

## A MONTHLY REVIEW OF EURO-GULF RELATIONS

A Euro-Gulf Information Centre Publication  
July 2020

### HOPE The UAE's Vision for Space Affairs



On 20 July 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will set a landmark on space exploration history with the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission's (EMM) probe, (Al Amal/Hope), set to be the first Arab interplanetary mission. Developed in partnership between the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre and the UAE Space Agency (UAE-

SA), the Hope Probe will be launched from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Japan and will travel 493.5 million kilometers, to reach Mars' orbit seven months later, in 2021. It will be the first spacecraft in history to provide a complete picture of the Martian atmosphere, giving comprehensive information on the planet's climate dynam-

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### Libya in the Cobweb – What's next?

*Exclusive Interview with Aya Burweila*

*Aya Burweila is the founder and Head of Operations of Code on the Road in Athens and BBC Expert in Terrorism and Radicalization. She was the Head of Research & Public Policy at Solidarity Now, an Athens-based NGO active nation-wide in the field of human rights. Her work on integration, conflict and extremism has been published in a wide range of journals and platforms.*

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Libya is currently in its ninth year of civil war, which has seen multiple transformations within the conflict actors' statuses along with a fluctuating presence of foreign powers in the territory. Multiple bids for establishing peace talks have been provided by the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), nevertheless the country remains entrapped in the dense cobweb of a

*Continued PAGE 6*

### Between the Posts: Saudi Arabia, Newcastle United and the Politics of Football

Football is a central crossroads between society, politics and business. The proposed purchase of Newcastle United (a football club active in the English Premier League), by a consortium whose majority shareholder is the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), is peaking interests and reactions across Europe and the Arab Gulf—meshing the sport-business-geopolitical relationship in a single nexus. Newcastle is a club that carries huge tradition in English football and the potential buyers' seek to attract a large global audience around the team and its future goals, starting from Saudi Arabia, a country that already boasts millions of supporters of the team and football more generally.

With the 2019 turnover at some £176 million (roughly €195 million) which will likely drop in 2020 due to the effect of the pandemic, the purchase price of £300 million (re: €332 million) is within the reach of the consortium led by the

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## Hisham al Hashimi

### A Critic Silenced and a Legacy Born



Iraq's brittle culture of free speech has again been exposed with the murder of leading analyst, Hisham al Hashimi, on 06 July. The 47 year-old was shot dead by unidentified gunmen outside his family home in Baghdad's Zayouna neighbourhood and pronounced dead at a hospital soon after. News of his death spread fast, sending a wave of grief and anger across his community and underscoring the decades-old perils faced by Iraq's vocal critical thinkers. No group or individual claimed responsibility for the assassination of the father-of-four, but for most Iraq observers the blame lies in the country's rogue militia groups, specifically Kataeb Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militia. The researcher had recently highlighted the impunity with which these groups operate in Iraq and received threats from them. In a country where civilians have faced torture and even death for challenging groups like Kataeb Hezbollah, Hashimi's murder could mark a further descent into the depths of self-censorship at a time when voices like his are paramount in the struggle for democracy.

**'We Might Call You in at Any Time'**

The violent stifling of opposing views is not a recent phenomenon in Iraq, where for more than two decades citizens moved cautiously under the watchful eye of Saddam Hussein's intelligence service. The system that was put in place after the fall of the dictator's regime in 2003 failed in a myriad of ways, including in its ability to uphold and protect free speech. Almost three hundred journalists and media workers were murdered in Iraq between 2003 and 2020, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. And, more than 500 protesters were recently killed by security forces linked to the same militias that are widely thought to have murdered Hashimi. In June this year, Human Rights Watch released a 42-page report outlining the spike in violations of the right to free expression in Iraq. The report – 'We might call you in at any time' – is a harrowing dive into the attacks, threats and arrests suffered by twenty one activists and fourteen journalists between 2018 and 2020. In it, Senior Crisis and Conflict Researcher, Belkis Wille, brings to light government and militia attempts to silence critics. Like the hundreds of demonstrators killed this year for speaking out against Iran's meddling in Iraq,

Hashimi's researched analyses of the country's militias sparked anger among Iran-backed groups. The question, said Wille of Human Rights Watch, "is whether to consider the murder of Hashimi as an extension of Iraq's reality, or a turning point, into something darker...He spoke out publicly but in a measured and well researched fashion," Wille said. That someone like that would become "a target to be silenced, will have a huge impact on the extent to which others might stick their necks out."

#### **Double-Edged Sword**

Before shifting his focus to the role of Iraq's militias, Hashimi rose to prominence as one of the country's foremost experts on all matters relating to ISIS. His unparalleled understanding of the group helped frame and consolidate the work of countless journalists, US troops and both foreign and local officials, including Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhim and President Barham Saleh. For years he cultivated and maintained contacts in high-reaching corners of Iraq's elite. Now, as the dust begins to settle on his murder, one of the realisations is that rubbing shoulders with officials and politicians may have contrib-



uted to his killing. Like a double-edged sword, his role as an advisor to the president and his ties to the prime minister should have offered him protection, instead, they merely fuelled the ire of his killers. For some the brazen murder of someone of his stance means there is little hope for those who want to engage in a meaningful dialogue about the country's state of affairs but have little in the way of powerful connections. This will continue to be the case so long as Prime Minister Kadhimi and his new government are unable to rein in Iran's brutish militias. Kadhimi, who blamed the murder of Hashimi on lawless armed groups, said in a statement that he would arrest and prosecute the killers. But if the prime minister's failed attempt to arrest fourteen Kataeb Hezbollah militiamen in June is anything to go by, bringing Hashimi's murderers to justice may be an overly ambitious undertaking for Iraq's new leader. In an interview with Al Jazeera, researcher Renad Mansour said of his friend and colleague: He was very close to the prime minister, he was very close to the president. He was seen as part of the establishment in that regard ... so many would have thought, and he himself at some point would have thought, that he would be more untouchable than many of the other activists who had been targeted." Over the years Hashimi had become not only a key source of information for Iraq watchers, but a point of reference for his country's youth. He took time to ad-

vised young activists and protesters, sometimes warning them to tread carefully in their battles for justice. In a symbol of gratitude, and perhaps a sign of resistance, a procession of colourful tuk-tuks – made famous for their role in the Iraqi uprising – drove by Hashimi's home. "Hisham was their number one supporter," Irfa Sawkat Editor Rasha al Aqeedi tweeted. He also encouraged them, and their diaspora counterparts, to engage in the country's political journey. For some in the diaspora community, his death dampened any hope of returning home. "Him [sic] pushing me to go and work for the government and to make a change really gave me hope and I could finally see that light at the end of the tunnel that so many Iraqis have been searching for,"

said one diaspora Iraqi. "With him gone, I don't know who can replace that ... he was the one supporting us, no one else did." Before adding: "We have to keep up the fight, it's what he would have wanted." Hashimi's work left no stone unturned, he was as critical of Iraq's rogue militias as he was of the political class and its endemic corruption. In April, he kindly lent his time and knowledge to inform me personally on Hezbollah's man in Iraq, Mohammad Kawtharani – he deciphered complex political dynamics with enviable ease. On 07 July a wake was held in his neighbourhood in Baghdad, and his body was laid to rest in the holy city of Najaf. The outpouring of grief is just a small testament of the legacy he leaves behind. In a beautiful tribute, long-time Iraq watcher Christine van den Toorn encapsulates the essence of a man she knew as a friend: *He wanted to see citizens empowered, communities united, good governance and the end of corruption, lawlessness and militia violence. He wanted a better life for all Iraqis. If that comes to pass, that would be real justice served.*

by Sofia Barbarani



# HOPE

## The UAE's Vision for Space Affairs

FROM PAGE 1

ics and its atmospheric erosion, which renders it unsuitable for life. The mission was originally announced in 2014, tied to the establishment of the UAESA, which functions as a centralised institution to lead the country's outer space programmes and research and development (R&D) activities. Despite the youth of the institution, the Emirates' interests in space are neither whimsical nor new. Over the past two decades, the country has invested about AED 20 billion (\$ 5.4 billion USD) on space-based activities such as data services, communications satellites, Earth-mapping and observation satellites, among others. However, such space programmes lacked long-term foresight which combines the scientific and the strategic dimensions of space, while being limited to the aegis of the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre's Satellite Programme, launched in 2006 and largely conducted with South Korean expertise, which had left the country's space-related capabilities externally dependent. A unified vision was only established with the UAESA strategic plan, resulting in a spike of short-term achievements. In October 2018, the UAE launched KhalifaSat, a remote sensing Earth-observation satellite, entirely designed, developed and manufactured in the country. And, in September 2019, Hazzaa al-Mansoori became the first Emirati and third Arab to go to space – deployed to the International Space Station (ISS). The launch of the Hope Probe will come as the third major accomplishment in a row for a country that is eager to become an advanced space-faring nation in a relatively short time.

### A Shifting Model for Space Affairs?

The results achieved in the last decade mark the transition of the UAE's approach towards outer



space from an external knowledge-dependent model to an indigenous innovation-based one. Similarly to procurements methods in the military sector, emerging powers in space might prefer to acquire their space capabilities 'off-the-shelf', mitigating costs, time and risks for R&D activities, which could impact on the economic and political sustainability of their space programmes. Such models can be effective when it comes to limited commercial and communications satellite programmes, but leave the countries dependent on their technological partner or providers, limiting the strategic broadness of their national space agenda. From this perspective, the Emirates' are rapidly shifting to a space model based on national knowledge and capabilities, although such objectives have yet to be fully achieved. If the KhalifaSat represented a milestone of such evolution, being fully designed, developed and manufactured in the country, the UAE's first astronaut deployment to the ISS was made on a Russian Soyuz space capsule, directly purchased from the Russian Space Agency (Roscomos) due to the country's lack of its own spacecrafts – which led NASA to define al-Mansoori as a spaceflight participant and not as an astronaut – revealing how the country's eager craving to enter

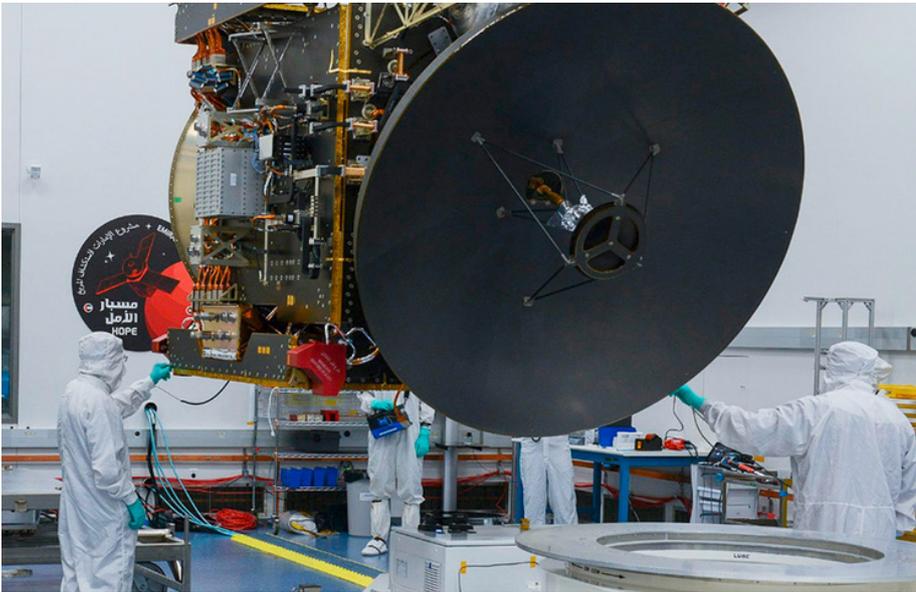
the space arena did not yet meet its original capabilities.[6] The EMM and the Hope Probe were fully developed by the UAE, although the unmanned spacecraft will be launched on a H2A202 rocket produced by the Japanese Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, in a further step towards reaching a model for space affairs based on national capabilities.

### The Strategic Framework

Beyond its ambitious scientific goals, the EMM is encompassed within the country's wider strategic agenda of enhancing international cooperation – in this context, through high-level technological R&Ds' partnerships – as well as of reaching its long-term economic diversification objectives, through space-related knowledge and capabilities transfer to its commercial sectors, such as the ones of energy, food and water.

### International Cooperation: UAE, the Pivot

As the UAE aims to become a beacon of technological innovation in the region, establishing itself as a reference point for advanced technological international partnerships will enhance bilateral relations with other countries and aid further science, technological and innovation (ST&I) objectives within its na-



tional strategy. The UAE's plan to become a space-faring nation will allow it to leverage its space power to enhance its influence on shaping security and activities' standards for space on an international level through its participation to international forums and organisations. It could even be argued that its growing presence in space, if combined with a medium-term development of other GCC countries' space programmes, could lead to the establishment of a regional set of rules, similar to the 'Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities', originally drafted by the European Union in 2008. Such diplomatic leverage would not only be limited to the space dimension of politics, but could become a relevant – although not essential part – of the Emirates' international soft power, also through increasing R&D and commercial space-capabilities procurement programmes and their economic leverage. Additionally,

the UAESA cooperates with major international space agencies such as NASA, Roscomos and the European Space Agency (ESA). Such cooperative status could allow the UAE to assume a pivotal role on advanced technological partnerships among politically-antagonistic powers and enhance its diplomatic influence.

#### **From Space to Earth: HOPE for Sustainability**

The UAE's Hope mission and its broader space vision are functional to the country's strategic goal of building a diversified and sustainable economy – a common objective to the other Gulf countries – as it seeks to do so also leveraging on Technology Transfer (TT) driven innovations, which represents an essential drive to space-related activities, extending the spectrum of space technologies and know-how to a variety of non-space sectors and functions; the investment return is essential for the sustain-

ability of space-related innovation programmes. The EMM is no exception to that.

The mission of the Hope Probe itself, related to the analysis of climate and atmospheric dynamics on Mars, mirrors the strategic concept behind the UAE's economic vision: to meet the country's technological needs in a number of key sectors for its economy, such as energy, food and water, through technological transfer and development.

#### **Mars 2117**

The Emirate's ambitious vision for space is projected over a longer term with the analog mission Mars 2117, which aims to establish a human settlement on the Red Planet for the year 2117. [12] Regardless of the mission's final result, the project will lead to further knowledge on the survivability challenges that would be face on Mars, related to food, water and energy security, and it highlights the extent of the UAE's vision for space. Space represents a functional dimension for many small and medium-powers in regards to internal and external aspects of their economies. The UAE's vision for space and its growing enhancement represents an opportunity not only for the country's economic development and technological innovation but also a strategic space for enhancing its international status on Earth and beyond.

*by Arnold Koka*

# DYNAMICS

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# Libya in the Cobweb – What's next?

*Interview with Aya Burweila*

■ FROM PAGE 1

plurality of actors involved. Furthermore, following recent major shifts in the battle lines and the on-the-ground military presence of foreign players, the conflict seems far from reaching an adequate settlement. To explore the current perspectives on Libya, we interviewed Aya Burweila, founder and Head of Operations of Code on the Road in Athens and BBC Expert in Terrorism and Radicalization.

*The Libyan conflict has seen major shifts recently, such as military involvement of Turkey and the increasing territorial presence of Russian-backed mercenaries, adding further layers to an already complex scenario. Could the new developments – especially in reference to Russia - trigger an increased involvement of the US in the country?*

No. Not all foreign actors in Libya are created equal. Russia –which allegedly contributes 800-1200 Wagner mercenaries with experience fighting IS in Syria- is but one country in a global coalition that supports the native Libyan majority, its democratically elected parliament and the national army, led by Khalifa Haftar, who was appointed to his post by the parliament in March 2015. Turkey controls only the north-west corner of Libya and supports, not surprisingly, the GNA: an unelected Islamist regime that has expired, was never ratified and which co-opted the very militia cartel it was mandated to disarm by the Libyan Political Agreement. Lacking support in Libya, the GNA is propped up by an increasingly dangerous Islamist regime in Ankara and over 10,000 militant jihadists from Syria as well as human, oil and arms smuggling networks. They pose a threat not only to Libyans and their aspirations for a normal functioning state, but to Europe and the wider region as well. The United States has foreign interven-



tion fatigue and does not wish to be fooled once more into supporting Islamists and jihadists in Libya as it was in 2011 and recognizes that a stable and democratic Libya is good for both American business and security as well as the region.

*Could Turkey leverage on its increasing military presence impact to control migration flows towards Europe? If so, how could the EU-Turkey relations evolve?*

Absolutely. The militia cartel that occupies the northwest of Libya is heavily involved in human trafficking and is co-opted by the GNA, Turkey's satellite government. Erdogan will attempt to exploit the plight of refugees to blackmail Europe as he has done last year at Evros, Greece. This is an especially dangerous card that Erdogan can play as the GNA and AKP has smuggled over 10,000 militant jihadists and mercenaries from Turkey's "Free Syria Army" to Tripoli. It is important to note that Turkey has provided logistical, military and financial cooperation to ISIS and has recycled its fighters into its auxiliary Syrian army following IS's territorial defeat. As a

state sponsor of terror, there is an urgent threat that militant jihadists can be smuggled into mainland Europe to terrorize Europeans as they have terrorized Libyans.

*Gulf states play their roles echoing the regional cleavage between Saudi Arabia and the UAE as opposed to Qatar and Turkey. Particularly, the first two have expressed their support for Egypt's President El-Sisi warning of a military intervention in the country. Should we expect an on-the-ground involvement by the Gulf countries? What consequences could it have on the regional scenario?*

If Turkey makes the mistake of crossing the red line, I imagine there will be a corresponding escalation. Right now, Turkey and Qatar are stuck: almost ten years of supporting Islamists and jihadists in Libya at the expense of Libyan peace and democracy and they have nothing to show for it: the oil crescent is protected by the army and the gas-rich eastern region remains free of terrorist organizations and is enjoying a renaissance. The containment of Turkey's military expansionism in Libya will help

stabilize both the country and the region and prevent the GNA's militia haven from expanding. Moreover, it will assist in the implementation of goals articulated in the Cairo Declaration: a Presidential Council

elected by the Libyan people and under UN supervision, all foreign entities fighting on either side to withdraw their mercenaries from Libya, dismantling of the militia cartels, and surrendering of weap-

ons so the Libyan National Army can fulfill its tasks and mandates.

*Interview conducted by  
Arnold Koka*

## Mediterranean Tensions

### France Temporarily Withdraws from NATO Operation Sea Guardian Over Incident with Turkey

On 1 July 2020 France announced that it would be temporarily leaving Operation Sea Guardian—a NATO naval mission in the Central Mediterranean which aims at intercepting the illicit trafficking of weapons used to fuel the conflict in Libya. France's unexpected move comes after a naval incident with Turkey in the Mediterranean the previous month, which France claims was not addressed properly by NATO. During the incident, the French frigate Courbet, under NATO command, was prevented from approaching a suspicious vessel which was being escorted by Turkish warships. Tensions in the region are rising fast as Turkey — a NATO member and candidate to accede to the European Union (EU) — insists on flexing its geopolitical muscles in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean and in Libya. Ankara has militarily supported the UN-recognised (but unelected) Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj and has supplied both weap-

ons and fighters to boost GNA war efforts and push back the Eastern-led Libyan National Army (LNA), led by General Khalifa Haftar, from the outskirts of the capital. Haftar's LNA initiated a military offensive that aimed to subdue Tripoli since April 2019, but has recently been halted by GNA troops aided by Turkey's drones, militias and armoured vehicles. Ankara's support for the GNA has a strategic aim and comes after a controversial maritime memorandum signed last November between Turkey and Libya (al-Sarraj), where the contiguous maritime border of southwestern Turkey and northeastern Libya have been delimited for the purpose of hydrocarbon exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. The memorandum is not recognised by the EU and other Mediterranean states such as Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel, since it does not consider Greece's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and fuels tensions in the area. Various naval missions patrol the water of the Central and Eastern Mediterranean in order to inter-

cept the trafficking of illicit weapons entering Libya. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has already issued several resolutions — the latest being resolution 2526 (2020) — calling for arms embargoes on the North African state torn by instability and conflict since the fall of Dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. In addition to NATO's Sea Guardian, the EU has recently approved EUNAVFORMED IRINI, as part of its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) strategy to secure stability in its strategic neighbourhood. Operation IRINI's primary goal is likewise to intercept illicit arms trafficking in Libya, while its secondary goals include the disruption of human trafficking and intercepting illicit oil exports from Libya. IRINI has also had a close encounter with a Tanzanian-flagged cargo ship escorted by Turkish warships last month. The Greek frigate Spetsai, under the command of Operation IRINI, attempted to hail the vessel but the Turkish warships communicated that it could not cooperate. Stakes are indeed high in the Libyan conflict, whose outcome also seems key to Mediterranean tensions. Both Turkey and the GNA do not recognise the actions of IRINI as they consider the naval mission biased in favour of the LNA, since it acts on only one weapons trafficking route, used primarily by Turkey to supply the GNA, while Libya's Eastern land border with Egypt remains unchecked by European military forces. Egypt, Russia, France and the United Arab Emirates support the Libyan Eastern Parliament in Tobruk, known as



the House of Representatives (HoR) led by representative Aguila Saleh. General Khalifa Haftar's LNA, which supports Tobruk, is basically a patchwork army engaged in a war effort to control Tripoli and topple the GNA, supported by Turkey, Italy and Qatar. As the tide of military victories seems now to have shifted

towards Tripoli, Turkey's ongoing support guarantees its maritime deal and future investments in the oil rich North African state. As for France, it continues to support EU naval operation IRINI, but its temporary withdrawal from NATO Operation Sea Guardian should be perceived as a warning

about possible fractures in the Cold War mutual defence organisation and as a clear sign of the geopolitical changes in the region that sees Turkey as a major source of instability vis à vis its Mediterranean neighbours.

*by Melissa Rossi*

## Hashd al-Shaabi is Killing the Kakais Heirs of One of the Most Ancient Religions in Iraq

In May 2020 local activists and NGOs warned the representatives of both the Iraqi and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) that the Kakai/Yarsan community living in the area of Khanaqin was the object of continuous deadly attacks perpetrated by ISIS with the logistical support of Hashd al-Shaabi. According to Farhad Al-Kake, a religious man and director of the Chraw Organization for Documentation, attacks of this kind on the Kakai/Yarsan community are not isolated and have been carried out since 2003. However, over the past few months they have escalated.[i] On 10 May 2020 ISIS killed Burhan Hatam Muhammed and Nabard Naser Fatehulla, two farmers. On 21 May, 2020 Shafaq news published an interview with the leader of the "Karmsir" axis of the Pesh-

merga forces, Mahmoud Sankawi, who was confirmed to be in possession of "solid evidence" on the involvement of hundreds of former ISIS militants in the Iraqi factions responsible for coordinated attacks against Kurdish peasants with the aim of emptying their villages in the Khanaqin district of the governorate of Diyala.[ii] Then, on 13 June 2020, less than a month later, a new attack was perpetrated (according to witnesses) by members of Hashd al-Shaabi, and left six members of the Kakais dead (Safa Abdulla Ali, Shahab Bashir, Khasan Aziz, Tariq Aziz, Eazan Jamal and Hussein Aasim) and three others injured (Muaid Khalil, Ali Shahab and Muhammad Shahab). According to testimonies, the attack happened at 2300h, in a house in the outskirts of Khanaqin in

the Diyala province where a considerable number of Kakai/Yarsans live. Members of the community living in Erbil were notified and arrived at the scene around 0700h on the morning of the 14th only to find caskets on the ground. By then local community members had already removed the bodies and began to organize the funerals. The Iraqi police in charge of the security in the area arrived fourteen hours after the events.[iii]

### Who are the Kakais?

The Kakais/Yarsan are among the most ancient religious groups in the Middle East. Theirs is a monotheistic religion which originated in the Zagros mountains, their sacred land. According to their belief, the Angels were created before Adam and for this reason



their religion is older than the first man created by God. The Angels have the power to reincarnate not only among themselves but also in other beings, human and even non-humans. In the Kakai/Yarsans' version of history Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Plato and others who, with their thinking, changed the world were reincarnations of the same soul in charge of renewing humanity's faith in God. They currently live (mainly) in the areas of Khanaqin, Erbil, Sulemaniya and Halabja.

### **Iraq's Disputed Territories: An Endless War**

Khanaqin is an ancient city eight kilometers away from the Iranian border on the banks of the river Diyala. Because of its strategic position on the road to Baghdad, together with Kirkuk and Sinjar, it constitutes one of the most disputed areas between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. Law 140 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution provided for the restitution to the Kurdish region of some territories forcibly 'Arabised' by Saddam Hussein and the Baath party. The law also provided for the running of a referendum in the interested areas to determine whether their inhabitants wanted to be part of Kurdistan or Iraq. The referendum was supposed to take place in 2007 but it was actually never carried out due to the difficult relationship between Erbil and

Baghdad. The result was that after thirteen years the disputed territories remain a point of contention further exacerbated by the war with ISIS during which the Kurdish regional government annexed most of the previously disputed territories. This law also provided for compensation in money and lands to those who willingly decided to go back to the lands they occupied before the Arabization process. In the specific case of the Kakai/Yarsans the Arab Kirwi clan which occupied Kakai/Yarsan lands received land plus twenty million Iraqi dinars in compensation for returning the lands to the previous owners while Muslim Kurds received lands together with ten million for the same purpose. Despite compensation paid to them they actually never left the area. Instead, many of them support militias and have created a security threat to the Kakais/Yarsans.[iv] The ethnic complexity of the area makes it very vulnerable to attacks from the various militias. In this context, it is unsurprising that Hashd al-Shaabi — the Iranian backed militia composed of members belonging to ISIS — has an interest in attacking Kakai/Yarsan villages which have strong, often familiar links with those on the Iranian side of the frontier. The motivation is religious as well as political since the Yarsans in Iran are also a religious minority targeted by the Iranian authorities. Hashd al-Shaabi's goal is to gradually erase the presence

of any non-Islamic groups and to complete the Arabization process started during the previous regime. Since 2016, the Kakai/Yarsans have been pressured to choose between leaving their ancestral lands and become Shias. Witnesses report that the leader of Hashd al-Shaabi in Dayala, Zayed Dalib, showed up at the funeral of the victims saying that 'it was their own call' to leave or to convert. At the same time Ryan al Kildani, one of the leaders of the Babylon Brigades,[v] offered protection against Hashd al-Shaabi's attacks.[vi]

### **Need for Recognition and Protection**

Active members of the Kakai/Yarsan community have been advocating for their inclusion on the list of religious minorities officially recognized by the Iraqi state. In an effort to increase awareness, and protection, Farhad Al-Kake and the Chraw Organization for Documentation have gathered enough information to prove that in the last six years 250 members of the community have been killed after being declared 'infidels,' and that since 2014 the community is the target of a planned genocide with the tacit complicity of the Iraqi authorities who are supposed to protect them.

*by Maria Rita Corticelli*

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# A Month in the Gulf

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## BAHRAIN

Monday, 13 July—Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa issued a royal decree provisioning the addition of a BD177 million (\$470 million USD) emergency expenditure to the 2020 state budget for the fight with COVID-19. On the same day, the King decreed a reallocation of \$450 million USD from the Future Generations Reserve Fund (FGRF) to the state budget. The measures aim to address the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Kingdom.

## QATAR

Wednesday, 8 July—Speaking to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting on the situation in Libya, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, said that the Libyan crisis can be resolved only by supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Fayez Al-Sarraj and backed by Turkey and Doha, highlighting the need to commit to the 2015 Skhirat Agreement and the Berlin Conference outcomes.

## KUWAIT

Monday, 6 July—The United Kingdom's Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, and Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister, Khaled Al-Jarallah, discussed bilateral partnership and issues related to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Yemen. Cleverly later also spoke with the GCC's Secretary General about trade and investment opportunities and the importance of UK-GCC Strategic Partnership.

## SAUDI ARABIA

Wednesday, 16 July—The Saudi Human Rights Commission (HRC) launched three international initiatives to emphasise the reforms implemented in the country and develop cooperation with other organisations. The initiatives consist of an International Communication Programme, aimed at engaging with civil society institutions active in the field; an English-language information platform on human rights developments; and an English-language newsletter on the Kingdom's human rights reforms.

## OMAN

Tuesday, 23 June—Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yousef bin Alawi bin Abdullah, chaired the extraordinary Ministerial session of the Arab League Council, which gathered the member states' Foreign Ministers to discuss the crisis in Libya and issues related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The Council approved two draft decisions to refer the GERD issue to the United Nations Security Council and to seek cooperation on the Libyan issue.

## UAE

Tuesday, 15 July—The UAE's Ministry of Economy and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) started the first edition of the China-UAE Economic and Trade Digital Expo, organised between 15 and 21 July 2020. The initiative aims to strengthen trade connections and explore new enterprise and economic cooperation opportunities, through a range of virtual panels with industry leaders.





## WOMEN IN THE GULF

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# Between the Posts: Saudi Arabia, Newcastle United and the Politics of Football

FROM PAGE 1

PIF. More than 97% of Newcastle fans, according to a survey, say they are in favour of the purchase, which must now be confirmed by the English football governing authorities. After Qatar's European football debut with the purchase of Paris Saint Germain by the Qatar Investment Authority and the Emirate property (Abu Dhabi United Group) of Manchester City, the Saudi initiative appears as an attempt by the Kingdom to also enter into one of the most important sports business in the world.

## Done deal? Not Yet.

Unfortunately, the story has been complicated. In mid-June 2020 a World Trade Organisation report raised doubts about the effectiveness of the measures against intellectual property piracy adopted by the government of Saudi Arabia in the BeOutQ affair—the pirated satellite network that broadcast content owned by the Qatari BeIn network, excluded from transmissions to the territory of Saudi Arabia since 2017 (the year the diplomatic crisis between the GCC countries and Qatar began), but holder of the rights for the MENA region of many primary European football leagues and other international broadcasts. The WTO did not find any evidence that BeOutQ operates from Saudi Arabia, but only highlighted that the Saudi authorities should have implemented procedures and sanctions against intellectual property infringements. More than one attempt has



been made in the UK to link the BeOutQ affair with the proposed purchase of Newcastle United by the PIF. The story took on political and diplomatic connotations, with tensions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the background. After the statements by the Saudi authorities to distance themselves from BeOutQ's activities and its future commitments, it is difficult for the Premier League to deny the authorisation to transfer ownership of Newcastle to the new owners. Doing so would damage relations between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia whose commercial exchanges impacts much more delicate and strategic sectors than football, such as aerospace, armaments and, obviously, hydrocarbons. For their part, the Saudi authorities have denied any involvement in BeOutQ's activities and have affirmed their commitment to combat any infringement on intellectual property and to protect the television rights of the main world football events. In recent days, af-

ter the WTO report, the president of the Saudi football federation, Yasser Hassan Almisehal, wrote to the heads of the main international sports organisations — from FIFA to the IOC — to underline the commitment that his federation and the whole Saudi government will put into the fight against piracy. It is in the interests of Saudi Arabia to implement measures that effectively tackle hacking and reassure the international football community and the WTO. And, it is in the interest of the international football authorities to favourably view this commitment and not take a prejudicially hostile position in relation to the PIF's purchase of Newcastle United. Denying the PIF's investment would not mean enhanced protection of television rights; the two portfolios are separate and actions in one should not prejudice actions in another. In short, Saudi Arabia should be able to buy Newcastle United.

by Piercamillo Falasca



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A Special Project by  
The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC)  
Via Gregoriana 12, 00187, Rome  
www.egic.info  
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Edited by Arnold Koka  
at The Euro-Gulf Information Centre  
Printed at  
Reggio Emilia Service di Antonio Fagioli

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