

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **North Africa**

**#Lybia** – NATO and the EU call for a ceasefire in Libya



On the 13th of May, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, met with the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya Ghassan Salamé in Brussels for talks on the security situation in Libya. He pointed out that the military approach is not the answer to resolve the current crisis and urged the conflicting parties to join again the UN-sponsored political dialogue. Moreover, Stoltenberg stressed that the Atlantic Alliance “is prepared to help Libya build effective security institutions, including a modern Ministry of Defence and effective security services under the civilian control of the government”. Last Monday, Salamé also gathered with the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which released a statement calling on all warring groups to “immediately implement a ceasefire and to engage with the United Nations to ensure a full and comprehensive cessation of hostilities”. The

Council further labelled the LNA military offensive against Tripoli and the subsequent escalation in and around the capital as a “threat to international peace and security”.

To know more about this topic:

- Council of the European Union website, “Libya: Foreign Affairs Council statement”, 05/13/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2JzaV2a>.
- NATO website, “NATO Secretary General calls for end to Libya fighting”, 05/13/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Yyc4vb>.
- *Middle East Monitor*, “NATO calls on conflicting parties in Libya to return to dialogue”, 05/15/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2LG6iG5>.

## Levant

[#Syria](#) – As Assad’s forces advance against rebels, European nations urge end to escalation in north-western Syria



In the past two weeks, forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia, have intensified their attacks against the rebel-held enclaves in north-western Syria, seizing on Monday five villages and a strategic hill in the province of Idlib, i.e. the last major insurgent stronghold in the country. Indeed, most of this territory is held by an array of rebel groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, that also controls parts of Hama and Latakia provinces. The fighting has also hit the buffer zone agreed in September under a Russian-Turkish deal. According to the UN, 120 civilians were killed since late April, while 180 000 people have been

displaced. Britain, Germany, and France issued a joint statement on Monday calling for an end to the escalation of violence. While acknowledging that the presence of extremist groups in Idlib “remains of grave concern”, they affirmed the current Syrian advance “is not about fighting terrorism. It is about pushing forward the ruthless reconquest by the regime”.

To know more about this topic:

- *Radio France Internationale*, “Syrie: les forces du régime repoussent une contre-offensive jihadiste”, 05/11/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2LG5AbT>.
- *The Washington Post*, “Syrian troops capture 5 villages in last rebel stronghold”, 05/13/19, available at: <https://wapo.st/2E8ShdX>.

## Gulf

[#Yemen](#) – Houthis withdraw from key Red Sea ports in a diplomatic breakthrough after months of stalling



On the 11th of May, Iran-backed Houthis have begun unilaterally moving their militias out of the key ports of Hodeidah, Saleef, and Ras Isa, marking the first practical progress under the ceasefire deal agreed in Sweden last December. According to the plan, both the Houthi rebels and Hadi’s government forces – supported by a Saudi-led coalition – were meant to withdraw their fighters, leaving the UN to monitor shipments. Indeed, these ports are used for grain, oil, commerce and aid,

with Hodeidah handling 70% of the country's food imports and humanitarian relief. On Sunday, the United Nations has said the first full day of the Houthi withdrawal from the three Red Sea ports went “in accordance with established plan”. According to many commentators, this move represents a potential breakthrough in the civil war, which has led to what the UN describes as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis”, with 24.1 million civilians in need of aid.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, “Yemen: Houthis begin Hodeidah port pullout”, 05/11/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2VsrGhz>.
- *Le Monde*, “Au Yémen, les rebelles houthistes ont commencé à évacuer le port d’Hodeïda”, 05/11/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2HrYimC>.
- *Al Jazeera*, “Houthi withdrawal from Yemen ports going according to plan: UN”, 05/12/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2YtYQiO>.

## #ArabInsight

#DealOfTheCentury – An insight into the latest revelations about the US-sponsored Israel-Palestine peace plan



The US-sponsored peace plan to settle the long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine remains one of the main concerns of several Arab newspapers. A few weeks ago, we [provided a commentary](#) of an

article published by *Al Ra'i*, where the author investigated the secrecy around the long-awaited peace package and put forward hypotheses on the potential content of the plan. As new details emerged in recent days, the online platform *BBC Arabic* released an issue titled “Deal of the Century: Will the American plan turn into a ‘nightmare?’”. It presents a variety of viewpoints expressed in pan-Arab newspapers – e.g. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* – and by analysts from the MENA region.

In the first place, the article discusses the background of the forthcoming deal in light of the increasingly close relationship between Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump, on the one hand, and the current regional scenario, on the other. On the first point, it is worth recalling that the US President recognised Jerusalem Israel’s capital in 2017 and, in late March, declared the country’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, captured from Syria in 1967. According to many, this latter move sets a precedent which would apply to the West Bank as well. In early May, speaking at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner revealed two key aspects of the plan. Firstly, he voiced scepticism about a two-state solution, thus reversing a longstanding position of the US administration on the issue. Secondly, he stated that the peace package would confirm Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, saying that this will “help because what we need to start doing is just recognising truths”. On Wednesday – amid tensions triggered by the fragile ceasefire agreed on the 6th of May after a week-end of renewed violence – Palestinian Authority PM Mohammad Shtayyeh dismissed the proposal as an “Israeli plan written by American hands” which would give Israel “a free hand to annex most of the West Bank under the title of security”. In the article, the Iraqi writer and critic Farouk Yousef predicts that the deal will be announced as a *fait accompli*, meaning that its announcement will be delayed until the final stage of the plan – i.e. the annexation of area C of the West Bank – is completed. Concerning the second point, Yousef stressed that “the designers of the Deal of the Century consider the Arab weakness as a permanent situation, which is not true”, adding that “What the Americans are saying will not be binding on anyone if the Arabs regain their ability to be a strong party in the dialogue”. For the time being, some Arab countries have adopted a somewhat ambiguous stance. In particular, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt wish to consolidate their relationship with Israel, notably to counter Iran’s influence in the region, and are likely to be interested in the deal. In this respect, the writer argues that “The plan deals with Israel as a great power in the region, who can provide protection to all who demand it, while it deals with the Arab countries as rich sheikhs who need to be protected. As a consequence, they must pay not only the price of protection, but also the cost of “liquidation of the Palestinian cause”. Finally, the issue quotes the Jordanian columnist Kamal Zakarneh, who firmly asserts that the “internationalisation of the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the best way out in these circumstances”.

*[The article is available in Arabic at the following link: <https://bbc.in/2WTrBbe>]*

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*\*As a general disclaimer, the article does not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation\**