

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **North Africa**

[#Tunisia](#) – Tunisia bids farewell to President Essebsi and announces early election



On the 27th of July, thousands of people have gathered in the capital Tunis to bid farewell to the country's first democratically elected President, Beji Caïd Essebsi, at a state funeral that was attended by several foreign leaders. Essebsi, who helped guide Tunisia's democratic transition after the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, died aged 92 last Thursday. Appointed as PM after Ben Ali's fall, he founded in 2012 the secular Nidaa Tounes party – now part of the governing coalition with the Islamist party Ennahda – and was elected head of state two years later. Caïd Essebsi was widely perceived as a

unifying figure in Tunisia's fractured political landscape, but ultimately unable to bring prosperity and stability to a country beset by a persistent economic crisis and hit by sporadic terrorist attacks. Hours after his death, Parliament Speaker, Mohamed Ennaceur, became interim president in line with the current constitution. Meanwhile, the electoral commission announced a presidential election for the 15th of September, two months earlier than scheduled.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al-Monitor*, "Tunisian president's death leaves conflicted legacy, unclear future", 07/25/19, available at: [bit.ly/2ZjX2tj](https://bit.ly/2ZjX2tj).
- *Middle East Monitor*, "Tunisia bids farewell to president Essebsi at state funeral", 07/27/19, available at: [bit.ly/2YdItLD](https://bit.ly/2YdItLD).
- *The Arab Weekly*, "Tunisian president's death changes country's political landscape", 07/27/19, available at: [bit.ly/2YefWWn](https://bit.ly/2YefWWn).

## Levant

[#IsraelPalestineConflict](#) – PA's Abbas announces the suspension of all agreements with Israel



Last Thursday, Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), announced the suspension of all agreements signed with the Israeli government. The decision came after an emergency meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), in the aftermath of Israel's demolition of

several Palestinian buildings in Sur Baher village, on the outskirts of East Jerusalem. The two sides have been working together on matters ranging from electricity, water usage, and security. On the latter point, Abbas accused Israel of using security as a pretext to force Palestinians out of the area as part of long-term efforts to expand Jewish settlements. The leader further reiterated PA's rejection of the so-called US-backed "Deal of the Century" peace process. Hamas released a statement on Friday, qualifying Abbas decision as a "step taken in the right direction". Against this background, many commentators notes that PA officials have made similar threats in the past, but a full cancellation of agreements with Israel has never come to fruition.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Eye*, "Mahmoud Abbas says he is suspending all agreements with Israel", 07/25/19, available at: [bit.ly/2YvsbgC](https://bit.ly/2YvsbgC).
- *Al Jazeera*, "PA's Mahmoud Abbas declares suspension of all deals with Israel", 07/26/19, available at: [bit.ly/2MuL0dz](https://bit.ly/2MuL0dz).

## Gulf

[#GulfTensions](#) – Iran blames British plan for a European-led security force in the Gulf as the UK sends warships to protect its vessels



Last week, the UK Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, unveiled a plan for a European-led maritime security force in the Gulf, as a reaction to the seizure by Iran's Revolutionary Guards of two UK-linked

oil tankers in the strategic strait of Hormuz. The Foreign Office said any distinct European-led maritime initiative would not exclude the United States, but work in cooperation with the US naval forces. Yet, he clarified that the country would not join the US in its decision about the withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). Throughout this week, France, Italy, and Denmark gave initial support for the British plan. Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei described the initiative as “provocative” and as conveying an “hostile message”, arguing that any European military fleet in the Persian Gulf would only increase tensions in the region. In the meanwhile, a British warship – a type 45 destroyer HMS Duncan – was dispatched to the Persian Gulf to escort UK tankers. Finally, on the 27th-28th of July, delegates from France, Britain, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran gathered in Vienna for talks aimed at salvaging the JCPOA.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Defense Post*, “Type 45 destroyer HMS Duncan arrives in Persian Gulf to escort UK tankers”, 07/29/19, available at: [bit.ly/2Kcgke9](https://bit.ly/2Kcgke9).
- *Gulf News*, “UK rules out seized tanker swap with Iran”, 07/29/19, available at: [bit.ly/315nvMa](https://bit.ly/315nvMa).
- *The Guardian*, “Iran releases audio of patrol boat warning off Royal Navy ship”, 07/29/19, available at: [bit.ly/2GBPsDz](https://bit.ly/2GBPsDz).

[#ArabInsight](#)

[#Syria](#) – An insight into the US-Turkey relations over the Syrian context



Tensions between two NATO allies, Turkey and the US, has been intensifying in recent weeks, with Ankara threatening to launch a new offensive into Syria and Washington weighing sanctions due to Turkey's purchase of a \$2.5 billion Russian-made missile system. This week, we provide a short insight into the latest development regarding US-Turkish relations and policies *vis-à-vis* the Syrian context, taking a cue from two articles released on the 24th and the 25th of July by, respectively, [BBC Arabic](#) and [Al Jazeera](#).

Early this month, Ankara reportedly sent military reinforcements to the border with north-eastern Syria, seemingly signalling its intention to enter the Kurdish-held territory East of the Euphrates. Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu declared that his country would enter the territory if a so-called “safe zone” is not established. The Turkish government has long been threatening to initiate a military incursion to clear this border area, which is controlled predominantly by Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), i.e. the main component of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighting against the IS. Indeed, Ankara considers these Kurdish militia as a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its Western allies. In an attempt to defuse tensions, the two parties agreed in June 2018 on the establishment of a “safe zone” along the Turkish border in north-eastern Syria. Yet, many observers note that, on this particular point, the so-called Manbij Roadmap has been plagued by a lack of clarity from the very beginning. On the 22nd of July, soon after the revived threats of military incursion, the US Special Envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, visited Ankara for the latest round in the long-running negotiations over the creation of the buffer zone. However, Çavuşoğlu stated on Wednesday that its country was “running out of patience” as Washington appears to be stalling in efforts to seal an agreement. The day before, while discussing a number of issues dividing Turkey and its NATO allies, President Erdoğan was quick to point out that such talks would do little to deter Ankara from attacking the SDF: “Regardless of the result of the meetings with the US [...] we are determined to shatter the terrorist corridor east of the Euphrates River” – he said.

Not only the Turkish President has so far shown little appetite for compromise with regard to Syria, but also to the US sanctions related to the acquisition of four batteries of Russian S-400 air defence systems, that would likely undermine the country's weak economic recovery; moreover, the US recently announced Ankara's ejection from the F-35 fighter jet program. As Erdoğan's policies have become more ambivalent towards the US, Ankara has drawn closer to Moscow for economic support as well as military backing – although Russian and Turkish foreign policy on Syria continues to diverge in spite of the Idlib demilitarisation agreement reached in September 2018 by Putin and Erdoğan.

Finally, several commentators highlight that, to predict Turkey's next move, it is worth considering that the country perceives the void resulting by the collapse of the "caliphate" both as a threat and an opportunity. On the one hand, it provides a room of manoeuvre for Kurdish groups to consolidate their autonomy; on the other it may allow Turkey to assert its strategic intent across the Kurdish-majority regions in Syria, but also in Iraq.

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