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North Africa

#Libya – Al-Sarraj proposes a national conference to end conflict



Last Sunday, during a press briefing in Tripoli, the head of Libya’s internationally recognised government (GNA), Fayez al-Sarraj, put forward an initiative aimed at ending the current crisis in the country. The PM proposed the organisation of a national conference – that would be sponsored by and coordinated with the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) – in order to gather “all Libyan parties and members from every area who call for a peaceful solution”. Al-Sarraj’s *ouverture* came soon after the

UN Security Council unanimously extended the arms embargo on the North-African state, reiterating that there is no military solution to the conflict. Meanwhile, Khalifa Haftar forces show no sign of withdrawal, although the Libyan National Army (LNA) has remained unsuccessful in capturing the capital from the Government of National Accord ever since fighting began on the 4th of April.

To know more about this topic:

- *Bloomberg*, “As Battle for Tripoli Rages, Libyan Premier Demands New Dialogue”, 06/16/19, available at: <https://bloom.bg/2x0iPKr>.
- *The Libya Observer*, “Libya's Al-Sarraj proposes peace gathering to end crisis”, 06/16/19, available at: bit.ly/2RINXxf.
- *El Watan*, “Crise libyenne: Al Sarraj tend la main à Tobrouk”, 06/18/19, available at: bit.ly/2Zumv39.

Levant

[#DealOfTheCentury](#) – US to postpone the unveiling of the Middle East peace plan amid Palestinian boycott of Bahrain workshop



In the past week, the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) has continued to call on the Arab states and other invited countries to boycott the US-led “Peace and

Prosperity” workshop, to be held in the Bahraini capital Manama on the 25th-26th of June. According to the White House, the economic aspect of the much-awaited “Deal of the Century” would be revealed on this occasion, while the unveiling of its political component has been repeatedly postponed. The Palestinian leadership has cut ties with Washington over the Trump administration’s perceived pro-Israel bias and criticised Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan for having confirmed their participation. On Monday, US Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt hinted a further delay until early November, i.e. after the second round of elections in Israel, scheduled for the 17th of September, and the formation of a government coalition.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Monitor*, “PLO calls for a boycott of US-led economic workshop in Bahrain”, 06/14/19, available at: bit.ly/2IPMdZf.
- *Al Jazeera*, “US envoy hints Israeli-Palestinian peace plan could be delayed”, 06/17/19, available at: bit.ly/2Zupb0H.

Gulf

[#SaudiVsIran](#) – Riyadh calls for ‘decisive action’ over tanker attacks



Saudi Arabia is blaming Iran for last week's attack on two ships in the Gulf of Oman – the Japanese-owned *Kokuka Courageous* and the Norwegian-operated *Front Altair*. In an interview with the Saudi-owned daily *Asharq Al-Awsat*, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that Riyadh "does not want a war in the region," but stressed that the kingdom "will not hesitate in dealing with any threat to its people, sovereignty, and vital interests". He also called on the international community to take a "firm stand towards an exponential regime that supports terrorism and spreads killing and destruction". In this context, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih declared that "there must be a rapid and decisive response to the threat" to energy supplies, market stability, and consumer confidence after the attacks in the Gulf area". In the past weeks, the kingdom has accused Teheran "and its proxies" of the May 12th attacks on four tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates. Iran has strongly denied any involvement in these events.

To know more about this topic:

- *CNN*, "Saudi crown prince blames Iran for Gulf of Oman tanker attacks", 06/16/19, available at: cnn.it/2WKxqnD.
- *Asharq Al-Awsat*, "Mohammed bin Salman to Asharq Al-Awsat: We don't want war but we won't hesitate in dealing with any threat", 06/16/19, available at: bit.ly/2KoPfqz.
- *Le Point*, "Attaques en mer d'Oman: Riyad demande une réponse « décisive »", 06/16/19, available at: bit.ly/2FhyEkt.

[#ArabInsight](#)

[#GulfTensions](#)– Drums of war between the US and Iran? The Arab press perspective



In recent months, mounting tensions between Washington and the Teheran have reinforced fears that the two countries could be hurtling towards conflict. Hours after last week's attack on two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo concluded Iran was responsible for targeting the Norwegian and Japanese-owned ships along the transit route near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. In mid-May, the US accused Teheran of, *inter alia*, a previous strike against four ships off the coast of the UAE, a drone attack on a Saudi pipeline – claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels – and a rocket strike near the American embassy in Baghdad. "Taken as a whole, these unprovoked attacks present a clear threat to international peace and security, a blatant assault on the freedom of navigation and an unacceptable campaign of escalating tension by Iran", Pompeo said. Faced with these allegations, the Islamic Republic denied any role in the aggressions. Yet, the Secretary of State inferred that Teheran was retaliating because of crippling US sanctions which have slashed the country's oil exports and severely affected its economy: "Iran is lashing out because the regime wants our successful maximum pressure campaign lifted". In the meanwhile, the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) declared last Monday that the country will now accelerate uranium enrichment to 3.7%, above the 3.67% mandated by the nuclear deal (JCPOA). Shortly after, US acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan stated that the US will send 1.000 additional forces and military resources to the Middle East, precising that the troop deployment was for "defensive purposes" and citing concerns about Iran and its proxies' threat on the United States' personnel and interests across the region. In this respect, Pompeo and like-minded allies emphasised that the Trump's administration is considering a range of options, including military action. In reaction, President Rouhani affirmed on Tuesday that Teheran "will not wage war against any nation", adding that "the Americans' efforts in the region and (...) their desire to keep Iran secluded have been unsuccessful."

Over the past weeks, Arab newspapers have been widely discussing this volatile situation. It appears that the majority of them exclude the eventuality of a military confrontation between the two international players.

On the 16th of June, in an article titled "Did the war break out in the Sea of Oman"? published on the Egyptian daily *Al-Abram*, the journalist Mustafa Said wrote: "The US forces in the Gulf region are limited compared to the war in Iraq; Iran is way more powerful than Iraq, as it has hundreds of thousands of medium and long-range missiles (...). It is stronger on the ground thanks to its large number of military forces, as well as the presence of allies in more than one country". He pointed out that "A limited air or missile strike, as happened with Syria several times, (...) would be a serious gamble". The writer highlighted that, in case of direct confrontation, Teheran would be "ready to resist", also through to its proxies in the region, i.e. the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, and

ready-made militant cells. Against this background, he underlines that Iranians will not go to negotiations now, nor make concessions for free, because they will seek the removal of sanctions, both nuclear and non-nuclear. At the same time, he dismisses the prospect of an imminent conflict, expecting that the recent declarations by the Trump's administration will not go beyond rhetoric. For its part, *The Independent Arabiya* expressed concern about the way in which the White House is handling the ongoing crisis. Putting on the table the option of a military solution instead of remaining within the limits of diplomatic and economic pressure is seen as a dangerous move: "Everybody understands that the war will be costly and difficult in terms of economic, military, security, and political repercussions. The two sides are continuing to test each other's limits to their patience until direct negotiations", noted Hani Suleiman, political researcher at the Arab Centre for Research and Studies. On the contrary, in his column on the Bahraini daily *Akbbar Al-Khaleej*, Mohamed Mubarak affirmed that the Iranian regime is only a "fragile system that cannot withstand any long-term confrontation with the world's superpower". Similarly, the Saudi commentator Khalid al-Sulaiman, writing for *Okaz*, stresses that Teheran is "facing the abyss" due to its internal situation of "economic bottlenecks". The country holds both "the keys to war and peace". In this context, the US would be only trying to adjust Iran's regional behaviour and expansionist political ideology. However, the Islamic Republic "does not mind standing on the edge of the abyss, at least as long as some concrete action is taken".

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