

# Failure to stop Assad's aid abuses threatens entire region, analysts warn

Sat, 2022-02-19 00:29

NEW YORK: Syrian authorities have grown more skilled at manipulating international aid during 11 years of conflict, according to a newly published report by the Center for Strategic and International Study, an independent think tank in Washington.

It said that the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad has turned billions of dollars in foreign assistance, intended to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, into a lasting "profit center" used to reward loyalists and punish the opposition.

The 70-page report, titled Rescuing Aid in Syria, states that those who are benefiting from international aid to the country are the same people who created the humanitarian crisis in the first place. It is based on interviews with 130 UN officials, aid workers, analysts, diplomats, field monitors and mediators involved in the Syrian conflict.

They said the Assad regime has tightened its grip on aid agencies in a number of ways, including through visa approvals, and is diverting assistance for its own gain in the areas it controls and restricting international access to areas it does not.

It also threatens, tortures and arbitrarily detains Syrian aid staff and withholds basic goods and services, including food and clean water, from millions of Syrians in rebels-held areas as a tactic of war, the report added.

Failure to reverse this damage could push the entire region to the brink of despair, it warned, as it called on Western donor governments to break the cycle of abuse – and do it soon as time is running out.

Syria is at a turning point, according to the report, with the number of vulnerable people in need rising amid a tacit acknowledgment that Assad will remain in power and a push, mostly by regime ally Russia, to move to a reconstruction phase, without any reforms to humanitarian assistance and without addressing any of the myriad issues affecting the country, including displacement.

Aid advocates fear that more international money will be used as a weapon of war by the regime.

"For a long time, diplomacy has stalled and aid has been used essentially as a containment strategy by Western governments, or even just kind of a pat on the back, to think they're doing something for one of the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crises since the Second World War," report author Natasha Hall told Arab News.

“With rising needs and with no end in sight, really, to the core causes of the conflict, if the international community decides that aid and diplomacy is the way forward for Syria then we need to essentially start treating it like it’s the main course.”

Since the start of the war, western donor governments – the EU, the US and Canada – have sent more than \$40 billion in aid to Syria. Billions more continues to make its way to the country. Yet despite 11 years of generous payments, every part of Syria continues to suffer and for millions of people life feels ever more hopeless.

More than 12 million Syrians now struggle to find a meal, with the number increasing by 50 percent between 2020 and 2021. Water shortages and a prolonged drought have led to depleted wheat harvests, and had a devastating effect on the livelihoods of millions and exacerbated food insecurity across the country.

In the government-held northeast, people are moving to camps for displaced persons not to flee fighting but to escape poverty and hunger. Children increasingly are suffering from stunted development. A coordinator with one nongovernmental organization said its workers are reporting alarming malnutrition figures.

“If the borders were opened tomorrow, millions more would spill across, fleeing relentless insecurity, hunger and a devastating drought,” the report warns.

The Assad regime has a long history of facing accusations that it is manipulating foreign aid. It is accustomed to working with international NGOs and UN agencies, dating back to when it oversaw the Palestinian and Iraqi refugee crises.

When pro-democracy protests began in 2011, therefore, the regime “pretty much off the bat knew how to establish their own red lines, so they ensured the Syrian Arab red crescent would be the primary implementer and deliverer of all aid,” said Hall.

“They also threatened and co-opted and surveilled international aid workers that were talking out or talking too much about manipulation, diversion, the hampering of aid delivery. Those were PNG’d (declared persona non grata) and thrown out of the country. In this way, they were able to essentially control the aid apparatus. But today it is a bit more insidious.”

Hall said the regime is deliberately starving opposition-held areas while food and other life-saving essentials are left sitting in warehouses, and refusing to allow opposition-linked NGOs to distribute aid.

She called on Western donor governments to break the cycle of abuse through a coordinated, comprehensive and informed approach that includes independent monitoring. Only these governments have the power to do this “because they are the donors,” Hall said, given that the Syrian regime “impedes monitoring when it wants and needs to,” and the threat of coercion and murder that hangs

over aid workers has prevented UN agencies from monitoring aid.

“I think it’s time to assess if aid is helping the people that are actually in dire need and if it’s not, then who is it helping?” she said of the challenge facing Western donors as talk continues about opening Syria up.

Neglecting to address this question, Hall added, will affect not only Syria but spill over to the wider region. The sight of desperate Syrians fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh or Libya, or Daesh cells forming and striking, can already be seen.

“Frankly within this kind of soup of instability, you add (Daesh) to the mix, you have the potential for black swan events to occur at any point,” she added, referring to a name for unpredictable events that are beyond what is normally expected of a situation and can have potentially severe consequences.



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Why justice for Syrian victims of Assad regime atrocities is not a forlorn hope Assad regime dropped chlorine bombs on opposition, weapons watchdog says

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# How Expo 2020 Dubai showcases Arab achievements, heritage and ambitions

Fri, 2022-02-18 23:36

DUBAI: In 1851, the Great Exhibition set out to bring culture, history and innovations together in one place – London – for the world to see. Since this inaugural world expo, however, more than 85 percent of the global events have been hosted by either European or North American cities.


Some notable exceptions are the expos held in Asia, including Osaka in 1970, Aichi in 2005 and Shanghai in 2010, almost all of which set attendance records. But to date, these major events have been predominantly northern and western hemisphere affairs.

That is why Expo 2020 Dubai has been such a big deal, not just for world expos but also for the Middle East and North Africa region as a whole, with the Arab world occupying center stage for the first time.



As host, the UAE has offered the very essence of Arab hospitality, first by dedicating a pavilion to every participating nation, and, second, by giving every nation its own “national day” throughout the event. Saudi Arabia’s day fell on Jan. 7.

## WHEN ARAB STATES STOLE THE SHOW

For 170 years, expos have provided a platform to showcase the innovations that have shaped the world





**1893**  
CHICAGO  
USA



When Egyptian exhibitors debuted belly dancers for an American audience, it caused something of a scandal among proponents of corset-clad Victorian modesty.

**1904**  
ST. LOUIS  
USA



When an ice cream vendor ran out of dishes, his neighboring stall-holder Ernest A. Hamwi rolled one of his Syrian pastries into a cone shape. And so the ice cream cone was born.

**1939**  
NEW YORK  
USA



The Lebanese pavilion featured a large map of the Lebanese Republic, sending a clear message of national aspirations. But with the outbreak of WWII during the expo, Lebanon became part of Vichy France. Its aspirations had to be put on hold.

**1964**  
NEW YORK  
USA



The United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria) pavilion had a collection of artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamun. The works were of superb quality but small in scale. Following criticism, the UAR exhibitors rescinded the 50 cents admission fee.

**1970**  
OSAKA  
JAPAN



Three weeks into Expo 70, officials in Riyadh received a puzzling cable that read: "SEND MORE SAND STOP PAVILION PROVING POPULAR." 1 million people visited the Saudi pavilion in the first month alone.

**1970**  
OSAKA  
JAPAN

Khalid Al-Far, a Cairo-trained architect, designed the Kuwaiti pavilion: a square structure with 82 gold painted fiberglass domes, 10 green and gold tiled panels and a pool containing a floating model of a pearling dhow.

**1992**  
SEVILLE  
SPAIN

According to Anthropology Today, "In the 1992 Omani Expo pavilion, staff spent much of their time explaining to visitors that Oman was not in Africa."

ARAB NEWS

Expo 2020 Dubai has also had a distinctly Arab feel. The site is peppered with traditional Arabic design features, on its sunshades, water fountains and even public seating.

It is a well-known expo fact that pavilion positioning is everything, often indicating a nation's global significance and its relationship with the host. With masterful design planning, the UAE was able to place participating Arab countries at the heart of the action, giving them greater visibility and prominence.

Naturally, the UAE pavilion is the largest, occupying the prime position. Its immediate neighbor is the impressive, world record-setting Saudi Arabian pavilion, and close by are Morocco, Palestine, Egypt, Kuwait and other Arab countries.

The Saudi pavilion achieved three Guinness World Records for the largest interactive light floor, the longest interactive water curtain and the largest interactive digital screen mirror. But it is not alone in showcasing avant-garde architecture ideas.

Many Arab pavilions are thoughtfully designed, with enormous curb appeal and cultural significance. They are also among the largest in the expo, and several have already been earmarked to remain as permanent structures on the site, tied to their nations as cultural centers after the event concludes.



Front view of the man made EXPO 2020 lake in Dubai Desert, UAE. (Supplied)

While the expo lives up to its theme of “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future,” it also offers a visible celebration of Arab cultures and nations on a global stage.

World expos have long been used by participating states to present a national narrative, which are often framed to project the country in the most marketable way possible in order to boost trade and tourism.

Nations use the events to communicate aspects of their culture and heritage, create mutual understanding, and shape global public opinion through art, innovation, entrepreneurship, technology and policy.

Arab pavilions at Expo 2020 Dubai each tell a different story. However, a series of common themes has emerged: Celebrations of heritage; concrete and incisive approaches to the future; and a focus on cultural, social and environmental sustainability.

Themes celebrating the past are normally divided between the ancient past, such as the Bronze Age settlements of Failaka Island in Kuwait, and the more recent past, before the rapid urbanization of the last half-century.

# ARAB COUNTRIES IN WORLD EXPOS

Year of first participation in a World Expo

**1967**

Montreal

Kuwait  
Algeria

**1958**

Brussels

Syria  
Saudi Arabia  
Jordan

**1970**

Osaka

UAE

**1939**

New York

Lebanon

**1851**

London

Egypt  
Tunisia

**1992**

Seville

Oman

**2010**

Shanghai

Bahrain

## ARAB NEWS

Indeed, the Arab pavilions go to great lengths to pay homage to the feats and wisdom of past generations. For example, the first exhibit in the UAE pavilion features a stylized desert, with the soft, fine sand of Emirati dunes used as a projection surface for old film reels paying tribute to Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE's founding father.

In the nearby Vision Pavilion, dedicated to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, a guided video tour begins with the story of his stay with a Bedouin leader in the desert as a child, and the lasting impact that connection with the land made on him as a leader.

In the Saudi pavilion, ancient cultural sites, such as the tombs in Al-Hijr, At-Turaif District and the AlUla valley, are featured in a striking visual tour of the rich cultural history and natural beauty of the Kingdom.

The pavilion has hosted more than 1,800 events, activities, programs and themed weeks that reflect the Kingdom's vibrant society, longstanding heritage and new economic opportunities.



With masterful design planning, the UAE was able to place participating Arab countries at the heart of the action, giving them greater visibility and prominence. (AFP/File Photo)

In the Oman pavilion, meanwhile, a focus on frankincense highlights the sultanate's eye-catching landscape and long trading history.

Far from focusing exclusively on their glorious past, Arab pavilions look to the future. Many have a concrete vision that highlights targets set in order to achieve desired development outcomes.

Saudi Arabia has put sustainability at the heart of its vision for the future, Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify its economy, alongside a pledge to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2060.

Egypt has its own Vision 2030 plan, announced in 2016, which sets out eight national targets aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on an inclusive economy, education and the environment.

# EXPECTED EXPO 2020 DIVIDEND

A long-term investment 'in the future of the UAE'



Expo 2020 and its legacy will boost economic activity by  
**33.378 billion**  
2013-2031



Restaurants & hotels:  
**\$3.1 billion**



Construction:  
**\$7.35 billion**



And support  
**905,200**  
full-time equivalent (FTE)  
job-years  
2013-2031



Events organization &  
business services:  
**\$18.757 billion**



Economic activity will equal  
**1.5%**  
of UAE GDP during expo  
October 2020 – April 2021



Spending in SME sector  
**\$1.279 billion**  
supporting 12,600 job-years  
November 2013 – October 2020

Source: EY Report: The economic impact of Expo 2020 Dubai

ARAB NEWS

Sustainability is a prominent theme across all Arab pavilions, with a particular focus on passing cultural riches, knowledge and prosperity on to the next generation.

In this vein, Kuwait's pavilion addresses the resilience of its earliest settlements, while a stylized water tower at the pavilion's center highlights the ways in which humans have carefully managed its natural resources in order to flourish there.

Exhibits in the pavilion also focus on Kuwait's system of democracy and investment in its young people.

The theme of overcoming adversity can be found in several pavilions belonging to Arab states that have endured conflict and economic instability.



While the expo lives up to its theme of “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future,” it also offers a visible celebration of Arab cultures and nations on a global stage. (Dany Eid/Expo 2020 Dubai)

Although Lebanon’s pavilion is much more austere compared with other Arab offerings, its message is a strong reminder of the resilience of its people.

Given the multitude of challenges the nation is facing, the pavilion’s presence is a powerful statement in its own right. Like Kuwait, the pavilion’s content focuses on the country’s youth, particularly its artists.

Taken together, Arab participants in Expo 2020 Dubai have made good use of this global stage to highlight their achievements, heritage, ambitions and fortitude. In this sense, the expo can be considered an Arab triumph.



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[Expo 2020 Dubai](#)

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Expo 2020 Dubai's Saudi pavilion to celebrate the country's designers with fashion show  
Palestine's Expo 2020 Dubai pavilion takes visitors on a multi-sensory tour of Jerusalem

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## [Palestinians offer Jerusalem Friday prayers in solidarity with eviction families](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-18 19:45

RAMALLAH: Dozens of Palestinians performed Friday prayers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem in a display of solidarity with families facing eviction by Israeli authorities in the area.

The groups were provoked by opposition protests, who raised Israeli flags and insulted them.

The calls for evictions have been led by the extremist member of the Knesset, Itamar Ben Gvir, the leader of the far-right Otzma Yehudit party who moved his office to the neighborhood six days ago.

Ekrima Said Sabri, head of the Supreme Islamic Council, said in the Friday sermon: "The steadfastness of the people of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood is a protection for the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque."

Denouncing the attempts to expel the residents from their homes, he added that the Jerusalemites are facing injustice and racial discrimination.

Israeli police officers were deployed to the streets of the sensitive neighborhood, cordoning entrances and the prayer area.

Police checkpoints were established throughout the neighborhood, while the Israeli Defense Force has reinforced its deployed forces across the West Bank in preparation for a Friday of anger called for by the Palestinians.

Palestinian citizens traveled from within the Green Line, Jerusalem and the West Bank to support the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in response to calls by activists and religious and national bodies.

Sareen Jabarin, a political activist from Umm Al-Fahm, who was on a bus with a group of fellow activists, told Arab News: "We are going to support our people in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and what they are subjected to – ethnic cleansing and eviction of their homes – because of the apartheid policy pursued by the Israeli government."

Jabarin, who participated in similar demonstrations last year, added that she would continue to protest against attempts to displace Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.

Tensions are increasing ahead of the approaching implementation date of the order to evict the Palestinian families from their residences in the neighborhood and replace them with Jewish settlers. The violent action is expected in March.

The move has raised anger and concern not only among Palestinian groups but also among Arab and Islamic countries, international organizations and the EU.

In a tweet on Feb. 18, an EU delegation expressed its concern over ongoing developments in Sheikh Jarrah. It said that "incidents of settler violence, irresponsible provocations" and other acts in the neighborhood "only fuel further tensions and must cease."

The issue has united Jerusalemites of different religious and political affiliations to defend those threatened with eviction.

Palestinian activists from the neighborhood told Arab News that some social

media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook had blocked their accounts for highlight the controversial events that are taking place.

Fatah leader in East Jerusalem, Hatem Abdel Qader, said the people's "presence today is to respond to the provocation from Knesset member Ben Gvir and the Israeli police that are trying to provoke Jerusalemites and are trying to create an environment that expels Jerusalemites from their homes."

Meanwhile, a UN statement said: "The announcement of the scheduled eviction has recently raised tension in the Jerusalem neighborhood, with clashes involving Palestinian residents, Israeli settlers, and Israeli security forces resulting in property damage, multiple injuries and arrests, including the arrest of eight children since Feb. 11."

Families have been subjected to attacks with pepper spray and stones resulting in injury and property damage, the UN added.

There are 218 Palestinian families, comprising 970 individuals, including 424 children, living in East Jerusalem, mainly in the neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, that are currently facing the threat of forced eviction by the Israeli authorities.

"The United Nations has repeatedly called for a halt to forced evictions and demolitions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem: Under international humanitarian law, forcible transfers of protected persons by the occupying power are forbidden regardless of their motive," the statement said.

"Active steps must be taken to de-escalate the situation before another crisis erupts; we urge all political and community leaders to refrain from provocative action and rhetoric. Israeli authorities must take steps to ensure the protection of civilians, including Palestine refugees," it added.



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[Sheikh Jarrah](#)

New eviction standoff in flashpoint Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem  
VIDEO: Al Jazeera journalist banned from entering Sheikh Jarrah after being detained by Israeli police

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## [Tunisia's speaker says the suspended parliament will inevitably return](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1645133629610335900

Thu, 2022-02-17 00:37

TUNIS: Tunisia's speaker, Rached Ghannouchi, said on Thursday that the suspended parliament will inevitably return, in the clearest challenge to

President Kais Saied.

Saied suspended Parliament in July and seized control of most powers, a move his opponents described as a coup.

Ghannouchi said in an opposition meeting that Tunisians will “get rid of dictatorship” and called on the opposition to unite to face the setback. Tunisia’s president this month dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council, one of the remaining institutions in Tunisia that was able to work independently of him.

Saied cemented his grip over the judiciary last week with a decree that lets him dismiss judges or block their promotion, helping consolidate his power after he seized executive authority last summer.

Responding to journalists, Saied said during a visit to Brussels on Thursday, “Just as (French) General De Gaulle said, “Not at this age, I’m going to start a dictatorship.”

Ghannouchi, the leader of Islamist Ennahda party did not announce further details about plan to return parliament, but it is likely that it will be through an invitation to a public session via video.

Last week, Ghannouchi said he would meet a European parliamentary delegation that will visit Tunisia on Feb. 20, as part of meetings with civil society, politicians and lawmakers from the suspended parliament.



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[Tunisia](#)

[Rached Ghannouchi](#)

[Ennahda party](#)

US officials meet Tunisians civil society members Tunisia to host world premier of film about Sicilian immigration

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## [Builders find 2,000-year-old Roman cemetery in Gaza](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-18 00:03

GAZA: A 2,000-year-old Roman cemetery containing at least 20 ornately decorated graves has been uncovered near the shoreline in the northern Gaza Strip, with the Antiquities Ministry calling it the most important local discovery of the past decade.

Gaza is rich with antiquities having been an important trading spot for many civilizations.

Ruins discovered there include the remains of a siege by Alexander the Great as well as a Mongol invasion.

Twenty Roman graves have been located so far and the team expect to unearth 80 in total within the 50-square-meter cemetery.

Only two graves have been opened, one contained skeletal remains and some clay jars.

Because of the shape of the graves and the relatively ornate decorations, they likely belonged to "senior ranking people" in the Roman empire during the first century, said Jamal Abu Rida, director-general of Gaza's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

Unlike Muslim graves from later periods that face north to south, the Roman graves lie east to west, he said.

"We have made several discoveries in the past, this is the most important archaeological discovery in the past 10 years," said Abu Rida.

The area is closed off to journalists and the public while the site is organized and made safe for visitors, the ministry said.

The site, which is being supervised by a French team of experts, was found by a construction crew working on an Egyptian-funded housing project. When they came upon some of the cemetery's large, ancient bricks, they stopped work and called in the archaeologists.

Gaza is run by Hamas, which has fought four wars with Israel since 2008.

The conflict has crippled the local economy and authorities usually engage

international groups to help excavate and preserve archaeological findings, said Abu Rida.



Main category:

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[Palestine](#)

[Roman cemetery](#)

Charities to plant 25,000 olive trees across PalestineUK civil society groups slam call to refer pro-Palestine students to police