



MIDDLE EAST WEEKLY

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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.

Inside This Issue

AN UNENDING GAME OF CATCH AND RELEASE

US NEW EFFORTS IN ENDING THE WAR IN YEMEN

SMALL RAY OF HOPE IN SAUDI ARABIA

A CAT STOCK IN A CORNER

HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN PALESTINE

AN UNENDING GAME OF CATCH AND REALEASE¹

One of the promises president Joe Biden made which helped him in securing his place in the oval office was to change the US foreign policy with regards to Iran and the JCPOA; a deal which Donald Trump made null and void the first chance he got. However, it seems as if Iran and the United States are waiting for the other side to take the first steps. In every speech POTUS gives regarding Iran and the JCPOA, president Biden claims his willingness to return to the US commitments in the JCPOA. That is of course, if Iran returns to its commitments first. Ironically, Iran's officials such as its supreme leader and president also say the same thing. In other words, neither side seems willing to take the first step. This game of catch and release began as soon as president Biden took office. A game which only worsens the daily livelihood of civilian citizens.



CHANGE IN US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST²

Earlier last week, president Joe Biden announced that the United States will end its military support of the Saudi Arabia with regards to the conflict in Yemen. The move signaled a distinct shift in Washington's approach to the conflict and a renewed emphasis on reaching a diplomatic solution to the years-long war, which has caused what the United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. But since the announcement on Thursday, the Biden administration has released few details on what support to Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces in Yemen it plans to end – or how it will differentiate it from other US assistance and arms sales to Saudi Arabia. “The United States provides spare parts, munitions, technical assistance, all kinds of things to the Saudi military, which enable its offensive operations,” Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told Al Jazeera. “So if the Saudis continued to use the Royal Saudi Air Force to bomb targets in Yemen, presumably, under this doctrine, that aid and assistance should halt.”



SMALL RAY OF HOPE IN SAUDI ARABIA³

It seems as if Saudi Arabian women activist, Loujain al-Hathloul will see the light of day after 1000 days in captivity for speaking up against the gender inequalities in Saudi Arabia. In a series of tweets, her sister Alia al-Hathloul said Loujain was expected to get out of prison as per a judge's order but will remain on probation and be banned from travel outside of Saudi Arabia. "It is a potential release from prison and she is still under probation, [a] travel ban and awaiting news of the appeal process," said Alia on Tuesday. Loujain al-Hathloul, 31, has been in custody since 2018 after being arrested along with at least a dozen other women's rights activists in a crackdown on dissent led by de-facto ruler Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman (MBS). Her arrest came just weeks before the historic lifting of a decades-long ban on female drivers, a reform they had long campaigned for. According to London-based NGO ALQST, Monday marked 1,000 days since Loujain's imprisonment.



A CAT STOCK IN A CORNER⁵

After years of international harassment, one of Iranian officials seems to be fed up with all of it. Iran's intelligence minister has warned that his country could push for a nuclear weapon if harsh international sanctions on Tehran remain in place, state television reported. The remarks by Mahmoud Alavi on Tuesday marked a rare occasion in which a government official said Iran could reverse its course on the nuclear program. "Our nuclear program is peaceful and the fatwa by the supreme leader has forbidden nuclear weapons, but if they push Iran in that direction, then it wouldn't be Iran's fault but those who pushed it," Alavi was quoted as saying. "If a cat is cornered, it may show a kind of behavior that a free cat would not," he said, adding that Iran has no plans to move towards a nuclear weapon under current circumstances. New US President Joe Biden has explicitly stated that Washington will not be making the first move. This could push the Iranian cat into a tight corner. When an immovable object meets an unstoppable force, there will always be unwanted massive casualties.



HOPE FOR DEMOCRACY IN PALESTINE⁴

After two days of negotiations, fourteen factions including Hamas and Fatah agreed on holding a legislative and presidential election in May and July. The deal reached on Tuesday in Egypt's capital provides for an "electoral cases court" and commits to allowing free campaigning and voting. A joint statement at the end of the two-day session in Cairo said both groups and 12 other Palestinian factions pledged "to abide by the timetable" for the long-delayed balloting and "respect and accept" the results. There has been widespread scepticism the elections will even happen. Many Palestinians believe they are mainly an attempt by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, of Fatah, to show his democratic credentials to new US President Joe Biden, with whom he wants to reset relations after they reached a new low under Donald Trump. The two groups also agreed to release detainees held on political grounds in the West Bank and Gaza and allow unrestricted campaigning. There are 2.8 million eligible voters in Gaza and the West Bank.



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