

The U.S. Military Exits Iraq, Leaving Behind a Nation in Peril

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Jared Malsin and Sangar Khaleel

BAGHDAD—After spending more than 23 years and \$1.7 trillion, America is winding down what critics have called its forever war in Iraq , closing the last major U.S. military base on Wednesday. “We don’t think we need the military there anymore,” President Trump said during a White House visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi in July. “We have a fantastic champion, a new champion,” the president said. “He’s young, and he’s handsome.”

Zaidi, a 41-year-old businessman, sat beside Trump during the visit and announced a deadline, also set for Wednesday, for Iranian-backed militias to hand over their weapons. “There is no justification for their existence after the 30th of September,” he said.

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The Small English Town Rattled by Alleged Terror Plot Near U.S. Bomber Base

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By David Luhnnow

FAIRFORD, England—For the past 80 years, locals in this bucolic English town have grown used to the sounds of American and British warplanes taking off from a nearby military base. But the past few days have brought something entirely new and unsettling: an alleged terrorist plot to strike at American forces on the base.

Police arrested five masked men only a few hundred yards from the base early Sunday morning on suspected explosives and terrorism charges.

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GEORGE GILSON/TO BHMA INTL EDITION

TO BHMA International edition

Lord Byron: the Poet Who Conquered the Heart of a Nation

By George Gilson

No foreign figure in the history of Modern Greece has been celebrated, admired, and offered such immense gratitude as Lord Byron, and justly so.

Byron, in the mere five months of his last journey to Greece, by offering his name, fortune and celebrity turned the attention of all of Europe to the courageous liberation struggle of an impoverished and downtrodden Christian nation against the powerful Ottoman Empire.

A fine full-figure statue of the poet at the knees of a bare-

breasted female personification of Greece, crowning him stands near the magnificent neoclassical Zappeion in central Athens; a bust is situated at the historic main building of the University of Athens, and there are others in Mesolonghi, where he died, not in battle but of a fever, on April 19, 1824.

After his death, some Greeks began to name their sons Byron (even though the Orthodox Church requires that children be baptised with Christian names). This fashion gained impetus at the time of the 100th anniversary of his death in 1824.

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A statue depicting a grateful Greece crowning Byron, carved by sculptors Henri Michel Chapu and Alexandre Falguiere, located outside the Zappeion Gardens, in downtown Athens, Greece.

TO BHMA International edition

Athens’ Hill of Secrets

By Cheryl Novak

Before there was a park, there was a horse track. Before the horse track, there was a cemetery. Today, there is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC), one of the most admired additions to modern Athens. Designed by Renzo Piano and completed during Greece’s financial crisis, it gave a tired city and its people a modern public library, a park and a home for the Greek National Opera.

Beneath this modern

landmark, archaeologists discovered a very different Athens. More than 2,000 burials have been recorded at Phaleron over successive excavations. The discovery that made the site famous came in the spring of 2016, when archaeologists working in the Esplanada sector uncovered 79 adult men laid out in several groups. Many still wore iron restraints around their wrists. The positions of others suggested they had been bound with materials that later decayed.

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An image of the artificial hill of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, which lies in the center of the Phaleron excavations.

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One with the future



A member of Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, a paramilitary group the U.S. has designated as a terrorist organization, standing guard in front of a mural of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's late supreme leader, in Baghdad, Iraq.

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Instead, America's open-ended war with Iran is pushing Iraq deeper into conflict, with the U.S. exit leaving behind a country where well-armed militias are only tightening their grip. Militants and Iranian forces launched more than 600 attacks on U.S. diplomatic and military facilities in Iraq in the first two months of the war, The Wall Street Journal reported.

In a sign of Iraq's instability, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad now sends frequent security warnings to individual Americans and others. About two a week regard kidnapping by militants. A team from the Journal abruptly left Baghdad this month after Iraqi, U.S. and European officials warned of a security threat that American officials later said was a kidnapping risk by a Shiite militia.

Iran-backed militias have long exercised influence in Iraq. But Tehran has renewed its support since the U.S. initiated its bombing campaign in Iran in February, according to current and former U.S. officials and defense experts.

The flow of small arms, drones and small-diameter, short-range rockets from Iran initially slowed while Tehran focused on fighting the U.S., but ramped up this summer, a U.S. official said. Recent attacks involved longer-range missiles and drones, the official said, hinting at a menacing weapons upgrade.

This month, a drone at-

An Iraqi demand that tens of thousands of militants turn in their weapons falls short in a conflict fed by America's war with Iran

tack that Saudi Arabia said was launched from Iraq near the border with Iran temporarily closed its East-West oil pipeline—an increasingly vital artery in the months since Iran disrupted shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. Other attacks damaged an U.S. diplomatic and logistics hub at the Baghdad airport.

Zaidi, who never held public office before becoming prime minister in May, has been embraced by the Trump administration as someone they can do business with. He owns a bank, an insurance company and media and construction firms. His bank was banned by the Treasury Department from dollar transactions in 2024 over suspicions it helped finance Iran and its proxies. Zaidi denied knowing about such transactions. Former U.S. officials said they didn't believe he had any personal involvement.

The Trump administration is counting on Zaidi to disarm the militants, which number in the tens of thousands and include paramilitary groups that receive funding or weapons from Iran.

Maj Gen. Saad Maan, a spokesman for the Iraqi military, said some militant factions had handed in their weapons, and others are planning to do so. Others scoffed at the idea. "These weapons are



Framed portraits of Shiite religious and political figures for sale at the Baghdad International Book Fair.

for our sovereignty, our freedom," said Kazem al-Fartousi, a spokesman for Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada, a paramilitary group the U.S. designated as a terrorist organization, funded and armed by Iran.

A forced disarmament by the government "will not happen," he said in an interview in Baghdad. His group and other militias hold top positions in ministries, as well as dozens of seats in Iraq's parliament where they played a role in Zaidi's selection in the negotiations that followed last year's election.

"The government is an outcome we helped produce," he said. Zaidi and his deputies are now talking about pushing Wednesday's disarmament deadline to next year.

"The Counter-Terrorism Service, through its security and operational roles, is advancing its strategy to control weapons and consolidate them under state authority," said Sabah Al-Nu'man, a spokesperson for the commander in chief of Iraq's armed forces. The military exit follows an agreement between the Biden adminis-

tration and the previous Iraqi prime minister to remove American troops by 2026.

The U.S. has made clear to Iraq that it was critical they retain their sovereignty and prevent attacks from within its borders by Iranian-backed militias, a senior U.S. official said. A Pentagon official said the U.S. was ending its official military operation, but it maintained intelligence, surveillance and other capabilities in the region that could be used in Iraq.

Ayatollah postcards

In Baghdad, young professionals sipped iced coffee and typed on laptops in the exclusive Karrada neighborhood on a recent, seemingly peaceful day. Yet many said they plan to leave, worried that insecurity and economic pressures will build without a strong U.S. presence. "If the troops were to leave, why were they here in the first place? They were here to accomplish a goal. Did they? No," said Mustafa Al-Zaidi, a 22-year-old medical student who plans to eventually work abroad. "Will we be like Afghanistan or like Yemen and Syria?"

In late March, militiamen believed to be affiliated with Kataib Hezbollah, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, kidnapped American freelance journalist Shelly Kittleson,

bundling her into a car on a busy street in Baghdad. She was released about a week later, after the group negotiated with the Iraqi government for the release of imprisoned militants, current and former U.S. officials said.

"We are in a state of war launched by the American-Zionist enemy against Islam," said Abu Mujahid al-Assaf, a Kataib Hezbollah official, in a social-media post announcing Kittleson's release. The group, known for roadside bombings and sniper attacks against U.S. troops, is among the Iran-backed militias rejecting Zaidi's call for disarmament.

Some residents expressed resentment about Iran's interference at a time when Iraq, the world's fifth-largest oil producer, is showing signs of an economic recovery. In Baghdad, new boutiques and cafes have opened. The government is building the capital's tallest structure, the central bank headquarters, on the banks of the Tigris.

"If something is not in Iraq's interest, we don't want them," said Rahman Hussein Ahmed, a 51-year-old former fighter in a rebel group that opposed both Iran and the U.S. Militia leaders, he said, "are tools of Iranian interests."

Iran's influence is visible in a souvenir stall in Baghdad's old city. Postcards feature the picture of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader who was killed in the U.S.-Israeli attack this year. Another shows Qassem

Soleimani, the former commander of Iran’s Quds Force who was killed in a U.S. air-strike in 2020.

At Baghdad’s airport, a portrait of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a militia commander killed in the same 2020 strike, awaits visitors outside the arrivals hall. Posters put up around the city center say, “We will make the decision,” a jab at the prime minister’s militia disarmament initiative.

Before the militias emerged, Iran and Iraq had fought a nearly eight-year war that was estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands and ended in a stalemate in 1988. Fifteen years later, the U.S. invaded Iraq to take down Saddam Hussein, buttressed by Bush administration claims—later proven false—that the Iraqi leader was hiding weapons of mass destruction. Close to 4,500 U.S. troops and as many as 300,000 Iraqis were killed.

In working-class Sadr City, veterans reminisced over tea about shooting down U.S. helicopters in the early days of the 2003 U.S. military occupation. The chaos that followed the U.S. invasion created an opening for Iran to extend its influence in Iraq, whose population is predominantly Shia, the same branch of Islam followed by most Iranians.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, helped organize armed groups that attacked American troops with the aim of driving the U.S. out of Iraq. The IRGC sent rockets, armor-piercing explosives and other armaments to the Iraq-based militias, and dispatched its officers to train them, declassified U.S. intelligence documents show.

After winding down the initial war, the U.S. withdrew its troops in 2011. Three years later, American troops returned to battle Islamic State, or ISIS, a group of Sunni extremists who spilled into Iraq from Syria. Thousands of U.S. airstrikes helped Iraqi and Syrian forces defeat the militants, and American troops remained in Iraq. By then, the Iran-backed militias were entrenched. After helping fight ISIS, some militias were absorbed into Iraq’s political system, forming political parties that had a say in the prime minister’s selection. Militia members took influential jobs in the education ministry and the tax and customs authority.

Al-Fartousi, spokesman for the Kata’ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada militia, said his organization and other armed groups often act independently of Iran and have grown this year. “The resistance factions have become stronger because they are tackling the most important event in the world, which is the U.S. war with Iran,” he said. “The U.S. drove us into this war.”

The Pentagon’s Inspector General said in a report this year that U.S. support to Iraq

in key counterterrorism operations had “slowed to a near halt” because of the Iran war.

‘Go legit’

Zaidi’s selection as prime minister was a compromise. Trump warned he would cut off U.S. aid to Iraq when Nouri al-Maliki, a former prime minister close to Iran, was proposed for the job in January.

Zaidi, who dresses in dark blue suits and has a bushy black mustache and cropped beard, was quickly embraced by Washington. Political analysts said he tried to balance competing interests, underscored by his visit to Tehran soon after traveling to Washington this summer.

His disarmament initiative has persuaded some militant groups to cooperate in the hope of having sanctions lifted. Asaib Ahl al-Haq, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, was among those that said they would work with the government. “They seem to want to go legit,” said David Schenker, a former assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs. “They want to go on vacation in France with their families.”

Even if Zaidi decided to confront the armed militants, he would face long odds. Iraq’s underfunded army crumbled when fighting ISIS in 2014. The country’s Counter-Terrorism Service, a U.S.-trained force known for battling ISIS, commanded an estimated 14,000 soldiers as of 2024, fewer than the militias.

To think that Zaidi could disarm the militias in a matter of months “was an impossible request,” said Victoria Taylor, a former senior State Department official who left government this year after working on Iraq issues.

A U.S. defense official said the military was airlifting equipment and personnel out of Erbil, the last U.S. military base, in time to meet Wednesday’s deadline. Some U.S. Marines will remain to protect American diplomatic missions, along with contractors to maintain Iraq’s fleet of F-16 jet fighters and American-made tanks, according to current and former U.S. officials. The military has already removed a Patriot air defense battery stationed around Erbil, current and former U.S. officials said. The U.S. is likely to concentrate its remaining air defenses to protect the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the consulate in Erbil, current and former U.S. officials said, despite continuing Iranian and militia strikes.

“These militia groups exist because Iran wants them to exist, and Iran finds continued utility in using them as a tool and a lever against the Iraqi government and the U.S. in the region,” said Taylor, the former senior State Department official.

“That will continue to be the case after the departure of U.S. troops,” she said.

The Small English Town Rattled by Alleged Terror Plot Near U.S. Bomber Base

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Locals in Fairford question whether it really was a terror plot or something more mundane

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The residents of a small hamlet nearby, Whelford, were hastily evacuated by police and put up in nearby hotels.

On Monday, British police released the five suspects—all U.K. nationals living in London—on bail, saying they were still under investigation. Authorities said residents would be allowed to their homes soon.

Locals here were unsure what to make of the latest twist. On the one hand, it seemed terrifying that this picturesque corner of the Cotswolds could have been the staging ground for a terrorist attack. President Trump said the men were aiming to do big damage. British security services said they were probing whether there was a link to Iran.

“There’s a degree of anxiety, especially those who were hurried out of their homes at dawn,” said Mike Evemy, leader of the local district council.

But others wondered if the attempt was all it was cracked up to be by U.K. and U.S. officials.

“Something doesn’t add up,” said Adrian Watkins, a local construction worker sipping a pint at a local hotel. “How serious can the in-

cident have been if they let them go already?” he said.

Watkins wondered if the men were actually stealing diesel, which he says is happening with growing frequency amid sky-high prices.

Residents noticed increased security in recent weeks—more police patrolling the surrounding area and entrances to the base blocked by heavy equipment. The American servicemen also hadn’t visited the town in the past week. Iran had warned the U.K. that it could strike back for allowing the base to be used for attacks.

A local farmer who tipped police off to the masked men has said she doesn’t understand why the men were allowed to get so close to the base, especially if the U.S. and U.K. had some evidence of a threat against the base.

Police cordoned off most of the area around the base following the arrests on Sunday. On Monday, there were no jets taking off and no American servicemen to

be seen in town, which was swarming instead with visiting police and journalists.

Jill Valentine, who has lived in the town for 50 years and was out walking her dog, said the incident seemed strange, “fairly amateur.”

Valentine, like many in town, said the town liked having the Americans nearby and had never felt particularly threatened before by geopolitics. But she added that many locals were less happy with the base’s most recent use as a launchpad for attacks in an unpopular conflict with Iran. The conflict has sent already high U.K. fuel and fertilizer prices even higher, hurting farmers.

Fairford has a symbiotic relationship with the base, which helps the local economy. This town is known for two things: the original medieval stained glass windows in its ancient church and a world-beating air show hosted every year with the latest in military technology.

Around town, lined

with winding streets and tan-colored stone cottages, locals speak highly of the American servicemen and women, even if their commander in chief gets negative reviews from some.

“We love having them here,” said Bridget Kearney, who manages a pub frequented by the Americans. Her bar is festooned with U.S. military patches and dollar bills. “They are so polite; I get tired of being called ‘ma’am.’”

“No one has a bad word to say about them,” said Gordon Jones, another longtime local.

The base is less popular with others, and was the site of protests in March and April from hundreds of antiwar activists.

The U.K. government initially turned down U.S. requests to use the site as a staging ground for attacks on Iran, angering the Trump administration, but later agreed for it to be used for strikes to protect U.K. allies in the Gulf from Iranian reprisals by hitting Iranian military sites.

Corrections & Amplifications: Jill Valentine, a resident of Fairford, was incorrectly identified as Jill Lavender in an earlier version of this article. (Corrected on Sept. 28)

Residents noticed increased security in recent weeks—more police patrolling the surrounding area and entrances to the base blocked by heavy equipment.



TODD SHEPHERD/REUTERS

Police officers guard an area as roadblocks remain in place near RAF Fairford airbase, after police declared a major incident at the base and arrested several men on suspicion of offences under the Explosives Act, who have since been released on bail, in Fairford, Gloucestershire, Britain, September 29, 2026.

Lord Byron in Greece: the Poet Who Conquered the Heart of a Nation

In a gripping eyewitness account of Byron's last journey to Greece, Count Pietro Gamba gives insight into the character of the prototypical Byronic hero

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At that time, the government decided to name an entire neighborhood populated by Asia Minor refugees “Vyro-nas” in his honor.

Byron, one of a handful of the most important English romantic poets of the 19th century, would have been more than delighted. Though he already enjoyed great fame, he managed, by becoming the European “poster boy” for the Greeks’ struggle for independence, to transform his life into legend.

The creator of the poetical Byronic Hero chose an adventurous and risky path by which he made himself a Byronic Hero in the flesh. His decision to make his life mirror his art was a conscious choice, and that becomes clear in the historical evidence, not least in the only detailed, eyewitness account of his mission in Greece.

Eyewitness account, a poet's fatigue

Count Pietro Gamba, who acted as Lord Byron's companion and secretary throughout the tumultuous journey, in a diary published in 1825, the year after Byron's death, and entitled *Lord Byron's Last Journey to Greece*, writes that Byron's thoughts turned to Greece at the end of February, 1823. “I have become tired of writing, and the public must have too,” Byron said.

Gamba was himself imbued with a revolutionary spirit. He was a member of Italy's Carbonari, which aimed to overthrow absolute monarchies and establish constitutional governments. But that was not the basis of his acquaintance with Byron.

He was the brother of Teresa, Contessa Guiccioli, Byron's married mistress, with whom he had his most passionate, long-term affair (1819-1823), that began during his stay in Ravenna while writing *Don Juan*, his last major poem.

Foreign powers

Though Gamba's narrative clearly reflects his enormous admiration, it by and large offers a straightforward, fairly objective account of events with many direct quotes, on which he bases interpretations of the poet's sentiments, interspersed with observations about Byron's disposition and reactions to people and circumstances.



The Reception of Lord Byron at Messolonghi, painted by Theodoros Vryzakis.

Maintaining balances

Byron — while trying with his stance to maintain some balance in the ongoing civil war between the Greek politicians and the military chieftains who actually fought the Turks — formed a very close, natural association with Prince Alexandros Mavrokordatos, Greece's most prominent political figure, he supported a Western-style centralized, liberal government with complete control of the military by politicians.

Mavrokordatos was the par excellence exponent of British interests in Greece, as he was convinced, and rightly so, that the empire's support was crucial for the success of the revolution.

In 1825, a year after Byron's death, he headed (along with Georgios Kountouriotis) the so-called British Party, established through a petition asking for British protection during the War of Independence.

On the other end was Theodoros Kolokotronis, the greatest military leader of the revolution, who led the liberation struggle in the Peloponnese with great successes. Kolokotronis, like Mav-

rokordatos, favored a centralized government, but wanted the military, which had fought and shed blood in the revolution, to maintain strong, localized power and not be sidelined by the politicians.

Given the fact that Byron's overarching aim was to mediate between factions, the challenge was to reconcile the political and military powers-that-be in Greece. The military chieftains had the upper hand when Byron arrived.

Byron's motivations

Gamba lays out Byron's motivations, and his conviction that no one was more devoted to the cause of Greece's liberation, at the outset.

“The challenge of his venture made him intent upon undertaking it. If those vowing devotion to Greece's liberation had planned a crusade with few obstacles, then Lord Byron would never have joined in the undertaking. He was not one to follow the crowd or to engage in enterprises free of danger.”

Gamba relates how a clergyman named Ignatios, Archbishop of Arta, gave Byron letters of introduction to two of the most important fig-

The glorious events which have assured, as it now appears, the liberty of Greece, have confirmed Lord Byron's anticipations, and have shown that his hopes were as well-founded as his designs were nobly conceived. But the Greek people have not forgotten their benefactor in the day of their triumph – they have a profound sense of the obligations they owe him, and their gratitude will endure as long as they have a name amongst the nations of the earth.

Count Pietro Gamba

ures in the Greek Revolution: Prince Alexandros Mavrokordatos and Markos Botsaris. The brave Souliote Botsaris was killed in a foray against the Turks in Karpenisi, and Byron would later hire many of his Souliote warriors as his personal guard.

Mavrokordatos, however, became a close ally and collaborator of Byron both on the political and military level.

Strategizing on Cephalonia

Byron spent his first five months in Greece on the Ionian island of Cephalonia, then under British control. There, as Gamba recounts in detail, he assessed the situation on the ground, corresponding with all the parties, conferred with local British officials, and set out the strategy for his next steps. Only then did he decide to spend a substantial part of his fortune for the struggle. At the request of the provisional legislative body, he signed his historic cheque for £4,000 – roughly £332,000 today – to finance an emergency fleet of 14 ships (nine from Hydra and five from Spetses) to successfully defend Messolonghi from

the fierce siege by Ottoman Albanians.

He would later progressively offer another £3,000 in cash expenses, making his total cash expenditure about £800,000 in today's value.

The choice of Messolonghi

Byron was persuaded by Mavrokordatos, who had taken charge of Western Greece, to abandon his original plan to go to Tripolitsa (the former strategic-administrative centre of the Ottomans in the Peloponnese, conquered by revolutionary war hero Theodoros Kolokotronis in 1821) and to join him at his headquarters in Messolonghi.

As Gamba's account makes clear, the two men shared the objective of organizing a standing army under the strong control of a central government, along European lines.

This pitted them against the military chieftains of the Peloponnese, and not just Kolokotronis, who had incidentally served in the British Army on Zakynthos during the Napoleonic wars, achieving the rank of brigadier 1810. Kolokotronis, as would

be expected, fought for localized power centers that would give substantial authority for decision-making to those who had actually fought and shed their blood in the revolution.

Mavrokordatos, European diplomatic recognition

Kolokotronis tried unsuccessfully to court Byron, to persuade him to come to the Peloponnese and to peel him away from the politicians, both because of the huge international prestige he would lend and the money he could disburse from his personal fortune and the forthcoming British loan.

Byron sided with Mavrokordatos because he was convinced that a central British-style constitutional government was the only way Greece would achieve diplomatic recognition from European powers, and of course from Britain first and foremost.

The problem for Byron, however, was that Kolokotronis was stronger than the government, and his protracted efforts to reconcile the warring chieftains would not come to fruition.

The age-old Greek scourge of factionalism

He is repeatedly quoted as saying that the Greek factions were more preoccupied with battling each other than fighting the Turks.

“They are more intent on persecuting and calumniating each other than on securing the independence of their country. More is to be feared from their own dissensions than from the Turks.”

Having noted Byron’s famous quote that — “I come not here to join a faction but a nation, to act with honest men, not speculators or speculators, as the Greeks daily call each other.” — Gamba offers a glimpse of his character and tactic.

Byron’s name as powerful weapon

“Those who have studied the character of Lord Byron in his writings will easily believe that prudence was not in the catalogue of his virtues. He carefully avoided every appearance of ostentation and had great dread of being taken as a searcher after adventures.”

Byron was well aware of the overriding importance of his image as a symbol. “By perseverance and discernment, he hoped to assist in the liberation of Greece – To Know and To Be Known,” Gamba notes.

This was undoubtedly one of his greatest contributions to the struggle, and it helped him exploit his wide nexus of connections in Britain and on the continent.

A natural lust for adventure, from Italy to Greece

Again and again, Gamba’s journal indicates that the ad-



Portrait of Lord Byron, painted by Thomas Phillips in 1813.

venture and risk of Byron’s undertaking was a central psychological underpinning of his overarching passion for the liberation of Greece’s enslaved, as Byron oft repeated, people.

Prior to the momentous decision to turn his sights to the Greek liberation struggle, Byron made his residence in Italy (1816-1823), but according to Gamba the political state of the country disgusted him: “He had thoughts of going to the United States of America, and I once saw him nearly on the point of departure.”

Representing the London Philhellenic Committee

Gamba makes clear that Byron’s mission was not only the action of a solitary romantic crusader for freedom, though it was that as well. It began with his induction in the powerful London Greek (Philhellenic) Committee months before his departure for Greece.

The committee portrayed itself as a private philhellenic organization which, however, included many MPs, politically influential people, and even the major British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the founder of classic utilitarianism.

The committee recruited Byron, but the poet already was imbued with the romantic passion to help Greece gain its freedom, to be resurrected as it were, not as a continuation of ancient glory — he had no such illusions — but as a free state among the nations.

To dream the impossible dream

Byron’s romantic dream of releasing Greece from its centuries old bondage was eloquently expressed over a decade before the start of the Greek Revolution, in his great poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, in which he himself is essentially the hero, based on his 1809-1811 Grand Tour of Eu-

rope and the Mediterranean:

“Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth! Immortal, though no more; though fallen, great! Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth, And long accustomed bondage uncreate?”

Yet, Byron was in no way imbued by a hatred for the Turks. He confided in Gamba that, in his early youth, reading Ottoman history brought him great delight, and that one might discern oriental tinges that derived from that in his poetry.

‘Unite now or forget dream of liberty’

Byron strongly pressured the Greeks to unite, warning that a failure of warring factions to reach reconciliation would mean that “all hopes of a [British] loan will be in vain.”

Gamba quotes a long letter to the Greek executive and legislative bodies, penned in

Cephalonia on November 30, 1823:

“All this assistance which the Greeks could expect from abroad — assistance neither trifling nor worthless — will be suspended or destroyed. What is worse, the Great Powers of Europe, of whom none was an enemy of Greece, but seemed to favor the establishment of an independent power, will be persuaded that the Greeks are unable to govern themselves, and will perhaps themselves undertake to settle your disorders in such a way as to blast the brightest hopes of yourselves and your friends.”

History would prove him right. In the starkest terms, as Gamba relates it, Byron warned in yet another letter, to Mavrokordatos, that there were three possible eventualities: Greece would either reconquer her liberty, or become a dependency of sovereign Europe, or return to being a Turkish province.

“She has the choice only of these three alternatives. If she wishes to be truly Greece, free and independent, she must resolve today, or she will never again have the opportunity.”

Utility of the Greek Committee, military role

The London Greek Committee was not an organ of the officially neutral British government, but it had documented contacts, and its role went far beyond humanitarian relief. In effect, there was a pragmatic use of the philhellenic movement as an instrument for advancing British influence over the Eastern Mediterranean, while officially maintaining neutrality so as not to fuel any direct Anglo-Ottoman confrontation.

A British Army officer in active duty, Colonel Leicester Stanhope, was sent by the committee to Greece and worked closely with Byron, not least in securing a crucial British loan of £800,000 (of which only £470,000 or 59% of the nominal loan amount was received by the Greek provisional government) – £67.3 million in today’s purchasing power. The rest went to

exorbitant fees and commissions. By all accounts it could not have been issued without the tacit support of the British government.

British newspapers, including *The Times* of London spoke of “scandalous” terms.

Stanhope, who was by Byron’s side in Messolonghi, said in his correspondence that the committee sent engineers, artillery officers, infantry and cavalry officers. This meticulous organization of military-political planning with a large arms stockpile for targeted operations clearly could not possibly have been accomplished without government acquiescence or involvement, direct or indirect.

George Canning: The sea change in British policy

British foreign secretary George Canning (a public square in Athens bears his name), with whom Byron was acquainted prior to his journey to Greece, played a pivotal role in supporting the Greek Revolution diplomatically, and then more tacitly financially.

In spring 1823, Great Britain abandoned its neutrality and recognized the Greeks as a warring nation. Though Gamba stresses the role of Byron and mainly the Greek Committee in pushing for the crucial 1824 and 1825 (the latter after Byron’s death) British loans to Greece, it should be noted that the British government did nothing to impede the process, suggesting at the very least tacit approval.

British political, financial and strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean were linked to the outcome of the struggle.

Byron’s pure, romantic intentions

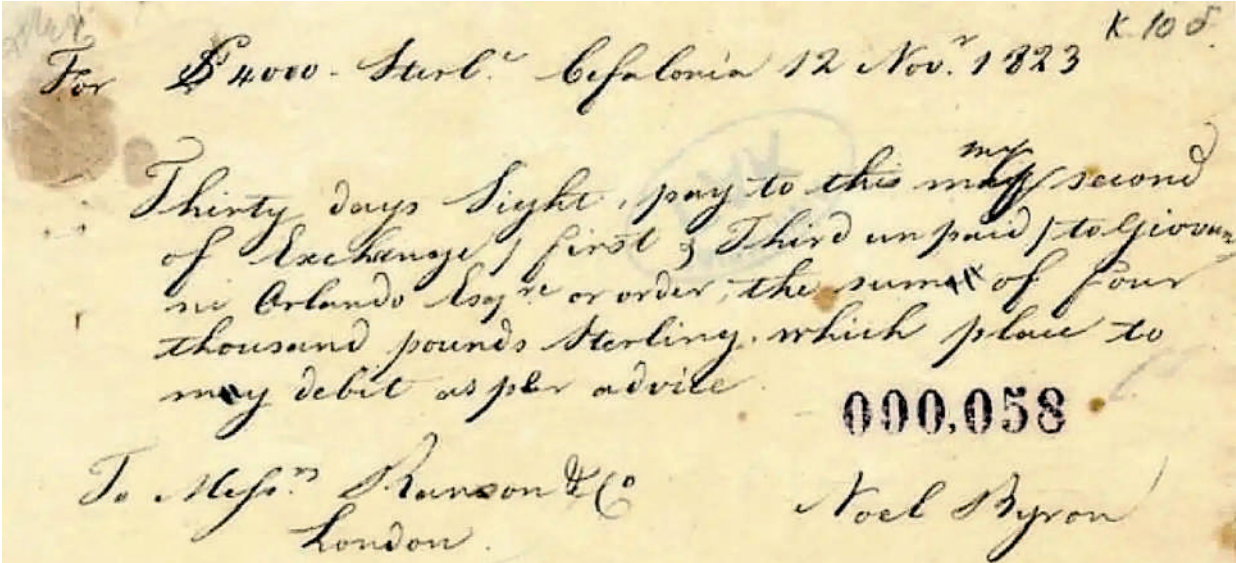
This, however, can in no way be interpreted to mean that Byron intended to serve as a tool for the advancement of British government interests. His pure intentions focused solely on the cause of the liberation of the Greeks, as Gamba’s narrative makes clear at every turn.

This is evidenced by all his actions, both on the island of Cephalonia and subsequently in Messolonghi, where he died while working toward Greek independence.

The crusading nature of his endeavour, the charm of risk and danger were a core part of Byron’s disposition and constitution, as Gamba’s, account stresses:

“Opposition and the prospect of the greatest dangers were to him the most alluring excitement.” In another remark to Gamba Byron noted, “I have always looked upon storms as one of the sublimest spectacles in nature.”

In that sense, it is perhaps no surprise that he knowingly placed himself at the center of one.



In the cheque pictured above, Byron stipulates that £4,000 (£332,000 today) be paid to Ioannis Orlandos to receive funds and travel to London.

Athens' Hill of Secrets

A decade after 79 shackled skeletons captured global attention, science is rewriting the story of ancient Phaleron. But the cemetery's greatest secrets may remain beyond archaeologists' reach

Continued from Page One

Photographs of the skeletons traveled around the world, and almost immediately, the men acquired possible identities.

Could they have been supporters of Cylon, the aristocrat whose seventh-century BCE attempt to seize power ended with the killing of his followers, despite their having sought sanctuary? Or were they foreign invaders, mercenaries or prisoners captured in some other conflict?

Theories from the time can be seen at the SNFCC in a small onsite exhibit. A decade later, research results from archaeologists are coming in and providing some answers.

When teeth talk

A recent study led by Julianne Stamer, a doctoral researcher at Arizona State University, tested tooth enamel from 66 of the Esplanada men and 97 adults buried elsewhere at Phaleron.

Tooth enamel forms during childhood and does not remodel later in life. The strontium it contains reflects the geology of the places from which a person obtained food and water while growing up.

"Strontium isotopes enter tooth enamel during childhood and reflect the geology of the area in which a person grew up," Stamer explained to *TO VIMA International Edition*.

Of the 66 Esplanada men, 64 had signatures consistent with the local Attic range. Across the full sample, 156 of 163 individuals, or 95.7 percent, produced apparently local signatures.

That does not identify their political allegiance or explain why they were killed. It does, however, make one theory much less likely: that the group consisted primarily of outsiders brought to Attica and executed.

Jane Buikstra, Stamer's supervisor and one of the scholars who helped establish American bioarchaeology, is careful about going further.

"Our osteobiographical approach focuses on individual life histories that, in

the absence of written records, are written in bone and other human tissues," she told *TO VIMA International Edition*.

Buikstra highlights that the date of the burials has yet to be settled. Radiocarbon dating would normally help, but the men fall within the Hallstatt plateau, a section of the calibration curve that produces frustratingly broad date ranges. Interpretations based on the archaeological evidence extend from the late seventh to the fifth century BCE.

A late seventh-century death places them in an era of competing aristocratic factions, before Athens developed a broadly accepted legal order. In contrast, a fifth-century execution would situate them in a very different political world.

Moreover, Buikstra highlights uncertainty over how the men were killed. The restraints and burial positions indicate captivity, but forensic work is calling in to question whether or not they actually received blunt blows to the head.

The association of the shackled men with Cylon remains a possibility, but for Buikstra, it's far from a certainty.

A cross-section of ancient Greek society

For Stella Chrysosoulaki, the head archaeologist who led the rescue excavation at Phaleron, the attention paid to the shackled men has obscured the scale of the wider discovery.

"There is so much more to the Esplanada than the shackled men," she told *TO VIMA International Edition*. "Phaleron is a large cemetery including people buried over several centuries and using a range of very different practices."

The latest comprehensive review of the evidence identifies more than 230 possible or confirmed 'biaiothanatoi', a term used for people who died violently or received markedly unusual treatment in death. A total of 171 skeletons appear in individual and paired burials and in at least 17 collective burials extending across roughly three centuries.

Even where violence is

clear, bones cannot reliably distinguish political victims from prisoners, captives, enslaved people or ordinary offenders. Yet the pattern suggests that organized violence, captivity and coercive punishment recurred in the society that eventually produced Athenian democracy.

The cemetery also contains many newborns, infants and young children. Some were placed inside amphorae, cooking pots or

hydriae. Some vessels had been reused or assembled from fragments. Other children were buried with cups, feeding vessels or figurines, including a small horse and rider.

Buikstra is struck by the unusual frequency of child remains, but cautions against reading it simply as evidence of exceptionally high infant mortality. Burial customs, preservation and the extent of the excavated

area may all have shaped the sample.

Meanwhile, Buikstra hopes further work will reveal more about maternal health as well as infant feeding, nutrition and disease.

The graves also challenge the older description of Phaleron as a cemetery reserved for the poor and marginalized. The people buried there did not share a single diet, state of health or form of burial. Preliminary

comparisons even suggest that some adults in the collective burials had marginally better dental health than others found in individual graves at the site.

Increasingly, Phaleron is looking less like a cemetery for one excluded group than a final resting place for a cross-section of a complicated society.

The Hill of Secrets

Then there is the part ar-



An image of the excavation of the Skeletons of Phaleron, where 79 adult men were found, many bound with iron restraints.

© MINISTRY OF CULTURE — PHALERON EXCAVATION ARCHIVE



An infant's grave, surrounded by burial offerings. The discovery changed archaeologists' understanding of infant burial practices in ancient Greece.



Aerial photograph of the Esplanada excavation site at SNFCC.

chaeologists did not excavate.

The recent excavations examined approximately 11,000 square meters in separate areas of the former Phaleron horse track. The 2022 exhibition catalogue *Phalēróthen: Between Two Worlds* identifies a 57.480 square-meter unexplored gap between the Central and Northwestern excavation sectors. Archaeologists also traced the continuation of the cemetery beneath parts of the SNFCC's artificial hill and park without investigating it. Its full extent in this section remains unknown.

Chryssoulaki said the graves appeared to be growing denser at the point where excavations stopped. She believes the cemetery's central and possibly best-preserved zone may lie beneath the hill.

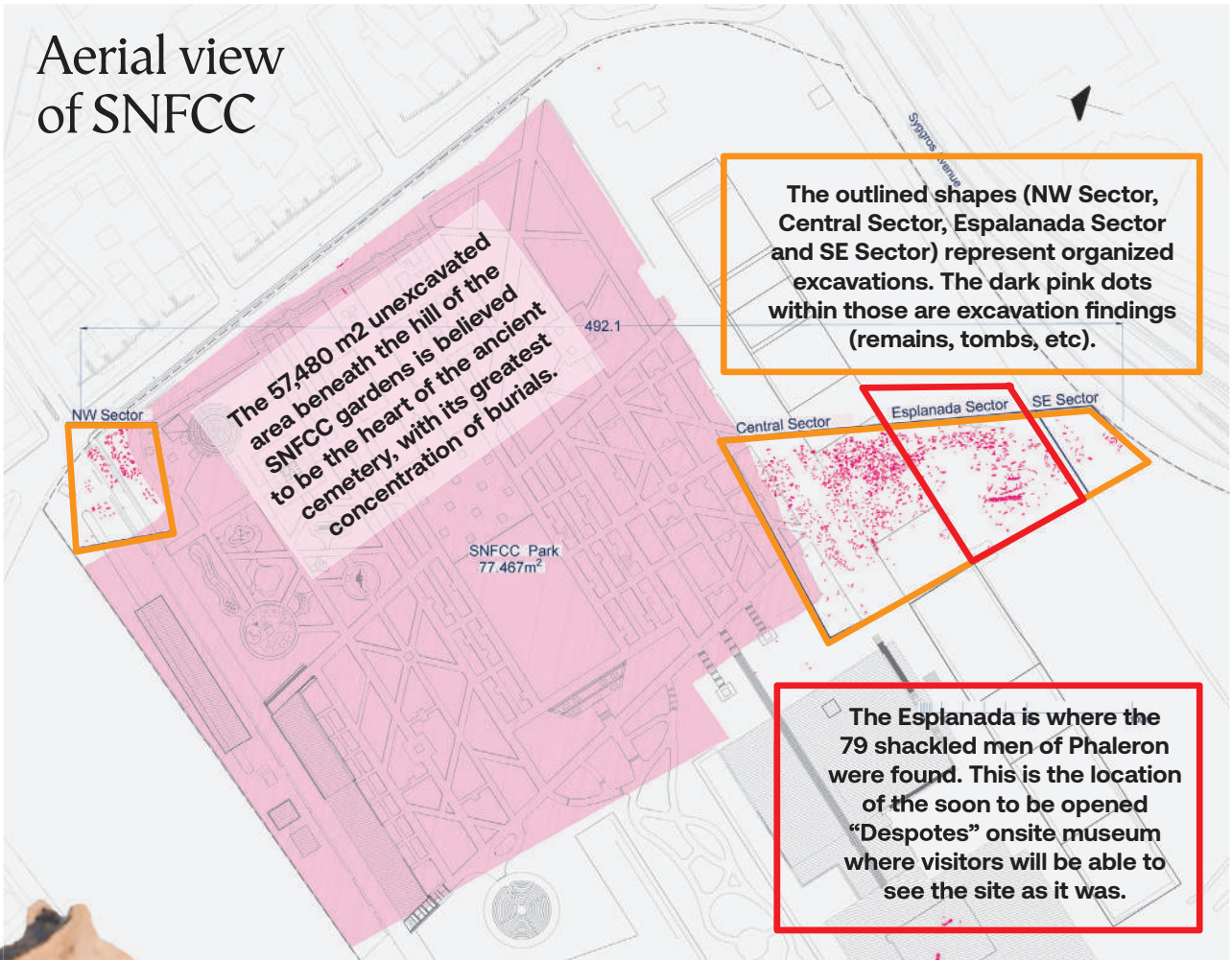
"We weren't allowed to dig exploratory trenches beneath it," she said. "I can only hope that the compacted soil deposits, including layers associated with the old racecourse that occupied the site before the SNFCC, created a protective barrier over the graves before the new layers of were added."

She stressed that the SNFCC complied with Greek law and financed rescue excavations wherever construction required earth to be removed. Where the project added soil instead, excavation was not required. The park and artificial hill could therefore be built without investigating the ancient layers below.

The old racecourse may itself have offered some protection. Chryssoulaki said it was laid over more than a meter of fill and did not require foundations that cut into the archaeological layer.

Leaving remains in place

Aerial view of SNFCC



The Despotes museum, which is adjacent to the SNFCC, and was scheduled to open in the first half of 2026.



Among the excavation's findings were different ceramics including pitchers and figures.



is not necessarily archaeological neglect, clarifies Chryssoulaki. Excavation is destructive, and future researchers may possess methods for extracting information that are unavailable today. But because exploratory trenches were not dug beneath the hill, neither the number and significance of the burials nor their present condition is known.

The shackled men of Phaleron are slated to return to a purpose-built protective and exhibition structure beside the SNFCC. In January, the Ministry of Culture announced the €7.5 million museum shell would be completed during the first half of 2026. That deadline has passed, and a public opening date has yet to be announced.

An unfinished archive

At Athens' most famous ancient cemetery, Kerameikos, the celebrated tombs show how prominent families of the time chose to commemorate their dead. Phaleron preserves a less "curated" record of the city's dead: infants, people buried without lasting memorials, and victims of violence.

Learning about Phaleron's version of history matters just as much as researching Kerameikos, particularly for a society that produced democracy. Ultimately, the site's greatest contribution may not lie in identifying one famous historical event, but in revealing more about the people the written sources left out.

Some of their stories have now been unearthed from the ground and continue to be pieced together by archaeologists around the world. How much more of that history remains beneath the SNFCC park is unknown.

For now, Athenians and visitors will continue to walk among the lavender and olive trees, largely unaware of the silent history at rest beneath their feet.

From longevity regimens costing thousands of euros to IV treatments delivered to yachts and villas, Greece is seeing a rapidly expanding wellness market operating in a regulatory gray area

By Giorgos Sakkas

“They were simply looking for something that would bring in fresh money without involving any insurance fund.” A professor who studies healthcare economics and has in-depth knowledge of the development of Greece’s “wellness” and “longevity” market uses this phrase to describe the financial incentive behind a rapidly expanding activity in the country: the booming market for services and alternative treatments promising to “regenerate” the body and preserve youth and longevity.

The market is growing at an estimated annual rate of 17.5% globally and is expected to reach \$600 billion within three years.

As private healthcare entrepreneurs told *TO BHMA*, it is extremely difficult to quantify the economic footprint of these activities in Greece. However, data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority offer an initial picture of the market’s scale.

A ‘statistical umbrella’

In 2023, the broad NACE category 86.90, “Other human health activities,” included 18,942 legal entities, 48,917 employees and total turnover of approximately €1.45 billion.

The figure does not, of course, represent the “turnover of longevity,” since the

category is a broad “statistical umbrella” covering a range of different healthcare services that have no connection to medicine or pharmaceuticals. It does, however, indicate the size of the pool in which many newer activities are developing.

The recently defined category 86.96, “Traditional, complementary and alternative medicine activities,” also falls within this broader category. This is not a Greek invention, but rather ELSTAT’s alignment with European requirements.

The amounts being spent on some of these additional and alternative services become more tangible when looking at the market itself. In Athens, a wellness company advertises three longevity programs lasting between four and seven hours, priced at €2,300 to €4,850. If a “genomics and epigenetics” program is included, the cost rises to €6,600.

In Thessaloniki and Katerini, meanwhile, IV wellness treatments are priced from €120, while intravenous administration of NAD+ — nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide, a substance involved in cellular metabolism — starts at €150.

This is a significant market attracting new organized investments in specialized facilities operating as multispecialty medical centers, while a much broader ecosystem of smaller providers is also emerging, many of whom have no connection to licensed healthcare professionals.



The Lucrative Business of Eternal Youth

Estimates therefore put the total value of this market, including informal payments, at more than €1 billion in Greece.

In villas and on yachts

Under the same commercial umbrella, vastly different services are being offered, ranging from preventive care, genetic testing and personalized nutrition to infusions, “detox” treatments, hyperbaric oxygen and many other interventions.

“These wellness and longevity vitamins you hear about are not ordinary vitamins. They are specialized formulations prepared in compounding pharmacies and administered intrave-

nously,” lawyer Evangelos Katsikis, who has previously handled similar cases, told *TO BHMA*.

There is also an additional, much harder-to-measure part of this economy: services delivered directly to customers.

A typical example can be found on the island of Mykonos, where mobile IV therapies are advertised for hangovers, jet lag or exhaustion, with practitioners traveling to hotels, villas, private homes or even yachts.

The trend appears to have started on the island with so-called hangover drips and gradually expanded into a broader range of intravenous services.

No regulatory framework

At the same time, the new European NACE 2.1 classification separately records “traditional, complementary and alternative medicine activities.” Category 86.96 includes, among other services, acupuncture, herbal medicine, homeopathy and reflexology.

This is where one of the market’s paradoxes emerges: the state can recognize an economic activity for tax and statistical purposes without having established a unified regulatory framework governing how it is practiced.

A Business Activity Code, or KAD, allows an activity to be recorded, but it does not,

by itself, constitute a license for every individual procedure, nor does it determine who is authorized to perform it.

“Whatever existed abroad, whether equipment or a trend, they tried to bring it to Greece,” an executive at a multispecialty medical center told *TO BHMA*. “But the institutional framework is not simply a gray area. It is non-existent...”

The Health Ministry, however, has announced the creation of a special committee to address the regulatory framework.

The current ambiguity even extends to the terminology businesses use in their marketing.

“The term ‘clinic’ should be used only for private hospitals, meaning secondary healthcare facilities,” Katsikis said.

He explained that the English term “clinic” is used “on signs, advertisements and so on” for doctors’ offices or unrelated facilities, even though its use in such cases is clearly prohibited.

This is how a multi-tiered market is taking shape. On one side are organized investments, multispecialty medical centers, doctors, geneticists, advanced diagnostics and evidence-based preventive medicine. On the other is a rapidly expanding field where terms such as “longevity,” “anti-aging,” “regenerative” and “functional medicine” can serve as powerful commercial tools without scientific evidence or established clinical application.

