



The Brief

MAIN LATEST

10-03-2017 03:56

Markets may be anticipating a bigger than expected number from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics on Friday, as US Treasuries sag. (David P. Goldman)

10-03-2017 03:07

Sectoral returns in past 12 months and since the presidential election: The best thing you can do is, don't look like a bond. (Asia Unhedged)

10-03-2017 02:42

The Trump trade and the consumer: Bloomberg's Weekly Consumer Comfort Index rose sharply to surpass the 2007 level for the first time since the crisis. (Asia Unhedged)

10-03-2017 01:59

The inverse correlation between Oil prices and 5-year TIPS yields continued through 12:30 PM Thursday. (Asia Unhedged)

10-03-2017 01:06

China saw a drop in new February loans, which was less than expected, but a positive sign as mortgage lending and shadow banking activities were down. (Asia Unhedged)

09-03-2017 23:33

Financials led gains in early US trading, while energy and energy infrastructure firms were the main losers. (Asia Unhedged)

EGYPT-IRAN POLITICS // TOP PICK

Egyptian-Iranian détente a boon for the region and beyond



By SEYED HOSSEIN MOUSAVIAN AND YASSIN EL-AYOUTY | MARCH 1, 2017 9:42 PM (UTC+8)



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In the Middle East, the two most contiguous cultures are the Egyptian and Persian civilizations. For ages, they stood as beacons of durable learning and contributed immeasurably to human progress.

With the resurgence of "firstness" (i.e. America First), with all its ominous implications of narrow nationalism, there is a profound global need for a "dialogue of civilizations." This call is not new, having originally been proposed by former reformist Iranian president Mohammad Khatami and most recently echoed by the Grand Imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar in a speech before the German Bundestag in 2016.

However, while a broader conversation between the Islamic and Western civilizations is still of the utmost importance, so too is intra-Islamic dialogue. Egypt, with a third of the Sunni Arab world's population, and Iran, the biggest Shia country, can be the prime movers for reconciliation in the Muslim world and for regional stability. Relations between the two regional powers originally soured in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, when then-Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat gave refuge to the ousted Shah and signed the Egypt/Israel peace treaty in 1979.

Efforts to reconcile the two countries have been made in the past. In 2004, one of the authors, Mousavian, then head of the foreign relations committee of Iran's National Security Council, was invited for a confidential meeting with Osama El-Baz, the then senior political advisor to then-Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

After a day of negotiations in Alexandria, a package was agreed for the normalization of Iranian-Egyptian ties. Ultimately, however, the agreement was met with rejection by top decision makers in both Cairo and Tehran.

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morning with Asians the main gainers, except for China, which was hit by oil prices. (Asia Unhedged)



Letter from Tehran: Trump 'the bazaari'

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Trump will hold a listening session with community bankers today to identify which regulations they find most burdensome. (Asia Unhedged)

09-03-2017 23:04

A 15% increase in microfinance services for women in poor countries could potentially reduce gender inequality by half in the average developing nation, study finds. (Quanda Zhang and Alberto Posso)

09-03-2017 22:49

The European bank index (SX7E) was up this morning following optimistic remarks from the ECB president. (Asia Unhedged)

09-03-2017 22:40

Thailand's anti-graft watchdog on Thursday said it will investigate senior government officials and employees of the country's flagship airline over bribes paid more than a decade ago by Rolls-Royce. (Agence France- Presse)

09-03-2017 22:27

Despite official silence on the issue during China's NPC meetings, businesses and officials are talking about capital controls. (Asia Unhedged)

09-03-2017 22:26

The 10-year US Treasury yield moved before the big 10-year Bund yield jump, and corresponding euro rise. (David P. Goldman)

09-03-2017 22:15

German 10-year bund yields and the euro were up after the ECB announced there will be no more rate cuts or

The historic pendulum of Egyptian politics towards Persian Gulf issues can be seen as emblematic of Egyptian diplomacy's aim to balance foreign relations

Nevertheless, one of this article's authors, Yassin El-Ayouty, assesses that if diplomacy were tried again, it would likely succeed. In a trip to Cairo in December last year, he found a groundswell within authoritative non-governmental organizations for Iranian-Egyptian rapprochement. The reasons for the warming up to Tehran are diverse and include cooperation on terrorism. Mousavian has also found readiness for such rapprochement in Tehran.

Despite fear-mongering by some in Egypt about a so-called "Shia menace," El-Ayouty, through his present work on a book on the "Sunni-Shia split," has found no religious foundation whatsoever for such a division.

Egyptian and Iranian Islamic scholars have in the past reached historic accords on bridging Shi'ism and Sunnism. In the late 19th century, Egyptian Sheikh Muhammad Abduh and Iranian cleric Jamal al-Din Asadabadi cooperated on creating a pan-Islamic movement. In the 20th century, Iranian Grand Ayatollah Seyed Hossein Borujerdi and Al-Azhar Grand Imam Mahmud Shaltut established cordial relations. Shaltut even issued a famous fatwa recognizing Shi'ism as a recognized Islamic sect. Al-Azhar had, for many years prior to that fatwa, taught Shi'ism as a part of its curriculum.

Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been an uptick in sectarian rhetoric from prominent Egyptian figures. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent former Muslim Brotherhood acolyte, regularly engages in divisive bombast about Shi'ism and is a leading encourager of the some of the most reactionary elements in the Muslim world.

The late Iranian scholar, Hashemi Rafsanjani, once debated with Qaradawi after he had made controversial anti-Shia remarks. Qaradawi, however, is currently out of favor with Al-Azhar and living in Qatar as a Qatari citizen, a leading proselytizer of the puritanical and exclusivist Wahhabi sect.

In addition to the religious and political tensions between Cairo and Tehran, Egypt's increased reliance on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE – has also served to lower the chances for Egyptian-Iranian rapprochement. The Egyptian economy has for years been sliding downward, a decline in fortunes due largely to a booming population (nearing 100 million). Interestingly, a top lifeline for Egypt



09-03-2017 21:50

Wolverine gorges on China, Korea filmgoers, but Marvel's latest mutant hero blockbuster is locked out of the Japanese top spot by an earless time-traveling robot's 37th adventure. ([Russell Edwards](#))

09-03-2017 21:22

Did higher US interest rates tumble oil prices? Watch for commodity markets to be highly sensitive to signs of a global tightening cycle. ([David P. Goldman](#))

09-03-2017 21:09

More than 20,000 refugees from Myanmar have flooded into border camps in neighboring China as fighting erupts between government forces and ethnic Kokang rebels. ([Reuters](#))

09-03-2017 20:29

2 Malaysian UN staff quit North Korea after Kim murder row ([Agence France-Presse](#))

09-03-2017 19:20

The latest statistics by OiKa, a website about wedding banquet prices, showed that couples have to subsidize as much as HK\$1,000 per guest if they opt for a top end hotel. ([Ben Kwok](#))

09-03-2017 19:00

Asia Times offers a selection of photographs depicting how women around the world protested and could Be Bold For Change – this year's International Women's Day theme – on March 8. ([Asia Times Staff](#) and [Reuters](#))

09-03-2017 17:49

Theresa Calo, a Filipino maid in Hong Kong, is going to run in the London Marathon next month while raising funds for Oxfam, a charity focused on the alleviation of global

Wahhabi sect.

Egypt's hands-off stance in the war unleashed by Saddam Hussein on Iran (1980-1988) was reversed in favor of an inter-Arab collaboration to stop Saddam from swallowing up Kuwait (1990-1991). This was followed by an apprehensive wait and see regarding America's 2003 war of choice on Iraq. The historic pendulum of Egyptian politics towards Persian Gulf issues can be seen as emblematic of Egyptian diplomacy's aim to balance foreign relations.

Such desire to bifurcate Egyptian foreign policy makes the resumption of ties with Tehran a necessity. There are grounds to be optimistic about a future Cairo-Tehran rapprochement, as evident by the following facts:

1. The negative reaction of the GCC towards the Iran nuclear deal found no tangible expression of sympathy in Cairo;
2. The charges by America and some regional states about Iran's fomenting terrorism or instability find no echoes in Cairo;
3. The Egyptian role in the so-called Arab coalition against Houthis in Yemen has been confined to safeguarding safe passage through the Gulf of Aden;
4. Iran's role in support of the Syrian regime has now been directly bolstered by Cairo's recognition of the folly of regime change in Damascus or anywhere;
5. Cairo's relationship with Riyadh has its ups and downs. This is especially so in regard to rising opposition by Al-Azhar to the Wahhabi stranglehold on religious practices and education in the kingdom.

Egypt and Iran are the two most historically influential and leading civilizations of the Muslim world and indeed, humanity. Furthermore, any idea of a religious animosity between them today is grossly exaggerated. After all, it was the Shia Fatimid dynasty that constructed Cairo over a millennium ago.

Egypt and Iran are the respective powerhouses of the Sunni Arab and Shia worlds. Cooperation between them can play a critical role in managing regional conflict, alleviating Sunni-Shia sectarianism, and containing calamitous regional civil wars. Critically, Iran and Egypt also have principally a similar stance on terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Therefore Cairo-Tehran have great historical responsibility to establish strategic cooperation to manage devastating crises in the region.

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is an Iranian former diplomat, now a Middle East specialist at Princeton University. He is the author of Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace.



09-03-2017 17:44

Five women from South Korea, aged between 30 and 38, were arrested by Hong Kong police for prostitution in a two-day special operation ended Tuesday, local media reported. (Asia Times Staff)

09-03-2017 17:31

Early this week US military vehicles, all hoisting the American flag and in broad daylight, rumbled across the increasingly diluted border with Iraq into the strategic Syrian city of Manbij in what could be the sign of a battlefield deal with Russia. (Sami Moubayed)

09-03-2017 17:30

A former Indonesian domestic worker was arrested on Wednesday by Hong Kong Customs in Yuen Long in the New Territories for receiving a parcel containing 250 grams of cocaine. (Asia

Strong State.



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#GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL #SHI'ISM #SUNNISM #ISLAMISM #RELIGION
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Seyed Hossein Mousavian and Yassin El-Ayouty

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is an Iranian former diplomat, now a Middle East specialist at Princeton University. He is the author of Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace. Dr Yassin El-Ayouty is an attorney licensed in Egypt and the US, and professor of law. He is the author of The New Egypt: From Chaos to the Strong State.

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Galen Linder

Very informative article. If Iran and Egypt work together for peace and development in the region, it will have a powerful impact.

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Mounir Zahran · Paris Sorbonne University

Congratulations to both the authors for an excellent foresighted article article that may contribute to the rapprochement and normalization between the two most respected civilizations and countries .

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