

# ARAB DISPATCH

*Arab Dispatch - a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation*

**Issue n. 8/20**

**13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> August**

## **North Africa**

**#Egypt – Cairo, Addis Ababa and Khartoum resume talks over the GERD under the umbrella of the African Union**



*Source: Akbar El Yom*

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, Egypt and Sudan have agreed on resuming AU-led talks with Ethiopia over the filling and the operations of the giant hydroelectric dam, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Since then, the water ministers of the three countries have been holding meetings to discuss concerns and exchange opinions over a possible final agreement.

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia are expected to submit proposals to be merged in a first draft agreement. Once finalised, it will be submitted for approval to the Chairman of the African Union, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Years of negotiations, with the support of a variety of mediators including the United States and lately the African Union, have so far failed in reaching a balanced and unanimous agreement between the three key Nile basin countries.

Egypt and Sudan, the two downstream countries, have been pushing Ethiopia not to start filling the dam's reservoir without reaching first a Nile water-sharing agreement that guarantees the interests of all the three countries involved.

Indeed, talks got suspended early this month after Ethiopia announced the completion of the first stage of filling of the dam's reservoir by 74 billion cubic-meter.

However, now that the three countries have agreed in submitting proposal agreements the negotiations are expected to be more fruitful. The Prime Ministers of Egypt and Sudan seem to be optimistic over the development of the talks.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Al Jazeera*, Nile dam: Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan resume African Union-led talks, 16/08/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/nile-dam-egypt-ethiopia-sudan-resume-african-union-led-talks-200816185139217.html>
- *Asbarq al-Awsat*, Egypt, Ethiopia Sudan resume AU-led talks over GERD , 16/08/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2451881/egypt-ethiopia-sudan-resume-au-led-talks-over-gerd>
- *Foreign Brief*, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to resume talks over dam, 17/08/20, available at: <https://foreignbrief.com/daily-news/egypt-sudan-and-ethiopia-to-resume-talks-over-dam/>
- *Abram Online*, Trilateral Gerd talks set to continue on Wednesday, 18/08/20, available at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/378042/Egypt/Politics-/Trilateral-GERD-talks-set-to-continue-on-Wednesday.aspx>

## Levant

**#Gaza Strip – After a week of clashes between Israel and Hamas, Egypt intervenes as a mediator**



*Source: Al Monitor*

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, an Egyptian delegation arrived in Gaza trying to mediate between Hamas and Israeli forces in order to de-escalate tensions, after a week of clashes at the fence separating the Palestinian enclave from Israel. The delegation committee met with Hamas leaders and discussed the recent Israeli attacks and a possible truce between the parties.

For seven days in a row last week, the Israeli army launched air strikes targeting Hamas military observation spots on the Gaza Strip in response to Palestinians' rockets and explosive balloons floating across from Gaza.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August Israel reported Palestinians riots and violent protests along the Strip, stating that Palestinians burned tyres and launched explosive devices and grenades.

Clashes went on the day after, when Israel intercepted with its iron dome two rockets fired from Gaza into Israel.

In response to the latest heightened clashes, Israel launched again an air strike targeting Hamas' military compound used to store rocket ammunitions. In the meanwhile, the Israeli navy fired against Palestinians fishing boats, banning all the Palestinians from using the strip's fishing zone. A punitive move that, with the Karam Abu Salem goods crossing recently closed by Israel, will put a further strain on the already precarious living conditions of thousands of Gazans.

According to the Middle East Eye, tensions between Palestinians and Israeli forces have heightened since the historic deal signed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August by Israel and the United Arab Emirates with the support of the US President Donald Trump, perceived by many Palestinians as a severe betrayal from an Arab country. Hamas has strongly condemned the agreement under which Israel was supposed to suspend the annexation plan of parts of the occupied West Bank, except that the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clarified later on that "he will remain committed to annexing portions of territories of the West Bank".

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Haaretz*, Netanyahu says "wasn't given a choice" but to suspend Annexation Plan in UAE deal, 13/08/20, available at: [https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-insists-he-didn-t-give-up-on-west-bank-annexation-in-exchange-for-uae-ties-1.9077099?utm\\_source=smartfocus&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=haaretz-news&utm\\_content=5023074](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-insists-he-didn-t-give-up-on-west-bank-annexation-in-exchange-for-uae-ties-1.9077099?utm_source=smartfocus&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=haaretz-news&utm_content=5023074)
- *Middle East Eye*, Israel launches air strikes on Gaza, fires upon Palestinians fishing boats, 16/08/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-air-strikes-gaza-fire-balloon-rocket-attacks-fishing-boats>
- *Daily Sabah*, Egyptian delegation meets Hamas leaders in Gaza Strip over recent tension with Israel, 17/08/20, available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/egyptian-delegation-meets-hamas-leaders-in-gaza-strip-over-recent-tension-with-israel>
- *Arab News*, Egyptian mediators due in Gaza after a week of clashes, 17/08/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1720636/middle-east>
- *Asbarq Al-Ansat*, Egypt mediators enter Gaza after a week of clashes with Israel, 17/08/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2453821/egypt-mediators-enter-gaza-after-week-clashes-israel>



## Gulf

### #Yemen – Saudi delegation in Aden to oversee the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement



*Source: GeoRivista*

On the 16th of August, a Saudi delegation met in Aden with Officials from the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a separatist group formed with the support of the United Arab Emirates.

The delegation together with STC's officials tackled the withdrawal of the military units from the area, in accordance with the Riyadh Agreement, a power-sharing deal between north and south Yemen, signed last November by President Hadi and the STC, that aims to mend coalition divisions by forming a technocratic government.

The delegation will be monitoring any violation of the agreement from both sides in order to facilitate a power-sharing solution and the implementation of a new unified government that will finally defeat the Iran-backed Houthi forces.

As reported from the Saudi News Agency Arab News, Mohammed Al-Jaber, Saudi Ambassador in Yemen, stated that the delegation together with the Saudi-led troops will be supervising the complete

withdrawal of the STC's military units from Aden and Abyan. On the other side, Mohammed al Naqeb, spokesperson for the STC declared to the news agency that their units will comply with the terms of the agreement and undertake to respect the ceasefire announced with it.

Meanwhile, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August the Yemeni Prime Minister, Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed, met with the leaders of the STC to discuss possible ways to form a new government. As reported by The National, the meetings focused on a possible unified front to finally end the Houthi rule in Yemen. Discussions also tackled strategies to restore the dire economy and normalise the worsening condition of the country.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *The Arab News*, Saudi committee in Aden to oversee forces withdrawal, 16/08/20, available at, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1720421/middle-east>
- *The National*, Saudi Committee to oversee withdrawal of STC troops from Aden, 17/08/20, available at <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/saudi-committee-to-oversee-withdrawal-of-stc-troops-from-aden-1.1064898>
- *The Arab News*, Yemeni Prime Minister meets party heads to discuss formation of new government, 18/08/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1721171/middle-east>

## #ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

### #Israel #UnitedArabEmirates – Prime Minister Netanyahu and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Bin Zayed sign deal to normalise diplomatic relations



*Source: Middle East Eye*

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August the United Arab Emirates and Israel have signed a historic deal that aims to normalise the diplomatic relations between the two countries and bring peace into the region. The agreement has been signed by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, with the support of the President of the United States Donald Trump.

According to the three parties, the agreement has been signed in order to normalise diplomatic ties between the two countries, but most importantly in order to prevent Israel from proceeding with the annexation plan.

In three weeks, delegations from the UAE and from Israel will be invited for a signing ceremony at the White House while other bilateral agreements regarding direct flights, telecommunications, opening embassies and security proceedings will be soon signed by the parties.

The United Arab Emirates, that despite its predecessors was never directly involved in any hostility with Israel, will be the third Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Tel Aviv after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

President Donald Trump, who brokered the deal between the two countries, described what he called the “Abraham agreement” as a “huge breakthrough and a historic peace agreement between two great friends, Israel and the United Arab Emirates”, pointing out that, after this remarkable step, other Arab countries might follow. Benjamin Netanyahu during a press conference said that this historic moment represents the “beginning of a new area in the diplomatic relations between the Arab world and Israel”, while the UAE Foreign Affairs Minister, Anwar Gargash, defined it “an important step to ensure a two-state solution”.

The normalising agreement, strongly rejected by the Palestinian Presidency who immediately recalled its ambassador from Abu Dhabi, has been welcomed by few Arab countries while others preferred to remain silent until further developments.

The Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman expressed their support to the UAE, adding that this joint declaration will certainly contribute to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A positive reaction came also from the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who welcomed with great appreciation the agreement and the decision to suspend the annexation of occupied territories of the West Bank.

On the other side, Palestinian authorities and factions saw the tripartite declaration as a big betrayal against Palestinians. During an emergency meeting held at the presidential headquarter of the Palestinians Authority in Ramallah, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, Minister of Information and spokesperson for the Palestinian Presidency, stated that this agreement represents a big betrayal against Jerusalem and a violent aggression against Palestinians, adding that it will definitely destroy any Arab peace initiative.

Reactions from the two main political movements in Palestine, Hamas and Fatah, came straight away the announcement of the normalising deal. Abbas Zaki member of the Central Committee of the Fatah movement accused Abu Dhabi of abandoning its religious and humanitarian duties towards the Palestinians cause, while Hamas’ spokesperson, Hazem Qassem, firmly condemned the move taken by Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, stating that it represents a clear denial of Palestinian rights and it is nothing but a reward to the Israeli occupation that will encourage more massacres.



The Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement has also expressed its indignation throughout its spokesperson, Daoud Shehab, that described the move as a legitimisation of the Israeli occupation.

Although this deal has been welcomed in the West as a further step towards a two-state solution, many analysts has pointed out that bilateral agreements between the two countries are unlikely to bring peace in the region.

As reported from al-Quds, the Emirati-Israeli rapprochement might reveal the Gulf desire to establish a strong alliance against Iran, which has become a top priority in most of the Gulf countries' agendas.

There are also many concerns regarding clauses included in the agreement in regards of weapons exchange between Israel, UAE and the United States. The tripartite declaration might indeed open a new weapon trade between the US and the UAE and remove Israel opposition in regards of arming the UAE with US weapons.

Israel seems interested in expanding security cooperation with the Emirates. As a matter of fact, the so called normalisation agreement between the two countries includes also the security field with a possible military cooperation between the parties and a possible involvement of Israel in the Red Sea Alliance that might lead to increase Israeli arms companies' exports to the Gulf countries.

*Sources:*

- *Al Quds*, الاتفاق الإماراتي الإسرائيلي تخل عن الفلسطينيين و لن السلام للشرق الأوسط, (The Emirati-Israeli agreement abandons Palestinians and will not bring peace to the Middle East), available at: <https://www.alquds.co.uk/إعلام-ألماني-الاتفاق-الإماراتي-الإسر/>
- *Al Quds*, ترامب يعلن اتفاق إبراهيم التطبيعي بين بن زايد و نتنياهو والرئاسة الفلسطينية تعتبره خيانة للقدس, (Trump announces the Abraham normalizing agreement while the Palestinian Presidency defines it as a big betrayal against Gerusalem), available at: <https://www.alquds.co.uk/-ترامب-يعلن-عن-اتفاق-إبراهيم-التطبيع/>
- *Al Quds*, الفرج الإماراتي ...سلام مقابل سلاح و الاتفاق مع اسرائيل لا يشمل كلمة واحدة عن فلسطين, (Peace in exchange for weapons and not a single mention about Palestine in the agreement), available at: <https://www.alquds.co.uk/الفرج-الإماراتي-سلام-مقابل-سلاح-والا/>
- *Al Jazeera*, ردود الفعل تتوالى هكذا رأى العلم اتفاق التطبيع الإماراتي الإسرائيلي, (Reactions over the Israeli-Emirati normalisation agreement), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2020/8/14/ردود-الفعل-تتوالى-هكذا-يرى-العالم>

- *Asbarq al-Ansat*, دعم عماني للاتفاق الإماراتي الإسرائيلي .. و التزام أوروبي بحل الدولتين (Oman supports to the Emirati-Israeli agreement while European countries welcome a two-state solution), available at: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2448811/-الاسرائيلي-والتزام-دعم-عماني-للاتفاق-الإماراتي-الاسرائيلي-والتزام-أوروبي-بحل-الدولتين>

*\*As a general disclaimer, the articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation or any institution of or associated with NATO.*