

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya – As Civil War Continues, US Air Strikes Target ISIS Militants in the South of the Country



Last week, US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper confirmed that, in late September, the United States conducted at least four airstrikes against ISIS operatives in southern Libya.

According to estimates made by US intelligence, the US Air Force drone attacks supposedly killed 43 militants, accounting for approximately one third of the ISIS fighters active in the country.

Notably, a senior defence official, speaking under condition of anonymity, affirmed there was “[a pretty significant degradation of their capabilities and, again, they struggle to reconstitute because of the nature of the operatives who were killed in this strike](#)”.

The news came out while the civil war continues to plague the country, with the latest air strikes being conducted on Tuesday 19th by General Haftar’s forces. The attacks targeted the port city of Misrata, hitting an ammunition deposit and armoured vehicles just delivered from Turkey. Besides, another strike had been carried out by Eastern Libyan forces against a biscuit factory near Tripoli the day before, Monday 18th, killing at least 10 people.

To know more about this topic:

- *New York Times*, U.S. Drone Strikes Stymie ISIS in Southern Libya. 18/11/19: [nyti.ms/2XEUKVZ](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/middleeast/libya-drones-isis.html)
- *Military Times*, Esper says US forces combating ISIS in Libya ‘continue to mow the lawn. 14/11/19: [bit.ly/2s0pS6t](https://www.militarytimes.com/2019/11/14/us-forces-combating-isis-in-libya/)
- *Reuters*, East Libyan forces target munitions in Misrata with air strikes. 19/11/19: [reut.rs/349RpR5](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-air-strikes-idUSKBN1Z1005)
- *France 24*, UN envoy slams foreign interference, air strikes in Libya. 18/11/19: [bit.ly/2QOEYqn](https://www.france24.com/en/libya/20191118-un-envoy-slams-foreign-interference-air-strikes-in-libya)

Levant

#Palestine – US Secretary of State Declares that Israeli Settlements in the West Bank are no Longer Considered Illegal



On Monday, 18th of November, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that the United States does not consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank as violating international norms. The decision took by the Trump administration marks a stark reversal of four decades of US policy.

Pompeo affirmed that “[Calling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law has not worked. It has not advanced the cause of peace.](#)” The decision was hailed by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, when he said that it was “[an achievement that will stand for generations.](#)”

On the other hand, according to a Palestinian Presidential spokesman’s, the US is “[not qualified or authorised to cancel the resolutions of international law, and has no right to grant legality to any Israeli settlement](#)”.

Through its Secretary General, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Arab League supported the Palestinian position and condemned the American decision, fearing that it will undermine the possibility of achieving peace in the region.

To know more about this topic:

- *New York Times*, In Shift, U.S. Says Israeli Settlements in West Bank Do Not Violate International Law. 18/11/19: [nyti.ms/2KKPuLo](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/middleeast/israeli-settlements.html)
- *The Guardian*, US says Israeli settlements no longer considered illegal in dramatic shift. 18/11/19: [bit.ly/2rdKoQK](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/18/us-says-israeli-settlements-no-longer-considered-illegal)
- *Al Jazeera*, Analysis: US settlement move, a Palestinian leadership failure. 20/11/19: [bit.ly/2QLfYQq](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/20/us-settlement-move-palestinian-leadership-failure)
- *Reuters*, Trump shift on Israeli settlements fulfils wish list of evangelical base. 19/11/19: [reut.rs/37oWgA1](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-settlements/trump-shift-on-israeli-settlements-fulfils-wish-list-of-evangelical-base-idUSKBN191001)

Gulf

#Yemen – Houthi Rebels Released South Korean and Saudi Ships



On Sunday, 17th of November, two South Korean and a Saudi-flagged vessels, together with their sixteen crew members, were seized by armed Houthis in the Red Sea near the island of Uqban and then taken to the port of Salif. Three days later, on Wednesday, 20th of November, the sixteen crew members held captive have been freed.

A spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition defined the ships' seizure as a "[terrorist operation](#)" that could endanger world trade and international navigation.

Even though Houthi forces have been driven away from most of Yemen's coast in the past years, they are still holding Hodeidah, the biggest Yemeni port in the Red Sea, and using it as the main base for their maritime incursions.

The seizure of the vessels and their subsequent release follow [last week's news of a peace deal](#) signed by Saudi Arabia and the southern rebels that permitted, this Monday, the return of Yemen's internationally recognised government to the city of Aden.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Yemen's Houthis release captured South Korean, Saudi vessels. 20/11/19: bit.ly/2qCdo4P
- *The Guardian*, Yemen's Houthi rebels hijack towboat with apparent Saudi link. 18/11/19: bit.ly/2pzE6dI

- CNN, Yemen's Houthi rebels seize Saudi Arabian ship in Red Sea. 19/11/19: cnn.it/2QzQFRw
- *The Maritime Executive*, Houthi Rebels Hijack Saudi Tug. 18/11/19: bit.ly/2Xxdhnd

* Related to this topic, we point out our Gulf Analyst Eleonora Ardemagni's latest publication, *The Hutis: Adaptable Players in Yemen's Multiple Geographies* (CRiSSMA, [Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore](http://Universita%20Cattolica%20del%20Sacro%20Cuore), 2019).

#ArabInsight

By [Elena Tosti Di Stefano](#)

#Tunisia – Is Ennahda facing a “political test”? A look into the Arab press



On the 15th of November, Tunisia's recently elected President Kais Saied has tasked Habib Jemli with forming the new government after the moderate Islamist party Ennahda (“Renaissance”) nominated him for the Prime Minister's position. Jemli, who describes himself as an independent, served as junior minister in the first Ennahda-led government established in late 2011 after the fall of Ben Ali's regime. He has two months to find a coalition out of a deeply fractured Parliament in which Ennahda emerged as the largest party in the October 6th elections, winning 52 of the 217 legislative seats. Jemli's appointment followed the election of the Renaissance movement's leader, Rached Ghannouchi, as speaker of the Parliament after the second-ranked Qalb Tounes (“Heart of Tunisia”) – led by scandal-spattered media magnate Nabil Karoui – unexpectedly backed him, opening the way for a possible

coalition government between the two parties. During the past few days, the Arab press has discussed at length both Ghannouchi's and Jemli's nominations, particularly in relation to the rising role of Ennahda in the Tunisian political scene.

Several newspapers and online information platforms have underlined that Ennahda and Qalb Tounes had previously presented themselves as ideological rivals and fiercely ruled out entering into coalition. In this respect, Ghannouchi declared that "Only a fool does not change". In an article published on the Tunisian news website *Kapitalis*, political analyst Fawzi Ben Younes Ben Hadid noticed that "an atmosphere of chaos prevailed during the first session of the new Tunisian Parliament" after the election of Ennahda's leader as its speaker. He underlines that the unexpected alliance "does not benefit the Tunisian people who were waiting for free and fair parliamentary elections in order to appoint a speaker by consensus between parties, not by holding lengthy calculations and prioritising personal over public interest". The author argued that, while the Renaissance Party had repeatedly manifested its refusal to ally with "the corrupts" – i.e. the Heart of Tunisia and the Free Constitutional Party – it ended up siding with the former. Ennahda "will have a direct confrontation with the citizens who do not accept this farce" – he added – because "Tunisia is on the verge of a new youth uprising". On the contrary, Bahraini journalist Abdullah al-Ayoubi, writing on *Akhhbar Al Khaleej*, asserted that "Ennahda's political ambition to head the next Tunisian government remains as legitimate as the ambition of any of the other Tunisian parties involved in the political process, with all their ideological orientations [...]. The only condition to keep such differences within the framework of legitimate competition is to abide by the Tunisian Constitution and to respect popular will". Likewise, writer Ali Qasim told *Al-Arab* that "the last-minute consensus recalled the policy of consensus adopted by [the secular n.d.r.] Nidaa Tounes ["Call of Tunisia" n.d.r.] and the Renaissance Party since 2014". Indeed, Ennahda's leader "has simply observed the rules of the game – not only the political, but also the democratic game". Anyhow, Ghannouchi is not only a "puzzling figure, but also a Machiavellian leader".

In analysing the reasons behind Ennahda's pragmatist stand, *AlJazeera* highlights that pragmatism and determination have been the main elements of the party's approach since 2011, saying this attitude makes perfect sense in light of the harsh political repression they have faced during Ben Ali's era and the unique window of opportunity opened by the Jasmine Revolution.

Arab pundits and commentators widely agree that Ennahda is facing a "political test". In his op-ed on *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, Salem Labiadh stressed that in forming his government, Habib Jemli is confronted with significant obstacles [...] related to the sharp political contradictions between the winning political parties within the Parliament, which are divided over many ideological backgrounds, [namely] Islamist, national, constitutional, liberal, and pragmatic". Moreover, if the Prime Minister-designate manages to

form a new executive, “he will find himself facing a more exhausting confrontation than the one of political parties, this time linked to the law on finance and the state budget”, i.e. reforms started by the outgoing PM Youssef Chahed aimed to reduce the country’s heavy deficit and public debt. As concluded by *Abdullah al-Ayoubi*, “Water alone will reveal whether Ghannouchi [and his party n.d.r] are good at swimming in the sea of politics or will be swept away by its current”.

As a general disclaimer, the articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation