

Israel treats Gaza like a PlayStation

Wed, 2019-03-27 21:08

GAZA CITY: Israel's targeting of Al-Multazem Insurance Co. in Gaza, in an airstrike that destroyed its headquarters, must raise serious questions over the country's "target bank," the pool of information Tel Aviv uses to decide where to launch attacks.

The company was located on the ground floor of a three-story building with four apartments, housing the 28-member Al-Ghazali family.

Talal Al-Ghazali said he received a call from an Israeli officer telling him to evacuate the house, followed by five "warning rockets" from an Israeli drone overhead before a military jet destroyed the building completely.

Al-Multazem was established in Gaza in 2008 as a Palestinian public shareholding company, and has branches across Gaza. Its old headquarters in Gaza City was destroyed in 2014, and in an area where people live cheek-by-jowl alongside businesses and government bodies, there is always the chance that they will suffer disproportionately.

"Gaza is a small area densely populated with civilians, and Israel, with its vast arsenal, treats it as a video game," said Adnan Abu Amer, a commentator on Israel.

"Israel relies on a broad security and military system, including collaborators working on the ground, aerial photography via satellites and drones, and other forms of espionage through mobile phones and computers, and extracting information via interrogation. This information is used by Israel to update the database of its target banks."

The banks, according to Abu Amer, include human targets, such as political and military leaders. They also contain military buildings, but also, curiously, civilian establishments and organizations crucial to Gaza's financial structure and security.

The decision to bomb a target is taken at the top level. The bombing of the house of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, for instance, would have required clearance from the Israeli defense minister. It stands to reason that bombing targets like Al-Multazem would need similar authority.

In 2014, Israel bombed all branches of banks run by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in addition to bombing retail outlets and other economic targets.

Abu Amer claims the bombing of Al-Multazem follows that pattern, trying to cripple Gaza's financial support structure.

Economic analyst Hamed Jad said Israel's targeting of economic facilities had had "catastrophic consequences" for the Gaza economy over the years, exacerbated by the blockade of the area by the Israeli Defense Force for the past 13 years.

He pointed out that Israel's stance of targeting Gaza's economy as much as Hamas's military wing had worsened living conditions at an alarming rate, with unemployment in Gaza now standing at 52 percent, 53 percent of Palestinians in Gaza City now living in poverty, and 68 percent of the population facing food insecurity.



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Uneasy calm holds in Gaza despite exchange of fire
Palestinian killed by Israeli fire in West Bank clash: ministry

[Actors union expels two stars for criticizing Egypt in US](#)

Wed, 2019-03-27 22:01

CAIRO: The Egyptian Actors Union has cancelled the membership of two prominent former associates – Khalid Abol Naga and Amr Waked – after they attended a session in Washington, DC. criticizing the country's human rights

record.

The union called their actions “a great betrayal of their homeland and of the Egyptian people ... pushing the agenda of conspirators against the security and stability of Egypt.”

It added that the pair would not act in Egypt again, stressing that it could not accept members it considered traitors.

Waked ridiculed the decision, describing the organization, through his official Twitter account, as “the union of political arts.” Naga said that it was important that the union should not rush to judgements, and that it should have contacted him first to ask for an explanation.

Lawyers on behalf of the organization have filed letters to the Egyptian attorney general’s office against the pair, accusing them of committing acts of treason, incitement against the state and publishing false news.

In an informal session of the US Congress in Washington, Waked called on Egyptian people not to fear the regime.

He added that he had received threats that he would be arrested if he returned, but that it was his duty to express his opinion on behalf of the Egyptian people.

Mohamed Abdel Fattah, a member of the union, told Arab News that regardless of his opinion of the actors’ visit to the US, the union had overstepped the mark.

“There are hundreds of unemployed actors, but I do not see any activity from them on that, only decisions to persecute colleagues. I am surprised by their interest in political affairs, all the while ignoring the problems of members such as the unsafe environments under which many members work.”

Doubts have also been raised over the legality of the decision, given that it remains unclear whether Waked and Naga were notified of the intention to expel them, or even investigate them before their expulsion, contravening Egyptian law.



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Egyptian singer Sherine banned after claiming lack of free speech
Banned Egyptian singer appeals to president

[Syria requests urgent Security Council meeting](#)

Wed, 2019-03-27 21:46

NEW YORK: Syria asked the UN Security Council on Tuesday to hold an urgent meeting on the US decision to recognize the Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

President Donald Trump signed a proclamation Monday in which the US recognized Israel's annexation of the strategic plateau, despite UN resolutions that call for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan.

In a letter, the Syrian mission to the UN asked the council presidency, held by France, to schedule an urgent meeting to “discuss the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the recent flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council’s resolution by a permanent member-state.”

The French presidency did not immediately schedule the meeting and diplomats said there would be a discussion at the council about the request.

On Friday, Syria wrote a separate letter urging the council to uphold resolutions demanding that Israel withdraw from the Golan.

US acting Ambassador Jonathan Cohen told a council meeting on the Middle East that Washington had made the decision to stand up to Syrian President Bashar Assad and Iran.

“To allow the Golan Heights to be controlled by the likes of the Syrian and Iranian regimes would turn a blind eye to the atrocities of the Assad regime and malign and destabilizing presence of Iran in the region,” said Cohen.

Trump’s decision could be seen as a “God-send” for Iran which will “try to capitalize on the US-Israeli move to try to fill the void of official Arab leadership” in the region, said Fawaz Gerges, an international relations expert at the London School of Economics.

Arab countries, which have long fought for the Palestinian cause, “have been reduced to extreme fragility and none of them will go to war for Syria,” said Said Sadeq, a political sociology professor.

“Trump’s decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights ensure that Israel will be in a state of perpetual war with its Arab-speaking neighbors,” added Gerges.



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Saudi Arabia condemns US move on occupied Golan Heights
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Trump's pledge to Israel

[‘Homegrown Islam project’ could lead to new Ankara-Berlin tensions](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-26 23:09

ANKARA: Germany has reportedly initiated a campaign to push German Muslims to develop a new interpretation of Islam, the Financial Times reported on Monday.

“What we need now is an Islam for German Muslims that belongs to Germany,” Markus Kerber, the government representative responsible for relations with the Muslim community under the German Interior Ministry, reportedly told the Financial Times.

The move of Europe’s economic powerhouse is expected to influence Turkey’s state-led diaspora engagement with German-Turks as well as its state-level relations with Germany. But experts do not anticipate relations to further deteriorate as they say they are already as bad as they can get.

Turks, mostly from the conservative section of society, have been emigrating to Germany since the early 1960s; originally as guest workers during the economic boom. They have since become the largest Muslim community in the country.

Germany’s new plan aims to counter foreign influence on the Muslim community and provide homegrown training to all imams preaching in Germany.

The largest Islamic organization in Germany is the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs, which is affiliated to Turkey’s state directorate for religious affairs. Turkey is sending imams to Germany who are paid by the Turkish government and who are preaching in Turkish in 900 mosques funded by Ankara.

According to Yoruk Halil, a halal butcher living in Frankfurt, Germany's new move will be beneficial for the Turkish Muslim community.

"Those imams coming from Turkey do not benefit Turkish youth in Germany because these young people have been raised with a totally different culture and they mostly speak German, so they cannot establish a healthy dialogue with those imams," Halil told Arab News. "In order to reach out to the Muslim community, including Turks, there is a need to use homegrown imams.

My 15-year-old son has been going to the mosque for five years and he even told me that he has better communication with imams being trained and educated in Germany," he said.

There is also a continuing debate over requiring Muslims in Germany to pay a worship tax.

Turkey is against any "Germanification" of Islam and considers any redefinition of Islam for Germany against the universality of the religion.

Germany's move intends to further integrate Muslims' daily routines into German society, to boost the loyalty of the 3 million members of the German-Turkish community. It is therefore considered a move for breaking the Turkish community's ties with their national and religious identity as well as their traditions.

Last year, German police recorded some 578 hate crimes against Muslims between January and September, while about half of Germans think that Islam is incompatible with the values of their nation, according to recent research by pollster YouGov.

"Turkey has been developing diaspora politics since the mid-2000s, and Turks in Germany have been put at the center of it," Murat Onsoy, an expert in Turkey-Germany relations at Hacettepe University in Ankara, told Arab News.

However, for Onsoy, the presence of imams in Germany who have been appointed by Turkey is a socialization factor for the Turkish diaspora – who show relatively low rates of crime – and to maintain their links with their home country.

"If Germany rejects Turkish funding to these mosques, they will face serious difficulties in covering their expenses," he said.

Germany has a community of about 4.5 million Muslims worshipping at about 2,400 mosques, and the number is expected to rise with the refugee influx from Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Syria. The German federal constitution, called Basic Law, gives autonomy to Muslim communities to receive funding and religious officials from abroad to operate mosques in Germany.

"It is unlikely that this article of the constitution would be easily amended. Various provinces would react to such a move, resulting in widespread protests. The Turkish government would raise the issue at the intergovernmental Islamic organizations, and the German government would be

obliged take a step back,” Onsoy said.

He, however, draws attention to the timing of the debate.

“It coincides with the upcoming local elections in Turkey this Sunday, and in the past we witnessed that such potential crises with Western countries have been used by the ruling government to consolidate its voters through engaging in international polemics and assuming the role of the defender of external Turks and ‘Islam’ worldwide,” he said.

Ayhan Kaya, professor at Istanbul Bilgi University, said that the move in Germany to bring a homegrown reading to Islam had already been on the table since Angela Merkel’s initiative in 2006.

“Although it contradicts with the Sunni Islam rhetoric, what Germany did is a counter-move against the lobbying strategies of Muslim countries such as Turkey, Morocco or Algeria within German territories,” he told Arab News.

Kaya also noted that in the past Germany and Turkey developed joint projects to train imams who would be appointed in Germany by providing them with linguistic and cultural-integration skills.

“This latest move is a dialectic result of the political maneuvers on the diasporas by countries who are sending and receiving migration,” he said.



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Merkel, Erdogan hold tense talks in shadow of protests
Germany, Turkey hail progress in handling refugee crisis

[In Turkey, small sums go a long way as Syria kids go back to school](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-26 22:55

ADANA: Like many students of her age, 16-year-old refugee Fatmeh dreams of becoming a doctor. And a modest monthly sum of less than 10 euros could make all the difference.

Originally from the Syrian city of Aleppo, the teenager has been living in Adana in southern Turkey for six years with her father and three small brothers.

To help feed the family, the father sells Syrian pastries that she helps make at home.

"I missed the first term of school to help my dad look after my three little brothers and prepare the pastries," she told AFP between classes at public school in Adana.

Fatmeh is one of 460,000 refugees in Turkey – most of them Syrian – whose family benefits from monthly supplements aimed at keeping school-age children in class rather than out working.

The money – 35-50 Turkish lira for boys, and 40-60 lira for girls (\$6-\$11/5-9 euros) – is part of the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education program, funded by international sources like the European Union and managed by the UN children's fund UNICEF, the Red Cross and the Turkish authorities.

If the sums seem meager, it can be a boon for poor Syrian families who often live on basic aid and informal work, especially those with several school-age children.

The amount is similar to that given to Turkish families by the social services so as to avoid complaints that Syrian refugees get preferential treatment, says Mathias Eick, a spokesman for the EU's humanitarian operations.

"We've assigned €86 million to the program to date," he told AFP.

Turkey is home to around 3.5 million Syrian refugees, and most of those benefitting from the program are Syrian.

According to UNICEF data, around 600,000 school-age Syrian children are in education in Turkey while another 400,000 are not.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of students who have officially signed up for classes end up skipping school to work and help their families survive.

At Fatmeh's school in Adana, teachers listed absent students and contacted their parents to persuade them to let their children return, with the program as an incentive.

"The teachers in school were able to persuade my father by explaining how the aid could help," she said. "It wasn't hard because he always pushed me to go to school, but it was me who helped out in the house."

Twelve-year-old Moussab, also from Aleppo, found himself back at school three weeks ago after missing the first term.

"We needed the money so I skipped school to work in a tailor's workshop. I earned 500 lira a month," he said.

Reem Zeidane, one of the school's administrators, said last month they managed to bring back 45 of the 150 children who were absent from classes.

"This payment makes a big difference for the families, especially those who have four or five children," Zeidane said.

Turkish authorities and UNICEF have also set up a "non-formal" education program, including Turkish courses, for refugee children and adolescents who have not attended school for at least three years.

As part of this program, 13-year-old Ali takes Turkish lessons every morning in a youth center in Adana. In the afternoon, he works in a car workshop for a monthly salary of 400 lira.

Ali's father, Hamza, is unemployed after two accidents at work, and his mother is ill. With four sisters, three of them in school, he is the main breadwinner.

"If one day our situation improves, I'll quit work and sign up for school," he said.



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Syrian children in focus at Sarajevo museum on war and childhood
EU gives \$100M to UNICEF for Syrian children