

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## North Africa

**#Egypt** – Tripartite talks over the GERD fail as Cairo withdraws from the latest negotiations



*Source: Daily News Egypt*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, Egypt has decided to withdraw from the latest tripartite negotiations over the controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

Only few days ago, the talks seemed to be back on track, however, after Ethiopia proposed a new draft of filling guidelines and the Egyptian Water Minister said that Ethiopia proposed guidelines that are insufficient to implement any filling regulations or legal obligation.

For more than one year, the three countries directly involved, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, have been discussing over the operation and the filling of the hydroelectric dam, without reaching any solution.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, Ethiopians took part in joyful demonstrations endorsed by the government in Addis Ababa to celebrate the achievement of the GERD's reservoir filling by 74 billion cubic-meter. Move that put further pressure on Sudan and Egypt.

The two countries, which rely on the Nile for most of their water supplies, are worried for their access to fresh water. Cairo fears the severe consequences that a limited access to water might cause on its booming population, while Sudan is concerned for its agriculture-based economy and for the damages that the GERD might eventually cause on its already existing dams.

Both of them have repeatedly asked for a binding agreement before filling the dam's reservoir, while Ethiopia insists on non-binding guidelines.

The three countries seem to be stuck on how much water will Ethiopia release and over the proceedings to be observed by the three parties if a multi-year draught occurs.

Egypt has been blaming Ethiopia for not abiding the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention which requires the upstream countries to negotiate with downstream countries operations and regulations of any water project. It also underlined in several occasions its rights over the Nile, which consist in 55 BCM of water, amount that Ethiopia refuses to give to Egypt as it recalls to an agreement established without its consultation.

With Egypt's withdrawal from the tripartite negotiations and Sudan threatening to follow are currently stalled.

*To know more about this topic:*

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- *BBC*, Nile dam row: Egypt fumes as Ethiopia celebrates, 03/08/20, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53573154>
- *The New Arab*, Ethiopians celebrate progress in building dam on Nile river, 03/08/20, available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/8/3/ethiopians-celebrate-progress-in-building-dam-on-nile-river>

## Levant

### #Lebanon – Massive explosion puts further strain on the country



*Sources: Arabian Business*

To exacerbate an already severe economic crisis, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, a devastating colossal explosion of a warehouse at the port area, reported to be storing 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, hit the city of Beirut, causing massive damage over an extensive portion of the capital. According to the BBC, this horrific explosion, that has been heard as far away as Cyprus with an equivalent of 3.3 magnitude earthquake, made at least 135 victims and left 300.000 people homeless.

Lebanon's President, Michel Aoun, has declared a two-week state of emergency. Authorities are already working on securing the city and providing citizens with food, water and shelters. The international community have been particularly touched by the images reported from Beirut at the time of the explosion. French President Emmanuel Macron, during his visit to Beirut on Thursday offered France's support to the Lebanese people after the port blast, while also underlining that Lebanon would “continue to sink” unless its leaders carry out reforms.

This devastating explosion occurs in very difficult times for Lebanon, a country that is already trying to emerge from an unprecedented economic crisis and an internal political deadlock.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, one day before the blast, the Lebanese Foreign Minister, Nassiff Hitti, submitted his resignation, criticizing the Government's mishandling of the economic crisis.

Earlier on Sunday, the Minister had declared that the Lebanese Government shown no will to implement reforms to tackle the economic crisis, which is why international donors decided not to provide Lebanon with financial aid.

The outgoing Minister has also strongly criticised the deeply rooted corruption of the political establishment. "I took part in this government to work for one boss called Lebanon, then I found in my country multiple bosses and contradictory interests", said Nassiff Hitti while submitting his resignation to the Prime Minister, Hassan Diab. He added that, "given the absence of will by the political establishment to implement economic and structural reforms", he chose to step back and resign from his position.

Since almost one year, Beirut is struggling with a significant financial crisis causing an important decline in the value of the Lebanese pound and bringing half of the population to live below the poverty threshold. Lebanon is one of the most indebted countries in the world, with a sovereign debt of more than 170% of gross domestic product.

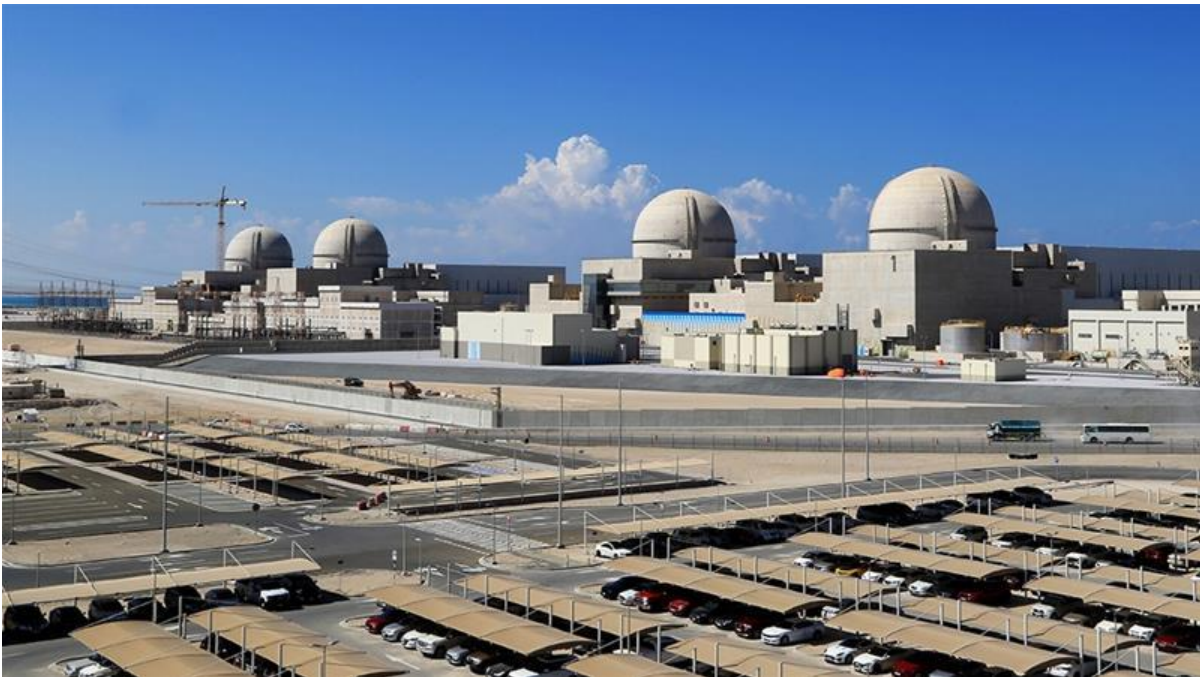
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- *Daily Sabah*, Lebanon's FM resigns over lack of "will to reform", 03/08/20 available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/lebanons-fm-resigns-over-lack-of-will-to-reform>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Resignation of the Lebanese FM adds to Diab's woes, 03/08/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/resignation-lebanese-fm-adds-diabs-woes>
- *Al-Monitor*, Lebanon's FM resigns in protest at mishandling of crisis, 03/08/20, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/contents/afp/2020/08/lebanon-politics.html>
- *The Guardian*, Lebanese foreign minister quits over slow reforms, Aoun adviser takes over, 03/08/20, available at: <https://www.theguardian.pe.ca/news/world/lebanese-foreign-minister-hitti-says-he-will-resign-today-report-480595/>

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## Gulf

### #United Arab Emirates – The first nuclear reactor of the Arab world



*Source: Al Jazeera*

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Cooperation (ENEC) has announced that the first of the four nuclear reactors of the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant, located in the area of Al-Dhafrah (Abu Dhabi), has successfully started producing heat.

The United Arab Emirates, that are among the biggest oil producers worldwide, are trying to rely less on oil, currently their major source of energy, by generating power from different sources.

The Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant, operating with Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO), includes four nuclear reactors. The Unit 1 has already started producing heat, the second reactor has been

completed in July, while the other two units are still under construction. Once all the four nuclear reactors are operational, Barakah will produce steam to generate electricity, with an approximate production of 5.6 gigawatts, providing up to 25% of the UAE's energy.

The UAE will host the first nuclear reactor in the Arab world, however, as experts highlighted, the country will also become the third nuclear-component state in the Middle East, after Israel and Iran, with possible geostrategic consequences.

Although the Atomic Energy Agency has been supervising the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant since the very beginning of the operations, some experts are concerned about the UAE's choice to implement a Nuclear reactor, questioning the real need of the country to produce nuclear energy considering its potential solar energy. The Emirates Nuclear Energy corporation has clarified that the Barakah Plant is a strictly peaceful project, however, there are a lot of worries about a new nuclear reactor in the area.

The Head of the Nuclear Consulting Group, Paul Dorfman, has expressed his concerns on the project, saying that the Barakah Plant "risks further destabilizing the Gulf region and raising the possibility of nuclear proliferation". He also added that the UAE's choice on nuclear energy seems suspicious, given the latest rising costs of the nuclear energy production against the falling prices of renewable energy technology.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *CNN*, Oil-rich UAE opens the Arab world's first nuclear power plant. Experts question why, 01/08/20, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/01/middleeast/nuclear-power-uae-intl/index.html>
- *Al Jazeera*, UAE starts first nuclear reactor at controversial Barakah plant, 01/08/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/uae-starts-operations-arab-world-nuclear-power-plant-200801101118964.html>
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## #ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

### #Syria – Escalating tensions on the Golan Heights



*Source: Agence France Presse*

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, Israel launched an air strike on several Iranian military checkpoints located in Quneitra, at the border with the Golan Heights.

As reported from Al Arabiya, the Israeli air strikes hit several military sites around the city of Daraa and Quneitra. The strikes, probably targeting Iranian military headquarter and Shiite militias affiliated to Hezbollah, were most likely launched in retaliation of an attempted attack, earlier on Monday, during which Israeli helicopters attacked and killed four men affiliated to Iran-backed Hezbollah that were caught displaying explosive near the border with the Golan Heights.

Tensions have been arising between the two countries since last month.



Israel has launched several airstrikes in Syria targeting government's military sites and the Iranian-backed militias. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, last month, five Iran-backed fighters were killed in an Israeli missile strike in the south of Damascus, while last week "unknown warplanes" hit Iranian forces and affiliated militias in the city of Al-Bukamal, in the Deir ez-Zour Governorate.

Dr Yousseff Haddad, researcher on Middle East affairs at the Arab and Islamic Studies Department of the Georgetown University, stated that, last month, tensions between the two rival countries have been escalating, pointing also out, that Israeli strikes on the Syrian territories had significantly increased since last month's comprehensive military agreement between Syria and Iran.

The agreement, signed by the two countries on July 8<sup>th</sup>, has stipulated a military and security cooperation between Damascus and Tehran. According to this, the Islamic Republic will provide the Syrian government with air and missile defence systems and with a more consistent presence of Iranian militias on the Syrian territory. Dr Haddad added that this specific agreement does not bring any significant change in the already existing military cooperation between the two allied countries, however it offers to Israel a further opportunity to attack Iran in Syria.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, commenting on Monday's latest attack against Syrian military targets, said in a statement that Israel would not let the guard down and respond to any attacks or any attempts of attack against the country. The army will hit the cells until the dispatchers, in order to defend the country.

Naftali Bennet, former Minister of Defense added that the Israeli army would continue military operations in Syria until the complete clamp down on the Iranian forces. He also underlined that Israel would never allow Iran to set up an Iranian military base in Syria, announcing that the army would attack any cells affiliated to Shiite militias that are trying to transform the Golan Heights in a war front to launch attacks against Israel.

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