

How GCC countries can meet the carbon-reduction challenge

Wed, 2020-06-17 19:20

DUBAI: For some time now, energy experts have been calling attention to the urgent need for oil-producing Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to enable a circular carbon economy and move to a cleaner, technology-driven future.

In a sign of the shifting strategic priorities of the bloc's biggest oil producer, Saudi Arabia was the host this year of the international Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS) conference.

Speakers at the Riyadh conference laid out the case for a step-by-step transition to less carbon-intensive and more environmentally friendly technologies in the Kingdom's long-term national interest.

"Global climate objectives are dictating much of the technological shifts in the energy sector, and the momentum behind sectors like solar, wind or battery storage is immense," said Dario Traum, head of EMEA Energy Transition at BloombergNEF.

"To be modern, diversified and competitive, Saudi Arabia's economy needs to adopt these new technologies wholeheartedly.

"Saudi Arabia has set extremely ambitious (goals) for the transformation of the country, and these will be best served if it fully acknowledges the shifting economics and technology of the energy sector."

FASTFACTS

Circular Carbon Economy

* Circular economy is a system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources.

* Inspired by how nature works, circular carbon economy is a closed-loop system where carbon emissions are reduced, reused, recycled and removed.

* Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS) can capture up to 90% of CO₂ emissions from electricity generation and industrial processes.

* CCUS process involves capturing, transporting and securely storing CO₂ emissions underground in depleted oil and gas fields or deep, saline aquifer formations.

* Use of CCUS with renewable biomass is one of the few carbon-abatement technologies successful in taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere.

The speakers said a transformation of the energy sector is bound to generate new growth opportunities while delivering a cleaner environment for the population to live in.

“Saudi Arabia, as a society and an economy, is going through a rapid transition,” said Antoine Vagneur-Jones, MENA lead analyst at BloombergNEF.

“A lot of the focus has been put on diversification to reduce the weight of the oil sector and attract more international investors into the country,” he added.

“Accelerating clean energy investments will have to be matched by measures similar to those needed in the other sectors the Saudi government is looking to grow.”



This picture taken on December 11, 2019 shows a view of Jubail Desalination Plant at the Jubail Industrial City, about 95 kilometres north of Dammam in Saudi Arabia’s eastern province overlooking the Gulf. (AFP/File Photo)

Vagneur-Jones said for a start, the electricity-generation sector has to be opened fully for independent power producers.

According to him, there are few, if any, examples of rapidly growing clean energy markets without this condition being met.

“Auctions are a great way to attract international investors,” he told Arab News. “Saudi Arabia’s tenders have been slow to deliver results and have focused on contracting very large projects. This approach fails to provide the frequency and transparency needed to support the development of a vibrant clean energy industry.”

Some other routes through which the Kingdom could nurture a clean energy boom, according to Vagneur-Jones, are energy price reforms to facilitate the adoption of rooftop solar panels, and regulatory changes to create a demand for clean energy power-purchase agreements.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Speaking in the same vein, Traum said: “The main way in which the world is currently reducing emissions is through energy efficiency, and through the substitution of the most polluting forms of energy with some that emit less or no emissions, for example through the switch from coal to gas, gas to renewables, and combustion engines to electric ones in cars.”

He added: “These changes will deliver the vast majority of the emissions reductions needed to meet global climate objectives.”

Nevertheless, there will remain a number of “hard to abate” sectors in which switching to clean electricity may prove difficult, Traum cautioned.

Citing heavy industries such as steel manufacturing and cement production as examples, he said new solutions such as clean hydrogen and the capturing and storing of carbon may become necessary for decarbonization.



A general view shows the solar plant in Uyayna, north of Riyadh, on March 29, 2018. (AFP/File Photo)

Balancing the costs and benefits will prove equally daunting. Developing CCUS will require substantial investments from the industries concerned and governments to scale up solutions so they become economically viable.

While there are signs of activity resuming in some markets, research and development spending in the energy sector is said to be nowhere near where it needs to be for CCUS to play a central role in the near to medium term.

Experts say sweeping reforms and transitions are difficult for every country, especially when the sectors most in need of overhaul are central to the economic DNA of a country, as is the case with oil in Saudi Arabia.

“Clean energy today is a global success story that is increasingly driven by the competitiveness of the sector,” Traum said.

“Solar and wind are the cheapest forms of new clean energy generation in virtually all of the world.”



This picture taken on December 11, 2019 shows a view of Jubail Desalination Plant at the Jubail Industrial City, about 95 kilometres north of Dammam in Saudi Arabia’s eastern province overlooking the Gulf. (AFP/File Photo)

In the context of the Kingdom, Traum, said: “The authorities have historically let the population benefit from the energy riches of the country through a variety of fiscal transfers, including heavily subsidized retail energy prices.”

While this has delivered historic socioeconomic benefits, today it distorts the economics of energy technologies, and thus is a barrier to the rapid adoption of renewables and the government’s plan to diversify the economy, he added.

Traum said the historical importance of the oil sector does not mean Saudi Arabia cannot reinvent itself as one of the largest clean energy markets globally within a year or two from now.

“Scheduling regular auctions, with a pre-agreed volume, and transparency in the bidding process has shown to create rapid investment booms in dozens of countries around the world, with Kazakhstan, Mexico and India being notable examples,” he added.

“There is no reason that an economy the size of Saudi Arabia’s, with its remarkable solar resources, (cannot) join these frontrunner markets.”



Saudis work at a solar panel factory in Uyayna, north of Riyadh, on March 29, 2018. (AFP/File Photo)

Elsewhere in the GCC region, there is tangible evidence that energy transition is happening, especially in Dubai, according to Faisal Rashid, director of demand-side management at the emirate’s Supreme Council of Energy.

“There are disruptive technologies that enable us to make our energy infrastructure more smart,” he said, citing a slew of examples: Energy storage, net-zero-energy buildings, vehicle electrification, smart grid and metering, digitalization of energy systems, and integrated water-optimization strategies.

Elaborating on the topic, Rashid added: “If we speak about both supply and demand, energy efficiency and solar adaptation in our region, there is good potential for drastic improvement, (especially) due to the very high per capita energy intensity. Renewable energy storage and more efficient cooling are also key opportunities.”

Over the past decade, renewables are said to have lived up to their potential, with capacity growth worldwide having exceeded fossil fuel volumes.



A general view shows the solar plant in Uyayna, north of Riyadh, on March 29, 2018. (AFP/File Photo)

“We can save up to 30 percent on average by using proven technologies and known measures,” Rashid told Arab News.

“Green mobility by increasing electric vehicles and hybrids are also viable and being pursued in Dubai, aiming to reduce fossil fuel usage with 2030 as the horizon and improve air quality.”

Dr. Najib Dandachi, CEO of UAE-based consultancy Al-Usul, said transportation and electricity production are responsible for a little more than 50 percent of emissions, and the GCC is no exception.

“In fact, the situation may be exacerbated by water desalination and the limited existence of public transport in most of the countries of the region,” he told Arab News.

“However, most GCC countries have embarked on truly aggressive clean energy programs that will rapidly displace fossil-fuel, thermal-power generation.”

Dandachi considers Saudi Arabia the most ambitious country in this regard, pointing out that it recently upgraded its plans with the aim to generate about 27 gigawatts of clean energy by 2024.

“All agencies must cooperate and coordinate to maximize the chances of achieving those targets in a relatively very short time,” he said.

“Additionally, there are serious efforts spearheaded by the UAE to develop renewables-based water-desalination plants, the objective being to reduce its carbon footprint as much as technically feasible.”

Under the circumstances, increased cooperation and alliances with experienced consultants, suppliers and advisors, who understand the particular nature of the business environment, will be of the essence, Dandachi said.

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New BP CEO sets ambitious 2050 'reinvention' carbon targets
Energy Ministry, KAUST spotlight circular carbon economy

Turkey deploys troops against Kurdish rebels in Iraq

Author:

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Wed, 2020-06-17 14:12

ANKARA: Turkey launched an air and ground offensive against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq on Wednesday, in a move likely to increase friction with the Baghdad government.

The defense ministry said "commandos" moved in, supported by drones and helicopters, following a bombardment with rocket launchers and artillery guns that hit more than 150 targets.

It said the operation, dubbed "Claw-Tiger," came after a "recent upsurge in attacks on our police stations and military bases" near the Iraqi border. Turkey carried out air strikes earlier this week that drew an angry response from Iraq, which labelled them "a violation of sovereignty."

The Turkish military regularly carries out operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in southeast Turkey and its rear bases across the border.

The operation on Sunday night was dubbed "Claw-Eagle" with raids in the northern Iraqi territories of Kandil, Sinjar and Hakurk.

A PKK source in northern Iraq told AFP Turkish forces "carried out a commandos airdrop from military helicopters backed by warplanes, and clashed with our fighters" in an area called Haftanin, which is in Dohuk province near the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Reda Manujri, an independent analyst in northern Iraq, said Turkish troops would likely seek to occupy a "strategic mountain chain" along the border between Iraq and Turkey, possibly even setting up military bases there. The expert said the "silence" from the Kurdish regional government and Baghdad "indicates that they both had information from, an understanding with, and perhaps even collusion with the Turkish government on this attack." PKK bases are not explicitly authorized but are tolerated by an autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party spokesman defended Turkey's actions.

"Turkey continues its effective fight against terror using its rights based on international law," Omer Celik said on Twitter.

"It is our most natural right and duty to fight against terrorists who attack our borders, citizens and security forces."

The PKK, which has fought an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, is banned as a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies.

Tens of thousands have been killed during the violence, which resumed after a two-year cease-fire collapsed in 2015.

Iraq summoned Turkey's Baghdad envoy Fatih Yildiz over the raids on Sunday

night.

The ambassador tweeted he had informed Iraqi officials that Turkey would “fight the PKK wherever it is” if Iraq did not “take any steps” to remove the PKK’s presence.



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[Caesar Act sends Syria’s Bashar Assad a tough reality check](#)

Tue, 2020-06-16 22:36

NEW YORK CITY: It all began in 2014, when a Syrian military police photographer, codenamed “Caesar,” testified in disguise before the US Congress. He provided the back stories for some of the 55,000 images of torture victims that he had helped to smuggle out of Syria.

The trove of photographs testified to a campaign of human rights violations, torture and murder by the government of President Bashar Assad.

The stage was thus set for the drawing up of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which did not pass until late last year as part of a Defense Spending bill.

FASTFACT

Caesar

Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act is named after “Caesar,” a Syrian military forensic photographer who documented torture by Assad’s regime.

The legislation warns Washington’s friends and foes alike, worldwide institutions, businesses and officials that engage in any business with the government of Assad could be subject to travel bans, denied access to capital, and arrest.

“Any country or individual, if you’re supporting Assad, stop now! If you’re thinking of supporting Assad in the future, cancel your plans! Because the Caesar bill is an open-ended warning to every one (who deals with Assad),” said Mouaz Moustafa, the executive director of Syrian Emergency Task Force, dubbed “Caesar’s Godfather.” He brought Caesar to testify in Congress, and then coordinated efforts to help in the drafting, passing and now implementation of the bill.

The legislation received rare bipartisan support. Top Republicans and Democrats from the congressional foreign affairs committees urged all nations to shun Assad, who “remains a pariah,” and called on the Trump administration to vigorously enforce the new measures.

“The regime and its sponsors must stop the slaughter of innocent people and provide the Syrian people a path toward reconciliation, stability and freedom,” said Representatives Eliot Engel and Mike McCaul and Senators Jim Risch and Bob Menendez.

“(Assad) will never regain standing as a legitimate leader,” added the joint statement.



A Syrian military defector using the pseudonym Caesar, while also wearing a hood to protect his identity, testifies about the war in Syria during a Senate Foreign Relations committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, March 11, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

While Assad appeared to be emerging victorious from the civil war and talk had turned to reconstruction, a spiraling economy is now threatening his grip on power.

“The Assad regime understands what most of the world doesn’t about the reality on the ground (where it) can detain and torture to death, displace or murder by airstrikes or chemical weapons,” said Moustafa.

“The world will just watch and make statements of condemnation. And the only solution that we have seen actually progressing over the last nine years is the military solution: that of the Assad regime and the Russian air force and Iran and Hezbollah and other terrorists.

“The Assad regime is counting that they’ll just kill, displace, and detain until he occupies all of Syria. And he thinks when he does that, he can claim victory, and then the world somehow is going to welcome him back.



A Syrian military defector using the pseudonym Caesar, while also wearing a hood to protect his identity, testifies about the war in Syria during a Senate Foreign Relations committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, March 11, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

“The Caesar Act pulls away that military victory from the Assad regime. It says that no matter what, any place that the Assad regime rules and governs cannot be worked with or dealt with or ever integrated into the international community, because Assad belongs in the International Criminal Court, not in the United Nations.”

Sanctions from the era of President Barack Obama already target the oil sector, and powerful Syrian individuals. The Caesar Act closes loopholes in these sanctions by adding secondary sanctions that target entities operating for the Assad regime’s benefit in four sectors: Oil/natural gas, military aircraft, construction and engineering.

Opinion

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This includes indirect support to the regime, such as support to Iranian- and Russian-backed militias operating in Syria.

“This revision alone in the bill is worth the whole legislation, because (it) ensures that (individuals) who have been sanctioned in the past and have found creative ways, loopholes, to be able to (get around) the sanctions will now see secondary sanctions placed on them, meaning any company or individual that wants to have any relationship with these sanctioned individuals, will also have sanctions applied to them,” said Moustafa.



A displaced Syrian woman and her daughter walk through a street, ravaged by pro-regime forces air strikes, in the town of Ariha in the southern countryside of the Idlib province on April 5, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

The bill’s backers want to stymie reconstruction because Assad is offering lucrative investment contracts to countries to re-establish diplomatic relationships with them.

“The regime is hijacking the private sector. They say they want reconstruction but what they really mean is they want to do another round of stealing the resources of Syria,” said Nizar Zakka, a Lebanese citizen who is a member of the Caesar Act team.

Zakka, now global ambassador for peace and director for Program Development Peacetech Lab at the US Institute of Peace, endured torture in Iranian prisons for four years, and was asked to join the team as a voice for the victims of torture.

Moustafa says reconstruction deals also serve another purpose: Demographic change and what amounts to ethnic cleansing that the regime, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah have conducted inside Syria.



Children play in front of a building, destroyed by pro-regime forces air strikes, in the town of Ariha in the southern countryside of the Idlib province on April 11, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

“When a regime levels whole towns, destroys infrastructure, targets hospitals and displaces well over 10 million people, and then is asking for investments so people can pay for him to rebuild what he destroyed, land that he’s expropriated from millions of refugees that will never be allowed to return – the Caesar Act puts an end to that,” he said.

Syria’s economy has collapsed after a decade of war. Hyperinflation and a currency nosedive have raised the cost of food and medicine beyond the reach of most citizens and resulted in mass business closures and widespread food shortages.

The economic downslide is made worse by the financial crisis in neighboring Lebanon, where banks have served as a conduit to the world for Syria’s business community.

The Syrian government called the sanctions “economic terrorism,” and said the US will “bear main responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people.”



A handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) on MAY 4, 2020 shows Syrian President Bashar Assad meeting with members of the government team tasked with handling the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. (AFP/HO/SANA)

Critics of the legislation claim it is being used for US strategy, which aims to crush two of the regime’s main backers, Iran and Hezbollah, and could push Syria and the region to the brink of a dangerous new stage of the conflict.

Moustafa dismisses those accusations as mere conspiracy theories.

“First of all, the United States and the international community (should) be ashamed of themselves for allowing that never-again moment in Syria to go on for so many years with the worst sadistic types of crimes happening.

“The Caesar act is the reaction of Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress. It’s the reaction of regular American people that saw photographs they have (only seen the likes of) in history books about the Holocaust or the Rwandan (genocide.)



People wave Syrian national flags and pictures of President Bashar Assad during a demonstration in support of Assad and against US sanctions on the country, at the Umayyad Square in the centre of the capital Damascus on June 11, 2020. (AFP)

The bill “is meant to do exactly what the letter of the law says: Protect civilians and punish the criminals.

“It’s the very least the US can do, but it is a very positive step meant to fix the many mistakes of the previous administration and this administration and anyone that hasn’t done enough to help Syria,” Moustafa said.

The Caesar Act establishes criteria that Assad and his allies must meet before sanctions can be lifted.



People wave Syrian national flags and pictures of President Bashar Assad as they gather for a demonstration in support of Assad and against US sanctions on the country, at the Umayyad Square in the centre of the capital Damascus on June 11, 2020. (AFP)

They include halting the Syrian-Russia air campaign and its targeting of civilians; allowing unfettered humanitarian access to areas under regime, Russian or Iranian control; releasing thousands of political prisoners, facilitating the return of refugees; a genuine political process leading to some form of power sharing; constitutional reform; and ensuring that war criminals are held accountable.

The first group of sanctions will be revealed on Wednesday. More will be gradually unveiled over the summer.

“This is to give those who are dealing or thinking of dealing with Assad the time and option to stop. It is a delicate process. If you immediately put sanctions on people, you are going to lose them to the other side. That is in no one’s interest right now,” said Zakka.

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Syria's Assad removes prime minister as economic hardship grows
Rami Makhoul vs. Bashar Assad: Rift within Syria's ruling family?

[Yemen repatriates more nationals from Jordan, Egypt](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-06-16 14:40

DUBAI: Yemen repatriated over 300 stranded nationals from Jordan and Egypt amid coronavirus travel restrictions, state news agency Saba New reported. The plane from Egypt with 174 Yemenis onboard landed in Seiyun Airport in Hadramout, and all arrivals had to undergo coronavirus PCR tests. The other flight, which helped return 147 citizens from Jordan, arrived in

Aden's airport.

The report said Yemen's government continues to work with stranded citizens to help repatriate them back home.



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Yemen parties should 'compromise to end the war,' says British envoy
Saudi Masam project clears 169,434 mines in Yemen

[Arab League says Turkey is copying Iranian interference in Arab world](#)

Tue, 2020-06-16 16:43

LONDON: Turkey was condemned for its violations in Libya and urged to stop its interference in the region's conflicts by the assistant secretary-general of the Arab League on Tuesday.

Citing Turkish action in Libya, Hossam Zaki compared Turkey's behavior with the destabilizing role Iran plays in the Middle East, saying: "Turkey and Iran do not respect the principles of good neighborliness with the Arab countries, and are stoking the fire of discord," telling Egypt's news agency that Turkish and Iranian interference in Arab affairs must stop.

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He also said Turkish interference in Syria and Iraq and its recruiting of foreign fighters and terrorists to fight in Libya soil were "unacceptable" to Arabs.

The official said Turkey's agreement with the Libyan government covertly aims to achieve economic, political and military gains, adding that Tehran and Ankara are supporting militias in the region to serve their agendas.



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Arab League slams Iran for interference in regional issues
Arab League slams Israel's West Bank annexation plans 'a new war crime'