



MIDDLE EAST WEEKLY

Month: Nov 20 | Issue 15 | CSSAME

Middle East in a Week

Regarding international relations and world politics, the Middle East may be the most controversial region in the current times. On the one hand it sits on most of the world's oil reserves, while on the other hand, it inhibits the followers of the most controversial religion in the world, Islam. These matters combined have created a region filled with drastic events. Every day, there are new wars erupting in the region and every day, there are new ways through which the west and the far east try to increase their influence in the region. This region inhibits 411 million people out of which 28 % are under the age of 25 years old. This newsletter tries to give weekly updates on the important issues in the Middle East and combining them with some analysis, hopes to have a role in changing the region's situation to the better.

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AUSTRALIAN WAR CRIMES IN AFGHANISTAN¹

After four years of inquiry, the Australian officials found evidence of malpractice and possible war crimes in Afghanistan. Evidently, Australian forces were responsible for the death of 39 civilians in Afghanistan. The inquiry began in 2016 and as a response to the prior cover up which happened at the hands of the Australian government. Detailing the findings, General Angus Campbell, chief of the Defense Force, said the investigation found evidence that members of the Australian special forces had killed prisoners, farmers or other civilians, and offered his unreserved apologies to the people of Afghanistan for any wrongdoing. In a letter accompanying the inquiry's report, James Gaynor, the inspector general of the Australian Defence Force, described the nature and extent of the alleged misconduct as "very confronting", noting there were additional allegations that members of the Australian military had treated people under their control with cruelty.



ART KNOWS NO BOUNDS²



Despite the massive political pressures which are enforced upon the Iranian public through economic sanctions, some international organizations do show the promise of cooperation. For instance, a record label in Hamburg, Germany, shows determination in introducing the Iranian music to the world. Hamburg-based 30M Records, founded earlier this year by Matthias Koch, will later this week release its first album by two Iranian artists, offering a mix of traditional Iranian music and modern sounds. "I have a deep fascination of Iranian cultural traditions and history. I love traditional instruments like kamancheh, tar, setar, and daf," the 49-year-old Koch told Al Jazeera. He first travelled to Iran in 2016 shortly after a landmark nuclear deal signed between Tehran and world powers was implemented. The deal lifted multilateral sanctions on Iran, promising to open it up to the world. Koch says US sanctions were one of the reasons that prompted him to establish 30M Records. 'I want to make it possible for Iranian musicians to release their music, especially in times of the US economic sanctions, and give them access to international networks,' he said.

CAN THE STUDENTS' WIN LEAD TO FUTURE TRIMPH?³

Every year since Abouzeid began attending the Lebanese American University (LAU) in 2018, the 20-year-old had supported independent candidates in student council elections – and each time, they lost to electoral lists backed by Lebanon's establishment parties. It was a usual affair in Lebanon, where the parties and affiliates of a small sectarian elite exert control over many aspects of public life, from unions and syndicates to business sectors and student councils. Still, Abouzeid could not bear that the establishment was this year running unopposed at the LAU's campus in northern Jbeil, historically a stronghold of the Lebanese Forces, a right-wing militia turned political party. Then came the surprise. Independents won all the student council seats they contested in the October 9 polls, 14 of a total 30 at the university's two campuses in Beirut and Jbeil. They also won the popular vote with some 52 percent. Last year, they won just three seats. Now, some view the series of student election successes as the beginning of a transition from the streets of protest to the seats of power.



ONE MORE US SANCTION IN IRAN'S SADDLE⁵

Trump's next stop on his way to Iran's total isolation was the Khamenei-linked foundation and Iran's intelligence chief who were added to the long list of Iranian sanction targets for the United States. The administration of President Donald Trump on Wednesday continued its relentless 'maximum pressure' campaign of sanctions targeting Iran, blacklisting a foundation controlled by the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei over alleged human rights abuses. As part of Wednesday's action, the US Treasury also blacklisted Mahmoud Alavi. He is the head of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, which Treasury claims 'has played a key role in the Iranian regime's brutal human rights abuses against the Iranian people', including beatings, sexual abuse, prolonged interrogations, and coerced confessions. One could only ask that 'when will US lose its monopoly on human rights?'



29-YEAR-OLD CEASE FIRE ERUPTED⁴

On November 13, 2020, the phone call between Omar Sidi and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres changed course from discussing sovereignty over the territory disputes in the Western Sahara to crisis management. Flares of violence between the Polisario Front – which Sidi represents at the UN – and Morocco erupted that morning. ‘In the face of provocations from the militias of the Polisario, the Kingdom of Morocco had no other choice but to assume its responsibilities in order to put an end to the deadlock situation generated by these actions and restore free civil and commercial movement,’ the Moroccan ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement. The recent violence in Western Sahara marks a collapse of a 29-year ceasefire between the pro-independence Polisario Front and the pro-autonomy Kingdom of Morocco, mirroring the repeated diplomatic failures of the two parties – and of the international community – to broker a sustainable peace agreement over who controls the territory. ‘The secretary-general remains committed to doing his utmost to avoid the collapse of the ceasefire,’ said Stéphane Dujarric, Guterres’s spokesman, in a statement that followed the clashes.



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