

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Tunisia - Rached Ghannouchi Elected as New Parliament Speaker



On Wednesday 13th of November, the leader of Tunisian Islamist party Ennahdha was appointed speaker of the country's new Parliament. He was elected with 123 votes out of a possible 217 in a strongly divided House and fundamental for his entrustment has been the support of Nabil Karoui's party Heart of Tunisia. Both parties had in fact previously ruled out the possibility of entering into coalition presenting themselves as ideological rivals.

Notably, Ennahdha won last month's election obtaining only 52 seats out of the 109 required to form a majority. In this context, the election of Rached Ghannouchi suggests that his party may still have the

chance to gather enough support across Tunisia's fractured political scene to build a governing coalition.

Ennahda, as the biggest party in parliament, will have to indicate its candidate for the post of Prime Minister by Friday. At that point the nominee will have two months to form a coalition government.

To know more about this topic:

- *Reuters*, Tunisia's parliament picks moderate Islamist party leader as speaker. 13/11/19: reut.rs/32IwUtj
- *Al Arabiya*, Tunisia's divided parliament attempts to choose a speaker. 13/11/19: bit.ly/2QeeGxk
- *Le Monde Afrique*, Au Parlement tunisien, une victoire en demi-teinte pour le parti islamo-conservateur Ennahda. 14/11/19: bit.ly/2NJKb0t
- *Human Rights Watch*, Tunisia: New Parliament's Rights Priorities. 13/11/19: bit.ly/2NLdPCp

Levant

#Gaza - Senior Islamic Jihad Commander Killed by Israeli Air Force



On Tuesday 12th of November, Israel launched airstrikes targeting Islamic Jihad positions in Gaza strip and killing Baha Abu al-Ata, a Palestinian senior commander of the Movement.

The move triggered an intense fighting for the first time in weeks, with Islamic Jihad launching dozens of rockets towards Israel, which, in turn, used fighter jets to bomb facilities belonging to Movement.

Islamic Jihad is Gaza's second most powerful group and has an on-off alliance with Hamas. However, the fact that, until now, Israel and Hamas have avoided a direct military confrontation has been read as a way for the two sides to prevent a dangerous escalation of the conflict.

Gilad Erdan, Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs, said that the country keeps holding Hamas responsible for all violence emanating from Gaza, but he confirmed that the focus of Israeli attacks, for now, is on Islamic Jihad.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, Israel strikes on Islamic Jihad chiefs prompt reprisal rocket attacks. 12/11/19: bit.ly/2qRVSt0
- *New York Times*, As Islamic Jihad and Israel Battled, Hamas, in a Twist, Sat on the Side lines. 13/11/19: nyti.ms/377z8pq
- *BBC News*, Rockets fired at Israel after Gaza ceasefire starts. 14/11/19: bbc.in/2CFcIOS

Gulf

#Yemen – Saudi Arabia and Houthi Rebels Are Holding Indirect Talks in Oman



In the first week of November a peace deal was signed in Riyadh by the internationally backed government of Yemen and a southern separatist group supported by the UAE. On Sunday 10th of November, hoping to find a broader settlement, Anwar Gargash, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, declared that: "[An agreement must take account of the legitimate aspirations of all parts of Yemeni society. That includes the Houthis](#)".

Following Mr. Gargash's declaration, news came out this week that indirect talks between Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Houthi rebels are taking place in Oman. Officials from both sides, speaking under the condition of anonymity, confirmed the existence of such talks, which are likely to have begun in September after a Houthi-claimed drone struck a key crude processing plant in Saudi Arabia.

Most analysts are reading the unfolding events as a sign of potential future advances towards the achievement of a wider political solution that could end years of war.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Saudi, Yemen's Houthis hold 'indirect talks' in Oman to end war. 13/11/19: bit.ly/33NrP4f
- *The Arab Weekly*, Riyadh agreement extends scope of Yemen settlement to include Houthis. 10/11/19: bit.ly/2QtTzY7
- *Bloomberg Opinion*, Yemen Gets a Rare Shot at Peace. 13/11/19: bloom.bg/2CI0TqX
- *The New York Times*, Yemen's Government Signs Peace Deal with Southern Rebels. 5/11/19: nyti.ms/2OaxDON

#ArabInsight

By [Elena Tosti Di Stefano](#)

#IsraelGaza – What's behind Israeli strikes against Islamic Jihad? A glimpse into the Arab press



During the past few days, the Arab press has paid particular attention to Israeli assassination of senior Islamic Jihad leader Baha Abu al-Ata in the Gaza Strip (*v. supra*). An analysis of Arab newspapers and

online information platforms shows that Arab pundits and commentators have mainly adopted two stances regarding the reasons behind Tel Aviv's decision to launch military attacks against Islamic Jihad.

First, several newspapers expressed fears that such a move could lead to a “new, serious escalation in the Gaza Strip”, subsequently resulting in a “full-scale confrontation” – as written by [Al-Arab](#). “The Palestinian street in Gaza and the West Bank is in a ‘state of boiling’ after the attacks”, said the electronic daily [Rai Al-Youm](#), citing sources in the Gaza Strip. The editorial suggests that “the escalating situation may continue and eventually lead to a long war”, adding that “we do not know exactly whether Hamas will join the *jihad*” and, if it does, the ensuing conflict “will cause huge human and material losses”. [Al-Quds Al-Arabi](#) argues that, in the past, the choice to eliminate individual Palestinian militant leaders “did not achieve any of Israel’s objectives of deterrence”. The article refers to Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, co-founders of Hamas, killed in 2004, noting that after these assassinations “the resistance factions regained the initiative quickly and better”, as “open violence generates resilience and a desire to honour and avenge the martyrs”.

On the other hand, some newspapers appear to agree that the Israeli move was an attempt by PM Benjamin Netanyahu to “buy time in order to thwart Benny Gantz in forming his executive or pushing him to create a government of national unity” – as asserted by Ali Abu Haleb in the Jordanian [Addustour](#). In a similar vein, Mohammed Harroub, writing on [Al-Rai](#), stated that “the atmosphere of war imposed by Netanyahu and his faction on the Gaza Strip [...] serves him politically”. Both Haleb and Harroub emphasise that the longest-serving Prime Minister in Israel’s history finds himself in the most intricate political situation he has ever faced, not least because of his corruption indictment. Most notably, after his second, consecutive failure to form a government, the mandate was passed to his rival Gantz, leader of the Blue and White alliance, who has until the end of next week to accomplish the task. Considering that the option of a third-round of elections is widely discredited by the public opinion, he has two alternatives left: forming a minority government relying on Arab parties for support; or a unity government, almost certainly led first by Netanyahu. In this respect, the Palestinian newspaper [Alquds](#) argues that Netanyahu’s objective was to disrupt Gantz’s political talks with the Arab Joint List to prevent the prospect of a minority government. In recent weeks, current PM has repeatedly insisted on the need for Israel to have a unity government to counter the security challenges facing the country. The targeting killing of al-Ata and consequent retaliation represent one of these challenges, and Gantz was seemingly left with no option but to offer his support.

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