

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## North Africa

#Egypt – Egypt voters approve extension to al-Sisi's rule



Last Saturday, Egyptians began voting in a three-day referendum on constitutional changes that may see President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stay in power until 2030. The final results came in on the evening of April 23rd. According to the election commission, voting turnout was 44.3% and 88.8% of those taking part confirmed the amendments. Egypt's Parliament – dominated by members loyal to the President – approved the proposals on Tuesday, with 531 out of 554 votes in favour. The amendments extend presidential term limits to six years, enabling al-Sisi to run for re-election in 2024. They also bolster the

role of the military and expand presidential control over the judiciary. The President's supporters claim that these changes are necessary to give him more time to complete major development projects and economic reforms, while critics argue they will further entrench al-Sisi's authoritarian rule.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Monitor*, "Egypt holds referendum that could keep Sisi in power until 2030", 04/20/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2IWWiFH>.
- *Le Monde*, "En Egypte, un référendum aux allures de vote de confiance pour Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi", 04/22/19, available at: <https://lemde.fr/2UAHCy7>.
- *The Guardian*, "Sisi wins snap Egyptian referendum amid vote-buying claims", 04/23/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2VsO52J>.

## Levant

[#Lebanon](#) – Beirut ready to draw maritime border with Israel under UN supervision



On the 23rd of April, during a meeting with UNIFIL head Major Stefano De Col, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri declared that Beirut is ready to demarcate its maritime borders with Israel through the same procedure used to draw the Blue Line under the supervision of the UN. The move could help settle a long-standing dispute over ownership of a 332 square miles triangular patch of the Mediterranean Sea [marked 4 in the image above]. Recently discovered oil and gas reserves in this area are predicted to generate up to \$600 billion over the next decades. The dispute resurfaced last year,

when Lebanon signed a deal with an international consortium to start exploratory offshore drilling in 2019.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Times of Israel*, “Lebanon ‘ready’ to demarcate maritime border with Israel under UN supervision”, 04/23/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2VlxygU>.
- The Daily Star, “Lebanon ready to mark maritime borders with Israel: Berri”, available at: <http://bit.ly/2Dy3Rpm>.

## Gulf

[#Saudi Arabia](#) [#UAE](#) – Riyadh and Abu Dhabi pledge \$3bn aid to post-Bashir Sudan



Last Sunday, Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced support for Sudanese Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Transitional Military Council he is heading. They also pledged to inject \$500 million into the Sudanese central bank and \$2.5 billion to help provide food, medicine, and petroleum products. The move may give some breathing space to Sudan’s military, which overthrew President Omar al-Bashir on the 11th of April and is currently under pressure from demonstrators, the African Union, and the US to give way to a civilian government. Khartoum plays a key role in the regional interests of Riyadh and its allies, siding with them against Iran and providing troops to the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen. Hours after the Gulf states made the

announcement, protesters gathered outside the capital's military headquarters, rejecting aid offers made by Abu Dhabi and Riyadh.

To know more about this topic:

- *Bloomberg*, “Gulf Powers Promise Sudan \$3 Billion in Latest Bailout for Ally”, 04/21/19, available at: <https://bloom.bg/2PuC9be>.
- *Al Jazeera*, “Sudan protesters to Saudi Arabia, UAE: ‘Please keep your money’”, 04/22/19, available at: <http://bit.ly/2DrDryY>.

## #ArabInsight

#DealOfTheCentury – An insight into the still-unveiled US-sponsored plan for Israel-Palestine peace settlement



In recent days, media speculation continues to surround the US-sponsored peace plan to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the 21st of April, the Jordanian newspaper *Al Ra'i* published an article titled “The secrecy around the ‘Deal of the Century’”, where the author analyses the expected content of the plan and its foreseeable impact on the regional scenario.

According to the latest news, the details of the long-awaited peace-package will not be released before the end of Ramadan, in early June, after more than two years of effort by Donald Trump's adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner. For the time being, little is known about the forthcoming proposal. Last

Friday, a senior White House official affirmed that the plan “is fair, realistic, and implementable [and] will enable people to live better lives. Yet, as reported by the *Washington Post* and reminded by the author, the deal presumably excludes a two-state solution. In recent declarations, Kushner has linked peace and economic development to Arab recognition of Israel, as well as to the acknowledgement of a version of the *status quo* entailing Palestinian “autonomy”, as opposed to “sovereignty”. Moreover, the deal is expected to focus heavily on Israel’s security interests. Indeed, the proposal should be considered against the background of Netanyahu’s increasingly close relationship with Trump, who is seemingly overturning decades of US foreign policy in the peace process. Most notably, he recognised Jerusalem Israel’s capital in 2017; cut assistance funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in September 2018; and, at the end of March, declared Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, captured from Syria in 1967. As the author points out, this latter move sets a precedent which would apply to the West Bank as well. Therefore, the delay in releasing the “Deal of the Century” would be due to Trump’s desire to wait for Netanyahu to form a new coalition government after the April 9th elections.

The newly appointed Palestinian Authority PM Mohammad Shtayyeh has argued that the deal is doomed to failure, as “there are no partners in Palestine for Trump. There are no Arab partners, nor European ones”. On this last point, the EU has rejected the idea of Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank soon after Netanyahu promised earlier this month that his future administration would annex portions of Area C. On the 15th of April, HR/VP Federica Mogherini insisted on the importance of keeping the two-state perspectives alive, affirming that any peace plan must be based on the pre-1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps and the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of the two-states. As far as the Arab countries are concerned, the author of the article stresses on their less unified – and sometimes ambiguous – stance. Last Sunday, the Arab League (AL) held an extraordinary meeting in Cairo, where it unanimously condemned any peace proposal “which does not respect the rights of the Palestinian people”. Yet, as [previously discussed](#), some AL nations – especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt – are likely to be interested in the ‘Deal of the Century’ and are currently blamed by Fatah officials for exerting pressure on regional countries and Palestinians to accept the US-backed peace plan.

[The article is available in Arabic at the following link: <http://bit.ly/2vjmb0o>]

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

