

ARAB DISPATCH

Arab Dispatch - a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation

Issue n. 18/20

22nd – 29th October

North Africa

#Libya – Despite UN efforts, Erdogan refuses to leave his position in the conflict



Source: Sada Elbalad English – From the left: the leader of the Libyan National Army, Khalifa Haftar, the President of the Libyan House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, and the Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord, Fayeż al-Sarraj.

On the 23rd of October, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSM) announced that the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission, which includes five senior officers appointed by the Libyan National Army (LNA) and just as many by the Government of National Accord (GNA), had agreed on a

permanent ceasefire after days of talks held in Geneva. If fully implemented, the ceasefire should lead to the end of the conflict and to the departure of all foreign-fighters and mercenaries within three months.

After the announcement of the ceasefire by the UNSML, the Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has expressed his concerns on the reliability of the agreement. The ceasefire could indeed threaten Ankara's footprint in the country, since one of the arguments discussed is the withdrawal of all foreign fighters. with the aim to end the presence and influence of Turkey and Russia in Libya. Erdogan's concerns on a permanent ceasefire in Libya suggest his refusal to abandon his position in Libya, which also guarantees him an outpost on eastern Mediterranean.

According to the Middle East Monitor, despite the permanent ceasefire agreed by the parties, Ankara continues to train the special forces of the GNA-backed militias. Turkish military trainings are already a clear violation of the inter-Libyan agreement that stipulates, in fact, *“the freezing of all military agreements related to training inside Libya and the departure of the foreign training crews”*.

Furthermore, unsurprisingly, on the 25th of October, few days after UNSML's announcement, Qatar's Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalid al-Thani, a major Turkish ally and financial sponsor, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding on security and military cooperation with the GNA's Minister of Interior, Fathi Bashagha, challenging UN efforts. After participating to the Libyan conflict from behind the scenes, Qatar is now “jumping in”, just when Turkey risks reducing its presence in Libya.

Such move might suggest a shared-plan between Turkey and Qatar on Libya, a plan that might end with Doha replacing Ankara in the conflict.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Qataris sign security deal with GNA, challenging UN efforts in Libya, 27/10/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/qataris-sign-security-deal-gna-challenging-un-efforts-libya>
- *Al Arabiya*, Libya's warring parties agree to permanent ceasefire, 24/10/20, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2020/10/23/All-parties-in-Libya-agree-on-permanent-ceasefire-UN-mission-to-Libya>

- *The Arab Weekly*, „Erdogan downplays Libya agreements hinting at spoiler role, 18/10/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2571361/algerian-army-calls-supporting-constitutional-referendum>
- *Middle East Monitor*, Turkey continues to train Libya’s GNA forces, 26/10/20, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201026-turkey-continues-to-train-libyas-gna-forces/>

Levant

#Lebanon – The return of Saad Hariri



Sources: DW – The Lebanese Prime Minister and leader of the Tayyar al-Mustaqbal party (Future Movement), Saad Hariri.

On the 22nd of October, the Lebanese President Michel Aoun designated the Sunni leader Saad Hariri as Prime Minister.

Saad Hariri, on his fourth nomination as PM, resigned almost one year ago amid mass popular protests, erupted all over the country against the highly corrupted ruling class, the lack of basic services and a

procrastinated economic crises. His novel nomination followed weeks of political crisis after Mustapha Adib's resignation.

The newly appointed PM has been largely supported by his party, Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), the main Shiite parties, Hezbollah and Amal, and the Hizb al-Taquadummi al-Ishtiraki (Progressive Socialist Party) led by the Druze politician Walid Jumblatt.

Hariri will have to form a new cabinet capable to produce financial and economic reforms in order to receive international financial aid - as required by France. The new government will have to address the worst economic crisis after the Lebanese civil war, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the horrific explosion at Beirut's naval port on the 4th of August.

The return of Hariri was an expected scenario after the resignations of Hassan Diab, unable to properly tackle the crises after the port's blast and the ones of Mustapha Adib, incapable to address the disputes over sectarianism within the government.

The newly appointed PM will have to address the same challenges that forced him to resign one year ago, now significantly worsened. Since his resignation, in fact, the economic and financial crisis has been severely exacerbated. Lebanon's global debt is fast growing, while the central bank's reserves are dwindling, leading to basic goods' price hikes. The Lebanese Lira lost 80% of its value against the US dollar. Adding to that, the US sanctions, as per Trump's "maximum pressure policy" on Iran, have severely affected Lebanese Hezbollah and, consequently, companies and businesses linked to the group.

While welcomed by the old political establishment, Hariri's renomination raised the anger and frustration of the exhausted Lebanese, the same Lebanese that called for the removal of the entire ruling class during last October Revolution. Despite almost one year of protests and the terrible blast that underlined, on people's lives, the inefficiency and corruption of the political class, the renomination of Saad Hariri shows that nothing has really changed in the country. On the contrary, the former PM returns stronger than ever, bringing back the very same dynamics that characterise the sectarian-based Lebanese government.

To know more about this topic:

- *Arab News*, A "Saad" day for Lebanon: Hariri's fourth term as PM met with scepticism, 22/10/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1752641/middle-east>

- *The Guardian*, Saad Hariri returns as Lebanon PM a year after resigning, 22/10/20, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/22/saad-hariri-returns-lebanon-pm-year-after-resigning>
- *Daily Sabah*, Lebanon's premier-designated Hariri starts talks to form government, 23/10/20, available at: https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/lebanons-premier-designate-hariri-starts-talks-to-form-government?gallery_image=undefined#big
- *Middle East Eye*, Lebanon: Hariri again tasked with forming new government, 22/10/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-hariri-new-government-crisis>

Gulf

#Qatar – Doha is determined to buy F-35 warplanes from Washington



Source: International Astronautical Federation.

On the 25th of October, the Israeli Energy Minister and member of the security cabinet, Yuval Steinitz, stated that, despite Tel Aviv's opposition, Qatar will most probably acquire F-35 warplanes from the United States, becoming the second country, after Israel, to operate these specific jets in the region.

Early this month, Doha has formally submitted to the US his request to buy F-35 jets, the most advanced warplane in the world, and Israel, immediately opposed Qatar's request.

Washington and Doha have already close defence ties. Al-Udeid air base, located south-west of Doha, hosts the biggest US military outpost in the Middle East, implemented to contain Iran's influence. Moreover, selling F-35 Jets to Qatar might be a counter move to negotiate a possible normalisation deal with Israel that has been so far rejected by Doha.

Nonetheless, to provide Qatar, a small country with extremely delicate ties in the region, with the most advanced warplane, might turn out to be a dangerous choice for both the US and the region's stability.

Qatar has in fact close relations also with Iran, Palestinian HAMAS and Islamist groups, such as Muslim Brotherhood. In 2013, Doha funded and supported Mohammed Morsi's government in Egypt. However, in 2017, its alleged relations with terrorist groups cost the country an ongoing sea, land and air blockade by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt.

Worth to mention that Qatar is Turkey's closest ally. Since 2017, Doha hosts the Qatari-Turkish Armed Forces Land Command base, recently expanded with aerial and naval equipment, perceived by Saudi Arabia and by the United Arab Emirates as a dangerous source of instability in the region. Ankara was an important supporter for the country during 2017's crisis and both align with the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Lately, Qatar has supported Turkey's military efforts in Libya by sending mercenaries.

According to the Jerusalem Post, Qatar already owns a sophisticated military equipment, as it will receive four dozen of the most advanced version of the F-15 in the next years. The determination of Qatar to upgrade its aerial military equipment with the most advanced warplane in the world, could increase the risk of instability in the region.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Eye*, Israel accepts US sale of F-35 warplanes to Qatar could happen, 25/10/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-accepts-sale-f-35-warplanes-qatar-could-happen>

- *The Jerusalem Post*, Selling F-35 jets to Qatar poses a direct threat to Israel, 17/10/20, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/selling-f-35-jets-to-qatar-poses-a-direct-threat-to-israel-646056>
- *The Eurasian Times*, After UAE, has Israel removed its objection to sell F-35 stealth jets to Qatar?, 26/10/20, available at: <https://eurasianimes.com/after-uae-has-israel-removed-its-objection-to-sell-f-35-stealth-jets-to-qatar/>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Iraq – First anniversary of October 2019's protest movement



Source: The Arab Weekly – Iraqi citizens commemorating the victims of the 2019's October Revolution.

As reported by [Al-Mayadeen](#), on the 25th of October, thousands of Iraqis took the streets of Baghdad to commemorate the victims of last year's October revolution and to express their frustration over a government that has not been able yet to implement any of the announced reforms.

Like one year ago, the protests started in al-Jumhuriyah bridge and Tahrir Square (Baghdad) and quickly turned into violent clashes with security forces. Protesters, mainly students, gathered peacefully raising the Iraqi flag and chanting the national anthem, while the police answered, in a repeated scenario, by firing stun grenades and tear gas against protesters.

According to [Al-Ittihad](#), the Prime Minister Mustapha al-Kadhimi, commenting on the clashes between protesters and the security forces, has promptly accused “ *جماعات منفلة وعصابات أرادت حرف التظاهرات عن مسارها السلمي* ” – “*external groups and gangs of diverting the peaceful course of the protests*”, reproducing the well-known rhetoric of external actors to justify the police intervention against the protesters.

More than one year ago, on the 1st of October, mass protests erupted across the country against the political establishment. Through an unprecedented popular movement, Iraqis asked for the removal of the political class. More than 500 protesters were killed during the clashes and 30.000 wounded. Popular calls, together with the support of the Iraqi Shia Leader, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, led to the resignation of the former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi. On the 6th of May, Mustapha al-Kadhimi succeeded him, promising to accomplish protesters' demands and to bring a real change in the political establishment.

The revived protests highlight the fact that many of these demands have yet to be addressed, while the current situation have been significantly worsened by the global pandemic. Furthermore, although last year's protest movement led to important changes within the political establishment, protesters seem to have lost their initial enthusiasm.

[Al-Ain News](#) reported the frustration of demonstrators that, like in 2019, gathered in Tahrir Square to demand once again drastic economic reforms but also justice for the activists that lost their life during last year's demonstration.

“ *الأوضاع لم تتغير حتى الآن، ومطالبنا التي كتبناها بدم الشهداء ما تزال على لائحة المسؤولين دون أي تنفيذ* ” – “*the situation has not changed since last year; our demands, written with the blood of our martyrs, are still pending as they have not been implemented by the people in charge*”, said Mustapha Hussein, a young protester who has been actively participating in the protests since last October.

An Iraqi activist, Rawa Shahab, during an interview with [Al-Ain News](#), accused Iranian-backed militias of interfering in last year's demonstrations and killing activists, urging the Prime Minister Mustapha al-Kadhimi to take distance from the parties responsible for the death of more than 5 hundred activists. She added that today the Prime Minister has "تحديّ لإثبات هويته الوطنية والأخلاقية بتقديم القتلة إلى المحاكمة للقصاص" - "the ethical and national obligation of bringing the killers to trial with neither fear or hesitation".

As a matter of fact, despite the high participation of students, academics, professionals and intellectuals in the latest wave of protests, today the movement is certainly more fragmented. Many leaders of the movement and prominent figures of the civic society have been either imprisoned or killed by security forces during last year's protests, while some other activists want to give a chance to the Prime Minister Mustapha al-Kadhimi, hoping that the October Revolution forces will be represented in the next parliamentary elections, to be held in June.

The Iraqi analyst Nasser al-Tayye stated to [Al-Ain News](#) that the country is facing a completely new era and he firmly believes that if all the different voices and forces that guided the "حركة 25 أكتوبر" (*the 25th October Movement*) manage to unite themselves under one solid umbrella, they will be able to participate in the next elections. As reported from Al-Tayye, on the 25th of October, activists announced the formation of what they called *جبهة تشرين* - *the October Front*, which includes 21 groups representing the protesters. He added that only by standing unite they will have a real sea-change in the political establishment.

In an interesting article published by [As-Sharq Al-Awsat](#), the political analyst, Mina al-Arabi, highlighted the similarities between the Iraqi and the Lebanese political systems.

Both countries share diversity and mobility in their political establishment which led, last October, to very similar protests movements. Their diversified political establishment make both Iraq and Lebanon very different from any other country in the region.

However, she pointed out that "في الواقع هذا التنوع بات مرهونا بانتخابات لم تعد تخرج بتغيير حقيقي، بل تؤدي عادة الى إعادة ترتيب للكراسي وتبادل المصالح بين الأحزاب المسيطرة على مفاصل الدولة، وعلى رأسها تلك المسلحة والمدعومة من قبل إيران" - "this diversified system relies on elections that are no longer producing any real change within the political establishment. On the contrary, they lead usually on a rearrangement of chairs and interests between the different parties that control the state, between them, armed groups supported by Iran".

She added that “ غطاء الانتخابات والوعود بتغيير رئاسة الحكومة لم تعد كافية لترضي الشعبين العراقي واللبناني بأن هناك “
elections and the promises of changing prime ministers will no longer convince the people of Iraq and Lebanon that a real sea-change is taking place within the corrupted political class”.

Unfortunately, “ ما يزيد الوضعين العراقي واللبناني تعقيدا هو ان في كلا البلدين يُطلب من الطبقة السياسية الحاكمة أن تُصلح “
نفسها. ومن المفارقة أن السياسيين والاحزاب السياسية التي تحكم البلاد، وهم المنتفعين الاوائل من النظام القائم ماديا وسياسيا، يُطلب
منهم أن يقوموا باصلاحات ستضر لا محالة بمصالحهم
“what is worsening the Iraqi and the Lebanese scenario is the opposition by the political actors themselves to implement any reform to the political system. Politicians and political parties are in fact the first beneficiaries of the system in place and, understandably, they are not willing to implement any reform that will certainly threaten their personal financial and political interests.””

**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.*