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The Last Thing to Read this Week

by

FRAUKE GREIFFENHAGEN



Kingdom of Bahrain



Sunday, 22 April—Two Qatari fighter jets intercepted a UAE civilian aircraft traveling through Bahraini airspace, on a flight from Dammam, Saudi Arabia, to Abu Dhabi. The UAE and Bahrain accused the jets of flying less than 700 feet (2010 metres) from the commercial aircraft, which was carrying 86 passengers.

Wednesday, 25 April—Bahrain's public prosecution has presented new evidence against three men charged with treason and spying for Qatar. Ali Salman Ali Ahmed, Hassan Ali Jumaa Sultan and Ali Mehdi Ali Al-Aswad stand accused of committing 'hostile acts against Bahrain with the intention to overthrow the political system', during the 2011 uprisings in the country. The prosecution published recordings of telephone calls in which Qatar's former Prime Minister, Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al-Thani, urged Ali Salman, head of the outlawed Al Wefaq bloc, to continue protests in pursuit of destabilising the government.

Thursday, 26 April—Bahrain's King, Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, has commuted the death sentences handed down to four men to life in prison. The four were convicted of forming a terrorist cell and plotting to assassinate a military official. Two of the men were listed as having fled to Iran and were tried in absentia. It was not immediately clear if their sentences were commuted as well.



State of Kuwait



Monday, 23 April–The state-controlled Kuwait Oil Company said that it contained a fire at the onshore Al-Maqwa oil field. The fire broke out while an emergency team responded to what was being described as a ‘minor’ leak. Another small leak was reported at the facility earlier this month.

Wednesday, 25 April–Kuwait has declared the Philippine Ambassador, Renato Villa, persona non-grata and asked him to leave the country within a week. The move comes amid a diplomatic dispute between the countries, after the Philippines’ president, Rodrigo Duterte, imposed a ban on Filipinos traveling to Kuwait to work, citing insufficient protection for domestic workers. Two Filipino embassy workers had been arrested over the weekend for allegedly convincing Filipina maids to run from their employers. Villa fueled the dispute by claiming that Kuwaiti police did not sufficiently respond to maids in need of protection. Affairs, demanding better working conditions, a paid holiday, as well as equal salaries to other nationalities, in return for lifting the ban. Kuwait’s domestic worker market has not yet recovered from the crisis following a Pilipino ban on domestic workers to the Gulf state and is seeking to find a solution before the holy month of Ramadan.



Sultanate of Oman



Monday, 23 April–Oman's Minister of Oil, Mohammed Al-Rumhy, told The National that the sultanate will seek to award contracts to large oil companies, such as BP, Shell, Total and Eni, to boost production and promote hydrocarbon exploration. The contracts will be a mix of bilateral agreements and awards from an Omani bid, concluded last year. The sultanate will also look to China and India in order to boost domestic production.

Thursday, 26 April–Oman's Ministry of Oil announced that construction of the \$7 billion (USD) Duqm refinery has begun in the Wusra governorate of the Sultanate. The Minister of Heritage and Culture, Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, and Minister of Oil and Gas, Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad Al-Rumahi, attended a 'laying of the cornerstone' ceremony for the massive, 900 hectares, complex, which will be completed by 2022.



State of Qatar



Monday, 23 April–Qatar Airways signed a contract to sponsor the AS Roma football club. The sponsorship will run until the end of the 2020/21 season and includes the airlines' logo displayed on the front of the official team shirts. The deal is the largest ever signed by AS Roma, and one of the largest in Italian football club history.

Wednesday, 25 April–The CEO of Qatar Airways, Akbar Al-Baker, said in a statement that the airline has suffered 'substantial' losses in its last financial year, due to the regional dispute with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, which lead to the airline being blocked from flying to 18 cities in these countries.

Wednesday, 25 April–The ambassadors of Saudi Arabia (Mohammed bin Nawaf), Bahrain (Fawaz bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa), the UAE (Suleiman Al-Mazroui), and Egypt (Nasser Kamel), to the United Kingdom, published a letter in the Financial Times, directed at Qatar, in which they stressed that their countries do not wish to make Qatar a vassal state, but urged Qatar to change its' attitude towards its' neighbours and end the funding of terrorism.

The letter is available [here](#).



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Monday, 23 April–The political leader of the Houthi rebels in Yemen, Saleh Al-Sammad, has been killed in Saudi-led air strikes on Hudeida province. The Houthi's Al-Asirah TV network reported that the president of the Supreme Political Council, which has been running Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since the Houthis captured it in 2014, was killed in the strikes. The Houthi's leader, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, said in a televised address that a successor had been elected, and that the strike would not go unanswered. Hudeida is considered the safest strong-hold for the Iran-backed Houthis, making this attack, which marks the greatest political blow to the group since the beginning of the war, highly significant.

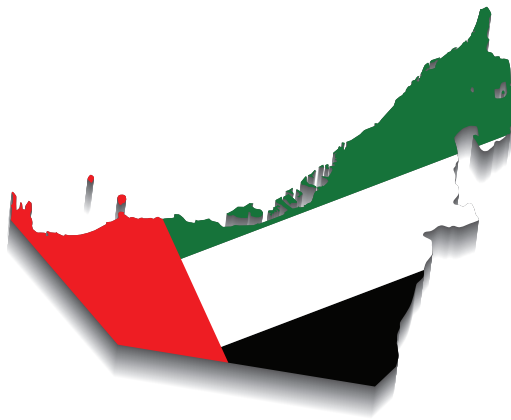
Monday, 23 April–Saudi Arabia intercepted two ballistic missiles fired by the Iran-backed Houthis, which were directed at a major Saudi Aramco facility in the southern city of Jizan. No damages or injuries were reported. The spokesperson for the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen, Colonel Turki Al-Maliki, confirmed the interception, and criticized Iran for its continued support of the armed group, which was in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 2216 and 2231.

Wednesday, 25 April–Saudi Arabia's King Salman launched the construction of an 'entertainment city' in Qiddiya, south of Riyadh. The multi-billion-dollar project will boast a theme-park, motor sport facilities and a safari park. The project is part of the Kingdom's 'Vision 2030'; there will be an investment of \$64 billion in the entertainment sector over the next decade in efforts to diversify the Saudi economy and boost domestic spending.





United Arab Emirates



Tuesday, 24 April–The United Arab Emirates will spend \$ 50.4 million (USD) to rebuild Mosul's iconic Grand Al-Nuri Mosque. The 12th-century building was destroyed by Daesh fighters last year, during the final weeks of the US-backed Iraqi campaign to free Mosul from the Jihadists. It was also the site from which Daesh-leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, declared IS' establishment in 2014. The restoration and reconstruction will be in partnership with the UN cultural agency, UNESCO, Iraq's Culture Ministry and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). The project will take approximately 5 years.

Thursday, 26 April–The UAE and Kenya have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on domestic employment. UAE Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, Nasser bin Thani Al-Hamli, and Kenyan Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Ukur Yatani Kanacho, signed the MoU, which sets standard for employment and working conditions for Kenyan workers in the Emirates and details rights and duties for both sides.



The Arabian Gulf is rapidly becoming a geopolitical pivot. As a result, it is important to understand the internal and international dynamics unfolding in the region and the countries that compose it. We at EGIC are proud to present “The Last Thing to Read this Week” segment which contains a small, carefully selected, batch of the most important events unfolding in the countries of the Arab Gulf to help you map the region’s trends.

