

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

[#Libya](#) - General Haftar rules out Tripoli ceasefire and dismisses UN-led talks



In recent days, Libyan eastern commander Khalifa Haftar has once again rejected a ceasefire deal in the battle for Tripoli, arguing that the Libyan National Army (LNA) will continue fighting until extremist militias in the city lay down their arms. He also accused the UN Special Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salamé, of no longer being impartial, claiming that the United Nations seek to partition the country. These declarations came soon after Salamé described the ongoing military offensive on the capital, launched on the 4th of April, as a “suicide” and as “the start of a long and bloody war”. Speaking at the

New-York based International Peace Institute on Wednesday, he also argued that the oil-rich nation has become “a textbook example of foreign interference today in local conflicts”. It is worth noticing that the UN Security Council failed last month to agree on a draft resolution demanding a truce in Libya and a return to political talks.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, “UN envoy attacks lack of 'moral motivation' to end Libyan war”, 05/22/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2ECcAk3>.
- *Al Jazeera*, “Libya's Haftar vows to fight until Tripoli 'militias' defeated”, 05/26/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2wpmbXc>.
- *Le Monde*, “Libye : l'émissaire de l'ONU est « un médiateur partial », selon le maréchal Haftar”, 05/26/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2wlJojE>.

Levant

[#Lebanon](#) - Israel agrees to U.S.-mediated maritime talks with Lebanon



On the 27th of May, after a meeting with US envoy David Satterfield, Israel’s Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz declared that his country had agreed to enter US-mediated talks with Lebanon in an effort to set a maritime border for the benefit of both countries’ interests in the development of natural gas and reservoirs. This move could help settle a long-standing quarrel over ownership of a 332 square miles

triangular patch of the Mediterranean Sea [marked 4 in the image above]. The dispute resurfaced last year, when Lebanon signed its first contract to drill for oil and gas in its waters, including for the block disputed by its southern neighbour Israel. The international consortium, which is set to start explanatory offshore drilling in December 2019, is composed of energy giants Total, Eni, and Novatek.

To know more about this topic:

- *Bloomberg*, “Israel Agrees to U.S.-Mediated Maritime Talks With Lebanon”, 05/27/19, available at: <https://bloom.bg/2I33g9Z>.
- *The New Arab*, “Israel 'open' to talks with Lebanon over disputed sea border”, 05/27/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2VOvNEZ>.
- *The Times of Israel*, “Israel accepts US-mediated talks with Lebanon on sea border”, 05/27/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2EDiYrg>.

Gulf

[#YemenWar](#) - President Hadi criticises UN Envoy's handling of war after recent diplomatic breakthrough



On the 22nd of May, in a letter addressed to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Yemen’s internationally-recognised President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi criticised the UN Special Envoy to the

country, Martin Griffiths, describing him as legitimising the Iran-aligned Houthis. In the five-page address, Hadi denounced the Envoy's "insistence on dealing with the rebels as a de-facto government and as an equal to the legitimate and elected government" of Yemen. The attacks come the same month Griffiths seemed to have achieved a diplomatic breakthrough, getting the Houthis to agree a unilateral withdrawal of their militias from Hodeidah and two other key ports. In this respect, the Yemeni President accuses Griffiths of failing to properly oversee the Stockholm agreement, claiming that the rebels had only handed control of the ports to "militias leaders" loyal to them. After receiving the letter, Guterres reiterated his confidence in the UN Special Envoy, saying the latter would double down on efforts to support both sides in the conflict and ensure that the Sweden deal is fulfilled.

To know more about this topic:

- *Reuters*, "Yemen president slams U.N. envoy's handling of war in letter to secretary-general, 05/24/19, available at: <https://reut.rs/2M9kJ5T>.
- *Gulf News*, "Yemen government suspends talks with UN envoy Martin Griffiths", 05/27/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2K9QskH>.

[#ArabInsight](#)

[#MeccaSummit](#) - Teheran-Riyadh tensions: a glimpse into the upcoming Saudi-sponsored Arab meeting



In the past weeks, tensions have soared between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the 12th of May, several commercial vessels – including two Saudi oil tankers – were sabotaged off the coast of the port city of Fujairah, in the UAE. A few days later, two oil pumping stations close to Riyadh were hit by a drone attack claimed by the Teheran-backed Yemeni Houthi militias. As Iran promptly denied any responsibility for the sabotage, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir affirmed that the Kingdom wants to avert war but stands ready to respond with “all strength and determination” to eventual offensives, adding that the ball is now in Teheran’s court. In this context, King Salman called for an emergency summit of Gulf leaders and Arab states to be held in Mecca on the 30th of May, aimed to discuss recent “aggressions and their consequences” in the region. This week, we provide a short insight into the forthcoming meeting based on a thoughtful article recently published by *BBC Arabic*, titled [“Will Saudi Arabia succeed in mobilising Arabs against Iran?”](#).

The gathering will coincide with the 14th summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is scheduled to take place the following day in Mecca. According to the official agenda, it will address “current issues and developments in the Muslim world”, as well as the US-sponsored “Deal of the Century” blueprint that is expected to be unveiled next month at a meeting in Bahrain. Despite recent declarations and the stated objectives of the summits, many observers – including the author of the article – have interpreted the initiatives as an attempt by the Saudi monarch to rally Arab support for an eventual US strike against Iran. Indeed, tensions between Washington and Teheran newly escalated this month, when the United States put pressure on countries still buying oil from Iran by ending exemptions from sanctions. Moreover, Donald Trump ordered to beef up the US military presence in the Gulf in response to alleged threats to US troops and interests. “If Iran wants to fight, that will its official end” – he claimed. In parallel, he invoked a rarely used aspect of federal law to push through a \$8bn sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia, with Secretary of State Pompeo saying that the transfers “must occur as quickly as possible in order to deter further Iranian adventurism in the Gulf and throughout the Middle East”.

But is the context favourable to form a united Arab front *vis-à-vis* Teheran? In the first place, part of the answer is clearly reflected in the nature of Iran’s alliances in the region, at a time when the Islamic Republic appears to have forged strong ties with several factions in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Besides, while direct support to Saudi Arabia is likely to come from Bahrain and the UAE, the position of other Arab nations has so far been unclear – both on the possibility of participating to the emergency meeting and of adopting an anti-Iranian stance. In particular, the article focuses on Egypt’s position on the issue. In the wake of the Houthi drone attack, President al-Sisi showed a supportive attitude towards Saudi Arabia, stressing that the country was coordinating with the Kingdom to

confront all threats to its national security and Gulf stability. Yet, many international and local analysts believe that Egypt may be unwilling to engage in a military action in light of the deep economic crisis it is facing and its desire to avoid making new enemies in the region. In this respect, several reports indicate that both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are concerned about the lack of a clear Egyptian position towards Iran, that still has diplomatic relations with Cairo, albeit at a low level.

Elena Tosti di Stefano

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