

# ARAB DISPATCH

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**North Africa**

**#Tunisia – President Saied has appointed the new Prime Minister**



*Source: Jordan Times*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, Kais Saied, President of Tunisia, has appointed the Minister of Interior, Hichem Meshishi, as the new Prime Minister to succeed Elyes Fakhfakh. The new designated Prime Minister has not been chosen among the list of candidates proposed by the parties to the President, but was appointed as an independent candidate.

After the internal political crisis, that led the former PM Elyes Fakhfakh to submit his resignation, President Saied by ignoring the candidates proposed by the parties and parliament groups delivered a strong message with a tacit warning to the political establishment to put finally an end to internal strife.

Meshishi will have to form the country's new government within one month and to put it to a parliamentary vote of confidence. In case of rejection by the parties, the parliament will be dissolved and new elections will be held within three months.

The parties have already expressed their appreciation to the new designated PM.

Ennahda, the Islamist party and the largest bloc in the Parliament, has stated that the party has no reservations regarding Meshishi, however, the movement is expecting the new Prime Minister to form a government of national unity that will include as many parties as possible including Ennahda and its allies: Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia) and Intilaf al-Karama (Dignity Coalition).

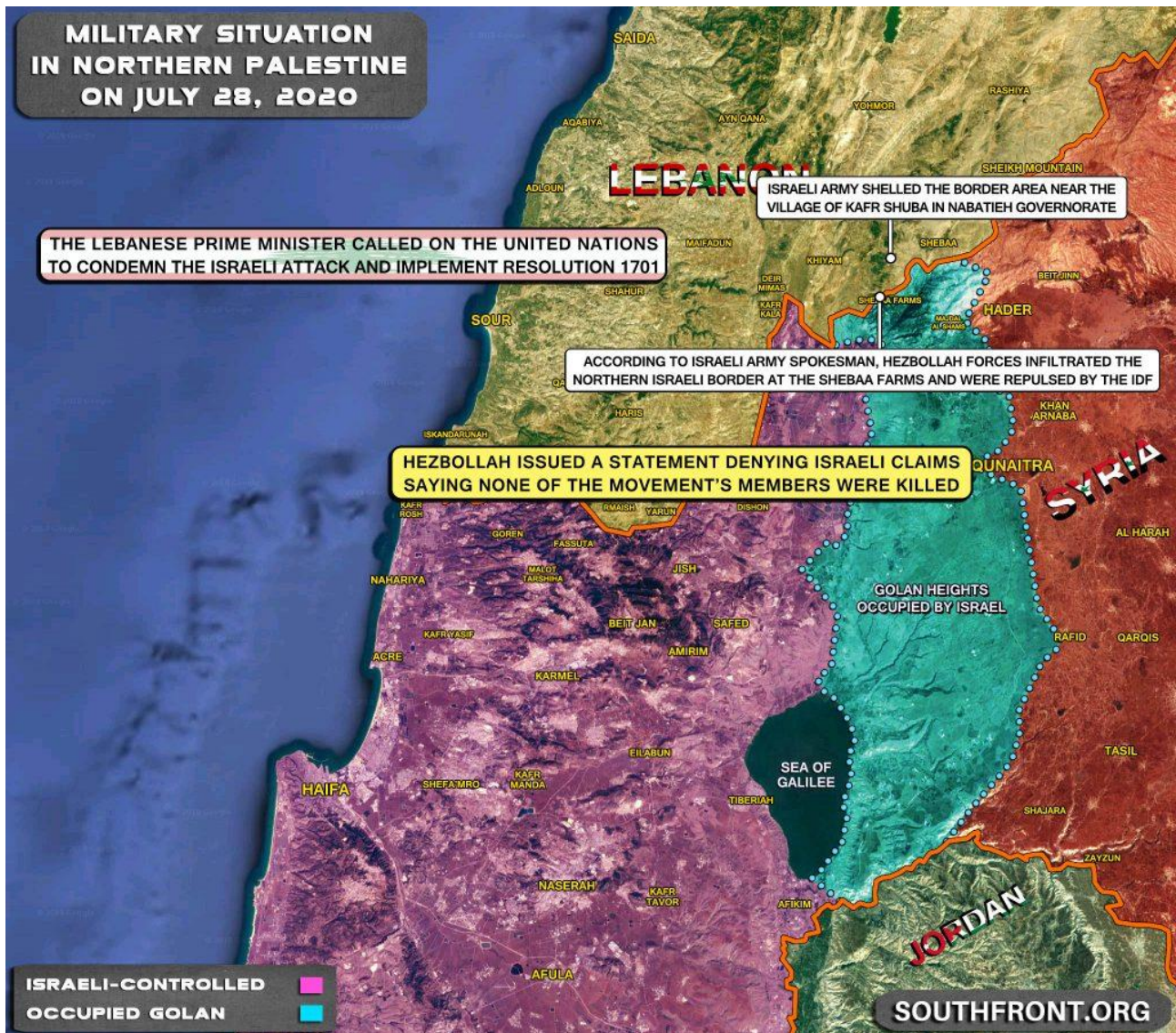
Although Ennahda lost its chance to have one of its candidates appointed as PM, the movement will most likely give its vote of confidence to Meshishi, in order to avoid early elections that might weaken even further its position and, therefore, the Islamists' influence in the government. The late dispute with the former Prime Minister that led to a political crisis and the latest accusations of being linked to detained terrorists made by Abir Moussi, leader of the Free Doustourian Party, have impacted negatively on the Islamist party that is now losing popular support.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *The Middle East Eye*, Hichem Mechichi named as Tunisia's new PM designate, 25/07/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hichem-mechichi-announced-tunisias-new-pm-designate>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Ennahda puts a good face on new PM designation, 27/07/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/ennahda-puts-good-face-new-pm-designation>
- *Al Jazeera*, Tunisia interior minister named new PM, to form gov't in a month, 26/07/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/tunisia-interior-minister-named-pm-form-gov-month-200726054338363.html>
- *Arab News*, Tunisian MP says Ennahda party has links to terrorism, 15/06/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1690131/middle-east>

# Levant

## #Lebanon – Israel’s decision to reinforce the country’s northern border



Source: *SouthFront.org*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, Israel announced its intention to reinforce the country’s northern border given the tension with the Iran-backed Lebanese militia, Hezbollah.

The decision has been taken after Hezbollah has threatened Israel to retaliate over the death of a militant during a strike occurred on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July near the airport of Damascus and attributed to Israel.

Since last August 2019, when two Hezbollah militants died in Syria under an attack carried out by Israel, Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Shia Movement, promised to retaliate for any fighter's death attributed to Israel and to respond actively to any threat against the group.

Hezbollah, together with Iran has widely supported the Syrian regime with military equipment and troops, while Israel fears Iran's growing influence in the region. The Syrian president, Bashar al Assad, and Hezbollah have accused Israel to have launched in the past two months at least eight air strikes against Tehran's military presence in Syria, while Israel pointed out that Iran is building a military base near the Golan Heights, threatening Israel's national security.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Al Arabiya*, Israel reinforces Lebanon border after Hezbollah threatens retaliation, 23/07/20, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/07/23/Israel-reinforces-Lebanon-border-after-Hezbollah-threatens-retaliation>
- *Arab News*, Israel reinforces Lebanon border after Hezbollah threats, 23/07/20, available at: [https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article\\_22453/](https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_22453/)
- *Daily Sabah*, Israel bolsters troops on Lebanon border as tensions with Hezbollah grow, 23/07/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/israel-bolsters-troops-on-lebanon-border-as-tensions-with-hezbollah-grow>
- *Israel Hayom*, Syria: 5 killed in alleged Israeli airstrikes on Iranian targets in Damascus, 21/07/20, available at: <https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/07/21/syria-5-killed-in-alleged-israeli-airstrikes-on-iranian-targets-in-damascus/>

## Gulf

### #Qatar – Doha and Ankara to enhance bilateral cooperation in Libya



*Source: Al Jazeera*

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, the Libyan Prime Minister Fayeza al-Sarraj and the Qatari Foreign Minister Muhammad bin Abdurrahman al-Thani met in Istanbul to strengthen bilateral cooperation between the two countries in order to find a political solution to the Libyan civil war.

The GNA is moving towards the strategic city of Sirte and Turkey is now asking for military support to Qatar, its ally in the region.

Since Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, warned that advances by Turkey-backed Libyan forces on the strategic city of Sirte could prompt an Egyptian military intervention in the neighbouring country, Doha and Ankara have been discussing the importance of strengthening their partnership in the Libyan civil war.

Qatar, together with Turkey, will support the Government of National Accord, by recruiting apparently more than 2.000 Somali mercenaries to fight against the Libyan National Army.

Qatar that, after the 2017 ban has been isolated by the GCC countries, has found in Turkey a strong ally to counterbalance the Saudi-led coalition.

The Qatar-Turkey alliance was established in 2015, with the set-up of the “Khalid bin Walid.” Turkish military base in Qatar and has expanded after the 2017 Qatar crisis, during which the GCC countries placed Qatar under political and commercial embargo, for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and for having contacts with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE has repeatedly asked Qatar to close the Turkish military base and to end the joint military training in the country, strongly criticizing the relationship between the Turkish party AKP with the Muslim Brotherhood.

During the Qatar diplomatic crisis, Ankara and Doha have considerably intensified their military and economic cooperation. Qatar has widely supported Turkey in the war in Syrian and in Libya. The two countries have become close regional allies creating a solid liaison in a geostrategic competition with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Al Arabiya*, Turkey, Qatar recruit thousands of Somali mercenaries to fight in Libya: Report, 25/07/20, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2020/07/25/Turkey-Qatar-recruit-thousands-of-Somali-mercenaries-to-fight-in-Libya-Report>
- *IAI*, The New Turn in Turkey’s Foreign Policy in the Middle East, 07/20, available at: <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2017.pdf>
- *The Defense Post*, Egypt’s Sisi Says Turkey/Qatar-Backed Assault on Libya’s Sirte Is ‘Red Line’, 21/06/20, available at: <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/06/21/egypt-sisi-libya-turkey-sirte/>
- *Ahval news*, Turkey, Qatari ministers meet as Egypt parliament approves Libya incursion, 21/07/20, available at: <https://ahvalnews.com/qatar-turkey/turkey-qatari-ministers-meet-egypt-parliament-approves-libya-incursion>

## #ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

### #Turkey – What is behind Erdogan’s decision to convert Hagia Sophia?



*Source: Israel Hayom*

At the beginning of July, the Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan, has announced the re-conversion of the historic building and museum, Hagia Sophia, back into a mosque.

By transferring the management of the Museum of Hagia Sophia, from the Ministry of Culture to the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Erdogan, has formalized his intention to convert the Museum into a mosque. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, Hagia Sophia mosque, has hosted its first Joumaa prayer (Friday prayer).

The 1.500 years old World Heritage Site, built as a cathedral during the Byzantine Empire under Emperor Justinian, has been converted into a mosque in 1453, by Sultan Mehmet II, commonly known as Mehmet Fatih (Mehmet the Conqueror), after the conquest of the city of Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1931, the mosque has been transformed into a museum by Gazi Mustafa Kemal “Atatürk”, founder of the Turkish Republic.

Erdogan's decision, obviously discussed in the international community, has indeed many-side meanings.

As reported from Al-Quds on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, many observers in Turkey believe that Erdogan's decision to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque is a political move to reaffirm his position that is wavering after two decades of leadership due to a severe economic crisis.

The Gelecek party (Future party), that strongly criticizes the AKP government, has stated that this gesture is only a cosmetic move to cover up the government's political failures. When the political establishment loses popular support, a new narrative based on Islamic values needs to be created, in order to galvanise religious feelings of Turkish people and to cover up the lack of a real political agenda.

The opening of the Hagia Sophia mosque should divert citizens' attention from a rather precarious political and economic position of the country, not to mention the wars in Syria and Libya, and the persistent Kurdish issue.

Moreover, as pointed out by several newspapers, this transformation reflects the ambition to advance Turkish Muslim hegemony over the Muslim world by recalling the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire. In more than one occasion, the President has recalled on the deeds of Sultan Mehmet and the Ottoman roots of Turkey.

Even the use inside the mosque of Ottoman Turkish language, instead of the current Turkish one, has not gone unnoticed. The name of the mosque inside the building has been written in Arabic letters, the alphabet used during the Ottoman Empire, and abandoned at the behest of Kemal Atatürk after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

The use of Arabic letters has been seen by many as a strong recall to the Ottoman past of the country, especially after the son of the President, Bilal Erdogan, and the Head of the Religious Affairs Authority, Dr Ali Arbash, had publicly blamed Atatürk for abandoning the Ottoman traditions and Islamic culture.

*Sources:*

- *Asbarq al-Ansat*, <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2415486/-غضب-في-تركيا-بعد-الهجوم-على-اتاتورك-في-افتتاح-آيا-صوفيا> (Indignation after the attack on Ataturk at the opening of Hagia Sophia)



- *Al-Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2020/7/13/-عودة-آيا-صوفيا-مسجد-ار-دود-فعل-جديدة-من> (The return of the Hagia Sophia mosque: reactions from Jerusalem, Berlin, Moscow and the Vatican)
- *Al-Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2020/7/12/أردوغان-آيا-صوفيا/> (Erdogan on the opening of the Hagia Sophia to pray: We did not care what others say)
- *Al-Quds*, <https://www.alquds.co.uk/أردوغان-يحذر-من-التهاون-مع-خطابات-معاد/> (Opening of Hagia Sophia to Muslims is a sovereign right that meets the will of the people)
- *Al-Ain al-Ekbbariya*, <https://al-ain.com/article/turkish-dissident-reveals-regime-hagia-sophia> (The Turkish scenario reveals Erdogan's plans behind Hagia Sophia)

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