



ARAB DISPATCH

ISSUE 23rd – November 24th – 30th, 2021

NORTH AFRICA #Morocco

First ever defence memorandum between Rabat and Tel Aviv

On the 24th of November, the Israeli defence minister, Benny Gantz, visited the Kingdom of Morocco.

The visit, the second since the normalisation agreement but the first of its kind, aimed at strengthening defence ties between Israel and one of the Arab countries that officialised diplomatic relation with Israel and at opening ways of military cooperation.

Upon his arrival, Gantz, was received by Morocco's minister in charge of defence administration, Abdellatif Loudiyi, and, after visiting the grave of Mohammed V and Hassan II, the king's grandfather, and father, the two ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will enable Rabat to buy high-tech Israeli security products, ranging from

attack drones to Iron Dome missile defence systems. The Iron Dome is designed to intercept mortar/artillery shells and short-range rockets.

The agreement established a full cooperation on purchases, research development and training.

The two ministers also tackled the regional security situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and highlighted the similar challenges that both countries face in the fight against jihadist terrorism, border and aerial threats.

This MoU between Israel and an Arab country has no precedent in history.

While Israel has close security ties with Egypt and Jordan, with which has already peace deals, it doesn't have a MoU with them and most significantly concerning security and defence cooperation.

Morocco and Israel have had previously unofficial ties at intelligence level however, both countries will now be able to formally share intelligence and Tel Aviv will be able to export advanced weaponry and defence systems.

Rabat, which normalized ties with Israel last December, getting in return the US' recognition of Morocco sovereignty on Western Sahara, may significantly benefit from the unprecedented

agreement, especially in the defence field.

Meanwhile, according to some analysts, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding will serve as a signal of strength to its neighbour Algeria, whose diplomatic relations quickly deteriorated last August.

Before leaving the kingdom, the Israeli defence minister visited the Talmud Torah synagogue in Rabat. Morocco had historically a strong Jewish community. More than 200.000 of Moroccan Jewish migrated to Israel after the founding of the state in 1948. Half a million of Israelis claim, in fact, Moroccan origins.



Source: Middle East Monitor – Israeli Defense Minister visits the Mausoleum of Mohammed V in Rabat

To know more:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Israel, Morocco sign landmark security deal as Gantz visits Rabat, 24/11/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/israel-morocco-sign-landmark-security-deal-gantz-visits-rabat>
- *The Jerusalem Post*, Israel, Morocco sign historic defence agreement, 24/11/21, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/israel-morocco-sign-defense-agreement-686858>
- *The North African Post*, Morocco, Israel sign historic defence memorandum, 24/11/21, available at: <https://northafricapost.com/54035-morocco-israel-sign-historic-defense-memorandum.html>
- *MENA Affairs*, Morocco, Israel signs MoU during Israeli Defense Minister visit to Rabat, 24/11/21, available at: <https://menaaffairs.com/morocco-israel-sign-mou-during-israeli-defense-minister-visit-to-rabat/>

LEVANT #Lebanon

No hopes for the land of the cedars

On the 24th of November Lebanon's interior minister, Bassam Mawlawi, expressed his concerns over the diplomatic crisis that flared up since the televised comments of the Lebanese information minister, George Kordahi, over Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Yemeni civil war.

According to Mawlawi "every delay in addressing the crisis with Gulf countries will further exacerbate Lebanon's massive economic crisis

and affect the lives of more Lebanese".

After Kordahi's comments were disclosed, the Lebanese Prime minister, Najib Mikati, who cannot dismiss Kordahi without the approval of two-thirds of the Cabinet, invited the minister to submit his resignations. George Kordahi, backed by the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah, refused to step down, recalling the fact that his remarks

were recorded before his nomination as minister of information.

Following the minister's remarks Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Beirut and asked the Lebanese envoy to leave the country. In support of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait also withdrew their envoys.

In retaliation of the comments made by Kordahi, Saudi Arabia further announced new imports' bans, a choice that will affect hundreds of businesses in Lebanon, already witnessing an unprecedented economic meltdown.

The Interior minister warned that the bans risk to curtail all trade with the Gulf, as many Gulf countries might follow Saudi Arabia's bans, and, most significantly, could undermine the employment, hence the residency, of more than 350.000 Lebanese citizens employed in the Gulf and whose remittances are essential to many Lebanese families severely affected by the economic crisis and that rely on remittances of family's members working abroad.

If the crisis between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia remains unsolved, the daily life of Lebanese people will further worsen, leading to a renewed wave of popular unrests and political instability.

Mawlawi is further concerned about Kordahi's political backers, notably Iran-backed Hezbollah, that are, de facto, halting the minister's resignation fuelling, by doing so, the diplomatic dispute with Gulf countries. The Shiite party on its side did not approve Kordahi's resignation and accused the Kingdom of "extortion".

Saudi officials said that the issue with Lebanon is not restricted to Kordahi's remarks but is rooted to the alliance of the country with Iran and the deep influence and power that the Islamic republic exerts on the country. Worth mentioning that, after the incidents, Houthis rebels put up posters across the city of Sanaa in support of the minister and announced their intention to rename a street of the capital after Kordahi.

The latest row of imports' bans might have severe political and economic impact as the country is already dealing with its worst economic and political crisis, described by the world bank as the world's worst economic crisis in the last 150 years.

with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in Doha to discuss the unprecedented diplomatic crisis and asked the emir to help Lebanon to ease the dispute.

On the 29th of November the Lebanese president Michel Aoun met



Source: France 24

To know more:

- *Deutsche Welle*, Row with Gulf states could speed up Lebanon's economic free fall, 11/11/21, available at:

<https://www.dw.com/en/row-with-gulf-states-could-speed-up-lebanons-economic-free-fall/a-59783426>

- *Al Arabiya*, Lebanon's interior minister: Crisis with Gulf could worsen, 23/11/21, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/11/23/Lebanon-s-interior-minister-Crisis-with-Gulf-could-worsen>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Lebanese minister warns crisis with Gulf could worsen beyond repair, 24/11/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/leban>

<ese-minister-warns-crisis-gulf-could-worsen-beyond-repair>

- *Gulf News*, Lebanon's President Aoun discusses Gulf crisis with Qatar emir, 29/11/21, available at: <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/lebanons-president-aoun-discusses-gulf-crisis-with-qatar-emir-1.84048567>

GULF #UnitedArabEmirates

As ties warm, Abu Dhabi and Ankara sign cooperation deals

On the 24th of November the Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan met the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara.

During the meeting the two leaders signed a number of deals for future investments and cooperation in the technology and energy sector.

The UAE, following its “zero problems” approach towards countries in the region (a wording echoing a similar past Turkish policy),

is showing to be willing to overcome its regional divergencies.

Starting with the Al Ula GCC's summit, that officially ended the boycott towards Qatar, the UAE has re-established diplomatic ties with many leaders of the region.

The “zero problems” approach includes also Iran, as Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs and chief nuclear negotiator, visited Abu Dhabi, on the 24th of November and met Anwar Gargash, the President's diplomatic

advisor, and Syria, as the Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed visited the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad early this month.

Rapprochement between Ankara and Abu Dhabi started in September, with a phone call between Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Tayyip Erdogan to de-escalate tensions and differences on regional issues.

On this occasion the UAE's Crown Prince discussed with his counterpart "bilateral relations and ways to enhance and develop them to serve the common interests of the two countries". Additionally, they exchanged their visions on regional issues.



Source: *Hürriyet Daily News*

To know more:

- *The Arab Weekly*, UAE, Turkey intensify quest for new chapter in relations as leaders talk, 01/09/21,

available at:
<https://thearabweekly.com/uae->

turkey-intensify-quest-new-
chapter-relations-leaders-talk

- *The Arab Weekly*, UAE presses ahead with “zero problems” policy as Abu Dhabi crown prince visits Turkey, 25/11/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/uae-presses-ahead-zero-problems->

policy-abu-dhabi-crown-prince-
visits-turkey

- *Al Jazeera*, Turkey, UAE sign financial cooperation deals as ties warm, 24/11/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/11/24/turkey-uae-sign-financial-cooperation-deals-as-ties-war>

ARAB INSIGHT

#MENA

Nuclear talks resumed in Vienna

Critical talks between world powers and Iran [have been resumed](#) in Vienna on the 29th of November. The Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) met in a physical format. The meeting was chaired by Enrique Mora on behalf of EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. After a 5 month-long impasse, delegations from Iran, the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany, and the UK addressed the restoration of the JCPOA deal and the challenges emerged after the US withdrawal in 2018, under the then President Donald Trump.

The Joint Commission discussed the return of the United States to the 2015 nuclear deal which was expected to limit Iran's nuclear activities in return for lifting of the US sanctions imposed on Iran. After three years since the US' backdrop, the recently appointed President Ebrahim Raisi, will most likely add further demands.



Source: Al Araby

According to the political analyst, [Amer al-Sabaileh](#), Iran will most likely further delay the negotiations as it is well aware that procrastinating the JCPOA deal means gaining time to further develop its nuclear capabilities. The analyst added that Tehran is in extreme need of lifting the US sanctions reinstated by the former US president, Donald Trump, and halting international isolation; however, it also aims at strengthening its nuclear capabilities and is fully aware that time is in its favour.

On the other hand, the Iranian political analyst, [Hussein Rourian](#), stated that Tehran is committed to return to the JCPOA deal and it will not procrastinate the talks as it aims at reviving the economy significantly affected by the harsh US sanctions and further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, as highlighted by [Ali Rajab](#), Iranian affairs' analyst, Tehran needs the revival of the talks over the nuclear deal also to unlock frozen funds estimated at more than 10 billion dollars, necessary to revive the economy and to tackle the pandemic. Iran is witnessing its worst economic crisis and, if the US sanctions will continue to crush the economy, there is a looming risk of major popular unrests across the country that might threaten the stability of the Iranian regime.

Nonetheless, through negotiations, Tehran aims also at lifting sanctions against major political figures. Among Iranian leaders and officials hit by the US sanctions stand out Sayyid Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei, son of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and the current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line ally of Ali Khamenei. According to the analyst, lifting sanctions against such important political figures will clearly be a political victory of the ultra conservatives over the reformists. Not to mention that lifting the sanctions will unlock frozen funds (around 20 billion dollars) that belong to several institutions under direct control of Ayatollah Khamenei.



Source: *The New York Times* - Heavy-water nuclear reactor in Arak (Iran)

What could undermine Iran's decision to return to the JCPOA deal are [two main conditions](#) that the Biden's administration is trying to include in the agreement: Iran's ballistic missile programme and the monitoring of Iran's regional influence, especially in Yemen and Syria. Two conditions that Iran has promptly rejected.

Regarding military security, Iran seeks through negotiations to halt Israel's cyber-attacks on nuclear facilities.

Following the announcement of the revived talks in Vienna, the Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett expressed his disagreement and announced that Israel will not take part into the negotiations and offered instead a military alternative to pressure the Iranian leadership.

According to [Amad News](#), the Iranian nuclear file opened a deep disagreement between the United States and Israel on the possible ways ahead to return to the

2015 nuclear deal. It seems that they both want the revival of the nuclear deal but while Washington opted to return to the negotiations table by reconsidering sanctions against Iran, Israel prefers the military option.

The United States already encouraged Israel to halt its sabotage operations against Iran's nuclear facilities that are considered counterproductive and further increase Iran's nuclear operations to enrich uranium. As a matter of fact, while Israel carries out cyber-attacks against Iran, the Islamic Republic responds by attacking Israel and US targets as well as US interests. Moreover, Iran has developed its defence capabilities and Israel's cyber-attacks are no longer effective as before.

The Biden administration is committed to return to the nuclear deal and will not let Israel to drag the United States into a military operation against Iran. Israel, on the other hand, is in extreme need of the US support at a regional level and will not be able to threaten credibly Iran without Washington.

Israeli officials admitted that the former Israeli administration clearly failed to undermine the nuclear agreement as Iran made significant nuclear advances. Previous open-source analyses in 2012-2013 underscored also the technical limitations of an Israeli air and missile attack against a set of high-value targets and the strategic risks of its aftermath.

At the same time other regional players, including members of the Gulf Cooperation Countries, supported the revival of the nuclear deal, some of them reversing the previous approval of the "maximum pressure" policy.

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