

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya #Egypt – The Turkey-Egypt normalisation: a solution?



Source: Strategic Council on Foreign Relations

On the 5th of May Turkey and Egypt held high-level bilateral talks in Cairo aiming at normalising diplomatic ties. The two-day meeting focussed on their bilateral relations and, most importantly, on the Libyan conflict and their energy rivalry in Eastern Mediterranean. Talks between Ankara and Cairo, whose ties had been completely severed since Egypt's coup in 2013, started last month with Erdoğan publicly announcing his intentions to discuss ways to normalise ties with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Both countries have shown to be eager to re-establish diplomatic ties and Turkey seems truly committed to exit its current diplomatic isolation. Following the reconciliation between Doha and Riyadh and the recent talks between Tehran and Riyadh, Ankara is trying to reassess its foreign diplomacy starting from cooling down tensions with Egypt, its major rival in the region.

The recent Erdoğan's overtures to Cairo might lead not only to a series of developments in Eastern Mediterranean and in Libya, where both countries play a central role and back opposite sides, but also to significant outcomes for the broader struggle between certain Sunni states and their rivals supporting the Muslim Brothers.

It is certainly too early to outline the outcomes in Libya and in Eastern Mediterranean of a resumed dialogue and surely solving the ideological differences (mainly based on the Muslim Brotherhood issue) will not be sufficient to support the fragile political transition in Egypt's western neighbour.

In Libya, Egypt opposes the persistent presence of Turkish military forces and mercenaries while, in Eastern Mediterranean (a key issue and driver behind Turkey's military involvement in Libya), aligns with Greece. Cairo remains sceptical about Ankara's real intent to withdraw its forces from the Libyan soil. In fact, while Egypt expects Erdoğan to pull out his mercenaries, last month a new batch of 380 irregulars was sent by the Turkish government in Libya. Never the less, if Egypt is sceptical about Turkey's next move in Libya, Ankara is highly unsure about Cairo's willingness to side with Turkey against Greece and Cyprus in exchange for ending support to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Obviously, their support to opposing sides in the Libyan conflict and their energy rivalry in Eastern Mediterranean will represent a significant obstacle to a possible Egypt-Turkey normalisation; however, both countries seem to recognise that they need to reconcile their positions in order to achieve a lasting stability in Libya.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Normalisation between Egypt and Turkey hindered by issues of mercenaries, Brotherhood, 10/04/21, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/normalisation-between-egypt-and-turkey-hindered-issues-mercenaries-brotherhood>

- *The Institute for National Security Studies*, A unified government in Libya: potential regional implication, 03/05/21, available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/libya-unity-government/>
- *Al Monitor*, Libyan conflict stands out as key to Turkey-Egypt normalization, 10/05/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/26/haftar-supporters-prevent-the-first-meeting-of-the-dbeibah-govt>

Levant

#Israel #Palestine– The conflict deepens internal divisions



Source: AIJAC

After almost two weeks since the fighting between Israel and HAMAS started, the future for political contenders and, more concretely, for both Israeli and Palestinian populations appears particularly uncertain, while a new coexistence will be difficult to rebuild.

If, as it happened in the past, the parties agree speedily on a ceasefire, if it will be respected, the result may predictably more “quiet for quiet” during some years until a new round of attacks. Temporary expedients generally offer temporary solutions, even during a protracted period of time.

On a domestic level, the risk of an irreparable civil cleavage within Israel is a concrete issue. Along a furious short conflict with hundreds of killed and displaced people, especially in an unviable Gaza Strip, violent clashes between Israeli and Palestinian youth erupted, culminating in dramatic lynching episodes in towns in which before peaceful coexistence was normal.

Arab Israelis are 20% of the total Israeli population and the issue is to what extent toxic relationships will pose a political and social challenge to a country with multiple identities, cultures and religions. Part of the society reacted with a clear message of peace and coexistence in Ramle, Tel Aviv and other cities, starting from the 15th of May, where citizens of different cultures and faiths were together on the backdrop of very tense and inflammatory situation.

Before this tragic cycle of violence, even the Islamist Knesset member, Mansour Abbas, was a potential bridge builder between different social sectors, but the irresponsible actions that led to the crisis weakened considerably his role, leaving room for HAMAS, who now perceived to have much more consensus among Arab Israelis in mixed towns.

Israel, traditionally focussed on weakening militarily its enemy in order to restore a fragile deterrence, was unable to contest politically HAMAS: at least in the sort period, the Gaza rulers achieved their goal of presenting themselves as the defenders of the holy city of al-Aqsa/Jerusalem and the Palestinian people.

Thus, the military victory on HAMAS could be a tactical gain for prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but has all the potential of keeping busy any future government in managing an extremely divided society in a shattered peaceful coexistence.

According to al-Monitor, a real remedy for such violent civil discord might be letting the Arab Israeli minority participating in the country’s governance and decision-making process, giving them the chance to build a real coexistence and a to be finally more integrated.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Monitor*, How Sheikh Jarrah became a flashpoint in latest Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 13/05/2021, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/how-sheikh-jarrah-became-flashpoint-latest-israeli-palestinian-conflict>
- *Middle East Eye*, Israel-Palestine: What happened this week explained, 14/05/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-gaza-bombing-what-happened-week-explained>
- *Al Jazeera*, Netanyahu says Gaza bombing to continue “in full-force”, 16/05/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/16/netanyahu-says-gaza-bombing-to-continue-in-full-force>
- *The Jerusalem Post*, Israel-Gaza violence: 9 days in, but what’s next?, 18/05/21, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/israel-gaza-violence-9-days-in-but-whats-next-analysis-668455>
- *The Jerusalem Post*, Biden to Netanyahu: “Wind down bombardment of Gaza, 19/05/21, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/gantz-to-austin-idf-to-continue-gaza-campaign-to-achieve-long-term-quiet-668452>

Gulf

#SaudiArabia – The Kingdom reaffirms its historic bonds with Pakistan



Source: *Al Khaleej Today*

On the 8th of May Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan met in Jeddah to discuss ways to reaffirm their economic and trade relations.

On the occasion the two leaders signed for the establishment of the Saudi-Pakistani Supreme Coordination Council, a body created to *"impart strategic direction to the development of Pakistan-Saudi relations"* and two Memoranda of Understanding that aim at strengthening security ties and enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries.

Over the years, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have been close allies, with the kingdom generously supporting Pakistan financially and with oil concessions. In August 2018, upon the election of Imran Khan as Prime Minister, Saudi Arabia offered a financial relief package of 6,2 billion dollars. One year later, in 2019, Mohammed bin Salman announced 20 billion dollars of investments in Pakistan including Aramco oil refinery and petrochemical complex in the strategic port city of Gwadar. Other investments were then made in the mining and renewable energy fields in parallel with a Free Trade Agreement to increase economic relations between the two brotherly countries.

However, this long-time diplomatic and economic cooperation was severed last year when the Pakistan's Foreign Minister criticised the Kingdom for not supporting its country over the Kashmir issue. After the incident, Mohammed bin Salman withdrew most of its loans and Islamabad was forced to turn to China for an emergency loan.

In this context, reaffirming the longstanding friendship with Pakistan, might represent for Saudi Arabia a significant occasion to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Besides the historic friendship and the economic interests between the two countries, a further factor of renewing links might be the US' decision to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and the impact that this might have on the region.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Diplomat*, What's behind Pakistan outreach to Saudi Arabia, 07/05/21, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/whats-behind-pakistan-outreach-to-saudi-arabia/>
- *Arab News*, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are back on track, 08/05/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1855386>
- *Arab News*, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan sign agreement to establish Saudi-Pakistani Supreme Coordination Council, 08/05/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1855546/saudi-arabia>
- *Anadolu Agency*, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia vow to strengthen "historic bonds", 08/05/21, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-saudi-arabia-vow-to-strengthen-historic-bonds/2233818#>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Lebanon – The risk of a “total darkness” in Lebanon



Source: The Arab Weekly

On the 14th of May, Turkey’s electricity firm [Karadeniz](#) that supplies power to Lebanon from two barges stationed on the Lebanese coast, announced its intentions to shut down electricity supplies over 18 months of payment arrears that produced a 100 million dollars debt. The decision was taken after a Lebanese prosecutor decided to fine the company following the TV channel Al-Jadeed announcement of corruption allegations, linked to the power contract.

The company’s spokesperson denied the charges and ask Lebanon to draw up a plan to pay its arrears, threatening to shut down electricity supplies.

The two power barges operated by Karadeniz provide Lebanon with 370 megawatts, about a quarter of Lebanon’s supply and, in case of a shut-off, the country will witness a total darkness.

Even before the severe economic crisis that hit the country, Lebanon was unable to meet its energy requirements and power cuts were usual on a daily basis.

Since the 15-year civil war, power cuts are part of people's daily lives and Lebanese have slowly learned how to deal with it. With the economic crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and most significantly by a highly corrupted political class, Lebanon's economy has imploded under an unprecedented amount of debt. Since October's national uprising in 2019, power cuts became even more frequent. In residential areas, far away from the capital, power cuts last longer and people live with no electricity for eight to twelve hours daily.

With increasing power cuts, schools and hospitals face difficulties to operate at full capacity and during the winter season the lack of electricity represents a serious matter. Furthermore, with the on-going economic crisis, Lebanese are no longer able to pay for private diesel generators.

Already last March the caretaker minister of energy [Raymond Ghajar](#) notified the Lebanese President Michel Aoun over the lack of funding that the country needs in order to purchase the required fuel to generate electricity, pointing out that the state-owned electricity company (Eletricité du Liban) had been functioning on the remains of a loan allocated under the 2020 budget, while there is no clear financial plan for the 2021 budget. On many occasions he warned the Lebanese President on the [severe repercussions](#) that all sectors will face if the power went out, and called for emergency founding to guarantee power to the country. He further underlined the catastrophic consequences that the country will encounter in the medical sector, mentioning the importance of ensuring electricity in hospitals, still fighting the spread of the Corona virus, and the necessity of securing the quality of vaccines. He added that it is unacceptable that hospitals rely on electricity generators that cannot supply electricity for more than seven hours.

At the same time the caretaker government cannot invest its scarce resources on electricity infrastructures, as state revenues are entirely allocated to cover the public debt.

The World Bank and international investors had pledged to invest 11 billion dollars in Lebanon's infrastructures; however, these investments are conditional on the reforms that the political class has promised but never implemented.

With the [Zouk power plant](#) running out of residual oil and the EDL still relying on the 2020 budget, the country is in dire need of a government capable to present a credible financial plan to secure power

generation. Unfortunately, the political class, still involved in internal controversies, after nine months since the Beirut's port blast and the following government's resignation, did not even agree on the formation of the next Lebanese government.

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