

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Egypt – Cairo carries out joint military exercises with different regional and international powers



Source: UAE News – Units of the forces participating in the “Saif al-Arab” military exercise

As reported on the 22nd of November by the Arab Weekly, Egypt is carrying out military exercises with regional and international powers in different strategic areas, showing the country’s awareness of the potential threats ahead and its readiness to protect internal security.

On the 17th of November Egypt started a major Joint Military Exercise under the name of “Saif al-Arab” (the Sword of the Arabs) at the Mohamed Naguib Military base together with the armed forces of Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrein, United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning, that an Egyptian Navy frigate carried out joint training in the Mediterranean Sea together with a French one (3rd of November, assisted by Egyptian F-16 multirole fighters), in addition to the bigger “Friendship Bridge 2020” exercise with the Russian Navy in the Black Sea (17-24th of November). In the same period (14-26th of November), during the “Nile Eagles 1” joint military exercise at the Sudanese Meroe base, aircraft of the two countries carried out offensive and defensive sorties, while the elements of Egyptian 999 task force (part of the Sa’qa-Lightning Special Operation Forces) carried combat search and rescue missions with their Sudanese counterparts (elements of the SOF battalions 143 and 144).

It is evident that Cairo is enhancing its preparedness in distant areas and with different allies due to its complex multi-vector strategic situation.

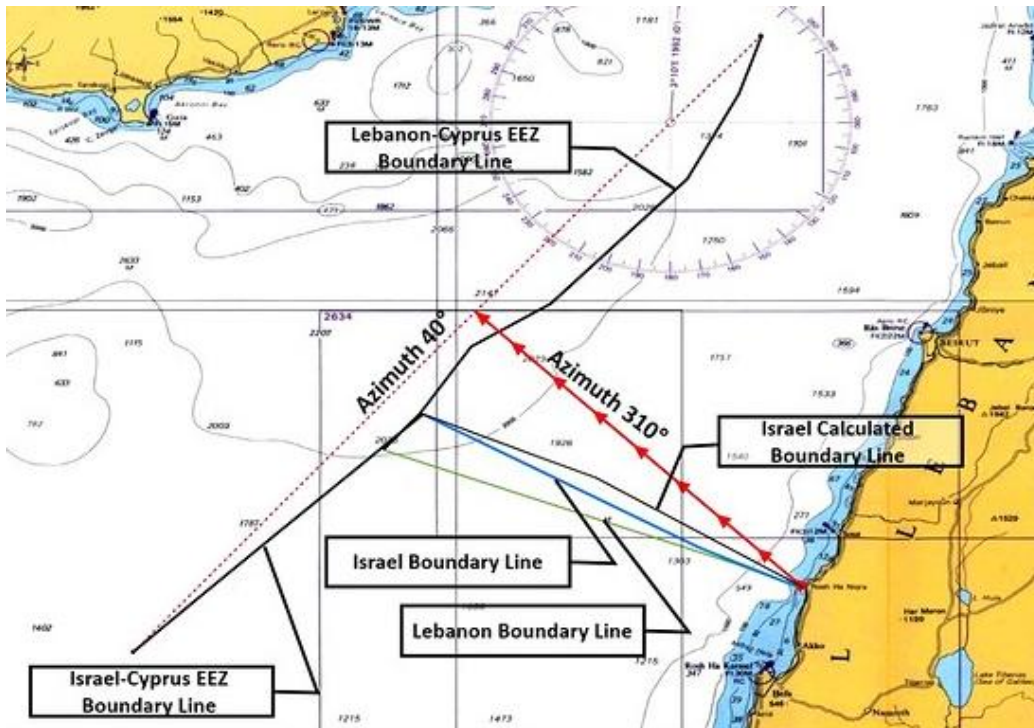
Egypt and Sudan are, in fact, strengthening their military ties amid the stalled negotiations over the Nile basin and the controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, while the “Sword of the Arabs” training aims to foster a military cooperation between Egypt and other Arab countries clearly to counterbalance the Iranian influence and threats in the Red Sea, but also the Qatari-Turkish alliance representing an actual threat in the neighbouring Libya and in the oil-rich Eastern Mediterranean waters.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Defaiya*, Saif al-Arab joint military drill kicks off in Egypt, 19/11/20, available at: <https://www.defaiya.com/news/Regional%20News/Egypt/2020/11/19/saif-al-arab-joint-military-drill-kicks-off-in-egypt>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Egypt’s military exercises hone down strategy to cope with threats, 22/11/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/egypts-military-exercises-hone-down-strategy-cope-threats>
- *Arab News*, Egypt joins major Arab military training exercise with KSA, UAE, 24/11/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1767346/middle-east>

Levant

#Lebanon – Maritime border talks with Israel stall



Sources: Israel Hayom – *The original map showing boundaries line in the Levantine Basin*

US mediated talks on the disputed maritime border between Israel and Lebanon seem to be stalled after both parties have pushed for extending boundaries lines into the other's territory.

According to the Middle East Eye, on the 23rd of November, the Israeli Energy Minister, Yuval Steinitz, accused Lebanon of being inconsistent and changing continuously its stance, leading the negotiations to a dead-end. He then invited the Lebanese President Michel Aoun for vis-à-vis meeting in a European country in order to finally solve the maritime border dispute once and for all, avoiding an unproductive back-and-forth.

With the support of the United States and the United Nations, last month, the two countries, technically in an on-going state of war, have launched a series of highly unusual talks to negotiate their shared maritime borders.

Negotiations started based on a map approved by the United Nations in 2011. The demarcation of the borders shows 860 square kilometres of disputed sea between the two countries but both sides are claiming extra portions in order to have exclusive access to the oil and gas rich Mediterranean waters.

In fact, according to the 2010's report released by the US Geological Survey, the eastern Mediterranean off the coast of Israel and Lebanon, known as the Levantine Basin, is extremely rich of oil and gas and, unsurprisingly, both sides are pushing to extend their maritime borders in order to start oil and gas exploration. In particular, Lebanon argues that its patch of sea is based on wrong parameters. President Aoun, after declaring that the demarcation should consist in a median line "*departing on land from the point of Ras Naqoura*" is now requesting an additional 1.430 square kilometres of sea overlapping Israel's Karish gas field.

The parties are expected to meet in December to further discuss the negotiations.

To know more about this topic:

- *The National*, What is Lebanon's and Israel's maritime border dispute?, 29/10/20, available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/explained-what-is-lebanon-and-israel-s-maritime-border-dispute-1.1101629>
- *Daily Sabah*, Israel accuses Lebanon of changing stance on maritime border, 20/11/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/israel-accuses-lebanon-of-changing-stance-on-maritime-border>
- *Middle East Eye*, Israel invites Lebanese president for direct talks over maritime dispute, 23/11/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-lebanon-aoun-invitation-talks-maritime-dispute>

Gulf

SaudiArabia – Houthis' new missile attack against a Saudi Aramco oil station



Source: Middle East Eye

On the 21st of November, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis launched a Quds-2 cruise missile attack against the Aramco petroleum products distribution station located in the city of Jeddah.

The spokesman of the rebel group's armed wing, Brigadier Yahya Sarie, already claimed the attack and warned that the "operations against the kingdom will continue". He added that the attack was carried out in retaliation for the Saudi-led coalition military operations in support to the Yemen's internationally recognised government.

The attack, targeting an important energy supplier located near by the Jeddah's King Abdulaziz International Airport, came just after the G20 nations summit and the visit of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to the still-under-construction Saudi megacity of Neom. Furthermore, the meeting was secretly attended by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, suggesting a new possible Normalisation Agreement between the Kingdom and Israel.

The group, that was used to Quds-1 cruise missile had recently adopted the new Quds-2 (of yet unknown design and characteristics), leading the United Nations experts to doubt that the weapons are assembled in Yemen but rather provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Yemen's Houthis hit Saudi Aramco site in Jeddah, 23/11/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/23/yemens-houthis-say-they-fired-missile-at-saudi-aramco-site>
- *Middle East Eye*, Yemen's Houthis launch missile attack on Saudi Aramco site, say officials, 24/11/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemens-houthis-launch-missile-attack-saudi-aramco-site-say-officials>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Iraq – The Arar land port reopens after 30 years of closure



Source: Gulf Insider – The Arar border crossing

As reported by the [Iraqi News Agency](#) (INA), on the 18th of November, after several virtual meetings, the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustapha al-Kadhimi and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, decided to reopen the strategic Arar border crossing after almost 30 years of closure. The Decision represents a long-awaited sign of closer trade ties between the countries.

Iraqi top officials, including the Iraqi Interior Minister, and a delegation from Riyadh met at the Arar desert border crossing to formally reopen the trade gateway to both goods and people.

The trade exchange area, connecting the Iraqi province of Anbar with Saudi Arabia, has been closed since 1991 following Saddam Hussain's invasion of Kuwait. Since then only pilgrims were allowed to cross the area once a year to enter the holy city of Mecca and perform the Hajj (the Islamic mandatory pilgrimage).

The rapprochement between the two countries has started in 2015 when Saudi Arabia, after 25 years, decided to reopen its embassy in Baghdad, aiming to restore a dialogue and to counterbalance the Iranian influence in the region. Two years after, in 2017, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel al-Jubeir, travelled to Baghdad on an official visit for the first time after decades followed by a Riyadh trip of the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

The decision has been officialised within the fourth round of talks held by the Iraqi-Saudi Coordination Council during which the parties discussed the necessity of enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields. The council was established in October 2017 with the aim of strengthening relations between the two countries.

According to the [joint statement](#) published by INA “أكد دولة رئيس الوزراء وصاحب السمو الملكي ولي العهد على” *“the Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi and the Saudi Crown Prince Mobammad Bin Salman are determined to strengthen their ties in all the fields”* [...] “انطلاقاً من الروابط والوشائج الاخوية” *“based on historical and rooted fraternal nexus that brings together the countries as well as their brotherly people”*.

In this context the Iraqi Border Ports Authority announced the opening of the new land port of Jadidat-Arar. The area will include a logistical area, administrative buildings and offices as well as a trade exchange yard with an allocated security sector.

The newly inaugurated land port, the only trade gateway between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, represents a significant opportunity in terms of economic development and is expecting to bring important financial resources to both countries. As reported by [Asharq al-Awsat](#) “افتتاح منفذ عرعر الحدودي مع المملكة العربية” *“given the major financial investments and given the amount of new job opportunities, that the land port is expecting to create, the opening of Jadidat-Arar has spread a lot of optimism among the citizens of the Anbar governorate”*.

According to the newspaper, the Governor of Anbar, Ali Farhan al-Dulaimi, pointed out that “ساحات” *“the trade exchange*

yard, that will be managed by Iraqis investment companies, will create thousands of new job opportunities for young Iraqis, especially for those living in the extremely poor areas surrounding the port”.

Moreover, as highlighted by [The Arab](#), reopening the Arar border crossing will not solely give to Iraq and Saudi Arabia the chance to develop a solid economic relationship but also the opportunity to finally “فرصة لتقليص الضغوط الإيرانية” – “reduce the Iranian pressure” and the political isolation that Teheran and its Shiite militias have created around the country.

In fact, despite the popular optimism toward the land port project, the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iraq was met with strong criticism and opposition by the Iraqi Shiite political parties. Qais Khazali, leader of Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (the League of the Righteous), the Iraqi Shiite political party and parliamentary group accused Saudi Arabia of trying to seize and “colonise” the country, adding that the Kingdom’s investments will undermine Iraq’s stability and security.

In a statement published on the [Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq’s website](#), Sheikh Khazali declared that the party “نرفض محاولات النظام السعودي في الإستيلاء على المساحات الكبيرة من أراضي محافظات الأنبار والنجف والمثنى والبصرة” - “firmly rejects Saudi regime’s (النظام السعودي) appropriation attempts of large portions of territories in the governorate of Anbar, Najaf, Muthanna and Basra, by using the pretext of economic investment” and accused, what he calls the “النظام السعودي” - “Saudi regime” of taking over the country’s natural resources.

He then concluded his statement “ندعو كل النخب من الأكاديميين في مختلف المجالات وطلبتنا الأجراء والفعاليات والإجتماعية وفي مقدمتها شيوخ ووجهاء العشائر المحترمون وكذلك القوى والشخصيات السياسية الوطنية إلى رفض هذا المشروع الخبيث وعدم السماح به” - “by inviting academics, clans’ representatives and the country’s political forces to reject the pernicious project.”

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