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B U L L E T I N S

16 - 21 December



The Last Thing to Read this Week

by

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Kingdom of Bahrain

Sunday, 16 December—On 16 and 17 of December the Kingdom of Bahrain celebrated its National Day, marking the anniversary of the establishment of Bahrain as a modern Arab and Muslim state by Ahmed ibn Muhammad ibn Khalifa, commonly known as Ahmed Al-Fateh, in 1783. Bahrain also celebrated the 47th anniversary of the Kingdom's full membership in the United Nations and the 19th anniversary of King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa's reign.



Wednesday, 19 December—Bahrain's Crown Prince, Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, received the US Secretary of the Navy, Richard Spencer. In the presence of the Minister of Defence, Major-General Abdulla Al-Nuaimi, they discussed regional and international developments. Prince Salman praised Bahraini-US cooperation and highlighted the US role in maintaining regional security and stability. Mr Spencer also met with the Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force, Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, and other Bahraini military officers to review bilateral relations and ways to enhance them, particularly in defence.

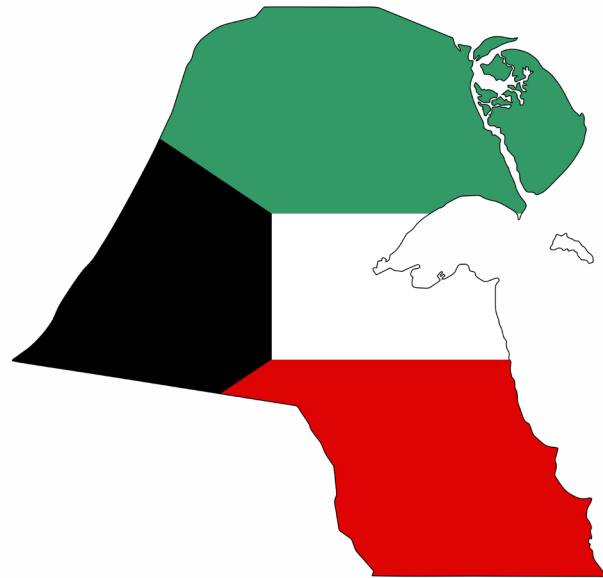


State of Kuwait

Sunday, 16 December—Kuwait's Foreign Minister, Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, met with his German counterpart, Heiko Maas, to discuss cooperation on settling regional conflicts. Maas reaffirmed the support of the European Union for Kuwait's regional mediation efforts, which was the main topic of the debate, particularly in regard to the Yemen war and the last week's UN-sponsored Yemen peace talks in Sweden. In addition, they discussed the Gulf dispute and the situation in Iraq and Syria. In 2019, Kuwait and Germany will be both non-permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Tuesday, 18 December—The Emir of Kuwait, Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, received Dutch Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Stef Blok. The Dutch Minister hailed Kuwait's efforts to maintain stability and peace in the region, notably Iraq and Yemen, and highlighted the trade relations between Kuwait and Amsterdam. He expressed his country's hope for developing their amicable ties as they share similar views on international issues.

Thursday, 20 December—The European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arabian Peninsula, headed by Michele Alliot-Marie, arrived in Kuwait for a four-day official visit. The delegation was received by Kuwait's Emir. Mrs Alliot-Marie reiterated the support of the European Union and the Parliament for Kuwait's mediation efforts in the Gulf dispute and added that the Presidents of the European Council and the Parliament invited the Emir to visit the EU to discuss the issue more. They also focused on Kuwait's efforts to end the Yemen war, regional situation, and relations between the Arab Gulf countries and Iran.





Sultanate of Oman

Wednesday, 19 December—Oman's Foreign Minister, Yusuf bin Alawi, arrived in Washington, DC to meet with the US Middle East Envoy, Jason Greenblatt, and US State Secretary, Mike Pompeo, to discuss the Muscat's growing role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and its mediation efforts in Yemen.

Wednesday, 19 December—The delegation of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, composed of Arnau Danjean, Željana Zovko, Ana Gomes, Amjad Bashir, Javier Nart, Klaus Buchner, James Carver and headed by the Committee's Chair, David McAllister, arrived in Muscat for a two-day official visit to discuss closer political partnership between the EU and Oman. During a meeting with the Sultanate's government officials, the delegation commended Oman's crucial role in resolving crises and maintaining regional stability, including its role as a diplomatic bridge between Saudi Arabia and Iran, pointing to Oman as 'honest broker' and 'a key partner in an insecure region.' They also discussed regional conflicts, notably Libya, Palestine and Yemen.





State of Qatar



Sunday, 16 December—Between 15-16 December, Qatar hosted the Doha Forum, a platform for policy-makers and experts from all over the world to discuss current challenges. Among the participants were: UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres; President of the UN General Assembly, Maria Fernanda Espinosa; UN Special Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura; Foreign Ministers of Qatar, Iran, Turkey, Somalia, Mali, Japan; Undersecretary-General of UN Counterterrorism Office, Vladimir Voronkov; UK Minister of State for the Middle East, Alistair Burt; Dutch Member of European Parliament, Marietje Schaake; Former White House Spokesman, Sean Spicer; and other notables.

Tuesday, 18 December—Qatar celebrated its National Day, also known as the Founder's Day.

Tuesday, 18 December—Air Italy, Italy's second largest airline, where Qatar Airways (QA) holds 49% stake, announced new flights to the United States starting from 2019. This provoked a row with three major US air carriers, members of the Partnership for Open & Fair Skies, who see the step as a violation of Qatar's January 2018 commitments that the QA would not introduce any flights from a foreign country to the US as they try to push QA, Emirates and Etihad



Airways from the US market due to the subsidies they allegedly get from the Gulf governments.

Thursday, 20 December—Qatar's Energy Minister, Saad Al-Kaabi, announced that Qatar Petroleum plans expansion and will invest some \$20 billion in the United States in the upcoming few years. The company is reportedly interested particularly in projects related to liquified natural gas (LNG), natural gas supplies and crude production. The move comes following the Qatari decision to pull out from OPEC earlier this month.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Monday, 17 December—Iraq's Parliamentary Speaker, Mohammed Al-Halbousi, met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman in Riyadh. During the meeting they discussed cooperation and reviewed bilateral relations. Mr Al-Halbousi commended the Kingdom's key role in supporting Iraq in the fight against terrorism and expulsion of Daesh from most of the territory in Iraq.

Monday, 17 December—Riyadh was selected as the capital of Arab Media for the period 2018-2019. On the occasion, the Arab Media Ministers met to come up with a joint Arab strategy to boost the role of the media industry to face the challenges to the Arab world. Moreover, they agreed to follow a code of conduct and ethics and discussed creation of a mechanism to speed up the implementation of the Council of Arab Media Ministers' decisions.



Tuesday, 18 December—Saudi Arabia's Cabinet approved record budget for 2019 set at 1.106 trillion riyals (\$295 billion). This represents a 7% increase compared to 2018, aiming to stimulate the Kingdom's economic growth in line with the Vision 2030. The largest item in the budget is education with 193 billion riyals, followed by military expenditures, which are about to decrease by 12% to 191 billion riyals. The savings on military allowed for more spending on social secu-

rity and healthcare, which are the third largest item with budget of 172 billion riyals.

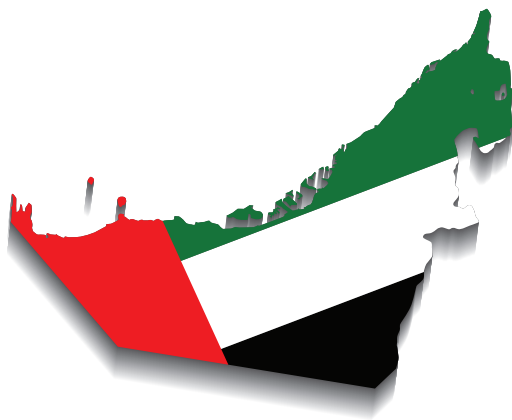
Thursday, 20 December—Saudi Arabia's Special Committee chaired by Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, created three new departments—for strategy and development, legal affairs, performance evaluation and internal review of intelligence operations—as part of the Kingdom's efforts to restructure its intel-



ligence services to improve their operations and assure they are in line with the National Security and the General Intelligence Presidency's Strategies, international law and human rights treaties.



United Arab Emirates



Monday, 17 December—The Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, formed a new body, the Supreme National Committee for Tolerance, to promote the UAE's image as a global centre for tolerance. The Committee is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdullah bin Zayed, and is composed of a variety of members from government officials and businessmen to artists and media personalities. It is tasked with creating a framework for 2019, which will be the Year of Tolerance.

Monday, 17 December—The UAE hosted a round of talks between the United States and the Taliban, another attempt to end the 17-year war in Afghanistan, attended by representatives from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the UAE. The Kabul government officials also arrived in the UAE but did not attend the talks with the Taliban as the group has repeatedly refused to negotiate with the Afghan government, insisting on talks with the US. On Tuesday, the US President, Donald Trump, announced the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Friday, 21 December—The UAE's Abu Dhabi Fund for Development will inject \$3 billion in the State Bank of Pakistan over the upcoming days to support the country's monetary policy, notably to augment liquidity and foreign currency reserves in the Bank.



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.

