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## 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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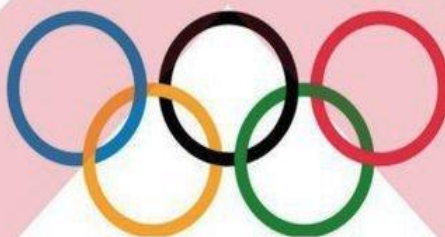
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STAND WITH HONG KONG

STAND WITH UYGHURS



***BEIJING 2022***



**BOYCOTT BEIJING  
WINTER OLYMPICS**

*Say no to concentration camps in China*

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

## Editorial: Sir David Amess

By Arthur Tane  
TCMER Executive Director



Sir David Amess, a member of British Parliament who was stabbed to death at a constituency meeting on October 15, was known as a strong supporter of Israel and advocate for Holocaust remembrance.

In one of his most notable acts as an MP, Amess, 69, pushed for the funding of a statue in London of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. Speaking during the House of Commons Holocaust Remembrance debate in January, Amess called the unveiling of the statue outside the Western Marble Arch Synagogue in 1997 by Queen Elizabeth II and Israeli President Ezer Weizman “one of the proudest moments of my life.”

“Although I myself am not a Jew but a Catholic, there is Jewish blood in each and every one of us. I would certainly have been proud to have been born a Jew, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with our local Jewish community,” Amess said. “I simply do not understand and have never understood anti-Semitism. The most important lesson from the holocaust is that although we cannot police the world, it is simply not acceptable to stand by and do and say nothing when genocide happens.”

Amess, who also said he planted a tree at Yad Vashem during a visit to Israel, was a longtime member of the Conservatives Friends of Israel, a parliamentary group aligned with the Conservative Party, serving as the group’s parliamentarian for many years. In a statement, CFI called Amess “a hugely popular and respected MP and a great friend of Israel.”

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid echoed the sentiment on Twitter, writing “he always stood with the Jewish community and was a true friend of Israel.”

Ali Harbi Ali, a refugee from Somalia, is being held after stabbing Sir David 17 times with a knife on Friday lunchtime, after attending Friday prayers at the local mosque. Ali

began planning to kill two other lawmakers two years ago, ended up targeting Amess because he supported airstrikes in Syria

A social conservative on the right of his party, Amess was a well-liked personality with a reputation for working hard for his constituents. He was also a trenchant critic of the ayatollahs' regime in Iran.

Mark Francois, Conservative MP for Rayleigh and Wickford who was mentored by Sir David Amess when he first arrived in Parliament, said Facebook and Twitter should be compelled by law to "drain the swamp" if they did not change their own rules voluntarily.

During House of Commons tributes to Sir David, Mr Francois said: "If the social media companies don't want to help us drain the Twitter swamp, then let's compel them to do it by law because they've had more than enough chances to do it voluntarily."

He said Facebook and Twitter chiefs Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey should be "dragged" to the bar of the House of Commons – "if necessary kicking and screaming so they can look us all in the eye and account for their actions or rather their inactions that make them even richer than they already are".

The MP added: "In the last few years David had become increasingly concerned about what he called the toxic environment in which MPs, particularly female MPs were having to operate in.

"So let's put, if I may be so presumptuous, David's Law onto the statute book, the essence of which would be that while people in public life must remain open to legitimate criticism, they can no longer be vilified or their families subject to the most horrendous abuse, especially from people who hide behind a cloak of anonymity with the connivance of the social media companies for profit."

The Online Safety Bill will compel social media firms to have a duty of care over users but it will not force them to ban anonymous accounts.



# One Year On: What Really Happened on November 3, 2020

By J. Christian Adams



After the last election, many of us hoped for a champion to undo voter fraud, that certain thing that drove President Donald Trump from office. A "Kraken." A powerful force of nature, a metaphor of strength, rising from the depths, restorative of truth and proper process. And unlike the Kraken of legend and Hollywood, a purported force of good.

Failure to understand the complex architecture and confusing events of the 2020 election makes it more likely that something like it will happen again. Indeed, the destabilizing forces at work in 2020 are emboldened by their success. The philanthropic streams of money that fuelled the 2020 outcome still exist. They are looking toward 2022 midterm elections to do it all over again.

That is why it is important to understand the complex mechanics that steered the outcome in 2020, so they do not happen again, so they do not further destabilize our political process.

Two ingredients drove the outcome in 2020: First, private philanthropy injected into government election offices and, second, a banana-republic style suspension of agreed-upon election rules. You didn't need much outright voter fraud when these two ingredients combined to poison the 2020 election.

First, ponder the private philanthropy. The most lethal poison injected in the 2020 election was essentially legal. It worked like this.

In the months before the 2020 elections, Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan donated hundreds of millions of dollars to the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL). Prior to Zuckerberg's largess, CTCL had an annual budget around \$600,000 per year. 2020 would be a very good year for them.

The CTCL took "ZuckBucks" and with extreme, strategic precision, re-granted it to thousands of government election officials to "help" them conduct the 2020 election. It

converted election offices in key jurisdictions with deep reservoirs of Biden votes into Formula One turnout-machines.

It is true that some small red counties got some CTCL money, but that was a fig leaf. Red counties took their grants and bought printers or paper. The real action was in the big cities, where hundreds of millions of dollars running through election offices fuelled a ground game that, before 2020, the Democratic Party could only dream about.

Consider Philadelphia. Philadelphia's annual election office budget was about \$9.5 million. The CTCL gave Philadelphia \$10 million in one burst in the summer of 2020 to spend by election day. And boy did Philadelphia spend the money. They hired new city employees - fresh from local activist groups - to go door to door and deliver ballots. Since they worked for the election office, everything was "legal." They bought radio advertising on Spanish and urban radio stations; "get out the vote, vote by mail, no need for any witnesses anymore!"

The government election office in Philadelphia used that \$10 million grant to implement a dream of some partisans: turn a government election office into a massive turnout machine.

But wait, isn't this illegal?

Who says so? For starters, you are free to be as stupid as you want and give the government your money. There is no prohibition on that, except in the states that have since banned it, but more on that later. Second, the Philadelphia government spending spree didn't mention the word Democrat. It didn't mention Biden. It didn't need to.

It's obvious. A facially impartial and hyper-funded campaign to turn out votes in Philadelphia, will end up turning out votes for Joe Biden, and that is precisely what happened. Neutral actions, wholly lacking any facial partisan taint, were hyper-fuelled with philanthropic dollars to turn out record numbers of voters in Philadelphia.

They just happened to nearly all vote for Joe Biden, and no matching effort was conducted in red counties. You could not convert dollars in sparsely populated counties into turnout machines the same way you could in concentrated urban cores.

And it wasn't just Philadelphia. It was the surrounding deep-blue counties of Delaware, Montgomery and Bucks. They also received massive CTCL grants. And it wasn't just eastern Pennsylvania. The same model was deployed in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Lansing, Milwaukee, Madison, Atlanta, Phoenix and urban cores across the USA.

By now you should be getting the picture. By now you can see their diabolical genius.

Understanding this architecture explains so many other parts of the 2020 election. For example, it explains the urban turnout explosion. Trump had unprecedented support among black voters. But so what? Trump's 15% of the black vote in Detroit was swamped in absolute terms because turnout there soared by 92,891 votes. Trump even had 20% of the black vote in Atlanta but overall DeKalb's turnout soared by 54,550 votes - 80% were opposed.

The more urban turnout, the bigger the Biden win.

This also explains the record number of under votes. City employees in Philadelphia delivering ballots to be voted at the front door didn't have time to worry about down-ballot races. Who cares about dogcatcher when you have a bigger mission? That is

precisely why under votes were so common in places where CTCL money was saturating the ground game. Get the oval next to "Biden" filled in, move on to the next front door, repeat, all of it perfectly legal.

The CTCL money did not fund voting integrity systems. It only funded a massive ground game to harvest blue ballots. It built processes to get those ballots distributed in urban cores, voted, and back in to be counted.

Mission accomplished. CTCL fuelled a ground game that got the result it set out to get. And who are you to complain, after all, because it was rooted in increasing urban turnout. You wouldn't dare complain about increased turnout, would you? The plan had the side benefit of silencing critics.

Did this plan go unnoticed? A few of us noticed this architecture spooling up in the spring, and warned about it. But most of the country was focused elsewhere, including the campaign. It is disappointing to have seen it coming. Now, after the fact, some states are fixing the problem and banning private money to government election offices.

They should ban it. Florida, Texas, Arizona, Georgia and Iowa have prohibited election offices from receiving private money. In the old days, we might refer to this sort of behaviour as bribery of government officials. The CTCL attached strings to their grants: that is the problem.

Now the second big ingredient that completes the architecture that explains the outcome of the 2020 elections: banana-republic style suspension of the rules based on COVID.

All across America, leftists and Democrats - some of the same leftists who helped cook up the Zuckbucks scheme - were suing states to break down rules and laws.

Remember, election laws are enacted ahead of time for a reason - so we can all agree on the rules before the game. In Monopoly, the price of Boardwalk shouldn't drop below \$400 just because I land on it and want it for \$20. Following rules provides confidence that the process was fair, even to the losers of an election.

That did not happen in 2020, and all across the nation, especially in swing states, the rules were thrown out in the name of an emergency. In Nevada, the state rushed to all of the mail-in ballots being sent automatically, even though the Public Interest Legal Foundation had documented tens of thousands of dead registrants, vacant lots and commercial addresses on the voter rolls.

Other states suspended their laws: Virginia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, New Mexico, Colorado, Minnesota, Arizona, North Carolina, and more.

In Virginia, the law said that mail ballots had to come in by election day or three days after election day, but only if they were postmarked by election day. Virginia state election officials ignored the law and issued rules to accept late ballots without any postmark. They called it "fair."

In response, I brought a lawsuit on behalf of county election officials who alleged that the Virginia Constitution's anti-suspension clause was violated. George Mason authored this limit on government power, saying that the executive cannot change the laws the legislature wrote. That one of our nation's founders included such a provision speaks to the wisdom of those giants from over two centuries ago.

A Virginia court struck down the bureaucrat's guidance and ordered that any late ballots had to have a postmark. In other states, the outcomes were not so positive. State and federal courts across the country were quick to capitulate to suspensions of election laws because of COVID.

In Philadelphia, these two ingredients – Zuckbucks and banana-republic style lawlessness, combined over and over again. COVID litigation forced the city to open new voting centers where people could roll in and vote with mail-in ballots in contravention of regular Pennsylvania law. Guess who helped pay for this new expense: That's right – Zuckbucks. But because the new centers were not part of the law, observers were not allowed in to watch, as they are in normal voting precincts. Because the voting centers were created on the COVID fly, election officials did what they pleased, and banned everyone from observing the process.

Across the country, states abandoned rules related to witnesses' signatures, to who can vote by mail, and to what has to be done to validate a mail ballot. City employees roamed door to door with armfuls of blank ballots, knocking and pushing people at home to vote in a process entirely foreign to state laws. Ballots were collected and delivered by others who had been strictly banned from touching someone else's ballot before COVID. Over and over, the rules broke down.

Let me be clear, there was voter fraud in 2020. But this time, it was bigger than voter fraud. This time, it moved hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of votes. In no election in my experience has voter fraud ever moved that many votes. This toxic 2020 plan was bigger, and more stealthy – and largely legal. After all, how is it illegal if the Pennsylvania Supreme Court orders it?

Most of all, it requires you to get smart about how election process works to begin to understand it.

Airplane accidents rarely have one cause. Usually a series of failures combine to create a catastrophe. Without one, the catastrophe does not occur.

The 2020 election was similar. Alone, all of the COVID changes might not have collapsed the process. But COVID-justified suspensions of the rules were matched with a \$350 million-dollar ground game from a partisan philanthropist. These dollars fuelled the bodies that rushed into the legal gaps created by COVID. The two ingredients combined to break down all of the guardrails.

The election of 2020 was, in fact, a free for all. You did not need voting machines controlled from outer space, or a centralized conspiracy to commit voter fraud, to get the outcome we got. You do not need fraud when you have almost 100,000 new voters turning out in Detroit. A billionaire and a banana-republic style breakdown of the law can go a long way to driving someone out of the White House.

*J. Christian Adams is President of the Public Interest Legal Foundation and a former attorney in the United States Justice Department Voting Section. President Trump appointed him to both his commission on election integrity and to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, where he continues to serve.*

## Two decades on, the West's cultural fault line exposed by 9/11 remains

By Melanie Phillips



For the West, there are no “forever wars.” Its wars are either won or lost; there are victors and vanquished. For Islamic extremists, war is indeed forever; defeat is only temporary.

Few of us, if any, will ever forget those terrible images of the 9/11 attacks on America. Twenty years on, it's painfully clear that many Westerners still don't grasp the full nature and scope of what they witnessed when the twin towers of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan fell.

On that dreadful day, the West was brought face to face with the fundamentalist strain dominant in the Islamic world. This involves the promotion of jihad, or holy war, against the non-Islamic world and those Muslims who the fundamentalists think aren't Islamic enough.

The West, particularly Britain and America, had mostly ignored the fact that this war had already been under way against itself for at least a decade.

In the 1980s, Western-backed mujahideen ran the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. The British and Americans ignored warnings that those fighters were Islamic fundamentalists who would now be galvanized to follow their defeat of the Soviet empire by attempting to defeat what they saw as the Western one. The rise of Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks were the result.

But the West had also ignored the mounting evidence of a cultural onslaught against it that had been waged by both Sunni and Shia Islam for years.

Britain seemed oblivious to the fact that, during the 1980s, Muslim immigrants had brought with them institutions dominated by the fundamentalist Wahhabi strain of Islam that had been imported into Pakistan and Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia. With a

growing domestic constituency of fundamentalists who were being either ignored or indulged, Britain was sleepwalking into Islamization.

In 1989, the British writer Salman Rushdie was sentenced to death by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, for insulting Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. He was forced to live in hiding for years, with his book publicly burned on British streets.

Yet few grasped that this was far more than an attack on a writer. It was an attempt to force the West to submit to Islamic values. And the emergence of the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran itself galvanized in turn the Sunni world to jihad.

After 9/11, however, the West told itself that jihadi fundamentalism was a "perversion" of Islam. This is dishonest. While many Western Muslims endorse human rights and deplore the atrocities perpetrated in the name of their religion, jihadi excesses are nevertheless rooted solidly in Islamic religious texts. Sept. 11 was an act of Islamic holy war.

Those who cannot even bring themselves to name the enemy that is waging war upon them will be defeated by it. That's why the claim of "Islamophobia" is so troubling.

For while real prejudice against Muslims is wrong, "Islamophobia" was invented by the holy warriors of the Muslim Brotherhood to silence any adverse comment of Islam. It was a religious obligation to impose a Muslim law of blasphemy. By enlisting against "Islamophobia," the West has effectively bent its knee to Islam—whose very name means submission.

Even today, Britain has not outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, ignoring the way its sponsorship of myriad groups and institutions has embedded the jihad into British and Western society.

In 2004, *The Washington Post* reported that American Muslim Brotherhood supporters made up "the US Islamic community's most organized force" by running hundreds of mosques and business ventures, promoting civic activities and setting up organizations to promote Islam.

Yet documents unearthed during the Holy Land Foundation trial in 2007 alleged that the Muslim Brotherhood in America was involved in weapons training, counter-espionage against the FBI and CIA, and "eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within."

No less perversely, the West has continually denied that the Arab and Muslim war against Israel is rooted in Islamic holy war (a blindness shared by Israel itself, which chooses to deal with this war of annihilation on more manageable nationalistic rather than religious grounds). It has similarly ignored the anti-Semitism that courses through the Islamic world, even though leading Islamists have acknowledged that their fear and hatred of the Jews lie behind their war on the West and modernity.

The 9/11 terror attacks didn't just reveal the West's blindness over Islamization. They also exposed its cultural and civilizational fault line that had been opening up since early in the 20th century.

British isolationism is rooted in the carnage of the First World War. In America, the avoidance of what Thomas Jefferson called "entangling alliances" goes back to the founding fathers.

Appeasement-minded Britain and America woke up to the threat from Hitler almost too late—and too late to prevent the Holocaust.

But after the Second World War, Western elites persuaded themselves they could actually abolish war itself. Economic ties would avoid it, international law would prevent genocide, and war itself would be replaced by negotiation and “peace processes.”

For a while, 9/11 punctured this lethal fantasy, resulting in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to suppress their incubation of Islamic terror.

In both places, however, the West was unable and unwilling to stay the course. Public rage at the junking of the “never war” fantasy was hugely compounded by the West’s strategic error in believing that invading these countries and then helping them become democratic societies would draw their terrorist sting.

The seriousness of the resulting mistakes in Iraq, in particular, seemed to confirm the influential view, in a West that had lost its belief in itself, that this arrogant and imperialistic culture had no right to tell others how to behave.

So the West failed to see that while the execution of these wars may have been deeply flawed, the necessity to defend itself against a deadly foe was all too real and had not gone away.

This loss of cultural self-belief had many causes. Secularism had eroded the biblical foundations of the West. The carnage of World War I destroyed the belief in dying for your country.

Most devastatingly of all, the Holocaust passed a shattering judgment against modernity. So in the repudiation of its foundational beliefs, the West arrived at precisely the same point as the Islamic jihadists.

Of course, Westerners never saw any similarity between themselves and Islamists locked into the seventh century and whom it dismissed as incomprehensible, crazy and worthless.

But in a mirror image, the West was busily severing the connection with its own historic values. This was compounded by an arrogant assumption that Western attitudes were universal.

The West tried to impose its utopian, post-modern belief in negotiation and compromise upon a Middle East and Islamic world that saw conflict solely in terms of victory and defeat, strength and weakness.

And so the West has continued to repeat its fiascos by indulging in the same fantasies that it will end the “forever wars”—whether through the Israel-Palestine “peace process,” the Iran nuclear deal or abandoning Afghanistan, where both British and American governments are now spinning themselves the fantasy that Taliban “realists” will keep the Taliban jihadists in check.

For Islamists, war is indeed forever. For such fanatics, defeat is only ever temporary.

For the West, however, there are no “forever wars.” Its wars are either won or lost; there are victors and vanquished.

And military strength matters less than belief. The 9/11 attackers didn't use sophisticated military hardware. They hijacked civilian aircraft and turned them into flying human bombs of enormous destructive potential.

What fuels the jihad is the power of an idea. That idea is the cult of death.

To overcome a cult of death, the West needs a belief in life. Its own life. That is the way to draw the necessary courage and resolve from this most somber anniversary; but alas, it seems the most difficult of lessons to learn.

*Melanie Phillips, a British journalist, broadcaster is currently a columnist for "The Times of London," her personal and political memoir, "Guardian Angel," has been published by Bombardier, which also published her first novel, "The Legacy."*



## "Back to Pre-9/11. But It's Worse"

By Guy Milliere



The election of President Joe Biden under extremely questionable conditions was hugely welcomed by many in America and Europe.... The leaders of countries that are the enemies of the United States seemed even more delighted. Iran's then President Hassan Rouhani said on November 5, 2020: "The next US administration will surrender to the Iranian nation". (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

September 11, 2001 was the first time the United States had been attacked on its mainland since 1812. Nearly 3,000 people were killed. Americans reacted with determination. American flags were soon everywhere. The idea that the attacks should not go unpunished seemed unanimous. It was promptly proven that the attack came from al-Qaeda; on October 7, the US military started to crush the rear bases of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the Taliban who housed them.

Twenty years later, the situation is on its head. Solemn commemorations were held in Washington, Shanksville and New York, but anxiety and anger pervaded the atmosphere of the country. US President Joe Biden attended the commemorations but did not speak. Instead, he released a videotaped speech in which he said he would hunt down "those seeking to do harm to America" and make them pay. These words, to many people, seemed hopelessly out of touch. The United States had just surrendered Afghanistan without even an attempt at resistance in an atmosphere of chaos, duplicity and defeat. The Taliban are in power again, and al-Qaeda - intermarried and effectively interchangeable with them - at their side.

How an American administration could give the power back to the same enemy - offering victory to Islamic terrorism and inflicting on the United States an unprecedented humiliation - requires understanding what has happened in the US since 9/11: a relentless work of undermining the United States to erode and destroy its power, and its will to defend itself and victoriously fight its enemies.

President George W. Bush set his goals quickly after the 2001 attack. As early as September 14, he said: "Our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil." Three days later, on September 17, he spoke of the terrorists:

"We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century.... [B]y abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism... The advance of human freedom – the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us... We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail".

Bush spoke of a "war on terror": "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there." "Every nation," he added on September 20, "in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

Almost immediately, the unanimity that seemed to exist began to break down. On September 24, a liberal magazine, *The New Yorker*, published a series of reactions to the attack written by supposed intellectuals. Most expressed reservations about the reaction that had taken shape. A political activist, Susan Sontag, hinted that the attack was probably the fault of the United States: "this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed super-power, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions". Hostility to President Bush, to freedom, and to the will to wage war began to take shape. The rest of the Western world followed a similar path. The leaders of several countries in Europe said they supported the United States, but many seemed lacking in firmness.

On January 29, 2002, President Bush, in his State of the Union address, referred to an "axis of evil", and cited three countries: North Korea, Iran and Iraq. On October 7, in a speech on Iraq, he explained in detail the many crimes committed by the Iraq's president at the time, Saddam Hussein, and stated that the US was considering war if Saddam Hussein did not choose to declare and destroy "all of its weapons of mass destruction", "end its support for terrorism", and "cease the persecution of its civilian population".

The notion of an "axis of evil" was swiftly declared "simplistic and dangerous" by various commentators; and throughout 2002, the hostility of many in America and abroad in the Western world towards Bush's policy grew stronger. It became even more pronounced after President Bush's speech on Iraq. Two European prime ministers continued firmly to support the United States: Britain's Tony Blair and Spain's Jose Maria Aznar, but French President Jacques Chirac, who had long term financial links with Saddam Hussein, opposed the war, tried to save the Iraqi dictatorship, and brought behind him Germany and most of the rest of Europe.

Saddam Hussein chose not to comply, and in 2003, in a matter of weeks, the war was over. Islamists, however, had come to Iraq from all over the Muslim world to fight "the infidels," wage holy war, kill and die, and an insurgency started that lasted until a US troop surge in 2007. By 2008, Iraq was stabilized, but what the late journalist Charles Krauthammer called the "Bush derangement syndrome" - which he defined as "the acute onset of paranoia in otherwise normal people in reaction to the policies, the presidency — nay — the very existence of George W. Bush " - began to emerge.

Relentless, frenzied protests swept across the United States and Western Europe. Protesters held up signs comparing Bush to Hitler and declaring him the worst terrorist on earth. Books were published accusing Bush of war crimes. A propaganda film by filmmaker Michael Moore, based entirely on conspiracy theories alleging Bush family ties to the Bin Ladens and Saudi royals, received the Cannes Film Festival's 2004 Palme d'Or and enjoyed worldwide success. The film left out all the crimes committed by Saddam Hussein. That he had exterminated dozens of thousands of Kurds with chemical weapons a few years before 2001, and his other crimes against humanity, apparently did not matter, and Saddam Hussein was described as someone who had never possessed weapons. Although Bush said from the start that he was not waging war on Islam, he was accused of it anyhow. That Islamic terrorism was still a clear and present danger, and that eliminating terrorists could be a good thing, was ignored. Instead, Bush was accused of creating terrorists. During Bush's presidency, no further terrorist attacks in the Western world took place - a situation that was also ignored. For millions of Americans and Europeans, from 2003 to 2008, the only monster on the planet, and the only danger to eliminate, was President George W. Bush.

This was the context for the election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008. Obama had described himself during the election campaign as a redeemer: the embodiment of "hope" and "change". Three months before the election, in July 2008, he had visited Germany, where he promised to "finally bring this war to a close". His past as a community organizer was considered by most journalists a positive quality. After a triumphant election, he at once asked his administration to stop speaking of the "war on terror", and instead to use the watered-down expression, "overseas contingency operations". He never spoke of "terrorists" and replaced the word with "violent extremists".

On May 21, 2009, he rejected the entire foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. "We went off course," Obama said, and promised to take the country in another direction. On June 4, in Cairo, he delivered a speech praising Islam and criticizing the United States.

Regarding Afghanistan, which he called "the good war," as opposed to Iraq's, Obama imposed the most restrictive rules of engagement on the US military, a decision that resulted in the deaths of many US soldiers. In 2011, Obama supported the seizure of power in Tunisia and Egypt by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization defined even by some Muslim countries as terrorist. He withdrew America's combat troops from Iraq, with the result that al-Qaeda, which had been destroyed under George W. Bush, was reborn under another name: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS proceeded to conquer a vast territory which, thirteen years after the destruction of Al-Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan, became a new center for Islamic terrorism and a source of inspiration for Islamic terrorists worldwide. Islamic attacks, which had virtually disappeared during the presidency of George W. Bush, reappeared. The years 2015-2016 were marked by a grisly wave of them throughout Western Europe and the United States.

Obama developed and approved the signing in July 2015 of the Iran nuclear deal. Although it was sold to the public as preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, it in fact did just the opposite and did not prevent Iran from pursuing its quest for nuclear weapons. Iran also received from the Obama administration billions of dollars which the mullahs quickly used to fund various Islamic terrorist organizations, thereby

making Iran the world's leading financier of international Islamic terrorism. Although Obama did eliminate Osama bin Laden, the assassination did not curb the spread of Islamic terrorism taking place at the time.

The press and the public in the West treated Obama as if he were an idol. Although many bloody attacks took place in Western Europe during his presidency - and although Western Europe suffered heavily from the creation of ISIS and the disorders created throughout the Muslim world during his term (more than a million migrants burst into Europe in 2015-2016) - the leaders of Western Europe did not stop praising him.

For many in America and Western Europe, the election President Donald J. Trump came as a shock. Although Trump had defined the war in Iraq as a "terrible mistake" and had criticized George W. Bush, he was and still is subjected to continuous demonization from the press, the media, social media, the CIA, the FBI, the IRS, the Department of Justice even more hostile than that undergone by President George W. Bush.

Trump, during his campaign, used two expressions borrowed from Ronald Reagan: "Make America great again" and "Peace through strength" - revealing that the direction he intended to follow was not at all the same as Obama's. It was clear that he would fight Islamic terrorism. Trump destroyed ISIS, eliminated its head, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, suffocated the Iranian regime economically to deprive it of being able to finance terrorism. He peace in the Middle East spectacularly, as none of his predecessors had, with the Abraham Accords, signed at the White House on September 15, 2020. No major Islamic terrorist attack occurred under his presidency. Yet, to this day, many in America and the rest of the West continue to pour out intense hatred against him. Western European leaders continue to criticize him and portray him as uncouth.

The election of President Joe Biden under extremely conditions was hugely welcomed by many in America and Europe. Biden was widely described as embodying the return to "professionalism" and "seriousness" after four supposedly horrible years. The leaders of countries that are the enemies of the United States seemed even more delighted. Iran's then President Hassan Rouhani said on November 5, 2020: "The next US administration will surrender to the Iranian nation". Communist China's President Xi Jinping said nothing but instantly stepped up military provocations against Taiwan and Australia, India, the Philippines and Japan.

From the first days of its existence, the Biden administration spoke of terrorism, but seemingly to refer only to "white supremacy" and "domestic terrorism" - evidently meaning Republicans and other Americans who had voted for Trump. Concessions to Islamic terrorism quickly followed. On February 12, the Houthi militia was removed from the Department of State list of terrorist organizations and started to receive US humanitarian aid. A few weeks later, their attacks on Saudi Arabia resumed. On February 18, the UN sanctions on Iran reinstated by Trump were rescinded, and economic sanctions partially lifted. Iran could now deliver missiles to Hamas, which used them in May to launch a attack on Israel.

The Afghan disaster was put in place. The Biden administration, unlike the Trump administration, had shown the Taliban and al-Qaeda that they had nothing to fear. The American media and the rest of the Western world hardly commented on the deceitful, catastrophic and deadly way the United States surrendered Afghanistan. A few former

Obama officials criticized Biden. An editorial of the French newspaper *Le Monde* spoke with joy of the "long list of humiliations suffered by the United States".

Several European leaders said they feared a return of Islamic terrorism to Europe, and started to react as most European leaders have reacted for decades: by trying to appease those who threaten their countries. On September 14, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said, "to have any chance of influencing events, we have no other option but to engage with the Taliban." The Biden administration appears to want to do the same. On September 3, it began funding "humanitarian aid programs" in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. On September 9, White House press secretary Jen Psaki praised the Taliban as "businesslike and professional".

Other members of Congress and political analysts hold a different view of the situation. "We're going back to pre-9/11 right now," Representative Michael McCaul, ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee said on September 12, "but it's worse, it's worse because now they're [the Taliban] fully armed with our weapons, our helicopters and pallets of our cash".

Former Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe said:

"I hope that it's just something that has an impact for decades, I hope it's not centuries; it's the most profound loss for the United States, certainly in our lifetime... this most recent, most painful, colossal, epic failure in Afghanistan has literally breathed life into the radical Islamic terrorist movement, not just in Afghanistan, but around the world. "

Former President George W. Bush now speaks differently from how he spoke during his presidency. He is now using the same words as Obama to designate terrorists - "violent extremists" - and has been tracing an equivalence, no matter how false, between "violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home".

Meanwhile, the only person under investigation for the completely avoidable strategic failure of America's surrender to the Taliban in Afghanistan is decorated US Marine officer, Lt. Col. Stuart Scheller, currently in the Marine Corps brig at Camp Lejeune, for violating a "gag order" to bar him from asking senior leaders for accountability.

The author and former Black Panther, David Horowitz, asked:

"What do you call a party that treats 81 million unvaccinated Americans as domestic enemies.... but allows hundreds of thousands of unvetted illegal migrants... to cross U.S. borders and be flown into the heartland by the United States Air Force? And once there - to get free medical care, welfare payments, and education?..."

"What do you call a party whose leaders require all of America's soldiers to undergo indoctrination in an ideology that calls for the 'dismantling' of America and tells them that their oath to defend the Constitution is an oath to defend a document that codifies 'white supremacy'?..."

"You call it treason."

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

# Biden's Afghanistan Withdrawal Unleashes a Lethal Terrorist Cocktail

By Richard Kemp



Despite their promises to deny terrorists safe haven, the Taliban will do the opposite. They and Al Qaida are joined at the hip, with both Osama Bin Laden and his successor Ayman Al Zawahiri having sworn unbreakable allegiance, *bay'ah*, to the leaders of the Taliban. Pictured: Bin Laden (center) and Al Zawahiri (left) address a press conference May 26, 1998 in Afghanistan. (Photo by Getty Images)

Twenty five year-old Ali Harbi Ali has been arrested on suspicion of the murder last week of British Member of Parliament Sir David Amess in a church in Essex. Ali is a member of a well-to-do Somali family who were given refuge in Britain from the war-torn East African country in the 1990s. British authorities had previously been alerted to his radicalisation and he was referred to the UK's "Prevent" anti-terrorist scheme.

The precise reason for his alleged attack on this particular MP, which he has reportedly admitted, has not yet been established but it is thought he may have been influenced by Al Shabaab, an Al Qaida group that operates in Somalia and Kenya.

Last month, the head of Britain's security service MI5, Ken McCallum, warned there was no doubt the Taliban victory in Afghanistan this summer has "heartened and emboldened" jihadists everywhere.

It may be that the murder in Essex was the first successful terrorist attack in Britain inspired by the consequences of US President Joe Biden's catastrophic decision to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan. Amess's savage knifing follows jihadist attacks in Norway that killed five and wounded three last week and another in New Zealand in September that wounded five.

Jihadists around the world celebrated the vanquishment of the West following the Taliban seizure of power in Kabul. Not only has this re-energised terrorist cells but it will also lead to an increase in recruiting and a funding boost from jihadist supporters. Prior to Biden's withdrawal, Al Qaida had been at a low point in their fortunes, following decimation by US drone strikes in the Pakistan tribal areas, catastrophic setbacks in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, the killing of Osama Bin Laden and the rise of the Islamic State. Their international prestige among fellow jihadists has now been

boosted as they share in the glory of the Taliban's success — in which they played a part.

Al Qaida, the Islamic State and other jihadist networks will capitalise on the climacterical success of their global movement, directing and inspiring attacks around the world, emulating IS at the height of its powers in Syria and Iraq, radicalising thousands and inspiring knife, vehicle-ramming, explosive and gun attacks in many countries.

A deeply grim prospect — but this widespread inspiration of terrorism will not be the most serious terrorist consequence of the withdrawal. We will see jihadists flowing into Afghanistan to join up with terrorists there, as they did in the years before 9/11. They will train, organize, establish global connections, plan attacks and receive direction and funding from the leadership. Despite their promises to deny terrorists safe haven, the Taliban will do the opposite. They and Al Qaida are joined at the hip, with both Bin Laden and his successor Ayman Al Zawahiri having sworn unbreakable allegiance, *bay'ah*, to the leaders of the Taliban.

The Islamic State's Khorosan branch, with several thousand fighters in Afghanistan, will pose a similar threat. Many political leaders in the US and UK claim the Taliban are sworn enemies of the IS, with some even suggesting that we might form an alliance against IS with Taliban terrorists. But this abhorrent proposition is merely an attempt to help limit the political fall-out from their ill-judged actions that facilitated the Taliban's conquest. The reality is that the Taliban and IS will sometimes kill each other and sometimes cooperate, a phenomenon beyond the comprehension of many commentators and politicians in the West, but a familiar pattern in the region. Ultimately, infidels and apostates are a common enemy whose destruction can unite adversaries in the face of almost any other ideological or practical clash.

The Taliban also are now more outward-facing in their jihadist ambitions. Before 2001 they were focused predominantly on Afghanistan. Today, after 20 years fighting Western forces and with many younger members who have greater international awareness, their eyes are also on the violent role they can play in establishing a global Islamic caliphate.

The resultant cocktail is even more lethal than before 9/11.

Today, all these actors know there is no prospect of further large-scale US intervention in the country, no matter how great their atrocities. The US remains capable of air strikes and even Special Forces raids against serious threats emanating from Afghanistan, but these require high-grade intelligence which, despite the powerful technical capabilities of the agencies, is extremely difficult to gain now that we have withdrawn all forces

The threat from Afghanistan is not to the West alone. There is also a grave risk to Russia and Central Asian countries and to the "apostate" Muslim countries especially in the Arab world. Pakistan and China, today the dominant external powers in Afghanistan, also fear terrorism emanating from the country. Pakistan has good reason to be worried, even though their intelligence services and army were the most effective backers of the Taliban — without whose support they could never have seized power in Kabul.

Following a crackdown on the Pakistan Taliban (TTP), which have long conducted a ruthless campaign against the Pakistan government, they took refuge in Afghanistan. As with jihadists around the world, the TTP will have been inspired by their jihadist bedfellows' success. It is also likely that the Taliban and a resurgent Al Qaida, which shares their ambition to bring down the government in Islamabad and has close links to them, will aid the campaign to do so. The prospect of a successful jihadist insurgency in Pakistan, with its nuclear arsenal, has been a long-standing concern for the US, which invested huge intelligence and military resources to help prevent it. Most of this capability was withdrawn with the exit from Afghanistan.

The Communist Chinese need have less concern about insurgency spilling across the border into neighbouring Xinjiang autonomous region. Like Pakistan, China supported the Taliban insurgency for many years. In return, the Taliban have frequently hunted down and killed many of the Uighur leaders — fellow Sunni Muslims — who took refuge in Afghanistan. Desperate for Beijing's funds and political backing, the Taliban can be relied on to do all they can to prevent any export of jihadism into China.

China will also seek to enlist the Taliban's support in curbing any further TTP attacks, as have previously occurred, against their people and projects in Pakistan, with whose government they are closely aligned. But we can expect no such efforts from Beijing to prevent terrorist actions against the West. On the contrary, as the new cold war intensifies, China is more than capable of using its increasing cooperation with the Taliban to enlist jihadists from Afghanistan as proxies against the US.

President Biden's withdrawal has not only brought darkness and mayhem to the people of Afghanistan and fatally undermined the strategic credibility of the West, it has also unleashed what may turn out to be the most dangerous terrorist threat the world has yet faced.

*Colonel Richard Kemp is a former British Army Commander. He was also head of the international terrorism team in the U.K. Cabinet Office and is now a writer and speaker on international and military affairs.*



## Biden's Afghanistan Mistakes

By Peter Schweizer



The details of the Biden administration's inner planning prior to the pullout from Afghanistan are beginning to emerge, and they are not comforting. "Failure is an orphan," as the old saying goes, but a paternity test is in order to explain a failed effort that will haunt the administration for years to come. Pictured: President Joe Biden (L) meets with his national security team on August 22, 2021 at the White House - Secretary of State Antony Blinken (R), Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin (3rd L), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley (4th L), National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan (2nd L), DNI Avril Haines and CIA Director William J. Burns. (Photo via Getty Images)

The details of the Biden administration's inner planning prior to the pullout from Afghanistan are beginning to emerge, and they are not comforting. "Failure is an orphan," as the old saying goes, but a paternity test is in order to explain a failed effort that will haunt the administration for years to come.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, appearing before congressional panel recently, tried to defend the rationale for the hasty withdrawal, claiming, "We made the right decision in ending America's longest war." This, of course, dodges the question of how the withdrawal was conducted.

There were extraordinary failures in intelligence assessments, stacked alongside conflicting agendas between the departments of State and Defense, the National Security Advisor, and the president's closest political minders. As is so often true of foreign affairs policy in the U.S., domestic political goals and campaign promises interfered with common sense and sound military planning. The price of incompetence was the deaths of 13 American servicemen and hundreds of Afghan civilians hoping to be rescued from vengeful Taliban gunmen.

There was also a misreading of our obligations under the Doha Agreement, signed with the Taliban in February 2020 by the Trump administration and cited by Biden as one reason his hands were tied in drawing down American forces in Afghanistan.

Biden campaigned on ending America's 20-year involvement in Afghanistan, and pledged in a national address, broadcast in April, that the last 2,500 troops would leave the country before the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. Most Democrats and even some Republicans welcomed his announcement. While Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said that "precipitously withdrawing US forces from Afghanistan is a grave mistake," his colleague Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) said, "I'm glad the troops are coming home." A few Senate Democrats, such as Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) also cautioned, "The U.S. has sacrificed too much to bring stability to Afghanistan to leave without verifiable assurances of a secure future."

Yet, while there was criticism of what the withdrawal would mean for the Afghans, no one expected the execution of it to be botched so badly. What led to the disaster?

One answer may be a fateful decision made by Blinken shortly after Biden's April announcement, when Blinken pledged to retain the full "diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian toolkit" to support the Afghan government, even after American forces left. The security of the U.S. embassy in Kabul was thereby made the priority. This had spill over effects on planners at both State and the DoD to protect the 4,000 American, foreign and Afghan staff during the drawdown. State and Defence officials settled on a plan to retain 650 troops to guard the embassy and secure Hamid Karzai International Airport, which the White House approved.

Yet in his opening statement before the House Foreign Affairs committee in September, Blinken asserted, "There's no evidence that staying longer would have made the Afghan security forces or the Afghan government any more resilient or self-sustaining," Blinken said. "If 20 years and hundreds of billions of dollars in support, equipment, and training did not suffice, why would another year, or five, or ten, make a difference?"

While Blinken's pledge back in April may have been an honourable gesture, he was either misinformed or overly optimistic about the stability of the U.S.-backed Afghan government. Either possibility made no sense given the worsening intelligence assessments at the time of the Taliban's ability to surround and threaten Kabul. Why did no one, in particular Joe Biden himself, challenge Blinken's rosy scenario for maintaining a functioning U.S. embassy in the face of obvious direct threats to it? Instead, this became the tent-pole around which the planners of the drawdown based their timeline and priorities. Blinken's statement to the House suggests he finally understands this.

Had Blinken's hopeful gesture been overruled, the withdrawal might instead have prioritized covering the removal of American citizens and Afghan civilians, under protection by sufficient U.S. military presence and air support from Bagram Air Base. As we now know, the loss of U.S. air support for the Afghan army led to the Taliban's military victory. Once intelligence reports finally caught up to the reality in the field, this should have led the decision makers to a complete re-think of how the drawdown was being conducted. Instead, the administration's senior leaders went along with the rushed schedule demanded by Biden, and Blinken's naïve attempt to maintain the embassy presence.

Then there is the Biden administration's claim to have been forced into its hasty withdrawal because of the Doha Agreement, negotiated by the Trump administration in 2020. Journalist and author Lee Smith has covered the conflict for several years.

Interviewed recently for the podcast of the Government Accountability Institute, Smith said that there was no chance the Taliban were ever *not* going to play host to terrorists like Al Qaeda once U.S. forces withdrew from Afghanistan. "The whole country is more or less ungovernable space, a place where no one will check on them and no one cares if they are there," he said.

Trump's Doha Agreement only bound the United States to "complete withdrawal of all remaining forces" with the "commitment and action" of the Taliban on its obligations, as laid out in the accord. Those terms bound the Taliban not to "allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qaeda, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies," as well as "not to cooperate with groups or individuals threatening the security of the United States and its allies," and to "prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies."

Even before the final assaults on Kabul and the suicide bombings at Hamid Karzai International Airport, it was clear the Taliban was neck-deep in a proxy relationship with al-Qaeda via its relationship with the Haqqani network. Once again, the information that should have led to a pause and a hard-nosed assessment of how to complete the withdrawal in an orderly, safe way was ignored to meet a political deadline.

Put together, these two failures have been enough to enrage not just those who believed our presence in Afghanistan should have continued, but those on the political Left and Right who supported getting out, provided it was done with dignity and left a stable government behind.

Instead, the Afghan men who helped the U.S., the women who breathed freedom for the first time, the military veterans from the U.S. and its allies who fought and died there all feel a sense of abandonment and frustration at this endgame incompetence. Those in the government who continue to hunt terrorist jihadis have lost their sources, bases of operation, and ability to quick-strike military targets that a resurgent al-Qaeda will now present there.

Author Lee Smith recently shared a comment from a journalist friend of his who is also a veteran of the Afghanistan War. His friend wrote him in frustration over the withdrawal and told him, "You don't spend two decades pumping trillions of dollars into a money pit and funding all manner of transparent fantasies one year at a time with no real continuity or long-range planning, then all of a sudden develop the ability as you're running out the door at half past midnight to make prudent decisions to secure your material interests."

*Peter Schweizer, President of the Governmental Accountability Institute, is a Gatestone Institute Distinguished Senior Fellow and author of the best-selling books Profiles in Corruption, Secret Empires and Clinton Cash, among others.*

# Accountability for Afghanistan

By Peter Hoekstra & John Shadegg



Near the top of the list of those who must be held accountable for America's debacle in Afghanistan are those individuals who hold Senate-confirmed positions. They were the architects of this disaster: Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left), Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (center), and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley (right). Together, these individuals either counselled the President that they would execute his direction effectively and safely, or they developed and implemented a strategy that they knew would not work. (Blinken photo by Jonathan Ernst/Pool/AFP via Getty Images); Austin & Milley photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

America has just experienced perhaps its greatest foreign policy debacle in modern history by surrendering to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The enemy that the U.S. held accountable for harbouring the al-Qaeda terrorist group that attacked us on 9/11 once again governs Afghanistan. The Taliban now holds the keys to whether, how, and when Americans left behind will be returned home safely. The question today is who will be held accountable for this debacle, a debacle in both strategy and execution.

There is really no debate about whether the exit plan from Afghanistan failed miserably. Americans left behind, our military equipment left behind, and the Taliban are victorious and now in power while our wartime allies were left blindsided and furious. We lost 13 U.S. service members along with nearly 200 Afghans killed. Who will be held accountable?

The disappointing fact is that there is a long and rich list of potential targets. It begins with President Joe "The Buck Stops Here" Biden as the obvious choice. The President bears ultimate responsibility for making the decisions that led to America's surrender and leaving our citizens behind. The President should be held accountable.

Also, near the top of the list of those who must be held accountable are those individuals who hold Senate-confirmed positions. They were the architects of this disaster: Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley. Together, these individuals either counselled the President that they would execute his direction effectively and safely,

or they developed and implemented a strategy that they knew would not work. Either scenario would demand that they also be held accountable.

There is broad bipartisan consensus that these four individuals bear much of the responsibility for recent events. Now is the opportunity for rational and cooler heads in Washington to demonstrate that Congress can respond appropriately to the tragic recent events. Here are our recommendations - a simple but effective and achievable proposal.

Holding the President accountable will be difficult. Congress has the tools — impeachment and censure — to hold a President accountable. The impeachments of Presidents Bill Clinton and Donald Trump were an overreach by those in Congress hell bent on attacking a sitting President. It was always clear that in those cases impeachment would fail, and to many that the actions of Clinton and Trump did not meet the test of treason, high crimes or misdemeanours. As in those cases, the most appropriate action at this time is use the censure process. Congress can and should send a definitive statement that President Biden's actions in regard to Afghanistan have been unacceptable. A censure would be a vote of disapproval of the President's actions in Afghanistan. As awful as Afghanistan has been, poor decision making does not legitimize the overturning of an election.

Blinken, Austin, and Milley should be held accountable and forced to resign from office. These three individuals do not carry an election mandate with them into their positions. Congress has the tools to formally remove them from office through impeachment, and they have other tools to achieve the same result. Simply by strongly stating that they have lost the confidence of the Congress, it would be obvious that they would have to leave their positions. Congress's real or threatened public shaming of Blinken, Austin, and Milley would be powerful leverage for getting them to do the right thing — resign.

Some may legitimately ask, what about Jake Sullivan, Susan Rice and others? In other attempts to hold people accountable (think recent impeachment actions) the efforts were seen as overreach. The results, partisan bickering and nothing happening. This is a responsible proposal, holding accountable those with an electoral mandate or Senate confirmation for their gross negligence and performance in this national disgrace. This makes a strong statement. The alternative is the path we already seem to be heading down, no one being held accountable.

The censure of the President, and three Cabinet members removed from office would send a clear message to the American people, our allies, and our enemies that we have recognized the serious errors that were made in Afghanistan. It would make clear that the decisions that were made are not the launch of a new Biden doctrine, but were serious miscalculations in American foreign policy. It also will send a clear message that Congress intends to exert its power as an independent branch of government to influence policy and exercise its War Powers. At this moment of weakness and vulnerability, this is the kind of signal of strength and resilience we need to send to our allies and enemies alike.

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

*John Shadegg is a former Representative in Congress, representing Arizona's 3rd Congressional District from 1995 until 2011.*

## **El Matari jailed for 7 years for preparing terrorist attacks in Australia**

**By Zara Dawood**  
**TCMER Board Member**



A radicalised ISIS member had plans to target Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral and the American embassy for terror attacks and 'to conquer' a rural town like Orange. The court heard El Matari planned to establish an Islamic State insurgency in Australia. El Matari admitted he was knowingly a member of the terrorist organization.

Isaac El Matari returned to Australia from Lebanon in June 2018 after serving nine months behind bars for attempting to join IS.

As he was monitored by authorities into 2019, he spoke with at least two associates about his plans to establish an IS insurgency in Australia, along with the potential importation of firearms.

El Matari received a maximum term of seven years and four months, with a non-parole period of five-and-a-half years.

He pleaded guilty to doing an act in preparation for a terrorist act and preparing to enter Afghanistan for the purpose of hostile activity, while also admitting he was knowingly a member of IS during the majority of 2019.

In a letter to a cellmate discovered a few months after his arrest in July 2019, El Matari continued to brag about his ability to facilitate the importation of firearms and other weapons, including suicide vests.

The judge found the offending was the result of social isolation, unmanaged mental health, susceptibility to influence, unhelpful peer associations, radicalised beliefs and a "romanticised perception" of living under delusional sharia law.

## Islamic Forum with Taliban cancelled

By Lina Zaidi  
TCMER Board Member

AFIC  
Australian Federation  
of Islamic Councils

TO BE LIVE STREAMED ON  
f LIVE AFICofficial

**THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF  
AFGHANISTAN  
AND DIASPORA MUSLIMS**

16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021 5.30 PM ADST  
UTC+11:00

Speakers:

Dr Rateb Jneid  
AFIC President

The Most Eminent  
Imam Abdul Quddoes Al Azhari  
National Grand Mufti of Australia

Br Zubair Sayed  
Islamic Council of  
Western Australia

Professor Mohamed Naqib Jan  
Professor of Law IJUM

Sheikh Sayed Abdul Basir Sabiri  
The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

Sheikh Sohail shaheen  
The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

AFIC has brought together a stellar panel of speakers for an online forum on the future of Afghanistan and our role regardless of whether we are in favour or against recent developments

An online forum that would have included two Taliban members has been cancelled after a backlash. The public backlash and government intervention has led the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils to cancel plans to host two members of the Taliban in an online forum for the Australian Muslim community.

Two top members of the Taliban have been invited to address Australian Muslims in a live webinar, sparking widespread Australian anger.

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils has organised a line-up of keynote guests to speak on October 16, which aims to discuss 'the future of Afghanistan and our role, regardless of whether we are in favour or against -recent developments'.

Speakers include long-time terrorist spokesman Suhail Shaheen and senior figure Sayed Abdul Basir Sabiri.

'This is absolutely appalling and it shouldn't happen,' 2GB breakfast host Ben Fordham fumed on his show on Thursday.

'The Taliban is being given the chance to brainwash young Muslims right here in Australia.'

Afghani refugees from the Hazara minority forced to flee the nation in the 1990s described the event as 'completely inappropriate.'

'To see faces like these on a prominent event like this is really traumatising,' says refugees advocate Sitarah Mohammadi. 'Our people have suffered so horrifically at their hands, and continue to do so to this day.'

Other speakers include AFIC president Rateb Jneid, National Grand Mufti of Australia Imam Abdul Quddoos Al Azhari will also be among the speakers and Islamic legal scholar Mohammad Naqib Jan.

The Afghanistan-Australian Advocacy Network (AAAN), along with prominent individuals and organisations in the Australian Muslim community condemned the panel for featuring members of the Taliban.

It released a statement saying that in the last two months, the Afghanistan-Australian community "had witnessed a constant flow of human rights abuses, and atrocities committed by the Taliban against family members, relatives, and community back home".

"For women and girl and vulnerable minority groups, we have seen the Taliban re-escalating their systemic discrimination and we've witnessed the oppression of Afghanistan's long-persecuted Hazara people," the statement said.

The AAAN also called on AFIC to withdraw the invitation to the members of the Taliban and to offer an unreserved apology to the Afghanistan-Australian community.

Arif Hussein from the Afghanistan-Australian Advocacy Network said there was "no justification for giving a public platform to members of the Taliban at a time when they continue to repress the rights of women and minorities such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan".

"This event clearly demonstrates a clear lack of judgment and empathy on AFIC's part."

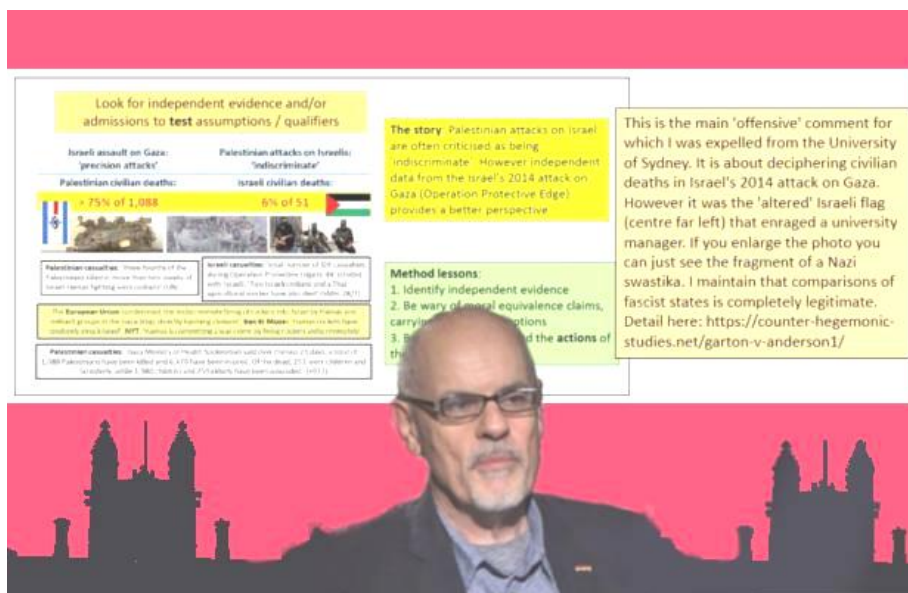
Mariam Veizsadeh from Islamophobia Register of Australia said it was "deeply shameful that AFIC thought it was appropriate to provide such a platform to the Taliban.

"It's just further proof that AFIC is out of step with Australian Muslims."



# Federal Court backs professor fired for swastika on Israeli flag

By Zara Dawood  
TCMER Board Member



A federal court judge initially ruled that Tim Anderson was not protected by the university's intellectual freedom clause because it “does not create any enforceable obligation.”

A former professor at the University of Sydney who was fired for superimposing a swastika on an Israeli flag garnered a victory in court after federal judges ruled in favour of the lecturer's intellectual freedom.

Tim Anderson, who was acquitted of planning the 1978 Hilton Hotel bombing in Sydney – that killed three and injured eleven – taught political economy at the university from 1998 until January 2019, when he was fired for publishing a lecture slide that included an infographic about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an Israeli flag with a swastika in the middle.

A federal court judge initially ruled that Anderson was not protected by the university's intellectual freedom clause because it “does not create any enforceable obligation.” However, after the National Tertiary Education Union and Anderson filed an appeal, three judges of the federal court overturned the decision.

Two of the appeal judges said the infographic was “an expression of a legitimate view, open to debate, about the relative morality of the actions of Israel and Palestinian people.”

Justices Jayne Jagot and Darryl Rangiargh argued that while the swastika flag image was “deeply offensive and insensitive to Jewish people” and could suggest a “false moral equivalence” comparing Israel to Nazi Germany, “the right [to intellectual freedom] would be meaningless if it is subject to qualifications such as not involving offence to others, not being discourteous to others, or not involving insensitivity to others.”

## **Berlin 1936. Beijing 2022. Must China's Uighurs play the role Jews did in Hitler Olympics?**

**By Ira Rifkin**



It should be evident to all paying attention that the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics will proceed as planned. Forget the meagre protests against China's cruel and immoral treatment of its own. The bad guys appear to be on the verge of another power-play victory.

Never mind the plight of China's Uighur Muslims, underground Christian churches, Tibetan Buddhists and all the other groups the Beijing government labels a political threat. They're of no lasting concern to the international elite who are quick to issue public condemnations, but oh so slow when it comes to follow up.

China's political power — a by-product of its enormous economic strength — is just too much to counter. And Beijing's despotic leaders darn well know it.

This recent Associated Press article — "Beijing Olympics open in 4 months; human rights talk absent" — underscores the point. These opening graphs summarize the story quite well. They're also a reminder of the efficacy of traditional wire journalism's inverted pyramid style. This piece of the story is long, but essential:

When the International Olympic Committee awarded Beijing the 2008 Summer Olympics, it promised the Games could improve human rights and civil liberties in China.

There is no such lofty talk this time with Beijing's 2022 Winter Olympics — the first city to host both the Summer and Winter Games — opening in just four months on Feb. 4.

Instead, there are some calls for governments to boycott the Games with 3,000 athletes, sponsors and broadcasters being lobbied by rights groups representing minorities across China.

IOC President Thomas Bach has repeatedly dodged questions about the propriety of holding the Games in China despite evidence of alleged genocide, vast surveillance, and crimes against humanity involving at least 1 million Uyghurs and other largely Muslim minorities. Tibet, a flashpoint in the run up to 2008, remains one still.

“The big difference between the two Beijing Games is that in 2008 Beijing tried to please the world,” Xu Guoqi, a historian at the University of Hong Kong, said in an email to The Associated Press. “In 2022, it does not really care about what the rest of the world thinks about it.”

An expert on Chinese sports and the Olympics, Xu said Beijing in 2008 attempted to placate “world opinion.” “Now it tries its best to tell the world its intentions. If the world does not listen, so be it,” Xu wrote.

Xi Jinping is now the powerful general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, but in 2008 he was in charge of running the Olympics.

The Beijing situation is loaded with news pegs.

For Olympic officials and aficionados this includes the possibility that should the games be pulled from Beijing at this relatively late date it could mean the collapse of the international Olympics movement.

That’s because as the games become ever more expensive to stage — and as citizen complaints in democratic nations about costs and inconvenience become louder — fewer cities are trying to land them. And that means that the Olympics are increasingly becoming the kind of circus that only authoritarian governments, answering only to themselves, are willing to stage. This is not a good look that will only increase the pressure on democratic nations and their athletes not to participate.

For others, Jews in particular, there is also this news peg — comparing Beijing 2022 to Berlin 1936.

I’ve noted the Berlin analogy previously in passing. The first time I did was in this 2019 post.

Moment, a monthly Jewish magazine based in Washington, D.C., (it updates online more frequently), takes on the Beijing-Berlin connection in its current edition. The piece, by former NPR religion reporter Tom Gjelten, is quite well done. It’s loaded with pertinent information.

Gjelten’s moral argument against Beijing 2022 relies mostly on China’s dreadful treatment of its Uighur minority. Gjelten wonders if China’s Uighurs are analogous to Nazi-era Jews, who, you should recall, were already highly persecuted as Adolf Hitler scaled up to his “final solution.” Gjelten wrote, in part:

Human rights advocates see a parallel between the muted response to China’s repression of the Uyghurs and America’s failure to challenge Nazi moves against the Jews in the 1930s, a time when the United States had deep political and economic interests in Germany. Senior American officials, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, hoped a conciliatory approach to Hitler would encourage Germany to continue payments on its multibillion-dollar debt to U.S. creditors. Wall Street bankers were heavily invested in German industry and wanted to protect their stakes. Major Hollywood studios were omitting movie references to Jewish mistreatment in order to satisfy Nazi censors and maintain access to the important German film audience.

One lesson of those years was that it was a moral failure to let competing interests impede an effective response to the Nazi horror. The plight of the Uyghur people in China presents an opportunity to see whether that lesson was learned.

Homo sapiens, in my experience, come off poorly when it comes to learning historical lessons. They also tend to favour short-term economic benefits over long-term moral goods. For these reasons I have little faith in the global community doing what I think is the right move here, which would be to boycott these games.

Anyone think otherwise? Let me know why in the comments section.

Religion reporters: How do religious leaders in your circulation zone (or nationally, given the internet's long reach) feel about this? Have they spoken out or just kept quiet? Are they even informed on this issue?

What does moral leadership even mean to them in today's increasingly fractured, volatile, climate-challenged and pandemic-stymied world?

Ask. You may get an honest reply.

*Ira Rifkin is an award-winning journalist and author specializing in the intersection of religion, culture, and politics, with special emphasis on globalization.*

# China's Growing Maritime Empire in the Middle East

By Arthur Tane  
TCMER Executive Director



The Middle East sits at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia — which the Belt and Road is intended to link together — and lies at the centre of the “oil roads” that feed China’s growing energy needs. Accordingly, Middle Eastern countries have emerged as target markets for Chinese contractors as well as potential Belt and Road gateways to destination markets in Europe and Africa.

Of the two branches of the BRI — the Silk Road Economic Belt (SRB) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) — the latter route accounts for half of global trade between China/East Asia and Europe and is served by the world’s largest container ports (i.e., Shanghai, Singapore, Shenzhen, Ningbo-Zhoushan, Busan, and Hong Kong). The Gulf sub-region is particularly well-positioned to take advantage of the MSR, as it has already established itself as an important intersection for global trade, logistics, travel, and finance.

China, through investments in and ownership of ports, is expanding its global maritime reach, and its appetite for ports shows no signs of diminishing. As of July 2020, Chinese firms reportedly (partly) owned or operated some ninety-five ports across the globe.

Out of the 95 ports, 22 are in Europe, 20 in the Middle East and North Africa, 18 in the Americas, 18 in South and Southeast Asia, and nine in sub-Saharan Africa. Just three Chinese companies, among them COSCO Shipping Ports and China Merchants Port, two central state-owned enterprises (SOE), account for the operations of 81% of those ports.

In China, COSCO is designated as one of 53 “important backbone state-owned enterprises”, according to a February 2021 report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). The report states:

"COSCO's status as an important backbone SOE means that it's uniquely beholden to the CCP in a way that other SOEs aren't... COSCO's organisational structure includes paramilitary capabilities that can be mobilised by the Chinese regime to defeat threats to the CCP's interests. One such capability is the company's in-house militia..."

The majority of China's overseas port investments and operations are concentrated in a small handful of some of China's SOEs, especially COSCO, the world's third-largest container carrier and the fifth largest port terminal operator.

As recently as May, COSCO signed an agreement to build a new port in Peru, close to its capital, Lima.

In June, COSCO increased its stake in the Piraeus Port Authority in Greece, to 67%. COSCO had already acquired Piraeus's two main container terminals on a 35-year lease in 2008, and the third in 2016. Also in June, COSCO, which already owns terminals in Spain - in Valencia and Bilbao - announced that, through its Spanish subsidiary, it would be opening a new rail service for freight between Valencia and Zaragoza.

In September, COSCO acquired a 35% stake in Hamburg's container terminal. Hamburg is Germany's largest seaport and Europe's second-largest container port.

COSCO has been described as the People Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) "leading supplier, providing Beijing with built-in shore-based support for the PLAN through a commercial enterprise structured to align with Chinese naval strategy, to an extent that leads some naval analysts to refer to COSCO as the fifth arm of the PLAN."

Also in September, Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG), another state-owned Chinese enterprise, began operating Israel's new port terminal in Haifa, Israel's largest container terminal. As part of the agreement, SIGP will do so for the next 25 years.

While on the face of it, China's acquisitions of ports looks like mere commercial transactions based on an economically driven agenda - the rhetoric China is employing - several analysts have pointed out that geopolitical concerns seem to be what are actually driving China's port investments. While China's acquisitions of ports ensures its strategic supply lines - say, of oil and gas from the Middle East - analysts have suggested that a military functionality is built into the strategy, as well. According to a 2020 report by the Asia Society Policy Institute:

"A deliberate military and strategic functionality seems clearly entrenched in the initiative. But the security challenge to United States or regional interests does not lie in the risk of a String of Pearls-type chain of overseas coastal fortifications from which the PLA can wage war and that it will defend. There is little evidence so far of Beijing constructing full-blown overseas military bases on the U.S. model, but there is abundant evidence it is developing a network of strategic strong points that can significantly raise the costs of any U.S. military intervention and lower the willingness of BRI [port] host governments to offer access or assistance to the United States."

"The PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy] depends on commercial ports to support its growing operations overseas" Isaac Kardon, assistant professor at the US Naval War College, testified at the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission's hearing on the global power-projection capabilities of the PLA on February 20, 2020.

"The distinctive aspect of the PLAN's efforts to support a growing overseas presence, however, is its access to a large and growing number of ports (partly) owned and operated by People's Republic of China (PRC) firms. PLA officers and Chinese analysts tout a variety of possible dual-use functions at these ports, which in some cases are dubbed China's overseas 'strategic strong points'".

The concern that China's acquisition of commercial ports worldwide might be used for strategic purposes has been reinforced by indications that some COSCO acquisitions have come at such high prices that "obtaining those assets is a matter of achieving strategic national security goals rather than a financial investment that will be required to deliver market-based returns".

China's port acquisitions and operations pose certain risks for US Navy vessels that call at ports under Chinese management. USN Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead said in 2019:

"U.S. naval vessels might not be able to call regularly at ports under Chinese management because of the risk that commercial port information-technology (IT) systems could be used to monitor or interfere with military systems and jeopardize U.S. information and cyber security".

For that reason, the US warned Israel that China's management of the new Haifa port terminal could potentially damage US-Israeli security cooperation, as it might lead to US Navy ships refraining from docking there.

In a paper published in 2019 in the Naval War College Review, Christopher R. O'Dea wrote:

"By creating a global port network for ostensibly commercial purposes, China has gained the ability to project power through the increased physical presence of its naval vessels—turning the oceans that historically have protected the United States from foreign threats into a venue in which China can challenge U.S. interests."

Another grave concern is that Chinese port investments create economic and political leverage for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that can affect local policy and decision making. Greece is a case in point: After China invested in and acquired much of the port of Piraeus, Greece blocked an EU statement criticizing China's human rights record at the UN. A Greek foreign ministry spokesperson said at the time:

"Greece's position is that unproductive and in many cases, selective criticism against specific countries does not facilitate the promotion of human rights in these states, nor the development of their relation with the EU."

Greece also prevented a unified EU statement against China's behaviour in the South China Sea, when the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled against Beijing's claims to sovereignty over most of the South China Sea in 2016, and Greece opposed tougher screenings of Chinese investments in Europe - a predictable move for all nations that become beholden to Chinese investments.

## Iran's Mullahs and China Empowered Under Biden Administration

By Majid Rafizadeh



The Chinese Communist Party has openly been helping the Iranian regime evade US sanctions - most likely due to what reports have been referring to as the weak leadership and "top national security threat" of the US Biden administration.

This Communist Chinese salvage operation could partially explain why the ruling mullahs of Iran see no incentive to halt their nuclear program or come to the negotiating table.

When the Biden administration reached out to Chinese Communist Party to cut its oil imports from Iran, a senior U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told the Reuters news agency:

"We have used our sanctions authorities to respond to Iranian sanctions evasion, including those doing business with China, and will continue to do so if necessary. However, we have been approaching this diplomatically with the Chinese as part of our dialogue on Iran policy and think that, in general, this is a more effective path forward to address our concerns."

China, however, immediately and defiantly refused to stop importing oil from Iran, and to comply with the US sanctions.

In another blow to the US, after many years of Iran trying to be a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), SCO members finally agreed in September to elevate Iran's status from "observer" to "full member," even though the global financial watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force, had placed the Islamic Republic on its terrorism financing blacklist.

The SCO is a political, military, economic and security alliance that currently includes China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.



This alliance will likely further deepen the economic, political and military partnership between Iran and China and Russia, and assist the mullahs of Iran to defy the West.

In the face of these critical developments, the Biden administration has remained silent.

China has also defiantly been using the same line of argument that the mullahs of Iran resorted to regarding the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Even though the Islamic Republic is violating its agreements with the JCPOA and stonewalling the nuclear talks while inching closer to becoming a nuclear state, instead of pressuring the Iranian regime to halt its nuclear program's advancement, Beijing is blaming the US for not lifting the remaining economic sanctions against the ruling mullahs and for not appeasing them. As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated in a September 24 briefing:

"The U.S. should redress its wrong policy of maximum pressure on Iran, lift all illegal sanctions on Iran and measures of long-arm jurisdiction on third parties, and work to resume negotiations and achieve outcomes at an early date."

For the Chinese Communist Party, siding with the Iranian regime has several advantages. First, Beijing can likely use Iran as a bargaining chip during its trade war with the US. China, for instance, might agree to pressure the Iranian regime in exchange for the US lifting its tariffs on Chinese products.

Not only is the Iranian regime benefiting from Biden administration's reportedly weak leadership, the Chinese regime is profiting as well. A 25-year deal, for instance, was recently signed between Iran and China. This deal, which appears similar to a colonial agreement, grants Communist China significant rights over the nation's resources. Leaked information reveals that one of its terms is that China will be investing nearly \$400 billion in Iran's oil, gas and petrochemicals industries. In return, China will get priority to bid on any new project in Iran that is linked to these sectors. China will also receive a 12% discount and it can delay payments by up to two years. China will also be able to pay in any currency it chooses. It is also estimated that, in total, China will receive discounts of nearly 32%. Another secret element of the agreement has a military dimension: China will deploy 5,000 members of its security forces on the ground in Iran.

Such a strategic and economic deal is a clear win for the Chinese Communist Party. The \$400 billion, a small amount for the world's second-largest economy, will be invested over 25 years; all the while, China will have full authority over Iran's islands, gain access to Iran's oil at a deeply discounted rate and increase its influence and presence in almost every sector of Iranian industry, including telecommunications, banking, energy, railways and ports.

Instead of appeasing the ruling mullahs, the Biden administration would do well to adopt a policy of maximum pressure on Iran and, through sanctions, cut the flow of funds to this predatory regime. For the ruling clerics of Iran, appeasement means only more weakness.

*Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a business strategist and advisor, Harvard-educated scholar, political scientist, board member of Harvard International Review, and president of the International American Council on the Middle East. He has authored several books on Islam and US foreign policy.*

## Prowler Preaching Neighbourliness

By Amir Teheri



Iran's new President Dr. Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi (center) has not managed to impose some discipline on the few hundred mullahs and brigadier-generals who form the core of the ramshackle regime. Thus the mullah from back of the beyond and the brigadier-general who has never seen a battle except on television, continue to make foreign policy comments mostly to threaten the very neighbors that the Dr. Ayatollah hopes to seduce. (Photo by Atta Kenare/AFP via Getty Images)

In his first statements on foreign policy, Islamic Republic's new President Dr. Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi made two claims: First that he would be the ultimate arbiter of Tehran's foreign relations and, second, that his top priority is to "establish close ties with neighbours and promote peace and stability in West Asia.

(The ruling mullahs now use the term West Asia, which was circulated by the Soviet Union, instead of the Middle East, which they regard as a term coined by "Infidel powers.")

Just week into his tenure, however, it is hard to find evidence to support Raisi's claim.

True, the new Islamic Foreign Minister Amir Abdullahyan is no Muhammad-Javad Zarif with his flamboyant style, personal ambitions and powerful American friends, and thus in no position to think of upstaging his boss.

Nevertheless, Raisi has not managed to impose some discipline on the few hundred mullahs and brigadier-generals who form the core of the ramshackle regime. Thus the mullah from back of the beyond and the brigadier-general who has never seen a battle except on television, continue to make foreign policy comments mostly to threaten the very neighbours that the Dr. Ayatollah hopes to seduce.

Worse still, such interventions go beyond mere rhetorical outbursts. Consider some events of the past 10 days or so.

Pakistan security arrested three men, identified as "citizens of Iran" and, according to Islamabad sources, members of the Quds Force, on a charge of plotting to kill 25 Chinese engineers by planting a roadside bomb near the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Gulf of Oman. The alleged plot claimed the lives of several Baluch children.

A few days earlier, units of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a series of artillery attacks on 22 villages in the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq where, Tehran claims, anti-Iran Kurdish "secessionists" have set up a number of bases.

Neither Baghdad nor Erbil authorities were forewarned, while the IRGC promised to repeat the deadly exercise.

Tehran's disregard for Iraqi sovereignty came in other forms as well. The official media threatened Baghdad and Erbil with "consequences" unless those who had organized a private seminar on normalization with Israel were "dealt with". The fact that the seminar in question was in conformity with Iraq's constitution and law, guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression, was conveniently ignored.

The Erbil authorities were forced to be economical with the truth by claiming they didn't know about the seminar and would not allow similar events in the future. The Baghdad authorities went further by issuing arrest warrants for three people, one of whom was in Germany at the time of the seminar.

The new violation of Iraqi sovereignty came a bit later and on a much larger scale. Baghdad had announced the closure of its borders with the Islamic Republic as a means of controlling the spread of Covid-19 which is wreaking havoc in Iran.

Iranian pilgrims wishing to go to "holy cities" in Iraq for *Arba'in*, marking the 40th day of Imam Hussein's martyrdom, were told that only those travelling by air could do so without obtaining a visa.

Yet, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, and people trying to make a fast buck during the pilgrimage, gathered at land border crossings and managed to dismantle the barriers and march into Iraqi territory to board buses heading for "holy cities". Islamic Republic border guards either watched the "invasion" or even helped speed it up.

On eastern borders, the Islamic Republic closed its borders with Afghanistan to prevent thousands trying to flee the new situation in Kabul. At the same time, however, hundreds of suspected Al-Qaeda members and their families living in exile in Iran for almost 20 years, mostly in the Dost-Muhammad area in Sistan-and-Baluchistan province, were "advised" to return to Afghanistan.

However, the biggest show of "good neighbourliness" promised by Raisi came inside the (former Soviet) Republic of Azerbaijan and along its borders with Iran and Armenia.

What Tehran media described as "a multi-faceted task force" consisting of helicopter gunships, tanks, armoured vehicles and elite Special Units under the personal command of IRGC's Chief of Land Forces Gen. Pakpur was assembled on full alert within sight of Azerbaijani troops and their Russian "advisers".

This large-scale sabre rattling coincided with the first anniversary of the war between Armenia and Baku over the enclave of High Qarabagh (Artsakh). Tehran put in motion a road show in three stages.

In the first stage, a few days before the anniversary, a long line of Iranian heavy trucks passed through the Lachin Corridor, theoretically under Russian control, to enter High Qarabagh to deliver supplies to Armenians. The idea was to show that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliev's claim of having won a great victory in last year's war was an empty boast as Russia, not his government, controls entry points into Azerbaijan and the disputed Artsakh enclave.

To save face, Aliev called in Tehran's ambassador to Baku and demanded that Iran stop sending trucks without proper visas from Baku. In the second stage, Tehran replaced Iranian number-plates with Armenian ones to claim that the lorries in question came from Armenia proper to supply fellow-Armenians in Artsakh.

For Aliev, this was like turning the knife in the wound, reminding people in Baku and environs that their president's claim of victory at the cost of thousands of lives followed by the virtual occupation of parts of the country by Russian troops bore little relation to reality. Iran's claim that matters had been cleared with Levon Jagarian, the Russian Ambassador in Tehran, poured salt on the wound as Moscow's man in Iran is an ethnic Armenian, as is Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

An angry Aliev, already under domestic pressure for mismanagement, corruption and nepotism, lashed back by announcing a total ban on truck traffic from Iran and claiming that "Azeris all over the world" back his position. This was seen in Tehran as an act of deliberate provocation by Aliev, as Iran sees itself as the true home of all Azeris, including the 12 million or so who live in the Baku republic and the Russian federation.

Raisi's claim of "good neighbourliness" remains just a claim. The fact is that either Tehran turns the Middle East (or West Asia, as the Kremlin prefers) into something like the Khomeinist Islamic Republic or the latter becomes more or less like other regimes in the region. An outsider, a prowler, cannot have normal, let alone good, relations, with others in a neighbourhood.

*Amir Taheri was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979. He has worked at or written for innumerable publications, published eleven books, and has been a columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat since 1987.*

## Iraq's General Elections

By Amir Taheri



Last week's election, the fifth in Iraq's history since liberation in 2003, shows that despite many ups and downs caused by historic and cultural bumps on the road, the process of democratization is still well on its course. Pictured: A woman voter casts her vote at a polling station in Baghdad on October 10, 2021. (Photo by Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP via Getty Images)

Bravo Iraq!

This was the phrase that automatically came to my mind the other day as the Iraq's latest general election was completed without incident.

The kudos was deserved for several reasons.

First, last week's election, the fifth in Iraq's history since liberation in 2003, shows that despite many ups and downs caused by historic and cultural bumps on the road, the process of democratization is still well on its course.

It also reaffirmed the invaluable consensus reached among Iraqis of all political persuasions that winning and holding power is legitimate only through the free expression of the people through elections. Though nothing in history is irreversible, the traditional culture in which power was won and lost in rebellions, coups d'etat, street riots, foreign invasions or assassinations of the ruler may have had its day in Iraq.

Because the parliament is the sole conduit for the exercise of people power, the results of the election will also determine who will serve as president of the republic and prime minister.

Next, because of the proportional representation system in force, no sect, party or group could hope to win a monopolistic hold on power. In a country that suffered

decades under a brutal one-party system, the election has the healing power of unity in diversity.

The very fact that the election took place is also a cause for celebration. Key players, including some foreign powers and political barons addicted to power and perk, did all they could to prevent an early election that they sensed might reduce their share of power.

For months, the official media in the Islamic Republic of Iran had played mood music against early elections in Iraq. And when it became clear that the process would not be halted, Tehran circles started mobilizing for affecting the outcome. "Supreme Guide" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei released \$200 million from a "national emergency fund" to enable the Quds Force, Tehran's foreign legion operating in several regional countries, propel its proxies back into power. The Tehran media called this Iraqi election "Qassem Soleimani's election" with the subtext that Iraqi voters would pay tribute to the assassinated general by massively voting for his local proxies.

Because Iraqis living abroad could not vote this time, the Quds Force organized day-trips for an unknown number of dual-nationals living in Iran, sometimes for decades, to vote for Quds Force candidates.

However, as the results show, Tehran's proxies did worse than anyone imagined.

The militia-dominated bloc led by Hadi al-Ameri lost 35 of its 50 seats. The biggest winner on the Shiite side was Muqtada Sadr's maverick bloc, which has called for limiting the holding of weapons only to the state; in other words disbanding the Iran-controlled militias.

In the past few days, Tehran media have tried to seek some solace in the fact that former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has managed to remain in the game as a victory for "martyr Soleimani's way." However, Maliki, though always close to the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was never a Soleimani stooge as the late general could not tolerate anyone with an ego himself. Soleimani's ideal lackey is Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese branch of Hezbollah, who, according to the late general's only lengthy interview, "would not drink water without consulting with us."

To belittle the impact of the Iraqi election, Iran's official media also harped on the theme of "low voter turnout." True, the latest election attracted only 43 percent of registered voters, one or two points below that of the previous exercise. However, Tehran official media quickly abandoned the theme because it reminded people of an even lower voter turnout in Iran's own recent presidential elections.

The latest Iraqi election has other interesting features.

It was the first to take place in 83 constituencies instead of 18 mega ones. The new rule allows the voter to make a choice based on his opinion of individual candidates rather than lists presented by party coalitions. The use of biometric cards also helped with ensuring the process against organized fraud.

The fact that a large number of candidates, almost 3,500, contested the 329 seats at stake, indicated the abiding attractiveness of the democratic process for a growing segment of politically active Iraqis. Those who entered the competition included the largest number of young activists, women and individuals standing as independents.

We have not completed a breakdown of the results, but at first glance it is clear that a new generation of Iraqi politicians is taking shape. The fact that young activists representing pre-Covid street protesters won more than 8% of the seats may point to new directions in Iraqi politics.

The results also indicate a faster exclusion of former exiles and dual-nationals that until recently dominated the political scene in Baghdad.

The parties and groups representing the Sunni Muslim community emerge from this election with a heightened profile and a more credible leadership, something that could speed up the healing of sectarian wounds inflicted on it since 2003.

The election also marked the marginalization of the Shiite clerical institutions based in Najaf both because the grand ayatollahs adopted a lower profile and because many candidates realized that endorsement by masters of the turban may prove a kiss of death in politics.

The Kurdish parties, still enjoying control of more seats than warranted by the demographic strength of the Kurdish community, emerge with more or less the same profile as before. This means that they would continue to play a key role in the formation of the next government. That could be a positive thing if the aim is to prevent wild swings of the pendulum. But it could also be negative if the Kurds let themselves be tempted by sectarian gains at the expense of broader national interests.

The ruling mullahs in Tehran had hoped that the election would turn out to be a referendum on American military presence in Iraq. That didn't happen, as the Iraqi political elite preferred to focus on the need for foreign military presence in all its forms be ended. The 2,500 US troops still in Iraq could be withdrawn at any moment under the status of forces mechanism in place since 2008. The same could not be said about the Iran's proxy units in Iraq that include many dual-nationals at all levels including their high command.

The Tehran media has labelled the Iraqi election as "the first test for Gen. Esmail Qa'ani" the lacklustre bureaucrat who has replaced the bombastic Soleimani.

Well, Qa'ani emerges as the loser that he deserves to be. As for Soleimani, who died in Baghdad, his ghost now witnesses a second death in Iraq, this time of Soleimanism.

*Amir Taheri was the executive editor-in-chief of the daily Kayhan in Iran from 1972 to 1979. He has worked at or written for innumerable publications, published eleven books, and has been a columnist for Asharq Al-Awsat since 1987.*

## Amid Beirut Clashes, Lebanon Falters

By Peter Rawlings  
TCMER Board Member



When armed members of Hezbollah and its ally Amal squared off against unidentified gunmen in Beirut's Tayouneh neighbourhood last week, the fighting was neither accidental nor unprecedented. Yet it did mark a dangerous crossroads for Lebanon, especially now that Judge Tarek Bitar is spearheading a serious new phase in the investigation of the country's 2020 port blast. The clashes also amplified sectarian tensions at a time when factions are trying to woo voters ahead of the March 2022 parliamentary election.

### Political and Security Context

Tensions have been brewing for a while—mainly since Bitar began to summon political and security officials for questioning and issue arrest warrants against others (e.g., Amal parliamentarian Ali Hassan Khalil). Hezbollah has led a political campaign against the judge and even sent its top security official, Wafiq Safa, to threaten him last month. Bitar did not budge, however, so Hezbollah tried a different approach: linking the public's call for justice to the threat of more street violence or another civil war, similar to when the group opened fire on Lebanese citizens in May 2008.

Yet Hezbollah's plan backfired when viral videos showed the group's supporters entering Christian neighbourhoods and provoking residents. This aroused strong criticism from the Christian street, including supporters of Gebran Bassil's Free Patriotic Movement, a longstanding Hezbollah ally. Another video showed a Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) officer shooting at Hezbollah members—something that the group neither expected nor welcomed. Perhaps most important, the violence did not scare Judge Bitar into resigning.

This is not the first time that public reactions against Hezbollah have resulted in violence this year. In August, armed tribesmen in the Sunni town of Khalde clashed with supporters of the militia, while Druze villagers in Chouya seized a Hezbollah rocket-launching vehicle to stop the group from firing on Israel from their town. Yet



the Christian street and the parties that represent them are more significant because they hold the key to preserving Hezbollah's control over the government. Accordingly, group leader Hassan Nasrallah devoted the majority of his speech after the Tayouneh clashes to reassuring the wider Christian community and disparaging individual Christian factions that do not support Hezbollah—mainly the “Lebanese Forces” party led by Samir Geagea.

Given Hezbollah's imposing arsenal and its control over most of Lebanon's institutions, one might wonder why it has not simply removed Bitar from the port investigation. The group has certainly tried to do just that, and its failure highlights the judiciary's potential as a small space that Hezbollah cannot easily subject to its agenda. Bitar worries the group's leaders not just because of his personal determination, but also because he represents an institution that could challenge them if the election does not turn out in their favour. Indeed, the anti-Iran and anti-militia sentiment that shook up this month's parliamentary election in Iraq has likely raised eyebrows in Beirut. If part of the system is willing to challenge the Hezbollah alliance today via the port investigation, then the courts or other parts of the system may challenge them again during or after the election. This is a scenario Hezbollah cannot risk, even if it means postponing or cancelling next year's vote.

For now, the group's failure to oust Bitar through street pressure will likely send it back to the legal drawing board. Hezbollah has already pledged to continue boycotting cabinet sessions until its demands are met. This tactic could buy it time to find legal mechanisms for interfering with Bitar, such as hindering his efforts to interrogate politicians or pre-empting his investigation by forming a parliamentary committee to scrutinize the port explosion in a more limited and politically safe fashion.

#### Risks and Opportunities

Cabinet sessions are currently on hold—technically, the body can convene without Hezbollah and Amal, but other members dare not do so. This impasse has essentially halted all of the vital steps the government is expected to take regarding IMF negotiations and other possible reforms (as unpromising as they are), so the economy will likely sink even further.

Security might deteriorate as well. The LAF is walking a very thin line given the rise in sectarian tensions between Geagea's Christian faction and Hezbollah's core Shia constituency. Military officials issued a statement noting that the LAF officer who fired the first shot in the Tayouneh gun battle is under investigation, but discharging or punishing him could inflame tensions further and, over time, erode the fragile LAF's morale and effectiveness.

Whatever happens, all of the parties will no doubt stay focused on the parliamentary election as their primary concern, attempting to take advantage of street tensions in order to boost their chances at the polls. Geagea's party will try to present itself as the strongest representative for Christians, while Hezbollah will continue criticizing it. The main loser in this scenario would be the anti-establishment groups that have formed since the mass protests of 2019.

In the short term, then, grassroots opposition groups would be wise to sidestep the brewing sectarian showdown (which only serves the political establishment) and focus on the most pressing issue of the day: pursuing justice while safeguarding the legal system and its representatives. The international community could help by supporting and protecting Judge Bitar, since the institutional space and public support

he symbolizes could be crucial to navigating worrisome scenarios before and after the election.

For its part, Hezbollah will try everything in its capacity to stop the port investigation because Bitar's efforts threaten the group's overall hold on power. Therefore, if Washington and other actors send a strong message about the importance of accountability for the port explosion, they can not only help secure a path to justice for that particular incident, but also bolster a relatively independent part of the judiciary. Judges might then feel more empowered to offer some protection against any new waves of violence or assassinations that may emerge in the coming weeks. From Khalde to Chouya to Tayouneh, many Lebanese have come to view street clashes as the only way to express their frustrations against Hezbollah and the wider political elite. Maintaining even a small space of accountability within one state institution could help restrain this anger, reduce the risk of violence, and bolster other struggling institutions.

Political compromise is not an option under the current circumstances. A political bargain to sideline Bitar would eliminate the only sovereign space left within Lebanon's institutions. The only other choice is to protect Bitar and ensure a free and fair election in March. Hezbollah will try to fight the second scenario, probably by threatening more insecurity and violence. Yet the civil unrest scenario is risky for the group—this strategy has already backfired three times in the past three months.

Officials may therefore opt for delaying or cancelling the election instead. With Iran-supported militias losing ground in Iraq's vote and Hezbollah developing a reputation at home for protecting corrupt figures and criminals, the group and its allies are at risk of losing if the election takes place on schedule. Given Bitar's investigation and other pressures, relinquishing their control over the legislative and executive branches would be too dangerous to their overall prospects for political survival in Lebanon. Hezbollah likely also realizes that it need not resort to violence to postpone the election—worsening economic conditions or the mere hint of security deterioration could be enough for parliament to justify this decision.

Ensuring that the election takes place on time and under international supervision is therefore vital. This is not enough, however—the international community must also help protect those in Lebanon who have the courage to stand up to the political establishment, taking steps that shield them from violence, arrests, random interrogations, and threats. Shia politicians who are running against Hezbollah need additional protection as well, and the LAF is the only institution capable of providing it. Washington should therefore consider using its security assistance program to the LAF as a means of leveraging such protection ahead of the election.

# The Coming Collapse of Lebanon

By Aiman Mansour



The ongoing deterioration of Lebanon is obvious. The country's government is rotting and corrupt. Young people and families of means are fleeing the country, sects clash with each other and within themselves for political dominance and prominent clans prevent a fairer distribution of resources. Religious, ideological and local identities dominate.

Indeed, the loyalty of the Lebanese public to the state as an established framework never really solidified. In a way, Lebanon never fully became a unitary state—and it isn't expected to become one in the foreseeable future.

It is difficult for those who favourably regarded the uprising against the Syrians following the Hariri assassination (February 2005) to digest the fact that Lebanon, to maintain its formal framework as a state, must have a strong patron that can function as an effective arbitrator and as an authority to implement their vision and views.

Israel failed in its attempts to fill this role following its military involvement in Lebanon ("Operation Peace for Galilee" in 1982). Ever since the civil war in the '70s and up until 2005, Syria was the patron that made sure no Lebanese political player ever accumulated sufficient power to dictate state policy. (This is why Syria intervened on the side of the Christians and against the Palestinians and the left-wing in 1976, even though ideologically it was not on the Christians' side.)

Syria's retreat from Lebanon was the result of immense Western pressure during the height of American hegemony in the region. This reflected Western rage over the Hariri assassination and the illusions of elements who thought they could take advantage of the situation to establish a functioning country that would over time succeed in resolving the Hezbollah issue. That did not happen, as was illustrated by the 2006 war with Israel and the internal Lebanese conflict of 2008.

During the long absence of strong political patronage, control of Lebanon shifted toward Hezbollah and its Iranian masters. Hezbollah and Iran are the only elements at the moment with both the desire and the means to fill this role, including the ability to overcome all other political players.

This trend, despite being threatening and discouraging, can also generate positive results if handled correctly, meaning that all interested parties in the arena begin to treat Lebanon and Syria as a political, military and economic whole.

Lebanon's financial collapse was not the result of Hezbollah's state within a state. Its roots have been in place for several decades, and despite this Lebanon has also known periods of financial growth, including after the Second Lebanon War (2006). The collapse—which now seems to be gaining uncontrollable momentum—derives mainly from the corrupt conduct of the Lebanese governments and the Central Bank of Lebanon under the leadership of Riad Salameh. Together they have formed a fundamentally broken financial system, which will result in the total collapse of Lebanon's banks.

According to some estimates, the Central Bank of Lebanon is responsible for the loss of more than \$160 billion that was wasted on the import of consumer products in the country—from subsidized fuels to tax-exempt luxury items. Moreover, while most taxes were imposed on the weaker elements in society, that did not input substantial amounts to the country's coffers, the wealthy and politically connected were exempted from paying any taxes at all.

At the same time, there has been no functioning Lebanese government for a long time. This prolonged, systemic failure sparked the resignation in 2019 of Sa'ad al-Hariri, continued with the establishment of Hassan Diab's weak government and led to the current crisis where nobody seems able to establish a government.

The conduct of external players isn't helping, either. Western countries, together with Arab Sunni countries, want to prevent Hezbollah and their allies from having any significant role in the government; whereas Hezbollah (supported by Iran, Syria and Russia) continues to take advantage of its power and the power of its allies in parliament to thwart the establishment of any government that would threaten their internal interests and gnaw at their influence.

These disagreements are expected to continue, such that even if a government is established the country's systemic failings are not expected to change.

Hezbollah's military strength is unchallenged. The Lebanese army is neither able to act nor interested in acting against the organization. The remaining Lebanese factions are very much weaker than Hezbollah. Even in the unlikely scenario of all Lebanese factions uniting against Hezbollah, they would not have the critical mass required to threaten Hezbollah's military dominance.

Nor will an external military initiative against Hezbollah necessarily lead to the desired result. The chances are slim that such an effort could truly establish an effective international regime to halt all weapon smuggling into Lebanon. Moreover, it is highly likely that a war initiated against Hezbollah would lead to the closing of ranks by large segments of the Lebanese public in support of the organization. Such an attack would be viewed by substantial portions of the Lebanese public as a threat to what remains of their lives and to the only force that sustains a semblance of basic living conditions in Lebanon.

Alongside Hezbollah's military dominance, its status as a financial patron of Lebanon continues to strengthen. Hezbollah is not only taking care of poor segments of society, especially the Shi'ites, but is also bringing energy resources from Iran. It has

even declared that it will consider any attack on Iranian tankers bringing fuel to Lebanon as an attack on Lebanese sovereignty.

With the support of Iran, Hezbollah is in effect filling a void created by the financial collapse of the Lebanese government. Hezbollah and Iran have also become the exclusive source of fuel to Syria.

The recent declaration by the American ambassador to Lebanon that the United States will act to connect Lebanon to the Egyptian-Jordanian gas network via Syria is far from being a near-term solution to the country's severe fuel shortage. Implementing this plan will require the formation of a government in Lebanon and an amendment of the U.S. "Caesar Law" which currently prohibits financial cooperation with the Assad regime.

It is true that the increasing dominance of Hezbollah in all aspects of Lebanese life will oblige the organization to invest significant resources to maintain relative security stability in Lebanon. From experience, the more the organization grows, the more its quality as a fighting force will be eroded. (This is why it has tried to avoid, until recent years, being sucked into any direct governing position.) Moreover, despite the organization being the most dominant representative of the Shi'ite community, the local identification of those joining its ranks will not dissolve and may increase internal tensions that already exist both within the Shi'ite community and the organization itself.

Militarily speaking, Israel's policy of thwarting the delivery of quality weapons to Hezbollah will continue and will focus on the Syrian arena. In this way, Israel avoids the potential international criticism it might draw if it acted in Lebanon. Moreover, there is significant added value in seeking to eliminate Iran's and Hezbollah's Syrian allies within Assad's government, as well as in the Syrian military and its intelligence branches. The Syrians are paying a price for cooperating in the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah. An increase in the price that Syrian officers and officials have to pay may force the government in Damascus into more restrained conduct toward Israel.

Developments in Syria will also have deeply significant implications for Lebanon. President Assad recently announced that the central government approach "is dead." He talked about a non-central model (*la markaziya*), allowing districts to run themselves with only minimal dependence on a central government.

The international community should support this model and act to promote a political solution, even if only partially, to the Syrian issue by formulating a new constitution that will adopt a non-centralized model as a major component of the country's future. If this happens, it could help advance a similar political arrangement in Lebanon.

A successful model of non-centralized governance already exists in the Arab world, in the United Arab Emirates, where seven emirates run their internal affairs by themselves with a relatively high degree of independence, whereas Abu Dhabi dictates unified foreign and defence policies.

In Iraq, for example, tribal divisions, ethnic groups and sects do not make for a stable government, and this leads to the involvement of foreign elements, especially Iran and to a certain extent Turkey. A decentralized government in Syria and Lebanon will not prevent such external interference, and may, in fact, limit it if semi-autonomous districts are capable of standing on their own and forging their own external relationships.

Reinforcing local identities, as opposed to maintaining the ongoing farcical and hypocritical rhetoric of a deeply rooted nationalist collective in Lebanon and Syria, may increase the focus of various populations on developing their local economy and competing over resources in a manner that restrains attacks against Israel.

The Western dream of an independent and unitary Lebanese state that is not under Syrian hegemony (and where Hezbollah no longer has a paralysing hold on state institutions) is just that—a dream. In reality, Hezbollah has only increased its dominance of Lebanon. The alternative vision proposed here, which seeks long-term Syrian and Lebanese stability based on decentralized constitutional arrangements leaving Syria as the main arbiter, has a better chance of succeeding. This should be the basis for practical discussions on the future of Lebanon between Israel and its allies.

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# New Zealand Terrorist Revealed

By Chan Ling  
TCMER Board Member



On Friday, September 3rd, a 32-year-old Sri Lankan national, Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen, inspired by the Islamic State, stabbed six people in a New Zealand supermarket before police shot him dead. The refugee was living at the Glen Eden mosque under court-ordered supervision at the time of the attack.

The “refugee” who arrived in New Zealand in 2011 from Sri Lanka on a student visa has been known to security forces since 2016. He was arrested in 2017 and again in 2018 for terrorist activity. He was placed in pre-trial detention in 2018 until his release in May 2021. However, despite the migrant’s previous arrests, being deemed a threat to New Zealanders, attempts to join ISIS, and warnings from experts that an attack was imminent, the left-wing courts and government refused to deport or further jail this terrorist. Instead, the courts let the dangerous terrorist free and ordered police to supervise him instead.

Even with plain-clothes officers monitoring the terrorist, he could still enter a grocery store, grab a knife from a display case and stab at least 6 people. Witnesses said the Muslim shouted “Allahu Akbar” during his stabbing rampage.

The phrase “Allahu Akbar” *actually* means that “Allah is greater” *than any other god*. When recited, it empowers Muslims, making them feel superior to the rest of mankind. “Allahu Akbar” has, in fact, been a jihadist tool since the early years of Islam.

When it is shouted publicly as an expression of rage, however, particularly during an attack on others, it is intended to intimidate or threaten; its purpose is to emphasize that the assault is being committed on behalf of Allah — submitting to his command to kill enemies — and in the expectation of the reward of eternal paradise.

Police responded within minutes of the stabbings and can be heard discharging their weapons to stop the Islamic migrant. The terrorist remained unnamed until today, despite prior terror-related arrests in 2017 and 2018 and three years in prison:

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster said nothing was unusual about the man's actions before the attack, and he appeared to shop normally. However, he added that the police had kept their distance because the man had a "high level of paranoia" regarding his surveillance, and it took more than two minutes to reach and shoot him after he started frantically stabbing customers."

#### Previous Charges and Police Investigations:

##### 2016 Investigation

Police first started investigated Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen in March 2016 when he shared videos and pictures of graphic war-related violence and comments advocating violent extremism. He also posted comments in support of Islamic terrorists involved in other attacks.

According to New Zealand media outlet Stuff, "he was formally warned by police in April and May 2016, and he apologized and closed down his social media account." However, he reactivated his account in July, and in October 2016, police were again alerted to his postings of extreme and violent materials.

##### 2017 Charges

The migrant was first arrested in 2017 after police became concerned about his Islamic terrorist activity. The police arrested him at the airport "after telling a person at an Auckland mosque he wanted to go to Syria 'to fight for Isis.'" At the time of his arrest, he had a one-way ticket to Singapore.

When police searched his home, they found a large hunting knife under a mattress and more "fundamentalist material." There was also a photograph of the man posing with a firearm and links saved on his computer to where firearms, crossbows, and other military equipment could be bought online.

Police also discovered terrorist-related internet activity, and he was eventually charged with several offences relating to distributing objectionable material and was held in custody.

He admitted the charges of possessing restricted material and was subsequently bailed before being re-arrested on the current Terrorist charges.

New Zealand terrorist, 32-year-old Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen who conducted a terror attack at Auckland Mall, where he stabbed at least five shoppers at the supermarket

##### 2018 Charges

In July and August 2018, the migrant repeatedly accessed "violent" Isis propaganda online before buying a knife. As a result, the court charged the Muslim migrant with possessing objectionable publications, possessing a knife without lawful authority, and failing to comply with a search.

On the repeat offender's first day out on bail, he searched the internet for camouflage trousers, his own name, news stories about his case, and "Isis allegiance." The police also discovered that he bought a new knife and a throwing star.



At this point, the Crown tried to charge the man under the Terrorism Suppression Act for “planning or otherwise preparing to cause the death of or serious bodily injury to one or more persons.” However, New Zealand’s High Court ruled that preparing for a terrorist attack was not an offence under the country’s anti-terrorism laws.

The migrant remained in prison for three years, awaiting his trial in May 2021. While in detention, he was further charged with assaulting guards.

The migrant, a member of a mosque in Auckland, had been arrested for watching repeated videos of decapitations, murders of children and civilians, burnings, and instructions on killing non-Muslims. Even on the morning of his arrest, he was still accessing Islamic terrorist videos.

The “how to kill non-Muslims” video watched by the migrant shows a prisoner having their throat and wrists cut and a “non-believer” running with an explosive device strapped to him before it explodes. Another video provides instructions on “How to attack kuffar and how to make explosive devices.” Kuffar, or kafir, is a derogatory Arabic term used to describe an “infidel” or non-believer.

Not only did the migrant seek out the materials online, but he bookmarked many of them. His google searches and bookmarks included: “Islamic State dress, New Zealand prison clothes and food, improvised explosive devices, heroes of Isis, and an Isis-issued booklet on how to avoid being detected by Western security.”

During the trial, the prosecutor tried to warn jurors what the Islamic migrant was capable of. He held up the knife that the terrorist purchased and told the court, “As you’ll see, it’s not a small knife, not the sort of knife you’d have in your kitchen drawer.” But, he continued, “It’s a knife with a very specific purpose.” The hunting knife is also in a camouflage sheath.

**Terrorist Posted Isis material to ‘learn about his religion’**

On May 21, 2021, the jihadi took to the stand to defend his actions in front of a jury. He claimed he was accessing the ISIS material because he was trying to learn about his religion. The migrant claimed he was a victim of a “racist” court who put him in jail because he was a Muslim and his religion was not liked. Furthermore, he tried to evoke sympathy by stating, “Before the Christchurch attacks, police picked on Muslims.”

During the migrant’s testimony, he threatened the court, stating, “You put me in jail because I am a Muslim and you don’t like my religion. That makes you an enemy. Allah says you will be punished.”

On July 6, 2021, Justice Sally Fitzgerald sentenced him to only one year of supervision for possessing ISIS propaganda that promoted terrorism. Since he had already spent three years in pre-trial detention, the judge felt he had served his time. The court imposed dangerously light charges despite the migrant’s threats, previous charges in 2017, and a pre-sentence report that concluded he “supports the goals of Isis and is of a high risk of re-offending and a harm to others.”

Police expressed concern that the 32-year-old, who has twice bought large hunting knives and is considered to have “the means and motivation to commit violence in the community,” was only being supervised, not jailed.

As the prosecutor, police, and experts warned, it only took him a few months to make good on his threats and stab 6 non-Muslims at a Supermarket in Auckland.

#### Refugee Status – Student Visa – Was Supposed To Be Deported

Samsudeen, 32, arrived in New Zealand in 2011 from Sri Lanka on a student visa. He and his father were seeking refugee from Sri Lanka due to their political backgrounds and persecution by the government. He was granted refugee status on December 20, 2013.

However, on May 31, 2018, the Refugee Status Branch served Samsudeen notice of its intention to deport him back to Sri Lanka after his string of terrorist-related incidents and arrests.

#### Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern Whitewashes

New Zealand's left-wing Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, labelled the Muslim terrorist as an "extremist" and immediately went to great lengths to explain the attack had nothing to do with Islam.

For years, PM Ardern's and her government's narrative has not allowed any healthy discussion or reasonable concerns about migration and/or terrorism. Instead, she acts as an attorney to defend jihadis and, Islamic ideology that motivates these attacks.

Despite Arden's repeated ignorant defence of Islam, terrorists like the Sri Lankan migrant all have one thing in common: They credit their motivation and success to religion.

Many people prefer to bury their heads in the sand or look for ways to re-cast Islamic terror to fit their own political agenda. However, Muslims behind the violence are quite explicit about the religious certainty that compels their actions.

The teachings and early history of Islam that explain the violence are discussed elsewhere on this site. Here is shown that, as far as Islamic terrorists are concerned, their acts are done explicitly in the name of Allah and for the cause of Islam and Islamic law... across the globe.

The Prime Minister and the courts have acted as accomplices to the Islamic terrorist. Despite threats lodge by the Muslim migrant and warnings by professionals that an attack was going to happen, the government refused to deport Ahamed Aathil Mohamed Samsudeen, a known threat. Furthermore, her government continued to hide the terrorist's name and photograph from the public. Finally, today, after years of hiding the terrorist's name, it was released to the public.

The driving impulse of the Islamic migrant to kill unbelievers is religious in nature and not the act of an "extremist." His behaviour and actions are part of his belief system, allowing him to slaughter unbelievers en masse. Leaders like PM Jacinda Arden will never defeat our enemy if she continues to pretend that terrorists like the Sri Lankan migrant were not motivated by Islamic doctrine and faith.

## **Biden Ignores Palestinian Support For Terrorists**

**By Bassam Tawil**



Despite the decision by the Biden administration to resume financial aid to the Palestinians and work toward reviving the "peace process" with Israel, most Palestinians continue to support Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group that does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

The Biden administration's talk about achieving a "two-state solution" does not seem to impress many Palestinians. They believe, according to a recent public opinion poll, that this solution is no longer practical or feasible. These Palestinians, the poll found, prefer to wage an "armed struggle" against Israel.

In his recent speech before the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. President Joe Biden, expressing his administration's policy toward the Israeli-Arab conflict, said:

"The commitment of the United States to Israel's security is without question. And a support – our support for an independent, Jewish state is unequivocal. But I continue to believe that a two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel – Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state."

Ironically, on the same day Biden that delivered his speech at the UN General Assembly, another public opinion poll published by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research on September 21 again showed that many Westerners are clueless about the real attitudes of the Palestinian public.

The findings of that poll confirmed that a majority of Palestinians continue to see Hamas and other terrorists as their heroes and role models. The results also

confirmed that a majority of Palestinians continue to believe that violence and terrorism are the best and only way to deal with Israel.

With such views, it is safe to assume that the Palestinian state the Biden administration is hoping to establish alongside Israel will be controlled by Iranian-backed terrorists such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose declared goal is to replace Israel with an Islamist state after killing or expelling as many Jews as possible from their homeland.

The results of the poll lead to the unmistakable conclusion that the Palestinians are telling Biden that his proposed "two-state solution" is far from the best way to ensure peace and security in the Middle East.

The Palestinians are saying that the "two-state solution" is the best way to facilitate and expedite their mission of destroying Israel. Unfortunately, at least for the near future, that would most likely play out as a non-solution that could end up destabilizing the area and drawing in the United States.

The Palestinians, through their views, are making it clear that a Palestinian state in any part of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will be used as a launching pad to "liberate" all of the land, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

What is important to remember is that a semi-independent Palestinian state already exists in the Gaza Strip, from where Israel withdrew completely in 2005. This autonomous state, controlled by Hamas and other jihadi groups since 2007, has already been used as a launching pad this year to fire tens of thousands of rockets and incendiary balloons into Israel.

If the Israeli army and Jewish settlers are no longer inside the Gaza Strip, why are the Palestinians continuing to fire rockets and other projectiles into Israel? The answer is simple: the Palestinians want to drive the Jews not only out of the Gaza Strip, but out of all of Israel.

The most important findings of the poll include a dramatic decline in support for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and a rise in the popularity of Hamas, as well as increased support for terrorism against Israel.

This discovery does not surprise those who are familiar with the bellicose anti-Israel rhetoric that is sounded day in and day out by Palestinian leaders, media outlets, mosque preachers and political activists.

While the Biden administration is talking to Abbas and his team, nearly 80% of the Palestinian public, according to the poll, are demanding the resignation of their president.

Their demand reveals that an overwhelming majority of Palestinians have no confidence in Abbas and are likely to reject any peace agreement he signs with Israel. First, anyone who signs a peace deal with Israel will be regarded as a traitor and rewarded the same ill-starred way as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who signed a peace treaty with Israel and was assassinated. It is a consequence with which Abbas is acquainted:

"Leaving the circle of struggle against Zionism is high treason, and cursed be he who perpetrates such an act." (Hamas Charter, Article 32)

They also know that Abbas, now in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of his four-year term, has no mandate to sign anything with anyone. The results of the poll show that most Palestinians see Abbas as an illegitimate leader who no longer represents the majority of his people.

The Palestinians, in short, are telling the Biden administration and the rest of the world that it is a waste of time to rely on Abbas as a leader to market any peace agreement with Israel to his people.

Another crucial finding that the Biden administration and other international parties need to take into consideration: Hamas and the opponents of Abbas are set to win in new Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections.

This disclosure also does not surprise anyone familiar with the Palestinian arena and is apparently the reason Abbas decided earlier this year to call off the parliamentary and presidential elections that had been scheduled to take place on May 22 and July 30. Abbas does not need a poll to tell him that his rivals in Hamas and other Palestinian groups would defeat him at the voting booth by a landslide.

Abbas and his ruling Fatah faction have yet to recover from the stunning defeat they suffered at the hands of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election. Less than a year later, Hamas threw members of Abbas's Palestinian Authority off the highest floors of tall buildings in Gaza, thereby driving Abbas and the PA back the West Bank. Since then, Abbas has not only been unable to visit his home in Gaza, but in 2014, Hamas attempted a full-blown coup d'état against him.

The results concerning new elections are the best evidence that a future Palestinian state will be controlled by a terrorist group whose charter openly calls on all Arabs and Muslims to create an Islamic state:

"The Islamic Resistance Movement is a distinguished Palestinian movement, whose allegiance is to Allah, and whose way of life is Islam. It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine." (Article 6)

The Hamas Charter also pledges to wage jihad (holy war) against Israel:

"The day the enemies usurp part of Moslem land, Jihad becomes the individual duty of every Moslem. In the face of the Jews' usurpation, it is compulsory that the banner of Jihad be raised." (Article 15)

"Ranks will close, fighters joining other fighters, and masses everywhere in the Islamic world will come forward in response to the call of duty, loudly proclaiming: 'Hail to Jihad!'. This cry will reach the heavens and will go on being resounded until liberation is achieved, the invaders vanquished and Allah's victory comes about." (Article 33)

And to reject any negotiated settlement:

"[Peace] initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement... Those conferences are no more than a means to appoint the infidels as arbitrators in the lands of Islam... There is no solution for the Palestinian problem except by Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility." (Article 13)

If presidential elections were held today, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh would receive 56% of the vote, as opposed to 34% for Mahmoud Abbas.

If Abbas did not run in the elections, Palestinians would vote for Marwan Barghouti, a terrorist leader who is serving five life terms in Israeli prison for his role in a series of terror attacks against Israel, in which at least five people were murdered nearly two decades ago.

Haniyeh and Barghouti are popular among Palestinians because of their involvement in terrorism against Israel. Palestinians are apparently dissatisfied with Abbas because they believe that he is not doing enough to provoke terrorist attacks against Israel.

Also ironically - the Middle East can provide quite a bit of it - while Biden was talking at the UN General Assembly about his vision for a "two-state solution," the poll (which was published on the same day of the speech) found that 62% of the Palestinian public are opposed to the concept of the "two-state solution."

The poll also found that 39% of the Palestinians prefer waging an "armed struggle" against Israel. Additionally, a large majority of 61% opposes an unconditional resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

In perhaps the greatest irony, the Biden administration's decision to resume financial aid to the Palestinians and renew US relations with Abbas and the Palestinian leadership does not seem to enrapture Palestinians. A sizeable majority say they do not want to see Palestinian leaders deal with the US president and his team *at all*. According to the poll, 58% of the Palestinians are totally opposed to a return to dialogue with the US administration under President Biden. Moreover, 49% do not believe that the election of Biden and the resumption of American aid to the Palestinian Authority open the door for a return to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations within the framework of the "two-state solution."

If anything, the results of the poll again highlight the wide gap between the perceptions and wishes of the Biden administration and the international community, and the reality of the Palestinian situation.

Those who continue to talk about a "two-state solution" are not only deluding themselves, but also endangering the security of the Middle East by seeking to establish yet another terrorist state, especially so soon after the debacle of the U.S. surrender to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Here is some well-intentioned advice for Biden and other world leaders: before you link the idea of peace and security to the idea of a "two-state solution," try believing the Palestinians when they say that they prefer "armed struggle." Try believing the Palestinians when they say that they would vote for any leader who supports violence and terrorism against Israel. Try believing, when the Palestinians say they reject peace with Israel, that they actually mean what they say.

*Bassam Tawil is a Muslim Arab based in the Middle East.*

## Jerusalem Consulate: A Nail in the Coffin of Peace

By Richard Kemp



Biden plans to open a consulate in Jerusalem. This amounts to a de facto US embassy to the Palestinians on Israeli territory. Its true purpose is to undermine Israeli sovereignty in its own capital city. Pictured: David Friedman, former US Ambassador to Israel. (Photo AFP via Getty Images)

Only a few months ago, Joe Biden betrayed a US ally by withdrawing forces from Afghanistan, bringing down the government in Kabul and consigning the country to the bitter depredations of Taliban terrorists. Now he is winding up to betray another, much closer ally – Israel.

Biden plans to open a consulate in Jerusalem. This may seem like just another diplomatic facility to issue visas, promote trade and take care of US citizens, with no greater consequence than the US consulate in Edinburgh, UK. But it is far more than a mere office for paper-shuffling diplomats. It amounts to a de facto US embassy to the Palestinians on Israeli territory. Its true purpose is to undermine Israeli sovereignty in its own capital city and will jeopardise future prospects for peace between Israel and Palestinian Arabs.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, understands the implications only too well. In a recent interview, he triumphantly predicted that the new consulate would re-divide Jerusalem.

After the US moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital in 2018, it subsumed the existing consulate in the city to form a single diplomatic mission. This was achieved under the administration of President Donald J. Trump and that, together with a profound misunderstanding of the dynamics of peace, explains Biden's determination to re-open the consulate. He has devoted much of his presidency so far to undoing

everything he could of Trump's work, with the exception of the Afghanistan debacle, over which he uniquely claims to have been bound by Trump's previous plans.

The new consulate, exclusively to manage diplomatic relations with Palestinians, is designed to give hope that one day Jerusalem will be the capital of a putative Palestinian state. Israel can and rightly should never allow that. As well as betraying Israel, Biden's irresponsible diplomatic signalling – which also appeases his hard-left supporters – is a betrayal of the Palestinian people. They have suffered too long and too hard under the hostility of their leadership, which has consistently refused to entertain all proposals for peace with Israel that could lead to the establishment of their own state.

Successive Palestinian leaders have been encouraged in their intransigence by the US and Europe, who have for decades extracted concession after concession from Israel while Palestinians make none. The impossible aspirations of the PA leadership – who intend to see not a two-state solution but the destruction of the Jewish state – were dealt a severe blow by the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab nations, and by the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017 with the opening of an embassy there the following year.

These moves, made without pandering to the PA, and in the face of their implacable rejection, were never going to lead immediately to a change of heart by the Palestinians. But they represented a reaffirmation of the historic truth of the Jewish people's deep-rooted connection to the land of Israel, including Jerusalem, for over 3,500 years and created a historic paradigm shift in the region. The US and Arab states signalled the end of a long-standing indulgence of the PA's recalcitrance at the expense of their own people. The Palestinians would no longer have a veto over facilitating peace in the Middle East. This added a political pressure that holds out the best possible hope for an eventual rapprochement after decades of repeated failure from appeasing peace-processors.

Biden's administration has seriously damaged that prospect already. It has wilfully neglected the Abraham Accords, failing to encourage further Arab governments to normalise relations with Israel. The Accords were only achieved by strong American backing for each of the parties involved, offering economic, political or security benefits. Even if Biden was willing to pursue this policy (another of the hated Trump's) his far-reaching betrayal of Afghanistan has critically devalued US currency as a reliable ally and thus American influence in the Middle East – adding to the damage inflicted by weakness and appeasement towards the Iranian regime.

The intended consulate in Israel's capital will hammer yet another nail into the coffin of peace. It will motivate PA leaders to double down on their hostility towards Israel, inspiring further violence against Israelis as well as inciting Jew-hate around the world by lying condemnation and misrepresentation of Israel's necessary defensive responses. It will also encourage greater support for Hamas, the terrorist group that rules Gaza and is even more overtly opposed to Israel's existence, with Palestinians seeing their violent policies to have renewed potential for victory over the Jews.

All of this sounds like an unrealistically severe impact for the opening of a diplomatic office. In the context of the Middle East, where such craven submissiveness, especially by a superpower, means so much, it is not. The PA has demanded the closure of the US Embassy in Jerusalem since it opened. But the PA Prime Minister conceded in February that the establishment of a US consulate would be an adequate



substitute, saying that it "sends a [clear] political message." He understands what the US administration intends, that a consulate to the Palestinians in Jerusalem is tantamount to reversal of US recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the city.

That this is not mere bureaucratic reshuffling can also be understood from the Biden administration's determination to do it in the face of Israeli government opposition and despite it potentially breaching Israel's Basic Law, US law and the 1963 Vienna Convention, which does not allow a consulate to be opened without host nation consent. The Israeli Justice Minister, Gideon Sa'ar, made it clear a few days ago that this would not be forthcoming.

Some predict that Biden's consulate plan could even bring down the Bennett government. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid himself warned in September that it would destabilise his fragile coalition. In addition, opening a consulate in the same city as an existing embassy — an unprecedented move — reinforces its immense political significance. Especially as there is no practical purpose for the new facility, with the embassy already incorporating a department devoted exclusively to Palestinian affairs. If an independent consulate were really needed for the Palestinians it would make sense to put it in Ramallah, where virtually all PA government buildings are located.

Robert Gates, Obama's former Defence Secretary, memorably said that Biden has "been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades". Following his validation in Afghanistan of this damning indictment, Biden now has a chance to at last get something right by abandoning his plan to undermine a close ally, reduce the prospects of peace and sentence the Palestinian people to more decades of suffering.

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# The Role of Iran's Palestinian Mercenaries

By Khaled Abu Toameh



Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, it seems, want to continue receiving funds and weapons from Iran, but they do not want to be seen by Arabs and Muslims as mercenaries serving Iran's interests in the Middle East. Pictured: Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists parade with Bader 3 rockets in Gaza City, on May 29, 2021. (Photo by Thomas Coex/AFP via Getty Images)

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are embarrassed: Iran just admitted that both of those terrorist groups serve as mercenaries for the mullahs in Tehran.

For Hamas and PIJ, the admission is yet another sign that the truth can be painful and inconvenient, especially when it comes from a major ally such as Iran.

Recently, Maj. Gen. Gholam Ali Rashid, Commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, stated that his country has armies that operate outside of Iran.

Rashid was referring to Iranian-backed groups such as Hamas, PIJ, Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, the Syrian army and the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and other militias in Iraq and Syria. These groups, he said, "have ideological tendencies" with the mission to defend Iran.

Rashid pointed out that the former commander of Iran's Quds Force, Gen. Qasem Soleimani, said three months before his death that he had "organized six armies outside the territory of Iran."

Soleimani, who was assassinated on January 3, 2020, in a US drone strike near Baghdad International Airport, had been in charge of Iran's extraterritorial and clandestine military operations.

After his assassination, Hamas and PIJ revealed that Soleimani had been responsible for providing the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip with many types of weapons to assist them in their war against Israel.

Hamas official Osama Hamdan, for instance, was quoted earlier this year as saying that his group had "deep relations" with Soleimani, who sent Russian Kornet anti-tank guided missiles to the Gaza Strip.

Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar reported in December 2020 that during their first meeting in 2006, Soleimani gave him suitcases filled with \$22 million in cash.

PIJ secretary-general Ziyad al-Nakhalah revealed that Soleimani had sent 10 ships loaded with weapons, including long-range missiles, to the Gaza Strip.

Rashid, the commander who disclosed the connection between the terror groups and Iran's six "armies," claimed that the US and Israel are angry and concerned about his country's growing regional power.

The "belligerent American and Zionist regime's forces are angry about the extreme power of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region," he said. He added that Iran has indeed bonded with some nations and governments, "creating regional powers and religious-popular powers," according to the Iranian Mehr News Agency.

These groups, Rashid said, "represent a deterrent force for Iran and are ready to defend it against any foreign aggressor."

In short, the Iranian commander is threatening that his country will unleash its six "armies" against the US and Israel in any future war or military confrontation.

It is no secret that Hamas and PIJ have long been funded and armed by Iran. The leaders of the two groups have even boasted of their ties with Iran, especially Tehran's support for the jihad (holy war) to eliminate Israel.

Hamas and PIJ, however, do not like to be portrayed as puppets or proxies of Iran, which continues to meddle in the internal affairs of a number of Arab countries, including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Hamas and PIJ, it seems, want to continue receiving funds and weapons from Iran, but they do not want to be seen by Arabs and Muslims as mercenaries serving Iran's interests in the Middle East.

Apparently, Hamas and PIJ are concerned that Rashid's statements could harm their relations with Arab countries that already feel threatened by Iran's ongoing attempts to destabilize their security and stability.

Hamas and PIJ want the Palestinians and the rest of the Arabs and Muslims to believe that their only goal is to "liberate all of Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea" - a euphemism for driving the Jews out of Israel and replacing it with an Islamist state.

That is most likely why both Palestinian terror groups were quick to issue statements denying that their main goal is to defend Iran and serve its interests in the Middle East.

According to PIJ, its sole mission is to fight Israel:

"The resistance of the Palestinian people has existed since the establishment of the Zionist project and its occupation of Palestine, and it is not linked to any other goal. The resistance forces, including Iran, stand together against the Zionist enemy and its allies."

Echoing a similar position, Hamas thanked Iran for its long-time support for the jihad to destroy Israel. Hamas stated that this was the only "battle" it wished to be involved in, and hinted that it was not created to defend Iran. According to a statement issued by the terror group:

"[Hamas] affirms the depth of the relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its appreciation and thanks to it as one of the most prominent supporters of the resistance project in Palestine, and confirms that this support and this relationship is in the context of our battle as a nation against the occupation Zionism, and not in the context of any other battles."

In Lebanon, a country effectively controlled Hezbollah, some politicians reacted with fury to Rashid's talk about the six "armies."

"Take your armies and go with them back to Iran, where you can fight your battles away from the peoples you occupy to achieve your agendas," said Sami Gemayel, head of the Lebanese Kataeb Party. He also criticized the failure of Lebanese leaders to respond to the admission that Hezbollah was created to serve Iran, and not Lebanon: "Are you ready now to face the truth? Your silence is a great betrayal."

Some Arab analysts believe that, regarding the Iranian commander's talk about Tehran's six armies, particularly two, Hamas and PIJ, aim to thwart efforts by Egypt to reach a long-term ceasefire between Palestinian groups and Israel. Iran seeks to demonstrate to the Egyptians and other international parties that Tehran is a major player in the Palestinian arena, especially the Gaza Strip, and that it is fully capable of foiling any deal that would stop terror attacks against Israel.

The Iranian commander's statements coincide with the Biden administration's delusional commitment to the fiction that the US will somehow convince Iran to abandon its plans to acquire nuclear weapons.

While the Biden administration is talking about "diplomacy" as the best way to rein in Iran's nuclear program, the mullahs are preparing for war and advancing their scheme to annihilate Israel and, with the help of their six "armies," to occupy still more Arab countries.

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# Washington Suspends Qatari request for Military Equipment

By Zara Dawood  
TCMER Board Member



The first time an armament contract has been rejected at the level of the U.S. State Department and Congress.

The Government of Qatar has submitted a formal request for the purchase of four MQ – 9B Predator armed drones for more than a year, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet acted on this request, and officials have refused to state why.

The suspension of the deal was met with Qatari displeasure as the Qataris have tried to increase their influence in the region and support their Muslim Brotherhood leaders in the world despite allegations by Qatari officials about the intention to use aircraft to monitor natural gas facilities and terrorist threats.

However, according to military experts, the MQ- 9 Reaper systems are not just surveillance systems, but armed aircraft equipped with missiles and capable of carrying out offensive operations. What prevents the Tamim regime that supports terrorism and the living in the war industry from being used to blow up Yemen or to assassinate Afghanistan, Tunisia, Libya or Yemen?

## MQ- 9 Reaper

It was also later established in many locations, especially Yemen, following the subsequent scandals of the regime, with the support of the Houthis and the brotherhood, who had never been late at every opportunity to bomb the neighbourhood, and the media profits collected by Al Jazeera and other agencies about the continuation of Tamim's plays and regime.

According to “armed forces.eu”, Qatar has six drones for attack purposes, and specialists believe that these “UCAV combat drones” owned by Qatar place them in doubt when political assassinations in the Middle East occur with drones.

Those who are addicted to falsifying facts will not hesitate to confuse any political or even humanitarian event with humanitarian or even Islamic claims and to use them for the sake of a press release or to portray their political performance as protectors of the fever and executing the will of the major countries.

As new realities unfold every day, the danger of a regime that is extremely dangerous to itself, to its people, and, more importantly, to its surroundings is confirmed.

#### American Preferences

In the meantime, the United States Department of State has approved similar requests from other allies, including the United Arab Emirates, which have demonstrated clear American preferences towards strategically weighed countries and have further frustrated Qataris.

The suspension of the deal seems to have a hidden rejection. United States officials have long expressed concerns about the country's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and their great sponsor, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the past, Washington has always sensed Qatar's complicity and accused it of pursuing lax policies to combat the financing of terrorist groups.

A State Department spokesperson, speaking to the US Wall Street Journal, noted that the State Department's policy to oversee foreign military sales is not to comment publicly on proposed defence sales or transfers until Congress is officially notified.

This is not the first time that contracts for arming have been rejected or postponed by the United States in the Middle East, but it is the first time that a contract for arming at the level of the United States and Congress has been rejected, leading us to conclude an important thing, namely, that Qatar is currently outside the defence system of the United States Congress and the Pentagon as well.

So Qatari terrorism is again under the spotlight at three levels of American "defence, media and strategic" policy and the provision of the same armament systems to the United Arab Emirates by the United States of America, means that Qatar has a specific size that does not exceed the Traffic Police Department on the roads leading to the base. Many are in the level of strategic weighted weapons or intelligent monitoring weapons.

So, the United States Administration becomes fully aware that any weapons of an offensive nature can be delivered only to States with sufficient strategic awareness not to support terrorist militias, which is revealed by the delivery of MQ- 9 Reaper aircraft to the Emirates in exchange for refusing to hand over this type to Qatar.

It is noteworthy that the United States preferred this comment despite its efforts to maintain its influence in the Gulf region amid China's success in winning the largest number of parties possible.

Therefore, it seems that Qatar's refusal of Chinese rapprochement for closer cooperation with Washington, brought it back with a double loss on both levels.

## Qatari Women fail to break through in first legislative elections

By Don Gibbons



Qatar wrapped up its 1<sup>st</sup> legislative polls with no women elected to a representative council that is seen as unlikely to alter the distribution of power in the emirate.

Qatar went to the polls on October 2 in the first legislative elections the country has conducted. The vote was for 30 members of the 45-strong Shura Council, a body with limited powers that was previously appointed by the emir as an advisory chamber.

Male candidates were elected in all 30 of the seats up for election, the interior ministry's election committee reported, despite 28 women initially being cleared to run in the polls. The results raise the prospect that the emir will use his 15 direct appointments to the council to right the imbalance.

The final voter turnout was 63.5 percent according to officials, significantly higher than at 2019's municipal elections when fewer than 10 percent of voters cast ballots. Observers say the repeatedly delayed decision to hold the election comes with Qatar under heightened scrutiny as it prepares to host the 2022 World Cup.

### All-powerful emir

Former US ambassador to Qatar Susan Zideh said Qatar was "looking to see how it enhances its position on the world stage" which had led it to organise the polls ahead of 2022. On the issue of women's representation, Zideh said female voters would be focussed on "rights, whether it's personal status codes and other issues. "They're going to be looking to see how they can use this body," she added ahead of the results.

The Shura will be allowed to propose legislation, approve the budget and recall ministers. But the emir, all-powerful in the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, will wield a veto.

### Optics

All candidates had to be approved by the powerful interior ministry.

Most of Qatar's 2.5 million residents are foreigners, ineligible to vote.

Candidates stood in electoral divisions linked to where their family or tribe was based in the 1930s, using data compiled by the then-British authorities.

Qataris number about 333,000, but only descendants of those who were citizens in 1930 were eligible to vote and stand, disqualifying members of families naturalised since then.

In light of these limitations, what issues might emerge for discussion in the council, and what degree of input will its members and the constituencies they represent be permitted to have in national debates? A row has already broken out because some members of the Murrah tribe have been barred from voting this weekend. Technically, they are ineligible because they do not meet the arcane law mandating that a voter's ancestors lived in the territory of what is now Qatar before 1930. Yet some speculate that the true reason for their disenfranchisement can be traced back to 1996, when members of the tribe conspired against Tamim's father Hamad at the urging of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Another factor that may ruffle some feathers is the relative lack of gender diversity in this inaugural election. Of the 284 candidates running for the limited number of elected council seats, only 28 are women.

On the regional front, overt official criticism of Qatar has mostly stopped since this January, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt pledged to end the long political and economic embargo they imposed on Doha in 2017 over its maverick behaviour, ties to Iran, and other disputes. Yet Gulf social media channels are still awash in negative commentary against the Qataris.

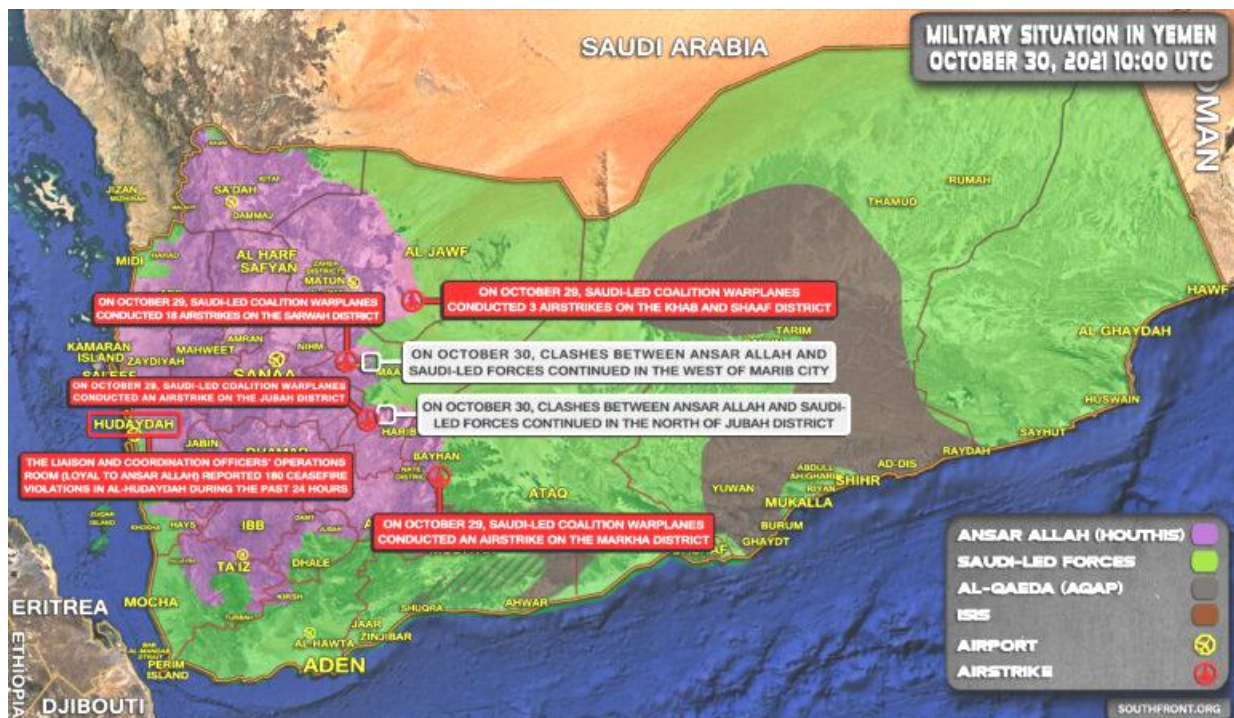
Concerns persist in Washington as well, despite the kudos Doha has won for continuing to host the largest U.S. air base in the region at al-Udeid and, most recently, for playing a major role in the evacuation of Americans and other foreigners from Afghanistan. On September 29, for example, the Treasury Department announced sanctions against Qatari citizens who worked with individuals in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to transfer millions of dollars to Lebanese Hezbollah.

The unstated reality is that the most important politics in Qatar and other Gulf Arab states are ruling family politics. Although the 2013 transfer of power from Hamad to Tamim was the smoothest transition in the country's modern history, some of his cousins still believe they have a greater claim to the throne. At the same time, as Qatar's economy develops and its society modernizes, its citizens will naturally want a greater voice in the gas-rich sheikhdom—if not a share of the action.



# Biden's Afghan debacle leads to increased attacks on Saudi Arabia

By Peter Rawlings  
TCMER Board Member



Many Arabs political analysts and writers are convinced that the Biden administration's flawed handling of the crisis in Afghanistan, which resulted in the Taliban takeover of the whole country, has emboldened various extremist Islamic groups, including the Houthis, who are now threatening Washington's Arab friends and allies.

The Houthis have been fighting the Saudi-led coalition-backed government in Yemen since 2015.

The main concern for the Arabs is that the "humiliating" manner in which the US ended its presence in Afghanistan has sent a message to Iran and its proxies - Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis - that the Americans are not only weak, but that they cannot be trusted to support or defend their allies.

The Iran-backed Houthis appear to be telling themselves: If the US is so weak and has no problem betraying its allies and friends, perhaps this is the right time to step up the attacks on Saudi Arabia.

Recent weeks have witnessed a significant escalation in the attacks of the Houthi militia in Yemen against civilian areas in Saudi Arabia. The destinations included oil facilities inside Saudi Arabia. On September 5, the Saudis announced that they intercepted a ballistic missile and armed drones that were fired by the Houthis in Yemen at the oil-rich Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, home to significant oil infrastructure. Two children were injured.

A few days earlier, the Houthi terrorists carried out a drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha Airport, injuring eight people and damaging aircraft. The airport has been targeted on several occasions in the past. In 2019, at least 20 people were injured in a similar drone attack on the airport.

The Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) denounced "in the strongest terms" the repeated terrorist acts carried out by the Houthi militia on Saudi Arabia. According to Al Ahram:

"In a statement issued Sunday [Sept. 5], the AIMC's General Secretariat stressed the need to hold accountable perpetrators of these terrorist acts and heinous war crimes. The Council renewed absolute support for all measures taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to preserve its lands, facilities and the safety of its citizens and residents."

"The scenes of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan carried many messages to the Iranian regime," said Saudi writer Fahd Deepaji.

"The withdrawal of the US troops reinforced the hypotheses and possibilities of Iran's renewed expansion to complete a project initiated by the administration of former US President Barack Obama to enable political Islam to rule the region".

Deepaji pointed out that the Biden administration had already sent another message to Iran and its proxies when it removed the Houthi militia from the list of terrorist organizations.

"This negligent handling by the US and the West made the Houthis falsely present themselves to the world as a strong party... The Houthi effort escalated and became bolder after the recent events in Afghanistan and the US defeat there. Now the US administration has an opportunity to show that its understanding of Yemen was wrong by declaring that it will not allow armed terrorist militias to impose a fait accompli on Yemeni soil...

"No one in the world understands the terrorist Houthi mentality as does the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has warned and continues to warn of its danger. The terrorism of Iran's proxies is one and indivisible, and the weakness and blindness of the West has not changed towards the Houthi militia and the Iranian regime."

Veteran Lebanese journalist and political analyst Kheirallah Kheirallah wondered whether the US, after withdrawing from Afghanistan, will continue to play the role of a bystander "at a time when there is no indication that the Houthis will stop their aggressive policy aimed at imposing a fait accompli [Iranian rule] on the Arabian Peninsula," which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as the southern portions of Iraq and Jordan.

Kheriallah believes that the US will not be able to do anything against the Houthi threat unless it takes into account that Iran is determined to use Yemen as a main card in imposing its conditions on the Biden administration. "Iran sees a new opportunity to advance in Yemen and consolidate its presence there," he added.

"At this particular stage, there is an opportunity for the US administration to act and show that its understanding of Yemen is better than its understanding of Afghanistan, and that it will not allow Iran to impose a fait accompli in Yemen. There is no doubt that the Yemeni situation is extremely complex and that there is an unparalleled human tragedy in this impoverished country. This should not prevent the US from adopting a

new, clearer and more understandable approach to what is at stake in Yemen, an approach that shows that Afghanistan's defeat does not mean a paralysis of US foreign policy or surrender to Iran, which is working to perpetuate a reality in Yemen that resembles the reality of Hamas's control of the Gaza Strip since 2007."

The Houthi militia was among the first Islamist groups to welcome the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the US "defeat." The militia indicated that it has been inspired by the Taliban's alleged victory.

Commenting on the fall of Afghanistan into the hands of the Taliban, Mohammed Abdul Salam, a spokesman for the Houthi militia, wrote:

"Every occupation has an end. America is now reaping failure after 20 years of occupying Afghanistan, so do the countries of aggression consider this?"

Abdul Salam's threat was directed mainly toward Saudi Arabia, which has been leading a coalition of nine countries to stop the Houthis from taking control over Yemen. The message that the Houthi spokesman is sending: Our Iranian-backed terrorist group will follow the example of Afghanistan and defeat America's friends, specifically the Saudis.

Yemeni journalist Zakaria Al-Kamali expressed fear of what he called "the Afghanization of Yemen."

"It is certain that the Houthis will import more experiences of the Afghan chaos and begin to implement them in the Yemeni territories," Al-Kamali cautioned, adding that it was obvious that the Houthi leaders are "jealous of the Taliban's security achievement in Afghanistan."

"The Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia fall under the category of war crimes and crimes against humanity," said Emirati writer Mohammed Khalfan Al-Sawafi, who also believes that the Iranian-backed militia is seeking to copy the Afghanistan model.

"They the Houthis aim to serve ideological and political goals of the Iranian regime. The terrorist Houthi militia is not different from other armed factions loyal to the Iranian regime in the region, such as the terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon, or the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq. All of these proxies practice the most heinous crimes and violations against civilians, whether in Iraq, Syria or Yemen. The logic of the Houthis and Iran is only understood in the context of their hostility to humanity. They are trying to pressure the Arab coalition forces and the entire international community by targeting civilians, including children, in order for the Iranian regime to try to impose its vision on the region."

What the Arabs find most disturbing is that the Biden administration has failed to take a tough stance against the increased Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia. So far, the Biden administration has responded to the attacks by issuing laconic statements describing the drone and missile attacks on civilian targets in Saudi Arabia as "unacceptable."

Iran, the Houthis and the Taliban must be laughing uncontrollably as they watch the Biden administration blunder the situation in Afghanistan and Yemen. At stake here is not only the credibility of the US, but the security and stability of America's Arab allies and friends who have been left alone to face Iran - which is leveraging the weakness and confusion in the Biden administration to extend its control more widely.

# Saudi Arabia expels Lebanon Ambassador

By Lina Zaidi  
TCMER Board Member



Lebanon's Information Minister Kordahi criticised Saudi Arabia's just war in Yemen

Saudi Arabia has ordered Lebanon's ambassador to leave within 48 hours over "insulting" comments by a Lebanese minister. The kingdom has also imposed a blanket ban on all imports from Lebanon.

The move comes days after remarks by Lebanon's information minister about the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen sparked outrage in the kingdom. Lebanon's prime minister said he regretted the Saudis' decision and hoped they would reconsider.

Saudi Arabia said it was also recalling its envoy in Beirut for "consultations".

The Arab League said on October 30 it was concerned about the deteriorating relations, and urged Gulf countries "to reflect on the measures proposed to be taken... in order to avoid further negative effects on the collapsing Lebanese economy".

In an interview aired earlier recently but recorded in August, Lebanon's Information Minister George Kordahi appeared to call Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) aggressors in the war in Yemen. For seven years, a Saudi-led military coalition has been fighting Iranian backed Houthi rebels.

Both Saudi Arabia and the rebels have faced international criticism over alleged atrocities in Yemen. But the Lebanese government said Mr Kordahi's remarks did not reflect its position.

Relations between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia have worsened in recent years. The Iran-backed militant terrorist group Hezbollah, which also backs the Houthi rebels in Yemen, has grown in strength in Lebanon.

Mr Kordahi is a member of a political bloc allied to Hezbollah.

Within hours of the Saudi announcement, nearby Bahrain also expelled its Lebanese ambassador.

Lebanon is grappling with a deepening economic crisis and political infighting. Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he was "deeply sorry" about the Saudi decision and would work to repair relations.



#### Row becomes full-blown crisis

This is a punishing rebuke by Saudi Arabia. The latest trigger was the emergence of old comments by Lebanon's information minister. But the bigger source of Saudi anger is the growing dominance in Lebanon of Hezbollah, the heavily armed Shia movement backed by Iran and Qatar.

The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, considered that the origins of the current crisis in relations with Lebanon are due to "Hezbollah's hegemony" there. Bin Farhan said, in a press statement, that the origins of the crisis with Lebanon go back to "Hezbollah's hegemony," adding that the kingdom has no opinion on whether the current Lebanese government should stay or leave.

Saudi Arabia has always wanted the group's grip diminished. This aspiration is shared by most Lebanese citizens.

Pulling out ambassadors puts even more pressure on Lebanon. Currently in the midst of such an economic and political crisis, many are wondering how many more blows it can take before a complete collapse.

# Saudi Arabia: What Has Changed?

**By Arthur Tane**  
**TCMER Executive Director**



So what has changed in Saudi Arabia? This is a question I am often asked by on the rapidly moving landscape of Saudi Arabia. And with the passage of time, I find my answers adapting to a more voluminous response.

So, what has changed, you may wonder.

A lot, I say — and for the better. Ever since Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman revealed his Vision 2030 to the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia has not looked back.

Internally, the Kingdom leapfrogged over decades of fundamental stagnation and moral dilemmas that wrapped every aspect of the day-to-day living of the people. From the size of one's beard to the kind of acceptable face veil that women should adorn, there were norms that dictated people's lives and existence. Added to that were the strictest of interpretations of our religion. The development of the country was indeed hijacked by edicts released by some powerful preachers.

Religious issues encompassed almost every aspect of the residents' lives in the country. From what was acceptable to watch on TV, to what was acceptable to be taught in school ... the country was held back by strict and often oppressive rules that impeded its march into the new millennium.

With a stroke of the pen, the Saudi Crown Prince put an end to all that, severely curtailing the influence and authority of religious figures in the country and limiting their participation in progressive agendas. While this may not seem to be a singular achievement to an outsider, it did have an immediate effect on the people of the country. It was almost like opening a huge window to a room full of oppressive stale air and letting the fresh cool breeze flow in. If one is asked to pick the most significant acts of the young Crown Prince, his stripping away of the powers of the religious police would factor among the top ones. Since then, the Kingdom has intensified its

efforts to wean itself away from a perilous dependency on its oil resources and move into a new market economy. Through various meetings and contacts with global economic giants, the Crown Prince has secured some financial alliances that will help forge capital growth based on commercial and industrial development and reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil revenue.

The country has begun to look as an attractive destination for foreign investors and it has come through a series of new laws aimed at reassuring foreign stakeholders that their interests are in safe hands. Along with bankruptcy and banking laws, the Kingdom has set out to prove that yes indeed it is a safe haven for investment.

The country began to address the issues of its people and especially the youth who make up a majority of its population. The youthful Crown Prince could well relate to the aspirations of young Saudis. Unemployment was tackled head-on with companies given more incentives for hiring Saudis. For those who were reluctant, new tariffs were imposed on hiring and maintaining of expats.

On the social side, new laws were introduced that slowly pushed Saudi Arabia forward in line with most countries of the world. Women were thrust into key positions in politics and economy. Business establishments and offices were encouraged to employ more women and they were allowed admission into stadiums for sports, entertainment venues and at other events that were previously the exclusive realm of men. And in 2018, the country removed one of the most significant hurdles that women had faced for decades — the right to drive on the Kingdom's roads.

Foreign visitors to Riyadh are sometimes almost ecstatic about the relaxation of previous mores that they observe. Some women continue to wear hijab but some wear western garb. Unrelated members of the sexes mingle in coffee shops. The once-feared religious police are nowhere to be seen.

So many significant changes have taken place in the past months and these have been welcomed and appreciated by the common public of Saudi Arabia.

Critics may still argue that there are many more issues concerning women that need to be addressed, such as male guardianship laws. But to those critics I would like to say: 'You cannot cross an ocean with a single leap.' The big positive is that changes are taking place in Saudi Arabia and they are there for good.

There are many challenges ahead. The country has to be in sync with the other developed nations of the world in terms of economic development, while keeping an eye on the hopes of its people. If the recent past is any indicator, then there is every reason to believe that Saudi Arabia's aspirations will definitely be realised.

Saudi women are expected to play a vital role in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA's) development strategy, Vision 2030. The number of Saudi women holding managerial positions has increased during the past decade, with the Kingdom recently enacting new reforms toward improving on its record of female empowerment and gender equality.

The World Bank report "Women, Business, and the Law 2020" recognized Saudi Arabia as the top reformer globally in the last year. Saudi Arabia implemented historic reforms to advance women's economic participation. The measures introduced freedom of travel and movement for women over the age of 21.



The decrees removed restrictions on women's ability to leave the house and equalized women's right to choose a place of residency. They prohibited discrimination based on gender in employment, the dismissal of pregnant women and discrimination based on gender in accessing to credit. The decrees introduced pension equality by equalizing the retirement ages for men and women and mandating pension care credits for maternity leave.

These bold reforms fundamentally changed women's legal rights in Saudi Arabia. 5.5 million Saudi women over 21 years of age are already benefiting from the reforms and will continue to reap the benefits for generations to come.



## Saudi Arabia sets new green objectives

**By Anastasia Kravtsov**  
**TCMER Board Member**



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced, on October 26, the establishment of the Green Initiative Foundation, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced two days earlier that it would commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2060 at the summit of the Saudi Green Initiative in Riyadh.

The goal represents a huge leap for the Green Saudi Initiative and the Green Middle East Initiative, which were announced in March, and are part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 program to reshape its economy, placing themselves at the centre of regional efforts to achieve international goals in environmental projects.

What is the Green Saudi Initiative?

Combined with a net-zero plan - where the kingdom will rapidly expand already significant investments in renewable energy - Saudi Arabia will work to restore, conserve and sustainably manage one billion hectares of land by 2040.

The Saudi Green Initiative aims to plant 10 billion trees - like rehabilitating 200 million hectares of degraded land. The goal also represents 4% of the global drive to reverse land degradation and 1% of the global effort to plant a trillion trees.

As part of the plan, 30% of the kingdom (600,000 square kilometres) will be protected areas, and efforts will be made to protect coastal environments.

The Green Middle East Initiative has a similar plan for the region. Saudi Arabia will work with countries to plant 50 billion trees across the Middle East.

Objectives of the Green Saudi Initiative:

1. Planting 10 billion trees in Saudi Arabia and 50 billion trees across the Middle East.
2. Reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the Middle East by 60%.
3. Renewable sources to produce 50% of Saudi Arabia's electricity by 2030.

4. Recycling 94% of the trash that now goes to landfill.
5. Increase protected areas to more than 30% (including marine and coastal ecosystems).
6. Eliminate more than 130 million tons of carbon emissions with clean hydrocarbon technology.
7. Reach net zero emissions by 2060.
8. The Green Saudi Initiative program aims to achieve more than 278 million tons per year in reducing carbon emissions by 2030.
9. The Kingdom will join the Global Methane Pledge to contribute to reducing global methane emissions by 30% by 2030.
10. Providing food to more than 750 million people in the world through the initiative.

Why are environmental projects important to the Middle East?

This relates in part to the region's commitments to international goals to mitigate climate change such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, and Saudi Arabia and the region face environmental challenges such as desertification, which is an economic threat.

The green initiative aims to increase vegetation, reduce carbon emissions, combat pollution and preserve marine life.

Sandstorms alone cost the region \$13 billion annually, and air pollution is estimated to cut life expectancy by one and a half years (18 months).

The ambitious programs aim to reduce carbon emissions in the region by 60%. Currently, only 7% of energy production in the Middle East is clean, so the initiative aims to reduce more than 130 million tons of carbon emissions, and reduce global carbon emissions by more than 4 %.

The kingdom has ambitious renewable energy goals, including increasing the use of wind and solar energy, which will generate half of the country's electricity by 2030 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Why are these projects important to Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program is a massive national reform plan aimed at reducing the kingdom's dependence on oil revenues. One aspect of this vision is environmental protection and climate goals that include diversifying energy production from fossil fuels to renewable sources.

As the region's largest economy, Saudi Arabia has long sought to be a leading force in shaping the Middle East and coordinating regional responses to crises from conflict to hunger to climate change, and the initiatives will chart a roadmap for the country and the region to protect the environment.

How did Saudi Arabia protect the environment in the past?

The two initiatives (Green Saudi Arabia and Green Middle East) build on the Kingdom's mission to help protect the planet which was at the core of its 2020 G20 presidency.

But it has long supported the so-called circular carbon economy, a framework that focuses on reducing carbon production and finding ways to reuse and recycle emissions.

In 2012, the kingdom launched the Saudi Energy Efficiency Program, a cornerstone of its plan to reduce carbon emissions.

The Kingdom is also planning to establish a huge new hydrogen fuel factory in the huge futuristic city of NEOM, in addition to the largest carbon dioxide purification plant in the world, with a capacity of 500,000 tons annually.

King Salman officially announced the National Program for the Circular Carbon Economy, or CCE, in November last year.

Speaking at the G20 Leaders Summit last year, Crown Prince Mohammed said the Assembly of Heads of State and Government “allows comprehensive management of emissions to mitigate climate impact challenges and promote cleaner and more sustainable energy systems, as well as develop stable and secure energy markets and energy access.”

How does the Saudi citizen view these initiatives?

Saudis see the country intensifying its efforts to raise awareness of environmental issues and is serious about nature conservation and sustainable development. Marine biologists have praised the kingdom's efforts to protect coastal and marine life last year.

Ghada Kamel, 27, a marine biology student and diving instructor from Saudi Arabia, said the initiatives came at the right time to teach the younger generation the importance of climate change and the preservation of the planet. Since last year, the Shura Council has implemented new standards and penalties for violations in order to preserve the Marine life.

Maliha Al-Sharif, 34, a Saudi architect, sees young Saudis becoming more aware of environmental issues. “For those who live in the kingdom, we have seen a drastic change in the way we interact with nature in the past seven years,” she said.

“From recycling, reusing and moving towards sustainable means of consumption and production, we have had more awareness at the grassroots level over the past few years, starting with education in schools.”

## Sudan's Latest Military Coup

By Alberto Fernandez



General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan

After months of nebulous plotting, the domestic and foreign actors who drove opposition to Hamdok's reformist government will become more discernible as the generals look for ways to solidify their hold on power.

Two-and-a-half years after the fall of dictator Omar al-Bashir, Sudan has witnessed another military coup. The generals struck less than forty-eight hours after a visit by U.S. special envoy Jeffrey Feltman, commencing a power grab that seems to have succeeded for now. Military authorities have arrested cabinet ministers and members of the transitional civilian government, dismissed governors, placed Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok under house arrest, cut internet access, seized state media, and decreed a state of emergency.

In an address to the nation on October 25, coup leader Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan justified his actions and reiterated his commitment to “the constitutional path” and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement with various rebel groups. On the latter front, he called on the last two rebel holdouts—Abdel Wahid al-Nur of the Darfur-based Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and Abdelaziz al-Hilu of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), based in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan—to fully join the peace process and help usher in “a new Sudan...of freedom, peace and justice.”

Burhan, who was previously the country's de facto head of state before spearheading the coup, sought to portray the military's action as a “correction” to the transitional process, emphasizing that the revolution was in danger and pledging to appoint a technocratic government that will guide the country to democratic elections in July 2023. Yet the essential question to be decided on the streets of Sudan in the coming days is clear: will the military solidify its rule enough to make and unmake governments for the long term, or will its power decrease in accordance with the framework guiding the post-Bashir democratic transition?

Just last week, Sudan witnessed massive popular demonstrations supporting the civilian government and marking the anniversary of the 1964 uprising, which overthrew the country's first dictator, Ibrahim Abboud. As news of the current coup circulated, scattered protests broke out with promises of more to come. Mohamed Nagy Alassam—a key leader of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which took part in the demonstrations that ousted Bashir's Islamist regime—called for peaceful opposition to the military's action. The country's well-developed civil society movement has proven to be resilient and creative in the face of brutal regime repression in the past, though it now faces its biggest challenge since early 2019.

### What Led to the Coup?

The warning lights for Sudan's fragile transition have been flashing red for some time now. On September 21, the government announced it had foiled a coup attempt by another army general, Abdul Baqi al-Bakrawi, who was supposedly working in sync with pro-Bashir elements. Meanwhile, a series of suspiciously timed and murkily led demonstrations broke out in the coastal region, with notables from the Beja people and other factions praising the military and calling for change in the civilian government while disrupting commerce and port access. Small crowds in Khartoum called for the same thing. The sense of walls closing in and hidden hands moving was palpable.

Further evidence of burgeoning conspiracies emerged on October 19, when Facebook announced that it was disrupting two large social media networks targeting users inside Sudan. One was connected to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by ambitious general Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (aka "Hemeti"), who serves as Burhan's deputy and is seen as the real strongman of the military faction. The other network was connected to Bashir loyalists and comprised more than a hundred accounts with around 1.8 million followers. Such activity points to a longstanding plot by military elements and Islamist subversives to undermine Hamdok's reformist government.

Indeed, by ousting the prime minister, the coup plotters removed a respected international civil servant who had made visible progress in reversing Sudan's isolation after three decades of Islamist dictatorship. The country had finally secured its removal from Washington's State Sponsors of Terrorism List and taken important steps toward economic reform endorsed by the World Bank and IMF. Hamdok also removed Bashir-era laws against blasphemy and "public order" decrees that regulated how women dress, cover their hair, and travel in public. And last year, he publicly attended the yearly memorial for the late liberal Islamic reformer Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, who was executed for apostasy in 1985 by a previous Islamist regime. These details are important because one of the narratives being promoted by pro-military elements is that the generals intervened to somehow "save" Sudan from pro-Bashir loyalists. Such Islamist loyalists certainly exist, but Hamdok was not one of them.

### Policy Implications

Because the coup happened shortly after the U.S. special envoy had seemingly calmed tensions between civilian officials and the military, it constitutes a direct challenge to Washington. The plotters must feel quite emboldened by regional allies, who appear to have convinced them that the fallout is manageable and that their "technocratic civilian government" plan will eventually win over enough of the international community to keep them in power and garner sufficient foreign assistance. To facilitate this outcome, the military or its civilian front men may try to take high-profile diplomatic steps, such

as finally sending Bashir to the International Criminal Court in The Hague or openly making peace with Israel (Hamdok's government was already cautiously exploring both of these paths).

Assuming they weather popular anger, the generals will also need to put together a credible civilian government. This presents them with a dilemma: if governance and economic figures continue to lag or worsen, they will no longer be able to blame the civilians they just overthrew. The junta will be hard-pressed to do better than Hamdok on those issues, and its leaders have little public legitimacy despite their efforts to appropriate the language of Sudan's youths and revolutionaries.

Consequently, the regional Arab governments and Sudanese politicians who support the new military rule will be unmasked in the coming weeks, and as they are, Washington and other parties need to make clear that there are consequences for supporting a rogue regime. Initial public comments from Cairo, Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Riyadh have been muted. But all of these states will need to balance between their individual agendas for Sudan and their complicated relations with the West.

One thing is certain: Sudan will be inherently unstable if its leaders ignore the stated interests of Western governments and the demonstrators who massed on the streets just a week ago. Twice in the country's recent political history, concerns about such instability have driven unpopular ruling generals to embrace political Islam as a vehicle for some sort of legitimacy. The current military leadership is divided—Burhan may not be in full control, or may have acted in competition with military rivals, while Hemeti has been maintaining a suspiciously low profile since the coup.

In the immediate term, Hamdok's ouster sets up an open clash with a U.S. administration that did try to help Sudan—though the Biden team could have done much more and sooner to back up its vocal declarations of support for human rights and democracy. Many in the region now see the administration as precipitously heading for the exit on many fronts, despite its protestations to the contrary.

In any case, the brewing clash will likely follow the model of escalation often practiced by the Bashir regime, of which Burhan and Hemeti were a part before they helped remove it. That is, Khartoum would make some outrageous decision, and the international community would engage it in an effort to make the decision less bad. The usual result was a focus on "process" over actual results, thereby giving the regime vital breathing space time and time again. The Biden administration may face the same potential trap in the next few weeks if the generals dangle the prospect of a substitute civilian puppet government.

Washington's best course of action now is not to waver, but to openly take a hard and clear line against the rule of Sudanese military strongmen (and their civilian enablers once their identity becomes known). Initial steps in that direction have been taken, with the Biden administration suspending bilateral aid and publicly condemning the military. In addition, the generals need to be quietly warned that things could get worse for them if the situation on the ground deteriorates further. The moral way forward—full defence of Sudan's 2019 democratic revolution and besieged transition—is also the best one for U.S. policy.

*Alberto Fernandez is vice president of the Middle East Media Research Institute and former U.S. chief of mission in Sudan.*

## Tunisia's Islamists Sidelined

By Don Gibbons  
TCMER Board Member



The removal of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda [Renaissance] Party from power early this year has been welcomed not only by Tunisians, but by many Arabs who have accused the Islamists, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood organization, of spreading chaos and instability in the Arab world. The Ennahda Party was inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the ideology of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The crisis in Tunisia erupted on July 25 after President Kais Saied dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the activities of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, whose speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, is the leader of the Ennahda Party. The decisions of the president were made in response to a series of protests against the Ennahda Party, economic hardship and spike in COVID-19 cases in Tunisia.

Tunisia is the third Arab country after Egypt and Sudan to say that it is fed up with the rule of the Islamists. With the exception of Qatar, most of the Arab countries have long regarded the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups as a major threat to security, stability and peace.

On October 11, Tunisians welcomed a presidential order formalized the new cabinet, naming the head of the government and its members. Despite this development, Tunisia's economic and public finance issues remain the biggest concern for Tunisians for the foreseeable future, even amidst the political and health crises the country faced recently.

President Kais Saied had promised that the new initiatives would respect Tunisians' hard-fought rights and freedoms and democratic constitution. He promised a new electoral code to hold lawmakers more accountable to constituents, and transitional arrangements to run the country before he names a new prime minister.

The North African nation was widely seen as a model for budding democracies but has failed to cure chronic unemployment and other social ills, especially in neglected provinces.

## Turkey: NATO's Pro-Russian, Taliban-Friendly Ally

By Burak Bekdil



The Taliban, since its founding in 1994, has been using the most notorious shariah-based law enforcement, including beheadings, stoning women to death, forcing *burqas* on women, killing girls who are students, gang-raping, locking women in their homes and various other medieval practices. Now, for the first time in NATO's history, a member nation's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has said that the Taliban's interpretation of Islam does not contradict Turkey's.

A love affair with Islam, in fact, seems to be blossoming. At the end of August, the Taliban asked Turkey for technical support to run Kabul's airport. Pro-Hamas, Islamist allies Turkey and Qatar have since been discussing with the Taliban conditions for reopening the Hamid Karzai Airport; only the security issue of technicians, private companies and security staff who will be running the airport remains a concern. On September 2, Turkey said it was evaluating proposals from the Taliban and others for the safe operation of Kabul's airport after the radical group's return to power in Afghanistan.

"We have held our first talks with the Taliban, which lasted three and a half hours," Erdoğan told reporters August 27. "If necessary, we will have the opportunity to hold such talks again."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also mentioned on September 6 that Turkey was in "direct talks" with the Taliban concerning the future of Afghanistan. "After all," the minister said, "It would be wrong for Turkey to completely pull out of Afghanistan."

The emerging alliance between Turkish Islamists and Afghan radicals does not look unrequited. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid stated that a Turkish technical team had already arrived in Kabul this month to help reopen its airport for domestic and international flights. A draft deal revealed by *Middle East Eye* in August included provisions that would see Turkey recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and provide security at the Kabul airport through a private firm.



On September 6, Al Jazeera reported that the Taliban had invited Turkey, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar to attend a ceremony announcing a new Afghan government after the dramatic U.S. withdrawal. Turkey is the only NATO member nation on the Taliban's guest list of countries. It is the only country with an official (candidacy) link to the European Union.

Around the Taliban, and in a bizarre combination of convergence of interests and ideological kinship, a new anti-Western circle is evolving, including a willing NATO member state.

Islamist ideology is not the only motive for Turkey in joining the Taliban-centric group of unofficial allies. Russia, for instance, does not recognize the Taliban. Anti-Western sentiments are bringing together these regional powers, who are now courting Afghanistan's radical rulers.

Turkey's partnership in the U.S.-led, multinational consortium that builds the F-35 fighter jet was suspended after Ankara decided to acquire the Russian-made S-400 air defence system. The decision cost Turkey's defence industry \$10 billion worth of lost contracts and U.S. (CAATSA) sanctions. The damage, moreover, is not unilateral. The hard lesson learned from relying on an "ally" for critical production, then needing to restore that capability as politics change, ultimately will cost U.S. taxpayers between \$500 million and \$600 million in nonrecurring engineering costs, according to Ellen Lord, the previous Under Secretary of Defence for Acquisition.

On the Turkish side, the lesson seems not to have been learned at all. Russian state-run arms exporter Rosoboronexport said at the end of August that it may soon sign a new contract with Turkey for the supply of more S-400 air defence missile systems. "Consultations are continuing. I believe they are already at their final stage," its Director General Alexander Mikheev said at the International Military-Technical Forum, Army-2021, without disclosing details of the possible contract.

Confirming that, Erdoğan said on August 29 that Turkey has no hesitations about purchasing a second batch of the S-400s from Russia. "Regarding ... the purchase of the second [S-400] package and so on; we have no hesitation regarding these matters. We have taken many steps with Russia, whether it be the S-400 or the defence industry," Erdoğan told reporters.

Russia's military engagement with Turkey may not be limited to an advanced air defence system only. The Director of Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, Dmitry Shugayev, has signalled that Moscow and Ankara are in talks over possible joint ventures concerning Turkey's efforts to build a new indigenous fighter aircraft, the TF-X. "At this stage, consultations are underway with the Turkish side at the level of specialized groups on the issues of interaction in creating the Turkish national fighter." Shugayev said.

U.S. President Joe Biden's Afghan drama will spur a number of anti-Western alliances based on different anti-Western calculations. Proof? Just look at the names of the countries on Taliban's invitation list for its birthday party.

*Burak Bekdil, one of Turkey's leading journalists.*

# Erdogan's Plans for the Future of Afghanistan: China, Russia and Terrorists

By Burak Bekdil



The US and the EU should not buy Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's fake pro-Western posture (such as when he offered to run the Kabul airport, then fled) or his fake anti-radicalism (such as when he is courting the Afghan terrorists). Erdogan's strategy, as a member of NATO, is clearly to bolster Russia's and China's plans for the future of Afghanistan.

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 in support of the communist Afghan government, then in conflict with radical Muslim fighters, Turkey was having its own civil war between ultra-left and ultra-right factions. In September 1980, the Turkish military staged a coup d'état and banned all political parties, including Islamist ones.

Turkish Islamists set up the Welfare Party, which would also later be banned. In 1985, halfway into the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Erdoğan was the dynamic, 31-year-old Istanbul provincial chairman of the Welfare Party. It was at one anti-U.S., anti-West event that Erdoğan invited a terrorist, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to Istanbul.

Hekmatyar is a former mujahedeen and leader of the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin political party. Ordinary Afghan citizens knew him as the "Butcher of Kabul" for shelling the city repeatedly for no other apparent reason than to make the murder stop.

There is one particular image that has surfaced time and time again to haunt the Turkish leader: A photo of Erdoğan sitting at the feet of Hekmatyar, who once was officially designated as a terrorist by the United Nations and the U.S. That photo was taken during the event in which Erdoğan hosted Hekmatyar in Istanbul in 1985.

The photo is still telling today, when, after the collapse of the Afghan government in August, Hekmatyar met with both Hamid Karzai, former President of Afghanistan, and

Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation and former Chief Executive, in Doha both seeking to form a government.

A few weeks ago, as Taliban's footsteps were becoming louder in Kabul, Erdoğan once again switched sides and celebrated his ideological love affair with Afghanistan's terrorists. "The Taliban's understanding (or interpretation) of Islam does not contradict ours," he said, shocking millions of secular Turks.

"Does it (Taliban's understanding of Islam) really not contradict ours? That understanding is about gang-raping, killing women, locking them in their homes, selling girls as slaves, banning schools for girls. When has ours turned into this?" asked Gamze Taşçier, an opposition member of parliament. "When has Turkey become a shariah state?" scores of other intellectuals asked Erdoğan.

Erdoğan's overtures to the Taliban, moreover, were not just limited to highlighting his tolerance to shariah. "Our relevant institutions," Erdoğan said, "are working on it, including talks with the Taliban, and I may also receive the leader of the Taliban."

There are two more important ramifications of the Taliban's advance and Turkey's subsequent leniency. First, the Taliban's capture of Kabul has ruined a Turkish plan to leave troops in the Afghan capital to operate the Hamid Karzai International Airport, a risk-filled task for which no other nation had volunteered.

Erdoğan had sought the job, it seems, to highlight Turkey's strategic importance to the Western nations, most notably the U.S. With that, he was likely hoping to have more leverage on the Biden administration when Turkey and the U.S. negotiated their most difficult divergences, including potential new sanctions on the Turkish government due to Turkey's acquisition of Russian-made S-400 air defence system. In short, Erdoğan was likely hoping to use the Kabul airport deal to reset deeply problematic ties with the U.S. by putting bilateral relations into a transactional frame. That way, Erdoğan's Turkey would score a point in portraying itself as a reliable Western ally.

Only a couple of weeks before the Taliban's capture of Kabul, Ankara and Washington were trying to iron out their differences for the terms and conditions of the Turkish control over Kabul's airport. As recently as August 11, Turkey still seemed intent on running and guarding Kabul airport after other foreign troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, on August 28, after speculation on social media that Greece would open its border to Afghan refugees until September 1, thousands of Afghan refugees flooded Turkey's land border with Greece.

Iran, for its part, seems to be hoping to hit two birds with one stone: by systematically facilitating the journey of illegal Afghans to Turkey and toward Greece, it might destabilize both Turkey and Europe. The mullahs in Iran would presumably be only too happy to transport tens of thousands of Afghans to their country's difficult border with Turkey. The rest would then be the problem of Sunni Turks and the West.

As the Middle East scholar and former Pentagon official Michael Rubin wrote, Erdoğan is also possibly seeking to utilize his partnership with Hekmatyar to help shape Afghanistan's post-war political order. "The U.S. should not let them," Rubin wrote.

"The persistence of Erdoğan's relationship with Hekmatyar illustrates that it was wishful thinking to believe that Erdoğan was ever anything more than a jihadi in a business suit, no matter how many diplomats projected their hopes of change on him."

In short, there is this designated terrorist, Hekmatyar, whose relations with Erdogan date back to 1985. Hekmatyar is now in talks with both the Taliban and Erdogan for the future of Afghanistan, while Erdogan is in talks with the Taliban and probably trying to figure out where to jump next.

Erdogan had been trying to appease the U.S. by guarding the Kabul airport, but that plan collapsed after the Taliban advanced into Kabul. Erdogan therefore lost a bargaining chip for his future dealings with Biden and the US. Now, due to Erdogan's long-term anti-Western ideology, he will probably be tempted to seek an alliance with whichever pro-sharia group(s) will, in the near future, be governing Afghanistan.

*Burak Bekdil, one of Turkey's leading journalists.*

# Dubai Expo Opens for Business

**By Anastasia Kravtsov**  
**TCMER Board Member**



A gateway to a world of new opportunities, Dubai Expo 2020 has finally started after a long wait. Bringing together the world in the sparkling city of Dubai, the Expo has come as a sign of hope, optimism, and a brighter future for everyone. There are 100 countries participating and showcasing their cultural, artistic, intellectual, technological, and sustainability-related prowess, putting in the best of efforts to exhibit what they are capable of and how they want their countries and respective communities to embrace the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Of all, one industry poised to gain the most benefits out of this show of global appeal is the business sector. So whether you are a business participating in the Expo, or someone operating in Dubai while the Expo continues, or one that is just visiting Dubai to witness this exceptional event, if you are a business, you all stand to benefit from it. Yes, you read it right.

The 7 benefits businesses stand to gain from Dubai Expo 2020 are:

## 1. Its theme is a lesson in itself

The first benefit is hidden in the theme of the Dubai edition of the Expo. “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future” governs the entire existence and creation of the Dubai Expo 2020. It is considered as one of the largest events for the business industry. Being the first Expo hosted by Dubai, and the first in the MENA region, it is rather special and is expected to be a one-of-its-kind experience. The theme is an indirect lesson in growth and development, which emphasises the foundational values of the UAE – empathy, collective efforts, and an attitude of never giving up.

## 2. The perfect place to network

It goes without saying that, with professionals from over 192 countries visiting and participating in the event, it is a haven for networking. It is not always that you get to meet people from across the world and from almost all possible industries at one

venue. It is also a rare opportunity to make new connections and expand your business to new heights by gaining access to the people in decision-making positions. With entrepreneurs, investors, and venture capitalists from across the region and the world coming to the event, it is an opportunity not to miss.

### 3. Get to know the UAE better

You could get this knowledge from various other sources, but there is no better way of learning about the UAE's future endeavours and its inspiring march towards a brighter future than visiting the Expo. If you are looking to understand how your business can join the bandwagon and start contributing towards the UAE's brighter future, the Expo is your place.

### 4. An excellent place to learn

Dubai Expo 2020 will help all types of enterprises learn and explore ideas at a global level. For start-ups, the Expo will be an excellent venue for growing a company, and so will it be for established businesses, aspiring ones, and professionals across fields. The Expo is anticipated to generate trade possibilities and open up a world of possibilities that was unimaginable before.

### 5. Attracting new clients

The world coming down to Dubai means you get to meet new people, and potential new clients. In the wake of the Expo, a lot of global businesses are looking to make Dubai their home. This movement of ventures and the opening of new ones is creating opportunities for many other businesses to work in tandem with the new ventures and generate more leads for their profits.

### 6. Increase your brand presence

The Dubai Expo 2020 brings an opportunity for local businesses to get a global-stature positioning. The event is expected to boost not only the tourism industry but almost all sectors such as education, healthcare, retail, entertainment, construction, real estate, and IT, among others. The Dubai Expo 2020 is a universal platform, which has the potential to help you increase your brand presence.

### 7. A chance to boost profits

The event will bring in an influx of local and international visitors and prospective clients, which will be beneficial for businesses seeking to expand and grow. It is estimated that over 25 million visitors will come to Dubai during the timeframe of the Expo. This translates to a plethora of business opportunities with a lot to take, learn from, and boost your profits.

Whether you are an entrepreneur or an established business, the Dubai Expo 2020 will offer a great opportunity for you to grow. All you need is a good amount of planning, a realistic strategy, and you are good to go.

Australia Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Dan Tehan, has opened the Australia pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, promising visitors an extraordinary journey through 60,000 years of innovation by the indigenous people of the country.

The opening ceremony was also attended by Reem Al Hashimy, Director General of Expo 2020 Dubai; Justin McGowan, Commissioner General of the pavilion; and Heidi Venamore, Australian ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

Minister Tehan said: "What we have in our pavilion is something extraordinary. It captures 60,000 years of unique innovation and our wonderful indigenous history. But

it also captures where indigenous Australians are today, how they are at the forefront of everything we're doing as a nation, especially when it comes to innovation. It captures the heart and the spirit of the Australian people.”



The ‘Blue Sky Dreaming’ theme of the pavilion celebrates Australia’s indigenous culture as the world’s oldest living civilisation.

Located in the Mobility District, the pavilion will hold a range of events and discussions during the six months of Expo 2020, aimed at strengthening networks, exploring trade and investment opportunities and fostering collaboration around global challenges.

For Further information

Visit - [www.austrade.gov.au/events/events/expo-2020-dubai](http://www.austrade.gov.au/events/events/expo-2020-dubai)

Email - [expo2020@austrade.gov.au](mailto:expo2020@austrade.gov.au) for the Austrade business program