

ARAB DISPATCH

Arab Dispatch - a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation

Issue n. 14/2021

8th – 15th April

North Africa

#Egypt – Cairo and Khartoum conduct “Nile Eagles 2” exercise



Source: Egyptian Armed Forces

On the 9th of April Egypt and Sudan concluded a five-day military exercise, dubbed “Nile Eagles 2”, at Merowe air base in northern Sudan amid escalating tensions with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

On the 6th of April the latest round of trilateral talks held in Kinshasa (Congo) have failed with Ethiopia rejecting Sudan’s proposal of forming an international committee, that would include the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, to help reaching a common agreement.

On the 7th of April, following the deadlocked talks in Congo, the Egyptian President Adel Fattah al-Sisi, has warned once again Addis Ababa about the threat that the lack of fresh water represents for the country's stability and the risk of a conflict over the dam project.

Already in early March the Egyptian and the Sudanese forces concluded a military accord in Khartoum to improve their capacity in carrying out military operations against common challenges and threats. With the launch of the Nile Eagles joint air-force drills the two countries have proven that they are keen on strengthening their military and security cooperation to face common threats, but most significantly that are willing to engage in a military operation against Ethiopia.

On the other hand, Egypt has been warning Ethiopia since the very beginning of the construction of the dam in 2011 and observers are questioning whether al-Sisi would be capable of carrying out an attack against Ethiopia or his warnings will be just political.

As a matter of fact, Egypt owns efficient military land and air forces, vastly superior than Ethiopia's Soviet-era military equipment and obsolete naval force. In reality Cairo's options are much more limited and essentially either to an air raid or a special forces operation. The latter is, due to logistic and operational limitations, is less probable than the first one.

Egypt's relevant main air bases (Aswan and Berenice) are at a less convenient combat range from the dam, while Sudan's bases of Merowe or Khartoum are nearer to the objective. Egypt's air force has no tanker aircraft, but some type of attack aircraft can practice buddy-buddy refuelling. It has, instead, a considerable array of Russian and US guided bombs that could damage the most vulnerable elements of a dam. The Ethiopian dam should be defended by modern Israeli Spyder-MR and Russian Pantsir air defence systems.

With this in mind, Egypt hopes to pressure Ethiopia to return to negotiations also by alerting the international community. If not, Cairo's last option should not be underestimated, although risks of failure may be high and even a successful attack to the dam's powerhouses could finally only stiffen Addis Ababa's resolve, stifling negotiations.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Center Washington DC*, The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Egypt's Military Options, 30/07/20, available at: http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-and-egypts-military-options/
- *International Policy Digest*, Facing up to realism: will Egypt bomb the dam?, 02/11/20, available at: <https://intpolicydigest.org/facing-up-to-realism-will-egypt-bomb-the-dam/>
- *Al Monitor*, Egypt and Sudan hold military exercise amid crisis with Ethiopia, 09/04/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/egypt-sudan-hold-military-exercise-amid-crisis-ethiopia>

Levant

#Lebanon – Minister expands claims over disputed maritime area with Israel



Source: i24news

On the 12th of April, Lebanon's caretaker public works and transport minister announced a new amendment that will add 1.400 km² to the economic maritime zone disputed with Israel. The new document will need to be submitted to the United Nations for a formal claim and for approval.

Negotiation talks between Israel and Lebanon, officially in a state of war since the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948, were resumed last October in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura under the auspicious of the United Nations and Washington, after three years of stall. In 2018 Lebanon signed its first contract with Total, Eni and Novatek for drilling in two areas of the Mediterranean, however one of the areas is extremely controversial as it is partially located in an 860 km² area claimed by both Israel and Lebanon.

Israel owns huge offshore fields in its waters while Lebanon is in extreme need of natural resources. The extraction of natural resources in the disputed waters is indeed extremely important for Lebanon, now facing an unprecedented economic crisis, as it will help the country to deal with a collapsing electricity infrastructure, reduce its debt and create new job opportunities. At the same time a possible agreement by the two sides might reinforce stability between the two countries.

Although the parties were optimistic back in October, the Israeli energy minister Yuval Steinitz believes that Lebanon's latest claim would derail the talks rather than help the negotiations towards a common agreement.

To know more about this topic:

- *AlJazeera*, Lebanon set to expand claim on disputed maritime area with Israel, 12/04/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/12/lebanon-set-to-expand-claim-on-disputed-maritime-area-with-israel>
- *BBC*, Lebanon and Israel hold talks on disputed sea border despite state of war, 14/10/2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54522733>

Gulf

#Iran – Israel threatens the Vienna talks on Iran’s nuclear deal



Source: BBC

On the 11th of April Iran’s Atomic Energy Agency reported a “nuclear terrorist attack” to its Natanz nuclear facility. US intelligence officials told that the attack, caused by an explosive detonated remotely, damaging the primary and emergency electrical system, was carried out by Israel.

The Natanz facility, located in the desert of the province of Isfahan, represents Iran’s main nuclear enrichment site monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The facility has been targeted several times by cyber-attacks, not to mention the killing of the prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh last November. The general policy of Tel Aviv is not to comment on the events. The incident at the facility occurred a day after the Iranian President Hassan Rohani announced, during Iran’s annual national nuclear day, that the country begun feeding uranium hexafluoride gas feedstock into about 30 uranium-enriching centrifuges installed at Natanz.

According to Arab News, despite the diplomatic ties between Israel and the USA, Netanyahu has stood firm in its rejection of the nuclear agreement and, according to Israeli military sources, the country may soon carry out exercises featuring a raid against on Iran. Moreover, also Gulf monarchies might represent hamper the Biden administration and its European allies in restoring the nuclear deal.

According to the Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif the attack aims at weakening Iran's role in the nuclear talks, adding that, despite Israel's efforts, it will strengthen their position. In fact, as stated on *Assharq al Awsat*, in response to Israel's attack, Iran has started to raise the level of uranium enrichment to 60%.

The Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately comment on Iran's accusation and stated that his country, declared once by himself as a nuclear power, "will never allow Tehran to obtain nuclear weapons".

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Iran's Zarif blames Israel for Natanz incident, vows revenge, 12/04/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/12/irans-zarif-blames-israel-for-natanz-incident-vows-revenge>
- *Arab News*, Israel sends message to Biden with Iran attack, 13/4/2021 at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1842376>
- *Haaretz*, Accident hits Natanz nuke site, 11/04/21, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-iran-nuclear-program-natanz-blast-advanced-uranium-enrichment-1.9700637>
- *Haaretz*, Remotely detonated device blew up Iran's Natanz nuke site, 13/04/21, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/iran-nuclear-plant-blast-caused-by-remotely-detonated-explosive-report-says-1.9707081>
- *INSS*, A return to the nuclear agreement? Contacts between the United States and Iran, 13/04/21, available at: https://www.inss.org.il/publication/vienna-talks/?utm_source=activetrail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=INSS%20Insight%20No.%201455

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#UAE #Bahrain – The Gulf hosts its first ever Yom HaShoah



Source: Arabic Post

On the 7th of April the UAE hosted their first ever Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) in conjunction with genocide's commemorations held in Israel.

As reported by [Al Khaleej online](#) “المحرقة النازية” لليهود “أقيمت في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة مراسم إحياء ذكرى “المحرقة النازية” لليهود – (الهولوكوست)، بالتزامن مع فعاليات مماثلة أقيمت في دولة الاحتلال الإسرائيلي، في فعالية تعد الأولى من نوعها في بلد عربي – “The UAE hold a ceremony to remember the Holocaust in conjunction with similar events held in the Israeli occupation state, the first time such events have been held in Arab countries.”

For the first time in history the Jewish communities in the UAE participated in the Yellow Candle Project, a ceremony to remember the victims of the Holocaust. During the event the members of the Jewish communities light a yellow candle in memory of the victims of the genocide.

During the commemorations a documentary film about the Jewish genocide was shown to the attendees followed by a discussion on the Holocaust and the Arab world. Similar ceremonies were organized by local Jewish communities also in Bahrain, the second country after the United Arab Emirates to sign the Abraham Accords with Israel.

Additionally, the Association of Jewish Communities in the Gulf organised a series of events to make youth from Bahrain and the UAE aware about the atrocities perpetuated by the Nazi regime against Jewish people.

The Twitter account [إسرائيل في الخليج](#) (Israel in the Gulf) commenting on the event published a post saying: *اضاء ناشطون اسرانييون واماراتيون ستة شموع في الامارات العربية المتحدة تخليداً لذكرى الملايين الستة في اصعب كارثة “إبشيرية - المحرقة النازية، نقف معاً ضد التطرف، لن ننسى” – “In the United Arab Emirates Israeli and Emirati activists lit six candles to remember the 6 million people lost during the most difficult human catastrophe ever: the Holocaust. We stand together against all the extremisms and we will not forget.”*

The UAE embassy in Israel on that day sent messages to remember the victims of the Holocaust underlying that the victim of the genocide were victims of extremism, hatred and discrimination. On its [Twitter account](#) posted: *في ذكراهم تؤكد دولة الإمارات أن القيم الإنسانية التي تأسست عليها ستبقى راسخة، ف#المحبة و#التعايش و#التسامح من الأساسيات التي تحتاجها البشرية ليعم السلام” – “In the remembrance of the victims, the UAE will remain firm on the human values that are the foundations of our country. Love, coexistence and tolerance are the fundamental basics that humanity need in order to build peace.”*

Majid al Sarrah cofounder of [Sharaka](#) (Partnership), a NGO founded following the Abraham Accords by young leaders from Israel and the Gulf to promote interreligious dialogue in the region stated: *نقف اليوم مع إخوتنا وأخواتنا اليهود في جميع أنحاء العالم. كانت المحرقة جريمة ضد اليهود نابعة من مشاعر قامت على الكراهية والتمييز” – “Today we stand with our Jewish brothers and sisters in the world. The genocide was based on hate and discriminations. We tell them that the Holocaust will never happen again”.*

Following the cofounder’s message another member wrote: *اليهود في جميع أنحاء العالم يجب أن يعرفوا أنهم ليسوا وحدهم، وأن الدول العربية الموقعة على اتفاقات أبراهام ودولاً عربية أخرى تقف إلى جانبهم” – “Jewish people in the world should know that they are not alone. The Arab countries that signed the Abraham Accords as well as other Arab countries are with them.*

**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.*