

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya – Al-Sarraaj resignation might jeopardize Erdogan’s economic plans in the Mediterranean Sea



Source: Hawar Nems

On the 16th of September Fayez al-Sarraaj, Prime Minister of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), has announced his intention to hand over his position to a new executive authority by the end of October. This development could sharpen political tensions and lead to new developments.

The announcement made by al-Sarraj, caught the President Erdogan by surprise, but the Turkish Presidential spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, stated that the GNA will remain the legitimate government in Libya regardless its leadership. He also added that Turkey will continue to play its political and military role in Libya in order to maintain security and stability in the region.

Nevertheless, the latest dispute between Fayez al-Sarraj and Fatih Beshaga has shown the actual political and military weight of the Minister of Interior. Given that, Erdogan is most likely concerned by pending economic agreements with the outgoing Prime Minister al-Sarraj, rather than by the political vacuum that al-Sarraj's resignation might create.

Regarding that, is worth mentioning that, on the 27th of November 2019, the GNA implemented with Ankara a bilateral memorandum of understanding on security and military cooperation, demarcating maritime boundaries. The agreement establishes a de facto an exclusive economic zone from the southern Turkish coast in the Mediterranean to the coasts on north-eastern Libya, which gives Turkey oil exploration rights in Eastern Mediterranean, ignoring Greece's sea rights and creating significant military tensions between the two countries. Moreover, on the 6th of September, the GNA and Ankara held talks over oil and gas exploration in Libya, in order to re-establish the Libyan oil industry, destroyed by the almost-ten-years-old war. According to a GNA statement the two sides discussed *"the return of Turkish companies to complete halted infrastructure projects in Libya and contributing to new projects"*.

Turkey's support to the Tripoli based government (GNA) grants indeed Erdogan's economic interests and goals in Libya as well as in the disputed waters of Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the resignation of al-Sarraj may put in jeopardy Turkish economic achievements in the region, redesigning Erdogan's political role in Libya.

To know more about this topic:

- *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, Turkish ambitions in Libya collides with the maritime demarcation rock, 08/08/20, available at: <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178746/>
- *World Oil*, Turkey in talks to secure Libyan oil and gas exploration rights, 10/09/20, available at: <https://www.worldoil.com/news/2020/9/10/turkey-in-talks-to-secure-libyan-oil-and-gas-exploration-rights>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Erdogan angry at Sarraj for stepping down before fulfilling Turkish demands, 19/09/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/erdogan-angry-sarraj-stepping-down-fulfilling-turkish-demands>

- *The daily Sabab*, Turkey-Libya deals not to be affected by Sarraj's resignation, presidential spokesperson Kalin says, 21/09/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-libya-deals-not-to-be-affected-by-sarrajs-resignation-presidential-spokesperson-kalin-says>

Levant

#EasternMediterranean – Submarine cables: more than meets the eye



Sources: *Quantum Cable*

In February 2020 the Turkish government has announced a NAVTEX (NAVigational TEXt Messages) informing that naval activities in specific area of the Eastern Mediterranean must be co-ordinated with Ankara, despite a previous communication by Cyprus. This apparently minor dispute may have an impact on two very important undersea cables: the Euroafrica Interconnector (high voltage electricity, connecting Cyprus, Egypt and Greece to the EU grid) and the Quantum Cable (high speed data), the latter being of particular interest after signature of normalisation agreements between some Gulf countries and Israel.

The Quantum Cable is a 7.700km subsea ultrahigh speed fibre-optic cable system connecting Asia and Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. It connects Cyprus with Israel, Cyprus with Crete and Attica in

Greece, as well as Italy, France and Bilbao, Spain. From Spain the connection is carried over to the USA (Virginia).

The Quantum Cable system deploys state-of-the-art transmission technology at an ultra-fast broadband speed of up to 160 Tbps. One of the unique features of the Quantum Cable system is that it will have one of the lowest latency rates between Asia and Europe, eventually it will be able to handle 60% of the world's internet traffic at peak time.

The way was paved by a trilateral declaration of co-operation in Thessaloniki, on the 15th of June 15, 2017 between Cyprus, Greece and Israel.

According to the texts published in the framework of the Abraham Agreement, there is the potential to extend this type of communication to specific Gulf countries, with obvious positive effects on their local financial systems operating in international and Islamic banking contexts.

To know more about this topic:

- *Euro-Asia Interconnector*, Quantum Cable, available at: <https://euroasia-interconnector.com/about-us/quantum-cable/>
- *Defense News*, Protecting undersea cables must be made a national security priority, 01/07/19, available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/07/01/protecting-undersea-cables-must-be-made-a-national-security-priority/>
- *Inside Over*, Il cavo che scatena l'ira del Sultano, 20/09/20, available at: <https://it.insideover.com/politica/cavo-sottomarino-turchia-quantum-cable.html>

Gulf

#United Arab Emirates – The Abraham Agreement has a remarkable potential



Source: CNN

On the 15th of September, during a ceremony hosted by the White House, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump have formalised the “Joint statement of the United States, the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates”, by signing the so-called Abraham Accords Peace Agreement dated 13th of August.

As mentioned on the official text of the Agreement the normalisation recalls the Treaties of Peace of Israel with Egypt and Jordan.

The ceremony was attended by Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrein, who recently decided to normalise diplomatic ties with Israel, following the path of the United Arab Emirates.

According to the official text of the treaty, published by the government website of the [White House](#) the parties “aspire to realise the vision of a Middle East region that is stable, peaceful and prosperous, for the benefits of all States and peoples in the region”, “desiring to establish peace, diplomatic and friendly relations, cooperation and full

normalisation of ties between them and their people” undertaking to foster respect and co-existence between their societies that belong to a common ancestor, Abraham.

The agreement, that promotes intercultural and interfaith dialogue between the parties, stresses the need of normalising ties and establishing diplomatic relations, enhances cooperation in other spheres like in finance, investment, tourism, civil aviation, visas and consular Services, trade and economic relations.

Needless to say, the third deal between an Arab country and Israel will go further than a mere normalisation with a considerable impact on the geopolitics of the Middle East. According to some Arab media, the normalisation agreement between Israel and the UAE will go deeper than the Egypt’s and Jordan’s previous peace agreements.

As mentioned by the Arab Weekly, the Egyptian and Jordanian deals focused more on security cooperation between the countries, while the Abraham deal stresses also the need of promoting a culture of peace, countering terrorism and establishing economic deals.

According to the Middle East Eye, unlike Israel’s previous agreements that did not enable a deeper exchange of societies, the Abraham Agreement may bring Israel into the fold of the region.

Evidently some actors like Iran and Turkey are keenly watching a possible domino effect in the region with further Gulf countries normalising diplomatic ties with Israel.

To know more about this topic:

- Middle East Eye, Israel-UAE deal: Iran and Turkey must form a united front, 16/09/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-uae-deal-iran-turkey-united-front>
- *Haaretz*, The Israel-UAE-Bahrain Abraham Accords Peace Agreement, 16/09/20, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-full-text-the-israel-uae-bahrain-abraham-accords-declaration-1.9159509>
- The Arab Weekly, Why UAE peace with Israel could be warmer than with Egypt and Jordan, 17/09/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/why-uae-peace-israel-could-be-warmer-egypt-jordan>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Bahrain – Following the United Arab Emirates, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa normalises his diplomatic ties with Israel



Source: Times of Israel

On the 15th of September, the Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani, has signed the Declaration of peace, cooperation, and constructive diplomatic and friendly relations with the State of Israel, during the ceremony hosted by the White House, for the formalisation of the Abraham Agreement. Following the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain will be the second Arab gulf country to normalise diplomatic relations with Israel, rising a strong popular opposition in the Kingdom.

Compared to the almost-null Emirati popular reaction to the Abraham deal, Bahraini citizens have shown a louder indignation. Many Bahraini opposition groups and independent Muslim circles have expressed their disappointment over the normalisation “trend”, by invading social media and by protesting in the streets shouting slogans against the Abraham agreement.

Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society (National Islamic Accord), the main Shia opposition to the Sunni minority royal family, operating clandestinely in the Kingdom and led by the Shia cleric Ali Salman, a central figure in 2011's Bahraini uprising, shared on their [Twitter page](#) under the hashtag “اتفاق الخيانة” – “*the betrayal deal*”, many videos showing Bahraini citizens protesting in the street of Manama against the normalisation deal with Israel, calling for the “جمعة غضب القدس” - “*Friday of the anger Jerusalem*”.

On the Twitter page the group al-Wefaq stated that is monitoring many protests occurring in different governorates of the country in opposition to what they call the “betrayal deal” and that despite of security services’ deployment by the government, Bahraini citizens will remain committed to the cause.

Ali Al-Aswad, the former MP of a-Wefaq, has expressed his concerns on the move taken by the Kingdom towards the State of Israel. Commenting the statement made on the 11th of September by the Shura Council and the Bahraini Parliamentary Assembly that “يرحبان بالخطوة البحرينية التاريخية وإعلان تأييد السلام مع إسرائيل” - “*welcome the historical steps made by the Kingdom of Bahrein towards a peace cooperation with the state of Israel*”, Ali Al-Aswad wrote on his [Twitter page](#) that “سيذكر لكم التاريخ تأييدكم للاستعمار والإستعمار” – “*only history will remember Bahrein’s support to colonisation*”.

Despite the not surprising popular indignation triggered on the web along with streets demonstrations and the strong accusations coming from Palestinian factions like Hamas and al-Jihad that described the gesture of the Kingdom of Bahrain as a “سقوطا سياسيا جديدا” – “*new political failure*” and a “عدوانا على شعبنا” – “*Ongoing aggression against Palestinian people*”, one still has to understand why the Kingdom of Bahrein made such a move, given the reluctance shown by King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa during his meeting with the US adviser, Jared Kushner, on the 2nd of September, held to discuss a possible normalisation between Bahrein and Israel.

According to [Al-Quds al-Arabi](#), the main reason behind Bahrein’s decision to normalise his diplomatic relations with Israel is indeed Iran and the threat of Iranian Shiite militias against the Sunni minority royal family that is apparently loosing popular consensus. Bahrein, Israel and other Gulf countries share a close position against Iran and normalising ties with Israel with the support of the United States would protect the small Kingdom from a possible revolution carried out by the Iranian backed Shia opposition.

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