

THE NEWSPAPER THE KEY

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Exclusive Interview

A year ago this month, US Ambassador to Mauritania Cynthia Kierscht presented her credentials to President Ghazouani. The Key Newspaper, as the only English-language medium in Mauritania, interviewed her Excellency to learn about her diplomatic experience and recent milestones that have strengthened the bilateral relations between our two countries politically, economically, socially, and culturally. We also touched on the immense prospects for strengthening the partnership in the field of energy and mining at the regional and international level.

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Four Mauritians Participate in 2022 MWF in Person



On June 2nd, Public Affairs Officer Amanda Cauldwell led the pre-departure orientation of four Mauritians preparing to travel to the U.S. to participate in the 2022 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African leaders (YALI). This prestigious program allows young leaders to continue their professional development and leadership training at U.S. universities for two months. Amanda thanked them for the inspiring work they do and wished them safe travels and good luck.

El-Naha mint Seyidi Awards Ceremony' Second Edition



On Saturday, June 11, the Union of Women in Media Organized the second edition of El-Naha mint Seyidi Media and Women's Issues Awards Ceremony. The awards ceremony was attended by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sports and Relations with Parliament, Mr. Mohamed Salem Ould Boukhress, Nouakchott Region's president Fa-

timatou mint Abdel Malick, and the president of the Mauritanian News Agency, Dr. El Houssein Meddou. Ould Boukhress gave a speech in which he emphasized that the ministry is working diligently to integrate and strengthen the presence of women in media scenes and encourage professional journalists to discuss their issues. Whereas the president of the Union of Women in Media, Ms. Lemnya

Sidi, stated this contest aims at promoting female journalists generally and raising awareness of the problems that face women especially.

Seven awards were given to the seven winners of different media categories: written, visual and audio. The awards also included categories for local languages.

Ask an American

"The Key Was a Tremendously Useful Resource"

Welcome to this month's Special Edition of Ask an American. Last month, I spent two weeks in Nouakchott visiting the city and meeting many avid readers of The Key.

1- Based on your own experience in Mauritania, what do America and Mauritania have in common?

I was frequently asked this question during my time in Mauritania and it is one that I struggled to answer. At the material level, the United States and Mauritania have little in common. Geographically, politically, linguistically, socially, and culturally, the lands and people that make up our two countries share little. Nevertheless, there is still room for common ground. Americans and Mauritians both value the role of the family in one's life. Americans and Mauritians both share a belief in the virtues of democracy. And Americans and Mauritians are both value hard work and dedication in life. It is on the basis of these characteristics that American-Mauritanian relations have remained amicable for so long. Our countries may share little at first glance, but below the surface the United States and Mauritania are not so far apart.

2- It's said that «Mauritians are very hospitable.» To what extent do you agree?

I agree unequivocally with this statement. The Mauritanian people are exceptionally hospitable. Everywhere I went during my time in Mauritania I was welcomed with open arms.

Ask an American

Hello! My name is Alex, and I am a college student and ESL teacher in the United States. Each month I will answer your questions about learning English and about life in the United States. Send your questions of less than 100 words to thekeynewspaper21@gmail.com to have your question printed and answered here in The Key.

3- Did you experience any cultural shocks? If yes, what are they?

This is a difficult question to answer. Overall, my experience in Mauritania was not particularly shocking. I have spent extended amounts of time in North Africa, with which Mauritania shares a number of similarities. Compared to the United States, however, there are a number of notable differences that took some getting used to. The first of these was the lack of formal markets. In the United States, street vendors are found only rarely in major cities. Otherwise,

almost everything one buys comes from a formal store. The most pointed example of this can be seen in the experience of buying food. In Mauritania, if one wants to cook a meal, it requires a trip to the butcher for meat, a produce stand for fruits and vegetables, a bakery for bread, a street vendor for mint, and perhaps another street vendor for spices. For most Americans, purchasing ingredients for a meal only requires visiting a supermarket, where all of those products can be found under the same roof. The need to buy each different food product from a different seller was a characteristic of Mauritanian life that is

particularly different from life in the United States.

The second major difference between life in the United States and Mauritania that I experienced was the entirely cash-based nature of Mauritania's economy. Today in the United States, almost every purchase that one makes is made using a credit or debit card. Some stores have even stopped accepting cash altogether, and many young Americans do not even carry cash with them.

The third, and most significant difference between life in the United States and Mauritania has to do with the prevalence of the internet. In the United States, the internet is a ubiquitous part of life, to the extent that it is now extremely difficult to go about daily life without having a constant connection to the internet. Mauritians, in comparison, are much less connected to the internet. To highlight the difference in internet use, a standard cellphone-data plan in Mauritania includes 2GB of data per month. Many Americans, in contrast, consume an equivalent amount of cellular data in one day.

4- How did The Key help you out when you came to Mauritania in terms of the information in English?

Reading The Key was a tremendously useful resource for learning about Mauritanian culture, history, and politics in advance of my visit. By reading The Key, I learned about the issues that matter most to Mauritians, as well as the way that they see their country in the past and present. I relied on what I read in The Key to ask well-informed questions of my hosts in Mauritania and better understand the country and its people.



President Ould Ghazouani Attends the 2022 Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan



President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani gave a speech on Tuesday, June 14, at Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The Africa CEO Forum was founded by Jeune Afrique and funded by the International Finance Corporation. The event hosts major private sector actors and was attended by multiple important global corporations and other African leaders.

In his speech, the President expressed Mauritania's future vision for investment: "Mauritania presents itself to you as a country of peace, stability, economic opportunities, and solid developmental ambitions. A country with a prosperous democratic dialogue and protected freedoms where visions and ideas move freely." The President then added, "this forum represents a valuable occasion for our country to showcase its investment opportunities and create partnerships with those who desire to keep pace with building a strong, diverse, sustainable, and comprehensive economy."

The president then expressed his gratitude to Côte d'Ivoire and the Africa CEO Forum for the chance it provides to exchange with big investors who are interested in the development of Africa.

BAC : 2022



On Monday, June 13, the national examination for secondary school completion diploma (also known as the baccalauréat) has begun for the academic year 2021-2022. The baccalauréat lasts for four consecutive days and the candidates take their exam depending on which division they belong to (Modern and Original Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, in addition to the Technical division). The 47251 candidates, 53.88% of which are girls, are sitting for the exam in 153 schools, 63 of which are located in Nouakchott. This year, the number of candidates from public schools (16203 candidates) had been greater than that of private schools (14126 candidates).

A Special Celebration Year

The British Ambassador in Nouakchott, Colin Wells, celebrated the 96th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, as well as her Platinum Jubilee, at his Residence on 2 June. His Excellency Mohamed Salem Merzoug, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mauritians Overseas, was the guest of honour, accompanied by senior members of his Ministry and the Presidency. Three hundred guests from government to business leaders, diplomats, NGOs, artists and journalists attended. This was impressive as there had been a big sandstorm earlier in the day. In the garden, guests were treated to a range of food dishes by La Palmerie ranging from the iconic Fish and Chips to new British favourites like sushi, pizza and curry. A five piece group of musicians from the Royal Corp of Army Music flew in to serenade everyone and to play the national anthems of both Mauritania and the United Kingdom. Mauritania's famous, talented DJ Dhakar then took the stage and made sure guests danced into the evening.



70% complete, towards Mauritania's economic security, as well as the more difficult challenges facing both Mauritania and UK following the invasion of Ukraine.

After the event, Ambassador Wells told The Key, "It is an honour to lead the celebrations of Her Majesty's Birthday in Mauritania. But, this year was a special year too as it was also the 70th anniversary of the start of her reign. The UK and Mauritania have strong relations, and you could see that today with the presence of the Foreign Minister as well as Mauritians and British friends enjoying each other's company."

British Ambassador Colin Wells, delivered a speech in which he praised the reign and commitment to her people by HM The Queen. He noted that Winston Churchill was in 10 Downing Street and Harry Truman was in the White House. The Ambassador joked that his own mother was just a 5 year old girl, ready to start school when the Queen came to the throne. He stated "Her Majesty The Queen is a much-loved and respected monarch and leader, a symbol of service and dedication to her country, her people and to the Commonwealth." The Ambassador also praised the strength of the Mauritanian - British relations, particularly on climate change and President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani's ac-

tive and high-profile role at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in 2021. He also noted the positive contribution of the BP/Kosmos investment in phase one of the GTA field development, now



Her Majesty, Queen of Spain, Visits The Market Garden of Nouakchott

On Thursday morning, May 2, her Majesty Queen Letizia of Spain visited the Region of Nouakchott's market garden. The garden, which is located 17 km from Nouakchott on Rosso Road, is financed by the Spanish Cooperation. Her Majesty was greeted by the president of the Region of Nouakchott, Fatimatou Abdel Malick, and the staff of project "Nourrir et Verdir Nouakchott". Her Majesty was informed by the staff of the progress and work that have been done in the garden. She was also offered a detailed description of all of the components of the project, its journey so far, and its expected results. This project falls under the Region



of Nouakchott's strategy of reinforcing cooperation between its partners in development, creating new employment opportunities for

vulnerable classes in Nouakchott, and supplying the market with the most consumed vegetables.

Exclusive Interview

**American Ambassador to Mauritania Speaks to The Key in her First Press Interview :
The U.S. government and the U.S. private sector are very excited that Mauritania is establishing itself as a renewable energy leader on the continent**

A year ago this month, US Ambassador to Mauritania Cynthia Kreisht presented her credentials to President Ghazouani. The Key Newspaper, as the only English-language medium in Mauritania, interviewed her Excellency to learn about her diplomatic experience and recent milestones that have strengthened the bilateral relations between our two countries politically, economically, socially, and culturally. We also touched on the immense prospects for strengthening the partnership in the field of energy and mining at the regional and international level.

The Key : Could you provide a brief background on yourself?

US Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : Born in Chicago, Illinois, I lived in Nashville, Tennessee, before moving to Fargo, North Dakota with my family where I graduated from high school. Fargo was a special place to grow up as it was very family-friendly, safe and had excellent public schools. In fact, my grandmother, for whom I was named, taught geography and social sciences in the public schools there for four decades. I even had her as my geography teacher in seventh grade. After high school, I went to Carleton College, in Northfield, MN, where I received a bachelor's degree in International Relations magna cum laude. After living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for a year, I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to go to Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government where I received a master's degree in public policy. I joined the State Department as a Presidential Management Fellow in 1990 and worked in the Political-Military Bureau, but quickly joined the Foreign Service where my first post was in Cairo, Egypt. I learned Egyptian Arabic before being posted there, which is why you may hear me speak "misry." Since joining the Foreign Service, I have been posted in Egypt, France, Tunisia, Morocco (with a brief stint in Libya), Colombia and now Mauritania. I have served half of my 32 years at the State Department in Washington, DC in the Bureaus of Counter Terrorism, Near Eastern Affairs, and Western Hemisphere Affairs, as well as in the Operations Center and the Executive Secretariat where you travel with the Secretary of State for domestic and international trips. I had the pleasure of working with Madeleine Albright and went to more than 20 countries during six months alone. I now live in Nouakchott



with my four adopted Mauritanian cats who showed up in my garden one day with their mom. They must have known that I had adopted four cats in Morocco when I lived there!

The Key : You have now lived in Mauritania for more than a year. How do you find the country, its culture, and its people?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : Before I came to Mauritania, people in Washington DC told me to expect a beautiful country with generous and hospitable people, rich in natural resources and scenery. Even so, I've been pleasantly surprised at how much I'm enjoying my time here. My mom and I had the pleasure of traveling to Chinguetti and Ouadane, where we learned so much about the rich history at the crossroads of learning and scholarship. Near Ouadane, we got to experience the fascinating landscape by climbing to the top of the Eye of Richat. I've also visited the National Parks of Banc d'Arguin and Diawling which are beautiful places to visit, see wildlife and just relax. And I've also had the opportunity to enjoy the seafood of Nouadibou and see the beautiful coastline from Cap Blanc. I have found Mauritania to have such interesting landscapes and an incredibly rich history. And it's true what they say about Mauritians being legendary for their hospitality. I've enjoyed so much tea and conversation, and many delicious meals since I got here more than a year ago.

The Key : How have U.S.-Mauritanian relations developed since your arrival in the country?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : The U.S.-Mauritania relationship remains a strong partnership – built on trust, shared interests, and common goals. Since my arrival, I'm proud to say that the United States and Mauritania have worked closely on an increasing number of priorities and projects. I'll highlight just a few of these partnerships: In March of this year, the U.S. government – in partnership with Ministry of Justice and the Commissariat on Human Rights – bolstered Mauritania's law enforcement efforts to identify and refer human trafficking cases through the justice system. On health, the U.S. government has donated more than 1.8 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to Mauritania, and we continue to work together with the Ministry of Health on future deliveries. And, last October, Mauritania hosted the most senior-level U.S. government visitor in recent memory, Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer. Finer's visit underscored our support for strengthening Mauritania's ongoing broad-based reforms. In addition to the visit by Mr. Finer, we have also hosted several other high-level visitors including the Deputy Commander of AFRI-COM, General Smith, as well as the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain. All of these visits point to the importance the U.S. places on our relationship with Mauritania.

The Key : As Ambassador, what are your priorities for the U.S.-Mauritanian bilateral relationship?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : Our goals for the U.S. Mission in Mauritania are to see Mauritania become more secure, democratic, and prosperous — all of which enhance Mauritania's status as a stable and important U.S. partner in the region. To achieve this, we build on a strong foundation of bilateral cooperation as we seek to support the efforts of Mauritania's government, private sector, and civil society to increase economic opportunities, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote tolerance and human rights.

The Key : You became Ambassador to Mauritania in 2021, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. How do you view Mauritania's handling of the pandemic up to the present?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : The United States was one of the first countries to assist Mauritania with what was at first a disease without a vaccine. In 2021, we helped Mauritania acquire 3,000 difficult to find Viral Transportation Media (VTMs) and hundreds of thousands of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). The VTMs are vital testing supplies that helped Mauritania detect, prevent, and respond to the threat of COVID-19. The PPEs assisted the workforce and first responders safely carry out life-saving interventions.

Exclusive Interview



When the vaccine capacity rolled out, the United States made available billions of COVID-19 doses to the world through the COVAX Initiative. To date, the United States has donated 1,843,410 COVID-19 doses to Mauritania. These vaccines have helped Mauritania to position itself as one of the most vaccinated countries in Africa. These are a combination of Astra Zeneca, Johnson & Johnson, and Pfizer doses. Additionally, on the non-vaccine side, the U.S. has provided Mauritania with \$6.3 million in COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C-19 RM) support, which is helping Mauritania mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on three Global Fund-supported diseases – AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Thanks to this effort, Mauritania will improve its local oxygen production, expand COVID-19 capacity-building through targeted training, and acquire medical supplies and equipment critical to the response. Last but not least, the Embassy is proud to work closely with the Ministry of Health on the Field Epidemiology Training Program, with \$620,000 in funding from the Centers for Disease Control, to improve Mauritania’s capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to public health crises.

The Key : The U.S. Embassy has been investing considerably in youth projects (Tamkeen \$7m and Nafore \$17m). What are some of the outcomes that you expect from these initiatives?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : The global pandemic propagated isolation, which has been hard on everyone, American and Mauritanian alike. Add to that Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, which has had major effects on the importation of wheat, and contributes to inflation – it hasn’t been easy on Mauritanian youth. But young people under age 35 represent 70% of Mauritania’s population and its greatest potential of human capital, and according to recent studies, disadvantaged youth lack employment or job opportunities, and they feel the lack of a supportive, enabling environment. In spite of all that, young people want to contribute in productive ways

to their society. The American Embassy recognizes the great potential of Mauritania’s young people and wants to support them in the most productive way.

The USAID program Nafore (which means “added value” in Pulaar) aims to increase the resilience of vulnerable youth to resist radicalization and extremism by fostering skills training, vocational education and building supportive youth networks. Some of the outcomes of the project will include increased access to sustainable job opportunities, training on conflict mitigation, psycho-social support and inclusive, youth friendly spaces. The USAID program Tamkeen (which means “empowerment” in Arabic) will strengthen Mauritanian youth capacity to lead positive civic change through leadership skills training in addition to building youth focused networks that promote civic engagement. Outcomes will include supporting locally based mechanisms for stakeholders to advance social cohesion, creating a learning focused platform, and recognizing and countering mis- and dis-information campaigns. We look forward to opportunities to coordinate with other youth focused activities and to learning and adapting the activities to the extent possible to attain the highest positive impact on Mauritanian youth. Mauritania has so many resources and great potential.

The Key : The U.S. Embassy in Mauritania has worked to combat corruption in Mauritania. Could you describe some of the concrete steps the Embassy has taken to do so?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : The U.S. Embassy fully supports President Ghazouani’s efforts to fight corruption, increase government transparency, and curb illicit finance. As detailed in the first-ever United States Strategy on Countering Corruption released last December, U.S. embassies have elevated anti-corruption work as a priority worldwide. We improved our risk management processes related to foreign assistance, and we supported partner governments’ capacity and will to counter corruption. Specifically, over the next year, the

U.S. government plans to support local civil society groups to better advocate for fiscal transparency in Mauritania.

The Key : As violence in the Sahel continues to increase, what role will and/or does Mauritania have in the U.S.’s strategy for the region?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : For the last eleven years, Mauritania has been an oasis of stability in an increasingly fragile Sahel. The U.S. applauds Mauritania’s role in countering violent extremism and terrorist activity within its borders. Because we see Mauritania as a critical influence in strengthening regional security, we’ve invested heavily in the capability and capacity of Mauritania’s military and security forces through a robust portfolio of cooperation

Mauritania is an oasis of stability in a fragile sahel

programs. In the last year, the U.S. delivered an English language lab to the G5 Sahel Defense College; concluded a multi-year, \$14.9 million support program for the Mauritanian Battalion supporting the G5 Defense Force; and sent military officers to advanced programs at elite American military institutions through the International Military Education and Training program. Mauritania’s commitment to its own defense as well as to the stability of the region is key to future peace and a reduction in violence. The U.S. will continue assisting Mauritania to achieve these vital objectives.

The Key : Despite its relative political stability and security, Mauritania remains classified by the U.S. Government as “high risk.” Do you concur with that classification based on your time here?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : Actually, Mauritania is currently classified the same as many other countries, including Guatemala, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. The State Department reevaluates and changes these travel classifications as needed. You can read more about the U.S. Government’s travel advisories at travel.state.gov.

The Key : Current oil exploration presents Mauritania with a potential future as an oil exporting state. What are your views on this development and how do you feel Mauritania could best leverage the discovery of oil to support domestic development?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : Hydrocarbons production certainly has the potential to transform Mauritania’s economy over the next decade and, from what I have seen, this potential is being realized with the Phase 1 implementation of the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) project operated by BP and the American company, Kosmos Energy. In addition to the oil and gas projects, the U.S. government and the U.S. private sector are very excited that Mauritania is establishing itself as a renewable energy leader on the continent. By leveraging its unique natural resources and geography, and partnering with international firms, solar and wind energy could make Mauritania an energy exporter. More importantly, these renewable energy projects, coupled with the GTA project, could deliver cheap, reliable electricity throughout Mauritania and allow for new industries to grow. And, as Mauritania begins to see significant revenue from these projects, the U.S. Embassy will support efforts to ensure that all Mauritanians benefit from the country’s wealth of resources.

The Key : Your accreditation as Ambassador to Mauritania a year ago coincided with the launch of The Key. What does The Key represent to you and your embassy?

Ambassador Cynthia Kreisht : I can’t overstate the importance that Americans place in the first amendment to our Constitution – the one that talks about freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. A free press – with journalists that research and report on stories important to the public, who are trained to analyze and explain – is vital to a high-functioning democracy. Freedom of the press matters because without it, the public wouldn’t know what was going on in their communities and their country. A free press informs voters – and a democracy thrives on informed voters. For all these reasons, I applaud your initiative, and the hard work of all journalists across Mauritania. In addition, an English-language newspaper aligns well with the Embassy’s efforts to promote English language capabilities amongst young people in Mauritania, helping them to communicate in today’s world language while building technical and professional skills. **I congratulate you for your efforts and accomplishments in the last year as the only English-language newspaper in Mauritania.**

The Key : Thank you Ambassador Keircht for giving us the time and honor to have this interview.

The French Withdrawal from Mali: Fears of a Repeat of the American Scenario in Afghanistan

The current French withdrawal from Mali represents a failure for French military forces in their war on extremist and armed groups in the Sahel. Despite the success of Operation Serval in 2013 to wrest control of Northern Mali from these groups, France's failures stem from its military's inability to contain or eliminate a sufficient number of jihadists to diminish the threat they pose in the Sahel. The French withdrawal from the region is certain to create an atmosphere conducive to the spread of armed groups in and among Sahelian states, further challenging the capacity of these states to respond to violence within and between their borders.



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France's Position on Developments in Chad

France was one of the first states to respond to the killing of Chadian president Idriss Déby, offering its condolences to the Chadian people and describing the fallen president as a "brave friend." At the same time, Paris stressed the importance of a peaceful transition of power and the inclusion of various political stakeholders in forming a new civilian government.

France, the preeminent military power in the Sahel, has long seen "Déby Sr." as a key political ally. Chadian military forces actively participate in the G5 Sahel to combat terrorist and other armed groups in the Sahel, a region comprising Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania that experiences some of the highest rates of violence on the African continent.

It is likely that French support for Chad under Déby Sr.'s son, Mahamet Déby, will continue in exchange for the resumption of Chad's involvement in counter-terrorism efforts. The younger Déby, however, will first have to consolidate domestic territorial control and sufficiently manage the threat from armed groups plaguing much of the country.

Despite the possibility of creeping authoritarianism in Chad, it is not in France's interests to express its opposition to the Transition

nal Military Council led by Mr. Déby, as it contends with threats on multiple fronts. In the south, the Chadian government is fighting the various cross-border extremist groups that exist along the country's southern and southwestern borders. In the north, Chadian armed forces are engaged in a low-intensity war with the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (known by its French acronym FACT), a political group opposed to the current government. Déby also faces opposition from members of his own ethnic group, the Zaghawa, which dominated the state security apparatus during the elder Déby's tenure. Despite continued overall support, Déby has seen significant pushback from Zaghawa over his appointing of close family members to key political positions.

Russian Expansion and the Future of the Sahel after France's Withdrawal

The withdrawal of French troops in the coming weeks is not inevitable, however, particularly in light of Paris' frustration with Malian leaders' reversals on several defense agreements. France has described decision-makers in Bamako as "out of control" as it reevaluates the organization of French forces in Mali at the strategic and political level. In addition, France has called for European and local Sahelian forces to play a greater role in

combatting extremist and other armed groups in the region. The increased focus on other states has angered Malian leadership, which culminated in the recent expulsion of the French ambassador, who was given only 72 hours to leave Malian territory. Paris likely fears a similar situation to the withdrawal of the American forces from Afghanistan last year, which explains in great part the emphasis on conducting an orderly withdrawal and not leaving the weak Malian state alone in the face of extremist groups.

French embassies across the Sahel have not struggled to coax increased cooperation from the other Sahelian states, however. A full French withdrawal from the Sahel would have catastrophic repercussions for West Africa, leading to rapid destabilization, which would adversely affect the security of the entire region and pose a threat to North Africa and Europe to the north.

At the same time that France's withdrawal risks creating a security vacuum in the Sahel, Russia has worked to expand its presence in the region through the signing of bilateral agreements with multiple Sahelian states. These include a June 2021 agreement with the Mauritanian military to provide training and security-sector development. Russia's interest in Mauritania stems from the former's view of the Islamic Republic as an island of stability in the region. Mali and Niger also previously signed agreements with Russia in

2014 and 2017, respectively.

Key to Russia's expansion in the Sahel has been Bamako's reliance on the Kremlin-linked paramilitary forces known as the Wagner Group to fill the gap left by departing French forces. The Wagner group is favored by Malian leaders over the French, whose presence in the country has always been contentious. Russia's growing presence in the Sahel, however, will not be limited to countering extremist groups. Russia will likely seek to use its influence in the Sahel to exploit the E.U.'s continued inability to control Europe-bound migration from West Africa. By inciting or helping migrants from Sahel and other West African states, Russia could – likely in response to E.U. sanctions – foment another migrant crisis along Europe's southern shore.

Fears of the American Scenario

The political, security, and humanitarian environment that France faces is very similar to that faced by the United States as it withdrew from Afghanistan. The French withdrawal could lead to the formation of a coalition among some armed groups, which could dramatically shift the balance of power within Sahelian states between armed groups and governments. This is a similar scenario to the one witnessed in Afghanistan. French actions have generated fears within the E.U. that Afghanistan's experience will be repeated, leading to an increased risk to Europe from extremist groups.

Conclusion

The Sahel is a strategic region that is witnessing unprecedented levels of violence and terrorism, in addition to international and region competition for its wealth of natural resources. The withdrawal of French forces and the entrance of new, less predictable actors into the region's conflicts makes finding a solution to the Sahel's deep-seated problems an even more difficult task. Any strategy for stabilizing the region must therefore begin by countering the rise and spread of criminal, armed, and extremist groups that plague the Sahel states.





Goodbye Voice of Palestine: Shireen Abu Akleh

By Varha Abd Selam
 Professor at Lebanese
 International University
 M.A. in Mass Communication

Growing up, the Palestinian cause still mattered, and Al Jazeera was and still is the only news channel that reports on it vehemently. As a child, I would imitate Al Jazeera's news anchors' manner of reading the news and its reporters' sign-offs. One iconic sign-off that I used to religiously imitate was Shireen Abu Akleh's. And like many girls of my generation, I aspired to become like her.

Abu Akleh was born on January 3, 1971, in Jerusalem. Her parents were originally from Bethlehem. She was pressured by her family to study architecture at the Jordan University of Science and Technology but decided to pursue print journalism instead at Yarmouk University, also in Jordan. Before becoming a correspondent for Al Jazeera, Abu Akleh had worked for the UNRWA, and as a journalist for Voice of Palestine and Radio Monte Carlo. She quickly became one of the most distinguished journalists in the Arab media. She was the first Arab journalist to be allowed inside Shikma Prison in Ashkelon to interview the Palestinian prisoners. She had virtually reported on every major event in Palestine, including the Second Intifada in the year 2000, the Israeli raids of the Jenin refugee camp in the Occupied West Bank in 2002, and many more crucial events. She returned to Jenin, in May 2022 with other reporters from other news organizations to cover the latest Israeli raids where she was shot and killed on the spot despite wearing a helmet and a blue protective vest marked «Press».

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

Since early April 2022, the Israeli forces raided Jenin refugee camp regularly under the pretext that some of the assailants of the latest attacks against Israelis by Palestinians were from Jenin. Many Palestinians, mostly young, have been killed by the Israeli forces during these raids. Wednesday, May 11, started like any other day. A group of journalists, including Abu Akleh, another Al Jazeera reporter Shatha Hanaysha, and Al Jazeera cameraman Majdi Banura arrived at the scene where an Israeli army convoy was waiting. In an interview, Hanaysha told CNN that the band of journalists stood in front of the convoy for five to ten minutes before moving. A tactic the journalists habitually employ as a group to ensure that the Israeli military had seen and recognized them as non-threatening journalists. As the reporters started walking toward the Israeli convoy, gunfire broke out. Abu Akleh was shot dead



in the head, and Al Jazeera producer Ali al-Samoudi was also injured. Hanaysha who was standing only a few feet away from Abu Akleh's motionless body as she laid face down in a pool of blood on the ground, took cover behind a slim tree trunk. Hanaysha crouched behind the tree unable to reach out to her colleague and in shock as gunfire continued in their direction. Eventually, and after many attempts, a man in a white T-shirt gets to them and drags Abu Akleh's body to a car standing nearby.

Israel initially alleged that Abu Akleh was killed by Palestinian gunmen, and later that she was caught in a crossfire. However, eyewitness testimonies, Abu Akleh's autopsy results, and a CNN investigation have proven that Abu Akleh was targeted and sniped by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Israeli military ultimately refused to conduct a criminal investigation, despite international outcries, stating that being killed in "an active combat zone" does not merit a criminal investigation except in the case of a plausible and instant suspicion of a criminal offense. Abu Akleh is only the latest in a series of journalist murders.

Martyrs of The Truth

In its 2021 onslaught against Gaza, Israeli airstrikes destroyed Al Jalaa Tower, a 12 stories building that housed the offices of multiple news outlets such as Al Jazeera and the Associated Press. The attack left no

casualties as the journalists and residents had been forewarned. Other journalists have not been as lucky. In 2014 alone, Israeli forces killed 17 Palestinian journalists during its attacks on Gaza.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) lists 19 deaths of journalists (including Shireen Abu Akleh) in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory alone between the years 1992 and 2022. However, that number magnifies, according to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, which accuses Israel of killing over 46 Palestinian journalists since the Second Intifada of 2000. As a result, the persistent assaults and killings of journalists have driven observers to accuse Israel of deliberately targeting journalists.

In a piece written by David Ottaway for The Washington Post following the leveling of Al Jalaa Tower, he recounts another instance in which Israeli forces attempted to bomb another building that housed journalists during an ongoing Israeli invasion. Ottaway writes about the 1982 Lebanon War when the IDF threatened the Western journalists who had made the Commodore Hotel their headquarters. The IDF attempted to intimidate the reporters into evacuating the hotel by airdropping leaflets warning of an impending attack on the capital Beirut, where the hotel was located. ...

At the time, the hotel hosted correspondents from major American media outlets: the New York Times,

The Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the three main American television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC. The correspondents alerted their head offices in the US and the White House made the threats stop abruptly. In the destruction of Al Jalaa Tower in 2021, the only American news outlet that was at risk was AP, and they only had an hour to evacuate the building as opposed to the several days that Ottaway and his colleagues had in 1982.

AP president and chief executive Gary Pruitt stated after the obliteration of Al Jalaa Tower that "the world will know less about what is happening in Gaza." By killing Shireen Abu Akleh and other Pa-

lestinian journalists, Israeli forces believed that the world would know less about Palestine. Nevertheless, with every death of a Palestinian journalist, the world knows more and more about Palestine and the crimes of Israel. With every death of a Palestinian journalist, a hundred more are born; a hundred more Shireen Abu Akleh, a hundred more Fadel Shaana, a hundred more Yasser Murtaja, and a hundred more James Miller are born.

"I chose journalism to be close to people. It may not be easy to change reality, but at least I was able to bring that voice to the world [...] I am Shireen Abu Akleh". —Shireen Abu Akleh.

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