
Vol. 2

May / June 2022

No.7

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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Australia's New Government

By Arthur Tane
TCMER Executive Director



Australia's new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has called Israel an "oppressor" and accused it of collective punishment against the Palestinian Arabs. Albanese has a history of anti-Israel positions. He has declared himself a "strong advocate of justice for Palestinians," called Israel an "oppressor" and accused it of collective punishment against the Palestinian Arabs.

Like his friend Jeremy Corbyn, Albanese is rooted in radical socialism. Corbyn and his hard-left cronies made the British Labour Party unelectable through their extremist policies and omnipresent anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

So Albanese has now taken care to tone down his Israel rhetoric. Earlier he declared that "Israel will have Australia's friendship and support" from a Labor government and said he was "passionate" about opposing the movement to boycott Israel. Yet last year Penny Wong, who is the Australia's new foreign minister, moved an amendment at a special platform conference cementing a 2018 commitment for "the next Labor government to recognize Palestine as a state," and expecting "that this issue will be an important priority for the next Labor government."

This means that Albanese's party supports the unilateral denial of political and legal reality with which the Palestinians seek to establish a terrorist state on Israel's doorstep working for its destruction under the imprimatur of the West. It also means that Albanese's party supports the agenda of a Palestinian Authority that pumps out incitement to kill Israelis and steal their land, teaches its children to hate Jews and rewards the families of those who murder them.

These dangers are now far worse because Albanese will probably need to govern with the help of the Green Party. Green politics were key to Morrison's defeat, thanks to the obsession with man-made climate change that appears to have gripped the Australian public. Politicians nicknamed the "teals"—they blend green ideology with radical

ideologies saw off a clutch of Liberal Party politicians, mostly in affluent areas of Sydney and Melbourne. The most prominent of these Liberal scalps was Josh Frydenberg, who had been touted as Morrison's likely successor as Liberal leader.

The Greens are the only political party to have rejected the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)'s working definition of anti-Semitism. Last year, their national conference voted to "halt military cooperation and military trade with Israel." Months later, a former high-profile Green parliamentary candidate, Julian Burnside, tweeted that Israel's "treatment of the Palestinians looks horribly like the German treatment of Jews during the Holocaust." After a public rebuke from the Jewish community, Green leader Adam Bandt said his party "abhors anti-Semitism in all its forms."

Green MPs tend to be venomously hostile to Israel. This is not surprising, considering that fundamental to deep green ecology, which was enthusiastically embraced in the 1930s by the German Nazi Party. Green ideology, which gives priority to the inanimate and animal world over humanity, is communistic in essence.

Repudiating reason, the Greens' driving cause of man-made global warming theory shares with anti-Zionism the disturbing characteristic of a narrative based on nonsense that has nevertheless been accepted by many as an unchallengeable truth. There is a pernicious symbiosis between anti-Zionism and "progressive" ideologies such as the green agenda and identity politics. All are based on untruths or malevolent distortions. All aim to destroy Western culture.

As a nation we have been increasingly troubled by rising anti-Semitism and Islamic radicalization, and the indulgence of both by the left-wing intelligentsia. The danger is that the ALP will now emulate the extreme Left by professing support for Israel while pursuing an agenda that undermines it at every turn.

The election of Albanese's Labour Party isn't just a blow for defenders of Israel. It also threatens to turn Australia into a weak link in the defence of the West, which becomes more urgent by the day.

The Anti-Semitism of Russian Elites

By Michael Curtis



On the evening of May 15, 1948 at the hall of the Tel Aviv Museum, David Ben-Gurion, born in Plonsk, Poland in 1886, chair of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, declared the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel to be known as the State of Israel. It would be a state based on freedom, justice, and peace; it would ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex.

No one at the meeting or in the 74 ensuing years could have suspected that an Austrian-German politician named Adolf Hitler would have approved of the creation of Israel. However, on May 1, 2022, in his fanciful, disgraceful, and delusionary remarks in an interview on an Italian TV program, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov attacked Ukraine and its President Volodymyr Zelensky: “the fact that Zelensky is a Jew does not negate the Nazi elements in his country. I believe that Adolf Hitler had Jewish blood. For a long time now we’ve been hearing the wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews.”

There are three interesting factors in Lavrov’s nonsensical and disgusting remark. One is that Lavrov accepted that the definition of a Jew is determined not by religion, but by purity of blood.

The second is the perverse implication that blames Jews for their own genocide. The third is the adoption of implicit anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. War criminal Vladimir Putin appears to have belatedly apologized to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for Lavrov’s remark, but this does not remove the revelation of the anti-Semitism of

Russian elites, holding views that resemble those in the U.S. of Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan.

Following this remark, Russia falsely claimed that Israeli mercenaries are fighting in Ukraine along with Azov militants, an alleged "far-right militia group." This falsehood comes at the same time that a delegation of Hamas officials, who continually threaten Israel with rocket and mortar attacks, is in Moscow in discussions with Russian foreign ministry officials. Hamas is propounding the argument that Palestinians do not want a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel but "we want it all, from the River to the Sea."

Israel will be celebrating Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Independence Day) with BBQ, musical performances, carnivals, and military productions. In 74 years, it has been transformed from a desert to an oasis and survived five major wars. The country has already commemorated Memorial Day, Yom Ha'Zikaron, a somber day remembering fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism, when the siren sounds throughout the country to stop everything for one minute.

The population at the founding of the State of Israel was 806,000. Today, it is 9.5 million: this includes 7 million Jews, of whom 80% are native born, two million Israeli Arabs, and 480,000 members of other groups. A considerable part of recent immigrants into Israel have arrived from Ukraine or Russia or surrounding areas, though one of the more intriguing ones is Jared Armstrong, African-American basketball player from Philadelphia who wants to be approved for Aliyah, citizenship in Israel.

Like all countries, Israel has made mistakes, often as a result of trying to protect its people, well aware there are barbarians at its gates, Hamas, Hezb'allah, and Iran. At 74 the country of supposed dreamers, still defining itself, has to defend itself. Yet even its defence in this regard is often criticized as "disproportionate." The country has problems: a shaky governmental coalition; income gaps among the population; socially challenged and divided people; differences between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews; the Arab minority, and the Palestinian issue. The poverty rate amid the Israeli Arab population is more than one-third, and almost half the Haredi, ultra-orthodox community, live below the poverty line but mostly identify with the State of Israel.

More important is the development of this independent homeland, some 3,000 years after the first Jewish commonwealth in the Holy Land, the only liberal democratic state in the Middle East, a state based on the rule of law, free and fair elections, civil rights for all, freedom of speech and religion, an ally of the U.S.

When the Russian aggression started, Israeli Prime Minister Bennett did not want to criticize or antagonize Moscow, and tried to maintain good relations with Russia. He has tried to be a mediator, speaking to both Zelensky and Putin.

Israel has been slow to send military and intelligence materials to Ukraine, but is now sending defensive military equipment to Ukraine.

A number of reasons explain why this staunch ally of the U.S. is reluctant to condemn Russian aggression. First, Israel, concerned with its security, is conscious that Moscow is a vital player in Middle East affairs, particularly in Syria. Israel's northern border with Syria is in real terms a border with Russia with its strong presence in the area. Russia has not prevented Israeli air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria, in order

to prevent Iranian missiles and technology getting to Hezb'allah in Lebanon.

Secondly, Israel is anxious to play a role in mediating the conflict. But Russia is not friendly. It reported on May 4, 2022 that the Syrians, using Russian weapons, shot down a precision guided missile fired from Israel.

There is also the issue of Russian-speaking Jews in Israel as well as in Russia and Ukraine. Israel fears that any actions critical of Russia might endanger and lead to more antisemitism in the two countries. Memories remain of the Kishinev pogrom in Bessarabia in Russian Empire of April 1903, and of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the falsified text of the Jewish plan for world domination, published the same year. Within Israel, Russian speakers, 1.2 million, are about 15% of the Jewish population, and they may be divided on Israel's response to Russia, and some of whom may have supported Putin in the past. Internationally, Israel also is aware of the problem of Russia's attitude to the negotiations on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement to which Israel is opposed.

Israel's policy regarding Ukraine has therefore been cautious. It has provided humanitarian aid and voted for the UN General Assembly resolution, and voted on April 7, 2022 for suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. but did not join in the decision on international sanctions against Russia. It did provide helmets and vests to civilian medical and rescue workers in Ukraine.

Yet Russia is unhappy with Israel which has called for dialogue. Putin wrote to Bennett calling for Israel to give control to Russia of the Alexander Courtyard., a compound of architectural structures containing icons by Russian artists, near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed that this should be done after the Israeli-American Naama Issachar, who had been arrested at Moscow airport for carrying a small amount of marijuana, was released from a Russian jail in January 2020. The veiled threat of the chief Russian spokesperson Dmitry Peskov is that the dispute over this church property in Holy City is "at the top of the Russian agenda." Already in 2008, an area of nine acres known as Sergei's Compound, which contains a luxury hotel, was returned to Putin.

At a moment when Moscow's aggression in east Ukraine appears to have stalled, Putin and Lavrov might reflect on their policies and utterances, and benefit by reading the Declaration of the Establishment of the Jewish state "we extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness."

Michel Curtis, writing in the American Thinker

Why Russia has once again turned on the Jews?

By Melanie Phillips



Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, caused outrage earlier this week after he was asked on Italian TV how Russia could claim to be "de-Nazifying" Ukraine when its president, Volodymyr Zelensky, is Jewish.

Lavrov replied: "I could be wrong, but Hitler also had Jewish blood. That [Zelensky is Jewish] means absolutely nothing. Wise Jewish people say that the most rabid anti-Semites are usually Jews."

After Israeli politicians reacted with fury to the suggestion that the Jews were responsible for their own victimization in the Holocaust, Russia's foreign ministry doubled down by asserting that the uproar explained "to a large extent why the current Israeli government supports the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv." In a phone conversation days later, Russian President Vladimir Putin apologized to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett for Lavrov's remarks.

Lavrov's preposterous attempt to make Jews and Nazis interchangeable was prompted by the fact that Zelensky's Jewish identity exposes as a lie Russia's claim to be de-Nazifying Ukraine. However, the foreign minister's comments contributed to fears that Russia is reviving Soviet-era anti-Semitism as a response to the crisis provoked by its aggression.

Israel was shocked by Lavrov's remarks because it believed Putin to be well-disposed towards the Jewish people. Jewish communities in Russia have been allowed to flourish. The Chabad-Lubavitch movement has hosted special Hanukkah concerts at the Kremlin, menorah-lightings throughout Moscow, and Putin has met, talked, toured and posed with Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar on Jewish holidays and at other times.

But Israel ignored the fact that Putin has also frequently cited anti-Semitic Russian thinkers in his speeches, and in his attacks on Crimea and Ukraine has teamed up with anti-Semitic thugs such as the Night Wolves and the Wagner Group.

Ksenia Svetlova, director of the Israel-Middle East program at Mitvim–The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policy, has observed that anti-Semitism in Russia always simmers just below the surface, particularly around the Russian Orthodox Church, and erupts in times of crisis.

After a horrific 2018 fire in a Kemerovo trade centre, for example, various Christian circles argued that the Jews were behind the tragedy as it coincided with a Jewish holiday. Professor Michal Bilewicz, director of the Centre for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw, has noted that Putin's recent references to a "fifth column" and "traitors to the nation" have sinister echoes. They almost exactly replicate language used by the Soviets in the 1940s and 1950s preceding anti-Jewish purges, and by Polish Communist leader Władysław Gomułka in a 1967 speech that preceded his own regime's purge of Jews.

Bilewicz writes: "The paradox of Putin's rhetoric is that he accuses Ukraine of 'Nazism' while simultaneously using anti-Semitic tropes to stigmatize Russians who oppose his war and support Ukraine."

This, he said, was reminiscent of the slur *Zhidobanderovtsy*, or "Kike-Banderites," used by pro-Russian activists during Moscow's 2014 war in the Donbas to link Jews and followers of Stepan Bandera. This linkage was absurd because Bandera led a Ukrainian ultra-nationalist organization that collaborated with the Nazis and was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews. "Yet it made sense to the followers of conspiracy theories," observes Bilewicz. "There is no logic in their thinking."

In a similarly nonsensical vein, Russia has also accused the Swedes of being Nazis in response to Sweden preparing to join NATO because of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Ads have been appearing at Russian bus stops depicting various Swedish national heroes as Nazis with the slogan: "We are against Nazism, they are not."

The word "we" is in the color of the Russian flag and "they" in the colors of Sweden's flag. Selective quotes appear next to each picture purporting to paint the figure as a Nazi. These include Astrid Lindgren, the children's author who created the character Pippi Longstocking; Ingvar Kamprad who founded Ikea; and Sweden's King Gustaf V.

In claiming to be fighting Nazis, Russia is trying to channel the Soviet Union's undoubtedly heroic resistance to Nazi Germany. Ignoring the inconvenient fact that the Soviet Union had first allied with Nazi Germany and thus started World War II, its stand against Nazism is a key element in Russia's mythic sense of itself. As a result, it thinks that claiming to be standing once more against Nazism casts it again in a heroic light. For these purposes, it has turned Nazism into a synonym for unspecified evil.

Exactly the same perverse rationale fuels the anti-Zionist claim that Israelis are Nazis. For just as Russia seeks to rewrite its aggression against "Nazi" Ukraine as heroism, so anti-Zionists rewrite their exterminatory anti-Semitism as a heroic stand against "genocidal" Israel.

Crucial to this infernal inversion of victim and aggressor is the belief by both anti-Zionists and Putinistas that they embody virtue, and so by definition, all who oppose

them are evil. This mindset is a hallmark of totalitarian movements and has led to the oppression, persecution and mass murder of millions.

It was why Stalinism was supported by people in the West, who believed that they were thus supporting the creation of a more just world. It was why so many “progressives” supported eugenics, the theory of manipulated breeding and racial improvement that derived from social Darwinism. Even though this ideology fueled Hitler’s program to eliminate those he deemed sub-human, it was promoted until the Holocaust by those who thought of themselves as working for the betterment of humanity.

It’s why those Muslims who hold that everything outside Islam is evil believe that when they blow Israelis or Westerners to kingdom come they are doing holy work. And it’s why the Palestinian Arabs tell themselves—in a demonstrably ludicrous denial of both history and reason—that they were the indigenous people of the land of Israel, that Jesus was a Palestinian, and that their murderous attempt to drive the Jewish people from its ancestral homeland is in fact an attempt to protect themselves from attack by the Jews.

This reversal of truth and lies, victim and aggressor, right and wrong is the hallmark of Soviet and Russian propaganda. It was no accident that the Arabs intent on destroying Israel developed modern anti-Zionism in cahoots with the Soviet Union.

The big anti-Zionist lie about Israel was created in the 1960s when the terrorist leader Yasser Arafat made common cause with the Soviet Union to rewrite history, demonize the Jewish state and thus subvert the West by twisting its collective mind and destroying its moral compass. Israel’s difficulties with Russia are growing. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu recently cancelled a scheduled phone call with his Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz, which was intended to discuss the cooperation and security coordination essential for Israeli air strikes on Iranian targets in Syria.

Without that cooperation, Israel’s defence against Iran on its Syrian border will be undermined. More ominously still, Russia is further cozying up to Iran. And meanwhile, it is ratcheting up its verbal aggression against Israel.

A spokeswoman for Russia’s foreign ministry claimed earlier this week that Israeli mercenaries were fighting alongside the neo-fascist Ukrainian Azov regiment. In fact, Israel has sent no mercenaries nor supplied arms to Ukraine—a cause of bitter complaint by Zelensky.

But last week, a group thought to have close links with the Kremlin posted a list of 20 Israelis claiming that they were fighting as mercenaries in Ukraine.

Most of those names belonged to Israeli security guards, consular officials and employees of the Jewish Agency for Israel. They had merely been sent to bolster Israeli embassy staff who had been evacuated to Poland in order to aid the return of Israelis stuck in Ukraine.

“He who sups with the devil,” it is said, “should have a long spoon.” Israel is only now realizing that, in supping with Russia, its own spoon has been far too short.

Melanie Phillips, a British journalist, broadcaster and author, writes a weekly column for JNS. Currently a columnist for “The Times of London.”

Australia's new Prime Minister not expected to reverse policy on Israel

By Israel Kasnett



When Australia's new prime minister, Anthony Albanese, won his country's federal election last month, there was speculation in various media outlets in Australia and abroad over whether he would alter policy with regard to Israel and the Palestinians. As the leader of the Australian Labor Party, which promised to recognize a Palestinian state should it win the election, Albanese has been painted as being more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause than his predecessor Scott Morrison, who was vocal in his support for Israel and who backed word with deed, for example by recognizing western Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

With the center-left Labor government now in charge, ending almost a decade of rule by the conservative Liberal Party and National Party coalition, some fear Israel will be unfairly vilified for defending itself against Palestinian terrorism. Albanese has been accused of making comments that appear to justify those fears. For instance, a 2014 Guardian report stated that Albanese slammed Israel over the "collective punishment" being endured by the people of Gaza, calling it "completely unacceptable."

However, Albanese's supporters point to his actions, which they argue suggest he will be no less protective of Israel than Morrison. For instance, last year, Albanese slammed a motion calling for a boycott of Israel over its treatment of Palestinians, saying it would be counterproductive. Albanese also pledged his "ongoing opposition" to the BDS movement.

Alex Ryvchin, co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, told JNS that while Albanese has at times "criticized Israeli policy and its military operations against Hamas, he has also shown himself to be an ally at critical times." He noted that in 2011, Albanese "joined with the Jewish community in its successful fight against BDS" in Marrickville, a suburb of Sydney.

To reverse a long-standing policy that holds Israel to be an important ally of Australia would be a “peculiar departure,” he added. “While some within the government and the wider party will be agitating for a shift in voting patterns at the United Nations or for morally and legally untenable policies like the unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state, any such moves would sidetrack the government from its policy priorities and would undermine the government’s credibility,” said Ryvchin.

Human-rights attorney Arsen Ostrovsky, an Israeli-Australian commentator on Middle East foreign affairs, told JNS that some degree of cooling in the Australia-Israel relationship was likely to be expected because Morrison’s support for the Jewish state had been uncommonly strong.

“There is a quintessential Australian word, ‘mateship,’ which connotes a deep friendship, rooted in loyalty, respect and solidarity. Israel truly could not have asked for a better ‘mate’ or ally than the previous Morrison-led government, which really set the gold standard in support of the Jewish state, both in word and deed. This was evident no more so than at the United Nations and in respect of Israel’s right to self-defense against Palestinian terror groups,” he said.

“Although Israel has been fortunate to have enjoyed relatively strong bipartisan support in Australia over many years,” added Ostrovsky, there could be “a gradual cooling down in the unwavering degree of support we have become accustomed to.”

Emphasizing that the Australian Labor Party “is certainly not Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party,” Ostrovsky said that while there is solid support for Israel at the top level,” there will “likely be considerable pressure to water this down in the rank and file.”

One of the first tests for the new Albanese-led government, “will be the upcoming Navi Pillay-led U.N. Commission of Inquiry, which is set to shortly release a damning report against Israel. Prime Minister Morrison’s government was unequivocal in standing by Israel in the face of the systematic bias and unfair singling out of Israel at the United Nations. I would hope that Prime Minister Albanese continues this policy,” said Ostrovsky, who is also chair and CEO International Legal Forum.

Jeremy Jones, director of international and community affairs at Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, said that for decades, bipartisan support within Australia for good relations with Israel “has been very strong.” Even so, he told JNS the previous government “was widely regarded as being among Israel’s strongest diplomatic allies.”

He noted that concern exists over a number of members of parliament now in government “who have voiced varying levels of hostility to Israel,” but at the same time that “there is a strong and active Parliamentary Friends of Israel group and supporters of Israel in senior government positions.”

He added that a number of strong Israel supporters in the previous government failed to get re-elected, and that “within the pro-Israel community there is concern at the increase in parliamentary representation by The Greens, including some with records of extreme anti-Israel positions, but it is unclear what influence, if any, they will have over foreign policy.”

Ryvchin, though, remains hopeful. “The Jewish community in Australia is diverse, but there is near consensus around support for Israel and opposition to hostile government policy and pronouncements,” he said.

High Court of Australia opens door to returning ISIS Terrorists

By Peter Rawlings
TCMER Board Member



Australia's highest court on June 7 found a Cabinet minister illegally cancelled a suspected Islamic State group fighter's citizenship in a landmark ruling that curtails how governments can deal with extremists. In what can only be described as an act of stupidity, the High Court, in a 6-to-1 judgment, restored Delil Alexander's Australian citizenship that was removed in July last year by the then-Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews.

The 35-year-old Alexander, who was born in Australia and has Turkish citizenship by descent, is in a Syrian prison on terrorism convictions. He left Australia for Turkey in 2013 and crossed the Syrian border before he was arrested by a Kurdish militia in 2017

Andrews cancelled Alexander's citizenship based on an Australian intelligence report that he had joined the group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and had likely engaged in fighting and recruiting for the extremist group. But the court ruled that the power she used — section 36B of the Australian Citizenship Act — was unconstitutional because it gave the minister the power of a court to determine criminal guilt.

A minister would still be able to revoke an Australian's citizenship under a separate section in cases where an individual had been sentenced to at least three years in prison for a crime that demonstrates the "person has repudiated their allegiance to Australia."

Rayner Thwaites, a Sydney University constitutional law academic, said the ruling meant a government could no longer cancel Australian citizenship without involving a court.

"The orders in the case are that section 36B is invalid, so that would have reasonably direct ramifications for others," Thwaites said.

The case has ramifications for anyone whose citizenship has been revoked under section 36B. It's unclear how many people could have their citizenships returned due to the ruling.

The previous Morrison changed the law in 2015 to enable dual nationals to lose their citizenship rights for actions contrary to their allegiance to Australia.

The first target was Sydney-born convicted terrorist Khaled Sharrouf who was also Lebanese by descent. He lost his Australian citizenship in 2017 while he was fighting alongside the Islamic State group in Syria and has since died in combat.

Peter Dutton, the first Home Affairs minister to use the power, reported in 2018 that another five dual-nationals had been stripped of Australian citizenship because of their involvement overseas with the Islamic State group. Australia was widely praised for ensuring that ISIS terrorists would be forbidden to return to Australia.

The new Albanese government says they will examine the judgment and its implications in detail. Attorney General Mark Dreyfus asserts that the government had a range of measures to protect Australia from offshore threats including so-called temporary exclusion orders that can prevent Australians from returning home for up to two years.

Sisters fleeing Saudi Arabia found dead in southwest Sydney apartment

**By Zara Dawoud
TCMER Board Member**



The bodies of two sisters, who died in an apartment in southwest Sydney under 'suspicious' circumstances, fled Saudi Arabia as teenagers for safety in Australia.

The women, aged 23 and 24, were discovered on June 7 in separate beds in their first-floor Canterbury unit. Officers conducted a welfare check when the pair failed to pay rent for four weeks and mail began to accumulate outside their doors.

Police said the sisters' bodies had been in custody for "some time" and "there were no obvious signs of injuries". While there are no signs of forced entry, detectives still consider their deaths suspicious, with Homicide Squad investigating the case. It is understood that the siblings fled Saudi Arabia without their families in 2017 when they were 18 and 19, and NSW police are now struggling to identify their relatives.

The women were employed for five years in a refugee service that helped foreign nationals escape persecution and seek asylum. The sisters did not have regular contact with their relatives back home. Despite their painful past, locals say the women were cheerful to neighbours.

Investigations have found that many women flee Saudi Arabia's male guardianship law, which allows their husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles and sons to control their lives. The reasons for the sisters leaving their homeland remain unclear, but it may not have been associated with the guardianship law. Staff at a nearby service station

described the pair – one a brunette and the other a blonde – as “calm” but “very friendly.”

The Department of Home Affairs will not confirm whether women are seeking asylum in Australia. “The department does not comment on individual cases,” a spokesman said. In 2021, a report found that in recent years, over 130 Saudi women have sought refuge in Australia.

Despite recent important women’s rights reforms, including allowing women over 21 to obtain passports and travel abroad without a guardian’s permission, Saudi women still must obtain a male guardian’s approval to get married, leave prison, or obtain certain healthcare. Women also continue to face discrimination in relation to marriage, family, divorce, and decisions relating to children, including child custody. Men can still file cases against daughters, wives, or female relatives under their guardianship for “disobedience,” which have previously resulted in arrest, and forcible return to their male guardian’s home or imprisonment.

In June 2021, the Saudi authorities amended the Legal Pleadings System, removing language that required the immediate enforcement of court decisions to send a woman to her mahram (husband or a male relative she cannot marry). This change suggests that there is no longer enforcement power for court orders to return women to a male relative as part of its judgement on disobedience cases. However, it does not prevent courts from penalizing women with losing their right to financial maintenance if they refuse to return to their marital home. As of September 2021, there was no accompanying guidance issued to the police and other law enforcement agencies, suggesting women may still face arrests and forcible return home to their families.

The Faces of China's Uyghur Detention Camps

By John Sudworth



Thousands of photographs from the heart of China's highly secretive system of mass incarceration in Xinjiang, as well as a shoot-to-kill policy for those who try to escape, are among a huge cache of data hacked from police computer servers in the region.

The Xinjiang Police Files, as they're being called, were passed to the BBC earlier this year. After a months-long effort to investigate and authenticate them, they can be shown to offer significant new insights into the internment of the region's Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities.

Their publication coincides with the recent arrival in China of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, for a controversial visit to Xinjiang, with critics concerned that her itinerary will be under the tight control of the government.

The cache reveals, in unprecedented detail, China's use of "re-education" camps and formal prisons as two separate but related systems of mass detention for Uyghurs – and seriously calls into question its well-honed public narrative about both.

The documents provide some of the strongest evidence to date for a policy targeting almost any expression of Uyghur identity, culture or Islamic faith – and of a chain of command running all the way up to the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping.

A hacker broke into a network of police computers in China's so-called Vocational Skills Education and Training Centres, exposing files that reveal significant abuses, according to a Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies paper released this week. The Xinjiang Police Files, as the cache is called, include a trove of speeches, images, spreadsheets, and other documents revealing wide scale abuses against Uyghurs and other minority ethnic groups. The unprecedented collection provides the first images from inside the Chinese detainment camps, reveals shoot-to-kill orders from former Governor Chen Quanguo, and exposes demands for new camps from President Xi Jinping "because existing ones are overcrowded," Adrian

Zenz, senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and the study's author, wrote on Twitter.

Since 2017, the Chinese government has detained Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Outside observers with little access to the region have struggled to understand the nature and scale of the detentions. But a transcript of a 2018 speech given by a public security minister, Zhao Kezhi, suggests that China had interned between one and two million Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities by the late 2010s and that Xi knew of these details, according to another report published this week by Zenz.

Zenz's paper was peer-reviewed and authenticated by more than a dozen investigative research teams at global news organizations, including the BBC and Le Monde. The credibility of the trove, Zenz also notes is "bolstered by their sheer volume; the detail, specificity, and metadata in many of the included photos; internal textual consistency; and overlap with previous document leaks." Further, the cache "broadly aligns with witness accounts, documentary evidence, and satellite imagery that all point to internment on a very large scale."

The massive collection contains more than 2,800 images of detainees, 300,000 personal records, and 23,000 detainee records, some of which are depicted in the BBC's photo essay, "The faces from China's Uyghur detention camps." Spreadsheets indicate that over 12 percent of the 2018 adult Uyghur county population was in camps or prisons.

China has denied accusations of mass incarceration and claimed that attendance is voluntary. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Michelle Bachelet is scheduled to visit Xinjiang this week but said that her trip is not an investigation, according to Bloomberg.

"We are concerned the trip might do more harm than good," World Uyghur Congress spokesperson Zumretay Arkin told Reuters. "China could use it for propaganda purposes."

The full story can be read at:

www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/85qihtvw6e/the-faces-from-chinas-uyghur-detention-camps

A woman's brutal killing shocks the Arab world

By Lina Zaidi
TCMER Board Member



The brutal killing of a young woman in broad daylight on an Egyptian street has shocked the Arab world, bringing the country's gender-based violence crisis into the spotlight.

Naira Ashraf, 21, was fatally stabbed on June 20 by a man whose advances she rejected, according to Egyptian prosecutors who said the suspect was arrested outside northern Egypt's Mansoura University, where the incident took place and where Ashraf was studying.

Video from a nearby CCTV camera showing a man attacking a woman outside the university went viral across the Arab world this week.

The Arab World has been shocked by the murder of Naira Ashraf Abdel Qader, who was killed in front of horrified onlookers and in full view of security cameras. Images of her body have spread on social media after she was repeatedly stabbed in her neck and torso outside the entrance of Mansoura University.

Police said a suspect was in custody, and in interviews had confessed he was motivated by her refusal to communicate with him on Facebook and marry him.

According to Egyptian news site Al-Falah Al-Youm, the accused, who has been named only as "Mohammed A" and was arrested at the scene, told the prosecutor yesterday that Ashraf had blocked him on social media and that he had made several attempts to contact her throughout a year and a half period which he told investigators "she became famous" and accrued a social media following.

Najum Masria, another Egyptian news site, reported that the victim's father revealed in a TV interview the accused had threatened Ashraf more than once, and that the family had reported these threats to the police.

Egyptian authorities have been consistently criticised by human rights groups for failing to protect women.

In its latest country report, Amnesty International said that Egyptian authorities were failing “to prevent and investigate widespread violence against women and girls”. And according to Human Rights Watch, “Egyptian authorities carried out an extensive campaign of arrests and prosecutions against women social media influencers, in violation of their rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination.”

Despite calls to stop circulating surveillance footage of the killing on social media, video footage of the attack and a crowd approaching the scene have gone viral, with users across the Arab world condemning the killing.

The United Nations Development Program in 2019 ranked Egypt 108 out of 162 countries measured on gender inequalities in health, empowerment and economic activity.

Saudi Arabia releases Murtaja Qureiris

By Hamia Nair
TCMER Board Member



Murtaja Qureiris, once considered by lawyers and activists as the youngest political prisoner in Saudi Arabia, was released on June 24. His case was first highlighted in 2019, which detailed how Saudi authorities arrested Qureiris when he was 13, three years after he was accused of participating in a bike protest during the 2011 Arab Spring at the age of 10. After almost four years in pre-trial detention, before his 18th birthday, he was presented with a charge sheet recommending the death penalty.

Prosecutors alleged that Qureiris belonged to "an extremist terror group" and committed violence during protests, including allegedly helping construct Molotov cocktails. Qureiris denied all of the allegations against him.

Qureiris was traveling with his family to Bahrain when he was detained by Saudi border authorities on the King Fahd causeway that connects the two countries. He was 10 years old when he allegedly committed at least one of the acts in his charge sheet. He was charged with accompanying his activist brother, Ali Qureris, on a motorcycle ride to a police station in the eastern Saudi city of Awamiya, where Ali allegedly threw Molotov cocktails at the facility.

Saudi Arabia announced in 2020 that as part of a royal decree it would abolish the death penalty for people who committed crimes as minors. Anyone who received a death sentence after being convicted of crimes they committed as a minor would receive a prison sentence of no longer than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility, according to a statement from the state-backed Human Rights Commission (HRC) at the time.

In 2019, at age 18, Qureiris was convicted and sentenced to prison, though the Saudi government did not announce the charge or charges on which he was convicted. A source familiar with the matter has said that he was officially spared the death penalty. International pressure started mounting on the Kingdom and multiple international rights groups condemned his detention. In 2019, the Austrian parliament voted to close a Saudi-backed Center for Interfaith Dialogue, in protest against the detention of Qureiris.

Iran's goals are not limited to the Middle East

By Sarah N. Stern



I have always been shocked by the way some of the foreign-policy community treats the Iranian nuclear threat—as though it were an academic problem from some distant, remote corner of the universe. Not only do they feel that Iran can be contained, as Russia, China and North Korea have by the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), but they believe that we in the United States are immune.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, through its terror proxies—in particular, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and their offshoot, Hezbollah—has a very active presence just under our noses, particularly in the tri-border area of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, and a growing and active presence within the continental United States.

Take, for example, the opening arguments against Alexei Saab of Morristown, N.J., who is charged with being a Hezbollah spy and planning attacks in Washington, New York and Boston.

Many in our foreign-policy establishment and academic community simply fail to grasp that Iran is a brutal, revolutionary theocracy with messianic zeal that does not want to limit this zeal to the Middle East; its leaders have hegemonic aspirations.

Iran has managed to surround Israel with a wall of fire—with Hezbollah in Lebanon and as many as 150,000 missiles in the north, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in the south.

Last week, another revealing story broke on the Islamic Republic of Iran's national television, in which Ali Motahhari, a "reformist" member of the Majlis, the Iranian parliament, said: "From the very beginning of our nuclear activities, our aim was to build a nuclear bomb. There is no need to beat around the bush."

In some quarters of the American government today, including among many members of the current administration, this news should be quite disturbing. For example, regarding the nuclear deal of 2015, the International Crisis Group states on its website that it “enshrined a core compromise the Crisis Group had advocated since 2003: acceptance of a limited, tightly monitored uranium enrichment program in Iran in return for that country’s integration into the global economy.”

This is extremely important because Robert Malley, who is leading the U.S. negotiations in Vienna, is the former president and CEO of the International Crisis Group. The entire premise that has predicated the negotiations is that if America sweetened the deal enough with the lifting of sanctions, Iran would not develop a nuclear bomb.

In fact, Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri-Kani understands America's negotiating position very clearly, saying in November: “The very term nuclear negotiations is rife with error. ... The goal is to lift the sanctions.”

Most people who follow this issue are aware that Iran has far exceeded the cap of acceptable uranium enrichment that was proscribed in the deal: 3.65%. Iran has already surpassed 40 to 42 kilograms of highly enriched uranium at the 60% level.

According to an April 11 report from the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), it is “a common fallacy” that Iran requires 90% highly enriched uranium to build nuclear explosives.

“With this quantity, an enrichment level of 60% suffices to create a relatively compact nuclear explosive; further enrichment to 80% or 90% is not needed,” it said.

Iran has also been hard at work at intercontinental ballistic missiles. It doesn’t merely want them to go from Tehran to Tel Aviv, but from Tehran to Washington, D.C., and New York City.

These vexing facts serve to illustrate just how clearly wrongheaded these negotiations have been.

Sarah N. Stern is founder and president of the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET), a pro-Israel and pro-American think tank and policy institute in Washington, D.C.

Iran Trying to Force the US to Meet All Its Demands

By Khaled Abu Toameh



Iran is trying to delay the signing of the nuclear agreement so that the mullahs succeed in forcing the Biden administration to accept all their demands, especially the removal of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the list of foreign terrorist organizations. Pictured: Members of the IRGC march during the annual military parade marking the anniversary of the 1980-1988 war with Iraq, in Tehran, on September 22, 2018. (Photo by STR/AFP via Getty Images)

As the European Union is trying to revive the stalled talks on restoring Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, many Arabs are again warning the Biden administration against rushing to strike a deal with the mullahs, saying this could jeopardize Washington's relations with its Arab allies in the Middle East.

The Arabs are saying that they cannot understand why Biden is prepared to allow Iran's mullahs to "humiliate" the US by setting their own conditions for restoring the nuclear agreement, including the demand to remove the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the list of terrorist organizations.

The Arabs are also reminding the Biden administration and the other world powers that Iran's mullahs have not changed their dangerous policies that threaten the security and stability of a number of Arab countries.

Iraqi writer Farouk Yousef pointed out that after the US gave Iran \$90 billion following the signing of the nuclear agreement with the Obama administration in 2015, the mullahs continued to support, finance and sponsor the activities of "evil forces" in the Middle East.

The "evil forces" refers to Iran's terrorist proxies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, and the Houthi militia in Yemen.

Yousef noted that the bulk of the money Iran received from the Obama administration was spent on terrorist groups run by the IRGC in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as terrorist groups run covertly in other Arab countries.

"It's clear that the administration of Joe Biden wants to sign the nuclear agreement with Iran at any cost," Yousef said.

"However, Iran, which is the beneficiary of that agreement in all cases, has been procrastinating and extending time in an attempt to impose new conditions to get more gains. The question is: Don't the Americans realize that Iran, with its current ideological system, can only be a state outside international law in all its manifestations and meanings? Iran, which has supported terrorism in the region, will not abandon its militias. Iran cannot accept being a normal country. It will always be a source of chaos and damage to the stability and security of many countries in the region through its direct intervention in the internal affairs of these countries."

Yousef warned that submission to the mullahs and appeasing them would mean that the US has given up its friendship with America's traditional allies in the Arab world. It would also plunge the entire Middle East into more anarchy and instability, he cautioned.

"Reviving the nuclear agreement without imposing conditions on Iran that limit its expansionist and aggressive policy and its permanent interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the region would mean that the US has decided to forfeit the friendship of those countries... It also means pushing the region towards chaos."

Yousef expressed concern that Iran seems to be dictating its conditions to the US administration, "which appears to be submissive to all Iranian conditions, including those related to its continued hegemony over four Arab countries [Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen] and its interference in the affairs of other Arab countries."

Iran, he added, is "humiliating" the US administration by trying to delay the signing of the nuclear agreement so that the mullahs succeed in forcing the Biden administration to accept all their demands, especially the removal of the IRGC from the list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Another prominent Iraqi writer, Ali Al-Sarraf, pointed out that there is a clear majority in Congress that tells Biden that he took the wrong path in dealing with Iran.

"This majority has reminded Biden of what he should have paid attention to, but decided to ignore," Al-Sarraf wrote.

"A false beginning cannot lead to a correct ending. Biden was not ignorant of the wrong way he started [dealing with Iran]. All the countries in the region were telling him that the resumption of talks with Iran must include Iran's missile program and its destabilizing activities in the region, including the activities of its militias that threaten stability in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Biden chose not to listen to his country's allies, including Israel. He refused to take the reservations of America's allies into consideration. That is why America's allies don't trust him. They don't trust Biden because he is committing a serious strategic mistake that threatens the interests and influence of the US and the interests and security of its allies."

Al-Sarraf added that Biden could have told the mullahs that a return to the nuclear agreement would take place on the basis of three conditions: abandoning violations of the commitments in that agreement, curbing Iran's ballistic missile program because it is an integral part of the threat, and stopping the actions of militias that threaten the security and stability of the countries of the region.

He, too, expressed concern over the possibility that the Biden administration would remove Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from the list of terrorist organizations.

The IRGC, Al-Sarraf noted, is directly involved in the civil war and violence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

"Worse, the Revolutionary Guard has turned these countries into victims of corruption and economic and security failure... They have also made tens of millions of the people in these countries who face the hardships of daily life in its most extreme forms and fall victim to the emergence of terrorist organizations."

Like many Arabs, Al-Sarraf asked why the Biden administration was not defending the interests of America's allies.

"The US, while looking after its interests in the region and maintaining a large military presence there, should take the Iranian threats into consideration, and even make these threats the most important issue... But Biden's administration chose, from the outset, to ignore the Iranian threats and embark on the path of negotiating with Iran over the nuclear deal. Even if Biden chooses to ignore everyone and sign the agreement, he cannot later claim that he did not know the price. Biden will not be able to convince his allies in the region that he has reached a good deal. Iran's own actions will prove to him that he took the wrong path."

Lebanese writer Rajeh El Khoury said that he shared the view that the mullahs were trying to gain more time before returning to the negotiations over the signing of a new nuclear agreement.

He also noted that Biden appears to be in a hurry to strike a deal with the mullahs because of the growing opposition he is facing at home. "It's strange that the Biden administration is rushing to reach a deal with the Iranians at any cost," he said.

El Khoury pointed out that even as the nuclear talks were underway in Vienna over the past year, Iran continued to meddle in the internal affairs of the Arab countries and endanger the security and stability of America's allies in the Middle East.

Veteran Lebanese journalist Kheirallah Kheirallah described the current US policy in the Middle East as "defective."

This policy, he wrote, "has encouraged Iran to go far in threatening the countries of the region and their security with the help of the Revolutionary Guards."

"To put it more clearly, there is no sane person in the region willing to take seriously any reassuring words issued by [US Special Envoy for Iran] Robert Malley and other officials in the US administration concerned with the Iranian file. Every child now knows that these American officials have nothing but flattery for Iran, especially in light of the cold American reaction to the attacks it carried out against the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates."

From Barack Obama to Joe Biden, Kheirallah wrote, nothing has changed in Washington. "If anything has changed, it is for the worse."

"The slogan raised in Washington remains that the Iranian nuclear file overshadows all crises in the Middle East and the Gulf, and that this file has nothing to do with the practices of the Islamic Republic in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. How can such an administration, which has abandoned its allies, including Saudi Arabia, succeed in responding to Vladimir Putin in Ukraine? How can a US administration gain the trust of its allies despite its refusal to take note that northern Yemen has become a base for Iranian missiles and drones? These missiles and drones are directed at the Arab Gulf states and are now threatening navigation in the Red Sea as well. The Biden administration failed the Ukrainian test. The tragedy is that it does not want to admit this and does not want to know why its allies do not trust it anymore."

Emirati political analyst Salem Alketbi wrote that he, also, was worried about the collapse of the strategic partnership between the US and its Arab allies.

Alketbi pointed out that the Biden administration made a mistake when it removed the Houthis from the list of terrorist organizations because that only increased tensions in Yemen and the rest of the region.

"The decision did not serve the interests of the US... It would be a mistake to remove the Revolutionary Guard from the list of terrorist organizations because it will lead to the same catastrophic results, will be costly for the Americans and lead to the collapse of US relations with strategic partners in the Gulf."

Alketbi advised the Biden administration to conduct a "comprehensive review" of its role and policies in the Middle East in order to address the mistakes and not to add to them by committing new ones. "What is needed is not a step that deepens the dispute with the allies, but steps to restore confidence and bridge the gaps."

The concerns expressed by the Arabs over the policies of the Biden administration towards Iran and Washington's Arab allies should sound a loud alarm bell in the US.

The Arabs are saying that they have lost confidence in the Biden administration because its policies will lead to disastrous results and endanger the security and stability of several Arab countries.

It is clear that the Arabs see Iran as the main threat, by far, to their security.

It is also clear that a return to the nuclear agreement and the removal of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from the list of terrorist organizations would cause massive damage to the interests of the US. It will lose all its Arab friends, who will stop working with the Americans in a number of fields, including the war on terrorism.

It now remains to be seen whether the Biden administration will continue with its benighted policy of appeasing the mullahs or heed the insistent wake-up calls of America's real allies.

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

Biden's Iran Nuclear Policy is Disastrous, Misinformed and Dangerous

By Majid Rafizadeh



The Biden administration seems to be investing all its political capital in reviving the nuclear deal with the ruling mullahs of Iran, while it seems clear that Iran's theocratic establishment is only buying time to defiantly advance its nuclear program and has now reached the point where it is close to the nuclear threshold. (Image source: iStock)

The Biden administration seems to be investing all its political capital in reviving the nuclear deal with the ruling mullahs of Iran; the Iranian regime has been defiantly advancing its nuclear program, stepping up its uranium enrichment, working on 1,000 more centrifuges, gaining irreversible knowledge in nuclear development while "negotiating" with the P5+1.

It seems clear that Iran's theocratic establishment is only buying time to advance its nuclear program and has now reached the point where it is close to the nuclear threshold. The Islamic Republic is thought to be only weeks away from obtaining the weapons-grade materials necessary for a nuclear weapon. Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz warned on May 17, 2022:

"Iran continues to accumulate irreversible knowledge and experience in the development, research, production and operation of advanced centrifuges... Today, the prices for tackling the Iranian challenge on the global and regional levels are higher than they were a year ago and lower than they will be within a year".

The New York Times also acknowledged that the regime is only weeks away from going nuclear:

"Iran has come within roughly a month of having enough material to fuel a single nuclear weapon, crossing a threshold that may raise pressure on the US and its allies to improve the terms of a potential deal to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement."

It is totally contradictory that the Iranian regime is progressing its nuclear program at a high speed while participating in global negotiations, the main purpose of which is ostensibly to curb the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

This crisis comes at a time when more Iranian leaders have acknowledged that the regime's nuclear program was, after all, designed to manufacture nuclear weapons from the outset, and not for peaceful purposes as the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has claimed.

Former Iranian Prime Minister Ali Motahari stated on April 20, 2022: "To do enrichment directly creates the illusion that we want to make a bomb... From the very beginning, when we entered the nuclear activity, our goal was to build a bomb and strengthen the deterrent forces but we could not maintain the secrecy of this issue, and the secret reports were revealed by a group of hypocrites."

On November 29, 2021, the former head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Fereydoon Abbasi-Davani, was the first Iranian official to admit that his work was part of a nuclear "system" designed to develop nuclear weapons: "When the country's all-encompassing growth began involving satellites, missiles and nuclear weapons, and surmounted new boundaries of knowledge, the issue became more serious for them."

Despite these revelations, all the Biden administration seems to do is appease the mullahs in order to reach a deal. The Biden administration first told the Iranian leaders not only that the U.S. was willing to lift nuclear-related sanctions, but also that it was considering lifting non-nuclear related sanctions. That was followed by the first concession toward Iran's proxy militia group, Yemen's Houthis.

Even as the evidence — including a report by the United Nations — showed that the Iranian regime was delivering sophisticated weapons to the Houthis in Yemen, the Biden administration suspended some of the anti-terrorism sanctions on the Houthis that the Trump administration had imposed. Soon after, on February 12, 2021, the Biden administration revoked the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group. A few weeks after that, in June 2021, the Biden administration lifted sanctions on three former Iranian officials and several energy companies. Then, in a blow to the Iranian people and advocates of democracy and human rights — a few days after the Iranian regime hand-picked a purported mass murderer, Ebrahim Raisi, to be its next president — the Biden administration announced that it was also considering lifting sanctions against Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

During a critical Senate hearing on May 25, 2022, Robert Malley, President Joe Biden's special envoy for Iran, defended the administration's efforts to revive the nuclear deal with the ruling mullahs of Iran.

Although there is a report that the Biden administration will not be removing Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from the terrorist list, Malley clearly suggested that the IRGC's removal from the terrorist list is not off the table: "We'd made clear to Iran that if they wanted any concession on something that was unrelated to the JCPOA — like the FTO designation — we needed something reciprocal from them that would address our concerns."

But Malley declined to say what the administration is asking for from the Iranian regime to de-list the IRGC from the terrorist list.

Malley also suggested that the Biden administration will submit a final draft of the nuclear deal to the Congress for review. This proposal, however, is most likely an attempt by the Biden administration to pacify the Congress so they will let their guard down. We should recall that the Obama administration, in which Biden was the Vice President, also said that the Congress would get a chance to review the nuclear deal. But Obama went ahead and reached a deal with Iran without Senate approval. The nuclear deal was reached through executive order, not through the Senate.

And later, it was revealed that the administration made multiple secret deals with Iran's ruling mullahs. One of the secret deals consisted of allowing the Iranian regime to have access to US dollars by sidestepping sanctions. "The Obama administration misled the American people and Congress because they were desperate to get a deal with Iran", said Senator Rob Portman (R-OH), who chaired the Senate panel conducting the investigation at the time. The Obama administration also secretly agreed to remove sanctions on several Iranian banks, including Bank Sepah and Sepah International. In addition, according to a previous report by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, the Obama administration agreed "'in secret' to allow Iran to evade some restrictions" in the last year of the nuclear agreement. David Albright, a former UN weapons inspector, stated that "The exemptions or loopholes are happening in secret, and it appears that they favour Iran." These are only few examples of the secret deals conducted with the Iranian regime to appease it.

While "negotiating" to reach a nuclear deal, the ruling mullahs of Iran continue to advance their nuclear program and inch closer to obtaining a nuclear bomb, the missiles to transport them, and to attack and seemingly, when possible, to take over their neighbours.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is President of the International American Council on the Middle East.

US Treasury targets Russian-backed Iranian oil-smuggling network

By Mike Wagenheim



On the day that the Biden administration point man on Iran testified before a Senate committee, the U.S. Treasury Department announced a new sanctions package targeting an oil-smuggling and money-laundering network belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF), backed by Russia.

The network, which was led by Quds Force official Behnam Shahriyari and former Quds Force official Rostam Ghasemi, "has facilitated the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of oil for the Quds Force and Hezbollah, and it spans several jurisdictions, including Iran and Russia," according to a Treasury statement.

"The United States remains fully committed to holding the Iranian regime accountable for its support to terrorist proxies that destabilize the Middle East," said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson in the statement. "While the United States continues to seek a mutual return to full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, we will not hesitate to target those who provide a critical lifeline of financial support and access to the international financial system for the Quds Force or Hezbollah. In particular, the United States will continue to strictly enforce sanctions on Iran's illicit oil trade. Anyone purchasing oil from Iran faces the prospect of U.S. sanctions."

Treasury claims that Ghasemi leveraged a Russia-based company—RPP Limited Liability Company—to transfer millions of dollars from Russia to the IRGC-QF. The entity was formerly managed by Afghanistan's Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, businessman Kamaluddin Gulam Nabizada.

Nabizada, previously linked to a scheme to defraud the Kabul Bank, is alleged to have raised funds for the IRGC-QF in tandem with unnamed senior Russian government and

intelligence officials. Mihrab Suhrab Hamidi, RPP LLC's manager, has overseen the company during some of the allegedly illicit oil sales and transport.

Treasury says the UAE-based Zamanoil DMCC has worked with the Russian government and Russian state-owned Rosneft to ship large quantities of Iranian oil to companies in Europe on behalf of the IRGC-QF.

Four Iran-based IRGC-QF officials and associates were also targeted for sanctions, along with three Turkey-based IRGC-QF associates alleged to have concealed the source of proceeds from illicit Iranian oil and petrochemical sales. Lebanon-based Concepto Screen SAL Off-Shore, which has been accused of facilitating oil deals likely benefiting the IRGC-QF and Hezbollah, was sanctioned, in addition to other companies based in Turkey, South Korea, Hong Kong, Iran and China.

The designations will result in all property and interests in property, and all businesses owned directly, indirectly or partially by the individuals named, being blocked and reported to the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). All transactions between individuals in the United States and entities designated would also be prohibited.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the Biden administration announced the sanctions even as it continues efforts to seek a joint return with Iran to compliance Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the Iran nuclear accord.

U.S. Special Envoy on Iran Robert Malley discussed the new sanctions during his testimony Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, detailing the status of JCPOA negotiations. The sanctions announcement was praised by the panel's chairman, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), but derided by Ranking Member Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), who said the administration should turn its focus on sanctioning Iranian oil sales to China.

Iranian "Aeroterror" Flights Reborn in Latin America

By Maria Zuppello



Argentina's seizure of a Venezuelan-flagged cargo plane arriving from Mexico last week exposed a joint venture between the regimes of Iran and Venezuela. It came as the two governments signed in Tehran a 20-year cooperation plan that involves aviation in addition to economic and military deals.

This strengthened alliance has enabled Iran to resume "aeroterrorist" flights to Latin America. Iran can transport illicit goods and terrorists by using aircraft operated by allied nations. Such flights started in 2007, enabling Tehran to fuel its economy with drug money and transfer uranium for its program.

"The government stopped a Venezuelan aircraft sanctioned by the United States and detained the passports of five Iranian crew members," Argentine security minister Anibal Fernandez wrote on Twitter.

According to a confidential report reviewed by the Investigative Project on Terrorism which formed the basis of the seizure by Argentine authorities, "the cargo aircraft that landed in Buenos Aires had a very large crew with 21 members and has been spending lengthy periods of time on the ground at almost each stop it made since its first maiden flight on February 11."

The Boeing 747 is owned by Emtrasur, a subsidiary of the national Venezuelan airline, Conviasa. This aircraft is the only one Emtrasur operates. The plane was sold a year ago by Iran's Mahan Airlines, which denies current ownership and is on a U.S. blacklist "for providing financial, material and technological support to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF)."

The Quds Force is an IRGC military intelligence division. The United States designated it as a terrorist group "for providing material support to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations."

Argentine authorities seized the aircraft, which was supposed to carry automotive parts, fearing that it concealed weapons or terrorists.

Since cargo stops usually are short and carry small crews, suspicion was raised that members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were traveling as a crew, as Fernandez confirmed.

"In particular the name of the captain, Gholamreza Ghasemi, matches that of a retired IRGC commander who is a board member of Qeshm Fars Air with ties to the Quds Force," Fernandez told local Radio Perfil.

While the United States sanctioned Qeshm Fars Air in 2019 for allegedly shipping weapons to Syria, anti-regime Iranian media reported that Ghasemi was involved in at least one Iranian arms transfer case to Lebanon's Hizballah in the summer of 2018.

The confidential report revealed that Emtrasur's cargo plane left Minsk, Belarus in February, and flew from Asia to Latin America, Russia and Cuba. Media reports indicated it carried medical supplies, including 2.5 million influenza shots, from China to Venezuela via Nicaragua.

"The aircraft drew attention during a previous stop in Paraguay, in the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, when it flew there (with no cargo), stayed three nights, took consignment of 80 tons of cigarettes, and then flew out to Aruba," the report said.

The Paraguayan-made cigarettes were from Tabacalera del Este S.A., the major supplier of the illicit cigarette trade in the Western Hemisphere. It is owned by former Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes, who enabled Hizballah to smuggle his cigarettes into the region. Cartes' bank has been investigated for money laundering activities and used by U.S.-designated Hizballah fundraisers such as Mohammed Faye Barakat.

The illicit tobacco trade had become a key revenue source for Hizballah, particularly in Latin America. The Venezuelan aircraft, which according to the confidential report, often flew without transponders to avoid being detected by radar, in its trip to Paraguay seemed to be used to smuggle cigarettes.

According to Fernandez, Ghasemi, who also traveled to Paraguay, is a relative of Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, who is wanted by the Argentine Justice Department for his role as a Quds commander in planning the 1994 attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people.

The perpetrators were never caught.

"Are people with links to AMIA ideologues returning to Argentina?" opposition deputies Ricardo López Murphy and Gerardo Milman asked in a lawsuit against Argentine authorities accused of authorizing the landing while being aware of the risks.

The unhealed scar of the AMIA bombing, and dread of future attacks drove investigators to examine this Boeing flight's history, given the extensive history of criminal activity involving Iranian aircraft in Latin America.

The Venezuelan opposition claimed in 2010 that Iran had obtained mining rights to use Venezuelan uranium resources and that some samples were transported through Damascus from Caracas to Tehran on aeroterror flights. They were operated by Venezuela in collaboration with Iran Air between 2007 and 2010.

These planes were never filled with tourists as Venezuelan authorities claimed when they inaugurated the route. In contrast, they would reportedly leave Caracas each week loaded with narcotics destined for Syria and cash and return from Iran and Syria with guns, IRGC and Hizballah and Hamas operatives, and other Iranian intelligence agents.

To conceal their identity, the Venezuelan embassy in Damascus provided the terrorists with real Venezuelan passports. Ghazi Nasseraddine, the then-commercial attaché and a known Hizballah member with Venezuelan citizenship, was in charge of the operation.

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents reportedly dubbed the scheme "aeroterror."

Concerns are mounting that Iranian aircraft disguised as Venezuelan may again fly around Latin America to transport weapons, surveillance drones, and even uranium.

Furthermore, the United States claimed that Iran used Mahan Air in 2020 for shipments to Venezuela to boost energy production for President Nicolas Maduro's government and evade U.S. sanctions.

During his visit to Tehran to sign the cooperation agreement, Maduro announced the launch of a weekly passengers flight route between Caracas and Tehran without providing details.

Venezuelan Vice Minister of Air Transport Ramón Velázquez, the president of Conviasa, anticipated in February that while cargo flights have occurred between the two nations for the last three years Venezuela wanted attract tourists.

"Venezuela is a strategic destination for Iran and tourism is going to have big importance, above all else," Velázquez said.

However, it is hard to believe that these two countries, whose economies are ravaged by dictatorships, are focused on tourism instead of using the planes to spread their regimes' terror and making an end-run around international economic sanctions.

Latin American authorities need to be alert in identifying and seizing Iran-tied planes. The more Iran can skirt sanctions and transport terrorists to the region, the greater the chances are for more deadly attacks like the AMIA bombing.

Maria Zuppello is an Italian investigative reporter based in Brazil and an expert on the crime-terror nexus. She is the author of the book Tropical Jihad.

Analysis of IAEA Iran Verification and Monitoring Report – May 2022

By David Albright, Sarah Burkhard and Andrea Stricker



Excerpt

This report summarizes and assesses information in the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) quarterly safeguards report for May 30, 2022, *Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)*, including Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The IAEA's latest report details Iran's rapidly advancing nuclear activities and inspectors' diminished ability to detect Iranian diversion of assets to undeclared facilities.

Highlights and Breakout Estimate

- Due to the growth of Iran's 60 percent enriched uranium stocks, Iran has crossed a dangerous new threshold: its breakout timeline is now at zero. It has enough 60 percent enriched uranium, or highly enriched uranium (HEU) in the form of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) to be assured it could fashion directly a nuclear explosive. If Iran wanted to further enrich its 60 percent HEU up to 90 percent HEU, typically called weapon-grade uranium (WGU), used in Iran's known nuclear weapons designs, it could do so within weeks utilizing only a few advanced centrifuge cascades. In parallel, within a month, including a setup period, Iran could produce enough WGU for a second nuclear explosive from its existing stock of near 20 percent enriched uranium. Whether or not Iran

enriches its HEU up to 90 percent, it can have enough HEU for two nuclear weapons within one month after starting breakout.

- Within 1.5 months after starting breakout, Iran could accumulate enough WGU for a third nuclear weapon, using its remaining near 20 percent enriched uranium and some of its 4.5 percent enriched uranium. In 2.75 months after starting breakout, it could have a fourth quantity by further enriching 4.5 percent enriched uranium up to 90 percent. At six months, it could have produced a fifth quantity by further enriching both 4.5 percent enriched uranium.
- In essence, Iran has effectively broken out slowly by accumulating 60 percent enriched uranium. As of May 15, Iran had a stock of 43.1 kilograms (kg) (in uranium mass or U mass) of near 60 percent enriched uranium in UF₆ form, or 63.8 kg (in hexafluoride mass or hex mass). Iran also has 2 kg of 60 percent HEU in chemical forms other than UF₆.
- Iran has moved 90 percent of its stock of 60 percent HEU to the Esfahan site, where it maintains a capability to make enriched uranium metal. Although Iran has stated that it is using the HEU to make targets for irradiation in the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), it has converted only a small fraction of its HEU into targets – about 2.1 kg – and is unlikely to convert much more.
- Iran's current production rate of 60 percent enriched uranium is 4.3 kg per month (U mass) using two advanced centrifuge cascades and up to 5 percent low enriched uranium (LEU) as feed.
- Iran is learning important lessons in breaking out to nuclear weapons, including by experimenting with skipping typical enrichment steps as it enriches up to 60 percent uranium-235 and building and testing equipment to feed 20 percent enriched uranium and withdraw HEU. It is starting from a level below 5 percent LEU and enriching directly to near 60 percent in one cascade, rather than using two steps in between, a slower process entailing the intermediate production of 20 percent enriched uranium. It has used temporary feed and withdrawal setups to produce HEU from near 20 percent enriched uranium feed. Iran is also implementing a plan to allow IR-6 cascades to switch more easily from the production of 5 percent enriched uranium to 20 percent enriched uranium.
- Iran is currently not enriching uranium to 20 percent in one cascade of IR-6 centrifuges at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, a cascade that was active during prior reporting periods. Iran has installed a second cascade of 166 IR-6 centrifuges at the FFEP, but still has not yet fed it with UF₆. It also has six IR-1 cascades that were already producing 20 percent enriched uranium. The installation of advanced centrifuges at the FFEP enhances Iran's ability to break out using a declared but highly fortified facility.
- The production rate of 20 percent enriched uranium at the FFEP remained fairly steady at 19.9 kg (U mass) per month or 29.4 kg (hex mass) per month.
- As of May 15, Iran had an IAEA-estimated stock of 238.4 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium (U mass and in the form of UF₆), an increase over the previous reporting period's 182.1 kg. Iran also has an additional stock of 35.9 kg (U mass) of 20 percent uranium in other chemical forms.

- As with the previous reporting period, Iran has not produced any uranium metal.
- At the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP), Iran has installed 36 cascades of IR-1 centrifuges, six cascades of IR-2m centrifuges, and two cascades of IR-4 centrifuges. Of those, 31 IR-1 cascades, six IR-2m cascades, and one IR-4 cascade were being fed with uranium. A third IR-4 cascade was being installed.
- Iran's current, total operating enrichment capability is estimated to be about 12,600 separative work units (SWU) per year, compared to 13,400 SWU per year at the end of the last reporting period.
- Average daily production of 5 percent LEU remained steady at the FEP, but Iran's total usable stock of below 5 percent LEU continued to decrease, due to the increased rate of its use as feedstock at the PFEP and FFEP.
- Iran's overall reported stockpile of LEU increased due to a significant increase in Iran's stock of up to 2 percent enriched uranium, much of which was produced as tails in the production of 20 percent and 60 percent enriched uranium.
- In its latest report, the IAEA states that "prior to the end of March 2022, the Agency replaced all of the storage media in JCPOA-related cameras," including those at Iran's new or temporary centrifuge manufacturing and assembly facilities. The IAEA will not have access to video recordings and data, which Iran claims it will keep in its custody, until it receives relief from sanctions. The IAEA, for more than one year, has not been able to monitor Iran's production of advanced centrifuges, particularly rotors and bellows, per JCPOA monitoring provisions, and faces a difficult challenge in reconstructing events should Iran turn over these data.
- The IAEA also faces a gap in knowledge about Iran's advanced centrifuge manufacturing activities from June 2021 until January 2022, raising doubt about its ability to ascertain whether Iran may have diverted centrifuge components.
- Combined with Iran's refusal to resolve outstanding safeguards violations, the IAEA has a significantly reduced ability to monitor Iran's complex and growing nuclear program, which notably has unresolved nuclear weapons dimensions. The IAEA's ability to detect diversion of nuclear materials, equipment, and other capabilities to undeclared facilities remains greatly diminished.

Andrea Stricker is deputy director and a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' (FDD) Nonproliferation and Biodefense program.

Israel Needs a Statesman – Now

By Guy Milliere



Since June 2021, for the first time in 12 years, Israel seems to have a weak prime minister, Naftali Bennett. Israel needs its strong tribe status. Israel needs a statesman. Now. Pictured: Bennett (right) and his foreign minister, Yair Lapid, on June 13, 2021. (Photo by Emmanuel Dunand/AFP via Getty Images)

Beersheba, Israel. March 22. Mohammed Abu al-Kiyani rams his car into a rabbi riding a bicycle, killing him, then drives to a gas station and stabs a woman to death there, and then drives to a shopping mall and stabs two more people to death. After fleeing the mall, he crashed his car into another vehicle and was finally shot and killed by armed civilians as he charged at one of them with a knife.

On March 27, Ayman and Ibrahim Ighbarieh open fire at people standing at a bus stop in Hadera, kill two Border Police officers and wound ten more people before they, too, are shot and killed by off-duty police officers who were eating nearby.

March 29, in Bnei Brak, a suburb of Tel Aviv, Diaa Hamarsheh, murders five people in a shooting spree before being shot dead by policemen, one of whom Hamarsheh had mortally wounded.

April 7, Raed Hazem opens fire at people in a central Tel Aviv pub, killing three and wounding a dozen. He is killed a few hours later in an exchange of fire with police.

Fourteen Israelis were murdered; two dozen wounded, some seriously. It was the worst wave of terror attacks Israel has seen in a while.

Three of the five terrorists had previously been arrested for serious crimes, tried, imprisoned, then released. Abu al-Kiyan, a teacher who encouraged children to join the Islamic State, was convicted in 2016 for membership in a terror group and sentenced to four years in prison, but released after only three years. There he had taken part in a "rehabilitation program for 'ISIS prisoners'".

Ibrahim Ighbarieh, arrested by Turkish authorities for attempting to join the Islamic State, was handed back to Israel, where he was tried, convicted, served a prison sentence of 18 months and released. Hamarsheh, imprisoned in 2015 for dealing in illegal firearms and affiliating with a terrorist group, had spent six months in prison.

The Israeli judiciary gives light sentences to people who appear ready to commit murder and other terrorist acts. In Israel, constantly threatened by terrorism, terrorists and would-be terrorists are imprisoned only briefly before being released back out on the street.

The terrorists who murdered in Bnei Brak and Tel Aviv came from territories exclusively controlled by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and were in Israel clandestinely. There are many breaches in Israel's security fence; the Israeli government knew about them but did not fix them. The terrorists in Beersheba and Hadera, however, were Arabs from within Israel - and constitute a threat that may be gaining ground.

There are nearly two million Arabs in Israel, full-fledged citizens who make up about 20% of the population of 9.5 million. Many serve in the military, police and civil service. Israeli Arabs sit as members of parliament, serve as mayors and judges (including on the Supreme Court), and work "in the foreign service, with a handful serving as ambassadors since 1995." Israel's Arab citizens have the same rights as its Jewish citizens but are not required to serve in the military, although many volunteer to join. These Arab citizens are descendants of families who did not flee in 1948 during a war that was begun - but then lost - by five Arab countries, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, that invaded and tried to kill the new country.

When, after the war, the Arabs who had fled wanted to return, Israel refused, explaining that they had been less than loyal. These are now known as Palestinians. They live in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank (of the Jordan River; formerly occupied by Jordan), the Gaza Strip (formerly occupied by Egypt), and in other countries around the world. While the Jews welcomed their co-religionists to Israel as full citizens, the many Arab states did not do the same for their brethren. Instead, Arab states left the newly-stateless Palestinians in refugee camps, often squalid, presumably in the hope that one day they would resume the war they lost, but this time win it.

In an atmosphere of a daily diet to hate Israel and the Jews, some Arabs become murderers. Although all of the Arabs born in Israel have Israeli citizenship, many today, out of communal solidarity, define themselves as Palestinians and believe it is their duty as Muslims to wage jihad against Jews and Israel.

In Israeli Arab towns, or in mixed cities where the population is partly Arab and partly Jewish, there is evidently significant traffic in arms that are stolen or smuggled into Israel. Even though the Israeli police regularly carry out operations to seize them, trafficking continues. Arms not seized by the police are sometimes used to commit ordinary crimes - or can be used for terrorist attacks.

The uprising of Israeli Arabs that shook Israel last spring, as Hamas launched missile on Israel, indicated that a worrying situation was taking shape. Synagogues were ransacked and burned; nearly 400 Jewish homes were looted. Arabs blocked road to stop cars and attack drivers that were Jewish. Jews were lynched, killed or wounded, in the streets just because they were Jews. Rioters destroyed Israeli flags and raised Palestinian ones. Israeli intelligence established that during the uprising, Hamas operatives had been coordinating with Israeli Arabs.

Israeli security experts said that a problem existed and answers were needed.

The "problem" is all the more serious because the situation in the region has also been deteriorating; the Middle East policies of the United States since January 2021 have been exacerbating the "problem".

The years before 2021 had brought relative calm and improvements. The United States had cut much of its funding for the Palestinian Authority, which had been used for terrorism. As a result, terrorism had substantially decreased. When the US pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal and drastically sanctioned Iran, the mullahs and their Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had less money to finance and arm Hamas. ISIS was crushed. A rapprochement began between Israel and the Arab world and led to the Abraham Accords, signed between the United States, Israel, and five Muslim countries – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, Kosovo and Sudan. For the first time in decades in the Middle East, "peace, security and prosperity" held sway.

The election of US President Joe Biden, however, quickly revealed that better lives for people in the region, including the Palestinians, were about to end. The Biden administration immediately returned to the policies of the Obama years. It restored the funding that Palestinian leaders use for terrorism, without first stipulating that the terrorism had to stop. The Biden administration resumed nuclear negotiations with Iran – through an intermediary from, of all places Russia. (Iran did not allow the US officials in the room.) The US government itself had named Iran "the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism;" now the Biden administration was again enabling the ruling mullahs – who call for "Death to Israel" and "Death to America" – soon to have an unlimited number of nuclear weapons, the intercontinental ballistic missiles to deliver them, and billions of dollars for terrorism and resuming their efforts to take over the oil-rich Middle East. Meanwhile, America's interlocutor, Russia, has been working with Iran on how it can evade US sanctions for invading Ukraine so that both countries may further enrich themselves by Iran selling Russia's oil.

Since June 2021, for the first time in 12 years, Israel seems to have a weak prime minister, Naftali Bennett. He has evidently promised to work in "quiet coordination" with the Biden administration and never criticizes the administration's anti-Israel policies.

The leaders of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas see that an anti-Israel administration is in place in Washington and draw their own conclusions.

The nuclear deal that the Biden administration has been trying to sign with Iran is even more disastrous for Israel than the original 2015 deal, yet Bennett remains silent. He hinted a few months ago that he no longer considers the Iran deal to have been a "historic mistake." Recently, he added, "We are not automatic naysayers. We're taking a practical approach". The deal, however, deeply the leaders of the Sunni Arab world,

who are as threatened by Iran as Israel; Bennett's attitude can only increase their concerns.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently visited Israel to explain the administration's Middle East policies. He was supposed to go to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed declined to receive him.

Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid wanted to find a way to remedy the refusals. He invited the leaders of four Arab countries (UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco) to a summit at Sde Boker, in Israel, to meet with Blinken. There was almost no mention during the summit of Iran. Lapid simply stated briefly that "the shared capabilities we are building intimidates and deters our common enemies, first and foremost Iran and its proxies". Blinken used the opportunity to insist on a make-believe "two-state solution", downplay the Abraham Accords and criticize Israel.

Although the summit took place just a few days after the Beersheba attack and coincided with the Hadera attack, Blinken did not denounce terrorism. He said instead that the Abraham Accords "are not a substitute for progress between Palestinians and Israelis," and added that peace involves working "to prevent actions on all sides that could raise tensions, including settlement expansion, settler violence, incitement to violence".

When "settlement expansion" is made to sound as grave a transgression as murder, terrorism will resume. Lapid said nothing. The Arab leaders also said nothing; they could hardly have been reassured.

On December 29, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz hosted Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in his home, and offered the PA a \$32.2 million loan against future tax revenues that Israel collects on Ramallah's behalf, as well as to "legalize the status of 9,500 undocumented Palestinians and foreigners living in the West Bank and Gaza." Gantz reported that the meeting had gone well and added, "I will continue to meet with him and other elements... with whom discourse helps our stability, security and interests". Two days later, Abbas delivered a speech accusing Israel of "racial discrimination", "organized terrorism" and "ethnic cleansing". Gantz said he was disappointed, but ready to meet Abbas again.

"[F]or the past 70 years," wrote the journalist Caroline Glick, "the nations of the Middle East have viewed the US as the most powerful tribe in the region", but that this is no longer applies. The Biden administration's concessions to Iran are perceived by Arab leaders as treason, and the behavior of the Israeli government has led them to doubt Israel's strength. Sunni Arab leaders, Glick wrote, are currently "trying to decide whether to grovel to Iran, or stand with Israel". She concluded that today, "Israel has but one option – to become the strong tribe of the Middle East".

The Israeli government will have to curb the Israeli Arab terrorist threat and, internationally, take a stand on the Biden administration's policies on terrorism and the immense danger coming from Iran. Israel needs its strong tribe status. Israel needs a statesman. Now.

Dr. Guy Milliere, a professor at the University of Paris.

The fall of the Israeli government and the upcoming election

By Ruthie Blum



The moment that some Israelis have been dreading and others happily anticipating finally arrived on June 20. Though the announcement by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid of a call for the disbanding of the Knesset was virtually a foregone conclusion, it came as a bit of a surprise.

Earlier in the day, it was reported that Bennett had bought his teetering coalition an additional week. This was attributed to the fact that Likud Party and opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu was postponing a no-confidence motion for several days.

Still, the public response has been similar to that surrounding the death of someone who suffered a long and drawn-out illness; despite the inevitability of the demise, the end is slightly jolting. Nevertheless, nobody skipped a beat—certainly not the politicians or reporters scrambling to address the new reality—at the sound of the government's last breath.

Judging by the polls, those who had hoped it would survive aren't numerous, but they have begun to reiterate the rhetoric of the anti-Netanyahu camp. Sadly, some voters who experienced buyers' remorse at having opted for Bennett in the first place—as he represented for them the uncompromising Zionist who would annex Judea and Samaria—are singing the same tune about Netanyahu.

If they allow their ideological purism to govern their ballots on Oct. 15, the ostensible date for the fifth Knesset election in three-and-a-half years, they are likely to find themselves back where they started. And it won't serve their interests to have Likud unable to form a majority coalition.

The same goes for Likud supporters who considered it a waste of their time to vote at all, given the repeated impasse that led to four inconclusive rounds. Ditto for disgruntled Likudniks who don't favour Netanyahu but say that there's no candidate they consider a substitute.

One thing that Israelis across the spectrum seem to share, however, is embarrassment at the content of Bennett's statement about why the coalition is no

longer viable—as though it ever were destined to succeed with such an internally disparate makeup.

“We stand before you today at a difficult moment, but with the understanding that we made the right decision for Israel,” he began. “A year ago, we formed a government that many thought was impossible, in order to stop the terrible spiral in which Israel was caught.”

He got the first part right. What followed, on the other hand, was laughable.

“In Israel, a year ago, there was massive unemployment, a huge deficit, rioting in the streets and missiles on Jerusalem,” he went on, failing to mention the pandemic in this context. Oh, and a surge in terrorism spurred, among other things, by an internecine Palestinian Authority battle between Fatah and Hamas over which group is better equipped to demolish the Jewish state.

He then proceeded to point to the main impetus behind his “Zionist” move to forge a coalition with a mere seven seats: a government that was in “total paralysis.” Here he omitted the bit about the signing of the Abraham Accords, for example, in September 2020.

“Together, we got the country out of the pit,” he said. “We returned the values of fairness and reliability to centre stage. Israel resumed being led.”

Here is where he highlighted how well it worked out. This raised a few eyebrows, considering the circumstances under which he was speaking: the flop of the kumbaya experiment.

A more substantial guffaw was elicited when he invoked the famous biblical story of King Solomon’s judgement.

“We chose to be the mother who safeguards her child’s life at great personal expense,” he said, before listing what he claimed to be his coalition’s outstanding accomplishments. These, according to the outgoing premier, included repairing the economy, making the south of the country safer, successfully fighting terrorism and conducting wonderful relations with the administration in Washington.

In the alternate universe that Bennett described, Lapid—the “alternate prime minister” replacing him until the establishment of the next government—is a perfect fit. Not so much for the Israeli populace living in the real world.

It’s a population whose justified fear is that the results of the upcoming election will not resolve the political deadlock that characterized the previous ones. The only way around it, other than an overhaul of the electoral system (which isn’t in the cards in the near future) is for all eligible citizens to cast a ballot. This means curbing the purism and joining, not hovering above, the fray.

There was a 67.4% voter turnout in March 2021. It is possible and necessary to raise that percentage considerably. We Israelis owe it to ourselves to aim for majority rule.

Ruthie Blum is an Israel-based journalist and author of “To Hell in a Handbasket: Carter, Obama, and the ‘Arab Spring.’”

No Easy Solutions in Lebanon

By Hussein Aboubakr Mansour



Despite optimism brought by the latest Lebanese elections, there is no easy way out from Hezbollah's grip. The re-election of Hezbollah's man and Amal's leader Nabih Al-Berri as speaker of the parliament shows that the "Party of God" is intent on maintaining power. A group of new young faces who will enter parliament indeed show rising opposition to Hezbollah, yet considering the astounding economic and security failures of recent years, it is too little too late. Lebanon has no way out of Iran's labyrinth.

Lebanon's current compounded crisis, despite the country's long-troubled history, is one of the worst episodes of modern Lebanese history. Economic and social indicators seem to point to a worsening situation with no clear solution in sight. The political dysfunction of the country doesn't seem to be heading toward a resolution, despite mediation and requests from major foreign patrons with multiple failing attempts to form a government. Lebanon's recent fallout with the Arab Gulf states indicated that the Lebanese government is not able to maintain even its most important relationships.

The World Bank Regional Director of the Mashreq Department Saroj Kumar Jha described the current crisis in Lebanon as the worst in its history and one of the worst in the world. Like all other people of concern, Jha blames the crisis on the endemic corruption for which the country is famous. Decades of political dysfunction and apathy seem to be leaving the country with very few prospects of quick recovery, if any. The Spring 2021 Lebanon Economic Monitor finds Lebanon's financial crisis one of the top 10 worst since the mid of the 19th century.

Prior to the crisis, Banque du Liban borrowed depositors' money and used it to support the local currency until the entire system started to come apart in 2019. Suddenly, the entire Lebanese financial sector including the central bank as well as the state became insolvent. Lebanon's GDP plummeted from \$55 billion in 2018 to a meagre \$20.5 billion in 2021. The banking sector completely stopped lending and doesn't

receive deposits. The lira continues to lose value to ever-rising inflation in the triple digits.

US Lebanon policy always had to counter Hezbollah at its heart. For the longest time prior to the rise of Hezbollah and Iranian threats, the US lacked any real Lebanon policy. But since the Biden administration took office, a new kind of American attention is being directed towards Lebanon—the US seems to be willing to separate its policies in recognition of the system of two powers that exist in and seeks to accommodate the complex reality on the ground to prevent Lebanon's collapse.

One side of the policy seeks to support the Lebanese army and state. On the other side, the US continues trying to counter Hezbollah's influence and operations globally. Hezbollah operates a large network of terrorist operatives, illicit finances and drug trafficking that has established solid footing in the Western hemisphere. Countering Hezbollah is not just a Middle East policy option but also a national security priority.

Having a dual policy for one country is not new, but it is important to ask if the objectives of both policies are complementary or competitive. In Lebanon, the US is working hard to prevent the collapse of the Lebanese state and another source of refugee problems in the region. This will likely exacerbate the issue of wider instability in the region, given also the rising regional tensions between Iran and its rivals.

The US is not the only country with these goals in Lebanon; France and the Arab Gulf have been trying to play that part for some time too. At the same time, the US and other countries are sanctioning corrupt Lebanese figures to incentivize reform and disincentivize inaction. The reform issue is central as almost all international donors conditioned the assistance on the execution of such reforms—about which the Lebanese elites seem unenthusiastic. The issue of sanctioning corrupt officials became urgent especially after U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last December that Lebanon's financial collapse was the result of a "Ponzi scheme" by corrupt officials and politicians.

All international donors condition their assistance to Lebanon on reforms. The International Monetary Fund conditioned assistance of \$8 to \$10 billion the Lebanese government on the following actions: Tackling head-on the fundamental problem of weak governance. Reforms to enhance transparency must be centred on strengthening anti-corruption framework and improving the performance of state-owned enterprises, particularly the energy sector.

This should include audits of the central bank and the electricity provider; Implementing a fiscal strategy, combining deep debt restructuring and reforms to restore credibility, predictability and transparency of the fiscal framework, while expanding the social safety net to protect the most vulnerable; A comprehensive restructuring of the financial sector—recognizing upfront the losses at private banks and the central bank, but doing so in a way that protects smaller depositors; Establishing a credible monetary and exchange rate system, supported by the unification of multiple exchange rates and accompanied temporarily by formal capital controls.

But the political elites in Lebanon demonstrated an alarming lack of urgency and commitment on all these fronts. Some reports even suggested that influential political and economic personalities have worked together to sabotage steps toward implementing the needed reforms that may endanger their interests. This is why

Lebanese citizens were eagerly awaiting the latest elections hoping to bring about a political change. But can such a change occur with Hezbollah firmly holding to its power in the country?

Hezbollah's role in Lebanese politics is undoubtedly the largest obstacle to solving the country's dysfunctional political impasse, but it is not the only problem. The crisis should be understood as a result of a long drawn-out process of bankruptcy, corruption and political ineptness, in which the political and financial elites all played a large part—the elites used the state's financial resources to finance their patronage and lacked any fiscal responsibility.

It is only natural that the Biden administration would be focused on the economic crisis in Lebanon, but it seems such a focus is moving to the forefront of American policy. The State Department's Lebanon policy overview focused entirely on economics and does not mention Hezbollah, nor does it mention Iranian-sponsored terrorism that instrumentalizes Hezbollah troops even outside of Lebanon.

The US needs to remember that while Hezbollah may not figure predominantly when discussing Lebanon's economic collapse, it does play a central role in its political dysfunction. Hezbollah may not tap into the institutions of the state as much as other actors for patronage, but its terrorist methods mean it instead relies heavily on violence, assassinations and intimidation to achieve its political goals.

Hezbollah is the strongest militant actor in Lebanese politics and is recognized as the dominant political force that holds the single most important veto power in the consortium of Lebanese power. This means that while Hezbollah cannot be directly blamed for the economic corruption and collapse, it is exactly Hezbollah's position that protects the current dysfunctional arrangement of power and which prevents reform. The party's solid position in Lebanese politics means that the party's priorities always come first.

Based on the recent elections and the lack of real prospects of political change, it is impossible to ignore the central role that Hezbollah came to occupy in the Lebanese political landscape with the most important political veto. Those who insist on optimism need to remember that one can either have guns or have politics, but not both. Hezbollah's armed resistance automatically precludes any possibility of political reform.

The contradictory objectives the US has in Lebanon are not commensurable and cannot be harmonized in a cohesive policy. One should ask whether true reform is even possible under the current political constraints. Can the Lebanese state be expected to produce a new political class that may be more functional politically at the same time it is in Iran's grasp? The answers to these questions are negative. Even more so given the escalation of Iranian regional aggression, the expansion of Iranian presence in Syria and a possible new nuclear deal with the US. Any hope of a change in Lebanon under the current conditions is futile, so the US must focus its policy instead on countering Hezbollah and Iranian influence more efficiently.

Lebanese elections unlikely to stop country's downward spiral

By Israel Kasnett



As Lebanon's parliamentary elections took place on Sunday, optimism for a better future ran low. Lebanon today faces catastrophic collapse; its economy is in tatters, and some three-quarters of the population live in poverty. The country finds itself in a chronic state of crisis with Iran and Hezbollah the primary causes for its downfall.

With traditionalists pitted against reformists and reports that Hezbollah has lost some of its parliamentary power, it is unclear that the elections achieved anything other than further governmental chaos and an even more polarized cabinet. Iran-backed Hezbollah will find a new avenue to get its way and rule the country subversively—if not in the halls of power then through intimidation and aggression.

Jacques Neriah, a special analyst for the Middle East at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA), has noted that these elections “are crucial since they will probably determine Lebanon's identity in the coming years.”

“The present legislative elections will lead to almost complete paralysis of the Lebanese body politic, adding to the national chaos because of the dire and exceptional economic situation,” he said. “Such a stagnation would point to the disintegration of Lebanon as a state—from a failed state as is the case today to a theoretically non-existent one in the future.”

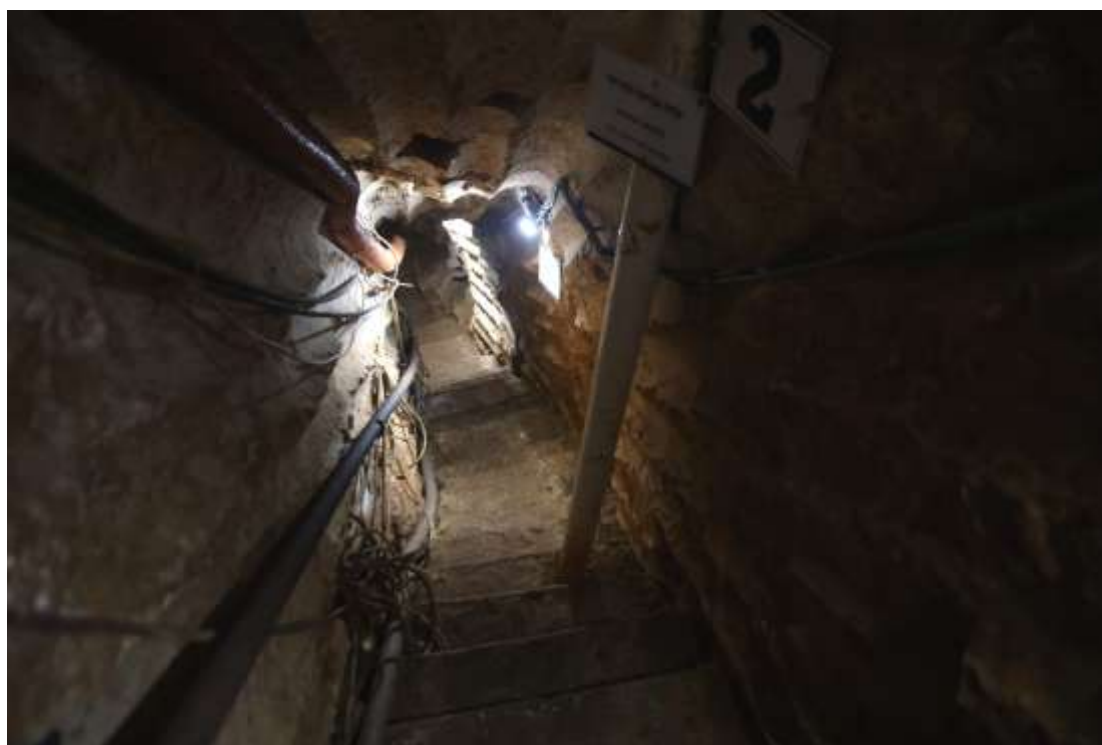
He also noted that the political struggle for power in Lebanon “is between two main ideological blocs: the one aiming to transform Lebanon into another province of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the other bloc fighting for Lebanon's Arab identity and independence.”

According to Dr. Shimon Shapira, a senior researcher also at the JCPA, Iran has long sought to establish an Islamic empire among the Shi'ite populations in the Middle East region and encourages them to “challenge the nation-states in which they operate and

to shape them by building a fighting Islamic society with military capabilities that is exclusively loyal to the leader of Iran, and that affords Iran active involvement in the jihad against Israel.”

“Lebanon was the Islamic empire’s first target,” he said. “Over the past decade, it has fallen like a ripe fruit into Iran’s hands. Through Hezbollah, Iran has taken control of the institutions of the Lebanese state and turned it into a failed state whose stability has collapsed amid severe economic and political corruption that threatens its demise. Meanwhile, Iraq and Syria have fallen, and Iran is using Yemen’s territory to wage the struggle against Saudi Arabia, whose legitimate control of the Islamic holy places Iran has put in question.”

While Hezbollah is largely viewed at home as the victorious party after the 2006 Second Lebanon War against Israel, it came with a cost; parts of Lebanon suffered severe damage when Israel responded to the terror group’s rocket barrage on Israeli civilians.



View of a Hezbollah tunnel that crosses from Lebanon to Israel, on the border between Israel and Lebanon in northern Israel, on Dec. 16, 2021.

Even after it struggled to recover over the next decade, in August 2020, a massive explosion rocked the Beirut port, killing more than 150 people and wounding more than 6,000. A sizable number of the city’s buildings were destroyed or suffered significant damage. No one in Lebanon has taken responsibility, but behind closed doors, many citizens believe Hezbollah was behind the unintentional blast caused by munitions stored at the port.

‘Struggle between Hezbollah and Israel at full throttle’

The underlying problem is that no matter how much progress Lebanon makes or how far it manages to drag itself out of its current mess, Hezbollah is poised to destroy the country once again—with Iran’s blessing.

Hezbollah works day and night to improve its military capabilities in the likely and inevitable event it goes to war with Israel.

Shapira noted that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah recently announced that the terror organization “had managed to convert thousands of missiles in its possession into precision-guided missiles, despite Israel’s attempts to thwart the process during its ‘campaign between the wars.’ ”

At the moment, according to Shapira, “Hezbollah is believed to have 130,000 missiles and rockets with ranges of 10 to 500 kilometres dispersed in Southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley in bunkers next to schools, clinics, hospitals, soccer fields, as well as the Iranian embassy in Beirut and the Lebanese Defence Ministry.”

Israel has made clear—mainly by bombing Iranian weapons deliveries to Hezbollah through Syria—that it viewed Iran’s precision-guided missile program as a red line and would not allow such missiles or technology to be produced or transferred to Hezbollah.

As Shapira noted, Nasrallah secretly visited Tehran last year to discuss options and responses in case Israel attacked Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iran’s directives to Hezbollah in the event of such an attack were clear: launch long-range missiles at Tel Aviv and other strategic targets deep inside Israel.

According to Shapira, Iran’s strategy in Lebanon is based on three main factors:

One, the turning of Lebanon into an Iranian forward position against Israel, including an array of short- and long-range missiles intended to deter Israel from attacking the Iranian nuclear program.

Two, the building of an Islamic society in Lebanon in the image of Iran whose fealty is to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Three, active involvement in the Palestinian jihad against Israel. It was the former head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Qassem Soleimani, who worked to surround Israel with missiles. Although he was assassinated in 2020, the threat he helped create remains true today.

In Shapira’s view, Israel’s main challenge with regard to Lebanon continues to be its struggle against the Iranian entrenchment in Syria, Iranian weapons transfers to Hezbollah and against Iran’s precision-guided missile program.

With Lebanon’s current political stalemate and an Iran-backed Hezbollah bent on controlling the country at all cost, Israel must now deal with a nearly non-existent state on its northern border that is quickly succumbing to Iran’s powerful and destructive domination.

“The struggle between Hezbollah and Israel is at full throttle,” said Shapira. “Hezbollah, with Iran’s help, is working to build long-range capabilities that will allow it to strike precise targets in the Israeli home front. Israel is resolved to prevent Hezbollah from gaining that capability.”

Lebanon Gives Tehran a Double Whammy

By Amir Taheri



As official results came in, Iran's Supreme Guide Ali Khamenei and Major General Esmail Qaani, chief of the Quds Force who is supposed to rule the "Resistance Front" countries as a satrap... realized that the Lebanese electorate, or at least the 49% who went to the polls, had denied Tehran the "crushing victory" it had hoped for. Pictured: Khamenei meets with Hassan Nasrallah, head of Lebanon's Hezbollah terrorist organization. (Image source: khamenei.ir)

It was only a couple of weeks ago that the general election in Lebanon made the headlines in Tehran's official media. "Supreme Guide" Ali Khamenei had labelled the election as "a referendum on the Resistance Front", a coalition of Iran-controlled groups that have struck roots in Iraq, Syria, north Yemen, Gaza and Lebanon. He had also publicly donated an extra \$25 million to the Lebanese branch of Hezbollah to ensure its victory.

Certain about securing a "crushing victory", partly thanks to the misguided boycott declared by Lebanon's former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the Tehran media had started speculations about whom Khamenei might choose as the next president if Lebanon were to replace the current octogenarian incumbent. The matter had been raised in the audience that Khamenei granted to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on a lightning visit to Tehran.

At the same time, Major General Esmail Qaani, chief of the Quds Force who is supposed to rule the "Resistance Front" countries as a satrap, had pinned his hopes on a victory in Lebanon to compensate for the massive defeat suffered by his hirelings in the Iraqi election earlier.

However, as official results came in, Khamenei and Qaani realized that the Lebanese electorate, or at least the 49 percent who went to the polls, had denied Tehran the "crushing victory" it had hoped for.

That meant a double whammy in two of the four Arab capitals that Ayatollah Ali Yunesi boasts are now under Tehran's control; the others being Sanaa and Damascus.

The question was how to break the bad news to the Iranian public that is currently engaged in a nationwide uprising against the Khomeinist system?

Iran's official IRNA agency, controlled by the office of the president, decided to describe the defeat as a failure for Hezbollah's Christian and Druze allies rather than the group itself.

Despite the fact that turnout among Shiites was 11 percent lower than the average of two previous elections, IRNA boasted that the Shiite vote held for both Hezbollah and Amal.

Needless to say, the setback that Hezbollah suffered in the south, traditionally a Shiite stronghold, was not mentioned.

The Fars News Agency, controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, on the other hand, tried to drown the fish, as they say, by downgrading it to the 13th place in its news menu. Even then, it gave the results on a constituency-by-constituency basis, leaving the reader, if he were patient and good at math, to work out the final result himself.

Giving a glimpse of Tehran's anger, it also noted that while a new majority in the Lebanese parliament could be tolerated, it would not be allowed to change policy towards either Israel or the United States. A threat of assassination against the new majority in the Lebanese parliament? Who knows.

What is certain is that a majority of politically active Lebanese seek a new departure for the country. It is also certain that Hezbollah and its allies have been bloodied but, thanks to abiding support from the Islamic Republic of Iran, remain unbowed.

As Iran itself enters what looks like a new period of tension and crisis, that support is bound to diminish but is unlikely to evaporate overnight. Hezbollah may no longer have a veto on all key issues but retains enough power to delay and significantly block the path to the reconstruction of the Lebanese economy and political system. Blockage as a tactic is already being used by the defeated pro-Tehran groups in Iraq, delaying a return to normal governance, let alone embarking on long overdue reforms.

In other words, Lebanon isn't yet out of the deadly maze created for it by the Islamic Republic and its allies. Delaying tactics could prevent the nomination of a new prime minister and, later, a new president. And that, in turn, would prevent the injection of aid promised by the International Monetary Fund, not to mention private Lebanese and foreign investors.

The way to deal with such delaying tactic could be a direct appeal to the Shiite community that is equally suffering from the economic meltdown caused by foreign intervention. Numerous direct and indirect messages from Shiites inside Lebanon indicate a growing weariness with a scheme that sees the country, in the words of Tehran's *Kayhan* daily, as nothing but a "shield for Islamic Republic" of Iran. Large

chunks of the Shiite community have seen the prosperity they had secured since the 1980s melt away as a result of the economic crisis that has plunged 70% of Lebanese into poverty.

The election results are good news for a number of reasons.

They close the sorry chapter of Michel Aoun and also see the back of Saad Hariri, who has self-destructed. The immovable Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri may also have become movable, if not immediately but in due course. The fact that 13 to 16 newcomers, standing as independents, have managed to enter the closed citadel of a parliament controlled by a handful of corrupt and incompetent barons is also good news.

What is important now is for the international community to offer Lebanon a package of quick aid as a reward for having opted for change. In other words, the international community should not enter a delaying tango in which Hezbollah delays the formation of a government and the IMF delays the writing of checks. The same goes for other potential foreign investors. Making their help conditional on relegating Hezbollah to the backyard would only play in the hands of Tehran, which claims Lebanon cannot move forward without Hezbollah.

Wresting control of many state institutions, including security, away from Hezbollah is unlikely to happen overnight. And disbanding Hezbollah's parallel army would be even more complicated to achieve.

Granting Lebanon urgent relief from its current pains would send a positive message that even a slight distancing of Hezbollah from full control could bear fruits for the average Lebanese. That, in turn, would strengthen the message that Lebanon could do better without a politico-military Trojan Horse in its midst.

There is no doubt that Hezbollah is an illness and the key cause of Lebanon's sorry state today. But this is a disease that cannot be cured with instant surgery; it requires patient treatment. The latest election could signal the start of that process which is bound to be accelerated by positive developments in Iraq and, eventually, in Iran itself.

Amir Taheri was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979.

What Hezbollah's Parliamentary Loss Means for Lebanon

By Hanin Ghaddar



The voting results provide even more hope for change than meets the eye, though the winners will need international help to prevent Hezbollah from obstructing the next steps.

On May 15, Hezbollah suffered a major defeat in Lebanon's parliamentary election, losing not only its majority control of the legislature but also all of its non-Shia-Muslim allies. Despite low turnout, threats of violence, financial difficulties, and growing national despair, the people voted for change, choosing reforms over Hezbollah and its ever-growing military arsenal.

From a distance, one might conclude that the major political parties managed to maintain substantial parliamentary blocs. Yet a closer look at the details reveals that a number of significant changes will mark Lebanon's new political scene.

First, Hezbollah lost the Christian cover that has enabled it to manipulate various levers of power and flout the constitution, including the arms that make it the country's most potent military force. Previously, the Hezbollah-allied Free Patriotic Movement, headed by Gebran Bassil, enjoyed the majority of Christian representation in parliament, but Samir Geagea's "Lebanese Forces" party will now claim that mantle, winning more than twenty seats compared to seventeen for the FPM. Bassil's loss will also affect his ambitions to win this fall's presidential election.

Second, Druze areas in the Chouf and Aley districts witnessed real breakthroughs by the opposition, with three seats going to independents—Mark Daou, Najat Aoun Saliba, and Halime Kaakour. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt maintained his representation as well. Even more notable were the losses by Wiam Wahab and Talal Arslan, two key

allies of Hezbollah and Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. In fact, Assad lost traditional allies all across Lebanon, such as Assaad Hardan, Elie Ferzli, and Faisal Karami.

Third, in Beirut's western second district, Sunni voters defied former prime minister Saad Hariri's calls to boycott the election, and many of their votes went to new independent candidates, including big wins for Ibrahim Mneimneh and Melhem Khalaf. Hezbollah had its eye on this district, where it worked hard to boost its own Sunni candidates and hoped that low overall turnout among this community would help compensate for its expected loss of Christian allies. Ultimately, the group aimed to cultivate a significant Sunni bloc via wins in Beirut, Tripoli, West Beqa, and Saida-Jezzine. Yet its plan to penetrate the Sunni street failed, and the majority of its Sunni candidates lost. As for Hariri, his exit from the country's political scene is now finalized.

Fourth, the south brought the biggest surprise. For the first time ever, Hezbollah's joint list with allied party Amal lost seats to two outside candidates, Elias Jradeh and Firas Hamdan. This setback came despite the many violations committed by Hezbollah-Amal representatives inside and outside the voting stations.

So what does all this mean? Hezbollah lost nearly everywhere in Lebanon, and although it managed to force the preservation of its twenty-seven-member Shia bloc in parliament, its support appears to be slipping even among this core constituency. Compared to the 2018 election, all Shia districts witnessed lower turnout, indicating that a considerable silent majority is dissatisfied with the group politically.

Moreover, the new independent members of parliament generally do not abide by sectarian identities or political affiliations. This is a big break from the opposition's former "March 14" coalition, which was larger but definitely more sectarian. In addition to new civil society representatives, a combination of winning factions—Samy Gemayel's Kataeb Party, traditional independent candidates, the new anti-Hezbollah Sunni bloc, and the Lebanese Forces with their largest bloc yet—could have a real chance to take Lebanon in a new direction. The formation of the next government, the outcome of the presidential election, and, most imminently, the selection of the next speaker of parliament will go a long way toward determining the horizons of this potential change.

Current speaker Nabih Berri, the head of Amal, can no longer guarantee holding that post for an eighth time—at least not unless he is willing to compromise with Jumblatt and Geagea. The challenge remains agreeing on another Shia candidate (as the constitution mandates for this post) when all of the Shia members are members of Hezbollah or Amal. After their election victories were announced, Geagea, Gemayel, and Tripoli Sunni politician Ashraf Rifi publicly promised their constituencies that they would not repeat the previous mistake of allowing Berri to remain speaker. If all opposition forces decide to reject Berri and take the daring step of agreeing on a single nominee, the parliament might finally see a new speaker—a development that would greatly affect Amal's internal politics, popular support, and relationship with Hezbollah.

The new majority, although fragmented, shares many of the same views regarding reforms and Hezbollah's arms. If they manage to coordinate, they could even spark a new discussion on national defence strategy, focusing on Hezbollah's arsenal while

also addressing the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the appointment of key security and financial officials, and, most important, what kind of leader they want to emerge from the presidential election.

The main obstacle to such momentum will be a humiliated and anxious Hezbollah. Having lost this round, the group will no doubt use all of its tools to influence the next steps, including threats of violence. Yet its old formula of bullets vs. ballots—which worked after the 2005 and 2009 elections—might not be as successful this time around, simply because the group’s political allies can no longer provide cover.

Hezbollah could also play another game at which it has long excelled: delaying key processes by blocking decisions and creating vacuums in government institutions. It has used such deadlocks to affect government formation and presidential elections many times before. This time, it might try to link those two events in order to force a compromise that guarantees its preferred presidential candidate a win. Unfortunately, this scenario could obstruct reforms and political change, ensuring that the promising electoral outcome is not properly reflected in state institutions. More international pressure is therefore needed immediately to prevent an institutional vacuum and discourage any compromises that threaten to cripple the movement toward change.

*Hanin Ghaddar is the Friedmann Fellow at The Washington Institute and author of its recent study *Hezbollahland: Mapping Dahiya and Lebanon's Shia Community*.*

Russia's War in Ukraine is Destabilizing the Middle East and North Africa

By Saeed Ghasseminejad



The war in Ukraine is already setting the Middle East on fire. In Iran, the government announced it would cut wheat subsidies amid rising global prices triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The announcement ignited a wave of protests that quickly turned political, as demonstrators called for the overthrow of Tehran's clerical regime. But the ayatollahs are not the only ones in a hot and dry region that feel threatened by the upheaval in global wheat markets. In 2020, Russia and Ukraine provided 43 percent of the wheat imported by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), compared to just 19 percent in 2008. The region also depends heavily on Russian and Ukrainian corn.

This system shock is not the first time in recent memory that turmoil in global grain markets has turned up the political temperature in MENA. Wheat prices spiked three separate times between 2008 and 2012, contributing to what began known as the Arab Spring, but mostly degenerated into bloody and intractable wars still raging in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. To tamp down risks, the Biden administration has already allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to fight global food insecurity.

Yet the administration should deal differently with friendly governments than it does with adversaries. Assistance for partners such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt should be more generous. In contrast, there is no reason to bail out the dictatorship in Tehran, whose corruption and military adventurism is the main drivers of its people's hardship. Nor should Washington do favours for the Hezbollah-dominated Lebanese government, which takes marching orders from Tehran and whose corruption devastated the economy even before the war in Ukraine began.

There are several ways the war has destabilized the markets for wheat and corn, of which Russia and Ukraine are top exporters. First, the war itself makes it difficult or impossible for Ukraine to grow and harvest crops. Second, the Russian blockade of Kyiv's Black Sea ports has cut off the main avenue for exports. Third, sanctions against Russian oil and gas can threaten the supply and increase the cost of fertilizer and fuel. The price of seeds is also rising. Fourth, while there are no sanctions on Russian grain, financial sanctions make doing any business with Russia more difficult. Transportation has also become harder to manage.

The prices of wheat and corn in 2021 and 2022 have jumped to their highest level since 2008. If the war continues, the supply shock in late 2022 and early 2023 may be even more significant. After the spikes associated with the Arab Spring, prices had been on a decreasing trend until 2020. The pandemic then ushered in loose monetary policies and supply chain problems that put upward pressure on prices across the product market. Finally, the war in Ukraine set an already-hot wheat and corn market on fire. The MENA region is water-stressed and has only 2 percent of the world's renewable water resources, making it very sensitive to waves of drought. As a result, MENA countries rely heavily on grain imports and are very sensitive to price shocks. Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco were among the top fifteen wheat importers in 2020. Egypt, Algeria, and Iran were among the top fifteen for corn in 2020.

Russian and Ukrainian exports have an outsized share of MENA markets. Overall, Russia was the number one wheat exporter globally in 2020, while Ukraine ranked fifth. Over the last few years, one-quarter of global wheat exports have come from Russia and Ukraine, a share that has risen sharply since 2008, when they only accounted for 10 percent of exports. MENA countries import as much as 45 percent of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine, up from 19 percent in 2008. Russia has a larger market share, with 27 percent versus about 16 percent for Ukraine.

Between 2018 and 2020, Russia and Ukraine also exported, on average, \$6.5 billion per year of corn to the MENA region, or 23 percent of the region's total imports—Ukraine provides about 19 percent, Russia just 4 percent.

Most MENA countries have a friendly relationship with Russia, so Moscow has no reason to use wheat exports (or the denial of exports) as a weapon. However, poorer countries in the region may still struggle to afford Russian wheat, although Syria allegedly received 100,000 tonnes of wheat that Russian forces stole from Ukraine.

Once the breadbasket of the Roman Empire, Egypt is now the largest importer of wheat in the world, with 81 percent of imports coming from Russia and Ukraine between 2018 and 2020. The World Bank classifies Egypt as a lower-middle-income nation, so it is especially sensitive to food prices. In 2020, Cairo imported \$2.8 billion of wheat. Shortages and rising prices could easily trigger unrest.

Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen already suffer from political instability and economic troubles; all purchased 50 percent or more of their imported wheat from Ukraine and Russia between 2018 and 2020. Libya and Tunisia also get half or more of their corn from Ukraine and Russia. Morocco, Jordan, Iran, and Syria are somewhat less exposed, which bought between 25 to 50 percent of their imported wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

If the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues grinding forward, wheat importers will likely have to contend with an even greater supply shock in the first half of 2023. The

United States may want to offer additional aid to partners such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt while helping them secure sufficient imports.

Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen already receive extensive humanitarian aid through the United Nations, most of it paid for by the United States and other Western donors. In Syria, the regime of Bashar al-Assad expropriates much of the aid for its own purposes. In Yemen, the Houthis diverted so much aid that the World Food Programme made the extraordinary decision to suspend part of its aid in 2019, although it later resumed. Last year, a Reuters investigation discovered that Lebanese banks lost \$250 million of UN aid money via ill-advised currency trades. Rather than calling for additional donations, the UN's first priority in these countries should be to stop the corruption that prevents aid from reaching those in need.

The Islamic Republic in Iran, the greatest threat to the United States's interests in the Middle East over the past four decades, has been the scene of protests over the high price of bread for the last few weeks. The protests were most significant in the southwestern provinces, where the mismanagement of water sources has been the worst. Those protests merged with demonstrations over the collapse of a high-rise building that killed forty-one in Abadan, in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

The common factor among the numerous mass protests that have roiled Iran since 2017 is that while they start over economic issues, they quickly become political, with the primary demand being the regime's collapse. International isolation, economic crises, and domestic discontent have put the dictatorship in a perilous position. Instead of throwing the Islamic Republic a lifeline, Washington should side with the protesters, empower them, and push the regime toward the edge. It is what the protesters want because they know that Iran's economic crises will never end for as long as the country suffers under a regime that values the pursuit of nuclear weapons and foreign military adventures far more than the lives or prosperity of its citizens.

Saeed Ghasseminejad is a senior advisor on Iran and financial economics at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), where he contributes to FDD's Iran Program and Center on Economic and Financial Power (CEFP).

Russia's Escalating Influence in Africa

By Judith Bergman



When the United Nations General Assembly voted on March 2, 2022 on a resolution to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, 17 African countries abstained, eight countries did not vote at all and one country (Eritrea) voted against the resolution. When Russia was suspended from the UN Human Rights Council on April 7, African countries were even less willing to counter Russia: Nine African countries voted against suspending Russia, while 24 countries abstained.

African voting patterns in the UN are just one indication of Russia's growing influence in Africa. While Russia's engagement on the continent is not nearly comparable in volume to that of China, Russia has nevertheless been significantly deepening its influence on the African continent in recent years, especially when it comes to arms sales - between 2015 and 2017 Russia entered into 19 cooperation agreements with African countries, largely about Russian weapons sales - and providing mercenaries. According to Joseph Siegle, Director of Research at the Brookings Institution's Africa Center for Strategic Studies:

"Unlike most major external partners, Russia is not investing significantly in conventional statecraft in Africa—e.g., economic investment, trade, and security assistance. Rather, Russia relies on a series of asymmetric (and often extralegal) measures for influence—mercenaries, arms-for-resource deals, opaque contracts, election interference, and disinformation"

According to a recent report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia was the largest arms supplier to African countries from 2017–2021, accounting for 44% of arms imports, followed by the US with 17% and China with 10%. The first Russia-Africa summit took place in Sochi in 2019, with leaders from more than 40 African countries in attendance. The second Russia-Africa summit is scheduled to take place this fall.

Although trade between Russia and African countries has reportedly doubled since 2015, to about \$20 billion a year, China is still Africa's largest trade partner, with trade between China and the continent at \$254 billion in 2021. But Russia's ultimate aims in

Africa are the same as China's: To gain influence by making African countries dependent on its services. While in the case of China, investments and infrastructure are offered in exchange for strategic access to vital natural resources and political leverage, in the case of Russia, it is weapons and Russian state-sponsored mercenaries, known as private military companies (PMCs) in return for the same.

"In its African strategy, the Kremlin is motivated foremost by a desire to thwart U.S. policy objectives, almost irrespective of their substance," according to Federica Saini Fasanotti of the Brookings Institution.

"Considering Africa 'one of Russia's foreign policy priorities,' Russian President Vladimir Putin also seeks to create African dependencies on Moscow's military assets and access African resources, targeting countries that have fragile governments but are often rich in important raw materials, such as oil, gold, diamonds, uranium, and manganese...They also offer to these governments the ability to conduct counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations unconstrained by human rights responsibilities... In turn, Russia seeks payment in concessions for natural resources, substantial commercial contracts, or access to strategic locations, such as airbases or ports."

Russian mercenaries (PMCs) have been engaged in multiple African countries from Sudan to Mozambique, where they have left a trail of human rights abuses. The largest and most famous of Russia's PMCs is the Wagner Group, a paramilitary organization linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of Vladimir Putin. Although ostensibly appearing as a private business, "its management and operations are deeply intertwined with the Russian military and intelligence community," according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and should be seen, therefore, as "a proxy organization of the Russian state rather than a private company selling services on the open market."

According to a CSIS report from September 2020:

"Russia's strategy is straightforward: to undermine U.S. power and increase Moscow's influence using low-profile, deniable forces like PMCs that can do everything from providing foreign leaders with security to training, advising, and assisting partner security forces.

"Moscow's use of PMCs has exploded in recent years, reflecting lessons learned from earlier deployments, a growing expansionist mindset, and a desire for economic, geopolitical, and military gains... PMCs now fill various roles to undermine U.S. influence and support Russia's expanding geopolitical, military, and economic interests."

The Wagner Group is estimated to have operated in around 30 countries worldwide, from Syria to Venezuela. It is, however, not the only Russian private military company operating abroad to enhance Russian interests. There are several others, such as the E.N.O.T. Corporation in Syria and the Feraks Group in Iraq.

Most recently, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 15, General Stephen Townsend, Commander of United States Africa Command, referred to Russia's PMCs, especially the Wagner Group, as "a malign influence."

"They don't follow anybody's rules. They do what they want. They buttress dictators...they do gross violations of human rights. I think it's bad for Africa's security

and prosperity in the future. They're present in Libya...to a lesser extent in Sudan. They essentially run the Central African Republic. And they're now in Mali, and a gathering strength and Mali, over thousand Wagner operators there now."

The Wagner group has been accused of a litany of human rights abuses and war crimes. In the Central African Republic, for instance, where Russia sent the Wagner Group to support the government in its fight against various anti-government rebels, the Wagner Group has been accused of raping and robbing unarmed civilians. The UN documented more than 500 incidents of extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence in 2020 alone.

In Mali, the Wagner mercenaries have been accused of executing 500 civilian men, reportedly the worst single atrocity in the country in decades. "One trader said he was drinking tea with his two brothers while waiting for the market to start when he heard shooting," one eyewitness said according to Reuters.

"Seven Russians approached, gesturing for us to get up. There were no Malian soldiers with them. They searched us and the house, then took us east of the village, near the river, where we found another 100 men. Another group of Russians pointed at my brothers and another man. I thought they were going for interrogation. They took them several metres away and executed them, point blank."

In Libya, estimates of the number of Wagner mercenaries deployed until recently ranged from 2,200 to 7,000. According to a March 2022 report by Middle East Monitor: "Russia's Wagner Group has withdrawn about 1,300 of its mercenaries from Libya to Russia through Syria to participate in the Russian military operation in Ukraine, according to military and strategic expert Colonel Adel Abdel Kafi."

In 2020, the US military accused the Russian mercenaries in Libya of indiscriminately planting landmines and booby traps in the country, which have killed civilians. One type of booby trap device found was a 120-mm mortar shell connected to a teddy bear, which would detonate when the bear was touched or moved.

The Wagner Group was initially deployed in Ukraine during Russia's invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014.

This year's Russian invasion of Ukraine - and the sanctions that it has engendered - is likely to incentivize Russia to seek even more engagement on the African continent in the coming years - as also for China. It should serve as a reminder to the current and future US administrations that as Russia and China increase their engagement, the US cannot afford to look the other way. "America cannot ignore Africa. Africa's challenges, opportunities, and security interests are inseparable from our own..." General Townsend said at the March hearing.

"Our competitors clearly see Africa's rich potential. Russia and China both seek to convert soft and hard power investments into political influence, strategic access, and military advantage."

Judith Bergman, a columnist, lawyer and political analyst.

High oil prices, Middle East politics cast shadow

By Simon Henderson



We are into a new era of potentially significant oil market moves. While Americans were observing Memorial Day, and the unofficial arrival of summer, the oil price was pushing past \$120 per barrel.

Reportedly, high gasoline prices were not reflected in a discernible drop in road trips, but it would be a stretch to think that American motorists are not bothered by the prices at the pump and/or feel rich enough not to care. Multiple factors go into the oil price, and it would be rash to think the trend is not likely to be upwards.

Part of the significance of the coming days is the occurrence of significant important meetings. Last week the energy and environment ministers of the G7 nations (the Western industrialized nations) met in Germany and recommended that “OPEC pump more.” On June 2 and 3, OPEC will meet along with the Russia-led OPEC+ group. Their definition of pumping more is a pre-agreed paltry 400,000 or so barrels a day.

That’s not enough to have much, if any, impact on prices. OPEC likely will argue that the market does not need more. That’s not surprising because OPEC members rather like \$120-per-barrel oil. And OPEC’s leader, Saudi Arabia, no longer thinks it has an arrangement with the U.S. to pump oil in return for American security. Despite yet another trip to Riyadh by the administration’s Middle East point man, Brett McGurk, and his energy sidekick, Amos Hochstein, de facto Saudi leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, aka MbS, seems determined not to be obliging to Washington.

But that’s another factor that could change. Biden administration officials are working on a Middle East trip for the president, which would end this stalemate, despite White

House antipathy toward the entrenched positions of MbS and others. Will MbS compromise on oil production in return for President Biden's handshake and recognition that he is the real power behind the ailing King Salman's throne? Don't hold your breath, but the increasing suggestion that Saudi Arabia and Israel may be on the cusp of what would be truly a historic mutual recognition might shift entrenched positions.

Two factors loom over the meetings of the next few days: Ukraine and Iran. Russian President Vladimir Putin may well judge that he is close to a tactical, if not strategic, victory in the Donbas. A consequence of this would be to bluster his way out of attempts by Europe to squeeze him on energy. And Iran seems as determined as ever not to agree to a reimposition of restriction on its nuclear program.

This analysis does not allow for the unexpected, but there has been that as well, with the detention by Iran of two Greek-owned tankers in the Gulf in retaliation for the U.S. Navy seizing a Russian tanker loaded with Iranian oil near Greece. Such an outcome of the action against Iran was eminently predictable but muddies the waters of higher-level diplomatic talks.

Probably the most significant calculation in the mind of the White House in resolving this conundrum will be the potential impact on President Biden's fortunes in the November midterms. Predicting this is arguably just too complicated. There are too many moving parts. The next opinion polls will be interesting to assess.

June is shaping up to be a potentially very significant month, in terms of Washington's role in the world and the world's perceptions of Washington.

Simon Henderson is the Baker Fellow and director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

The Death of Journalist Abu Akleh

By Don Gibbons
TCMER Board Member



Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz has dismissed claims by the Palestinian Authority that Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was shot dead on May 11 in the course of a firefight between Palestinian gunmen and the Israel Defence Forces in Jenin, was deliberately targeted by Israeli forces.

“The State of Israel offers its condolences following the death of Shireen Abu Akleh. The IDF is conducting an ongoing investigation into the matter in order to reveal the truth. Any claim that the IDF intentionally harms journalists or uninvolved civilians is a blatant lie,” he said.

He spoke after the P.A.’s attorney general released a report into the journalist’s death, alleging that IDF soldiers deliberately targeted her as she tried to flee. The attorney general also claimed that the IDF used an armour-piercing round also used by NATO, according to a report by Mako.

“The IDF is operating against murderous terrorism, which in recent weeks has claimed the lives of 20 people,” said Gantz. “Many of the terrorists who conducted the attacks came from the Jenin area, which is where the incident took place. We always act with precision, targeting terrorists and taking measures to avoid harm to civilians. We will continue operating in this manner.”

He added that “investigations and briefings are not carried out at press conferences, but rather in closed rooms. Despite multiple requests from Israel, the Palestinians refuse to cooperate, which raises the question of whether they really want to uncover the truth.”

Gantz also noted that “unilateral investigations and attempts to charge IDF soldiers with war crimes while promoting false assessments, such as the one published by CNN, undermine the ability to achieve peace and stability in the region while ultimately boosting terrorism.”

Duplication of Qatar: Enemy and ally simultaneously

By Qleaks



Last March, the US administration designated the State of Qatar a major non-NATO ally, a valued distinction carries by Israel, but what is weird thing about Qatar is that Qatar is an ally of the United States, and an ally of Iran and a world headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood, so how do you combine opposites?

To dispel the confusion in answering the question, we need to go back in time to 1996. That year, the Qatari regime undertook two major initiatives. It founded the Al Jazeera satellite television network and it opened Al Udeid Air Base, which it gave to the US Air Force to use as its Central Command responsible for directing all US air operations in the Middle East and South Asia.

It was the beginning of Qatari duplication, to be generous with the United States in donations and gifts, and to do whatever it wished to support and promote terrorism.

Since its inception, Al Jazeera has served as the most powerful mouthpiece in history for the Muslim Brotherhood and its message of global jihad. The network served as the home network for Al-Qaeda both before and after the Sept. 11 attacks, for Hamas, for ISIS and other Muslim Brotherhood terrorist groups. It has also served as the fierce apologist for Iran. The most recent example is its failure, not covering the mass anti-regime protests inside Iran these days.

Observers say that without Al-Jazeera, the forces of terrorism would never have risen as they have over the past 25 years.

Also, Al Jazeera is not an independent actor, but rather a platform controlled by the Qatari regime, whose Islamic and foreign policies are identical to Al Jazeera's editorial line, as Qatar is Hamas' international headquarters and largest financier, and it was the base of operations of the Taliban leadership during their 20-year war against America, and a refuge for terrorists and financiers before and after September 11.



Yusuf al-Qaradawi

The relationship between the Brotherhood and Qatar goes back to the 1960s, when the tiny emirate brought the chief Egyptian Brotherhood leader Youssef Qaradhawi to Doha after then Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled him from Egypt in order to create a massive program for Islamic education that would come to serve as state ideology.

Al- Qaradhawi received the highest paid Al Jazeera media network for spreading his terrorist message to the entire Arab world, and for decades, his “Shari’ah and Life” program was watched by tens of millions of Muslims worldwide.

David Ribois, author of “The Shadow War in Qatar”, explains that ” Because of the Qatari state’s intimate relationship and ideological connection with the Brotherhood, it has become very difficult to see where one ends and the other begins.”

In other words, Qatar is, at its core, an emirate that sponsors and finances terrorism almost from its inception.

Despite disseminating the message of global terrorism and supporting terror groups worldwide as well as Iran, the Qataris also made themselves indispensable to the Americans, They built the Americans a state-of-the-art base at their own expense(Al Udeid base) at a time of heightened tensions between Saudi Arabia and the US, as have many other valuable presents followed to the United States armed forces, to the private sector and American elites in all walks of life.

On the one hand, Doha plays a pivotal role in waging the terrorist attacks against the US and the free world. On the other hand, it showers them with gifts. Qatar opened campuses for US universities and think tanks in Doha. It opened factories that hire thousands of American workers in key states. It regularly invites influential communal and thought leaders on all-expenses paid luxury tours of Doha. It spends millions on lobbyists in Washington.



Al Udeid Air Base

During the George W. Bush administration, the US's dependence on Al Udeid base saved the regime from criticism and sanction after the 9/11 attacks and during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the Obama administration, ties reached new heights as Barack Obama and his advisors worked to realign the US towards the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran and away from the US' traditional allies, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In 2017, the Trump administration had a golden opportunity to cut ties with Qatar in 2017, when Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut off ties with Qatar due to its support for terrorism, Rather than side with its allies, the Trump administration first sat on fence and later mediated "peace deal" between the sides, and the Biden administration is currently expanding ties between the United States and Qatar.

Prince Charles accepted a suitcases of cash from Qatari Prime Minister

By Susan Yao
TCMER Board Member



Prince Charles personally accepted €1 million in cash stuffed in a suitcase from a controversial Qatari politician, reports say. The extraordinary payment was one of three totalling €3million the Prince of Wales is said to have received from Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani between 2011 and 2015.

Clarence House said the money was “passed immediately to one of the prince's charities who carried out the appropriate covenants and assured us that all the correct processes were followed”.

The sheikh, the former Prime Minister of Qatar nicknamed HBJ, handed over huge sums of cash in private meetings with Charles, The Sunday Times reported on June 26. At one meeting he reportedly presented €1 million - around £861,000 - stuffed into carrier bags from posh grocer Fortnum & Mason. At another one-to-one meeting at Clarence House in 2015, Charles accepted a holdall containing another €1 million.

Two advisers in the royal household hand-counted the cash, said to have been made up of now-discontinued €500 notes. Private bank Coutts is then understood to have collected the suitcase from Charles' London residence at the request of palace aides.

Each payment was deposited into the accounts of the Prince of Wales' Charitable Fund, a low-profile grant-making entity which bankrolls the prince's pet projects and his country estate in Scotland.

Royals are banned from accepting gifts of money in connection with an official engagement or duty under the royal gift policy. They can accept a cheque as patron of or on behalf of a charity.

Prince Charles' meetings with the sheikh do not appear in the Court Circular, the list of official engagements undertaken by working royals. But the revelation raises questions about the heir to the throne's judgement including how much he knew, what he asked about the cash and his impartiality in representing Britain globally.

Prince Charles repeatedly visited Qatar after the payments, including during HBJ's premiership. There is no suggestion the payments were illegal.

Al Thani served as Qatar's PM and minister of foreign affairs from 2007 to 2013, during which time he built close ties with British royalty. His lawyers declined to comment.

In November Prince Charles' top aide Michael Fawcett quit over a cash for honours row. He resigned from his post as chief executive of The Prince's Foundation and was said to be "heartbroken" and "shattered" by the events. It followed reports Fawcett offered to help a billionaire Saudi donor to the prince's charity secure a knighthood and British citizenship.

Tyrannical dictator Putin gives New life to NATO

By Clifford D. May



Credit where credit is due: Russian President Vladimir Putin is revitalizing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an alliance that has never been obsolete but that had become obsolescent.

Of course, boosting NATO was not the Russian dictator's intention. He expected his invasion of Ukraine to divide and perhaps destroy this beneficial international community.

NATO was founded in 1949 to prevent the Soviet Union—an ally against the Nazis, but only after Hitler broke his pact with Stalin—from subjugating Western Europe as it had Eastern Europe.

Even after the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991, many East European nations were eager to join NATO. They believed that membership ensured independence—come what may.

West Europeans, by contrast, tended to see NATO's mission as accomplished. Many embraced the delusion that peace had become natural and war unnatural—at least in their corner of the world.

Disagreements—including with post-Soviet Russia—surely would be susceptible to “diplomatic solutions.” So western Europeans allowed their military capabilities to weaken. (To be fair, the United States did too, though starting from a higher plane and not descending as far.)

A few years ago, I rudely suggested to a senior German diplomat that his country was free-riding at America's expense while growing increasingly dependent on Putin's fossil fuels. That dependence, I added, would sharply increase upon completion of Nord Stream 2, the underwater pipeline that was to deliver huge quantities of gas directly from Russia to Germany.

“We’re not becoming dependent on their gas!” he protested. “They’re becoming dependent on our money!”

A year ago this month, President Joe Biden waived sanctions on the pipeline. Sen. Bob Menendez, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called out the mistake. He said he failed to see “how today’s decision will advance U.S. efforts to counter Russian aggression in Europe.”

He was right, but it required Russia’s latest barbaric aggression to cap the pipeline and prompt German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to renew his commitments to NATO and pledge to contribute more to the collective defence.

But the big story is this: Finland and Sweden now want to join the club.

“Finland must apply for NATO membership without delay,” President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin said in a joint statement last week. “NATO membership would strengthen Finland’s security. As a member of NATO, Finland would strengthen the entire defence alliance.” Niinisto also addressed Putin directly: “You caused this. Look in the mirror.”

“There is a before and after 24 February,” Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told a reporter, referring to the date when Russia’s invasion began. “The security landscape has completely changed.”

Sweden’s decision strikes me as the more surprising. It has a two-century-long history of neutrality, including during the Second World War and the Cold War. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, most Swedes thought land invasions by European armies were as outmoded as Viking raids.

Sweden doesn’t share a border with Russia, but there is a Russian fleet just 200 miles away in Kaliningrad, formerly the Prussian city of Königsberg, now a Russian possession separated from the “mainland” by Belarus, currently a Russian vassal, and Lithuania, a NATO member formerly ruled from the Kremlin.

Finland’s border with Russia is 830 miles long. The Finns were under Russian rule for more than a century, achieving independence in 1917. Less than a generation later, in 1939, the Soviets launched the Winter War.

Vastly outnumbered, with few tanks or aircraft and little support from European countries preoccupied with the Nazi onslaught, the Finns defended themselves valiantly—many on skis, camouflaged in white, staining snow-covered forests with the blood of tens of thousands of Soviet soldiers, and tossing Molotov cocktails (a Finnish invention) into the turrets of Soviet tanks.

James Brooke, my colleague at the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, spent years as a correspondent in Moscow and Kyiv. In a recent essay on the Winter War, he recalled how Simo Hayha, a Finnish farmer turned sniper, “settled in his snow pits, tamping down the snow to avoid powder puffs from a shot. ... To minimize telltale breath clouds, Hayha filled his mouth with snow ... he managed to kill 500 Soviet soldiers in less than 100 days. One day, he shot 28. On the Soviet side, this invisible sniper was known as ‘Belaya Smert’—‘White Death.’”

In the end, the Finns were not conquered. But they lost 11% of their territory. And they dared not offend or provoke the Kremlin. “Finlandization” became the term of art for a

nation surrendering some of its sovereignty to a bully in exchange for peace. Unlike many NATO members, however, Finland has never let down its military guard.

It would serve the U.S. national interest for NATO to become a stronger community—willing and able to defend the independence, rights and core values of its members.

The United Nations was meant to be such an organization. But despots now dominate many if not most U.N. agencies. The U.N. Human Rights Council is only the most obvious example.

The United States will continue to be the major power within NATO. There's no alternative. But we should insist that, over time, its European members bear more of the burden for European security so we can focus on Asia.

Longer term, NATO should grapple with the fact that Putin's ally, Xi Jinping, ruler of neo-imperialist China, poses as much of a threat to Europeans as he does to Americans.

Big picture, here's the choice we must make: Do we leave our children a world shaped by free peoples, or a world shaped by the tyrannical dictators in Moscow and Beijing, along with their allies in Tehran, Havana, Caracas and Managua? There's no third option.

Clifford D. May is the founder and president of the Foundation for Defence of Democracies and a columnist for The Washington Times.

Putin's strategic failure and the risk of escalation

By Nigel Gould-Davies



Russia's invasion of Ukraine is emerging as a grand strategic mistake, argues Nigel Gould-Davies. As the situation becomes more volatile and less predictable, is escalation the only way forward for a weakened Putin?

After six days, it is clear that Vladimir Putin's invasion was based on delusions about Ukraine, the West and Russia. Whatever the outcome on the battlefield, Putin has unleashed forces that weaken his country's, and his own, position.

Firstly, Putin drastically underestimated Ukraine's cohesion and will to resist. When he declared war, he called on Ukrainian forces to lay down their arms. Many have died rather than surrender, while many Russian soldiers have done the opposite. Doubling down on his delusion, Putin then called on the Ukrainian military to overthrow President Volodymyr Zelensky. Instead, Ukrainians who have never used a gun are now learning to do so, and to make Molotov cocktails, in defence of their country. Putin is inadvertently completing the work he began in 2014 of uniting Ukrainian society and reinforcing its national identity.

Secondly, Putin badly underestimated Western cohesion and resolve. Russia now faces a range of sanctions never inflicted on a major economy, notably the freezing of central bank assets. German policy has undergone a seismic shift: the suspension of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, the exclusion of Russian entities from SWIFT, and the historic decision to send weapons to Ukraine. As in the late 1940s and late 1970s, Russia's overreach is unleashing the West's latent strength. But this response is even stronger now, for two reasons. The West now has economic weapons to hit Russia much quicker and harder. And Western unity extends across societies, as well as states. No significant body of opinion is sympathetic to Russia. Private organisations and companies are adding their own sporting and cultural restrictions to government sanctions.

Russia's aggression – which threatens the wider international order, as well as Western security – enjoys almost no support elsewhere. Major Asian states have signed up to new export controls on semi-conductors. Neither Russia's military performance nor its erratic diplomacy before the war have burnished it as a partner. China's abstention in the 25 February UN Security Council vote condemning the invasion of Ukraine makes a mockery of the Putin–Xi declaration of friendship with 'no limits' three weeks earlier. Except for Belarus, a co-belligerent, Russia enjoys no visible support even among post-Soviet autocrats. Putin is isolating Russia from the world.

Thirdly, Putin underestimated domestic opposition. His war against fellow Slavs is the most unpopular decision he has ever made. The stated aims – to 'denazify' a country with a democratically elected Jewish president, and to stop a 'genocide' that does not exist – lack credibility. Despite a severely repressed civil society, demonstrations began on the first day of the invasion, with 3,000 arrests made already. State media are instructed to call the invasion a 'military operation' and to quote only official Russian sources. But losing control over a still-porous information space, the authorities have begun restricting access to Twitter and other social media.

More significantly, Russian elites are disquieted. Anxiety radiated from senior government figures whom Putin browbeat and humiliated at an extraordinary televised meeting of the Security Council on 21 February. Several celebrities have expressed their opposition to the war. The tsunami of sanctions will hurt the entire business class, not only the oligarchs who have begun to signal their unease. All this matters because war is a contest of wills, as well as of arms. On the battlefield and home front, the contrast of Russian misgivings and Ukrainian morale will shape the course of the conflict. But opposition to the war matters for domestic reasons too. The invasion, its human costs and the pain of sanctions will weaken Putin's regime from below and within.

The invasion is emerging as a grand strategic mistake. As Ukraine's resistance, Russia's international isolation and Putin's isolation within Russia all deepen, the Kremlin suddenly finds itself much weaker on every political front. This continues a pattern of successive failures. When controlled instability through occupation and the Minsk Accords failed, Putin resorted to compellence. When compellence failed, he went to war. War is now producing even greater adverse effects.

What will Putin do now?

Putin has every incentive to end the war as quickly as possible. There are two ways he could do this. The first, which he has now begun to try, is to win the war through drastic escalation. But the meaning of victory is now less clear than ever. While Russia can occupy Ukraine at great human cost, no Russian puppet regime it installs will be legitimate or stable. Russia's international isolation and domestic crisis will intensify.

The second is for Putin to scale back his goals and negotiate a peace short of regime change in Kyiv. But given Putin's obsession with Ukraine and the stakes he has raised, this would be a humiliating setback that he would consider only if his own regime's survival were in doubt. Russia is not yet serious about the negotiations it has begun with Ukraine. Its head of delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, is a party hack and undistinguished former culture minister with no diplomatic or military experience. Talks are a diversion or, at most, a prelude to forced capitulation as Russia intensifies its indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets.

As at every stage of Russia's failure in Ukraine, escalation is both the riskiest course of action and the only one not guaranteed to leave Russia worse off. The key question is how far Russia will now escalate. In his declaration of war, Putin issued a barely-veiled nuclear threat against outside involvement in the conflict. He has now put Russia's nuclear forces on a 'special regime of combat duty'. In a 2018 interview about nuclear weapons, he said 'if someone takes a decision to destroy Russia, we have the right to respond. Yes, it will be a catastrophe for humanity and for the world. But I'm a citizen of Russia and its head of state ... Why do we need a world without Russia in it?' To justify his invasion, Putin claimed Ukraine was 'not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state'.

The West is now arming Ukraine and pushing Russia's financial system towards collapse. This situation is more volatile and less predictable than Cold War crises in Hungary, Berlin and Czechoslovakia, which had stable (if brutal) outcomes and posed no threat to Soviet domestic stability. Driven by visibly angry resentment of the West, Putin is making serious misjudgements. We are in uncharted and frightening territory.

Nigel Gould-Davies, Editor, Strategic Survey

From the Tsars to the Bolsheviks, Putin is just the latest incarnation of Russia's lust to dominate

By Antony Beevor

No country is as much a prisoner of its past as Russia. And no leader has become as much a victim of his own obsessive lies as Vladimir Putin. But where did this tragedy for the Russian people as well as Ukraine begin? And why did we not see this coming after the unspeakable brutality of Putin's conduct of war in Chechnya and Syria, deliberately using barrel bombs and nerve gas against civilian populations?

I certainly cannot claim to be one of the very few who had foreseen Putin's reckless gamble of invading Ukraine. I also underestimated the lingering resentment against the West among the majority of largely older Russians who get all their news from Kremlin-controlled media.

Putin is famous for his pronouncement that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geo-political disaster of the 20th Century. This was backed by a widespread conviction in Russia that the Cold War had been lost through a dirty trick after the US under Ronald Reagan deliberately outspent them on armaments.

The consequence of that collapse was war veterans and widows begging in the Metro, after their pensions became worth less than £4 a week.

Mikhail Gorbachev was blamed bitterly, partly because of the rapturous welcome he had received in the West, but also for his wife Raisa's conspicuous spending on their trips. In the Russian Ministry of Defence archives at Podolsk, my researcher and I overheard a conversation between cleaning women viciously welcoming the news that Mrs Gorbachev she had cancer. 'I hope she dies in agony', said one. 'It would serve them right'.

Having been researching my new book, *Russia – Revolution And Civil War* over the last few years, I should have recognised that the torrent of shameless falsehoods issuing from the Kremlin since well before the invasion of Ukraine in February was hardly new. In fact, the pattern has little changed for more than a century.

The Bolsheviks achieved power in the autumn of 1917, giving birth to the Soviet Union, through calculated deceit – with Vladimir Ilich Lenin encouraging industrial workers to believe that they would run their own factories when he had no intention of allowing them to do so.

The peasants – 'the infantry of the revolution' – were promised the estates of the nobility and the Orthodox church, when, in reality, all land would belong to the Communist state.

And the soldiers suffering in the trenches of the eastern front were promised peace, when, in truth, Lenin's plan was to turn the 'imperialist war' – as he described the 1914-18 conflict with Germany and its allies – into a civil war, which he described as 'the sharpest form of class struggle'. Lenin believed it was the only way to achieve absolute power yet he avoided any hint of the annihilation to come in his public utterances.



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His speeches focused instead on hate-figures – those he could label parasites, such as bankers, factory bosses, war-mongers and landowners. For the time being he avoided attacks on the other categories of people whom the Bolsheviks would later persecute. Lies, lawlessness and chaos in 1917 suited his purposes during the preparation for his seizure of power. He wanted the past to be utterly destroyed to the point that it could never be resurrected.

To the horror of other socialist parties, the Bolshevik 'revolution' revealed itself as an anti-democratic coup d'état, handing power to a new political elite. Leon Trotsky openly scorned liberals with their 'intellectual, pseudo-aristocratic, squeamish attitude toward the people', because they revealed their distrust 'in those dark masses'.

Yet Bolshevik leaders, once they had seized power, had not the slightest intention of placing trust in anyone but themselves, least of all in the 'dark masses', who had blindly bulldozed the opening they needed. On November 7, 1917, following the Bolshevik coup, the great writer and erstwhile friend of Lenin, Maksim Gorky predicted: 'The working class should know that miracles do not occur in real life, that they are to expect hunger, complete disorder in industry, disruption of transport, and protracted bloody anarchy followed by a no less bloody and dire reaction.

'This is where the proletariat is being led by its present leader, and it must be understood that Lenin is not an omnipotent magician but a cold-blooded trickster.'



Having been researching my new book, *Russia – Revolution And Civil War* over the last few years, I should have recognised that the torrent of shameless falsehoods issuing from the Kremlin since well before the invasion of Ukraine in February was hardly new. In fact, the pattern has little changed for more than a century. The Bolsheviks achieved power in the autumn of 1917, giving birth to the Soviet Union, through calculated deceit – with Vladimir Ilich Lenin (above) encouraging industrial workers to believe that they would run their own factories when he had no intention of allowing them to do so

Leaders in the Kremlin developed a total contempt for the opinions or interests of others. They were creating a brave new world which demanded the ultimate sacrifice and were as pitiless towards their own people as they were towards their opponents.

Red Terror was their weapon of choice against 'enemies of the people' to ensure control wherever they lacked support, but also to drive forward their reckless transformation of society without any regard for humanity.

The Bolsheviks brought in execution for a whole range of offences. So-called counter-revolutionary agitators and any bourgeois who avoided compulsory labour could be shot. Fly posting, the non-payment of taxes, breaking the curfew and resisting arrest also attracted death sentences.

The Bolshevik tactic was to claim that proletarian anger was so intense that they could not resist the demands for 'popular justice'. Their secret police, the Cheka, received the right to torture and kill, unhampered by any judicial process.

Lenin's own declaration of civil war could hardly have been clearer: 'War to the death against the rich and their hangers-on, the bourgeois intellectuals.' His dehumanisation of them as lice, fleas, vermin and parasites was tantamount to a call for class genocide. This is the legacy that colours so much of Putin's thinking now.

The Russian civil war – conducted largely between Lenin's Red Army and anti-revolutionary forces – extended right across the Eurasian landmass. From Finland, the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine in the west, it spread all the way to Siberia and Vladivostok in the Far East and down through the Caucasus in the south.

In 1919, after the defeat of Germany, it became an international proxy war, when British, French, American and Japanese forces, backed by detachments from other armies, landed to arm the Whites – the anti-revolutionary side – in the forlorn hope of preventing a Red victory.

The fighting polarised not just the countries of the former Tsarist empire. Its senseless cruelty and destruction, with more than ten million dead, politicised the rest of the world.

The vicious circle of hatred and fear led directly to the Communist-Fascist struggle in many countries, most notably the Spanish Civil War which broke out in 1936. That, too, became a proxy war, with Hitler and Mussolini supporting General Franco's Nationalists while Stalin's Soviet Union armed the Republic's Communist-dominated forces.

Britain, France and the United States, remained on the sidelines, afraid that Europe would stumble into another war.

We in the West have our own history of political failures – errors which we see repeated today. The French and the British governments persuaded themselves that when it came down to it, nobody in their right mind would want to repeat the horrors of the First World War.

They failed – as we failed two to three generations later with Putin – to understand that Adolf Hitler really wanted a war.

He was furious when Neville Chamberlain gave in at Munich and deprived him of a victorious invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler, just like Putin 83 years later, was not only planning to bring ethnic fellow-speakers back into the Reich. He wanted to crush and enslave those he regarded as their tormentors.

Stalin also famously misread Hitler's intentions, and was completely unprepared when the Wehrmacht invaded Russia in June 1941, tearing up the non aggression pact (the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact) between the two totalitarian states signed in August 1939.

Stalin's disastrous miscalculation had a profoundly traumatic effect on him, which the West in turn under-estimated. It led directly to the Cold War.

Determined to ensure that the Soviet Union should never again be taken by surprise, Stalin used the Red Army's occupation of Central Europe and the Balkans to turn the region into a cordon sanitaire of satellite states as an outer defence ring.

Putin, suffering from a similar atavistic paranoia which goes all the way back to the 13th Century Mongol invasions of Russia, is even more fixated with the idea of a conspiracy to encircle Russia.

The greatest difference between the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia today is the scale of corruption which engulfed the country following the collapse of Communism. The reckless pressure from the US under President Bill Clinton forcing Russia to sell off state-owned enterprises turbo-charged gangster capitalism. This accelerated even more when Putin took over from Boris Yeltsin in 2000 and redistributed corporations and banks among the oligarchs in exchange for massive kickbacks of up to 30 per cent making him the richest man in the world.

Ukraine had also been badly tainted by Soviet corruption under Brezhnev and the scramble for easy pickings from 1991, when it declared its independence from Russia. This was a moment Putin could not forgive.

Putin is not planning to rebuild the Soviet Union as much as he longs to recreate the Tsarist empire. Russia's hunger to dominate its borderlands, with bloodshed if necessary, was already long-established by the time of the revolution.

The great white hall in the Kremlin with the famous long table contains just four statues, all are Tsars. Soviet leaders are strikingly absent. And Putin's billion-dollar palace on the Black Sea coast is decorated throughout with the double-headed eagles of the Romanovs.

Putin became president largely due to Yeltsin's collapse from alcoholism. The chaotic performance in 2008 of the Russian Army in its invasion of Georgia prompted him into doubling the military budget.

Entrenched corruption in arms procurement led to huge waste in this modernisation programme. And little improved in training. Up to 5,000 conscripts committed suicide each year from the old practice of truly vicious hazing. General Aleksandr Lebed used to joke that in Siberia they had to put the new arrivals to work digging enough graves in the late spring ready for the next winter's casualties before the ground froze hard again.

The Russian tendency to confuse brutality with decisiveness clearly encouraged Putin's determination in subsequent conflicts. In the Syrian civil war which followed the uprising against Bashar al-Assad's oppressive regime, Putin's military intervention turned the beautiful and ancient city centre of Aleppo into another killing zone like Grozny, the Chechen capital annihilated by Russian bombing.

And yet almost everyone in the West failed to believe that he would ever repeat such violence on European territory. Once again it was case of applying our logic – that nobody in their right mind would want to return to the destruction and cruelty of the Second World War. Once again, we were wrong.

Angela Merkel had little difficulty in persuading pacifist Germans that surely the safest course was to bind Russia closely to the European economic system. They never realised that the advantages of Russia's cheap, non-nuclear energy in fact made them hostages to fortune.

In an astonishing process of distorted thinking, Putin, the self-appointed scourge of 'Ukrainian nazism', has followed Hitler's playbook even more than that of Stalin. Yet Putin, having said that he was launching his 'special military operation' to rescue Russian speakers from Ukrainian tyranny, has ended up killing thousands of them in the Donbas and especially Mariupol on the Black Sea coast.



Putin, having said that he was launching his 'special military operation' to rescue Russian speakers from Ukrainian tyranny, has ended up killing thousands of them in the Donbas and especially Mariupol on the Black Sea coast. This has turned the majority of Russian-speakers into strong supporters of Volodymyr Zelensky's government

This has turned the majority of Russian-speakers into strong supporters of Volodymyr Zelensky's government. Putin now casts them, too, as traitors. Meanwhile, the Russian army on Ukrainian territory has reverted to the primitive practices of rape and looting carried out by the Red Army in 1945. Some two million German women, to say nothing of Hungarian, Polish and even Russian and Ukrainian forced labourers, suffered sexual assault and gang rape at the hands of Soviet soldiers at the end of the Second World War.

Both then and now, Russian propaganda denied the crimes, yet implied at the same time that their mission of 'liberation' gave them a moral superiority which permitted such behaviour.

Putin's fixation with the Great Patriotic War, as they call the Second World War, and Soviet victory in 1945 has proved his undoing in Ukraine.

His dash to take Kyiv at the beginning of the war imitated Marshal Zhukov's assault into Berlin using tanks unsupported by infantry in April 1945, which also led to heavy casualties. Yet it is the utterly deluded definition of Ukrainians as 'nazis' which has taken over the Kremlin mindset, along with the idea that it is NATO which is at war with Russia.

This reflects Putin's own conviction that Russia fought the Wehrmacht single-handed, while secretly the western allies wanted to stab the Soviet Union in the back. Ultimately, he has trapped himself in a past that he fails to understand.

Today's equivalent, in his eyes, is the advance of NATO to Russia's borders, now with Finland and Sweden about to join the alliance.

He refuses to acknowledge that it is his own aggressive actions which have achieved that. So, combined with his bitter resentment that the West never showed proper 'respect' – that gangster euphemism for 'fear' – Putin wants to terrify us. And he does, because his own disastrous mistakes have backed him into a corner. He is prepared to use nuclear weapons if Russia faces an existential threat, and by Russia, he means his own regime if it is defeated in Ukraine.

This has created far greater dangers for the world than at any moment since 1945.

Russia: Revolution and Civil War 1917-1921 by Antony Beevor is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson on May 26.

Prepare a war-crimes tribunal for Putin

By Mitchell Bard



As the evidence of war crimes committed by the Russians in Ukraine mounts, and President Joe Biden has already labelled Russian President Vladimir Putin a “war criminal,” the United States should lay the groundwork for a war-crimes trial patterned after the Nuremberg trials following World War II. A tribunal should be formed with the most esteemed jurists from the United States, Britain, France, and perhaps one or more other countries, to ensure a fair and credible trial of Putin and the officers who carried out his orders.

The International Criminal Court is already gathering evidence, but the United States should not trust a body that has had a poor track record of convicting war criminals and deterring war criminals, and is so politicized that the United States doesn’t even recognize its jurisdiction.

During World War II, the U.S. government decided not to pursue German war criminals until after an Allied victory for fear of provoking reprisals against prisoners of war. The United States issued threats that it would punish the Germans for their actions, but the failure to do anything—such as capture and try Nazi officials or prisoners of war—led Hitler to believe he could continue to mistreat their prisoners, civilians and combatants with impunity.

When the war ended, representatives of the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union met and negotiated the ground rules for a trial of the “major” war criminals. An International Military Tribunal (IMT, though commonly referred to as the Nuremberg Trials) was created to prosecute Nazis for the common plan or conspiracy to wage aggressive war in violation of international law or treaties; planning, preparation or waging an aggressive war; violations of the international rules of war; and crimes against humanity.

The Allies’ motivation for holding a trial was to set an example for the future to show that crimes of the magnitude committed during the war would not go unpunished. They

also wanted to demonstrate they could resist the temptation to exact revenge (British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, for example, thought criminals should be summarily executed) and instead uphold the rule of law. They also sought to hold superior officers accountable for the actions of their underlings and to nullify the excuse that they were “just following orders.”

IMT prosecutors were determined to develop sufficient evidence to leave no doubt as to the guilt of the defendants. Like the Nazis, Putin and anyone else accused of war crimes should be entitled to representation and their innocence or guilt must be determined based on documentary and witness accounts.

How will Putin and others be tried since they are not likely to answer subpoenas to appear in court? Some perpetrators may be caught during the war and others tried, as some Nazis were, in absentia.

Does Putin care if he is called a war criminal? Some argue the accusation will make him feel cornered and, feeling he has nothing to lose, may escalate his attacks on civilians and, in a nightmare scenario, use nuclear weapons.

The United States is already using that fear to justify its unwillingness to directly intervene to save the people of Ukraine and a fellow democracy. Will we also overlook Putin’s war crimes for the same reason? Doesn’t this allow him to use nuclear extortion to restrict our ability to take any action against him? Worse, doesn’t it send a message to other nuclear states, such as North Korea, that they can do the same, and encourage Iran to build a bomb to achieve the same leverage?

Putin may not care about being labelled a war criminal, but his commanders might. Instead of counting on oligarchs to somehow rein in Putin because their yachts are taken away, isn’t it far more likely the war can be stopped by Russian generals who see that Putin is leading them to disaster and don’t want to find themselves being prosecuted for their actions? As in Nuremberg, they will not be able to escape accountability by claiming they were only following orders. Even if they are not captured and escape to Russia, they will never be able to leave without facing the possibility of arrest, incarceration, and possibly, execution.

Maybe Putin’s minions will decide fighting a losing battle for an autocrat is not worth the shame their families will have to live with if they are convicted of war crimes. They can ask the families of Nazi war criminals what it is like to grow up with that stigma.

And what about others who have committed war crimes, notably Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has interned the Uyghurs in concentration camps? Like Putin, Xi has enjoyed the benefits of leading a powerful country to escape accountability. The difference today is that virtually the entire international community is aligned against Putin, and we can watch evidence of his crimes every day on television. We cannot see what is being done to the Uyghurs, though it is no secret, and world outrage has not been mobilized against Xi. Moreover, the world’s interdependence with China is far greater than with Russia, making even the United States unwilling to punish Xi. It may be wishful thinking, but perhaps seeing an internationally-backed tribunal punish Putin’s aggression would give Xi pause before invading Taiwan.

As we have already seen, the anti-Semites wasted no time in making a specious comparison between Russia and Israel, and argued that the Jewish state should be similarly sanctioned for its treatment of the Palestinians. Undoubtedly, they would also

call on a war-crimes tribunal to put Israel in the dock, but Western powers are not going to try Israel just as they won't impose sanctions. They will have to be satisfied by the investigations of Israel by the International Kangaroo Court and the United Nations.

Just maybe, a tribunal that shows that unprovoked aggression and the slaughter of civilians will not be tolerated in the 21st century can succeed where Nuremberg failed.

Mitchell Bard is a foreign-policy analyst and an authority on U.S.-Israel relations who has written and edited 22 books, including "The Arab Lobby, Death to the Infidels: Radical Islam's War Against the Jews" and "After Anatevka: Tevye in Palestine."

How Lavrov Travels the World with Mistress and Sex Escort

By Christo Grozev Segodnya



Sergei Lavrov relaxed in the company of loved ones – mistress, oligarch and prostitute / Photo: "Today"

It might have been any collection of satisfied diners posing with a grateful chef and waitstaff outside a Tokyo restaurant. But this one was marked by the presence of three influential Russians: Sergei Lavrov, Russia's longtime foreign minister; Oleg Deripaska, a controversial oligarch close to President Vladimir Putin; and Gennady Rovner, a former oil executive and oil-and-gas industrialist.

Posing with the three Russians is Angelo Koo, chairman of the China Development Foundation of Taiwan, a country with which Russia has no formal relations.

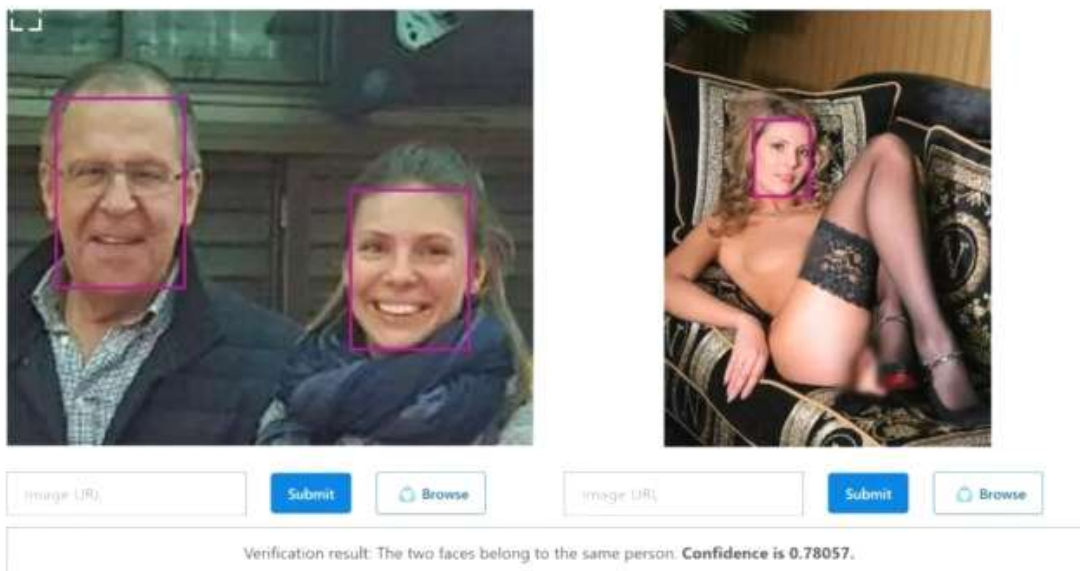
The photograph can be geolocated to March 20 or 21, 2018, based on travel records previously obtained by Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation. During these dates, Lavrov was on an official visit in Japan during which he famously implied that U.K. authorities were holding Sergei and Yulia Skripal against their will. Russian military intelligence officers had poisoned the Skripals with the Novichok weapons-grade nerve agent two weeks earlier. Another photo includes Lavrov's long-time interpreter and aide, speaking about the official nature of his visit.

Also of interest are two of this retinue's female consorts. Standing to Lavrov's right in the image is Svetlana Polyakova, a sometime actor, restaurateur and employee at Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also his mistress. Sandwiched between Lavrov and Deripaska, and evidently the latter's companion on the trip, is a woman in her early 20s named Ekaterina Lobanova.

In collaboration with The Insider, New Lines has identified Lobanova as a Russian erotic model. She would not be the first porn model or sex worker Deripaska has

traveled the world with, although she is the first to be publicly seen with the U.S.-sanctioned oligarch in the company of Russia's top diplomat, sanctioned in February for being "directly responsible for Russia's unprovoked and unlawful further invasion of Ukraine."

New Lines reached out to Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry. The ministry "ignored the request," Zakharova replied.



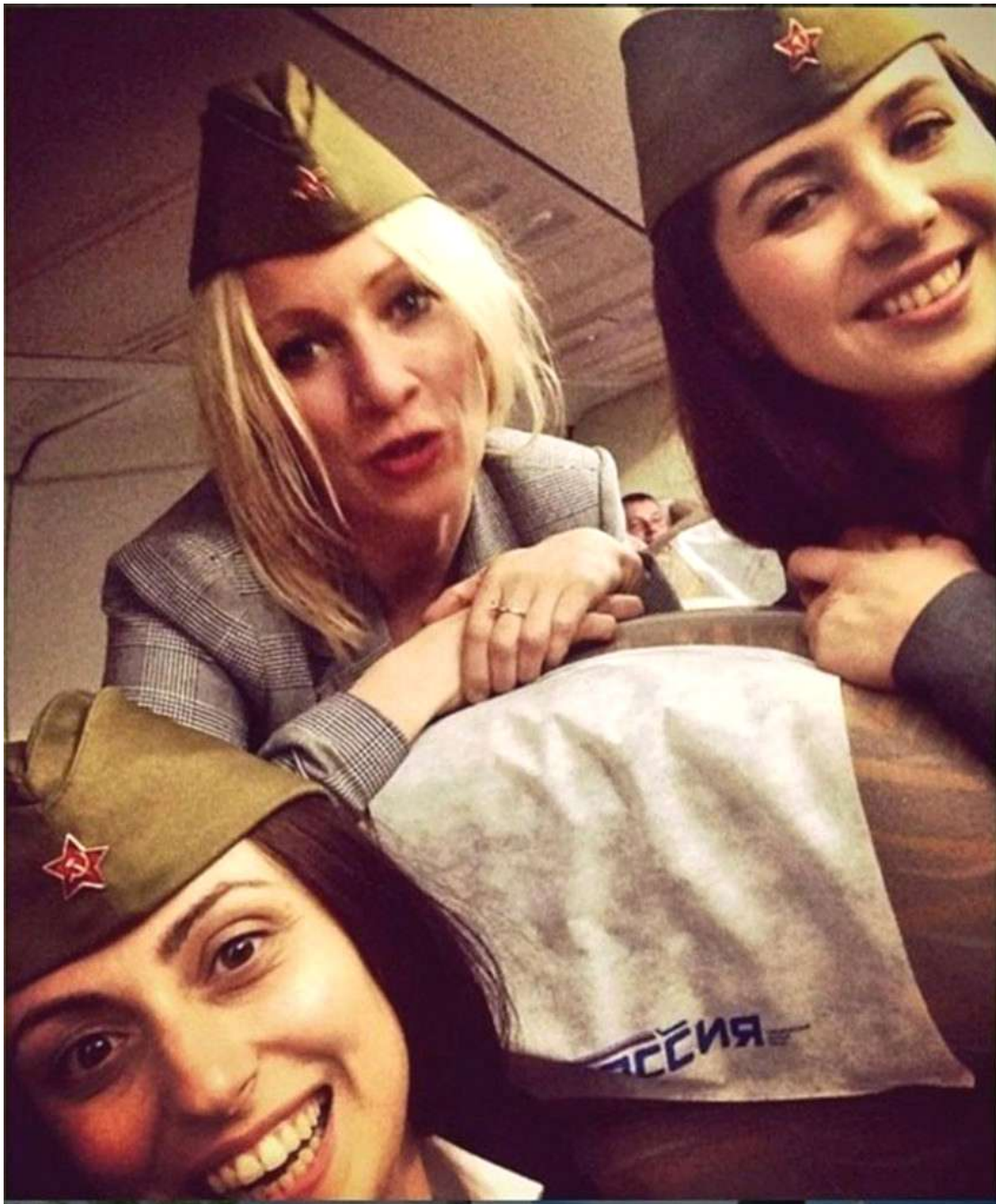
Lobanova is a prolific erotic model with her explicit photos ornamenting porn sites with names such as naked.me and peasex.com. In a particularly steamy shot, she is presented reclining on an embroidered black sofa completely naked save for stockings and shoes. Her talents are advertised in a word salad of broken English under the category of "young curly blonde girl" and the attendant ID number, 819795. Lobanova "shows lewd lust and desires," the ad reads, going on to describe her as feeling like "a genuine whore who wants to be shagged caressingly."

Lobanova's identity was verified using facial recognition software including Pimeyes.com and Findclone.Ru.

New Lines was also able to confirm the date of the photograph, which has previously not appeared publicly, by checking flight data for Polyakova and Rovner. Both were in Japan on March 20 and 21, 2018, records show.

While Lavrov's official visit to Japan was a matter of public record, the fact that he was accompanied by Deripaska was not known until now. The exact circumstances of the group's reunion in Tokyo remain unclear, but the photograph confirms previous reporting about Lavrov and Polyakova's extracurricular activities as well as of Deripaska's penchant for going overseas with high-ranking Russian officials in the company of young women in the sex industry.

In 2017, Navalny released a video showing that in August 2016, Deripaska sailed to Norway aboard his super yacht, Elden, with a Belarusian sex worker, Anastasia Vashukevich, also known as Nastya Rybka. In attendance, too, was Sergei Prikhodko, Russia's deputy prime minister, who had previously served in various government roles beginning in Boris Yeltsin's administration in the '90s. Like Lavrov, Prikhodko's bailiwick is international affairs and eyebrow-raising liaisons with Deripaska.



Wearing Soviet military hats, Lavrov's interpreter on his Japan trip poses for a selfie with Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, center, and an unidentified person.

In a video Vashukevich recorded and posted to her Instagram account, the oligarch is shown discussing the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations primarily as a function of then-U.S. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, who Deripaska said “hates” Russia. Navalny alleged that the oligarch’s hosting of Prikhodko on his boat (and also on his private jet) constituted a “bribe” — one borne out by Prikhodko’s lavish country palace and Moscow apartment, the costs of both far exceeding his modest state salary. Navalny also linked the recording, captured offhandedly by Vashukevich and written up with thinly veiled references to the relevant parties in her book “Diary of the Seduction of a Billionaire,” to Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

According to Navalny, Deripaska, who was sanctioned by the U.S. in 2018 in conjunction with Russia’s seizure of Crimea, works as an information-gatherer for the Kremlin and/or its security services. Such a plenipotentiary role was most famously

on display in his dealings with Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's former campaign chair and a corrupt lobbyist on behalf of Ukraine's pro-Russian government headed by former President Viktor Yanukovich. Manafort owed Deripaska \$10 million from a loan for a failed joint business venture and likely repaid it in kind in the form of private briefings about the state of the Trump campaign, which Navalny and others have said were intended for more influential audiences at the heart of the Russian government.

Manafort was convicted in 2018 in a U.S. federal court on multiple counts of tax evasion, bank fraud, failure to disclose a hidden foreign bank account and conspiracy. Sentenced to seven and a half years in prison, he was pardoned by Trump in December 2020.

His business partner, Konstantin Kilimnik — a Russian intelligence officer, according to the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee — passed sensitive Trump campaign polling data to Deripaska, presumably with the same intent. (The Ukraine-born Kilimnik is currently wanted by the FBI on charges of obstruction of justice and conspiracy to obstruct justice.)

Vashukevich was arrested in Pattaya, Thailand, in February 2018 for conducting "sex training" sessions. Vashukevich offered more details about Russia's meddling in American democracy in exchange for asylum in the U.S. "I'm ready to give you all the missing puzzle pieces, support them with videos and audios, regarding the connections of our respected lawmakers with Trump, Manafort and the rest," she said. "I know a lot. I'm waiting for your offers and I'm waiting for you in a Thai prison."

She never received asylum. After being released and then arrested in Russia, possibly at Deripaska's orchestration, she was released two days later, amid reports that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko intervened in her case.

Polyakova has been romantically linked to Lavrov since the early 2000s. Her identity was disclosed in 2014 when she received a religious award from the Russian Orthodox Church in the presence of the long-serving foreign minister. She has traveled with Lavrov extensively over the years, to about 60 countries. In addition to Japan, they include Italy, Portugal, France and Switzerland. Some trips have been on official Russian diplomatic business.

According to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), Polyakova "even appeared in cell phone address books under his last name." Lavrov, 72, is still legally married to Maria Lavrova, with whom he has a daughter, although his relationship with Polyakova is said to approach that of a common-law second marriage.

Lavrov's unofficial wife is also rich, far wealthier than one might expect of a Russian bureaucrat or the owner of largely unsuccessful restaurant businesses. Real estate registered in her or her family's name is worth close to \$14 million, the OCCRP reported. These include an apartment in Moscow's elite "Golden Mile" neighborhood and one in Sochi, where she and Lavrov have vacationed together.

One property that has gained scrutiny in light of Russia's war in Ukraine is in Kensington, London, and registered to PPK Investments Ltd, a company owned by Polyakova's daughter Polina Kovaleva. In 2016, then just 21, Kovaleva entered into a 999-year lease for the apartment in the tony London postcode for \$6.2 million — all cash.

Around the time her mother was photographed with Lavrov, Deripaska and Lobanova in Tokyo, Kovaleva was enrolled in a master's program at Britain's Imperial College London. The Financial Times noted that she has worked "as intern and in junior roles at the Russian state-owned bank VTB Capital, the commodities trader Glencore and the Saudi state oil company Saudi Aramco."

On March 24, 2022, the U.K. government included Kovaleva, whom it described as Lavrov's "stepdaughter," in its sanctions list, freezing her assets in London, including her Kensington digs, and banning her from travelling to and from the country.

Kovaleva revealed her own relationship with Deripaska on social media. On her since-deleted Instagram, she is shown lounging at his villa in Sardinia and, naturally, aboard one of his yachts.

Will the Real MAGA Man Stand Up?

By Josef Joffe



During the Cold War, “Whither NATO?” was a classic yawner. Suddenly, the Soviet empire collapsed. After the last Russian soldier had left Central Europe in 1994, “whither” turned into “Why NATO?” Europe was reunified, and peace would reign forever.

This happy denouement after fifty years of Cold War triggered a disarmament race in Europe. The West began to cash in its peace dividends. Just a couple of numbers: Germany’s 3,000 main battle tanks shrank to 264. Roughly half of its heavy gear was in the repair shop or dock. The Bundeswehr was cut by almost two-thirds. At the height of the Cold War, the United States had 320,000 troops in Europe; last year, they were down to 65,000, strewn across Europe from Portugal to Poland. Just a couple of brigades were actually configured for combat.

For all its fabulous riches, Western Europe did not prepare for war in order to deter it. After all, Russia’s shock divisions were no longer encamped on the other side of the Elbe River. Kant’s dream of “perpetual peace” now seemed to come true on a continent where for centuries peace used to be only a pause between two wars.

On February 24, the Kantian dream flipped into a nightmare when Vladimir Putin unleashed his war of annihilation. “You may not be interested in war,” runs a quip ascribed to Leon Trotsky, “but war is interested in you.” With the exception of NATO’s new members close to Russia, much of Europe continued to ignore the second part of the quote.

Why? Democracies are not very good at keeping their powder dry. Look at the record. Imperial Japan embarked on its highway of death across East Asia in 1931, but it took the United States ten years to meet the surging threat—and then only after Pearl

Harbor. Britain and France should have known that Der Fuhrer was preparing for the Big War from day one. Tearing up disarmament treaties, he proceeded to rearm at breakneck speed. Yet “England Slept,” as John F. Kennedy’s little book of 1940 had it, and so did France. They thought they could appease Hitler, and only eleven months after Munich, they had World War II on their hands.

History teaches again and again how imperialists expand. They start out by testing the will of their adversaries and watch the reaction to their gains. Hitler annexed Austria, the Sudetenland, and finally all of Czechoslovakia. It didn’t rouse the West. Putin’s playbook reads like a rewrite. When he went to the top in 2000, he launched a massive rearmament program. In 2008 he subdued Georgia, in 2014 he grabbed Crimea while chopping off Ukraine’s Donbas. Suddenly, Russia was back in the Middle East, whence Kissinger and Nixon had extruded the USSR decades before. All the while, Putin kept testing NATO defences on the Alliance’s periphery. In Syria, he was practically ushered in when Barack “Time for a little nation-building at home” Obama vacated his “red line.”

The West kept dozing. Obama and Donald Trump pulled troops out of Europe. The MAGA Man badmouthed NATO as “obsolete,” and Emmanuel Macron called the Alliance “brain-dead.” Future historians will not be kind to Angela Merkel, who sheltered Russia against serious sanctions. In spite of ever growing dependence on Russian energy, she defended Nord Stream 2 until her last days in office. “Reden statt rüsten”—to talk is better than rearm—was the official mantra. Plus, the mother of all follies: “Security can be had only with, not against, Russia.”

Putin must have purred with delight as he extended his claws toward Ukraine. Would Europe stop the flow of gas and shiver for Kyiv? Would the West openly arm Ukraine, let alone deploy division-sized forces to NATO’s eastern borders? Too provocative. And with what, when its tanks spend more time in the shop than on manoeuvre? If Putin was crazy, then only like a fox. And yet he did miscalculate.

He must have thought blitzkrieg, but the Ukrainians fought brilliantly—and the Russians like conscripts just out of boot camp. That confounded this author as well as fellow experts. In his wildest dreams, Putin could not have imagined that the West would rise in righteous anger after an endless peace. We mavens should have re-read what George F. Kennan wrote ages ago. He compared democracies, especially the United States, with one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed.

But then it is fury unbound.

History records that democracies like to wallow in neglect, but woe when they finally wake up. Britain slept; by 1940 it was a fight to the death. In World War I, it took Woodrow Wilson three years before he went after the Kaiser. FDR deployed America’s war machine against Hitler and Hirohito two years into World War II. In short, it takes a while for democracies to grasp the nettle; but once they do, fight they will.

This is where Putin made his gravest mistake, though we can’t blame him for casting caution aside. After all, he had been on a low-cost roll since 2008 from Georgia to the Donbas. The price was sanctions that did not really bite. So, why not keep going? When the West did come together as one on February 24, he must have been as

flabbergasted as a lap dog who is suddenly banished from the master bedroom. Putin should have read Kennan.

In his worst nightmare, Putin could not have foreseen that the Germans, who had turned pacifism into a state religion, would suddenly dispatch anti-air and anti-tank missiles to the Ukrainians, nor that tiny Slovakia would transfer S-300 missiles that take down high-flying planes. He must have felt contempt for Joe Biden, who had pledged, “We will lead by the power of our example, not by the example of our power.”

Back to Kennan’s dinosaur. In the end, power does displace lethargy in the affairs of nations. Never mind that, like Obama, Biden had earnestly tried to re-induct Russia into the community of nations, ended America’s combat role in Iraq, and decreed the not-so-glorious pullout from Afghanistan, following through on Trump’s deal with the Taliban. Retrenchment ruled, and Putin took notice. Why should Putin have worried about an America that had slid into a retractionist mode after George W. Bush?

In the run-up to the Russian invasion, Biden at last reversed America’s inward-bound course, beefing up the U.S. presence in Europe. His current request for defence spending is \$70 billion above what he had asked for last year. Biden began to signal that the United States would be the “indispensable nation” again, to invoke a self-congratulatory line used by both Bill Clinton and Obama.

Putin now faces a global coalition that encompasses not only NATO and the EU. Even perennially neutral Switzerland has joined the hardened sanctions regime. Count in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, and tiny Singapore on the other side of the globe. Finland and Sweden are sidling up to NATO. Balance-of-power politics tarries, but it finally kicks in.

It is an astounding testimony to Western cohesion. But only in fairytales do such miracles come out of thin air. True, the revulsion triggered by Russia’s slaughter of the innocents and the flight of four million Ukrainians have also galvanized the West. Still, heartbreak and outrage are not enough to corral cold-eyed states that always weigh moral duty against self-interest.

A posse does not arise spontaneously. There has to be a Great Organizer who convinces, coopts, and cajoles. Britain, France, or Germany could not do it—Europe’s Big Three. They cannot trade on the enormous economic and strategic power at the disposal of the United States. Nor would Trump have scored, even if he had wanted to take on his erstwhile buddy Putin full-bore. It takes more than grandstanding. Bullies can beat you up; they are never elected class president.

Biden, though, is the Un-Trump. Never before has an administration managed to harness so many unruly allies in so short a time (the two Bushes had to labor for months). It takes fast-paced diplomatic footwork to recruit nations, plus muscle and trust. Clout breeds convening power, agenda-setting, and “follow the leader.” Trust reassures would-be partners. The posse fell in behind the sheriff because he would not drag them into all-out war in the shadow of nuclear weapons. Plus, the mighty United States offered reinsurance. Mr. Big would not abandon the allies in case Putin attacked NATO territory. Good umbrellas make for good friends.

If you wish, Biden is the real MAGA Man. For all his pratfalls and his less-than-perfect command of the facts, the forty-sixth President might just be the right President at the right time. Same for his team in the national security establishment. In Trump’s days,

allies did not even know who tomorrow's secretary of defence or national security advisor would be. So, better not to commit.

So much for the accolades. Now to the darker side of the Ukrainian war—Phase II. Phase I was heartening to no end. The Ukrainians fought bravely and well, aided by the moral revulsion fed daily by Russia's war against cities and civilians. Phase II will be more treacherous. Those valiant Ukrainians will lose the advantage of fighting an invader who turned out to be badly led and trained.

Any army learns from its failures, and so will the clumsy, top-down military of the Kremlin. It will seek to consolidate its grip on the southeast, populated by Russian-speaking loyalists. Reversing conquest is harder than halting it. Fighting closer to home in the second round, the aggressors enjoy Clausewitz's "interior lines" previously held by the Ukrainians in the battle for Kyiv. Russia still rules the skies, and Putin has named a new commander whose reputation as ruthless killer in Syria precedes him. Escalation and more mass murder loom—what Biden has termed "genocide."

The cold logic of war now bids the West to raise the ante, and mounting risks will strain the coalition. It will have to intensify the training of Ukrainian fighters and send thousands of tons of ammunition, both smart and dumb. The United States will have to broaden intelligence sharing, space-based as well as tactical, to enable the Ukrainians to achieve surprise and disrupt the Russian order of battle. NATO will have to deliver heavy weaponry, not just 155-millimeter artillery, as it finally does, but also long-range anti-air and anti-ship hardware that will dent Russia's air and naval superiority. And all this while Putin keeps waving the nuclear club to intimidate the West.

Hence, the biggest question of them all: How long will this wondrous Western amity last? Will Berlin practice propitiation again while Paris shifts, as so often, toward mediating between East and West in order to pocket the broker's fee? On the home front, Biden will be tested by raging inflation, which saps his domestic support. Bipartisan unity on Ukraine might wane once the war begins to look indecisive and the electorate is no longer glued to the TV screen that brings the horror into its living rooms.

This is where Biden will be tested in the months (and perhaps years) to come. Will he perform as well as in past months? Ordinary mortals do not have the gift of prophecy. But we did learn that Mr. Foot-in-the-Mouth has grown in war, matching resolve with restraint and hardware with diplomacy. War does concentrate the mind, and so Biden might even get a shot at greatness, as previous war Presidents (LBJ aside) did, if we can save Ukraine.

We always know how wars begin, not how they end. But make no mistake about the stakes in Russia's war of conquest. Ukraine is not a "quarrel in a far-away country, between people of whom we know nothing," as Neville Chamberlain said in 1938 when he gave away the Sudetenland. Ukraine is where the future of Europe and a decent world order will be decided. Realism warns that even furious dinosaurs eventually tire of the burden when their own lives are not on the line.

Josef Joffe serves on the editorial board of American Purpose. A fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, he teaches international politics and political thought at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Henry Kissinger's talk of appeasing Russia is the rambling of a foolish has-been

By Adam Zamoyski

Why on earth did anyone think it was worthwhile having Henry Kissinger speak at the plutocrats' jamboree, Davos, this month?

The veteran American statesman, 99, fancies himself as something of a historian. But he seems stone-deaf to some lessons of history — and as he spoke to the assembled dignitaries in the Swiss ski resort, he seemed in denial about his own lamentable legacy of appeasement.

Today, Kissinger is urging Ukraine to begin negotiations with Russia, ignoring the fact that Vladimir Putin has categorically refused to contemplate talks with President Zelensky's government.

'Ideally, the dividing line should be a return to the status quo ante,' he said. By this, he meant that the starting point for negotiations should be that Russia be allowed to keep Crimea — the Ukrainian region it seized by violence in 2014 — and the Donbas, the border-region in eastern Ukraine that has seen some of this war's bloodiest fighting.

Failed

To me, Kissinger's suggestion smacked of the Munich Agreement of 1938, when then UK Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain preferred Hitler portions of central Europe in a failed bid to satisfy the dictator's lust for more territory.

A man like Kissinger, who fled Nazi Germany to the U.S. as a Jewish refugee that very year, should recognise the historical resonance. But no. Instead, Kissinger argues that the West must avoid alienating Russia which, he claims, has been 'an essential part of Europe for 400 years and has been the guarantor of the European balance of power structure'.

Not true. Actually, Russia's greatest achievement during most of that time (from 1613 to 1917) was to expand at a rate equating, on average, to 55 square miles per day.

In the 50 years between 1772 and 1812, Russia's border shifted westwards by almost 400 miles, and at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which sought to restore the balance of power in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, Kissinger's hero, the Austrian Chancellor Metternich, allowed Russia's border to move another 100 miles or so further into Europe.

The Congress — and Russia — in fact did little to guarantee European peace during the 19th century. Unrest, revolution and war flared up across the Continent over the following decades, ending in cataclysm in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I.

What the Congress of Vienna truly achieved, and what Kissinger seems to be advocating, was the suppression of the legitimate aspirations of peoples to rule themselves.



Henry Kissinger is urging Ukraine to begin negotiations with Russia, ignoring the fact that Vladimir Putin has refused to contemplate talks with President Zelensky. Pictured: Former United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger

History teaches us that when such powerful aspirations are harshly repressed, they eventually explode into violence.

Austria, Germany and Russia imploded in 1917 and 1918 and gave rise to Bolshevism, fascism, Lenin, Stalin and Hitler.

It also unleashed unimaginable hell on the people of Ukraine — including a famine induced by Stalin that cost millions of lives.

This is the lesson of history that Kissinger should heed. Instead, he now insists: 'If Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side's outpost against the other. It should function as a bridge between them.'

The silliness of this statement is barely believable. Ukraine is an outpost of democracy and civilisation — and it is confronting tyranny and barbarism.

What's more, it already is a 'bridge': giving passage to ideas like freedom and democracy and providing a view of what life might be like for ordinary Russians if Putin could be given the heave-ho.

That is precisely why the dictator felt he must invade it and install a puppet regime that would turn it into another Belarus. All these facts seem to have passed Kissinger by.

Kissinger is a believer in Realpolitik — in which politics are conducted based on practicalities, rather than grand ideological principles. But he is a poor practitioner.

One reason is that he is too theoretical and has a weak grasp of reality. Another is that he is too impressed by power and fails to face up to bullies. What he is good at is wrapping up this pusillanimity in high-sounding emollient phrases.



Kissinger speaks of Putin's 'miscalculation', as though it were some kind of unfortunate slip that should be treated with indulgence Pictured: Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (R) shaking hands with former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (L) in Moscow

On May 7, he warned that 'we have to be conscious of the differences of ideology and of interpretation' when dealing with Russia or China. The only 'ideology' at play in those systems is tyranny, and the only differences of 'interpretation' are between truth and lies.

He went on to say that we should avoid confrontation 'unless we are prepared to make regime change the principal goal of our policy'.

Tyranny

But regime change by one means or another has always been the policy of the West, as the world cannot be a safe place when large parts of it are ruled by nuclear-armed delinquents like Putin.

It is, of course, desirable to achieve it by peaceful means, but that requires strength and resolve, not pandering to tyrants. And it requires calling things by their name.

Avoiding the term 'invasion', Kissinger speaks of Putin's 'miscalculation', as though it were some kind of unfortunate slip that should be treated with indulgence. Hitler certainly 'miscalculated' when he sent his tanks into the Soviet Union in 1941 — but everyone still calls it an invasion.

Strangely, Kissinger also avoids mentioning the moral imperative to help innocent victims of aggression — as the Ukrainian people clearly are.

Instead, he invokes the risk of the West propelling Russia into China's arms by responding too aggressively to Putin, thereby creating a formidable alliance between Moscow and Beijing. It may be news to him, but they are already allied in hostility to the West.

Kissinger, who basked in the flattery he received from the Chinese when he was the U.S. Secretary of State in the 1970s, remains awestruck by their power and wealth, and deludes himself that the Communists could be 'co-operative' partners.

Practitioners of Realpolitik like to belittle or even smear those who get in the way of their chess-board manoeuvres, and Kissinger is no exception. He recently suggested that 'the root of the problem' in Ukraine was not, as Putin had explained loud and clear, that he wished to make Russia great again — but that the Ukrainians themselves had been at loggerheads.

Flawed

No doubt they were. Plenty of countries are politically divided. But that does not give anyone else a licence to invade them.

Except, that is, in Kissinger's mind: in 1975 he encouraged Indonesia to invade East Timor, initiating nearly a quarter of a century of massacres, torture and starvation.

Putin's war in Ukraine has brought together the members of NATO and the EU in a way that would have seemed impossible only a year ago.

It is now clear to anyone with a sense of history that Kissinger's thinking is flawed.

While his utterances could be dismissed as the ramblings of a foolish has-been, they will be lapped up as the pronouncements of a sage by the weasels for whom the war is inconvenient, who don't care about the Ukrainians' right to lead a decent, peaceful life, and who would like the whole thing to go away so they can get on with their own concerns and enjoy cheap Russian gas.

He will surely go down in history as Putin's and Xi Jinping's most useful idiot.

Adam Zamoyski is a historian and author

Biden's Saudi Arabia Opportunity

By Daniel Shapiro and Mark Dubowitz



The U.S.-Saudi relationship has lately endured some of the worst tensions in its history. But President Joe Biden's first visit to the Middle East next month, with stops in Israel and Saudi Arabia, offers a surprising opportunity — if both sides will take it.

A wide range of issues have stoked disagreement and mistrust between the long-time partners: Iran nuclear talks, the war in Yemen, the Saudi posture on U.S. rivals Russia and China, human rights (including the murder of Jamal Khashoggi), social reform in the Kingdom, oil production and prices, and the U.S. commitment to the Middle East.

That's a lot to tackle in one presidential visit of perhaps 24 to 48 hours. As senior officials from both countries travel between Washington and Riyadh to lay the groundwork, they should be realistic about what is achievable. One principle that should guide preparations: Not all bilateral differences can be resolved at once. However tempting a grand bargain may be, the relationship is more likely to be repaired step-by-step.

What is most critical to address first? Each side has core strategic interests for which they need to see the other side demonstrate concern. Cementing a set of understandings around these issues would make a visit valuable, even while other disagreements remain.

For Saudi Arabia, the core strategic interest is ensuring its defence against the threat posed by the regime in Iran and its proxies, particularly the Houthis in Yemen, who, with Iranian backing, training and arms, have launched dozens of rockets against Saudi civilian targets. Closely related is the Saudis' desire for confidence that the United States is committed to stopping Iran's development of nuclear weapons and that Washington retains a strategic commitment to the Middle East and to its regional partners, even as it addresses other strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific and Europe.

Here, Biden's experience cultivating the close U.S.-Israel alliance, while also navigating real differences, is relevant. His career-long bond with Israelis is evidence that as long as one demonstrates clear understanding and empathy for a partner's major security fears, it is possible to have very tough discussions on a range of topics and work through areas of disagreement.

Biden and Saudi leaders may not agree on returning to the Iran nuclear deal, for example; neither do Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (nor do the authors of this article, for that matter). One side sees the agreement as the least bad available alternative to buy the most time delaying Iran's nuclear program, while the other side argues it only delays the inevitability of an even worse Iranian nuclear breakout and fuels Iran's other regional aggressions through major sanctions relief.

The bridge to overcome this disagreement is to achieve understandings on what follows the nuclear talks, whether they collapse or result in a renewed nuclear deal. In either case, Iran's implacable hostility can be expected to fuel escalation. Recognizing the severe threat Iran and its proxies will continue to pose to U.S. forces and partners necessitates clear U.S. commitments, underscored by its ongoing presence in the region: to assist in development of integrated regional air defences; to sanction and designate Iranian entities engaged in terror and its ballistic missile and drone programs (even while the nuclear agreement lifts terrorism sanctions on Iran's central bank and oil and tanker companies); to facilitate interdictions of weapons shipments to proxies; to rally international condemnation of the regime's interference in its neighbours' affairs and abuse of its own people; and to prepare military deterrence and defence options, alone or with others, to ensure Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. That should include a clear and credible threat by Biden to use military force to stop an Iranian nuclear weapon. And the Saudis, who were shaken by the lack of any U.S. response to the Iranian attack on its major oil facility at Abqaiq in 2019 under the Trump administration, must have confidence that they will not be left alone in the event of similar attacks in the future. These commitments, which apply both to a renewed Iran nuclear deal and its sunsets and to a no-deal scenario, and which do not rule out maintaining de-escalation channels to Iran, should also elicit a Saudi commitment to take no steps toward developing its own uranium enrichment capability.

For Biden, the core strategic interest that must be addressed is ensuring that Saudi Arabia continues to orient its policies toward the United States, rather than hedge its bets by leaning toward Russia and China. There are many aspects to such commitments, from avoiding acquisitions of major Chinese and Russian military systems to standing with the United States in condemning outrages like Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's persecution of Muslim Uyghurs. In the context of the war in Ukraine, it also requires Saudi Arabia to agree to increase oil production to bring down prices, so sanctions on Russia have deeper bite and European energy supply needs can be met by non-Russian sources. Abandoning the oil production quotas the Kingdom and Russia established in the OPEC+ agreement will be a clear sign that the Saudis are prepared to give as well as receive, and understand that to be treated as partners, they must act like partners.

That is the essence of the bargain for both sides: the restoration of a partnership. It has always been somewhat transactional — a steady and cheap supply of oil in exchange for security — but its critical elements remain relevant even in the face of serious, perhaps unbridgeable, differences between the countries' leaders. Saudi

Arabia has no serious alternative to the United States as a guarantor of its security against the very real threats it faces. Facilitation of Saudi Arabia's own defense capabilities, and assurances of U.S. intentions, are fundamental to the Kingdom's success. Meanwhile, today's oil price spike underscores the critical role that Riyadh has often played during past geopolitical crises in stabilizing oil markets. And in an era of global superpower competition, keeping key Middle Eastern nations aligned with the United States is imperative.

These are the central requirements that would make a visit to Saudi Arabia worthwhile. And yet it would leave important issues unresolved, from U.S. concerns over Saudi human rights violations to Saudi complaints that its dramatic social reforms underway have not been recognized. Biden should acknowledge these profound changes, perhaps by meeting dynamic female social and business entrepreneurs only recently allowed by Saudi leaders to pursue their ambitions, which they attribute to decisions of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Biden can give credit where due and encourage a positive trend. But the Saudis should go further: They need to release key human rights activists from prison, especially those who pushed for the very social reforms MBS has now embraced, and commit not to imprison them in the future. They should also allow Raif Badawi and Loujain al-Hathloul, recently released from prison for advocating these social reforms, to secure a clemency from travel bans that would allow them to leave the Kingdom and, in Badawi's case, reunite with his family in Canada.

The Khashoggi murder will continue to hang heavily over this relationship, as it should. In a clear, direct, private conversation between Biden and MBS, it must be made clear that it is a stain that will remain; that there is genuine remorse; that the Khashoggi family's needs will be met; that no such crimes will be committed again; and that a pragmatic partnership on broader interests must proceed on this basis.

Beyond the confines of this visit, it's in the broader interests of both countries for Saudi Arabia to eventually join the Abraham Accords. This is a priority that Biden should advance, and a stabilized bilateral relationship should enable him to do so in the remaining years of his first term. Growing Israeli-Saudi military and intelligence cooperation suggests the promise of greater commercial, technology and people-to-people cooperation, and eventual full diplomatic relations. Cementing a coalition of moderate states in the region, advancing Saudi modernization, development and economic diversification goals, and — handled sensitively — offering the Palestinians a path to participate in normalization that improves, rather than impedes, prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement are all mutual goals that normalization can advance. Biden's trip may include a signal of what is possible, with a limited step like the resolution of the status of Saudi islands in the Red Sea while ensuring freedom of navigation for Israeli ships, or the expansion of Israeli civilian overflights of Saudi territory. Extending the current U.N.-negotiated truce in Yemen will also help sustain a stabilization of U.S.-Saudi ties, while leaving open the path toward a more permanent settlement.

The mutual interests served by stabilizing this partnership should lead Biden and the Saudi leadership to embrace a framework to recognize and advance their respective core strategic interests. This approach will serve one other critical cause: helping ensure that the U.S.-Saudi partnership is not subject to drastic swings with every change of U.S. administration. Biden is a known sceptic of the Saudis, views he held long before he called them a "pariah" during the 2020 election campaign. Precisely for

this reason, in striking such a deal he is well-positioned to strengthen bipartisan support in Congress and among the American people for the principle that this complicated, yet vital, relationship is worth preserving. That is an interest that surely Biden, the Saudis and most Americans can agree on.

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The fatal contradictions of Biden's Middle East trip

By Jonathan S. Tobin



The decision of an American president to visit the Middle East has always been seen primarily through the lens of its impact on efforts to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is not the case with President Joe Biden's planned trip in July to Israel, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia. With inflation and the price of gasoline skyrocketing in recent months, Biden's priority should be to increase Middle East oil production, not resurrecting the failed policies of the past and pressuring Israel to appease the Palestinians.

That will require the president to abandon his much-publicized hostility to the Saudi regime. In recent years, many Democrats have become ardent opponents of the U.S.-Saudi alliance, finding Riyadh's admittedly egregious human-rights record to be intolerable even as they downplayed or ignored the equally terrible if not worse actions of Iran. But with the American economy teetering towards recession as a result of Biden's overspending and Washington needing the Saudis to help offset the impact of sanctions on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Biden is going to have to swallow his pride. Though he had vowed to make Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—the country's de facto ruler—an international pariah, the president will now have to resurrect what's left of his old glad-handing skills to get the Saudis to help him out of this fix.

The fact that the international sanctions on Russia seem to have hurt the United States more than the authoritarian government of Vladimir Putin is ironic but no joke. Despite military setbacks and Europe uniting to cut Moscow off from the international economy, Putin has doubled down on his determination to continue his illegal and brutal aggression, meaning that no end to the fighting and the rising toll of civilian casualties seems to be in sight. What's worse, Russia appears to not have suffered too badly from the sanctions with the ruble becoming the best-performing currency, gaining value against both the Euro and the U.S. dollar, during the course of the war.

While the world has been hoping that the embarrassing performance of the Russian military and economic isolation would lead to Putin's fall, that much-desired outcome doesn't appear to be a possibility.

That means that America's Ukraine policy, while rooted in a justified desire to oppose aggression, seems to be turning out to be as much of a disaster as Biden's catastrophic retreat from Afghanistan or his inability to curb inflation or deal with supply chain crises.

That's where the Saudis, and the other Gulf emirates and the oil-producing nations of the OPEC oil cartel that Riyadh dominates, come in. OPEC has already promised to increase oil production this summer and is expected to do so again in the fall. Yet those announcements haven't yet had any impact on the price at gas pumps in the United States, which are ascending to record highs while also increasing the price of everything else that American consumers buy.

Since they are desperate to change the subject of coverage from gas prices and economic folly, Biden officials are spinning the trip to The New York Times as more about security than economics. There's some truth to this claim. The problem is that it betrays the basic contradiction at the heart of Biden's Middle East policy.

While the economic blowback from Biden's undeclared war to save Ukraine from Russia is causing problems, his other foreign-policy obsession—a revival of former President Barack Obama's 2015 Iran nuclear deal and efforts to achieve a rapprochement with the Islamist regime—is looming over his upcoming trip.

In Israel, Biden will meet with Yair Lapid, who, with the collapse today of the coalition he led with Naftali Bennett, will be interim prime minister until new elections are held. Lapid and Bennett spent the last year trying to convince the Biden foreign-policy team to abandon efforts to revive a nuclear pact with a rogue Iranian regime that has stonewalled repeated American attempts to bribe them with new concessions. Both Israel and the Saudis would like Biden to draw the appropriate conclusions from Iran's flouting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's efforts to monitor their nuclear progress and change course by toughening sanctions against Tehran.

Iran is showing its contempt for the international community and how little its promises not to build a bomb mean by digging a new tunnel network to house new nuclear facilities that would be less vulnerable to bombing attacks. That has added to the fears about its increased uranium enrichment, which seem to be the prelude towards a possible nuclear breakout.

Rather than this serving to stiffen Biden's spine, it has only increased fears that he will respond to Iranian provocations with new concessions that will allow it to become a nuclear threshold state while not suffering any penalties for doing so.

That is the context for a trip that will, at least on the surface, be part of an attempt to convince the Israelis and the Saudis that the United States is still committed to their security.

If the administration was really committed to stopping Iran, then it would be increasing its efforts to expand former President Donald Trump's Abraham Accords to other Arab and Islamic countries to shore up a regional alliance against Tehran.

Hopes that the Saudis will swap their under-the-table alliance with Israel for a full-fledged normalization are probably misplaced. As the self-styled guardians of the Muslim holy places, the odds that the Saudi regime—whose legitimacy is rooted in its own peculiar brand of religious extremism—would ever fully embrace the Jewish state are slim and none. But as they did in 2020 when the Trump foreign-policy team made the first real breakthrough for peace in a generation, their acquiescence to other countries normalizing relations with Israel is key.

But Biden's disinterest in widening the circle of peace is painfully obvious. His priority is keeping Israel and the Saudis from taking any actions that will undermine his hopes of a new deal with Iran, which means that it would be extremely foolish for either Jerusalem or Riyadh to place much trust in any assurances the president offers to them.

That is a painful dilemma because as much as the Saudis can flirt with trying to come to some sort of arrangement with Iran and its terrorist proxies, that isn't a viable option since Tehran will never be satisfied until the Saud dynasty and its allies are overthrown. Nor can Israel look elsewhere for help. Both an isolated Russia and a China bent on expanding its own malign influence in the Middle East are bad actors that have no real sympathy or common interests with the Jewish state.

So, while the Israelis and the Saudis combine to present an Iran still seeking regional hegemony as well as nuclear status with a formidable foe, having the United States led by a president that cannot be relied upon to oppose the deadliest threat to stability in the region creates a problem to which there is no obvious solution.

Nor can Americans feel good about an administration that, for all of its high-flown talk about standing by allies when it speaks of Ukraine, still seems intent on discarding its real friends in the Middle East. Expecting Israel and the Saudis to have America's back while also attempting to betray them by embracing Iran is a contradiction that may lead to yet another Biden disaster, which may be even more costly than the ones he has already blundered into.

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How Did Jared Kushner Get \$2 Billion from the Saudis?

By Timothy L. O'Brien



Jared Kushner's new private equity firm got \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia because maybe that's how you can cash in when your investing experience is slender but your father-in-law may wind up back in the White House. It's also possible that you can get billions for a firm with no track record because the White House did favours for the Saudis when your father-in-law still occupied the Oval Office.

It's probably a mix of both. Regardless, it's certainly not a reflection of Kushner's investing prowess. Before entering the White House as an adviser to former President Donald Trump, Kushner, 41, inherited wealth and his first adult job from his father, then botched his biggest gambit: vastly overpaying for a Fifth Avenue skyscraper soon before financial and real estate markets tanked.

The Saudis' stake in Kushner is also a reminder of the gargantuan financial conflicts of interest that plagued the Trump clan throughout their White House stay and continue to seep into their post-Washington deal making. And, of course, national security hazards run through all of this. Is it that easy to secure the allegiance and foreign policy mindshare of an influential White House adviser?

Yes, it is. At least in the Trump era.

"It's just a complete free-for-all," said Walter Shaub, who was an outspoken critic of financial conflicts in the Trump White House before resigning as director of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics. "The real concern here is that the public has no way of knowing exactly what favours someone like Kushner may have done for the Saudis."

While the federal government has taken steps in recent years to rein in the ability of former government officials to monetize their service in Washington, lucrative loopholes abound. The only professional restrictions Kushner faces, for example, involve him speaking to the federal government. He can still speak to and work with any foreign government he desires — such as the Saudis.

Kushner has company. Former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has also raised money for his investment fund from the Saudis and other Middle Eastern countries he courted closely when he was a powerful financial regulator.

Are those investments payoffs? It's impossible to get into the heads of all of the participants, but the fact pattern surrounding how the Trump White House intersected with the Saudis is telling. The Trump administration coddled Saudi Arabia even after ample evidence surfaced that the country had orchestrated the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Mnuchin met personally with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after the killing. The prince is chairman of the Saudi fund backing Mnuchin's new venture. The Trump White House also engineered arms deals with the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates, despite congressional opposition, and it backed both countries in their controversial interventions in Yemen's civil war. During his White House years, Kushner personally cultivated close ties with Prince Mohammed, offering him advice on how to handle fallout from Khashoggi's murder. The two men communicated with each other outside of formal government channels, using the text messaging platform WhatsApp to stay in touch. The relationship set off alarms among career national security staff members, but it apparently never cooled. A panel that vets how the Saudi sovereign wealth fund invests its money raised concerns about backing Kushner's new venture, Affinity Partners, according to the New York Times. It was overruled by the fund's board — which Prince Mohammed sits on. The panel had ample reasons to worry about Kushner, according to documents the Times uncovered. It cited the "inexperience" of Kushner's team and the risk of losing a lot of money. The panel's due diligence examination of Affinity found it "unsatisfactory in all aspects." It thought Kushner was charging excessive fees and that a partnership with his fund posed "public relations risks." Yet the Saudis still gave Kushner \$2 billion — probably because he represents an insurance policy for them. It's a wager on retaining future access, not on securing investment expertise in the present.

Shaub thinks deals like this show how necessary it is to have an emoluments policy governing the business practices of former government officials. "It's extremely dangerous," he told me. "But our ethics laws are in terrible shape overall. They're weak across all branches of our government."

Shaub says that the Biden administration hasn't done enough to tighten ethics standards, largely because the financial gravy train is often irresistible to many who pass through Washington, regardless of their party. When Trump came to Washington, he famously campaigned on the promise he would "drain the swamp" of lobbyists and other kindred spirits. But Trump was so financially conflicted himself that was always going to be unlikely. Soon before he left the White House, Trump revoked his own requirement that former federal employees refrain for five years from lobbying agencies in which they once worked.

Trump didn't drain the swamp. He just filled it with bigger alligators — with guys like Kushner.

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Return Of Old Leader Presents New Opportunities in Somalia

By Ido Levy

On May 15, the members of the Federal Parliament of Somalia gathered to elect Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as president, five years after he served in that office from 2012 to 2017. He will replace Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, aka “Farmajo,” who defeated him in the 2017 election.

Hassan Sheikh takes over at a particularly difficult time. The election was plagued by Farmajo’s obstructionism and political misuse of security forces, as well as reports of massive vote buying across the board. Meanwhile, the Somali National Army, state government forces, clan militias, and the al-Qaeda affiliate Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahedin are still fighting for control of the country—indeed, the uptick in political and military clashes since 2020 has given al-Shabab space to grow stronger.

Fortunately, Hassan Sheikh’s return gives the Biden administration new opportunities to deepen its partnership with Mogadishu and further U.S. interests in the region. Given Somalia’s strategic position on the Gulf of Aden, the country has been a nexus for arms trafficking and militant activity affecting both the Middle East and Africa. Al-Shabab is al-Qaeda’s largest and best-funded affiliate, with the UN recently estimating that it has as many as 12,000 fighters and revenue of up to \$10 million per month. The Islamic State’s affiliate in Somalia is gradually building strength as well. The Somali government is an indispensable partner in fighting such actors. Additionally, the new president could be receptive to normalizing relations with Israel, a major objective for the Biden administration.

A Calamitous Election Cycle

Although Farmajo rose to power with high hopes in 2017, his tenure became increasingly authoritarian and friendly to bad actors in recent years. Despite his term expiring on February 8, 2021, he refused to allow elections for months, holding out as long as possible to buy time and consolidate support.

Farmajo’s use of force has been problematic as well. In early 2020, he deployed 700 Turkish-trained Somali troops to the Gedo region in the hope of compelling political support there, leading to fierce clashes with Jubaland state forces. He also sent troops to subdue the formerly government-allied Sufi militia Ahlu Sunna wal-Jamaa (ASWJ) in Galmudug state. Meanwhile, the only entity still actively fighting al-Shabab—the U.S.-built Danab Brigade, Somalia’s premier special operations forces unit—lost its operational tempo following the Trump administration’s withdrawal of U.S. troops in January 2021. Three months later, government and opposition forces clashed in Mogadishu, causing the displacement of 60,000-100,000 people. And in October—without U.S. forces present to veto the action—Farmajo ordered Danab troops and other army units to suppress an ASWJ stronghold in the town of Guriel, where fighting continues intermittently.

Failing to secure his political survival by force, Farmajo—like many of the thirty-eight other presidential candidates—turned to wealthy foreign sponsors such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the hope of buying his way to victory. Both of these countries had sent millions to contenders in the 2017 election, and they increased their

contributions to an estimated \$50-100 million each in the current cycle. These may look like eye-watering sums in one of the world's poorest countries, but they were deemed necessary because Somalia has now normalized competitive vote buying for its 329 preselected parliamentary electors. In effect, each presidential vote cost between \$100,000-300,000 up front, plus the promise of an extra \$200,000 or more if the candidate won. Farmajo threw in his lot with Qatar and sought further financial and military support via good relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Turkey, while Hassan Sheikh had Emirati backing along with some support from Egypt and Kenya.

Amid this fierce political and military infighting, al-Shabab consolidated its territories in the south, increased in strength, developed an ever-more-sophisticated taxation system, and provided crucial services—particularly dispute settlement—more efficiently than the government. The group also continues to threaten and occasionally plot attacks against U.S. targets, and may try to carry them out if it begins to feel more secure in its position.

As for the local Islamic State affiliate, it continues to build strength from its enclave in the Galgala Mountains despite facing pressure from the more functional U.S.-backed Puntland Security Force (PSF). In fact, the group is increasingly becoming an important logistical node between the Islamic State's core "provinces" in Iraq and Syria and those in West and Central Africa.

Window for Renewed Cooperation

Farmajo's ouster gives Washington new opportunities to pursue common interests on several fronts. President Biden already seized on this by redeploying U.S. troops to Somalia shortly after Hassan Sheikh's victory. As described in detail by the author in a companion article, this is an important step that will reinvigorate the fight against al-Shabab by making the Danab Brigade effective again. Indeed, it was the deliberate insulation of Danab from political misuse and the unit's close relations with U.S. personnel that set it apart from the rest of the Somali army and enabled its effective offensive action against al-Shabab. In contrast, Somalia's aforementioned Turkish-trained commando unit, called Gorgor, is skilled but lacks the separate command-and-control system that would prevent its misuse, leading to its regular deployment for political gain (e.g., the 2020 Gedo incident).

Accordingly, U.S. officials should go further and urge President Hassan Sheikh's incoming administration—which has weaker ties to Turkey—to integrate Gorgor under Danab's command-and-control architecture. Washington should also redouble efforts to enlarge Danab to 3,000 members, up from its current strength of less than 1,000.

The change in government also makes expanding the Abraham Accords to Somalia a more distinct possibility. Israel has much to offer Somalia on the counterterrorism and economic fronts, while Hassan Sheikh's strong ties with the UAE—an original signatory of the accords—can facilitate channels of communication with Jerusalem. The United States could play the role of a middleman here. Guarantees of further U.S. economic and military aid, coupled with various Emirati and Israeli benefits, would go a long way toward securing normalization. According to a senior official who served during Hassan Sheikh's first tenure, the president met with then-prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and was likely planning another high-level meeting before losing his 2017 reelection bid. After the latest vote, a Somali diplomat close to Hassan Sheikh told the Times of Israel, "The group that is against normalization with Israel is out." The

time is therefore ripe for President Biden to work with Israel, Somalia, and the UAE to expand the Abraham Accords.

The United States should also deepen its partnership with the autonomous Puntland region, whose strategic port of Bosaso has easy access to the Bab al-Mandab Strait and Gulf of Aden. Due to its location, Puntland is a major economic center for Somalia—and a hub for smuggling from the Arabian Peninsula, which helps fuel widespread conflicts. It is also home base for the local Islamic State affiliate. More favorably, Puntland president Said Abdullahi Deni has close ties with the UAE, and the Emiratis hold significant economic interests of their own in the region. He is also an ally to Hassan Sheikh, having served as the president's minister of planning during his previous term.

Such factors give the United States a window to build on its existing military support to the PSF by encouraging greater security and intelligence coordination between Puntland and Mogadishu, with the aim of combating the Islamic State and smuggling. Puntland would also be an important area of concentration for economic investment in any Somali normalization arrangement with Israel.

Finally, as Hassan Sheikh consolidates his presidency, the United States should assure him that it is ready to work with him in pursuit of common interests. The swift congratulatory visit by U.S. Africa Command head Gen. Stephen Townsend was an important confidence-building measure as American forces prepare to reengage in the country. Washington should also take care to avoid any statements that might antagonize Mogadishu during this sensitive period.

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How Religion and Money Shape Russian Soft Power in Syria

By Ishtar Al Shami



While the world reacted with shock to Russia's brutal assault on Ukraine since the February 24 invasion, understanding Russia's role in Syria makes Putin's actions in Ukraine look more like a pattern than an anomaly.

In 2017, at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin said that "there are not so many countries around the world that have the privilege of sovereignty." This statement demonstrated the premise underscoring Putin's occupation of Syria and helps illustrate the intentions underlying Russia's soft power.

Carrot and Stick: Russia's Soft and Hard Power Pressures

Russia's hard power ambitions in Syria are quite evident through its military operations targeting civilians and opposition groups alike. The Russian military presence in Syria, which predates the war itself, centres around the Tartus Naval Base. Tartus was established in 1971 as part of an agreement between the Soviet Union and the Hafez al-Assad regime, and was significantly expanded in 2017 after Russia began its direct military intervention. In addition to helping with Assad's reclamation of Syrian territory, Russian forces have also overseen forced displacement operations—which Russia refers to as "reconciliations"—designed to shift demographics within in Syria to better facilitate the regime's control.

However, Russia has also seen its military presence as a means of promoting soft power influence within the country. Russia's Hmeimim Air Base in the Jableh district of the Latakia Governorate, which lies adjacent to the civilian airport known as Bassel

al-Assad International Airport, is the launch base of any number of Russian military operations in Syria. However, Russia also set up the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria at this air base, with the goal of recruiting civilians to disseminate targeted messages in various regions at war with the Assad regime. The intertwining of hard and soft power efforts—Hmeimim serves both as a centre of Russian influence and the base location of its displacement efforts—demonstrates how Russia seeks to influence both Syrian public opinion and the demographics of the country itself.

Russia likewise employs these methods when it comes to humanitarian aid. The Atlantic Council has outlined the ways in which Russia has employed humanitarian aid as a soft power tactic in Syria. Russia created a shadow aid system through institutional and religious frameworks not subject to recognized international norms. Under this system, aid networks did not partner with Syrian state institutions—a requirement for Western organizations working in the country. Simultaneously, Russia worked within the U.N. frameworks to restrict these aid channels so that their distribution remained under Assad regime control. According to the study, Russia used this aid system as a guise to cover its interference in Syria's societal infrastructure as it pursued demographic and ideological shifts conducive to its strategic goals. This process facilitated Syria's client-state status by depleting Syrian resources so that the country became entirely dependent on Russia for long-term aims, a method likewise employed by Iran in areas under its influence.

Russian Use of Religious Institutions

Russian officials have a long history of using ties to the Orthodox Church to claim that Russia is a savior for Christians across the MENA region. In July 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed this refrain by stating on Russia-24 that “the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was working with the Russian Church to make tangible progress in protecting Christians, especially in the Middle East and North Africa.” In Syria, Putin has repeatedly used the Russian Orthodox Church—which has a strong following in the Latakia district—as a powerful tool alongside military force to achieve certain aims. Russian initiatives have successfully convinced leading figures from the Orthodox Church in Syria to openly support Russian government and Syrian regime policies. Many of these figures profited from the ongoing war by providing aid or covering travel costs for those who wanted to leave. Moscow had seen the impacts of similar Church-based policies in former USSR countries and modelled its strategy in Syria accordingly.

In this context, the city of Latakia recently awoke to news of the “suicide” of the Greek Orthodox priest George Hosh, a major supporter of the Russian and Assad militias and a sponsor of the “reconciliations” and settlements with the regime. Hosh was also known for working with Syrian men and women who wanted to leave the country. However, he was accused of only helping Christians or individuals with an Islamic background who had converted to Christianity, including those who converted after being told that they could only receive aid if they became Christian. Converts would receive a baptismal record and were brought under the protection of the Church to apply for religious asylum.

Hosh worked on these issues as part of a Russian program for protecting Christians seeking asylum in Europe. Eyewitnesses stated that the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate would cover the costs of emigration for persons aided by this program. Local residents and social media reports indicated that although Hosh's death had

جزار بانياس وردود الفعل على الحادثة

وكما ذكر المصدر فإن الخوري حوش عُرف بتزلفه وتقربه الدائم لأجهزة أمن ميليشيا أسد وذلك قبل الثورة واستمر خلالها، وكان من أشهر تلك المواقف لقاؤه مع من قتل المئات في بانياس والبيضا والملقب بـ"جزار بانياس"، معراج أورال التركي من أصل سوري، أو علي كيالي بحسب اسمه السوري، وأخذ صورة تذكارية معه، فضلاً عن صور عديدة له مع قادت ميليشيات وشبيحة آخرين ساهموا بشكل مباشر في قتل السوريين.



been staged to resemble a suicide, it appears that he had actually been killed by the regime and Russians for unknown reasons.

Russia has also capitalized on Islamic institutions to pursue its own goals. Ramzan Kadyrov, the current head of the Chechen Republic, was one of Putin's close allies in the war in Syria and sent groups of Chechen fighters to Syria under a religious pretext. Russia's policy of using religious engagement to build ties with Syrian leaders was on display early on through their direct involvement in the war, as Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov organized a conference of Islamic religious scholars and regime-aligned sheikhs in the Chechen capital of Grozny.

Once in Syria, these fighters took direct orders from the Kremlin. Kadyrov also sent several thousand Chechen fighters as part of the battle with ISIS. Despite their military responsibilities, the most important part of their involvement in Syria was establishing ties with Syrian regime soldiers on the basis of their shared faith. Chechens have in fact fought on both sides of the conflict—anti-Putin Chechen fighters also infiltrated the ranks of extremist opposition factions fighting Assad. These fighters relied on the same pretext and jihadist ideology that Kadyrov employed to recruit poor, desperate youths to fight in the so-called holy war.

In the civil sphere, the Russian government-backed Akhmat Kadyrov Charitable Foundation, named for the current leader's father, has sent aid to regime-controlled areas since mid-2016 to influence public opinion regarding Russian and Chechen involvement in Syria. This aid is visibly politicized; Kadyrov and his affiliated media outlets make frequent public statements that his foundation's aid to Syrians has far surpassed that of other international organizations—a demonstrably false assertion.

Putin ally and businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin has likewise played a role in combining reconstruction contracts and religious interests to cement Russia's role in Syria while gaining favor with the public. Amid talk of reconstruction and normalization in Syria over the last couple years, there have been several oil and gas deals inked between the Syrian regime and companies with ties to the Russian mercenary group known as the Wagner Group, which is led by Prigozhin. This comes after years of Chechens working under Prigozhin to rebuild mosques in Aleppo, such as the Great Mosque, and others throughout Syria that were damaged during the war. Rebuilding these mosques has enhanced Syrian-Chechen relations while allowing the Kremlin to employ soft power tactics, mirroring an extant Russian domestic policy in which Chechens built mosques in Muslim areas of Russian cities to win over the local populace.

Education and Culture

Moscow does not rely on religious connections alone; it has made efforts to spread awareness and interest in Russian culture, art, and literature throughout Syria via cultural centres Moscow supports and directs. New branches of the Russian Cultural Centre have been set up in a number of Syrian governorates for this purpose. The main Russian Cultural Centre in Syria, which is headquartered in Damascus, was inactive for seven years before reopening in 2020.

In 2014, Russian was added as a primary language of instruction in Syrian educational curricula alongside French and English. At this point, both Russian and English remain optional courses for students. Interest in studying Russian varies by district depending on the degree of popular support for the Russian presence there, an issue explored more in-depth here.

Moreover, the Russian government and the Assad regime oversee huge budgets intended to support scientific missions to Russia, Belarus, and Chechnya.

Russia's Economic Hegemony in Syria

There have been major business deals made through contracts to constrain and exploit Syrian national resources and force Syria to accrue sovereign debt. These deals render Syria indefinitely economically dependent on Russia due to penalties for delayed payments, as well as high accumulated interest. These contracts can take many forms: Coercive contracts with the Syrian regime proffer significant loans that must be implemented exclusively by Russian companies owned by individuals close to Russian President Putin. These contracts are subject to international sanctions because of Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian crisis and war crimes committed in Syria.

Export credit loans, which Russia imposes by force in the form of secret loans for the regime. These loans come with the obligation to import and purchase goods exclusively from Russia and according to prices that Russia sets using rubles, which are higher than that of the global market.

Oil contracts with illegal shell corporations under the umbrella of the Wagner Group, to which the regime grants 25% of oil well revenues that it regains control of.

Contracts with private security firms—these companies have recruited Syrians in Libya, Armenia, and Ukraine into the Russian army as mercenaries, and have been deployed to Libya, Armenia, and most recently Ukraine.

An exclusive contract to control the Tartus port for 45 years.

These soft power efforts all help feed into Putin's haughty campaign to restore glory to Russia and achieve Russian supremacy at the expense of other peoples. Putin has employed hard and soft power in Syria to help prop up the Assad regime. However, the ways in which Moscow is implementing its soft power agenda in Syria demonstrate Russia's efforts to hollow out any Syrian autonomy in an attempt to suck what remains of Syria more deeply into the Russian orbit.

Erdogan Goes to Jeddah, With Brotherly, Neo-Ottoman Hat in Hand

By William Roebuck



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two-day visit to Saudi Arabia at the end of April capped a months long effort to repair ties between Riyadh and Ankara and underscored the continuing broader realignment among regional rivals over the past two years. It was the Turkish leader's first visit to Saudi Arabia since 2017, a year before the killing in Istanbul of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which shattered bilateral relations. While Erdogan signalled early in January his intent to visit the kingdom, the actual visit did not take place until after a Turkish court ruled in early April that in absentia legal proceedings against some 26 defendants in the Khashoggi case should be handed to the Saudi judicial system.

While the Saudi Press Agency published photographs of the Turkish leader embracing Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, there was a bit of one-upmanship, as the Saudis insisted the visit had taken place at the request of Erdogan, while the Turkish government claimed the visit came at the request of the Saudis. Erdogan met with King Salman bin Abdulaziz in Jeddah and held a separate one-on-one meeting with Mohammed bin Salman the evening of April 28, before traveling to the holy city of Mecca to perform umrah April 29. In remarks to journalists before his departure for Jeddah, Erdogan used the holy month of Ramadan to frame the trip, saying it represented "a fitting time" to repair brotherly relations between the two countries. In other pre-trip remarks, Erdogan underscored the importance of improving political and economic ties and strengthening cooperation in energy, food security, defence, and finance.

A number of analysts viewed the visit primarily from an economic prism, with one referring to it as "a major, major driver." Even Erdogan highlighted "the great economic

potential between Turkey and Saudi Arabia.” With his eye on Turkey’s presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, Erdogan continued with the Saudi visit the efforts he kicked off in 2021 in a major rebuild of his relations with the United Arab Emirates. Focused on the need to alleviate Turkey’s economic woes, including a soaring annual inflation rate of 60% (exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and more recent fuel price hikes caused by the crisis in Ukraine) and a collapse in value – by 44% against the dollar – of the Turkish lira, Erdogan hopes the ongoing charm offensive will continue to garner significant investment commitments and currency support like he obtained in November 2021 from the UAE.

As important, Erdogan has his eye on the “massive” Saudi market. Already improving in the first quarter of the year, Turkish exports for March reached \$58 million, as the Saudis had already begun to ease the crushing, near total, informal embargo on Turkish goods they imposed in 2020, driven by anger over Turkey’s handling of the Khashoggi murder. Still, there is huge room for growth in exports to return to the near \$300 million mark Turkey hit for exports to the kingdom in March 2020. With winter protests and his political support in Turkey sagging, economic support and foreign investment will be critical for Erdogan if he wants to juice the Turkish economy for job growth and expansion before the 2023 elections.

In addition to the economic framing, other perspectives serve as useful prisms for understanding the significance of Erdogan’s visit to Saudi Arabia. First, the Saudi-Turkish rapprochement signals Erdogan’s tacit acknowledgment that, at least in the intermediate term, political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood have declined as forces shaping the political and ideological landscape in the region. Analysts disagree about the extent of Erdogan’s understanding of this challenge. One view asserts that Erdogan’s outreach to the UAE and Saudi Arabia shows his acknowledgment that Turkey’s support for these forces in places like Libya and Syria (and earlier, Egypt), and allowing his country to serve as a hub for exiled Muslim Brotherhood leaders, had left Turkey “increasingly isolated.” Others see Erdogan’s cool pragmatism, his apparent willingness to consider some level of diminished support for the Muslim Brotherhood as a chip Turkey could play to shore up its regional influence, as sliding toward a colder cynicism: any pause in support for the Muslim Brotherhood would be temporary, to get Erdogan past the elections.

Almost certainly, the read from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi is that, regardless of Erdogan’s personal views and calculations, his visits and Turkey’s evolving policies make clear that political Islam as a political ideology, as marshalled in particular by the Muslim Brotherhood, is in decline throughout the region. In addition, it is likely their assistance to and investments in Turkey are conditional; Ankara’s reversion to full-throated support for the Muslim Brotherhood would likely cause a cutoff in vital assistance that Erdogan will continue to need post-elections. The heavy focus on new variations of nationalism in these Gulf Arab countries is designed to support these regimes’ efforts to undercut the appeal of Muslim Brotherhood ideology.

Turkey’s effort to realign its foreign policy over the past couple of years – evident in diplomatic shorthand with this visit – is a piece of the broader realignment among regional rivals. This pattern has been marked by efforts to leave behind old hostilities, for example, through the Abraham Accords, with their “institutionalization” of a new order, and by retrenchment, diplomatic manoeuvre, and efforts to exit from entangling military interventions.

Erdogan's visit to Saudi Arabia, like the exchange of visits with the UAE in 2021, also seems to signal a Gulf Arab calculation that, with some leverage and artful manipulation of trends evident in the region, Turkey can serve as a useful counterweight to Iran. It has the size, demographic heft (with an overwhelmingly Sunni orientation), and regional military might to afford the Gulf monarchies a degree of protection and shielding from Iranian projections of influence and force, assuming Turkey's support for political Islam remains in abeyance and its tacit collaboration with Iran on Syria either crumbles over time or at least never develops beyond the current limited tactical and diplomatic acquiescence.

Any Gulf Arab perceptions of Turkey as a counterweight to Iran are almost certainly fed by perceptions that the United States is demonstrating a declining interest in the region and is, in a sense, "withdrawing," regardless of legacy, extensive U.S. military realities on the ground. The messy, rushed withdrawal from Afghanistan by the administration of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. fed these Gulf perceptions of a distracted superpower, unable or unwilling to stay the course in projecting regional influence (regardless of its costly 20-year Afghani investment).

The Erdogan visit to Jeddah is also emblematic of the triumph of Mohammed bin Salman, with the end of a sustained, messy apprenticeship. And it is a powerful reminder of Saudi Arabia's regional staying power. With its huge oil reserves and disposable wealth, looming influence on the Arabian Peninsula, and extensive soft power radiating out through the region and beyond, Saudi Arabia – unlike most of its counterparts – seems to be able to afford all its mistakes, thanks to an ability to slough off missteps over time and outwait rivals and countervailing trends. The regional power also benefits from the overwhelming perception – shading into reality – that nothing much matters in the Gulf until the Saudis do it. All these dynamics are certainly evident in Mr. Erdogan's recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

Ambassador William Roebuck is the Executive Vice President of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.

How the Biden Administration is Getting Erdoğan's Moves all Wrong

By Burak Bekdil



The West's appeasement will, unfortunately, only embolden Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and push him further into the Russian orbit, both politically as a covert ally and militarily as a client of critical weapons systems. Pictured: Erdoğan holds a press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin on October 22, 2019 in Sochi, Russia. (Image source: kremlin.ru)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revived an old, outdated, near-defunct concept: a Western habit of overrating Turkey's "geo-political importance." Totally blind to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's anti-Western policy calculus, the Biden administration is pushing Turkey's Islamist strongman into further stealth hostility toward the civilized parts of the world.

"For better or for worse, Turkey is a NATO ally and will remain so. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, global politics are rapidly evolving in an unpredictable direction. The U.S. has, therefore, an interest in Turkey maintaining a robust air force," wrote Henri J. Barkey, a professor of international relations at Lehigh University. Ironically, Turkish court indictments mention Barkey, a former member of the U.S. state department's policy planning staff, as the key CIA operative behind the failed coup against Erdoğan's government in July 2016. Barkey, in Turkey, is a wanted man.

The West can clearly see Turkey's "unhelpful" behaviour - as it sees that of many countries - but shrugs it off.

Turkey, in response to the military operation in Ukraine, abstained from voting on suspending Russia's membership in the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe, the West shrugged it off.

As Western governments targeted Roman Abramovich and several other Russian oligarchs with sanctions to isolate Putin and his allies, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that "Russian oligarchs are welcome in Turkey."

Russia keeps using Turkish airspace as freely as if it had never invaded Ukraine.

More recently, Erdoğan's government said that it will not back Washington's plans to create special NATO deployment forces in the Black Sea region to contain Russia. The idea was proposed last year by U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, involving the Black Sea's littoral countries that are NATO members: Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria. "Turkey seeks to use diplomatic avenues outside the Montreux Convention and persuasion to keep NATO allies away from the Black Sea," news reports quoted Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar as saying.

More recently, Turkey's leading defence procurement official, Undersecretary of Defence Ismail Demir, said that the purchase of a second batch of the Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missiles was on the agenda:

"Turkey has been thinking and moving [for the second batch] and is adamant that it will buy the second system, no matter what America says, Turkey continues to apply the same decision that was made at the beginning [of the process to buy Russia's] S-400s."

In 2019, Turkey announced that it would become the first NATO ally to deploy a Russian-made air and anti-missile defence system, against NATO rules, which require all members to use the same weapons systems. Turkey paid \$2.5 billion for the S-400s. The move cost Turkey suspension of its membership in the U.S.-led, multinational, F-35 fighter jet program.

Turkey has also been targeted by the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). With that \$2.5 billion already in Russian coffers, Turkey, fearing further U.S. sanctions, has been unable to unpack and deploy the S-400s. This dust-up with the U.S. took place before Russia invaded Ukraine. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when every sane country is staying away from wiring even a few cents to Russia, NATO "ally" Turkey is still talking about buying a second S-400 system.

The result ? The U.S. is further appeasing Erdoğan.

In January, U.S. President Joe Biden surprised EastMed pipeline partners Israel, Greece and Cyprus by abruptly withdrawing U.S. support for the pipeline, thereby preventing a diversified energy supply to Europe, and further assuring even greater oil revenues for Russia and its war machine. The White House claimed that the \$7 billion project was antithetical to its "climate goals."

Turkey, from the beginning, was completely outside the EastMed project. Turkey is claiming part of the natural gas in the East Mediterranean fields, but not as an equal partner. Regarding the EU and EastMed: Europe's new push for diversification from Russia's energy has revived talks about EastMed. However, the European Commission is still insisting on knowing more about the EastMed pipeline's commercial viability before giving its final blessing.

In April, State Department Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland was in Ankara to ink a vague new strategic concept with Turkey. Observers say the concept

can provide the framework under which positive changes in bilateral relations can be advanced. "If it works, this is a win for both Congress and the White House," Barkey wrote in *The Arab Weekly* that "if the US refused to sell fighter jets, he [Erdoğan] would simply procure them from Russia instead."

Also in April, in an about-face, a senior U.S. State Department official said in congressional correspondence that the [potential] sale of F-16 fighter aircraft to Turkey would "serve U.S. interests and bolster NATO unity."

"The Administration believes that there are nonetheless compelling long-term NATO alliance unity and capability interests and U.S. national security, economic and commercial interests supported by appropriate U.S. defence trade ties with Turkey," Naz Durakoğlu, the State Department's top official for legislative affairs, wrote to Congressman Frank Pallone, who chairs the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Most recently, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that foreign military sales to key Washington partners such as Turkey and India should be sped up and bureaucratic hurdles removed.

Asked during a congressional testimony what the Biden administration can do "to cut through the red tape to help our work with our allies such as Turkey and India," Blinken told the House Appropriations Committee: "I think that we can and should do better in sales, particularly in the rapidity with which we're able to do things, review things. I think that's on us in the executive branch. It's also on Congress."

The West's appeasement will, unfortunately, only embolden Erdoğan and push him further into the Russian orbit, both politically as a covert ally and militarily as a client of critical weapons systems. Erdoğan has long been playing the old oriental carpet-selling game: pitting potential buyers against each other to get the best price - Turkey is hoping to be sold to the highest bidder.

The West's appeasement will just further embolden Erdoğan to keep blackmailing it: If you do not sell me F-35s or F-16s, I will buy fighter jets from Russia. Erdoğan then turns to Putin: I am your man in NATO. If you do not want me to be a real NATO ally, you must give me something. Erdoğan's double-play has to be stopped. For that, is needed a determined Western bloc who will remind him that he will not get what he wants from his (theoretical) allies in the West by blackmailing them.

Burak Bekdil, one of Turkey's leading journalists, was recently fired from the country's most noted newspaper after 29 years.

The Significance of Ukraine

By M. E. Boyd

Some observers think that the United States has committed acts of war against Russia through sanctions, provisions of war materiel, and intelligence and that we are, therefore, partly responsible if Russia is “driven” to attack us with nuclear weapons. This is not true. That we are involved in the defence of Ukraine does not make us guilty of acts of war.

The United States signed the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, along with Great Britain and Russia, guaranteeing the sovereignty of Ukraine after she left the Soviet Union in 1991. In this Agreement, Russia acknowledged Ukraine as a separate nation. Her defence was promised by all three parties.

In 2014 and then 2015, the Minsk Accords were signed to help end the separatist war in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine as negotiated by the Russians. The Accords included “withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, equipment, and mercenaries.” Russia now claims the Minsk Accords do not exist.

Russia also claims that her “special operations” are not an invasion. Russia claims she is merely trying to de-Nazify Ukraine for the good of the Ukrainian people and take the Donbas Region of Russian loyalists, crucial ports on the Black Sea, and anything else.



Image: Russians shell Mariupol steelworks.

Goodness. If these explanations are not enough, the Russian propaganda arm is in full swing scaring the daylights out of people with the veiled threat of nuclear war. The United States is not committing acts of war, though. Instead, we are honouring an agreement we signed with Russia and Great Britain to defend Ukrainian sovereignty.

No one blames Russia for thinking that Ukraine would surrender quickly as the best and brightest Ukrainians have been murdered or starved by Russian leaders for 100 years. But guess what? Ukraine is fighting back. Ukraine was stripped of its defences by the international community but, instead of cowering, Ukraine is standing tall. The

Ukrainian people voted out the Russian lackey and by some miracle, a true Ukrainian patriot has emerged.

The United States saw no hope for Ukraine and offered to take their President out of the country. He said No! The American people saw the atrocities and said No! as well. The current administration, not wanting to offend Russia as it negotiates for the United States on behalf of a treasonous agreement with Iran, threw a few meaningless sanctions on the Russians and made a few statements but had no intention of actually helping.

Time has passed. The Russians were supposed to make a quick invasion and the American administration could say that it did all it could while really hoping Russia defeated Ukraine with all due speed. We were HELPING the Russians, not committing acts of war against them.

What happened?

Against all odds and because of some very brave reporting, the world can see what Russia is all about. The genocide of Ukraine, begun one hundred years ago, still goes on. Mass graves – hands tied behind the back – rape – deliberate civilian extermination – starvation – millions of refugees – dogs and cats scrambling for food – shelling of homes, maternity hospitals – cluster bombs, and on and on.

Surrender! says Russia. No! says Ukraine. We don't need wars of choice! say prominent American commentators. This isn't a war of choice! say the American people. The current American administration is so incompetent they cannot be making the right call! claims ardent detractors. We are headed for WWII! cries the NY Times while they leak information that harms international efforts towards peace.

Let's be clear. America is helping Ukraine because the American People are demanding we help. Our strength has emboldened Great Britain and Germany to step to the plate. Finland and Sweden, always reluctant to side with the United States, are coming around. The Red Cross is trying its best. Volunteers are everywhere. Private militias are trying to rescue, trying to train and fight alongside.

The War Crimes you see are Russia's crimes. The American People will not allow nuclear extortion to prevail. Russia's plan to join Communist China on an international Belt and Road project through Ukraine, controlling crucial commerce through the Black Sea, taking over Moldova and Turkey in an attack on Europe and the West must be stopped.

The current administration would have allowed this plan to happen. The American People will not. Ukraine can win this battle for her existence. The American People know that her win is a win for our own survival. The Sovereign is bringing a reluctant and compromised administration around.

For victory to last, the United States must also offer to provide Europe with the oil and gas she needs to survive. We need to make that offer now, as perhaps the best chance for peace. No nation produces energy as cleanly and as efficiently as the United States. We must provide the energy the world needs immediately or the Chinese/Russian/Iranian alliance will be impossible to stop.

Boris Johnson, International Leader

By Michael Curtis



Boris Johnson has and is making a greater contribution with his practical actions to the support of Ukraine and defeat of Vladimir Putin, whom Johnson has called a “21st century tyrant,” than the grandstanding Macron in France or most EU members. The difference is stark; Macron has declared there must be “no humiliation of Russia.”

Johnson has had a successful career. Born in 1964 in Manhattan, he has a mixed pedigree including a maternal great grandfather who was a rabbi in Lithuania. He was educated at top prestigious schools: Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. He was chosen to be president of the Oxford Student Union in 1986. He became a journalist, a favorite on British TV talk shows, author of a number of books, including one on Winston Churchill, and then a conservative Member of Parliament in 2001. He was elected Mayor of London in 2008 and reelected in 2012. He returned to Parliament, becoming a prominent advocate of exiting the EU. He was appointed by Prime Minister Theresa May as foreign minister for a short time, then in 2019 was elected leader of the Conservative Party and became prime minister.

Boris Johnson’s main and immediate task, in addition to the Protocol for Northern Ireland, was to reopen Brexit negotiations and complete British withdrawal from the EU. The date was for Johnson, “the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act in our great national drama.” The fundamental irony today is that the country and Johnson, implementer of Brexit, is now leading the defence of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and bolder in confronting Russia to a greater extent than Brussels.

An unexpected consequence of Brexit is that Britain has not been isolated and marginalized as many predicted, but has under Johnson become the most active country and a leader in European politics. It is resuming the international role Britain once played, as in the confrontation with Russia in the Baltic during the Crimean war in 1854, and its preparation to send a fleet to protect Copenhagen in 1864 against a

threatened German attack. Johnson's boldness in the Baltic has echoes of strong leaders such as Pitt the Younger, Winston Churchill, and Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady who rescued the Falkland Islands.

It is not too strong to say that Britain has been the foremost European and NATO member in dealing with the Ukraine conflict. The contrast with Macron is telling. The French president was reluctant to agree to sanctions on Russia or to supply heavy weapons to Ukraine. Instead of reinforcing NATO, Macron has proposed a new European political community. Macron is also opposed to Ukraine becoming a member either of the EU or NATO. In contrast, Britain has played a decisive role in supplying weapons, in training and equipping the Ukrainians, and in strongly supporting sanctions against Russia.



Johnson was the first western leader to visit Kyiv, walk the streets with Zelensky, and address the Ukrainian parliament where he received a standing ovation. Johnson told the Ukrainians, in Churchillian terms, that their heroic defence against Russian aggression would rank as "Ukraine's finest hour... you have exploded the myth of Putin's invincibility."

Johnson broke new ground in flying to Stockholm and then to Helsinki to see the leaders of Sweden and Finland, two non-aligned countries during the Cold War, before they announced their plans to apply for admission to NATO. In a bold move Johnson signed a mutual security pact with the two countries. Sweden has islands near the Russian base of Kaliningrad, and has a military of 21,500 troops and 100 tanks. Finland has a 830-mile border with Russia that runs close to St. Petersburg, an army of 6,850 troops and 120 tanks.

Britain is aiding these two countries with security measures, Royal Navy warships have begun to patrol the Baltic, while the armies and the RAF are involved in joint exercises. Britain has agreed to share intelligence with Finland and Sweden as part a new northern security network that will include the British-led NATO force in nearby Estonia. This is a dramatic challenge to Putin, who cited NATO enlargement as a main

reason for his invasion and who always declared opposition to the expansion of NATO membership, but who on May 16, 2022 was obliged to say he had no problem with the application of the two countries. However, Putin also warned that the “expansion of military infrastructure to the countries will certainly invoke our response.”

Finland and Sweden recognize, as Johnson has asserted, that the security environment has fundamentally changed, and that the only country that threatens European security is Russia. The only problem for the application of the two countries is Turkey, which wants the Nordic countries to halt support for the Kurdish militant groups in their territory, before it agrees to their NATO membership.

Britain is playing a bold role, calling on allies to win the battle for Ukraine and prevent any further aggression by Putin, and to commit to further waves of sanctions as long as Russian troops remain in Ukraine. Sanctions in sensitive areas must remain. There is also need for a program like the Marshall plan to help rebuild Ukraine after the aggression has ended by a complete Russian withdrawal and peace agreement.

The solution for security is not the ambiguous European Confederation which President Macron has proposed but more likely an association of Britain with Scandinavian and Eastern European states proposed by Johnson, now the international statesman.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan becomes UAE President

By Lina Zaidi
TCMER Board Member



Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan had been serving as the UAE's de facto president since 2014. Rulers in the United Arab Emirates have unanimously appointed Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as the president of the hereditarily ruled nation on the Arabian peninsula.

The state-run WAM news agency said the rulers of the country's seven sheikhdoms made the decision at a meeting held in Al Mushrif Palace in Abu Dhabi.

It comes after the previous president, Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, died on Friday aged 73. The transition of power marks only the third time the US-allied country has selected a president since becoming independent in 1971.

The last came in 2004, when Khalifa took over from his and Mohammed's father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, a month after his death. The speed of Saturday's announcement, a day after Khalifa's death, appeared designed to show unity and reassure the world of the stability of the oil-and-gas producing country that hosts western military forces.

WAM described the vote as unanimous among the rulers of the country's sheikhdoms, which also includes the city of Dubai.

"We congratulate him, and we pledge allegiance to him, and our people pledge allegiance to him," Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, tweeted after the vote.

"The whole country is led by him to take it on the paths of glory and honour, God willing."

The UAE as a whole is observing a three-day mourning period, with businesses shut across the country and performances halted in Khalifa's honour. Electronic billboards all showed the late sheikh's image in Dubai on Friday night as flags flew at half-mast.

Mohammed, 61, had been serving as the UAE's de facto president since a 2014 stroke led his half-brother, Khalifa, to disappear from public view. Under his leadership, the UAE took on a more military focused approach, joining Saudi Arabia in its bloody, years-long war in Yemen that still rages.

Mohammed has been suspicious of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran, likely organising a campaign targeting Islamists in the UAE after the 2011 Arab spring and urging the west to take a harder line toward Tehran over concerns about its nuclear programme and its support of paramilitary groups throughout the region.

However, since the coronavirus pandemic the UAE under Mohammed sought to rehabilitate ties to Iran and Turkey, which has backed Islamists in the region.



Forgotten Feminists

www.freeheartsfreeminds.com

JULY 9

In a series of conversations called Forgotten Feminists, I interview women who I find to be inspiring. Feminists who should be celebrated, but who are-unfortunately-forgotten, as they do not fit a desired narrative.

Our next guest will be Samira

Samira is half Arab, half Danish, however growing up the cultural and religious values of her father were way stronger than her Danish side. When she became a teenager, the conflict between her two cultures caused a lot of turmoil and confusion for many years. She eventually felt the only way to free herself from the dichotomy was to leave Islam. But the break was a painful one. Her family disowned her for her choice to liberate herself and she missed her dad and her siblings. After a tragic loss of my first husband (an American non Muslim), she went back to her family with her 4 year old daughter. She was so devastated from the loss of her love that she decided to convert back to Islam and marry her cousin. Her second marriage was a disaster. Life under such strict rules was hell. After two years she left with both her kids, took off her hijab, and never looked back. But living under suppressed rules for so long had left an impact. At first after leaving Islam she was in no man's land. She felt ashamed for showing my hair and wearing normal clothes. There are so many long, difficult, and lonely phases to leaving Islam. So much rebuilding that needs to happen- especially for women. Samira and I will talk about all those challenges and offer advice for other women starting on their journey to freedom.

Join us on July 9th 4pm UTC to meet Samira, hear her story, and share your perspective.

