

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya – Haftar rejects the GNA ceasefire



Source: Reuters

On the 23rd of August, the military forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar rejected the ceasefire announced days earlier by Fayeze al-Serraj, Prime Minister of UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), fearing a “deception”.

The spokesperson of Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), Ahmed al-Mismari, expressed his concerns on the ceasefire proposed and said in a statement that *"this initiative is meant to cover up the GNA's true intentions"*, adding that Al-Serraj might take advantage of the ceasefire to prepare and launch a new attack on the strategic city of Sirte. Moreover, al-Mismari underlined the fact that, upon the ceasefire's announcement, units loyal to the GNA advanced towards his forces raising suspects on the reliability of the initiative.

However, Haftar's opposition to the ceasefire might bring itself to further fights over the city of Sirte, failing Aguila Saleh's proposal to demilitarise the city - Libya's major oil export terminal. If implemented, such demilitarisation should end the oil blockade that is bringing the country to its knees and lead to the formation of a new government to be hosted indeed in Sirte.

To know more about this topic:

- *Daily Sabah*, Haftar's forces reject Libyan government's call for cease-fire, 23/08/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/haftars-forces-reject-libyan-governments-call-for-cessa-fire/news>
- *The Arab Weekly*, LNA dismisses as 'deception' Sarraj government's ceasefire announcement, 23/08/20, available at: <https://the arabweekly.com/lna-dismisses-deception-sarraj-governments-ceasefire-announcement>
- *Al-Jazeera*, Haftar rejects GNA's call for Libya ceasefire, 23/08/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/haftar-rejects-gna-call-libya-ceasefire-200823173428282.html>
- *Ahval News*, Libya's Haftar dismisses ceasefire proposal as deception, 24/08/20, available at: <https://ahvalnews.com/libya/libyas-haftar-dismisses-ceasefire-proposal-deception>

Levant

#Syria – Explosion at gas pipeline: possible terrorist attack



Sources: *An-Nabbar*

On the 24th of August a blast hit and damaged a natural gas pipeline between the towns of Al-Dhumayr and Adra, northern Damascus, causing an electricity blackout across the country.

The major pipeline runs across four countries, bringing natural gas from Egypt into Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, where it supplies three power stations in the south.

The Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Ali Ghanem, stated to the State News Agency *Sana* that the blast has been caused by a terrorist attack, most probably organised by ISIS sleeper cells. The US special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey, agreed over the terrorist attack possibility, adding that ISIS activities have recently increased in eastern and southern Syria.

Besides, according to Syrian Minister of Electricity, Zuhayr Kharbotli, the natural gas pipeline has been hit several times since the beginning of the Syrian Civil war.

As reported by *The Guardian*, last December simultaneous attacks carried by drones targeted three oil and gas government stations in central Syria, near Homs. In January, only one month later, a bomb damaged other oil facilities that were used to pump oil into one of the two oil refineries of the country.

Given the current Western sanctions over Syrian fuel imports and with most of the oil fields in eastern Syria under Kurdish control, the country's Minister of Information, Imad Sara, suspects that the attacks might have been lunched against government's oil facilities to pressure Damascus to make concessions to its rivals.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, Arab gas pipeline explosion caused Syria blackout, 24/08/20, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/24/arab-gas-pipeline-explosion-leads-to-total-blackout-in-syria-state-media>
- *Arab News*, Syria says pipeline blast that caused blackout was terrorist attack, 24/08/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1723726/middle-east>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Blast hits gas pipeline in Syria, US suspects ISIS, 24/08/20, available at <https://theArabweekly.com/blast-hits-gas-pipeline-syria-us-suspects-isis>

Gulf

#Iraq – The US coalition hands over Taji base to Iraqi military forces



Source: Fars News

On the 23rd of August, the US coalition withdrew its troops from the military base of Camp Taji, 20 Km north of Baghdad. The camp, that hosted 2.000 members stationed to train Iraqis forces, has been handed back to the country.

This represents the eight transfer of an Iraqi military base used by the US coalition back to the Iraqi army, as per the withdrawal plan of American troops (5000 troops in total) from the Iraqi soil announced in December 2019 and implemented in March 2020.

The plan has been recently renewed by the US President Donald Trump during a meeting held on the 20th of August with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, to discuss containment strategies against Iranian militias and ISIS fighters in the country.

After last January US air strike at the Baghdad airport that killed the commander of the Iranian Quds forces, General Qassem Soleimani, and the leader of the Iraqi Shiite militia, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the withdrawal of the US troops has been a major priority and Iraq's parliament had voted this year for the departure of foreign troops from Iraq.

The US President has made it clear that the troops will leave the country as soon as the mission is completed and the country will be able to defend itself.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Time of Israel*, Trump reaffirms plan to withdraw all US troops from Iraq, 20/08/20, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-reaffirms-plan-to-withdraw-all-us-troops-from-iraq/>
- *Al Arabiya*, US-led coalition hands over Taji military base to Iraqi force, 23/08/20, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/08/23/US-led-coalition-hands-over-Taji-military-base-to-Iraqi-forces-State-media.html>
- *Daily Sabah*, US withdraws troops from Iraq's Taji base, 23/08/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/us-withdraws-troops-from-iraqs-taji-base>
- *Middle East Eye*, US troops withdraw from Iraqi base targeted by missiles, 23/08/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-us-troops-withdraw-taji-military-base-baghdad>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Libya – Mass protests denounce wrecked economy



Source: Arab News

On the 23rd of August, two days after Fayeze al-Serraj's announcement of a ceasefire and the agreement between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) over a possible demilitarisation of Sirte, hundreds of Libyans took the streets of Tripoli to protest against the GNA and to express their anger over the dire living conditions deepened by years of war.

Peaceful protests have been organised by the *Hirak Himt al-Shabab* (Movement of the Mettle of the Youth), a movement based in Tripoli that embodies the frustration of the Libyan citizens and denounces the unbearable deterioration of the living conditions, worsened by the lack of basic services and job opportunities.

One of the activists, Muhammed al-Breiki, organised the protests on one of the Facebook pages related to the movement, [Hirak 23/8](#), where he shared timings and places of gathering with the community, inviting all participants to wear white clothes to underline the peaceful character of the march and to use masks to prevent the risk of contagion.

As reported from [Al-Jamahiriyah TV](#), Ahmed Abou Arqoub, spokesperson of the movement, declared that their demands have been previously presented, with no success, to the Supreme Council for Reconciliation, a social council founded in 2016 to end conflicts and create a secure environment in the capital. After being ignored by the authorities, the movement decided to organise peaceful protests in Tripoli to express their frustration over the government. Many young Libyans answered to the call.

He also argued that the only solution to the Libyan crisis is the removal of the current authority, the GNA, followed by elections under international supervision that could eventually give voice to new national leaders. He clarified that the organisation does not belong to any political movement or faction but they rather “إلى توحيد الصفوف ونبذ الخلافات والوقوف وقفة رجل واحد لهذا الوطن حرصا على وحدته وسلامته” - “*stand united, rejecting any differences for this nation in the interests of its unity and peace*”.

As reported by [Al-Mashhad Al-Araby](#), the famous Libyan writer and political analyst Abdul Hakim Maatouq announced too his support to the *Himt al-Shabab* movement by writing: “كلنا مع همة الشباب” - “*we are all with Hirak Himt al-Shabab*”.

Demonstrations, calling for better living conditions and denouncing the intolerable mismanagement of the government unable to guarantee to its citizens basic needs like water, electricity and fuel, went on until the 26th of August spreading across other cities in the country. Protesters, mostly young men, raised the Libyan flag and chanted slogans in the name of the nation, calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister al-Serraj and the expulsion of foreign mercenaries sent in support of the GNA by Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

According to the Director of Counselling Department of the General Command of the Libyan Army, Brigadier General Khaled Al-Mahjoub, [“militias in Tripoli have conflicting interests that lead often to clashes between them worsening the already critical situation”](#).

On the 24th of August, *Al-Ghad Tv* released a [video](#) showing an old woman in the middle of Martyrs Square, where protesters gathered, railing against the GNA and the foreign forces involved in the Libyan civil war. “فلوسنا عند السوريين” - “*They sold us, they sold our country, they let Turks and Syrians mercenaries take our money and resources*”, shouted the women.

Ayman al-Wafi, a twenty years old protester, shared with [Al-Arab](#) news agency his frustration over the government and the dire living conditions he is facing on a daily basis due to electricity and water cuts and general lack of services. He added that he left Martyrs Square as soon as he heard gunshots fired by security forces to disperse the protesters.

Ali Wahida, a famous Libyan activist, commenting on the development of the protests that turned quickly into violent clashes with the army, wrote on his [Twitter page](#) that “ *بداية حملة الاعتقالات في طرابلس* “ - *the series of arrests made by the security forces are indeed a bad sign that highlights the choice of the Minister of Interior, Fathi Bashagha, to use violence and repression against protesters*”, calling for the immediate release of the activists.

Sources:

- *Yes Libya*, مظاهرات واسعة في طرابلس.. مسلحو الوفاق يستخدمون الرصاص والمتظاهرون يهتفون بالإسقاط النظام (Mass protests in Tripoli: the GNA opens fire while demonstrators call for the fall of the regime), available at: <https://yeslibya.ly/2020/08/23/مظاهرات-واسعة-في-طرابلس-مسلحو-الوفاق-ي-/>
- *Bawabat Alwasat*, متظاهرون في ميدان الشهداء ضد الفساد: ليبيا يا ولاد.. لا حقتر ولا سراج (Protesters at Martyrs square chant slogans against the government’s corruption: “Oh Libya, Oh boy...No Haftar... and no Serraj), available at: <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/293209>
- *Almashhad Alraby*, معنوق يعلن تأييده لحراك همة شباب طرابلس (Maatouq announces his support to the Hema Shabab Movement), available at: <https://almashhadalaraby.com/amp/211755#>
- *Al Giamahiriya TV*, حل الأزمة يبدأ بإسقاط السلطة في الشرق و تسليمها للنائب العام (The end of the crisis begins with overthrowing the eastern government and implementing a Parliamentary Assembly), available at: <https://www.ljbctv.tv/2020/08/حراك-همة-الشباب-حل-الأزمة-يبدأ-بإسقاط-!html>

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