

[Big explosion heard in Aden, Yemen](#)

Thu, 2021-01-07 23:30

ADEN: A loud explosion was heard in the Yemeni city of Aden on Thursday evening, residents and a security source told Reuters.

The explosion took place just outside a central prison in the southern port city, they added.

The security source said the explosion happened in an empty area and damaged a wall.

There were no immediate reports of deaths or injuries.

Pictures posted on social media showed a plume of smoke that appeared to rise from area outside the prison.

After Yemen government officials, backed by Saudi Arabia, arrived in Aden on Dec. 30 at least 22 people were killed in attacks. Saudi-led coalition warplanes then struck areas in Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa the next day.



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[Aden](#)

Houthi shelling kills 6 in Taiz as UN Yemen envoy visits Aden
Yemeni leader slams Iran's 'blatant' meddling

How the coronavirus crisis disrupted the global urban order

Thu, 2021-01-07 22:13

DUBAI: History is full of examples of mighty cities brought to their knees by deadly disease outbreaks. While COVID-19's global toll is miniscule compared with the ravages of, say, the Black Death during the Middle Ages, the sheer scale of urbanization and the interconnectedness of today's modern economy amplified the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. How the different cities adapted to the latest contagion may very well determine their resilience and longevity.

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 crisis has shaken up the existing global urban order and thrown the reputation of several Western cities into question. Yet in many ways, the pandemic has merely accelerated a long-established eastward trend.

In its 2020 Global Cities Index report titled "New priorities for a new world," management consultancy Kearney examined how the pandemic has impacted urban life and economic competitiveness of the world's metropolises. This year's study included data from 151 cities – up from 130 surveyed in 2019 – reflecting the growing importance of urban spaces in the Middle East, China and Central Asia.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings of the 2020 report are very different from previous years, as cities continue to limit entry to visitors, cancel events and festivals, and restrict the free movement and social mixing of their citizens in the hope of containing successive waves of the virus and its latest mutations.

LEADING CITIES OF THE WORLD

The 2020 Global Cities Outlook leaders according to Kearney

GLOBAL CITY OUTLOOK LEADERS BY DIMENSIONS

Personal well-being Nagoya	Economics Abu Dhabi	Innovation Beijing	Governance Stockholm
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GLOBAL CITIES OUTLOOK LEADERS BY METRIC

Stability and security Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka	Infrastructure Dubai, Abu Dhabi	Parents per capita Minneapolis	Quality of bureaucracy Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver
Healthcare evolution Moscow	GDP per capita Abu Dhabi	Private investments Toronto	Ease of doing business Almaty, Nur-Sultan
GINI coefficient index Prague	FDI infow London	University-sponsored incubators Prague	Transparency Vienna
Environmental performance Luxembourg			

ARAB NEWS

Source: Kearney 2020 Global Cities Report

Kearney's Global Cities Outlook (GCO) suggests that although some well-established contenders have maintained their ranking over the course of the year, others have witnessed a notable change of fortunes – for better or worse.

London, for instance maintained its high ranking in 2020 despite the British capital's repeated lockdowns and the economic uncertainties of Brexit. Meanwhile, for many rising cities, particularly those in China and the Middle East, it appears that long-term investment in governance and economic infrastructure is starting to pay off as they rapidly close the gap with their American and European peers.

One example is Abu Dhabi, which has risen to 7th place on the index, 13 notches above its 20th ranking in 2019, overtaking Stockholm, Amsterdam and Dublin. The city also topped the economics metric in infrastructure, which, as the report states, was "thanks to its openness to the private sector and robust engagement in public-private partnerships." This boosted per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and foreign direct investment.

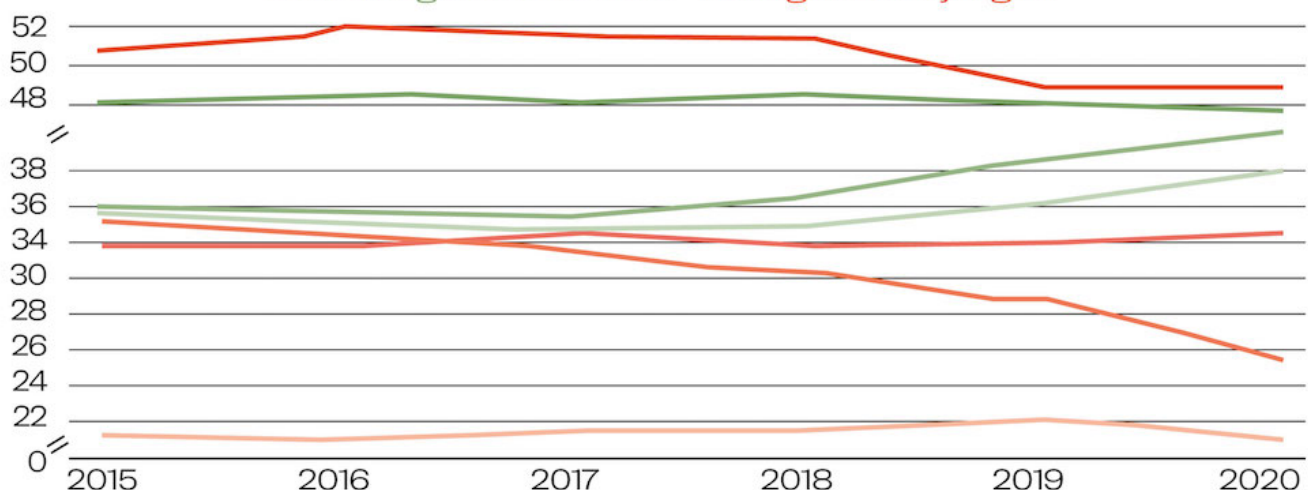
Dubai also has cause to celebrate, climbing 14 points in the index to rank 18th, up from 34th in 2019 and 41st in 2018. Meanwhile in Asia, Singapore dropped a notch to 3rd whereas Tokyo climbed two ranks to 4th. Although they have not emerged unscarred by the pandemic, these Eastern powerhouses are primed for significant growth in the coming years.

HOW MAJOR CITIES FARE BY REGION

North America remains the world's leading region in overall outlook

■ North America
 ■ Europe
 ■ China
 ■ Middle East
■ Asia Pacific
 ■ Latin America
 ■ Africa

— Outlook regional score trend
 — Average score by region



ARAB NEWS

Source: Kearney 2020 Global Cities Report

Dr. Parag Khanna, managing partner at FutureMap, a consultancy firm analyzing trends in globalization, says the world can be divided into two categories now. "The places that shifted together and are going to figure out how to move ahead and those that have not been successful at sticking to a plan," he told Arab News.

"Countries such as the UAE, Kazakhstan and Singapore are all countries that

are going to come out of the pandemic not necessarily better tomorrow but in the hierarchy of countries that had a plan and are going to stabilize a profit in the years ahead.”

Kearney’s analysis suggests that in order to emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis, city leaders have been forced to reimagine what comes next.

Its study covers four dimensions – personal well-being, economics, innovation and governance – which are key determinants of a city’s ability to attract talented human capital, generate economic growth, increase competitiveness and ensure stability and security.



An aerial view shows King Abdullah Finance City and the northern ring road which remains empty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on the first day of the Eid al-Fitr feast marking the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, in the Saudi capital Riyadh, on May 24, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

It stresses the need for “urban value creation,” meaning that in order to remain relevant and competitive in a post-pandemic world, “global cities will need to deepen their focus on creating public value – that is, value centered on the common good across all sectors and segments of society.”

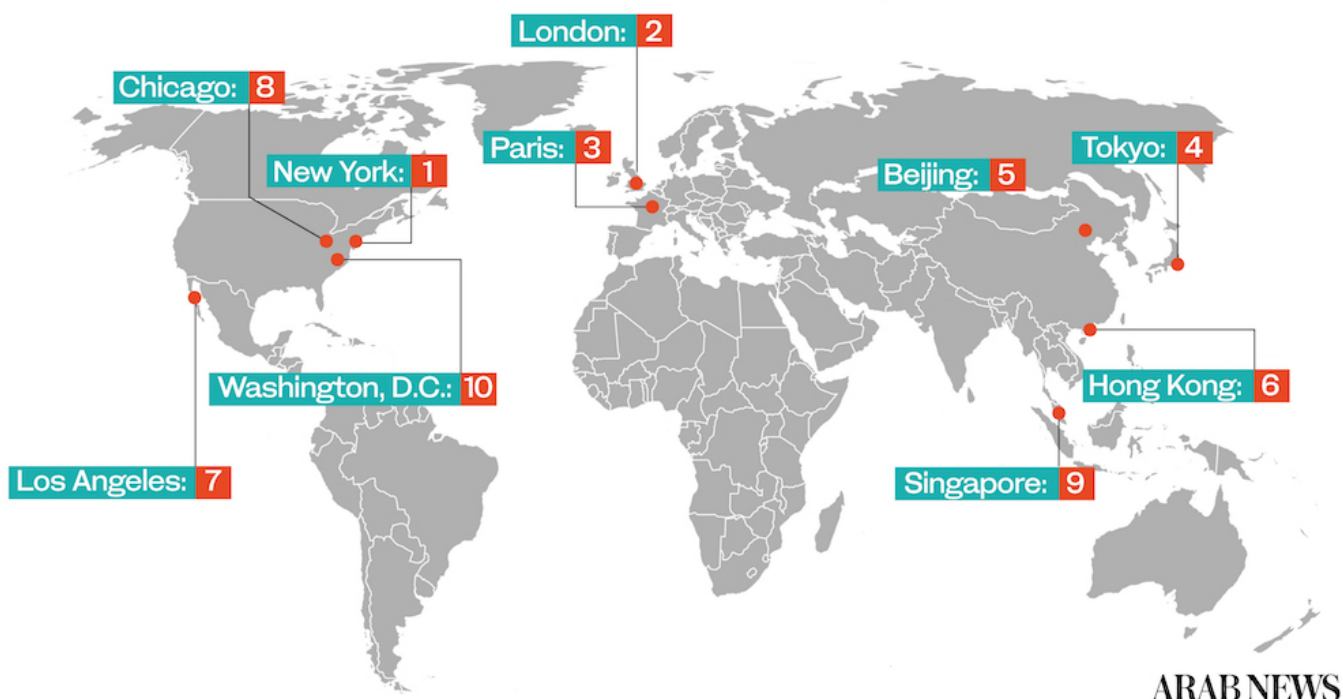
Other top priorities are promoting “global city connectedness” – meaning the international flow of goods, ideas and people – and “the transformation of urban space” – placing the onus on urban leaders “to address the many challenges tied to physical space that have been so starkly revealed by the pandemic.”

Khanna says the coronavirus crisis has shown that some countries need to slow down and re-evaluate. "It is more important now to fix the cities that you have than to build new cities that you don't necessarily know if you are going to need in the future," he said.

"When you are looking at cities now you need to ask yourself the following: Which cities are stable and successful? In what cities are people recongregating? Which cities are going to attract young talented people who could now be anywhere in the world because of remote work? And could Dubai or Riyadh or Tel Aviv or Istanbul or Muscat be that place?"

A case in point is NEOM in Saudi Arabia. Before the pandemic struck, the world watched expectantly as Saudi Arabia outlined its plans for the futuristic smart city located in the northwest Tabuk province.

TOP 10 GLOBAL CITIES OUTLOOK (2020)



With the global public-health crisis expected to catalyze the digital transformation of different sectors, "NEOM has an unprecedented opportunity to become the first health technology capital of the world, and a global hub for innovation and cooperation in health and wellness technology," wrote Roxana Mohammadian-Molina, chief strategy officer at London-based financial technology company Blend Network, in a commentary for Arab News in July last year.

As for the Saudi capital, Afshin Molavi, senior fellow at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, said: "Riyadh is making many of the right moves, particularly in its upgrading of transport infrastructure and the expansion of entertainment offerings.

"If it continues to move in this direction, I could envision Riyadh landing on most of the top regional urban indexes over the next few years."

The pandemic does appear to have accelerated a trend that has long been in evidence – the shift of business eastward, with major economic centers opening in China, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

The continued rise and apparent pre-eminence of the East during this challenging period may also have something to do with planning, allocation of resources and leadership.

TOP 10 GLOBAL CITIES INDEX (2020)



“The rise of the East has nothing to do with the fall of the West,” said Khanna. “The global economic pie was growing for centuries and certainly for decades during the entire post-Cold War era.

“The rise of the East began the second the atomic bombs were dropped in 1945 because that’s when Japan started to reinvent itself as a peaceful country. Japan then took exactly 30 years – from 1945 until 1975 – to become the world’s second largest economy.”

Khanna says many countries in the East have withstood the harsh punishment of the coronavirus pandemic thanks in part to sound socio-economic planning. “This reinforces the Asia-centricity of the coming era,” he said.

During this time of global fragmentation, there has also been a noticeable resurgence in economic activity along regional lines. “You don’t have de-globalization but an enhancement in regional cooperation,” said Khanna.

“It’s not an accident that reconciliation with Qatar is happening more now or the normalization of relations between the Israel-UAE or the recent Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – the big trade agreement that has just gone ahead in the midst of a pandemic, because Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thais and Koreans realize that for the foreseeable future, they are going to trade a lot more with each other rather than across the vast

oceans.”

Small wonder then, as the Kearney report concludes, the cities that are emerging on top are the ones that have long been innovating for the future, that have stuck to sound plans, and those that have strengthened their regional ties for the bumpy road ahead.

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[Middle East](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

How the coronavirus crisis has shifted priorities for Arab cities
As coronavirus steals jobs, urban Kenyans look to their rural families

[Egypt's Copts celebrate Christmas at home](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

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Thu, 2021-01-07 22:07

CAIRO: Millions of Egypt's Copts have been forced to watch Christmas Mass from their homes amid strict precautionary measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Coptic Orthodox churches celebrated Christmas on Wednesday night, but a ban on public attendance at religious festivals meant that Egypt's streets failed to witness the usual celebrations.

The church also adopted stringent preventive measures to ensure the safety of worshippers after many priests became infected with the virus.

The latest curbs follow a dramatic rise in cases amid end-of-year festivals, which led to a ban on public attendance at Mass and limits on the number of religious officials performing ceremonies.

Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Saint Mark Episcopate, presided over the Christmas Mass from the Monastery of Saint Pishoy in Wadi El Natrun, Beheira Governorate, while the Evangelical Church organized its own official Christmas celebration with prayers.

Coptic satellite channels and Egyptian TV broadcast the Mass live, giving Copts the chance to witness the event from home following the cancelation of the Easter Day celebrations last April.

However, the usual well-wishers' reception was dropped, public attendance was halted at all churches in Cairo and Alexandria, and the role of priests limited elsewhere.

Several monasteries canceled visits, while prayers were restricted to monks. Coptic church cemeteries also prohibited visits during Christmas.

A number of Coptic monasteries, including the Monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Assiut Governorate in Upper Egypt, closed their doors to visitors.

The Monastery of Saint Anthony in the Red Sea mountains said that it will refuse visitors until further notice.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi congratulated Pope Tawadros II and the entire Egyptian population on the occasion of Christmas.

"I enjoy being present at the celebration in the cathedral every year to congratulate the Coptic brothers, but the coronavirus prevented us from

attending the Christmas Mass this year," El-Sisi said.





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[Egypt](#)

Egypt sees 13 percent surge in oil, gas findsQatari finance minister
inaugurates hotel in Egypt

[Ankara on alert over McGurk's expected appointment to Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2021-01-07 22:13

ANKARA: US President-elect Joe Biden is expected to select Brett McGurk, the former envoy to the US-led anti-Daesh international coalition, as National Security Council senior director for Washington's policy in the Middle East and North Africa.

McGurk was appointed to the same post in 2015 by then-President Barack Obama and served until he resigned over the withdrawal of US forces from Syria in December 2018.

His expected appointment carries several messages to Turkey, according to experts, who argue that it could bring a new source of disagreement between Washington and Ankara as McGurk is seen negatively by Turkey's political leaders.

"This would be viewed as a very provocative appointment. A bad start for the Biden era on the US-Turkey relations front if this is realized," tweeted Yusuf Erim, an Ankara-based political analyst.

McGurk is often blamed by the ruling Justice and Development Party as the mastermind behind Washington arming the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in their fight against Daesh, with the YPG considered a terror group by Turkey because of its ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party that has waged a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the US, it is only natural that Biden will pick several former Obama officials to serve in his government.

"Brett McGurk may be a controversial figure for Turkey, but he is quite mainstream for the Democratic Party and popular in those circles, therefore it will be no big surprise if he gets a senior job within the Biden Administration," he told Arab News.

Unluhisarcikli also noted that McGurk is only one of several former Obama Administration officials who had friction with Turkey and will now become

part of the Biden Administration.

“This will be a challenge Turkey will need to live with particularly regarding differences over the YPG,” he said.

McGurk also took a tough stance on Turkey’s cross-border military operations against the YPG, and criticized Ankara for not effectively managing its border with Syria when foreign fighters were travelling to join Daesh.

As a former supreme court clerk, McGurk also served under President George W. Bush as a diplomat.

“The Turkish government should not be consumed by its perception of McGurk in judging what approach Biden might have toward Ankara. Biden is not necessarily a third Obama term and McGurk’s role is not typically the forefront diplomatic position,” Joe Macaron, a Middle East analyst at the Arab Center in Washington, told Arab News.

According to Macaron, if the expectation is that the US might withdraw from Syria and end support for the YPG, this expectation should be managed regardless of whether McGurk is serving in Biden’s government.

“The US-Turkish relations might be more tense moving forward, but they have common interests to work together on Syria if Ankara recognizes that Washington will ultimately not sell out the YPG,” he said.

However, pro-government media outlets have already begun their harsh criticisms of the McGurk’s potential appointment.

On Aug. 1, 2017, Turkey’s pro-government Yeni Safak newspaper published a front page that claimed “the coalition forces under the leadership of McGurk are the murderer of 46,000 civilians in Iraq and Syria.” In its coverage on Jan. 7, Yeni Safak has described McGurk as a “colonial governor.”

But Mehmet Emin Cengiz, a research assistant at the Al-Sharq Forum in Istanbul, McGurk’s return would not necessarily make a huge difference.

“Yes, Turkey is not satisfied with this possibility, while the YPG and its political wing are happy about it. However, even without McGurk’s presence, the Syrian Democratic Forces has already received very serious support from the US,” he told Arab News.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

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[Turkey](#)

[Brett McGurk](#)

SDF sees big risk of clash with Turkey in Syria
Anti-Daesh envoy quits over pullout from Syria

[Houthi shelling kills 6 in Taiz as UN Yemen envoy visits Aden](#)

Thu, 2021-01-07 22:07

AL-MUKALLA: At least six civilians, including two women and two children, were killed and many more wounded on Wednesday in heavy artillery and cannon shelling by the Houthis in the southern province of Taiz, a local Yemeni official told Arab News.

Col. Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni army spokesperson in the southern city of Taiz, said that the Iran-backed Houthis launched a major raid in Taiz's Al-Haima region, east of the province, targeting a military officer loyal to the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

More than 60 military vehicles, artillery weapons and cannons were involved in the raid, Al-Baher said.

“The Houthis shelled the area with heavy weapons that killed and wounded at

least 18 civilians and destroyed many houses," the military officer said on Thursday afternoon, adding that Houthi fighters were stationed on high locations where they shelled the area and gunned down residents. "Through my conversations with some residents, we learned that the raid is still going on and the Houthis are determined to humiliate the people."

The targeted officer is said to be a sniper from the Republican Guards who engaged in fighting against the Houthis. During the raid, the Houthis blew up two houses and took several children hostage to force the officer to surrender. Images posted on social media showed heavy smoke billowing from targeted houses and farms as the Houthis heavily shelled the area. The Houthis staged a similar assault on Al-Haima in 2018, looking for the same person.

Also in Taiz, the RASD Coalition for Monitoring the National Dialogue, a Yemeni organization that documents human rights violations during the war, said on Jan. 4 that more than 70 attacks by the Houthis on civilian targets in Taiz from Nov. 1 to Dec. 19 had killed 11 civilians, including six children, and wounded 37 others, including 21 children and four women in different districts in Taiz. Houthi missile and mortar strikes had also damaged or ruined 25 private and government facilities.

The escalation in attacks by the Houthis comes as the UN Yemen envoy Martin Griffiths on Thursday landed in the port city of Aden. After touching down in Aden airport, the UN envoy visited parts of Aden airport that were damaged by the missile attack.

On Dec. 30, three guided missiles ripped through Aden airport shortly after the arrival of Yemen's new unity government, killing 27 people and wounding more than 100 and triggering local and international outrage.

The Yemeni government accused the Houthis and Iranian military experts of staging the attack and called for labeling the Houthi movement a terrorist group. Despite his strong condemnations of the attack, Yemeni government officials pushed to convince the UN Yemen envoy to issue a statement shaming and naming the Houthis for attacks on civilians and derailing peace efforts to end the war.

During a meeting with the Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak at the presidential palace in Aden on Thursday, the UN Yemen envoy renewed his support for the new government and the strong condemnations of the deadly attack on Aden airport. The foreign minister called for punishing the Houthis for violating international law by targeting a civilian facility, officials told Arab News.

On Wednesday, the Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi told Griffiths that Iran ordered the Houthis to attack Aden airport with missiles to ruin peace efforts, and that the Houthis had never been serious about reaching a peace agreement to end the war in Yemen.



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Houthi militants kidnap Safer. Co engineers, kill civiliansYemeni army spokesman calls Houthis 'most dangerous terrorist group' in the region