

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya – Joint Military Commission holds a new round of talks in Sirte



Source: The Arab Weekly – The military commission 5+5 session in Sirte

On the 10th of November, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission started a new round of talks between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the Government of National Accord (GNA) over the implementation of the nationwide cease-fire agreement, signed in Geneva on the 23rd of October, under the supervision of the United Nation Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

The UNSMIL has already held five talks, four in Geneva and one Ghadames, to advance the cease-fire's implementation. The agreement aims to establish a permanent nationwide cease-fire between the rival parties that are expected to abandon “confrontation lines” within three months. The end of

military operations should lead to a reduced presence of Russia and Turkey in Libya. Furthermore, the talks also tackled the suspension of any training with foreign advisors and the removal of all the militias and mercenaries involved in Libya, although the GNA has already accused foreign mercenaries of interfering in the peace process and violating the cease-fire's conditions.

Economic pressure and the necessity of resuming oil exports, have pushed the parties to the negotiating table. However, the possibility of a longstanding cease-fire remains uncertain.

In fact, it is unlikely that, Turkey and Russia, will ever support the cease-fire, as they will not agree on reducing their presence on the oil-rich soil. Furthermore, there are still disagreements between the LNA and the GNA on finances and hydrocarbon resources.

The agreement does not tackle a possible reconciliation between the LNA's commander, Khalifa Haftar, and the GNA's Prime Minister, Fayez al-Sarraj. Reconciliation agreements, still unaddressed, will be necessary for the formation of a new Libyan government. Yet the appointment of the new Libyan government will certainly resume internal and international disagreements. United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Russia and Qatar, deeply involved in the conflict, will surely intervene in the Government's formation process.

To know more about this topic:

- *Stratfor*, The Promise and Peril of Libya's New Cease-Fire 03/11/20, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/promise-and-peril-libya-s-new-cease-fire>
- *The Libyan Observer*, New round of Libyan 5+5 military commission talks starts in Sirte, 10/11/20, available at: <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/new-round-libyan-55-military-commission-talks-starts-sirte>
- *Daily Sabah*, Joint military commission meets in Sirte to advance cease-fire implementation, 11/11/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/libya-joint-military-commission-meets-in-sirte-to-advance-cease-fire-implementation>

Levant

#Syria – Washington aims at a limited engagement with Damascus



Sources: Financial Times – Syrian Kurds gathering around a US mine resistant M1224 vehicle.

Within last month, the US diplomatic pressure to isolate Syria seems to be shifting towards a more wary engagement with the government.

Committed and extensively focused on fighting and defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Washington has engaged, since almost a decade, a diplomatic isolation against Syria.

Lately, on the 17th of June the US administration, has introduced new sanctions against the Syrian government, under the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act, in order to weaken President Bashar al-Assad. This has yielded no results and failed to prevent Damascus from trying to take control of north-eastern Syria. Since 2016, the USA have been progressively reduced diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian ongoing civil war. In December 2019, Washington announced his intention to withdraw most of its troops from Syria and to maintain only 400 troops. After the US retreat, Turkey's ground forces pushed south.

By engaging with the Syrian government, Washington is trying to prevent further clashes between the US and Syrian forces, hoping for peace negotiations between Damascus and opposition forces.

Furthermore, if Washington will ease diplomatic relationships with Damascus, it is likely that GCC countries, without fearing US economic sanctions, could engage in dialogue too with the Syrian government, and possibly affect Iranian ties with the country.

To know more about this topic:

- *Stratfor*, Is the U.S. Opening the Door for Diplomacy in Syria?, 27/10/20, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/us-opening-door-diplomacy-syria>
- *The New Yorker*, America's Abandonment of Syria, 27/04/20, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/04/27/americas-abandonment-of-syria>

Gulf

#SaudiArabia – The Kingdom reforms the controversial Kafala system



Source: BBC

On the 4th of November, the Saudi Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development (HRSD) launched the “Labour Reform Initiative” to ease the controversial “Kafala” (Sponsorship) system

between employer and employee, with the aim of establishing a more attractive and diversified labour market, in accordance with the Kingdom's Vision 2030.

This sponsorship system emerged in the 1950 to regulate the relationship between the employer and the migrant worker. The term "Kafala" was originally used to refer the Islamic adoption jurisprudence. Later on, the system was expanded to labour fixed-term sponsorship and adopted by GCC countries, Jordan and Lebanon. In Saudi Arabia, more than 10 million foreign low-income workers are regulated by the Kafala.

Under this system, a migrant worker is legally bound to the employer and legal sponsor (Kafeel) for their contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country without first obtaining a permission from the kafeel, denying, de facto, one of the basic human rights: freedom of movement. The worker is tied to the kafeel throughout the entire stay. Often the kafeel exerts further control over the migrant worker by confiscating passport and travel documents. For this reason the Kafala system has been often considered a form of modern slavery.

The reforms, that are expected to be implemented by the 14th of March 2021, will ease the Kafala system of the Kingdom and certainly improve low-income workers' conditions. The employee will no longer be required to obtain from the employer any permit to quit the job and will be allowed to travel outside Saudi Arabia without his approval. Furthermore, contracts will be documented digitally, so that expats will be able to directly apply for new jobs opportunity.

On the other hand, many regulations of the sponsorship system still need to be further discussed. Workers, in fact, will still need a sponsor to enter the country, with the high risk that the latter might exert control and pressure. Moreover, reforms do not apply to domestic workers that are, indeed, the most vulnerable category and that often are victims of employers' violence and sexual abuse.

To know more about this topic:

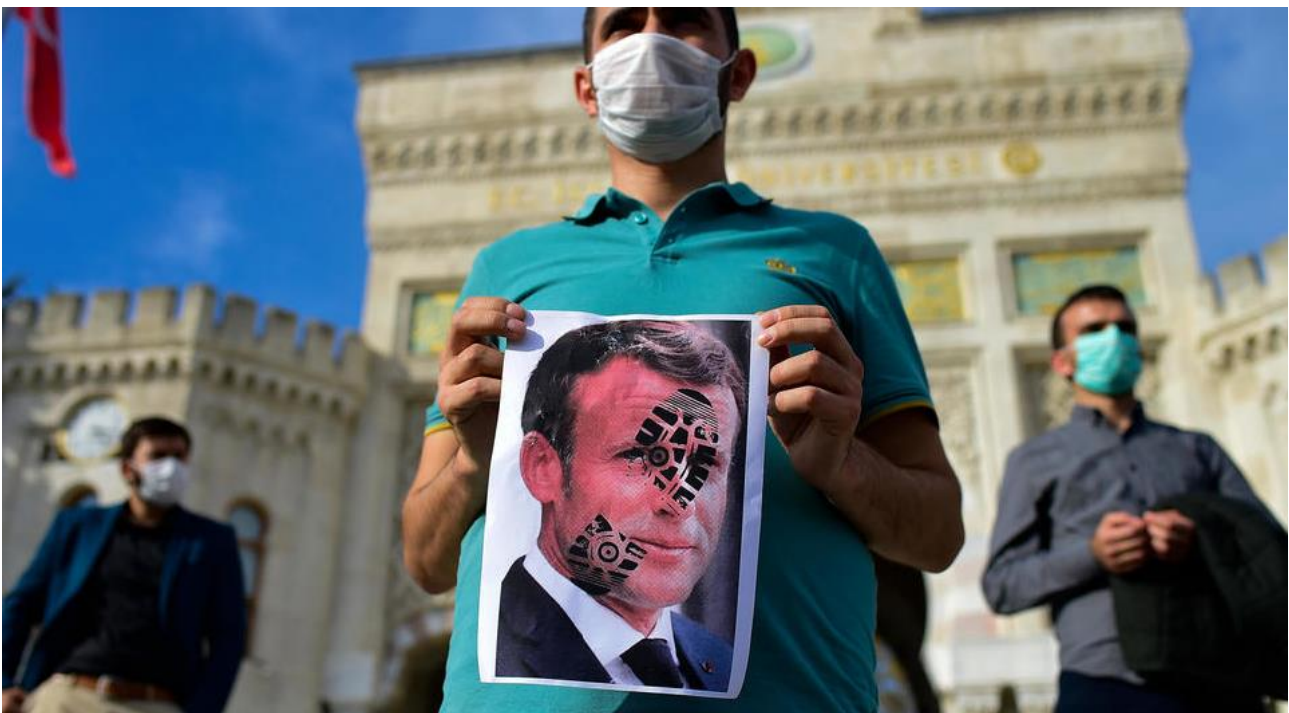
- ILO, The reform of Kafala System, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/132/PB2.pdf>
- *Al Jazeera*, Saudi Arabia to remove key restrictions on foreign workers, 04/11/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/11/4/saudi-arabia-plans-to-remove-key-restrictions-on-foreign-workers>

- *Stratfor*, Saudi Arabia's new labor reforms only address half of the problem, 05/11/20, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/saudi-arabia-s-new-labor-reforms-only-address-half-problem>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

IslamPolitics – The political campaigns around the figure of Muhammad



Source: France24 – Demonstrators in Istanbul holding images of the French President Emmanuel Macron

The shock of the last terrorist attacks in Nice, Paris, Dresden and Vienna has contributed to obscure a number of political actions and campaigns around the relationship between France and some members states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

After the horrific execution of a teacher by a Chechen terrorist, caused by a debate at school on the caricatures depicting Prophet Mohammad, French President Emmanuel Macron gave a speech during the ceremony held in commemoration of the victim, remembering that this French teacher knew the Quran, was interested in the Muslim civilisation and respected all his pupils, and that he was killed precisely for this and because he was teaching the liberties of the French Republic.

In previous statements he told that Islam was a religion undergoing a crisis and that Islamic separatism in France had to be stemmed, while in an [interview with Al Jazeera](#) he told he understood and respected the feelings of Muslims who are offended by the drawings, but that could never justify physical violence. The French Council of the Islamic community, the largest in Europe, decided to cancel the celebrations for the birth of Prophet Muhammed, in respect for the victims.

As reported by the Egyptian newspaper [Masrawy](#), Macron's statement sparked predictably a wave of criticism in several Islamic countries that witnessed protests and calls to boycott French products. Qatar and Kuwait strongly rejected Macron's speech for not condemning the caricatures and started an official campaign to boycott France. The dynamics are not too different from the past crisis of the Islamic cartoons sparked by the Jyllands-Posten during the Anders Fogh Rasmussen government (2005) that brought to a commercial embargo by a number of countries against Denmark.

[Al-Mamlaka TV](#), reported protests in Kashmir and Bangladesh. In Dhaka, 40.000 citizens took part in anti-France demonstrations organized by the Islamic Party. Protesters reached the French embassy and burned images of the President.

Strong criticism came also from Turkey that accused President Macron of carrying on a "Hatred campaign". " *هناك حملة استهداف للمسلمين مشابهة للحملة ضد يهود أوروبا قبل الحرب العالمية الثانية* ". - " *there is an on-going campaign targeting Muslims very similar to the campaign perpetuated against Jews in Europe* ", said Tayyip Erdogan commenting on the President's statements.

As reported by [Al-Quds](#), Fakhruddin Altun, head of the communication department of the Turkish Presidency, stated that " *لا يمكن استغلال الإسلام باسم الإرهاب* " - " *Islam cannot be used in the name of terrorism* ". However, he added that " *ندعو القيادة الفرنسية إلى تجنب المزيد من الخطاب التحريضي ضد المسلمين والتركيز بدلاً من ذلك على ضبط مرتكبي هذا العمل وأعمال العنف الأخرى* " - "[Turkey] invites the French Government to take distance from the anti-Islamic novel and to focus, instead, on containing those acts of violence". The escalating tensions between Ankara and Paris led the President to call the French ambassador for consultations.

Saudi Arabia, that did not witness any protest or call to boycott French goods, made official statements expressing the Kingdom's disappointment over the Prophet's caricatures. As reported by [Al-Ghad](#), the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that " *ترفض أي محاولة للربط بين الإسلام والإرهاب* ", - " *[Riyadh] refuses any attempt to link Islam to terrorism but strongly criticises the images of the Prophet, messenger of peace* ".

The official source added that “تُدين كل عمل إرهابي أياً كان مرتكبه، وتدعو إلى أن تكون الحرية الفكرية والثقافية منارة” – “[the Kingdom] condemns any terrorist operation while urges the intellectual and cultural freedom to serve as a beacon that radiates respect, tolerance and peace, while preventing actions that could lead to hatred, violence, extremism or violate the values of coexistence and respect between people”.

Despite the strong criticism coming from the Muslim community against France, many official Islamic institutions, preferred not to engage in the dispute and released statements condemning terrorism activities. As reported by [Al-Quds](#), Shaikh Ahmad al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, one of the highest authorities in the Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, said in a statement that “يؤكد الأزهر أنه لا يوجد بأي حال من الأحوال مبرر لتلك الأعمال الإرهابية البغيضة التي تتنافى مع تعاليم الإسلام السمحة وكافة الأديان السماوية، داعياً إلى ضرورة العمل على التصدي لكافة أعمال العنف والتطرف والكراهية والتعصب” – “According to Al-Azhar, there is no justification for those who practice terrorist actions, strongly condemned by the Islamic values of tolerance and by all the religions sent by God. We need to stand against all acts of violence, extremism, hatred and intolerance”.

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