

Analysts debate impact of Israel-UAE-Bahrain accords at Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate

Wed, 2020-11-11 23:18

DUBAI: The recent normalization of relations between Israel and two Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the UAE and Bahrain, could well prepare the ground for a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This was among the key observations of experts who took part in a panel discussion as part of the three-day Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate.

Sprinkled with references to strategic “recalculations” and “game changers,” Tuesday’s session, titled “The Gulf: Recalculations,” was one of the highlights of the seventh Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate, organized by the UAE’s Emirates Policy Center.

“The geopolitical map of power distribution in the Middle East has been changing,” said Abdulla bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, chairman of the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies (Derasat).

“If we look at the past two decades, we find that some countries previously played a central role but, for reasons of civil war, insecurity or economic stagnation, no longer do so. If we look at the Gulf in particular, we find that having quickly become a front runner, it is leading the region in terms of peace, economic development and political and regional affairs.”

Al-Khalifa said that GCC states, compared with the rest of the region, have successfully preserved their domestic security, continued to focus on positive economic development, provided necessary and advanced services to its people and residents and attracted great minds from all around the world.



Another strategic potential cited by Amos Yadlin at ADSD was more cooperation among Gulf states, Israel and the US to cope with “Iranian terror activity” and proxies of Iran, which he said were destabilizing the Middle East.
(AFP/Khamenei.ir/File Photo)

“There are very positive indicators that show that the Gulf is in a better-off position,” he said. “Forecasts indicate that were the Gulf to continue on such a positive economic development trajectory to 2030, it would be the sixth biggest economic bloc in the world, and this says a lot.”

To put the GCC’s achievements in perspective, Al-Khalifa cited a UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimate that placed the number of refugees leaving their hometowns – mainly from the Middle East toward Europe –at 225,000 in 2014. A year later, that number quadrupled to just above one million, before starting to gradually decrease.

“What happened during 2015 alone was the continuous channeling of funds toward areas of tension and the financing of terrorist and extremist organizations in parts of the Middle East,” he said. “This caused more instability, which undermined the security of many different countries in the region and which has led to more refugees fleeing toward Europe.”

Al-Khalifa took note of the (maximum) “economic pressure” brought to bear on Iran by the Trump administration and the labeling of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization last year but cautioned that no decisive action has been taken. “Many are of the notion that the current Iranian regime is betting on a new US administration,” he said. “And we are still to see the final results of the US elections, which are yet to

be reflected in developments in the Middle East.”

For his part, Albadr Alshateri, former politics professor at the National Defense College in Abu Dhabi, described the advent of the Abraham Accords – signed by Israel, the UAE and Bahrain – as one of necessity, owing to the geopolitical competition that is so “pervasive” in the region. He said the treaty’s three signatories all regard Iran as a common threat, adding that they have come together because of the gradual “erosion” of the Arab state system, which has been on the decline, particularly since 1990 and the invasion of Kuwait.

FASTFACTS

Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate

- * The 7th ADSD was held on Nov. 9-11**
- * Main topics were pandemic, US elections and UAE-Israel treaty**
- * Discussions were conducted via Zoom and live-streamed on social media**

“The Arab state system was a structure that shaped the foreign policies of different Arab states and provided leadership in the face of external threats and challenges,” he said. “Since that decline or erosion, core Arab states are now basically in chaos or are failed states, like Syria and perhaps Iraq. Egypt is also maybe too busy with itself to play the big role it used to in the regional system.”

From a global standpoint, Alshateri said that “a center of gravity” was lacking, as Washington’s declining role in the region will not allow it to play its traditional role of maintaining political order therein. He expressed cautious optimism by calling on the need to see results of the normalization of relations between Bahrain, the UAE and Israel leading to more countries joining the peace process.

“I personally advocate for something like a Westphalia peace treaty for the whole region where all countries, regardless of their ethnic composition or beliefs, can coexist in peace and harmony,” Alshateri said.

“If they cannot exist in harmony, at least they can exist within secure borders. If the new Abraham Accords can create such an environment or transformation, then we can talk about game changers. What impact the normalization of relations will have in the future is something to be tested.”



Erel Margalit, founder and chairman of Jerusalem Venture Partners (JVP), visits with members of Israeli high-tech delegation the Dubai Financial Market (DFM) on October 27, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

In conclusion, Alshateri called for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be resolved, adding that it is the core issue between Arabs and Israelis. "Solving this problem will push us forward to a more stable and secure region," he said. "Absence of that will make it harder. There will be great resentment publicly."

Participating in the same panel discussion, Amos Yadlin, a retired major-general in the Israel Defense Forces and executive director of Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies, chalked up the Israel-UAE-Bahrain normalization process to a convergence of interests and values, including modernization, moderation, stability and peace.

"The potential of a game changer is to show the public in the Middle East, which is suffering from civil wars in Syria, Libya and Iraq, the negative influence of Turkey and Iran and to show that there is another way of having better relations that will trickle down to everyone, not only among leaders," Yadlin said.

"The potential is also there to move forward on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The UAE stopped the annexation, and the Palestinians can come back to negotiate. It's going to be even easier with the new US administration. The Gulf has figured out that it can use the peace accords to promote negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians."

Another strategic potential cited by Yadlin was more cooperation among Gulf states, Israel and the US to cope with “Iranian terror activity” and proxies of Iran, which he said were destabilizing the Middle East.

“We can cooperate here,” he said. “We are not looking for war, nor clashes. But the very fact that Iran will know we are sharing intelligence and we are together to cope with the challenges is another opportunity for a game changer in the Middle East. If trust is built among the leaders and the people, we can all see a better Middle East.”

Twitter: [@CalineMalek](#)



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Experts weigh up Biden's Middle East policy options at Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate
Abu Dhabi Crown Prince, Netanyahu discuss UAE-Israeli ties

UN accuses Turkey of turning blind eye to Iranian assassinations

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-11 23:09

LONDON: Ankara allowed Iranian intelligence officers to plot and carry out extrajudicial killings on Turkish soil, according to two UN rapporteurs.

They also accused Ankara of allowing the escape of a man allegedly involved in the killing of Iranian journalist Masoud Molavi Vardanjani in Istanbul in 2019.

In a letter to Turkey's government, Agnes Callamard, UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and Javaid Rehman, special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, accused it of having "failed to conduct appropriate, formal investigations into the killing."

They urged Ankara to provide information on any investigation carried out or ongoing, the possible misuse of the Iranian consular premises in Istanbul, and to give details "about existing policies and measures aimed at ensuring that foreign intelligence officers are not allowed to perpetrate or orchestrate extrajudicial killings on Turkish territory."

Citing the 2003 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Turkey is a signatory, the letter said states "must take appropriate measures to protect individuals against deprivation of life by other states in areas operating on their territory, and states also have obligations under international law not to aid or assist activities undertaken by other states that violate the right to life."

It added: "Under international law in all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, states have an obligation to conduct 'thorough, prompt and impartial investigations'. Failure to conduct such an investigation may trigger additional violations of the right to life."

Vardanjani was shot in Istanbul on Nov. 14, 2019, reportedly at the behest of Iranian agents operating from their country's consulate in the city.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo later described it as "another tragic example in a long string of suspected Iran-backed assassination attempts" of dissidents.

Vardanjani had fled Iran a year earlier and established a channel on the communications platform Telegram, called "Black Box," to report on corruption allegations against senior Iranian politicians, lawyers and other members of the establishment, as well as to criticize the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Three months before his murder, he posted a message on social media saying: "I will root out the corrupt mafia commanders. Pray that they don't kill me before I do this."

The UN rapporteurs said prior to his death, Vardanjani was "befriended" by an Iranian named Ali Esfanjani, who was allowed to flee Turkey three days after the murder despite a Turkish police report released by Reuters later naming him as the coordinator of the attack, and as having reported on Vardanjani to Iranian intelligence for months beforehand.

In its response, Turkey accused the rapporteurs of behaving in a manner "not consistent with diplomatic practices."

Its permanent representative to the UN added in a diplomatic communiqué that "nine individuals, four of whom are foreign nationals enjoying neither diplomatic nor consular immunity, were arrested and put under pre-trial detention" for their alleged roles in the assassination.



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Erdogan aide faces new accusations over judicial interference

[Libya talks reach breakthrough on election roadmap, UN envoy says](#)

Wed, 2020-11-11 22:21

TUNIS: Political talks in Tunis on Libya's future have reached a breakthrough, the United Nations acting Libya envoy said on Wednesday, paving the way towards elections within 18 months.

The participants reached a preliminary agreement on a roadmap to parliamentary and presidential elections that includes steps to unite Libya's institutions, Stephanie Williams said at a news conference in Tunis.

She said Tuesday's "heinous killing" of dissident lawyer Hanan Al-Barassi in the eastern city of Benghazi showed there was a crisis of accountability across Libya.

After years of chaos and warfare in Libya, with key institutions held by rival factions riven by political, regional and ideological divisions, and foreign powers pouring in arms, many Libyans remain sceptical of peacemaking efforts.

However, the Tunis talks, which began on Monday, follow a ceasefire agreed last month between the main warring sides – the Government of National Accord (GNA) in the west and the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA).



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UN launches new Libya talks amid cautious optimismLibya's rivals start UN-led talks to reach political accord

UAE COVID-19 pandemic toll climbs to 520 as 1,214 new cases confirmed

Wed, 2020-11-11 21:58

DUBAI: The UAE on Wednesday recorded 1,214 new coronavirus cases and two deaths.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention said the total number of cases since the pandemic began has reached 145,599, with the death toll now 520.

The ministry added that 741 people recovered over the previous 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 140,442.

Abu Dhabi's Department of Health conducted a study of 1,038 people infected with COVID-19 who follow a healthy diet.

The study showed that there is a strong correlation between the individual's lifestyle and the number of days they spend in hospital for treatment of symptoms associated with the virus.

Patients who follow a healthy diet spend less time in hospital compared with those who do not, the study found.

"A healthy diet is important during the COVID-19 pandemic, because what the body consumes can affect its ability to fight and recover from diseases," the department said in a statement on WAM.

Sumaya Al-Ameri, of the Abu Dhabi Department of Health, said: "The study confirmed that adopting a healthy lifestyle contributes to strengthening the body's immunity against diseases in general and against the symptoms associated with infection with the COVID-19 virus in particular."

Al-Ameri said proper exercise, adequate sleep and avoiding unhealthy habits such as smoking are also important.

Abu Dhabi's Emergency, Crisis and Disaster Committee said the emirate continues to maintain a low percentage of confirmed coronavirus cases compared with the total number of tests conducted, due to its national screening program and other testing initiatives.

It is the first time an unconventional gas development in the Middle East has delivered gas to a pipeline so early in the project timeline. This marks an important step towards ADNOC's target of producing 1bn standard cubic feet (scfd) of gas from the concession before 2030.

– مكتب أبوظبي الإعلامي (@admediaoffice) [November 11, 2020](#)

“The percentage of confirmed cases per total tests conducted in the emirate over the past three months remained low at 0.39 percent,” it added. Meanwhile, Dubai Economy issued a fine to an electronic trading establishment for breaching anti-COVID-19 measures during daily inspection tours. Elsewhere, Kuwait recorded 778 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total to 134,159. The death toll reached 826 after five new fatalities were registered.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 778 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 749 حالة شفاء، و 5 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 134,159 حالة pic.twitter.com/OrsKxM85Ng

– (@KUWAIT_MOH) [November 11, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – الكويت

Oman's health ministry confirmed 302 new cases and five deaths, bringing the total to 119,186 and 1,321, respectively.

[#Statement](#) No. 224

November 11. 2020 pic.twitter.com/Y4SX8KMtI6

– (@OmaniMOH) [November 11, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة – عُمان

In Bahrain, one death was reported, bringing the death toll to 332, while 231 new infected cases were confirmed.

Out of 11299 COVID-19 tests carried out on 11 November 2020, 231 new cases have been detected among 78 expatriate workers, 148 new cases are contacts of active cases, and 5 are travel related. There were 244 recoveries from [#COVID19](#), increasing total recoveries to 81658 pic.twitter.com/W9HBCIsTJL

– (@MOH_Bahrain) [November 11, 2020](#) وزارة الصحة | مملكة البحرين



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Saudi Arabia confirms 14 COVID-19 deaths, 394 new cases UAE records 1,096 new COVID-19 cases, 3 deaths

[Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in Yemen](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-11 21:22

AL-MUKALLA: Arab coalition warplanes killed two Hezbollah military experts in Yemen during airstrikes on a training camp outside Houthi-held Sanaa last week, Yemen's defense ministry said.

Along with the two Lebanese experts, at least a dozen Houthi fighters who were undergoing military training in Sanaa's Arhab district were killed in the same raid.

Yemeni military and political analysts, along with diplomats, say that the incident again lays bare Iran and its proxy Hezbollah's continuing military interventions in the country.

Yemen President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has repeatedly accused the Iranian regime of deploying Iranian and Lebanese military officers in Yemen to support Houthi rebels who are coming under intense attacks from the Yemeni government forces backed by the Arab coalition.

Yemen military experts and officials believe that the influx of Hezbollah fighters began almost a decade ago and that the death of the latest two fighters is "the tip of the iceberg of the interventions."

Military experts said that it shows Hezbollah is actively propping up the Houthis despite rebel denials.

"Since Arhab is not a battlefield, the incident shows that the two Hezbollah members were equipping the Houthis with military know-how, rather than taking part in the fighting," Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesperson in the southern city of Taiz, told Arab News.

Hezbollah experts have helped boost Houthi military capacity with explosive devices, drones and missiles, he said.

Without military expertise from Iran and Hezbollah, Houthi weapons could not have hit Saudi and Yemeni cities and military sites during the war, Al-Baher said.

In January, a drone and a ballistic missile struck a military camp in Marib, killing more than 110 soldiers. Improved land mines disguised as rocks have also claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians.

Techniques for making land mines and directing missiles originated in Iran and was brought to Yemen by Hezbollah and Iran Revolutionary Guards military experts, Al-Baher said.

"Iran and its Revolutionary Guards are controlling the battles in Yemen. It controls the Yemenis and Lebanese," he said.

In 2016, a video clip circulated on social media showing a Hezbollah military expert lecturing Houthi fighters. Based on intelligence information, Yemeni officers believe that up to 1,000 Hezbollah experts are stationed inside command rooms and military camps in Sanaa, Hodeidah and Saada, the rebels' heartland.

At the same time, political analysts believe the Houthis are in desperate need of military and logistic support from Iran and Hezbollah amid an international arms embargo on Yemen.

“The Houthi group has been isolated by all countries,” Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s information ministry, told Arab News.

“Due to Yemen’s strategic location, Iran sees the Houthis as its most important camp in the region and the world. Iran and Hezbollah are using the Houthis as a tool to pressure Saudi Arabia and international marine traffic in the Red Sea,” Ghallab said.

Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, Yemen’s ambassador to the US and a former Yemeni president’s chief of staff, told Arab News that there is increasing evidence of Hezbollah military involvement in Yemen.

“Hezbollah is executing Iran’s agendas in the region. Hezbollah has always been the training, military, media and political incubator of the Houthis,” he said.



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Arab coalition intercept Houthi drones targeting Saudi ArabiaRights groups
slam Houthis as Yemeni reporters face execution