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North Africa

#Libya – US Ambassador in Libya proposes a new demilitarisation



Source: Asharq Al-Awsat

On the 12th of August the US Embassy in Libya announced new consultations between the US Ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, and Turkish officials regarding a future demilitarised solution to the Libyan civil war. During his visit to Ankara, the Ambassador discussed the need to a return to a UN-facilitated political dialogue and a possible demilitarisation of Sirte and Al-Joufra.

Yet, on the 10th of August, Ambassador Norland met in Cairo with Aguila Saleh, Head of the Libyan parliament that recognises the authority of the Libyan National Army (LNA). They discussed the intention to transform the city of Sirte from the centre of tensions between the GNA and the LNA forces into a new administrative city under a new authority. Aguila Saleh's proposal to transform Sirte into the headquarters of a new authority in Libya aims at eliminating Turkey's military presence and expelling the pro-GNA militias from the country.

The US Ambassador expressed his support for Saleh's proposal and "for a Libyan solution to end the conflict and ensure a stable and prosperous future for the Libyan people".

The US Embassy in Libya stated on Monday that Norland has arrived in Cairo following consultations between Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi and his US counterpart Donald Trump on steps needed to achieve a lasting ceasefire in the Libyan civil war, a full withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the country, and an UN-facilitated political dialogue.

Washington is pushing for these solutions in order to resume the oil production of the area and to restart the Libya economy.

To know more about this topic:

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- *Al Ahram online*, Diplomatic efforts for Libya, 11/08/20, available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1201/376509/AlAhram-Weekly/Egypt/Diplomatic-efforts-for-Libya.aspx>
- *Asbarq al-Awsat*, Libyan-American Meeting Discusses Solution that Excludes Turkey, 12/08/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2443561/libyan-american-meeting-discusses-solution-excludes-turkey>
- *The Libya Observer*, US ambassador discusses in Turkey demilitarized solution for Libya's conflict, 12/08/20, available at: <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/us-ambassador-discusses-turkey-demilitarized-solution-libyas-conflict>

Levant

#Lebanon – Prime Minister Hassan Diab steps back after port disaster



Sources: Reuters

On the 10th of August, almost a week after the devastating explosion that hit Beirut and the following massive protests, the Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab, submitted his resignation to President Michel Aoun.

Only two days before the Prime Minister offered to keep his position for other two months in order to work on possible reforms. On that occasion, the Christian Democratic Party, Kata'ib, that firmly opposes the Hezbollah-backed government, announced as well the resignation of three of its parliamentarians.

Mr Diab resignation followed the ones of the Minister of Information, Manal Abdel Samad, and of the Environment Minister Damianos Kattar and the Justice Minister Marie Claude Najm.

The former Premier stated that the endemic corruption among the political class is “*bigger than the state*” thus, he decided to “*fight the battle for a change alongside the Lebanese people*”. President Aoun accepted his resignation but asked the government to stay on until a new one is formed.

Diab’s Government, formed last October, with the support of Hezbollah militant group, after Saad Hariri’s resignation, was expected to bring together technocrats to find solutions and implement reforms to the acute economic crisis and the financial collapse of the country; however, it failed in its duties due to the discord among influential political forces that are ruling the country.

For the Lebanese people, Beirut’s blast represents a turning point of a protracted crisis. The explosion of 2.750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, stored without precautions at the Beirut port for seven years, has exacerbated the economic and political crisis in the country showing even further the negligence of the system.

President Michel Aoun called for an investigation site to determinate the authorities responsible for the explosion. However, both Aoun and Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, have rejected an international investigation on what has happened with the leader of the Shia militant group pushing for an investigation committee “*preferably from the army*”. This move made many Lebanese think that this is a clear attempt to cover up evidence.

As reported by *The Arab Weekly*, the port area is known to be under the control of Hezbollah, that apparently has weapons stored in the warehouses. Lebanese authorities in charge at the port are prohibited from intercepting and checking on cargos destined to the group.

Protesters are lashing out at the entire political establishment and they will not be satisfied by the Government’s resignation, however with a strong ally like Hezbollah, the most influential political force in Lebanon, it will be difficult to achieve another outcome.

Lebanese political circles and the international community donors led by France are asking for the constitution of a new government with highly qualified technocrats. It is still not clear the role that Hezbollah will have in the new government and which will be the reaction of Iran to this decision.

According to the donor summit led by France, international donors have pledged about 300 million dollars in financial aid for Lebanon, urging for major comprehensive reforms. The French President Macron, who was the first international leader to visit Beirut straight after the catastrophic explosion,

promised international support for the country and underlined that emergency aid will be delivered directly to Lebanese people with utmost efficiency and transparency.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Nasrallah, Aoun reject international investigation of Beirut blast, 08/08/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/nasrallah-aoun-reject-international-investigation-beirut-blast>
- *Daily Sabah*, Countries pledge nearly \$300 M aid for Lebanon in wake of devastating Beirut explosion, 09/08/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/countries-pledge-nearly-300m-aid-for-lebanon-in-wake-of-devastating-beirut-explosion>
- *BBC*, Beirut explosion: Donors pledge aid for Lebanon but want reform, 09/08/20, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53710556>
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- *Asbāq Al-Awsat*, Lebanese demand change after government quits over Beirut blast, 11/08/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2441911/lebanese-demand-change-after-government-quits-over-beirut-blast>

Gulf

#Iraq – Teheran puts pressure on al-Kadhimi's upcoming visit to Washington



Source: *The Times*

As reported from *The Arab Weekly* on the 10th of August, the Islamic Republic of Iran is exerting pressure on the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, ahead of his visit to Washington scheduled on the 20th of August as part of his foreign tour.

Al-Kadhimi, who hopes to mediate between the United States, Iran and Saudi Arabia, as his predecessor tried fruitlessly, has already visited Tehran and Riyadh to discuss a possible reconciliation between the two rivals. Now he is expected to visit the White House and to meet President Donald Trump to tackle the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and to discuss Iraqi economy which is on the brink.

This visit represents the second round of high-level talks between Iraq and the United States. At the beginning of June, a first round of talks has been held online and ended with an agreement. The Agreement establishes that the United States will reduce the presence of its troops on the Iraqi soil. As reported by *The Middle East Monitor* today there are 5.000 American troops deployed in Iraq under the US-led international coalition to fight against Daesh.

Al-Kadhimi, the first Iraqi Prime Minister to visit the US in the past three years, seems to be appreciated by the White House that, indeed, has never invited his predecessor because of his strong ties with Iran.

Iran has shown willingness to open a dialogue with Saudi Arabia but has strongly rejected the strategic talks tabled by the Iraqi Prime Minister with the White House. The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said to Al-Kadhimi during his last visit to Tehran that the Islamic Republic stands beside Iraq in the battle against Daesh and in the creation of a stable country. However, he also strongly condemned the US for the killing of General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad last January and for the consistent presence of US troops in Iraq.

Now that the Prime Minister's visit to Washington is approaching, Iran is putting as much pressure on the Premier as possible even by mobilising its allies in Iraq. In a public speech, the leader of the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq Iraqi Shia militia, Qais Khazali, declared that "*American weapons and troops must be completely removed from Iraqi cities*". Also Riyadh al-Masoudi, member of the Shia Sadrist movement that since 2010 wants to expel the American troops from Iraq and asked the Premier to be "decisive and resolute when it comes to demanding the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq".

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab News*, Iraq's prime minister to visit Washington next month for talks on US troops withdrawal, 24/06/20, available at, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1694721/middle-east>
- *The Baghdad Post*, Iraqi PM to visit Iran next week, 15/07/20, available at: <https://www.thebaghdadpost.com/en/Story/48878/Iraqi-PM-to-visit-Iran-next-week>
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#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Lebanon – After the blasts, the protests



Source: Zanyya

On the 8th of August, four days after the devastating explosion that killed more than 150 people and wounded 5.000 others, activists and civil society groups called for mass demonstrations against the entire political class demanding for their immediate resignation. Well known activists, who had guided last October's demonstrations, launched new demonstrations under the slogans "Hang them!" and "Time to pay the bill".

Thousands of Lebanese, coming from several neighbourhoods gathered in Martyr's square, a symbolic place in downtown Beirut, and marched on the ruins of the city hanging banners with the names of the explosion's victims written on it. Activists set up symbolic gallows and hanged images of President

Aoun and other members of the government's cabinet, addressing a strong message to the political establishment and showing their determination in finding the authorities responsible for Beirut's blast.

Demonstrators tried to enter the Lebanese Parliament, but they were blocked by security forces that fired tear gas against them. A group of protesters, including retired army officers, reached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, destroyed by the explosion, and shattered in pieces an image of the Lebanese President Michel Aoun, expressing their anger. The protests turned very quickly into violent clashes. The Red Cross announced that at least 117 people were injured during the demonstrations.

Hayat Nasser, an activist taking part at Saturday's mass protest stated to *Al-Dar* newspaper that the protests happening in Beirut represent the last biggest warning and that Lebanese will keep fighting since they have nothing to lose. She added that the country needs to be deeply "cleaned" and rebuilt ignoring the political ruling parties.

Nasser Yassim, analyst at the Iassam Fares Institute, and Associate Professor at the Health Management and Policy Department of the American University of Beirut, told to *Agence France-Presse* that activists, civic groups and protesters have to cut off the "head of the octopus", with a clear reference to the Lebanese sectarian-based government. He said that only by taking down the top government leaders who control the networks of corruption and clientelism, Lebanese will obtain a real change. He added that the system needs to be cleaned up from the smallest employee to the top leaders of the pyramid.

In a statement the Head of the Internal Security Forces (FSIO – Gen. Imad Isman) said that during the latest violent clashes many soldiers got wounded and he asked the demonstrators to keep the protest peaceful. However, severe clashes between security forces and protesters went on four days in a row with more than 100 people injured.

Lebanese still remember last year's massive protests against the political establishment; now their attitude has been exacerbated by the escalating political and economic crisis caused by endemic corruption and governmental mismanagement. With the catastrophic explosion that destroyed most of the city and killed more than 150 people, the anger of the Lebanese reached the limit.

The Government's resignation on Monday will not appease thousands of angry Lebanese and will not erase last week's Beirut explosion. The Lebanese will still demand the removal of what they see as a corrupt ruling class.

Sources:

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- *Al-Dar*, مظاهرات احتجاجية ضد السلطة السياسية بعد أربعة أيام من انفجار بيروت (Demonstrations against the Political establishment four days after the blast in Beirut), available at: <https://aldar.ma/188844.html>

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