

- **GEOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY BY COUNTRY**

- 1. **EGYPT**

- The US President's visit to Egypt was at the heart of the Egyptian media coverage this week. *Al Akhbar's* Sunday editorial dismissed the visit, reminding its readers that it was part of the US protocol before Bush leaves the White House, although the visit aspired to rally support against Iran. The newspaper maintained that the Egyptian agenda for the visit was made public and that it had no unannounced aims. Writing in *Al Mesri Al Youm* on the same day, Magdi Muhana considered the main aims for the visit to be the provision of support to Israel, marketing the USA's vision for the peace process and dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat. The Arabs are meanwhile stuck between Scylla and Charybdis: their response, whether positive or negative, will not be in their favour.
- Commenting further on Bush's visit to the region, *Al Massa's* Mohamed Fudah expected the US President to return to the USA empty handed, as he will neither succeed in swaying Arab states against Iran nor will he convince them to pressure the Palestinians to compromise their legitimate rights that are supported internationally. Tariq Abbas commented in *Al Mesri Al Youm* on Friday that the Arabs have few choices with regards to the Palestinian cause, which is in itself a victory for Israel and the USA. Abbas said that the Arab states gave up all their options when they agreed to negotiate with Israel, as Israel has gained via negotiations more that it obtained through force.
- On Monday *Al Ahrām's* Ibrahim Nafi commented on Israel's tactics to abort attempts to revive the peace process during President Bush's visit. He said that discussing a plan to invade Gaza during President Bush's visits to the Arab capitals was only a means to direct his agenda towards irrelevant issues in order to take the attention away from the peace process, thus delaying the final settlement of the Palestinian cause. *Al Akhbar's* leader on the same day observed that it is illogical to lay the blame on Hamas alone for the misery of the Palestinian people, as President Bush had done, saying that it is known to all that the real reason behind the Palestinian's plight is the Israeli occupation and its repressive policies against the Palestinians.
- The Egyptian media widely discussed the USA's viewpoint on peace in the Middle East. *Al Gomhuria's* Saturday leader stressed that any settlement that is not based on international resolutions will be unfair. The negotiations discredited the USA as a patron of the peace process, as the talks were carried out by a Palestinian party that does not represent the Palestinians as a whole. This party does not have Arab support and is up against a strong, well-armed and US-supported state. Writing in *Al Ahrām* on Friday, Mursi Attalla said that the Arabs should never overlook the fact that the USA's policy will always agree with that of Israel, as Israel and the USA seem to be two faces of the same coin. It is no surprise that President Bush has not denounced or acknowledged the terrorism of Israel against the Palestinian people, although he has dedicated a great deal of air time to "the security of Israel." President Bush is a reincarnation of Nixon and Condoleezza Rice of Henry Kissinger, Attalla argued. President Bush's has closed his eyes to Israeli criminal acts, just as his predecessor Lyndon Johnson failed to denounce the Israeli offensive in 1967. The same newspaper pointed out on Friday that President Bush's discussion of his administration's efforts to achieve a real settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis is simplistic as he holds the Palestinians responsible for establishing peace,

when they are obviously the victims. The newspaper considered President Bush's optimism about achieving peace before he is out of office to be quixotic.

- *Al Ahrām's* Saturday leader stressed the importance of Egyptian/American relations, demanding that Egyptian diplomacy puts an end to the plotting of those who are trying to sabotage these relations. *Al Ahrām* suggested that the issue of the tunnels on the Egyptian/Palestinian border, as well as the halting the US \$100 million financial support to Egypt, were exaggerated and the media had suggested that there is a serious crisis in Egyptian/American relations. The newspaper concluded that the US administration is well aware of Egypt's role in maintaining security and stability in the region and that the financial support issue should not be exaggerated.

2. LEBANON

- Coverage of the explosion in Karentina on Tuesday dominated the Lebanese media this week. *As Safir's* Wednesday leader noted that the explosion coincided with the increasing connection between the presidential crisis and the tension in the region as a whole, especially as the explosion occurred on the eve of Amr Moussa's visit to Beirut. Interestingly, the circumstances of the explosion are reminiscent of the Rumaila explosion which targeted the UNIFIL, also on the eve of Amr Moussa's visit. Diplomatic sources told *An Nahar* that this was the first time since 2004 that the USA has been targeted in Lebanon and it was a warning of similar attacks on other Arab and international delegations. This would be reminiscent of similar events in 1975. The newspaper commented sarcastically that Lebanon has become an international post box, as it noted the international implications of the explosion. Rajeh Khouri wrote in the same newspaper that the Arab initiative had been killed in its cradle, especially as the three main items in the initiative reflected the main things that the majority has been calling for: firstly the election of a president, then the formation of a government based on the 6+10+14 formula and finally an agreement on an election law. *An Nahar's* Wednesday cartoon commented that the targets of the explosions were known while the those who caused them are unknown.
- The Lebanese media pondered on the obstacles facing the Arab initiative. *An Nahar's* Gassan Tuwaini stressed on Friday the importance of appointing a president before a government is formed and he called on Nabeih Berri, the head of the parliament, to hold a session as soon as possible to elect Michel Suleiman as president. Tuwaini finally warned Amr Moussa, against giving too much attention to insignificant nuances. George Alam wrote in *As Safir* on the same day that Amr Moussa cannot enforce an "Arab Consensus" on the Lebanese leaders and that the Arab initiative offers a temporary settlement rather than a permanent solution. On Sunday *Al Anwar's* political editor wrote that the presidential election is a decision that is being made outside Lebanon and as it has not been made yet, the editor found it absurd to wait for a solution. *Addyjar's* political editor accused the majority of hindering Amr Moussa's visit by rejecting a dialogue with General Michel Aoun and of refusing to give in to the opposition's demands for a 'balancing third' and the 10-10-10 formula.
- The prospects of the initiative were widely discussed in the Lebanese media. In *Al Akhbar* on Saturday Nicola Nassif said that all the initiatives are waiting for a Syrian/Saudi reconciliation and that pursuing Amr Moussa's solution without this is pointless. The Arab ministers also give a higher priority to the presidential election over the election of a national unity government. Nicola Nassif pointed out on Monday that the initiative looks at the problem against the Middle East background and in the hope of bringing about peace and security in the entire region. This intensified Mubarak's tone in his discourse with the Lebanese. Writing in *An Nahar* on Saturday, Rossana Bu Minsif commented that the Arab initiative is the latest item in the "initiative

Bazaar" and that the rumours about Hamad Bin Jassim's visit to Beirut had not been confirmed yet. Minsif suggested that the Qatari Prime Minister's visit would be as important as that of Amr Moussa, given his role in convincing Syria to participate in the Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting. Minsif warned finally that the situation will escalate if the presidential void is not filled.

- A majority of the Lebanese leader writers considered that the initiative has already failed. Rafiq Khouri, writing in *Al Anwar* on Saturday, said that the failure has been caused either by the lack of seriousness on the part of the Arabs and of the international mediators or by the lack of interest and influence of the local political figures. *Addiyar's* political editor stressed on Sunday the significance of Mubarak's statement urging the Lebanese to adopt the Arab initiative as their last chance. Writing in the same newspaper on Monday, Radwan Al Deib did not expect a breakthrough, especially with regards to the presidential elections, before the situation becomes clearer. *An Nahar's* Gassan Tuwaini criticised Amr Moussa, as he had flown back to Cairo to explain the different positions in Lebanon to the Arab ministers instead of trying to help the Lebanese leaders to find common ground.
- Commenting on Syria's role in resolving the presidential crisis, *An Nahar's* Emil Khouri wrote on Saturday that Syria has a two-faced policy as it appears to approve the Arab ministers solution, leaving the mission of rejecting the initiative to its allies in Lebanon. Nasir Al Assad wrote in *Al Mustaqbal* on the same day that some believe that the Syrian regime is not against the election of General Michel Suleiman, as electing the Chief of the Army seems to be a solution that will appease all parties. *Addiyar's* political editor referred on Sunday to Amr Moussa's imminent visit to Syria, observing that Syria could play a positive role in bringing about a permanent solution to the situation in Lebanon.
- President Bush's visit was of interest to the Lebanese media. On Saturday *As Safir's* Talal Sulaiman said that the Arab leaders' overly warm reception of the US president was an insult to Arab dignity, especially as they were not affected by his outrageous statement in Israel that made Palestine a "Jewish State" and that stripped the Palestinians of all their rights, which the Arab leaderships gave up gladly. Talal Sulaiman also thought that the visit has had a negative effect on the Lebanese crisis. On Monday in the same newspaper Ghasib Mokhtar wrote that President Bush's support of the "Jewish State" has consolidated the Lebanese leadership's fears of a US attempt to dismiss the refugees' right to return and displace the remaining 1948 Arab Israelis. Mokhtar concluded that the lack of any Arab response has redoubled the fear that the Arab leaders have tacitly approved this plan.

3. JORDAN

- President Bush's visit to Palestine led the Jordanian media coverage this week. *Addastur's* Wednesday leader considered that the attack on Gaza that resulted in the death of 17 Palestinians and the injury of many more to be a proof that the visit was merely a prelude to a fully-fledged attack firstly on Gaza and later on Iran. Moreover, the newspaper dismissed talk of peace and the so-called "independent Palestinian state" as empty slogans used to pacify the crowds. The same newspaper said indignantly on Friday that President Bush's apparent concern for the future of a Jewish Israel was an obvious challenge to the right to return and a racist and religious annihilation reminiscent of the massacres of 1948. President Bush has made it crystal clear that his country has adopted what is widely known as the "Judaisation Project" that would deprive two million Palestinians of their right to return to their homeland and would threaten the security of another two million Israeli Palestinians.
- Writing in *Al Arab Al Youm* on Saturday Mohamed Kaosh said that as far as Israel is concerned, the visit was a raging success, while to the Palestinian Authority it was an

utter failure as it once again demonstrated the USA's bias in favour of Israel. There was, however, a wide perception among Jordanian commentators that the objective of Bush's visit was not to promote peace but to redirect the Arabs' concern from Israel to Iran.

- Commenting on Israel's view of the peace process, *Al Gad's* Hassan Al Barari wrote on Saturday that Olmert is not the type of leader who will lead Israel forward and seize the international momentum that the case has gained in order to revive the peace process. *Al Rai's* Saturday leader said that Israel will be mistaken if it tries to humiliate the Palestinians and force them to accept what they have refused emphatically during the past four decades, during which time Israel used up all its tactics to frustrate the Palestinians.
- The Jordanian media was concerned about the effect that Israel's agenda might have on Jordan. *Addastur's* Oraib Rentawi stressed on Sunday the importance of crystallizing Jordan's position on the future of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, including the naturalized refugees, especially on issues such as identity and integration. In this light Jordan should either continue to support the peace process and accept the solutions based on the "Jewish State" theory or increase its demands by threatening to veto any solution that does not include the return of refugees. Echoing this view, *Al Rai's* Saleh Al Qallab warned the negotiators, the Palestinian refugees and the host countries, which include Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq, against compromising the right to return, as this would trigger many dangerous demographic and political changes in these countries as well as compromising the Palestinian cause.
- The situation in Lebanon continued to receive Jordanian coverage this week. Rakan Al Mijali wrote in *Addastur* on Wednesday that the reason behind the Arabs' interest in the situation in Lebanon is that it represents a model in which the state is literally broken in pieces because of the spread of sectarianism and other differences, not because of occupation or military action. The west seems keen to spread this model across the region, as re-staging the situation in Iraq in every country in the region obviously seems much more difficult. Writing in the same newspaper on Tuesday, George Haddad said that although the Arab action plan has been welcomed across the political spectrum in Lebanon, the reasons behind this response vary greatly, as the parties have different readings of the plan. The writer called Amr Moussa to fulfil his promise to return to Lebanon within a few days to continue his mission, as the situation becomes more serious every day, seeming as it does to reflect relations between the major international players.

4. SYRIA

- President Bush's visit to the region led the Syrian media coverage this week. Gazi Al Dada, writing in *Teshreen* on Tuesday, pointed to the shame that haunts Bush as his years in office have passed in vain, especially with regard to the peace process. Al Dada described the president as "the arsonist," suggesting that the peace process was damaged by his fervent support for Israel's policy and by his obsession with the war on terror that had in the past few years sparked many conflicts in the region. Isam Dari wrote in the same newspaper on Saturday that President Bush has gone too far in adopting Israel's policies and ideologies. He repeatedly referred to Israel as "a Jewish State" during the Annapolis conference and on other occasions. This, Dari believed, revealed the extent to which the US administration has been marketing Israeli demands to the Arabs and Palestinians as US recommendations. Dari concluded sadly that the Palestinian people only matter to the US president when it comes to business. *Suria Al Gad's* Friday leader, by Issa Al Ayyoubi, said that the visit cannot

present a custom-made solution to all the Arabs' issues. Ayyoubi noted that the Europeans felt extremely threatened by the visit as it jeopardized their interests in the region. Writing in *Al Baath* on Sunday, Mohamed Al Khudr considered the visit an utter failure as the US president had been unable to convince any of the Arab states to extend their hands to Israel as a contribution to the peace process. This would have involved a gratuitous normalisation that would have pulled the rug from under the Arab initiative. Moreover, the US President also failed to rally the Arab states to support his agenda against Iran, on the pretext of ending its nuclear programme. *Al Thawra's* Assad Abboud warned on Monday that the US visit aimed to drag the Arabs into a battle that is not theirs, not only to isolate Iran but also to lead the war against it. The visit also aimed to gain the Arabs' approval of cancelling the Palestinians' right to return. *Teshreen's* Sunday cartoon showed the USA and Israel plotting against the peace process.

- Criticizing President Bush's concept of democracy, *Al Baath's* Shawkat Fakrudin commented on Monday that the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay scandals were only the tip of the iceberg as the pictures that have been released were only the lighter samples of the extent to which human dignity is violated behind bars. Izzadin Darwish commented in *Teshreen* on the same day that the "democracy" that President Bush has been marketing to the Arabs has been clearly demonstrated in Iraq and Palestine, where the blood of hundreds of Palestinians and Iraqis is shed on a daily basis.
- Commenting on the new Justice and Equality bill in Iraq, *Al Thawra's* Ahmed Hamadah on Monday considered it a step that reinforces the idea that humanity cannot be entirely uprooted, despite the objection of many analysts on the bill's contents. Hamadah added that the Iraqi parliament has also passed another law that allows former officers in the armed forces to return to their jobs, which they lost after the US occupation. Hamadah believed that such bills are a better response than the laws enforced by the USA, which were aimed at sparking conflicts across Iraq.

5. IRAQ

- The efforts made towards reconciliation were a major theme in the Iraqi media this week. *Al Sabah's* Saturday leader referred to the dialogue that took place during the Dead Sea talks in the context of the national reconciliation that the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has called for. The talks were part of Al Maliki's strategy to open the doors so that the different political factions can contribute to the reconstruction of Iraq and the establishment of a healthy political environment. The newspaper considered the government's interest in listening to the opposition as indicative of the extent to which democracy has been applied so far in the Iraqi political arena. The chief editor of *Al Sabah* quoted reliable sources as saying that Al Maliki met Al Meshhedani on Thursday to discuss a coordination between the government and the parliament in order to accelerate the national reconciliation process. The sources said that the parliament is expected to pass a number of critical bills, such as the Justice and Equality Law and the Pardon Law, and to approve the 2008 budget, which is thought to be the biggest in the history of Iraq. *Al Ittihad's* Monday leader expressed its concern with the decreasing enthusiasm of the Arab League in the reconciliation process, especially following the lack of attendance in the last meeting the League arranged. Notably absent were the Baathists and Sadr party members, in the context of the Majority and Muslim Scholars' firm belief in the futility of the meeting. *Al Ittihad* gave another reason for its concern, which is the fact that there are political and other elements that are deliberately evading reconciliation, because some of the essential requirements needed are not on their agendas. On Saturday the same newspaper's

political editor quoted an Iraqi List Representative as saying that the UN delegation in Iraq is preparing for a National Reconciliation conference in Cairo next March that will include both the government and the Iraqi parties, with no exceptions.

- The international interest in resolving the situation in Iraq was covered widely in the Iraqi media this week. *Al Sabah's* Tuesday editorial quoted Iraqi politicians as they welcomed Nicolas Sarkozy's initiative to hold a national accord conference in Paris. This would aim to allow the Iraqi politicians across the political spectrum to move closer towards achieving national reconciliation. *Al Sabah's* leader called on political leaders to seize the opportunity and to make concessions in support of the Iraqi political process, especially with regards to Article 140 and the oil contracts. Writing in *Al Sabah Al Jadid* on the same day, Hasabullah Yehya criticised Iraqi politicians for seeking foreign support to resolve purely internal problems, arguing that these problems can only be resolved from within.
- The Iraqi media also criticised the parliament's performance this week. On Sunday, *Al Mawqif* pointed out that the incompetence of the parliament derived from its weakness and warned that this will badly affect democratisation and political credibility in the long run. On the same day *Dar Al Salam* described the parliament as "the Parliament of Deferred Bills," taking the Justice and Equality Bill as an example, as a certain faction has objected to the eighth article of the bill unjustifiably. Also, a number of bills differed because of conflicts between the parties, as they involved blackmail and under-the-table dealings. Writing in *Al Mashriq* on Tuesday, Humaid Abdullah criticised Iraqi politicians for their unreasonable preoccupation with changing the Iraqi flag, saying that there are more pressing issues to be resolved, such as independence and reconciliation. Shaker Al Jibouri, writing in *Addastur* on the same day, echoed this view, as he noted that that the flag controversy only symbolises the battle between the different political doctrines in Iraq.
- The security situation in Iraq also featured in the Iraqi media this week. On Saturday *Al Mada* published news of the capture of suspects involved in the assassinations and bombings that took place in Samarra. The newspaper also revealed that a number of armed cells were found in Northern Baghdad in addition to a massive load of a weapons and subversive books. *Al Mada* quoted the spokesperson of the Law Enforcement Plan as saying that the plan has so far achieved a great deal. This has contributed to the return of many immigrants and has breathed new life into the streets of Baghdad. The newspaper considered these achievements to be the main reason behind the US administration's decision to decrease gradually the number of US troops in Iraq, although it is still against complete withdrawal. President Bush has announced his approval of General David Petraeus' recommendation to decrease the troops gradually to 130,000 thousand troops by August 2008.
- *Al Mada* considered the solution reasonable as it satisfies both those who have called for withdrawal and those believe that success in Iraq is vital to ensure the security of the USA. *Addastur's* Saturday leader referred on Saturday to the capture of the terrorist Mahmoud Dehwi, who has made a full confession of being behind the bombing of the minarets of the two Imams' Mosque in Samarra. *Addastur'* considered the arrest to be a first step in pulling the mask off the faces of those behind the raging terrorist network in Iraq. The *Al Jeeran* cartoon on Monday seemed to suggest that the increased violence is mainly because the fundamental Islamist groups want a 'Talibanesque' Iraq where militants cut off people's hands for playing the guitar.
- *Addastur's* economic editor wrote on Saturday that the Iraqi Ministry of Oil has excluded the international companies that signed contracts in Kurdistan, without the consent of the Ministry, from its invitation to international companies to invest in the Iraqi oil sector across Iraq, including Kurdistan and Kirkuk. The editor was certain that the ministry will not allow these companies, which have already signed contracts with

the Kurdish government without the approval of the ministry, ever to invest in Iraq. On Sunday *Al Sabah Al Jadid* featured news that the US Foreign Deputy for Oil affairs was, during his visit to Iraq, going to suggest a solution for the Oil and Gas Bill problem. The newspaper observed that the issue has become controversial because passing the bill was akin to giving the USA the Iraqi oil on a silver platter, saying that this would obviously paralyse the oil sector.

6. IRAN

- There seems to be a general dissatisfaction with the parliamentary elections in the Iranian media. The weekly *Sobh* argued that the elections cannot be considered 'free' as, according to Muntatheri's statement, the members of the Guardian Council of the Constitution, which is dominated by conservatives, is selecting candidates with their interests as the basic criteria. The newspaper added that this is due to the fact that the members of the Council were originally selected by the Murshid rather than elected by the people. The weekly *Meli* protested, saying that there is no point in participating in these elections as they will not be objective or 'clean'. The newspaper added that the nationalists nevertheless do not believe in boycotting the elections, as this would make the mission of those who want to minimise public participation much easier. *Meli* noted that the government has rejected the nationalists' proposal that suggested international supervision of the elections, on the pretext of preventing foreign interference. On a different note, the conservative *Jam Jam* wrote on Saturday that elections are one of the most prominent pillars in the Islamic political system, emphasizing the importance of increasing public awareness of the election process. The newspaper argued that the people should be able to know their enemy in order to elect those who are loyal to the revolution. The newspaper hoped that the new parliament would always be committed to the principles of the system, which gives top priority to confronting the American enemy and making efforts to resolve economic problems. On Sunday *Jumhoori Islami* again emphasised Khamenei's call for participation in light of the sensitive nature of the next phase of the country. The newspaper finally stressed the importance of respecting the law and systems and fighting bias, in order to regain credibility and encourage the people to vote.
- Negative comment on the visit of the US president to the Middle East permeated the Iranian media. On Saturday *Al Vifaq* suggested that President Bush has utterly failed to realise any of his ambitions in the past seven years and that the efforts he is trying to make during his last year in office will not bring them any closer. The newspaper thought that the main aims of the visit were to deal with the Arab/Israeli conflict and to isolate Iran. *Kehan* on Saturday echoed this and refuted claims that the visit aimed to discuss arms deals and oil exports. The newspaper added that all that President Bush had to offer the Palestinians were empty slogans and that the USA would never exercise pressure on Israel. The newspaper concluded that the real aims of the 'Iranian Threat' propaganda were to market weapons to the Arab states, as well as to divert attention from the real Israeli threat. *Jam Jam* on Sunday did not expect President Bush to succeed in rallying Arab support for an attack on Iran. *Al Vifaq* on Wednesday went on to say that the US president has failed in this mission because the Arabs and Iran have worked together to bridge the communication gap between them and because the IAEA reports have proved the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. *Al Vifaq's* cartoon on Wednesday showed Uncle Sam trying to present the Iranian nuclear programme as a threat to the Arabs' security.
- As for the Hormuz Straits incident, the e-paper *Mahr* described it on Tuesday as a US publicity stunt aimed at convincing the Arab leaders of the threat that Iran poses to them. The e-paper concluded that Bush's visit would increase the tension in the region

and spark more conflicts, to take attention away from Israel's crimes in Palestine. The weekly *Ahdath* said the reason behind the massive coverage the incident received was the fact that it took place on the eve of President Bush's visit to the region and his announcement that the USA is willing to stand up for Israel and any other country in the region if they are attacked by Iran. The newspaper also noted that Washington was afraid that the Iranian guards would abduct American soldiers in order to stop US pressure on Iran. *Ahdath* concluded that the US military has no orders to confront the Iranian forces and that Tehran wanted to prove its ability to control Gulf waters and in the Straits so as to humiliate the American forces.

- From a different view on the visit, specifically on Bush's speech on protecting the conservatives, in *Kehan* on Sunday Hussein Shareitimedari referred to Bush's support and protection during his visit for the conservatives in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, saying that many have denied any ties with America and have refused to become a 'Fifth Column.' Shareitimedari explained that the reactions of some conservative movements were not enough, as they should make a public announcement to prove their disownment of Bush's protection. The writer concluded that if some conservatives' reactions against Bush's claims are true, then they ought to re-evaluate their policies to prove that they are not on the American path.
- The visit of the Nuclear Chief Watchdog Mohamed Al Baradei to Tehran was received positively in the Iranian media. *Al Vifaq* on Sunday considered it a step in the right direction, following Washington's attempts to change the Security Council's path. The newspaper felt that the Iranian nuclear dossier is entering a new phase, referring to Al Baradei's statement that the USA has no right to manipulate the IAEA in order to enforce its hegemonic policies. Furthermore, *Tehran Amrose* referred on Monday to the Agency's statement on resolving the Iranian dossier issues within the next four weeks and to Al Baradei's appreciation of Iran's transparency and co-operation. *Tehran Amrose* concluded that Iran's honest approach has given the Agency a golden chance to regain its credibility and position in the world and to prove the US claims about the Iranian nuclear threat wrong.

7. KUWAIT

- As elsewhere, President Bush's visit to Kuwait dominated media coverage, particularly with discussion of its aims and implications. On Friday, Jasem Boudi wrote a column in *Al Rai* addressing the President and calling for the need for peace in the region, not more war. The author also suggested that the region requires transcontinental technologies rather than missiles and highlighted the need for economic, scientific, financial and commercial deals - not more weapons contracts. He concluded somewhat cynically, that all these recommendations will not come from his parliament. From an analytical point of view, Mohammad Al Saleh, writing for *Al Qabas* on Saturday, suggested that Bush's acknowledgment of Israel's "jewdization" means that Israel is now a country for Jews only. In so doing, the US President ignored a complete article from the historic UN Security Council Resolution which specifically demands the right to return to the borders of 1948. He also feared that it implies that Israel now has the right to expel around 1.5 million Palestinians still living in Israel. Moreover, in Al Saleh's view, the acknowledgment of a country based on its religion will inevitably encourage other countries to adopt the same philosophy, and hence end up with solely Islamic countries, Christian countries, etc. He concluded that with such implications few could be as optimistic as President Bush about the likelihood of achieving a peace treaty before his departure at the end of this year. Equally, as long as this issue remains unresolved then it should be assumed that this visit is purely a public relations visit. Also questioning the sincerity of President Bush's calls for greater

democracy, Badr Al Bahar wrote an article for *Al Qabas* on Sunday headlined “Excuse me President Bush” in which he suggested that Kuwait and Iran have for centuries had a common understanding over the “little pool” they share and are aware that any military adventures will “kill us all, particularly considering that the Bushehr nuclear plant is on the opposite bank”. Bahar thanked the US for its efforts in assisting the Kuwaiti people in many fields but added that if he really wanted to convince Kuwaitis that he had come to spread democracy then “excuse me, we will have to apologise for not believing him.” Writing in *Al Rai* on Wednesday, Shafiq Al Ghabra summarised another view of US’s campaign in the region over the past 8 years. He concluded that it had not been very successful, notwithstanding the different tactics that have been tried in dealing with the issues. He also suggested that this shows that Arabs are not easily subdued. At the end of all of these US moves, Al Ghabra asks: “What is our regional strategy or at least the Gulf’s strategy for our future existence, development and safe-guarding our security?” He does not suggest an answer. The cartoon in *Al Jaridah* cartoon on Monday depicted President Bush as a Lawrence of Arabia figure, except that he is wearing the US flag as a Ghutra (male head cover) which suggests that he has continued to see things from a US perspective and that the trip was unlikely to change his view.

- Kuwaiti commentators complimented the Education Minister, Nouriya al-Subaih, last week during her public questioning in the Kuwaiti parliament. On Friday, *Al Jarida* wrote about the historical event of the first Kuwaiti female politician being exposed to parliamentary scrutiny and how she excelled herself and proved that she is an ‘Iron Woman’. On Saturday, Anwar Al Rsheid wrote in *Awan* that this interrogation brought a new dimension to democracy in Kuwait through abiding by constitutional rules and the National Assembly. Al Rsheid concluded that it did not matter which minister or MP won or lost; what was important was that democracy in Kuwait was the final beneficiary.
- The Kuwaiti media also anticipated future parliamentary interrogations and their implications. Khaled Al Alawi wrote on Friday in *Al Nahar* about the potential interrogations on the horizon, first up being the Ministry of Defence to face questions by MP Burmeih alleging that the MOD has been going beyond its remit. The second minister to face similar probing will be the Minister of Interior by MP Muleifi on questions concerning the latest ‘nationalisation’ list. Writing in *Al Nahar* on Sunday, Nahar Al Mahfooz commented that although these interrogations scored points for the democratic process but they also contributed to a crack in national unity and worsened the current political struggle. Furthermore, it created an excuse for the Executive Authority to hide its weakness by using the lack of support from the National Assembly.
- The ‘Bedouin’ dilemma again continued to present a focus of interest for the Kuwaiti media this week. On Friday, Al Jawhara Al Queidi wrote a piece in *Al Jareeda* criticising those who were objecting to giving the ‘Bedouin’ Kuwaiti citizenship when they themselves were previously ‘Bedouins’. Al Queidi urged people to unite in the name of democracy. He concluded by asking when will this superficial exercise of democratic accountability would end and Kuwaitis could start digging more deeply into the heart of issues that really mattered. From another perspective, Ossama Safar wrote in *Al Qabas* on Monday questioning whether people really desire Kuwaiti nationality or just its benefits. He asked why Kuwait did not examine the alternatives such as permanent residency, or the right to education, free public health or maybe free accommodation, rather than issuing full citizenship. He believed that giving full nationality could have dangerous implications that might reflect adversely on Kuwait’s national make-up and he feared that Kuwaiti identity seemed to be tearing itself apart bit by bit. Safar concluded that Kuwait needs to look into what is it that people are after,

and to ask if nationality was to be given without benefits would they accept it, and the opposite, if the benefits were to be given without the nationality would it be rejected?

8. SAUDI ARABIA

- In Saudi Arabia, President Bush's visit to the region dominated media coverage in terms of its purpose and outcomes. A general sense of dissatisfaction was evident amongst many commentators in connection with Israel's policy of 'judaisation' – an issue that placed Saudi Arabia in particular under the spotlight. On Friday, *Al Youm* explained how Bush's affirmation of Israel's 'judaization' policy was completely unacceptable to both Palestinians and Arabs generally, since the implications of it are extremely dangerous – particularly its implicit rejection of the right to return. The newspaper concluded by questioning the purpose of President Bush's visit, especially with reference to the project to create an independent Palestinian state. On Saturday, the same newspaper observed that Bush's suggestion that the right to return should be abandoned with compensation for the refugees defied UN and constitutional resolutions.
- From a broader perspective, on Monday *Okaz* suggested that the US President's tour, which has been described as a diplomatic initiative prior to his leaving office, would be unfruitful. It observed that ever since President Bush took office in 2001, he has focused on Afghanistan and the war on Iraq despite his promises about achieving peace in the Middle East. *Okaz* concluded that Bush's policy of avoiding direct engagement in making peace in the Middle East over the past seven years, raised doubt about his new promise to find peace between Israel and Palestine. Abdallah Al Saudi, writing in *Al Jazirah* on Tuesday, suggested that the visit was coming a little too late. However this delay could be caught up. He added that rather than engaging in protocol-driven and expensive receptions and ceremonies, in order for the visit to be a success, President Bush must immediately engage in clear and proactive initiatives to halt the Israeli settlement process and to take firm action to stop Israeli attacks, lifting the siege of the Palestinian people so that UN resolutions 242, 181, 339 and 194 could be implemented. *Al Watan's* cartoon on Thursday offered its vision of the likely outcome of President Bush's visit as far as the peace process is concerned. It depicted an Israeli thank you note for President Bush's visit, dripping with the blood of a "Gaza Massacre".
- The Iranian issue again continued to be widely commented on in the Saudi media. The English language Saudi daily, *The Saudi Gazette*, was particularly vocal in tackling the Iranian dimension of President Bush's visit. The newspaper's editorial on Monday commented on Bush's speech in Abu Dhabi saying that it reflected the confused thought process of the US's foreign policies. The paper also criticised the US President for accusing Iran of sponsoring terrorism against its neighbours in 'threat speeches' when the Bush's administration is using the same style of speech followed by invasions of countries that are half a world away. The newspaper added that despite the continued accusations and threats, Washington still refuses to hold direct talks with a country it has interfered in for almost half a century. It concluded that if this is what the US considers as 'diplomacy' then they ought to use a dictionary, albeit that it seems that the Gulf state are being influenced by Bush's recurrent warnings. On Monday an editorial in *Al Bilad* observed that the Gulf states are continuing to monitor closely talk of a possible war in the region, mainly orchestrated by Iran, which seems likely to be the start of a new military financial burden. The newspaper emphasised that the present situation can be contained without a war, particularly given that any military adventure would almost certainly turn the region "into a fireball".

- Looking at Saudi Arabia's role in the light of the Bush visit, on Saturday *Al Watan* commented that the transparency of Saudi government and its understanding of all regional issues over and above its political and religious influence, makes it the main focal point for future political development in the region. The newspaper concluded that President Bush would be the first to acknowledge the importance of the Kingdom's vision, and that the King's initiatives towards building a conclusive peace in the region are a sound base from which to develop. On Monday, *Al Watan* also suggested that Bush needed to hear the opinion of those with the most influence in the region (meaning Saudi) so that he can retune his policies before it is too late. The editor added that Bush's visit to the Kingdom would give him a chance to find out what he really can or cannot do to resolve the region's many crises, and specifically the Palestinian one. Saudi commentators also assessed French President Sarkozy's visit to Saudi Arabia on Sunday as a further sign of the Kingdom's importance within the region. And on Monday, *Al Jazira* suggested that these two visits highlighted the role the Kingdom plays in shaping international policies. It added that Saudi Arabia's efforts will result in strengthening the Saudi-America-French relationship and open up solutions to issues that threaten the region and its stability.
- With the 12th postponement of the Lebanese presidential elections this week, on Sunday *Al Watan* used its editorial leader to hope that the 13th time would be the lucky one. The newspaper called on both the Lebanese people and the Arabs, more generally, to resolve the struggle before the next scheduled meeting on the 27th January and to convince all Lebanese parties of the importance of avoiding any further delays in ending this presidential vacuum. This was in the hope that it would avoid the issue being passed from the hands of the Arab league into a bigger framework (meaning the Security Council) which would inevitably subject Lebanon to further instability.

9. QATAR

- In Qatar, the media also focused largely on President Bush's visit - particularly in the light of its goals and outcomes. On Friday, *Al Raya* suggested that Bush's promise to protect Israel's security as a Jewish country would have dangerous implications for the peace process. It believed that negotiations would be hindered while Israel capitalises on the visit to represent a double stand against Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. The newspaper concluded that this visit was in effect just a farewell tour. Suleiman Saleh added in *Al Sharq* on Friday that Bush's announcement of Israel's 'judization' means the scrapping of the rights to return, in addition to justifying any action that Israel may take against the 1948 Arabs (the Palestinian refugees). Saleh added that the main goal of the Bush visit was to establish an American-Israeli-Arab alliance against Iran, but for this to materialise there had to be an agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis. On Saturday, *Al Watan* commented that the visit would not jump start the peace process but would in fact hinder it. The editor also observed that finalising a peace agreement this year was not logical both because of continuing US policies in the region generally and because of the gap between the Palestinians and Israelis specifically. From another perspective, on Sunday *Al Raya* observed that the main goal behind the visit was to complicate further the issues in the region and to market the US administration's ideas relating to Iran, Syria and support for Israel.
- The Qatari media also focused on the Lebanese crisis. On Friday, the political editor of *Al Sharq* wrote of the high hopes that all the Lebanese political players had for the forthcoming visit of Qatar's Prime Minister, Hamad bin Jassem, to Beirut. He added that the importance of this visit lay in overcoming the obstructions to the Sec Gen of the Arab League, Amr Musa's, mission as a result of the two sides in the struggle

having conflicting understandings of the League's recommendations. *Al Raya* added that saving Lebanon from this crisis will not be accomplished unless an 'agreement' can be reached on the presidency. In its view, what is currently required from the Lebanese is help in carrying out the plan to agree on a political programme to lead the election process and to resolve all of Lebanon's issue.

- In light of President Sarkozy's visit to Qatar, on Monday *Al Watan* noted that the summit that brought Sarkozy and Sheikh Hamad under one roof to set a framework for positive developments between the two countries in all disciplines, especially the economic one. The newspaper added that the French President's visit came at a very critical time for the region which required the close involvement of world leaders. However, the Iranian dimension also continued to dominate the assessment of the Sarkozy visit. This point was made very obviously in *Al Raya*'s cartoon on Tuesday, which observed the synergy between Bush's and Sarkozy's visits and depicted these as an attempt to constrain Iran.
- The visit by Mohamed El Baradei, the head of the IAEA, to Tehran this week also attracted some comment. Qatar's *Al Watan* wrote in its editorial on Sunday that El Baradei's confirmation of Iran's nuclear status also provided an assurance that the IAEA is doing a good job and not giving in to pressure from the larger powers who have been attempting to influence the IAEA's work in order to benefit their own political agendas. The newspaper suggested that the Agency should also put forward suggestions to eliminate Israel's existing weapons of mass destruction in the region.

10. BAHRAIN

- Following the trend in the rest of the region this week, the Bahraini media burgeoned with commentary on President Bush's visit to the Gulf region this week. Writers criticised his 'new policies' that were announced at the beginning of the tour in Israel. On Friday, Qasem Hussein suggested in *Al Wasat* that Bush seemed to see the Arabs as a joke. Writing in *Al Waqt* on Saturday, Ghassan Al Shehabi commented that the current negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders will not result in anything substantial so long as America continues to support the Zionist occupation. He believed that there is no hope of a solution and no hope of peace for the Palestinians who continue to live under the control of another state. In his view, the preparations for Bush's visit must demonstrate that this Arab oppression results from the US's unstinting and unquestioning support for Israel, and from Washington's unethical mediatory role between the opposing teams. In a similar vein, Sadik Al Hussein wrote an article in *Al Wasat* entitled "The Last Supper", in which he hypothesised that Bush's focus and aggressive tone towards the "Iranian threat" are means to ease international pressures from his own shortcomings in connection with the promises made at Annapolis. Writing in *Al Wasat* on Tuesday, Waleed Nuweihed added that President Bush's speeches that indict Iran, no longer hold any credibility for many Arab writers, journalists and businessmen as they have come too late in the day and at the end of the 'neo-conservative' period. Nweihed went on to suggest that Bush's useless 'Nazi' speeches about Iran, despite all the reports proving Iran's innocence, have another agenda away from Gulf Security which lies within the Palestinian file, and specifically within the context of 'Israel's security'. Nweihed concluded that the 'Iranian 'scarecrow' is a political façade to draw the Gulf away from the core issue of the region. *Akhbar Al Khaleej*'s cartoon on Wednesday suggested a similar refrain as it depicted the US and French presidents' tours as a race to squeeze the region's money having first raised fears over Iran.
- Commenting on the riots that have taken place on Bahrain's streets over the past few months, Mansour Al Jamari, writing for *Al Wasat* on Sunday, described how the riots

have taken a different form over the past week and how President Bush received two kinds of welcome, one celebratory and official, and another public and not so welcoming, with protestors from many political parties gathered around the American Embassy and repeating slogans that condemned US policies and questioned their ability to yield any positive results. Tamam Abu Safi wrote in *Al Waqt* on Sunday quoting some of the opinions of the different political parties who had protested in objection to the US visit. He added that although Bahrain is not aligned with Iran on many issues, it must continue to refuse to allow Bahrain to be used as a military base for any action against Iran.

- As for the Lebanese presidential vacuum, Waleed Nuweihed wrote on Saturday in *Al Wasat* that it should not be a surprise that Lebanon is going through this struggle. If a closer look is taken at Lebanon's history since the 19th century, it is clear that many local changes have taken place as a result of regional political changes. The country has been subjected to division and unification several times, so the possibility of today's conflict escalating and exploding out of proportion is very possible, even if external powers try to postpone the problem and delay the crisis.
- Finally, the issue of the rising cost of living saw a turning point this week as political leaders from the consultative council and parliamentary members tried to find a solution. Hafez Emam, writing in *Akhbar Al Khaleej* on Friday, suggested that despite the initiatives from the higher political leadership which had assigned 40 million Dinars to relieve the pressures from the present costs of living, it was the parliamentary members' initiatives that had received quick government response and better public support. On Sunday, Rashed Al Ghayeb wrote in *Al Ayam* complimenting the consultative council's decision to allocate their next meeting to discussing this crucial matter especially given the fact that some basic commodity prices have increased by 50-80%. The writer added that it is important to welcome this 'consultative' initiative.

11. UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

- The UAE media was also preoccupied by the visit of the US president to the UAE this week. On Monday, *Al Bayan* highlighted the excellence of UAE-US relations which continue to be based on mutual respect and coordination across the board, while in the same newspaper on Wednesday, Abdullah Ishaq criticised the nature of the visit which, in his view, was focused on marketing a radical solution for the Palestinian state, involving giving up the right to return and sparking conflict with Iran, which is not what one would expect from a country that, in the past few years, has tried to push an agenda of increasing democracy around the globe. Writing in *Al Khaleej* on Tuesday, Abdul Khaliq Abdullah commented that although the UAE government had received the US president warmly, the majority of the people could not care less about the visit as, like all the nations in the region, they are repelled by his policies. Abdullah thought that Bush was taking advantage of the UAE to send a message to Iran and maintained that the UAE must remain committed to its "positive objectivity policy", which would not allow it to lean towards either Washington or Tehran. In Abdullah's view, the USA remains "a mere service provider" rather than a trustworthy ally and, if looked at from an economic perspective, the USA is more in need of the UAE than vice versa. The UAE is now the economic heart of the Gulf and the USA's political, economic, and military weight cannot not change this fact he opined. Abdullah concluded that if President Bush had come to influence the GCC states and pull them away from their objective policies or to pressure them for more economic advantages, then he was not welcome in the UAE.
- However, by declaring Monday a national holiday in Dubai, mainly due to the rigorous security measures taken by Dubai's authorities, this turned out to have a positive

impact as text messages between residents reciprocated wishes of a “Happy Bush day”, hoping that President Bush would visit more often. This was picked up by Sami Al Riyami, Editor-in-Chief of *Al Emarat Al Youm* in his column on Tuesday, when he commented somewhat sarcastically by thanking Bush for the heavy rain that followed his visit after a very dry season. However, the general view of the visit was depicted in *Al Bayan*'s cartoon on Sunday which portrayed President Bush's peace effort as 'an empty dove of peace'.

- The new US vision of the Palestinian cause, which the US president discussed following his visit to the West Bank, also attracted considerable comment in the UAE this week. Hussam Kanafani wrote in *Al Khaleej* on Sunday that the vision, which spoke of "compensation" rather than the right to return, has also included 1948 Palestinians. He observed that this means that this vision could result in their transfer as part of the change, which is even more than Israel is hoping for. Writing in *Al Bayan* on Sunday, Mohamed Fadel reminded readers that the compensation idea was originally discussed during the Camp David talks in 2000, and had partly contributed to their failure. Writing in the same newspaper on Monday, Nawaf Al Zero suggested that President Bush's promises to Israel complemented Balfour's project of supplanting Palestine with a Jewish Israeli state back in 1917. Aisha Al Merri, writing in *Al Ittihad* on Monday, suggested that the obstacles facing the Middle East peace process have created a serious crisis. She believed that peacemaking requires serious and effective leadership and decision making, particularly in this sensitive period of history, and she suggested that the mainstays of peacemaking to be objectivity and rationality. Merri then gave looked at the example of the two state solution and suggested that it is almost politically impossible to achieve as it requires a too many concessions on both sides.
- The UAE media also featured comment on the situation in Lebanon this week. On Sunday, *Al Khaleej* commented that the Arab League seems to have forgotten to take account of the aftermath of the 2006 Israeli war, especially with regard to the sectarian and political divisions. The newspaper believed that the Arab foreign ministers should have dealt with the issue from a wider perspective in order to prevent the USA from going through with its project in Lebanon. Masud Daher wrote in the same newspaper that the Arab League has played a significant role in bringing about a logical solution; however, the implementation part remains in the hands of Lebanon's leaders. On Saturday, *Al Bayan* warned that failure in Lebanon would have negative effects on the other problems in the region. The newspaper also warned of internationalisation as this would put Lebanon's sovereignty on the line.
- Finally, returning to last week's incident in the Hormuz Strait, *Al Bayan*'s Mohamed Akif wrote on Friday that the US President was trying to increase the pressure on the GCC states in order to ensure the success of the containment policy he is trying to enforce on Iran and to strike some arms deals in the region. Khairudin Al Ayib, writing in the same newspaper on Sunday, pointed out that the USA and Israel knew full well that Iran was not going to use its nuclear weapons to attack Israel or the USA, but to gain international respect. The writer believed that Iran would never give up on its ambitions in the same way that the USA would not stop its pressure. The writer did not expect the USA to resort to using force until the Iranian project starts to seem more alarming, especially as President Bush's last year in office already appears to be fully committed.

12. OMAN

- Oman's media focused on the objectives of Bush's visit to the region. *Al Watan* wrote in its leader on Friday that Bush's re-adjustment of the peace agreements means that

the Palestinians must forget about the international resolutions that dictate that Israel should retreat behind its 1967 borders. The newspaper concluded that the unjust American position will prolong the crisis and further complicate the situation. On Sunday *Oman* questioned whether Israel will give anything in return for Bush's continued support in the region specifically the acknowledgement of Israel's 'judaisation.' Most probably Israel will not and Olmert's announcements seem to confirm that. *Al Watan* said on Sunday that all the announcements made by Bush during his visit were an attempt to please Israel rather than to communicate the American opinion. It added that Bush's alignment with Israel as a Jewish country is completely unacceptable and *Al Watan* questioned what would happen to the non-Jews living there. *Al Watan's* cartoon on Wednesday depicted Bush's visit to the Middle East as a 'breaking and entering' situation, suggesting that the visit was unwelcome.

- On the Arab initiative on the Lebanese dilemma, *Oman* wrote on Friday that the importance of the Foreign Ministers' meeting is that reaching clear and practical solutions for the Lebanese struggle is vital. The newspaper emphasised the importance of this Arab initiative in helping Lebanon. *Oman* concluded, however, that the initiative must coincide with a true intention by the Lebanese themselves to resolve the issue.
- The Omani media positively welcomed the Gulf Common Market. Nasser Al Yahmadi wrote in *Al Shabeeba* on Saturday that the Common Market aims to open a wider spectrum for investment as well as to provide economies of scale, to improve qualifications and negotiation standards. Al Yahmadi expressed his fears, however, of neglecting the equation involving inflation, growth and local produce, which will make the buying power of some countries stronger than others. The lack of a single minded approach towards pegging the US dollar with a series of currencies contributes to the increased cost of living and creates a significant dent for these economies. In *Oman* on Saturday Ahmad Al Obeidali wrote that the launch of the Common Market will have a great effect on Omani nationals, as well as on millions of others in the Gulf. He questioned whether this market will lead to similar laws around the Gulf; for example would he have the right to buy a house wherever he wants and will the Sultanate allow other Gulf members to own property in Oman?
- El Baradei's visit to Tehran received media attention this week. On Monday *Oman* considered that Iran's continuing collaboration with the International Agency and the fact that it is abiding by its commitments to halt nuclear expansion will create opportunities for the establishment of stronger bonds between the two sides. This may help to control any further punishments on Iran, provoked by Washington. *Oman* added that this relationship may obstruct the attempts by some to gang up with the USA against Iran and create fears that may emerge in the region in the coming period.

13. YEMEN

- The Yemeni media was dominated by the anniversary of the civil war in Southern Yemen on 13 January 1986. On Saturday *Al Thawrah* invited those walking in the wrong direction and trying to light fires to make use of the lessons learned in the 13 January war and refrain from actions against the nation and its welfare. Abu Baker Al Saqaf added in *Al Ayam* on Saturday that 13 January is a day for national reconciliation and forgiveness and a chance to purify the country of all its past crimes and mistakes. Al Saqaf added that continuing this mirage of a deadly unification will only lead to political suicide. In *Al Ayam* on Monday, Mohammad Al Abadi wondered why the southern patriots do not apologise to the people. Why do they not apologise to those who had high hopes in them and were let down, so that their dreams became

nightmares? Al Abadi apologised and asked for the southern people to forgive him. He asked both the authority and opposition to re-evaluate their destructive plans for the system. Furthermore, *Sanaa Press's* website referred to the horrible events that led to two deaths and 13 injuries during the Festival of Forgiveness and Reconciliation that was held in Aden on the anniversary of 13 January. The newspaper said that such events confirm that the southern case is of a country being subjected to military dominance and barbarism unconstitutionally. *Al Thawrah* added on Monday that what happened obviously aimed to re-produce territorial struggles and embed anger and the fact that the invitation was sectarian-based proved this agenda.

- As for Ali Abdalla Saleh's politics, the weekly *Al Wasat* said that the president's ability to contradict himself creates confusion, which makes it hard to predict what exactly the president wants. The opposition's inability to deal with such confusion makes it use an aggressive and threatening tone. *Al Wasat* added that the president's initiative to amend the constitution is unexpected and made him seem ahead of the 'Mushtarek' parties. It added that the 'Mushtarek' needs a complete make-over to reach an agreement on its conflicts and to find a political vision on alternatives. These can be discussed with the authorities, which seem to belittle the issues that are escalating day by day. From another perspective on the president's politics, Mohammad Al Qahiri wrote on the *Al Ishtiraq.net* website that the president can no longer contribute to improving the devastating situation in Yemen and he can no longer rule responsibly. He resolved the issue of unemployment by calling up 50,000 youths into the military and he dealt with his opponents by using the army against them. He belittled the war in Sa'ada, obstructed the southerners from any interaction and he geared up the northerners against them. Al Qahiri concluded that the situation has reached a dead end; the president must resign and early elections should take place.
- On the conflicts between the army and the Houthi rebels, in *Al Ayam* on Saturday Rayed Al Jahafi referred to the continuing attacks by the army on the Houthis' areas in Haidan province in Sa'ada. Al Jahafi confirmed the participation of military aircraft in the battle and the many fatalities and injuries on both sides. He added that both sides are getting ready in various areas of Sa'ada, in anticipation of an expansion of the battlefield.
- The Arab League's initiative on the Lebanese issue received some commentary this week. *Al Thawra* wrote on Wednesday that, unlike previous years, the Arab League has seen a shift in its activities and initiatives towards resolving open issues in the region, especially the Lebanese presidential struggle. The newspaper added that the Arabs have high hopes that this initiative will resolve the struggle, as a failure to do so will have dangerous implications on stability and the security of Arab patriotism. *Al Thawra's* cartoon on Saturday depicted the continuous postponements in the presidential elections as the only thing on the Lebanese people's mind.