Interview with CNBC on geopolitical tensions in the Middle East (including Israel’s airstrikes on Syria), 17 Jul 2025

Dr. Nasser Saidi, president at Nasser Saidi & Associates, speaks to CNBC’s Dan Murphy about geopolitical tensions in the Middle East including Israel’s airstrikes on Syria, recent positive macroeconomic and financial developments in Syria, Banque du Liban banning banks & brokerages from dealing with Hezbollah-linked financial institution and also regarding Lebanon being on the FATF Grey list & steps the country needs to take to rectify this.
Direct link to the video: https://www.cnbc.com/video/2025/07/17/israels-strikes-on-syria-not-helpful-says-nasser-saidi.html

---

“Grey list removal is milestone for investor confidence”, Op-ed in Arabian Gulf Business Insight (AGBI), 1 Mar 2024

The opinion piece titled “Grey list removal is milestone for investor confidence” appeared in the Arabian Gulf Business

Insight (AGBI) on 1st March 2024.

The article is published below.

Grey list removal is milestone for investor confidence

Coming off the FATF list is testament to UAE's willingness to improve overall governance

A collective sigh of relief could be heard this week over the UAE's removal from the Financial Action Task Force "grey list".

Being on a grey list can damage a country's reputation, and its sovereign credit rating, and adversely affect macroeconomic stability.

The FATF provides a framework of country measures to protect the integrity of global financial systems from illicit cash flows, money laundering and terrorist financing.

The grey list includes countries "that are actively working with the FATF to address strategic deficiencies in their regimes", whereas the "black list" are high-risk jurisdictions (currently including North Korea, Iran and Myanmar) "that are not actively engaging with FATF to address these deficiencies".

The International Monetary Fund finds that FATF grey-listing results in a large reduction in reported capital inflows, including foreign direct investment (FDI), portfolio flows, banking, payments and other flows.

Despite being on the list since 2022, the UAE has been resilient, has worked actively with FATF and continued attracting FDI and capital inflows.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development reports that the UAE (despite its much smaller economic size) ranked second after the US for greenfield FDI – in which a company creates a subsidiary in a different country from the ground up – in 2023, with project announcements rising by 28 percent.

In 2022, the UAE was ranked first in both the West Asia and Mena regions, receiving 47 percent and 32 percent respectively of total FDI inflows to the regions.

Both Abu Dhabi Exchange and Dubai Financial Market reported higher net foreign inflows in 2022-23, thanks to economic growth, a rising weighting in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, and more initial public offering listings.

Dewa, Borouge, Salik and Empower are IPOs that gained high levels of foreign participation in 2022. In 2023, the UAE’s eight IPOs raised $6 billion. On the Abu Dhabi Exchange there was a 35 percent jump last year in the foreign ownership of shares in listed companies.

The UAE’s removal from the grey list is testament to the country’s willingness to improve the overall governance and transparency of its banking/financial sector and address weaknesses.

The removal also shows the country has increased its ability to deter illicit money flows, undertake financial investigations and extradite financial criminals.

The return to conventional status will confirm and strengthen investors’ trust and confidence in the UAE as a trade and financial centre, leading to an increase in capital, FDI, transfer of technology and portfolio flows.

The removal will support the development and expansion of the banking and financial sector (domestically and internationally) and financial markets, as well as the outward facing financial free zones. Another major beneficiary will be the asset and wealth management activities of UAE-based family offices.

The FATF de-listing reinforces the positive news for the UAE from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s review of preferential tax regimes. This rated the UAE’s corporate tax regime for free zones and IFCs as “not harmful”.

It is important that the UAE continues on its journey in adopting and implementing international best practice and standards, and strengthens its financial regulatory regimes and systems.

However, an unintended consequence of FATF standards is an increase in compliance costs.

The costs of doing business for banks and financial service providers is often heightened by de-risking. The cost of providing formal financial services to micro- and small businesses, which are a major source of job creation and economic diversification, often rises.

Safeguards against money laundering and terrorist financing need to be designed and implemented to avoid negatively affecting financial inclusion and disincentivising the use of the formal financial system by ordinary individuals, businesses and micro- and small businesses in particular.

Simplified customer due diligence requirements can be introduced for low-risk financial inclusion products; processes for higher risk products can be enhanced using a risk-based approach to address concerns over money laundering and terrorist financing.

Similarly, digital ID systems can be used to support anti-fraud functions and to develop e-solutions that circumvent burdensome paper-based systems.

The UAE’s removal from the grey list is an important milestone and signals the growing integrity and maturity of the country’s banking and financial sector through the adoption of international standards.

This positive move further cements the UAE’s position as an international trading and financial hub.