jazeera correspondent Tayseer Aloni was sentenced in Spain in 2005 to seven years in prison for smuggling money to Al-Qaeda.

Al-Jazeera allowed a sheikh, who is a supporter of the Islamic State, to pledge allegiance in a live broadcast to then Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. It allowed the terrorist Anis Al-Naqqash, to call for terror attacks against American oil installations, also in a live broadcast. First in 2013, and then again in 2015 for a full two hours, the channel twice interviewed Muhammad Al-Joulani, leader of the Jabhat Al-Nusra organization, which split off from Al-Qaeda in Syria. According to a lawsuit recently lodged by Syrian opposition elements in London against the Qatari regime, the emirate also financed the Jabhat Al-Nusra organization with hundreds of millions of dollars.

One of the Muslim Brotherhood's most prominent leaders, Sheikh Yousuf Al-Qaradhawi, has been operating for years from Qatar and under its aegis. Qatar also hosted Indian Deobandi Muslim scholar and supporter of the Islamic State Salman Al-Nadwi after he had been expelled from Oman. In May 2021, former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that then emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Aal

Thani had in 2012 paid \$57 million to an armed group in Syria for the release of 57 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operatives.



Qatari Emir Aal Thani embraces Yousuf Al-Qaradhawi.

Qatar's billions have propped up the Islamist regime of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, providing debt swaps and cash, including an estimated \$25 billion in investments in recent years, that have cushioned Erdoğan from the political and economic consequences of his own policies and diluted the effect of American sanctions. This support facilitates President Erdoğan's military expeditions and conquests in Nagorno-Karabakh, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and Libya, as well as allowing his government to hold on to popularity domestically by keeping the country's faltering economy from total collapse. It was known to all media that for years, foreign fighters that travelled from all over the world to join the Islamic State were passing through Turkey. After Turkey occupied Northern Syria, the areas under its control became a safe haven, ruled and protected by Turkey, for jihadi terrorists from Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and other groups.

The scope of Qatar's "stealth" pro-Islamist subversion, which is not that stealthy, is astonishing. This very small very wealthy state is a great patron of a specific type of Islamism – the jihadi type. Why, then, does the United States countenance such a level

of bankrolling by Qatar of regional bad actors who are, uniformly, open opponents of the United States? Why would the U.S. support such an agent of anti-Western and anti-American subversion – against its own interests – in destabilizing pro-American democratic regimes? Indeed, the Qataris did not create the Taliban. Rather, it was Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) that created, equipped, and guided it militarily against the United States, while still enjoying for decades the status of being America's ally. This may be true, but it was only thanks to Qatar that the Taliban could grow to their current strength of being Afghanistan's strongest power.

Furthermore, the existence of the U.S. Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar buys Doha some American forbearance, but this is only because the U.S. military leadership does not understand the strategic situation. They apparently are convinced that Qatar is doing the United States a favor by hosting the base. The truth is that the U.S. could have the base in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE, for free. It is in fact America that defends the very survival of Qatar by maintaining its base there. One also cannot discount Qatari influence operations directly inside the United States itself, buying friends and influence in the Acela Corridor where Washington's elite moves and lives.

There is an additional element at play here. While Qatar supports out-right terrorists, including those from Al-Qaeda and ISIS, it often supports organizations, states, and individuals who are extremists but fall short, just barely, of Western terrorist designations. And the whole way that Qatar works – using money to buy influence to advance an ideological and political agenda – is something often discounted by Washington. We are more comfortable with the threat of bombs and drones than the threat of narratives and ideas. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States, and the West in general, has been uncomfortable with the ideological dimensions of politics and diplomacy. This Western unmooring and lack of confidence is a sharp contrast to the assured and aggressive ideological work not only from Doha, but from Erdoğan, Putin, and Xi. However, just because we do not fully understand the consequences of hostile ideological soft power and are hesitant in our response to it should not blind us to the fact that this subversion is happening. Yet the case of Qatar stands out because it does not only support anti-American Islamist movements, but also supports violent terrorist organizations who have wreaked havoc in America and spilled a lot of American blood. How long can such a policy continue?

Yigal Carmon is President of MEMRI

Saudi Arabia acts against Hamas terrorism

By Yoni Ben Menachem



Hamas has been deeply shocked by a Saudi court's decision to send dozens of its activists to prison. They were arrested more than two years ago on suspicion of money laundering and smuggling funds to the terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip, aided by money-exchange companies in Turkey.

On Aug. 8, the Saudi court published the sentences of 69 Hamas operatives living in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They were sentenced to periods of imprisonment ranging from six months to 22 years; five were found innocent and released. Senior Hamas figure Mohammed al-Khoudary, 81, the head of Hamas's Saudi branch, was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

In an official statement, Hamas condemned the sentences.

Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader abroad, has made efforts in recent months to approach Saudi Arabia and expressed hope that the Saudi authorities would grant amnesty to his men. Senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar said that the sentences were "a Saudi response to the Zionist requests and that it was a political decision, not a legal one." He added that Hamas was not closing the door to Saudi Arabia and was willing to restore relations.

Saudi Arabia defines Hamas, along with the wider Muslim Brotherhood, as a terrorist movement.

Success for Israel and the United States

It is said that the Trump administration and Israel were behind the Saudi activity against Hamas, and that their efforts succeeded in bringing about a complete disconnect between the two. Hamas points to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman as having adopted American-Israeli policy against the movement.

On Sept. 12, 2019, senior Hamas figure Marwan Abu Ras told the *Al-Khaleej Online* website that Saudi Arabia was drawing closer to Israel and was opening the gates of normalization with it by arresting senior Hamas figures in the kingdom.

The arrest and conviction of Hamas operatives mark the end of the “Golden Age” in relations between the Saudi royal household and the Hamas leadership.

The Saudi-Hamas rift

Hamas’s office in Saudi Arabia was opened in 1988 during the rule of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz. Al-Khoudary was appointed as the movement’s official representative.

In 1998, King Fahd hosted the founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and permitted him to collect donations in the kingdom for the Gaza Strip. “You are in our hearts and we stand with you until the liberation of Jerusalem,” King Fahd was quoted as saying at the reception for Yassin.

The first rift in Saudi relations with Hamas came in 2007 after the terrorist group forcibly took over the Gaza Strip and expelled the Palestinian Authority. Hamas leader Khaled Mashal and P.A. chairman Mahmoud Abbas met several months later in Mecca and signed a reconciliation agreement near the Kaaba shrine. According to the Saudis, Hamas violated the agreement.

Since then, relations have continued to deteriorate. In 2015, Saudi security officials arrested Maher Salah, a former Hamas leader abroad, and accused him of money laundering. He spent a year in a Saudi prison and was deported to Turkey.

In October 2016, the Saudi security forces detained senior Hamas figure Nizar Awadallah.

After President Trump declared Hamas a terrorist organization and following the inauguration of bin Salman as crown prince, Saudi Arabia’s rough handling of the Hamas movement accelerated. In 2017, the Saudis adopted Trump’s position, and in February 2018 the Saudi foreign minister declared Hamas a terrorist organization.

The wave of arrests of Hamas operatives that began in April 2019 represented a significant change in the Saudi royal household’s attitude towards the Hamas movement.

Hamas sources accuse the United States and Israel of putting pressure on Saudi Arabia to detain Hamas operatives in the kingdom and to paralyze the movement’s fundraising activities. They blame the Saudi royal household for sticking a knife in Hamas’s back because of the closeness between the crown prince and Jared Kushner, President Trump’s adviser and son-in-law. The crown prince, Hamas claims, desired to get closer to Israel.

Hamas kept the detention of some 60 of its operatives in Saudi Arabia very quiet for five months. The news was initially reported in the Qatari press, but Hamas refused to provide confirmation and tried via behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts through several Gulf States to secure the release of the detainees.

After Hamas concluded that this approach would not bear fruit, it issued an official announcement on Sept. 9, 2019, demanding the release of al-Khoudary, who was detained along with his son Hani.

According to Hamas sources, the movement was also assisted by former Palestinian official Muhammad Dahlan, who has a senior status among the Gulf States.

Hamas sources reported that the arrests of its operatives in the Saudi kingdom not only followed American-Israeli pressure but was also based on intelligence provided by Israel to Saudi intelligence. Israel and the United States sought to dry up Hamas's sources of funding in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's complete disregard for Hamas's requests to release its operatives testifies to its cooperation with the United States and Israel on the issue of fighting terrorism. Saudi Arabia needs the help of both countries to protect itself from the dangers of Iran and does not want to assist Hamas, an ally of Tehran.

On Sept. 10, 2019, the United States took a further step and imposed sanctions on senior Hamas figures and institutions abroad that dealt with money transfers to the organization in the Gaza Strip, including Marwan Mahdi Salah al-Rawi, owner of Redin Exchange in Turkey, his deputy Ismael Tash, and his Istanbul import/export company, SMART.

An effort to obtain clemency

Hamas is now trying to get the rest of the Arab and Islamic world to pressure the Saudi royal court to grant clemency to its imprisoned operatives.

The mission was assigned to Hamas leader Mashal, who has good relations with the Gulf States and is not considered close to Iran. The first move will be an effort by Hamas to release al-Khoudary, who, Hamas officials claim, has cancer.

Khoudary also has Kuwaiti citizenship and worked as the chief executive of Kuwait's military hospital. He held the rank of colonel in the Kuwaiti army.

Yoni Ben Menachem, a veteran Arab affairs and diplomatic commentator for Israel Radio and Television, is a senior Middle East analyst for the Jerusalem Center. This article was first published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Saudi-Emirati Economic Competition

By Don Gibbons
TCMER Board Member



Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have historically boasted close ties, but as the two countries simultaneously attempt to diversify their economies away from hydrocarbons, the countries will increasingly be in competition for limited resources in sectors such as tourism and defence.

Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirates' diverging regional interests appear poised to be reinforced by increasing economic competition, a split that, if adroitly managed by the United States, can be used as leverage to improve human rights, and manage Saudi and Emirati regional behaviour. As their post-oil economic models increasingly overlap, the countries will find themselves in a race for tourists, investment dollars, and high-quality professionals.

Saudi Arabia announced this year that companies would soon risk losing access to lucrative Saudi government contracts if they did not relocate their regional headquarters to Saudi Arabia itself — a move that could be interpreted as an attempt to undercut the UAE's dominance as the business hub of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Whether that policy ends up being so draconian remains to be seen, given the likely pushback from companies long in the UAE, but what is increasingly clear is that in a region racing toward a post-hydrocarbon future, the UAE and Saudi Arabia's overlapping diversification schemes are assured to bring about more economic competition.

Strategically, the Saudis and Emiratis have much in common. They both worry about the development of Iran's nuclear program and Tehran's regional influence, with both sides exposed to potential Iranian attack and the United Arab Emirates hosting a large Iranian diaspora whose loyalty has in the past been questioned by Emirati authorities. They are both seeking to escape the shackles of rentier economics into a post-

hydrocarbon future before the global market makes oil unprofitable. They are dominated by powerful royal personalities – Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi – who both agree that regional reform does not include political liberalization. These commonalities have propelled a close relationship both between the two rulers – the Emirati crown prince has been a mentor to his younger Saudi counterpart – and their countries' foreign policies.

The countries do not fully align on all regional priorities. The Saudis and Emiratis have diverged on Yemen policy as the UAE pulls away from military and diplomatic exposure to the conflict – leaving Riyadh to manage the fallout. The Emiratis have been bolder in Libya, backing warlord Khalifa Haftar, while the Saudis have largely sat the conflict out. And even on Qatar, the Saudis were quicker to push for a resolution to the blockade than the UAE in early 2021. Moreover, the UAE has shown disquieting signs of regional leadership that undercut Riyadh's typically leading role. Abu Dhabi led the charge into normalization with Israel and as a result remains the best-positioned Gulf government to receive the advanced F-35 from the United States.

Moreover, their simultaneous scramble to build post-oil economies is increasingly bringing the two countries into competition. One of the most immediate competitive venues is tourism, particularly the non-Hajj sector, where medium- and high-income tourists seek beaches, resorts, and Arabian adventure. While Dubai, the heart of the UAE's tourist industry, is currently light years ahead of Saudi Arabia, the nature of both Dubai's brand and tourism in general means that Saudi Arabia will have a chance to catch up and even steal away the mantle of tourist powerhouse. Dubai's high-end luxury brand prizes its modernity and technological edge, but some of its earliest tourist mega-projects, like the Burj al-Arab, completed in 2000, are already appearing stylistically dated, requiring major innovations and updates to restore their lustre that will likely necessitate outside financing. The UAE is also steadily introducing taxes like VAT, which while currently refundable nevertheless drive up the base costs of visiting the UAE, undermining the sticker price competitiveness of the emirate. These types of taxes are only set to grow as the UAE modernizes its finances, driving up the cost of tourism, particularly in cash-strapped Dubai, which exhausted its oil reserves decades ago. That said, the VAT tax is still very low compared to other places and a cost of doing business for foreigners who seek to avoid the restricted lifestyle in the Saudi kingdom.

With the luster of the UAE's tourist industry poised to fade, Saudi Arabia may move aggressively into the regional space, trying to lure tourists away from the Emirates and toward its own brand of luxury tourism. Jeddah Tower, due to be the world's tallest if finished – the project has been on hold since 2018 in part because of fallout from the 2017 Saudi purge – is squarely aimed at taking eyes off the current record holder, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. Numerous Red Sea resorts, malls throughout the country's urban centers, and recreational activities are being built that are strikingly similar to existing amenities in the UAE. Qiddiya, the entertainment mega-centre to be built in Riyadh, will, if fully completed, have water parks, golf courses, roller coasters, and other amenities that could undercut the edge of the UAE's own entertainment centres. Unlike Dubai, Saudi Arabia's still-flush sovereign wealth fund and willingness to dip into its Public Investment Fund means it can both invest in long-shot infrastructure and subsidize ventures to compete on price against the Emirates.

Saudi Arabia also has natural advantages the UAE cannot compete with. Saudi Arabia's hajj tourism is already deeply developed, with millions coming from both within Saudi Arabia and abroad to visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Its long history sitting on major trade routes has left a historical legacy the UAE lacks; ancient Al Ula, built in the first century, for example, rivals Jordan's Petra in tourist potential.

Investment dollars are another competitive angle, particularly as investors weigh similar projects in both countries. Here the UAE has an institutional advantage, with business-friendly regulations pushing it high on the World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business rankings to 16th globally. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was 62nd, as its regulations, legal system, and credit facilities lagged. Even so, the Saudis are making rapid strides: in 2018, they were ranked 92nd. New legal reforms and regulatory changes are rapidly making it easier to start up a business in the kingdom, and with the political will of the crown prince behind Vision 2030, more reforms are likely. That will likely close the gap between investment climates for the two, and with so much overlap in their tourist and diversification strategies, investors will weigh the comparative benefits of one country over the other.

To compete, Saudi Arabia will likely enact policies that will incidentally undercut the UAE, like its headquarters announcement, as it chases similar industries. But the UAE is unlikely to stand still: It too will reform its investment climate to further compete, seeking a comparative advantage over Saudi Arabia to maintain its own post-oil development strategy, while a potential boon in Israel-UAE economic ties will include transport, energy, defence, and financial deals that are still out of reach for Saudi Arabia.

As Saudi Arabia reforms its economy, it will need highly skilled foreign workers to plug the gaps in its labour market as its own native Saudis go through retraining and its education system slowly reforms. Sectoral overlap in development plans will again play a role here: Highly skilled scientists, technicians, business people, and investors will be sought after by both countries, with the two seeking to provide strong enough incentives to attract the talent they need. Both sides have already issued specialized visas to try to bring in highly skilled workers, and the UAE has even gone so far as to offer the prospect of citizenship — a rare commodity in the GCC — to encourage top talent to make the emirates their full-time home.

Reforms to the labour market are one thing, but so too is lifestyle, with expatriates seeking the freewheeling social norms of Dubai, something Saudi Arabia is now actively chasing through social reforms designed to reduce the power of the long-standing Wahhabi religious establishment. In this competition toward a Gulf Arab form of social liberalism, the UAE's smaller population and less complicated political scene offer it an advantage, but Saudi Arabia may try to offset its disadvantage through greater monetary incentives such as exempting certain workers from taxes or licensing fees or by using more strong-arm tactics to undermine businesses based in the UAE to convince them to relocate workers to Saudi Arabia.

This economic competition, overlaid with other strategic divergences, will add to a loosening of ties between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh. They are already adjusting to the post-Trump Middle East in which their risk profiles for U.S. pressure are different (the UAE, for example, does not have the same level of congressional focus on its human rights record, nor has its intervention in Libya created as many political waves in the United States as Saudi Arabia's Yemen military operations). But now they will also find

ways to undercut one another's development plans during the post-pandemic global recovery.

This economic competition will also make both more sensitive to diplomatic and economic sentiment surrounding their national policies. In the immediate term, the United States is most likely to emerge as a threat to this sentiment, with criticism of their respective human rights records, especially Saudi Arabia's, likely to spook investors and businesses and drive them in the direction of whichever country appears least likely to incur sanctions. At the moment, that is Saudi Arabia, but the UAE's own human rights record and regional activities in Yemen and Libya have also drawn U.S. ire. Aggressive regional behaviour by either country will also have an effect: Should the UAE, for example, consider overtly pressuring its GCC rival Qatar to hew closer to Abu Dhabi's regional policies on political Islam, it will face backlash from the United States that could benefit Saudi Arabia.

Both countries will need a greater sense of stability across the Persian Gulf with Iran, as investors worry that either country's policies could inflame tensions and ratchet up the possibilities of Iranian retaliation striking targets in Saudi Arabia or the UAE, undermining their hawkishness toward Iran. Moreover, while both countries will continue to diversify their relations with China, Chinese economic ties are likely to shift in the direction of whichever country appears poised to be more economically successful, shifting with sentiment rather than trying to strategically alter it to offset pressure on either country.

While the deep bonds that underpin Saudi-Emirati ties will remain, competition over limited investment dollars, workers, professionals, tourists, and business deals will alter their relationship. In this competitive space, not only will they try to lure business away from one another, but they may even be tempted to repeat the kinds of public relations and economic campaigns they have taken against others.

Arabs Celebrate Downfall of Tunisia's Islamists

By Khaled Abu Toameh



The removal of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda Party from power has been welcomed not only by Tunisians, but by many Arabs who have accused the Islamists, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood organization, of spreading chaos and instability in the Arab world. Pictured: Supporters of Tunisian President Kais Saied demonstrate in support of his removal of the Ennahda Party from power, near the parliament in Tunis, on July 26, 2021. (Photo by Fethi Belaid/AFP via Getty Images)

The removal of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda [Renaissance] Party from power has been welcomed not only by Tunisians, but by many Arabs who have accused the Islamists, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood organization, of spreading chaos and instability in the Arab world.

The Ennahda Party was inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the ideology of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The crisis in Tunisia erupted on July 25 after President Kais Saied dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the activities of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, whose speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, is the leader of the Ennahda Party. The decisions of the president were made in response to a series of protests against the Ennahda Party, economic hardship and spike in COVID-19 cases in Tunisia.

Tunisia is the third Arab country after Egypt and Sudan to say that it is fed up with the rule of the Islamists. With the exception of Qatar, most of the Arab countries have long

regarded the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups as a major threat to security, stability and peace."

The Palestinians, on the other hand, seem to be the only Arabs who continue to believe in the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, particularly Hamas, the terrorist group that has been ruling the Gaza Strip since July 2007.

A majority of Palestinians voted for Hamas in the 2006 parliamentary election. Recent public opinion polls showed that many Palestinians continue to support Hamas despite its repressive and failed policies and measures in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians, unfortunately, have not learned anything from the bad experience of the Egyptians and Tunisians with the Muslim Brotherhood.

By ridding themselves of the Islamists, the Egyptians, Tunisians and Sudanese were saying that they wanted to move on with their lives and secure a better future for their countries and their children. By sticking to Hamas, the Palestinians are saying that they have no intention of improving their living conditions by creating job opportunities and a strong economy.

"What happened in Tunisia was the inevitable result of years during which the Tunisian people remained under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood," commented Emirati writer Saif Al-Dareei. "This Muslim Brotherhood rule, represented by the Tunisian Ennahda Party and its leader Rashed Ghannouchi, tried to reap political gains on its own without considering the needs of the Tunisian people."

Al-Dareei pointed out that the Tunisians, like the Egyptians, have "revolted against the same obsessive policies" of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose followers support chaos in the Arab world. "The era of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood is over," Al-Dareei wrote.

"There is a popular will to remove the Ennahda Party, which infiltrated power under a false cover of democracy, rights and the constitution, and was planning to remove the president and neutralize his powers."

Al-Dareei called for a "united and strong Arab stand to support Tunisia, its president, and its people." This support, he noted, "has already been demonstrated by many Arab countries, whether by not interfering in Tunisia's affairs, or by supporting the Tunisian leadership to reform the conditions of Tunisians and their right to a decent and secure life."

Prominent Saudi journalist and writer Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed stated that he was not surprised by the downfall of the Islamists in Tunisia. "They [the Islamists] were associated with chaos and assassinations once they were in government," Al-Rashed wrote.

"The extraordinary measures the president took came to rescue the country before the collapse. In fact, what he is doing is saving the Tunisian regime, and Tunisia, the country, from the chaos that had begun."

Al-Rashed said that what happened in Tunisia reflected the "battle of the Middle East" against the Muslim Brotherhood. Noting that Egypt and Sudan got rid of the Islamist rulers in 2013 and 2019 respectively, he pointed out that in Tunisia it took longer to oust "the religious group that has a fascist political project."

Sawsan Al-Sha'er, one of Bahrain's most influential journalists and intellectuals, expressed relief over the ouster of the Islamists of Tunisia and said that this should serve as a reminder to all Arabs that Islamist parties – Shiite and Sunni alike – care about nothing else but reaching power.

"All these parties work for the same purpose: to dismantle the state so as to pave the way for the incorporation of the people to the [Muslim] nation," Al-Sha'er argued.

"The Arabs have discovered that these parties do not have a state project, a development program, or a future vision; the only project they have is to reach a position of decision-making and seize power. The religious parties do not recognize sovereign borders, the state's constitution, laws, and regulations. In all the Arab countries in which these parties have reached decision-making positions, they bypassed all constitutional and political frameworks, and they do not see anything wrong with that because they belong to a [Muslim] nation, and not to a state."

According to Al-Sha'er, the Islamists want to strip the Arab states not only of their national identities, but also make them subject to foreign powers, especially Iran.

"Tunisia shook off the dust of the Muslim Brotherhood and put an end to their control, preventing chaos and turmoil in their country," remarked Amal Abdullah Al-Haddabi, a writer from the United Arab Emirates. "Tunisians, like other Arabs, have suffered a great deal under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood."

Al-Haddabi pointed out that during the past decade, successive Tunisian governments that were dominated by the Islamists failed to score any achievements for the people:

"On the contrary, the country witnessed a continuous decline at all levels, and entered into an unprecedented crisis that reached its climax during the past two years with the failure to confront the Covid-19 pandemic, which frustrated the Tunisians... On the economic level, the unemployment rate rose to about 18%, according to official statistics, and the Tunisian economy contracted in 2020 by 9%, at a time when the governments under the control of the Ennahda Party were unable to address any of the real problems."

On the political level, she added, the Islamists engaged in endless and futile disputes with political parties and state institutions in order to retain control over the government, "plunging Tunisia into continuous political crises throughout the past 10 years."

According to Al-Haddabi, the Tunisian president was forced to step in when he realized that the country was on the path of chaos and destruction under the control of the Muslim Brotherhood.

"He took these steps to save his country and its people from the grip of the Muslim Brotherhood, their schemes and their dark policies," she emphasized.

"What happened in Tunisia is similar to what happened in Egypt in 2013, when the Egyptian people rose up against the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and overthrew them after discovering their subversive project, confirming once again the failure of the Islamists in managing the affairs of the state. What happened in Tunisia is very important, although it is long overdue. It will of course have important effects on the entire Muslim Brotherhood movement in the Arab region, because it confirms that the Arabs can no longer tolerate this group and its policies."

Saudi writer and journalist Abdel Aziz Khamis expressed hope that what happened in Tunisia would spread to other Arab countries. Urging Arabs to learn from the failed experience of the Islamists in Tunisia, Khamis listed a number of reasons why the Ennahda party failed:

"Ennahda failed to offer alternative programs to those adopted by [deposed Tunisian President Zine El Abidine] Ben Ali, against whom the people revolted in December 2010... It failed because it was not able to find real solutions to Tunisia's problems and because it was not concerned with serving the people or improving their living conditions."

Khamis said that the Ennahda Party also failed because it was unable to transform itself into a political party "in the modern sense of the word." The party, he added, "was not able to leave the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood."

Another reason the Tunisian Islamists failed, Khamis wrote, was because they "failed to believe in democracy in its true meaning, including freedom of the media, the independence of the judiciary and economic and social rights."

The Islamists, he said, "were living in a dangerous state of denial and condescension to reality, and that is another manifestation of failure." Khamis also pointed out that some of the terrorist attacks and assassinations in Tunisia were carried out by groups affiliated with the Ennahdah Party.

Evidently, many Arabs are pleased that the rule of the Islamists in Tunisia has finally come to an end. The jubilation in the Arab countries over the toppling of the Ennahdah Party sends a clear message to the rest of the world against embracing or appeasing the Islamists. Sadly, this is a message that continues to be ignored by the many Palestinians and leaders in the West who continue to support Hamas and other Iranian-backed Islamist groups that seek to eliminate Israel and keep the Palestinians mired in misery.

Khaled Abu Toameh is an award-winning journalist based in Jerusalem.

Abir Moussi: The Tunisian MP who was slapped but not beaten

By Magdi Abdelhadi



Abir Moussi is a thorn in the side of political Islamists in Tunisia

When Tunisian tennis star Ons Jabeur hit global headlines for becoming the first North African woman to reach the Wimbledon quarter-finals, another Tunisian woman also made the news but for all the wrong reasons.

Abir Moussi, the outspoken leader of the opposition Al-Dustur al-Hurr party, was slapped and kicked as she was filming a parliamentary session on her mobile phone in June.

The perpetrators were two male members of parliament widely seen as Islamists. They then threw water at her, followed by the empty bottles and the whole incident was caught on TV cameras - to the shock and bewilderment of many in the Arab world.

Ms Moussi is a passionate 47-year-old lawyer and indefatigable campaigner against political Islam in Tunisia - represented by Ennahda, the biggest parliamentary bloc, and other Islamist groups.

She was once a solid supporter of the ousted Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, and regards herself and her small party as the guardians of the secular tradition laid down by the founder of modern Tunisia, Habib Bourgiba.

In parliament, Ms Moussi cuts an extraordinary figure. She attends sessions wearing a helmet and a flak jacket because, she says, she has received death threats from Islamists.



Abir Moussi says she has no choice but to wear a helmet in parliament

She also keeps a photo of Bourgiba on her desk in the chamber and occasionally uses a hand-held megaphone to interrupt debates, while broadcasting the session live from her mobile with running commentary.

Her critics say she is a corrupt supporter of the old regime who wants to thwart Tunisia's transition to democracy.

Shortly before the parliamentary fracas in June, she upset her critics by opposing a development deal between Tunisia and Qatar - one of the main financial backers of political Islam in the region.

The Ennahda-led parliament has issued a strong statement condemning the attack on Ms Moussi and vowed to inflict the harshest possible sanctions on the two men - who do not belong to Ennahda, but are allied with it, though they publicly deny it.

'House of obedience for women'

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Ms Moussi's conduct - she is accused of obstructing the work of the parliament and violating parliamentary procedures - the fact remains that the incident has been seen and understood in Tunisia and beyond as simply two men physically attacking a woman.

Writing in the pan-Arab daily Al-Sharq al-Awast, Lebanese author Hazem Saghiyyah said he was especially disappointed because Tunisia was the only country where the Arab Spring uprising was a relative success, pointing to the 2017 approval of Law 58 law which promotes equality between the sexes.

Instead, Saghiyyah argues, the two men "wanted to turn the parliament into another house of obedience, much larger and more authoritative than the family home" - a reference to the controversial Islamic tradition whereby a judge can order a wife back to the marital home if she has left it for any reason.

Pushback against women's rights

Law 58 put Tunisia ahead of many of its neighbours and other Muslim majority countries as far as women's rights are concerned.

For example, it broke the controversial Muslim tradition of allowing a rapist to marry his victim to avoid jail and to "protect the family honour" of the victim. The law also strengthened protection for women who report violence against them to the police, and it obliges the police to refer them to hospital and treat their complaints with due diligence.

Despite the progress on the legal front, reality tells a completely different story. By all accounts, violence against women, and in particular domestic violence has increased.



Aïsha Meddeb

A local rights organisation says domestic violence kills a woman every week in Tunisia, and it has worsened during the pandemic, says the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women.

"Violence against women is more alarming than ever," says Aïsha Meddeb, a young professional.

"There is an incredible wave of frustration and anger that's released on women. Like someone trying to remind us that we belong to wherever they want us to belong. Successful women have existed since Bourguiba's time."

For its part, Ennahda says it championed Law 58, and is proud of its record on women's rights. "The party works hard at achieving equality for women in public life and takes measures to ensure their fair representation, and this work has meant that 40% of its MPs are female and that of the country's 70 female mayors, 42 of them are from Ennahda," it adds.

Yosra Frawes, the regional head of the International Federation for Human Rights, acknowledges the strides in legislation to protect women's rights, but adds that these have been reduced to mere "ink on paper".

She says the threat to these improvements comes from "the rise in right-wing and Islamic forces which seek to render these laws ineffectual - by, for example, tolerating the perpetrators, or people who disseminate outmoded ideas and encourage marrying underage girls and campaign against abortion".

Ms Frawes says although Tunisian women enjoy significant rights they have yet to attain full equality.

'Long and arduous path'

The main obstacle to that is a male-dominated society that renders all forms of discrimination and violence acceptable, she argues.

"Tunisian women, like all women in the region, face a long and arduous path to attain recognition of their human rights and to eliminate all forms of domination and violence... Whatever form of government there is, be it religious or military.

Far from being a uniquely Tunisian problem, Saghiyyah argues that the oppression of women is increasing across the region from Iran to North Africa.

He says this is partly due to the fact that the rights given to women were imposed from above - as in the case of Turkey's autocratic ruler Kemal Ataturk, or Bourgiba's Tunisia.

That is why it was easy for Islamists and their followers to set up all that is progressive - including women's freedom - as being against "the people and their freedom".



Police brutality and high unemployment have driven young Tunisians to protest

Back in June and still reeling from the attack in parliament, Ms Moussi made an impromptu speech:

"Where are you America," she asked rhetorically. "Is this how your democracy works? They have beaten me in front of you and in front of the whole world. Are these your democratic partners?" she added in tearful, and somewhat melodramatic, tones.

The entire episode illustrates the fundamental paradox troubling Tunisia's transition to democracy, and other countries like it.

Modernisation introduced by post-colonial autocrats such as Bourgiba may not survive the onslaught of the ballot box.

In free and fair elections, deeply conservative forces may win the vote and set the liberalisation of society back, and women are often the first losers.

Magdi Abdelhadi is a foreign affairs commentator

Erdogan Government Endorses the Taliban

By Uzay Bulut



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has recently clarified his stance on the Taliban, referring to Islam as the common ground between Turkey and the jihadist organization.

On July 20, Erdogan said that Turkey could negotiate with the Taliban about Turkey's plan to run the Kabul airport after the withdrawal of the US troops. He explained to members of the press in Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus:

Just as the Taliban held some talks with the United States, the Taliban should probably hold these talks with Turkey much more comfortably. For Turkey has nothing that contradicts their [the Taliban's] faith. And because Turkey has nothing that contradicts their faith, I think that we will be able to discuss and agree on these issues better. And there is a process flowing from Doha to there. I think we will evaluate this process well.

Erdogan's open signaling to Doha, the capital of Qatar, one of the prominent financiers of the Muslim Brotherhood, is remarkable. Apparently, by saying "the process [is] flowing from Doha," Erdogan refers to the future – or perhaps current – lucrative contracts among the Taliban, Turkey and Qatar.

In a later interview, Erdogan said that Turkish authorities are working to establish dialogue with the Taliban: Turkey's relevant institutions are currently working until we have some talks with the Taliban. Maybe even I can be in a position to receive the person who will be their leader.

Meanwhile, Erdogan's prominent supporters continue following his steps regarding the Taliban. One is Professor Mehmet Boynukalın, the former chief imam of the historic Hagia Sophia Church in Istanbul, which last year was converted from a museum into a mosque. Boynukalın praised the Taliban, saying: May Allah help them and enable them to rule with truth and justice.

Turkey's pro-government media also appears in agreement. The pro-Erdogan newspaper *Turkiye*, for instance, portrayed the Taliban in an exceedingly positive light during an exclusive interview with a spokesperson of the terrorist group.

In the interview published on August 20, Suhail Shaheen, one of the founders of the Taliban and its current spokesperson, said that “they need Turkey the most in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.” He explained:

Contrary to what is known, as the Taliban, we have had close relations with Turkey. Turkey is a very important actor for us, a respected and powerful country in the world, and a nation and state that has a very special place for the Islamic Ummah [nation]. Moreover, Turkey’s bond with Afghanistan cannot be compared with any other country.

I openly declare that as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, we need Turkey’s friendship, support and cooperation more than we need any other country. Afghanistan has rich underground treasures. But we do not have the power to process them. Our entire infrastructure has collapsed because of the [US] occupation and marauding rulers. We want to cooperate with Turkey in the fields of health, education, economy, construction and energy, and in the processing of untouched underground riches. It is our greatest expectation that our Turkish brothers will play an active role in these issues right after the internal balances are fully formed.

The 20-year war with the USA, in which we gave thousands of martyrs, is over. We fought primarily for the freedom of our people. Not for power or authority. We have gone through very difficult times, but throughout this period, the two most important factors that have led us to victory are the support of the Afghan people and our faith in Allah. In fact, this war was a kind of struggle of spiritual values against material ones.

Referring to the sharia rules and restrictions which the Taliban have imposed on Afghan people, Shaheen asserted: “We have banned these evils, which ruin the society in every way, both for the sake of the peace of our people and because they are the orders and prohibitions of Islam.”

Yet as the director of Jihad Watch, Robert Spencer, explains, “what the Taliban does is all in accord with Islamic jurisprudence. All of it: the sex slavery (Qur’an 4:3, 4:24, 23:1-6, 33:50), the subjugation of women (Qur’an 4:34), the covering of women (Qur’an 33:59), the killing of those who worked with the US (Qur’an 4:89),” and so on.

However, many in the West are unwilling or intellectually incapable of drawing parallels between the Taliban’s actions and Islamic scriptures. Investigative journalist Daniel Greenfield noted in a recent article:

Americans didn’t invent the forever war. It’s been going on in the Islamic parts of the world for over a thousand years. It’s unfashionable and politically incorrect to mention it. That’s why the media carefully describes the Taliban as “religious students” without naming the religion. It’ll refer to Sunni and Shiite infighting in Iraq while leaving off the “Islam” part of the group.

The West’s mainstream media largely ignores or fails to understand the Islamic nature of the Taliban’s crimes, often implying that the Taliban are just fanatics who are not true representatives of the religion. Yet Erdogan has been consistent in his stance on the issue. In 2017, for instance, he rejected the concept of “moderate Islam.” He said, “Islam cannot be either ‘moderate’ or ‘not moderate.’ Islam can only be one thing.” He added that the “patent of this concept originated in the West,” which “really want[s] to weaken Islam.”

As early as 2007, he said: “These epithets of ‘moderate Islam’ are very ugly, it is disrespectful and an insult to our religion. There is no moderate or immoderate Islam. Islam is Islam and that’s it.”

Erdogan, the media that operate as his mouthpiece and his other supporters have thus started to openly endorse the Taliban. However, the Turkish government’s willingness to further cooperate with the Taliban is not shocking at all. It is actually a continuation of a pattern, which is the Turkish government’s long-lasting support for Islamic terror organizations in the region.

The question is: Why does the West – and particularly NATO – turn a blind eye to Turkey’s President’s endorsement of the Taliban? Are they on the same page as Turkey concerning the Taliban and other Islamic terror groups in the region?

Uzay Bulut is a Turkish journalist and political analyst formerly based in Ankara.

Turkey and the West: Drifting Further Apart

By Burak Bekdil



Pictured: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (center), then EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini (right) and then European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Johannes Hahn at the 54th meeting of the EU-Turkey Association Council in Brussels on March 15, 2019. (Photo by Emmanuel Dunand/AFP via Getty Images)

In theory, Turkey is a NATO ally. In theory, also, Turkey is in negotiations with the European Union for full membership. In reality, both are illusions.

In September 2010, Turkish and Chinese aircraft conducted joint exercises in Turkish airspace. In 2011, the Turkish government announced plans to build a ballistic missile with a range of 2,500 kilometers. In 2012, Turkey joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as a dialogue partner. (Other dialogue partners were Belarus and Sri Lanka; observers were Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Mongolia.) Since then, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said numerous times that Ankara will abandon its quest to join the EU if it is offered full membership in the SCO.

In September 2013, Turkey announced that it had selected a Chinese company for the construction of its first long-range air and anti-missile defence system. After Ankara scrapped that contract, it went on to acquire the Russian-made S-400 system, which resulted in Turkey's suspension from the U.S.-led multinational consortium that builds the F-35 fifth-generation fighter jet. The S-400 controversy also triggered U.S. CAATSA sanctions against Turkey.

Turkey's socio-political distance from the West has been growing steadily. New research, by the Turkish pollsters Areda Survey, has shown that:

- 54.6% of Turks view the U.S. as the biggest security threat to their country while 51% think the biggest threat is Israel; 31.1% think it is the United Arab Emirates; and 30.7% think it is Saudi Arabia.
- 35.5% of Turks consider the U.S. unreliable; 32.8% think it is a colonialist state.
- 72.2% object to any kind of cooperation with the U.S.
- When asked with which one of the two countries Turkey should develop its relations, 78.9% said Russia against 21.1% who defended cooperation with the U.S.
- 58.2% of Turks think that Russia is their strategic ally.
- 69.3% think that the acquisition of the Russian S-400 system was the right decision.

Turkey's self-alienation from the West and Western institutions is not unrequited. New research in Europe shows how Europeans, once enthusiastic about Turkish membership in the EU, now feel Turkey does not belong with their political culture.

In April, the European Council on Foreign Relations surveyed more than 17,000 people in 12 European countries. The survey found that:

"Turkey is the only country that more Europeans see as an adversary than a necessary partner. Given that Turkey is a NATO member – unlike China, Russia, India, and Japan, all of which Europeans consider less threatening – this finding is quite worrying. Only 25% of Europeans see Turkey as a necessary partner, and only 4% see it as an ally with shared values and interests. In Germany, 41% of respondents consider Turkey an adversary.

"Our survey shows that Europeans generally want a cooperative rather than a confrontational foreign policy. The idea of 'strategic partnerships' is deeply embedded in the DNA of Europeans. At the same time, Europeans understand there are aspects of their relations with Russia, China, and Turkey that make these countries rivals or even adversaries."

Turkey is not better perceived across the Atlantic. President Joe Biden's use of the word "genocide" on April 24 perhaps was not a game-changer in deeply problematic U.S.-Turkish relations, but it enhances Turkey's political isolation, weakens its arguments on whether a genocide did or did not occur from 1915-24, and further destabilizes whatever is left of Ankara's soft power. "The American people honour all those Armenians who perished in the genocide that began 106 years ago today," President Biden said on Armenian Remembrance Day. With that statement, Biden became the first U.S. president to recognize the Armenian genocide.

More recently, Ambassador John Bolton, the former national security adviser to President Donald Trump, said he has joined the advisory council of the Turkish Democracy Project, a newly launched institution, "to shine a light on the darkening situation" in Turkey.

The Turkish Democracy Project is "a nonprofit, non-partisan, international policy organization formed in response to Turkey's recent turn away from democracy and toward authoritarianism," its website says.

"It's time to sound the alarm on Turkey," Bolton wrote in his Twitter announcement. He went on to describe Ankara as a one-time reliable NATO ally that has grown uncomfortably close to Russia.

On July 1, the U.S. added Turkey to a list of countries that are implicated in the use of child soldiers over the past year, thereby for the first time placing a NATO ally on such a list. It is a move that is likely further to complicate the already fraught ties between Ankara and Washington. The U.S. State Department determined in its 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report that Turkey was providing "tangible support" to the Sultan Murad division in Syria, a faction of Syrian opposition that Ankara has long supported and a group that Washington has said recruited and used child soldiers.

The feeling of drifting apart between the Turks and Westerners is mutual and growing. It is an inevitable result of Turkey's top-to-bottom Islamization over the past two decades. The West now has a small Russia to deal with.

Burak Bekdil one of Turkey's leading journalists.

Turkey: Arbitrary Arrests, Kidnappings, Torture in Prison

By Uzay Bulut



Torture and ill-treatment, as well as a lack of medical care for sick prisoners, are widespread in Turkish jails. Meanwhile, those who advocate for the rights of the victims are arrested. Given the horrifying scale of destruction of human rights of citizens of Turkey, is it not the time for governments finally to make human rights a priority in its dealings there? (Image source: iStock)

Turkey's government continues the systematic targeting and persecution of those perceived as "enemies" of the government.

Ayşe Özdoğan, suffering from stage-4 maxillary sinus cancer and one of the tens of thousands of Turkey's victims, was convicted of being a supporter of a movement led by Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric self-exiled to Pennsylvania. The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan calls Gülen's movement a "terrorist organization" and accuses it of carrying out an attempted coup d'état in 2016.

According to the court ruling, Özdoğan's so-called crime is to have worked at a dormitory affiliated with the Gülen movement. She was sentenced to nine years and four months in prison for being "a member of a terrorist organization". Her husband, a teacher, was dismissed from his job and imprisoned for the same alleged crime. Their 8-year-old son suffers from a congenital heart defect.

Özdoğan was arrested and imprisoned two weeks after being diagnosed with cancer in April 2019. As she could not pursue a required second cancer treatment surgery, the disease has spread to her brain. Although she was eventually released because of her son's heart condition, she is now massively disabled.

Turkey's Court of Cassation has approved her prison sentence, which means she will be imprisoned again soon. Ever since her release, she has been struggling on Twitter to make her voice heard. She is seeking support from the public and justice from state authorities. On June 14, she wrote on Twitter:

"Because my surgery was delayed while I was in prison, my left upper tooth, left palate, cheekbone and lymph nodes were removed. The bottom of my left chin is now empty. 20 cms of bone was taken from my leg and placed on my face. These surgeries have affected my whole body. I now have hearing, vision and speech loss.

"I'm having trouble walking. Since my tear ducts have been removed, my tears never stop; they flow constantly. Since platinum has been placed under my eye, inflammation occurs in that area, which can also be seen from the outside. According to the latest MRI I had, the tumour has spread to the back of my eye."

Sending Özdoğan to prison while her body is crumbling due to cancer means giving her a slow and painful death sentence. More so because torture and ill-treatment, as well as a lack of medical care for sick prisoners, are widespread in Turkish jails.

A human rights advocate group called "The Hunger Strikes Monitoring and Follow-up Coordination" - which includes organizations such as Diyarbakır Medical Chamber, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, Human Rights Association, Lawyers Association for Freedom, Association for Solidarity with and Aid for the Families of Prisoners and the Union of Health and Social Services Workers - visited prisons in Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Urfa, Bayburt, Erzincan, Malatya and Maraş and reported on the violations of rights in April, May and June 2021.

According to the report, political prisoners are often subject to torture, assaults, insults, threats, and other forms of ill-treatment in those prisons. Some of the abuses include:

A prisoner in Diyarbakır T Type Prison stated that he was repeatedly tortured in torture chambers, also known as aquarium rooms, sponge rooms or soft rooms. Those rooms are arranged in such a way that there are no security cameras there and no torture detection can be made. He stated that his left thumb was broken after the torture he was subjected to while his hands were cuffed behind his back on May 3, 2021. He stated that he was subjected to a nude search while he was being transferred from Espiye Prison. The report adds that there are many cases of torture in this prison, but the prisoners are generally reluctant to announce it, and they are made to feel desperate by being told that even if they file a criminal complaint to the prison administration and staff, they will not get any results.

In the prison of Elazığ, when the battered prisoners said that they wanted to go to the prison infirmary, they were made to wait for at least three days. When they finally had access to the prison doctor, they were not given a report of the assault. After the prisoners filed a criminal complaint about being beaten, a disciplinary investigation was launched against the prisoners for insulting the officer and insulting the president rather than opening an investigation against the perpetrators.

In Malatya, the prisoners said they were forcibly frisked while naked. When they did not accept being frisked naked, they were battered and received disciplinary punishments. They stated that the items they brought from the prisons they were transferred from were not given to them by prison authorities. There were suicide cases and deaths in some wards. Some prisoners said their release was prevented

due to the arbitrary punishments they received, such as being put in solitary cells for not accepting unlawful practices (including forced standing.)

Sick prisoners are not transferred to hospitals in most cases. They are not treated properly and their applications to the prison administration to seek help are unanswered.

The prisoners who are transferred to hospital are brought before a doctor in double handcuffs, and the doctors do not show any negative reaction to this ill-treatment. If prisoners object to the situation, they are removed from the medical room without being examined and a report is drawn up which states that the prisoners, of their own free will, do not want to be examined.

There are many prisoners with chronic diseases who do not receive proper medical treatment. Bayram Demirhan, for instance, had a loss of function in both kidneys, vision loss of 95 % in one eye and 20% in the other. Yet, he has not been medically treated. According to the report, in another case, a Kurdish prisoner from north-eastern Syria named Izeddin Reşo was tortured with electricity, which exploded his hands and feet. Afterwards, he suffered severe psychological problems.

Meanwhile, those who advocate for the rights of the victims are arrested. The opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) lawmaker, Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, for instance, was sentenced to two years and six months in prison for "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts. His parliamentary immunity was stripped on March 17. Gergerlioğlu started a "Justice Watch" in the Parliament that day. On March 21, he was forcibly removed by police and taken into custody. Gergerlioğlu was later released and continued his "Justice Watch" within his own house. On April 2, his house was raided by police, who imprisoned him.

Gergerlioğlu is an outspoken voice of victims of torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful dismissals, and other rights abuses in Turkey. On July 5, police intervened with tear gas in the "Justice Watch" that the HDP had initiated in front of Ankara Sincan Prison demanding the release of Gergerlioğlu. Five people, including Gergerlioğlu's son, Salih Gergerlioğlu, were detained by the police. The detainees were battered by police during arrest. Salih was released the same day; his father was released on July 7.

Also punished for speaking out against rights abuses was Sinan Aygül, Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper "Bitlis News". A lawsuit was filed against him for "violating the confidentiality of the investigation" after he covered a child abuse case that took place in the city of Bitlis in 2019.

The court board, citing the lawsuits filed earlier based on the news Aygül had made, sentenced him to 10 months in prison. They claimed that "There was no positive opinion in our court that he would not commit a crime again, considering the criminal personality traits of the accused and his insistence on committing a crime..." The Court of Appeal upheld the ruling by reducing the 10-month prison sentence to five months.

Aygül surrendered to the Tatvan prison to serve his prison sentence on June 30. The man who had committed the crime, however, was sentenced to five years in prison and then released.

Aygül made a statement to the press in front of the prison:

"The prison sentence I have received is not very important for me, but the punishment of a news article that reveals sexual abuse against children takes us to a completely

different point. Let's not allow the restriction of freedom of the press, and the legitimization of harassment and rape in this way."

Such unlawful imprisonments and arbitrary arrests have become systematic in Turkey to the point that Turkey now ranks 107th out of 128 countries in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2020.

Meanwhile, those who are outside of Turkey are not safe from the government's arbitrary acts. On July 5, President Erdoğan announced that the Turkish intelligence agency had "brought to justice" educator Orhan İnandı, who disappeared in Kyrgyzstan this past May. İnandı, a dual citizen of both countries, who had worked as a school principal in Kyrgyzstan for 26 years, is not the first target of an abduction by the Turkish government. Many other cases of the kidnappings of dissidents have taken place in African, Balkan and southeast Asian countries.

In February, the US State Department announced that President Joe Biden is committed to a foreign policy "that is centred on the defence of democracy and the protection of human rights." Given the horrifying scale of destruction of human rights of citizens of Turkey, is it not the time for the US government finally to make human rights a priority in its dealings there?

Uzay Bulut is a Turkish journalist and political analyst formerly based in Ankara.

Eye to the Horizon: The UAE's Maritime Ambitions

By Emma Soubrier



At the end of May, the Associated Press uncovered the construction of an airbase seemingly by the United Arab Emirates on the volcanic Mayun Island, also known as Perim Island, in the Bab el-Mandeb strait off the coast of Yemen. Not only is this, as underlined by U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, “a reminder that the UAE is not actually out of Yemen,” but it more broadly goes against the narrative of some articles suggesting the UAE is moving away from “a muscular foreign policy.” The country had appeared to be banking on a diversification of its diplomatic portfolio into soft power initiatives amid reports highlighting continuing UAE involvement in conflicts in Yemen and Libya. However, hard power (including the development of a local defence industry) is still a high priority for the country. This was confirmed by the high figures of total arms purchases as well as the partnerships strengthened or created at IDEX 2021 and the recent announcement of a \$982 million arms deal for four Falaj-3 offshore patrol vessels for the navy – the largest order to date for Abu Dhabi Ship Building, a local company that is now part of the EDGE Group. The UAE is increasingly looking to the maritime domain as an area of regional and global cooperation but also as a vessel of continued power projection.

In the Gulf Arab states, naval forces have historically been neglected, coming behind the air and land forces, despite the importance of maritime security to these countries' stability, economic and otherwise. Ken Pollack notes how, in the UAE, they were “receiving less money, attention, or high-quality personnel.” However, the navy (and its arsenal) were not completely ignored. One of the UAE's first local manufacturing companies was precisely a maritime one. Abu Dhabi Ship Building was founded in 1996 under the vision of Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, who was then chief of staff of the UAE armed forces, as a naval maintenance company that then developed its shipbuilding line. Among other efforts, the creation of the Abu Dhabi Ports Maritime Training Center in 2012 (since renamed the Abu Dhabi Maritime Academy) also signaled a determination to boost capabilities in this area. However, these developments do not compensate for the sharp and inherent limitations of the UAE's

navy. Christian Heller underlined how a small population and lack of sailors has limited the number of ships that the UAE can man – and thus use – at a time (only half of its corvettes), for instance.

Since the start of the war in Yemen, in a possible attempt to address some of these limitations, the UAE has made clear efforts to boost its navy. This is apparent in the development of new training centres related to maritime security. In 2016, the development of a UAE naval training centre by the Canadian company CAE was announced as part of \$113 million in contracts. Originally scheduled to open in May 2020, the facility is yet to be inaugurated – with delays possibly due to the coronavirus pandemic. In February, CAE managing director Thibaut Trancart noted that the training center was approaching completion. In 2019 the development of the Underwater Training Centre by the French company Thales, to be located at Al Taweelah Naval Military School like the centre developed by CAE, was announced – although no opening date was set then, and there have been no recent updates on the project. In 2019, the UAE and France did launch an advanced maritime strategic course at Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. Recent arms procurement by the UAE also illustrate this trend, including the purchase of two Gowind-2500 frigates and Exocet anti-ship missiles from France along with naval surface-to-air systems from the United States in 2019. In 2017, the appointment of a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family, Major General Saeed bin Hamdan bin Mohammed al-Nahyan, as commander of the UAE's navy was another sign of the increased importance being placed on maritime forces. These efforts to bolster the UAE's naval forces have been on display in the Saudi and Emirati intervention in Yemen since 2015, through different UAE missions and specific military equipment used for them. One notable maritime operation was a small amphibious assault on Mukalla in 2016. Additionally, the 2015 blockade of the Hodeidah port was enforced by the Baynunah corvette, manufactured by Abu Dhabi Ship Building. Moreover, the UAE has helped in rebuilding the Yemeni coast guard, notably training new units on the Hadramout coast along with Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, the UAE has continued efforts to forward its interests in Yemen, through its Southern Transitional Council allies, including in the maritime domain, which has sometimes increased insecurity. In particular, the power struggle between the United Nations-recognized government of Yemen and the STC in southern Yemen has had a detrimental impact on the coast guard's effectiveness in Aden. In May 2020, the STC refused to hand the coast guard control of waters in the Gulf of Aden off the coastal areas STC forces currently hold. Government officials claim this has prevented the coast guard from performing its duties, and they traded accusations with the STC for blame over the failure to prevent a pirate attack on a British-flagged oil tanker. A month later, the STC also seized Socotra, off Yemen's southern coast, forcing the coast guard and government forces to withdraw from the island. While this deprived the coast guard of a strategic location to ensure maritime security, this really benefited the UAE. Abu Dhabi has reportedly been building military bases on the island, in addition to funding infrastructure projects that connect the people living in Socotra to the UAE rather than the rest of Yemen.

The UAE wants to become an important player in the region's maritime security, and this explains its interest in building bases in strategic locations such as Socotra and Mayun. On Socotra, following the Abraham Accords, the UAE reportedly began setting up intelligence bases with Israel to collect information on maritime traffic and watch oil trading channels. Mayun is equally if not more strategic, at the heart of the Bab el-

Mandeb, described as “one of the world’s crucial maritime chokepoints for both energy shipments and commercial cargo.”

Eye on the horizon, the UAE views the seas as a promising field for diplomacy and cooperation. For example, the UAE participated in missions for maritime surveillance in the Strait of Hormuz and sought to de-escalate tensions with Iran through talks about maritime security in 2019. The UAE is also advancing initiatives on coastal and marine protection as part of an increased interest in environmental matters and human security at large. But the UAE doesn’t seem to be stopping there. As demonstrated through its missions and basing in Yemen, for Abu Dhabi, the maritime sphere seems to be yet another multifaceted vessel for the UAE to project power and influence in the region and on the international stage.

Emma Soubrier is a visiting scholar at the Arab Gulf Institute in Washington, DC.

A Royal Mark Up: How an Emirati Sheikh Resells Millions of Russian Vaccines to the Developing World

By Pjotr Sauer, Jake Cordell and Felix Light



Sheikh Ahmed Dalmook al-Maktoum being welcomed to Guyana by a high-ranking government delegation. Guyana Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Russia has awarded an Emirati royal exclusive rights to sell its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine to a host of countries in at least three continents in a deal that has seen buyers paying huge premiums for supplies, a Moscow Times investigation has found.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, Russia has advertised Sputnik V as a “vaccine for all mankind” and promoted the jab across the developing world as a cheap route out of the pandemic. But documents obtained by The Moscow Times, as well as interviews with officials and vaccine buyers, show that countries from Pakistan to Guyana have been forced to deal with a royal middleman and companies based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) acting as official Sputnik V resellers asking clients to pay more than double Russia’s advertised price to get their hands on the jab.

The deals have left a trail of controversy in their wake, threatening to undermine Russia’s already troubled vaccine diplomacy efforts.

The setup hinges on an arrangement between the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and Aurugulf Health Investments, an Abu Dhabi-based company established late last year with close connections to Emirati royalty. RDIF granted Aurugulf exclusive rights to sell and distribute its flagship Sputnik V vaccine in countries around the world, documents reveal, with Sheikh Ahmed Dalmook al-Maktoum, a low-ranking Dubai royal, acting as the chief dealmaker.

Connections between Russia, Maktoum and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over sales of Sputnik V in the developing world were first outlined by Norwegian outlet VG in an investigation published last month. While neither RDIF nor the Abu Dhabi company responded to requests for comment for this story, The Moscow Times has found a complex web of connections between the two leading to deals to supply millions of vaccine doses to some of the world's most in-need countries.

The Sheikh and the scheme

On March 10, 2021, businessman Jacques Sarraf travelled to Abu Dhabi for a meeting about importing Sputnik V into Lebanon.

Sarraf, head of the Lebanese Russian Business Council, honorary Russian consul in Lebanon and chairman of the Malia Group conglomerate, had first been contacted by RDIF six months earlier as part of its sales drive to potentially interested parties.

Sputnik V had been authorized in Lebanon and Sarraf was interested in getting his hands on doses for Lebanon's hard-hit private sector as supplies from the World Health Organization's (WHO) Covax facility were slow to arrive.

RDIF put him in touch with Chimera Investments, an Abu Dhabi-based private investment vehicle linked to Aurugulf, which the Russians told Sarraf was the "regional distributor" for Sputnik V. They could strike a deal directly, RDIF said, without Russia's involvement.

The Lebanon deal was just one of a handful of Sputnik V supply agreements struck during the first months of 2021 between Maktoum and Aurugulf-linked investment companies on one side and governments and private healthcare companies across the world on the other.

Despite being some of the most crucial healthcare procurements in history, the deals needed no approval from Moscow as they fell under a sweeping agreement with an RDIF subsidiary named Human Vaccine giving Aurugulf and Maktoum the exclusive right to resell Sputnik V in the developing world, according to multiple documents seen.

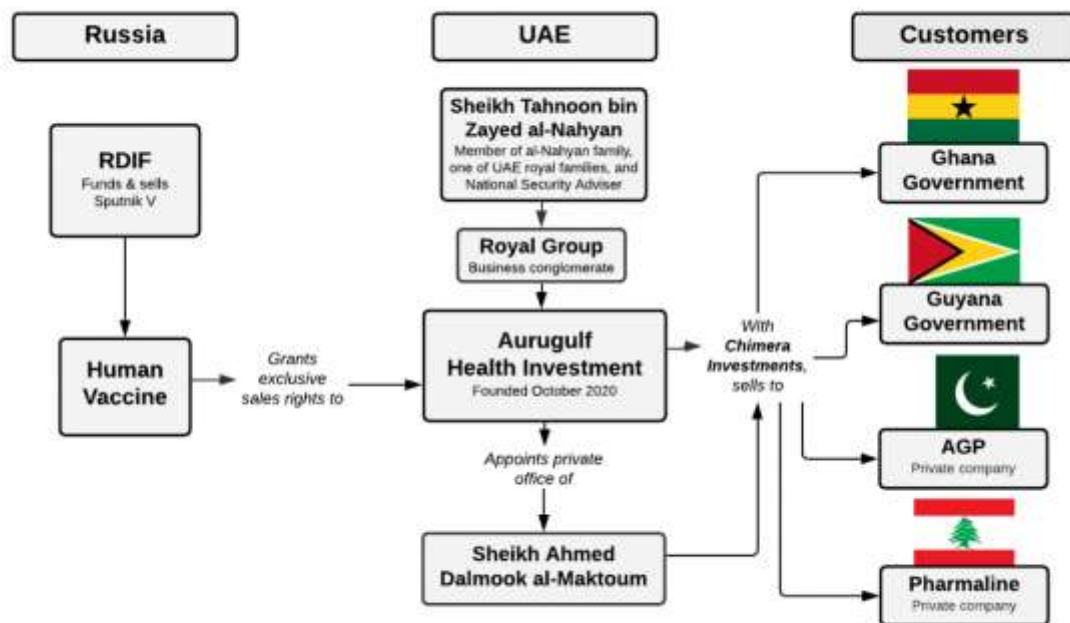
Chimera Investments — the company Sarraf visited in Abu Dhabi — is a subsidiary of Royal Group, a sprawling conglomerate run by powerful royal Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al-Nahyan, UAE's national security advisor and brother of the current leader of Abu Dhabi. The al-Nahyan family is one of the six ruling families of the UAE.

Corporate registry data seen also shows that Royal Group is one of two entities controlling Aurugulf, which was registered in Abu Dhabi in October 2020 — two months after Sputnik V was authorized in Russia and weeks into RDIF's intense marketing drive. The company has little corporate presence, according to registry data shared by corporate intelligence outfit Diligencia.

Aurugulf is named in multiple documents as the exclusive rights holder for the supply of Sputnik V in "many countries" around the world. In at least two instances — deals to supply millions of vaccines to private sector providers in Pakistan and Lebanon — Chimera Investments has also been involved.

"Aurugulf has been appointed ... as the exclusive seller and distributor of ... 'Sputnik V' adenovirus vector vaccine for Covid-19 in many countries of the world," one letter sent from Aurugulf to an African government reads.

Minutes from a board meeting of Pakistan's drug regulatory authority say it received a letter from RDIF confirming that "exclusive authorization has been issued by the first deputy CEO of RDIF, dated 8 November 2020, in the name of Aurugulf Health Investments ... for many countries, including Pakistan."



Simplified diagram showing abridged control structures and agreements to sell Sputnik V vaccines in select countries.

The scope of Russia's agreement with Aurugulf and in exactly which countries RDIF has granted the company exclusive rights to sell, market and distribute Sputnik V are not clear. The Moscow Times found Aurugulf involvement with at least four countries that have already signed deals for Sputnik V jobs – Ghana, Guyana, Lebanon and Pakistan – alongside documents naming Aurugulf as the exclusive supplier in South Africa and local reports the outfit also has rights to sell to Indonesia.

The arrangement differs from Russia's agreements to supply Sputnik V to EU members Slovakia and Hungary – both of which were direct agreements with RDIF's Human Vaccine subsidiary to supply Sputnik V at \$9.95 a dose, or \$19.90 for the full two-component inoculation.

That compares with \$19 per dose charged by Aurugulf to the Ghanian government, \$24 in Guyana and \$22.50 per dose paid by private provider AGP in Pakistan.

The point person striking Aurugulf's potentially lucrative Sputnik V resale deals is Maktoum, who is loosely connected to the UAE regime through family and marriage.

Aurugulf, having received exclusive distribution rights from Russia for Sputnik V, subsequently "agreed to appoint the private office of His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Dalmook al-Maktoum" as the company's "agent" to "develop, distribute and market our products" in a number of countries, including Pakistan and South Africa.

Industry figures that Maktoum himself has explicit approval, endorsement and support from Moscow for selling Sputnik V across parts of the developing world.

“We were told by the Russian side that Maktoum is the exclusive seller of the vaccine to a number of countries, so we went through him,” an executive at one company importing Sputnik V requesting anonymity.

An invoice shared by Pakistan’s Profit magazine lists “the private office of Sheikh Ahmed Dalmoock al-Maktoum (through Chimera Investment)” as the supplier for a shipment of 50,000 doses at a price of \$1.125 million to AGP in Pakistan. The bank details of Maktoum’s private office are listed as the recipient for the payment.

Middle Eastern analysts described Maktoum as a mid-ranking or lower-tier royal — somebody who can use his connections and access to score business deals around the world and act in concert with more senior royal figures to advance their business or political interests.

“He is known to have a strong network across Africa and has done a lot of work in Angola and Ghana before, in different sectors,” said Patrick Lord, Diligencia commercial director.

“It is not unusual for minor royals to trade off their ruling family connections, even if they are not actually very senior.”

Maktoum’s own business is the Ameri Group, which describes itself on its website as a company involved in energy, infrastructure and agriculture projects across 19 countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Experts familiar with Maktoum and the world of Emirati politics and business, who declined to be quoted, doubted he would be operating without approval from above.

Local anger

The use of the Emirati scheme to sell Sputnik V has been met with uproar in almost every country where a supply deal is known to have taken place.

In Pakistan and Lebanon, private companies leapt at the chance to get vaccines, circumventing sluggish national rollouts and delays to the WHO’s own vaccine sharing Covax facility. Sarraf said that in just seven days businesses requested vaccines for 830,000 people — 12% of Lebanon’s population — at \$38 per jab plus hospital fees, more than half the country’s monthly minimum wage.

Local Pakistani supplier AGP is embroiled in legal proceedings after selling its first batches to private clinics and is now battling with the government over what price the precious jabs can be sold at. It paid a wholesale price of \$22.50 each for the first batch of 50,000 doses, which arrived in Karachi on March 17 having been shipped from Abu Dhabi via Bahrain, transport documents show. That’s more than twice Russia’s advertised selling price, even before private hospitals added their own mark up.

The shipment of the vaccines cost less than \$0.10 per dose, according to an air freight receipt obtained by The Moscow Times.

The deals between Maktoum and private sector distributors in Lebanon and Pakistan also confer exclusive local distribution rights, potentially blocking the governments in Beirut and Islamabad from obtaining and distributing Sputnik V directly.

A possible Aurugulf deal to import Sputnik V into Kenya for use in the private sector has also run into trouble. The country’s Health Ministry pulled Sputnik V’s authorization for emergency use after discovering an imported batch of 75,000 had

arrived from Dubai, and not directly from the Russian government, Dmitriy Charneskiy, second secretary at the Russian Embassy in Nairobi.

“The vaccines ended up not being used and they even tried to resell them to other countries,” he said. “If you are looking for a happy Sputnik V story, this isn’t it.”

We not able to verify the specific involvement of Aurugulf in the deal to sell Sputnik V vaccines in Kenya, though there are no other known partners or producers of the vaccine based in Dubai, from where the shipment arrived, or the UAE.

The deals are not confined to the private sector.

Russia has also directly instructed governments to deal with Aurugulf and Maktoum under the terms of the exclusive resale agreements — despite attempts from those states to deal directly with Moscow or the RDIF.

In both Ghana and Guyana, the agreements with a Middle Eastern middleman have been met with loud criticism from opposition politicians.

In Ghana, the government was attacked for agreeing to import 3.4 million doses of Sputnik V at \$19 a dose — a deal which would see Aurugulf make \$30 million after buying the jabs at Russia’s \$9.95 asking price.

The Health Ministry said it had tried and failed to secure the vaccine through contacts with the Russian government, the Russian Embassy in Ghana and RDIF directly, eventually turning to Aurugulf in early March.

A similar story unfolded in one of South America’s poorest countries after Russian authorities instructed Guyana to deal with Maktoum and Aurugulf to get hold of Sputnik V vaccines. It struck a deal for 200,000 jabs at \$24 a dose, weeks after the government had published a video showing Maktoum arriving in the country on a private jet for a string of high-profile meetings.

As Russia has struggled to ramp up production and is nowhere near on track to deliver its promise of 1.6 billion jabs produced this year, some of the Aurugulf deals have also run into supply trouble.

In Lebanon, Sarraf has received just 80,000 of the one million doses he was promised by August.

“The last shipment was in April. During May and June we didn’t receive one vial,” he said, adding that when he spoke to Chimera last week they didn’t know when they would be in a position to send the next shipment.

Analytics company Airfinity estimates Russia has exported 22 million doses since the start of the pandemic, adding that the hoped-for explosion in international production has yet to take off.

Murky stories

The reasons why Russia gave Maktoum and Aurugulf a free hand to sell Sputnik V to a host of countries — including strategically important players in Russia’s foreign policy such as Pakistan — are unclear.

The terms and scope of the agreements have not been published.

Based on public statements made by health ministries in Ghana and Guyana, it appears countries themselves have no knowledge they are covered by the Emirati agreement until they try to buy the vaccines. As part of the process for granting Sputnik V emergency use authorization, Pakistan's medical regulator required the local Russian embassy to explicitly "verify the authenticity" of the Aurugulf setup and involvement of Maktoum.

Even some on the Russian side say they don't understand the system.

Ruslan Aliyev, Russia's deputy trade representative in Karachi told The Moscow Times: "We were in touch with AGP, they invited us to welcome the first batch of vaccines. But I do not know where the vaccines come from. I do not know what Aurugulf is, I have never heard about them."

"The Sputnik V story here is sort of murky," said Charneskiy, the Russian diplomat in Kenya. "I don't know who exactly brought in the vaccines, I just know they came from the UAE. We had no involvement in the distribution at all."

For Russia, theories ranging from a desire to limit its liability to attempts to curry favor with the Emirati elite have been put forward as possible reasons for the deal.

"Russia could be protecting itself from the reputational risks linked to producing and selling a major vaccine across the world," said Ilya Shumalov, head of Transparency International in Russia.

For the countries with no option but to negotiate with an Emirati royal as their best shot of getting life-saving vaccines, the feeling is one of helplessness.

In response to domestic criticism over his deal with Aurugulf, Guyana's President Irfaan Ali told local journalists at a press conference: "Every single manufacturer, developer, countries — whether it was for Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson and Johnson, AstraZeneca or Sputnik — we tried."

"We tried countries directly, we tried developers directly, we tried manufacturers directly, and we tried diplomatic channels. We tried every single thing and we continue to try every single day."

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