



ARAB DISPATCH

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NORTH AFRICA #Algeria

Algeria strengthens ties with Iran

According to the Middle East Monitor amid the increased Israeli influence in Morocco and the escalating diplomatic tension between Algiers and Rabat, we might witness, further intensifications in the already well-established diplomatic relations between Iran and Algeria.

Since the two countries restored diplomatic relations in 2000, Algiers and Tehran, developed strong cultural and economic ties while supporting each other internationally.

In 2012 they were the only countries to object the decision of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to suspend Syria's membership due to the government's harsh repression against the popular protests.

Algeria always supported Iran's rights to develop nuclear technology while Iran widely supported the Polisario Front, the independent movement that claims the western Sahara territory, leading Morocco to cut diplomatic ties with the Islamic republic, accused of funding the independent movement through its embassy in Algiers and even through Lebanon's Hezbollah. Nonetheless, in 1980 Tehran officially recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic proclaimed by the Polisario Front.

Last August, amid escalating tensions between Morocco and Algeria, Tehran and Algiers strengthen even further their diplomatic ties.

Iran welcomed Algeria's choice to cut diplomatic ties with Morocco and in

September the Algerian Foreign Minister, Ramtane Lamamra, discussed with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, possible ways to foster their bilateral cooperation.

On the 11th of November the Iranian foreign minister, Amir Abdollahian, held a phone conversation with his Algerian counterpart during which he expressed his desire to develop their bilateral ties in all fields, including in the military.

Abdollahian praised Lamamra, for his disappointment over Arab countries normalising diplomatic ties with Israel and for his vote against Israel's return to the African Union as an observer, an accreditation own by Israel until 2002.

The two foreign ministers also discussed the developments in the Libyan political transition and agreed that the Libyan crisis can only be solved with the involvement of Libyan groups without foreign interference. Finally, they expressed hope for the upcoming meeting of the Arab League that will be held in Algeria next March and that will discuss the return of Syria into the organisation.

Certainly, intensified relation between Tehran and Algiers come amid the growing influence of Israel in the region.

Algeria strongly opposed and objected Morocco's decision to normalise ties with Israel, a move that Lamamra described as "irresponsible" and an act of "betrayal" towards Palestinians.

With Egypt's recognition of Israel in 1979 and with the more recent normalised relations between Israel and Morocco followed by Sudan's normalisation deal, the Jewish state reinforced significantly its position in Africa. After the visit of the Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, to Morocco, during which defense ties were normalised, the newspaper, Israel Hayom, reported that the two countries are planning to establish a joint military base in Morocco.

In this context, the increasing ties between Tehran and Rabat will surely be considered very negatively by Morocco and most significantly by Israel vis-à-vis its ambitions in North Africa.



Source: Ramtane Lamamra Twitter Account - Iranian foreign minister, Amir Abdollahian (R) with the Algerian Foreign Minister, Ramtane Lamamra

To know more:

- *Institute for Security Studies*, Israel's accreditation to the AU is dividing Africa, 09/10/21 available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/israels-accreditation-to-the-au-is-dividing-africa>
- *Tehran Times*, Iran FM holds phone conversation with Emirati, Algerian counterparts, 12/11/21, available at: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/466960/Iran-FM-holds-phone-conversation-with-Emirati-Algerian-counterparts>
- *Middle East Monitor*, We can expect stronger Algeria-Iran ties as Israel plans to establish a base in Morocco, 23/11/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211123-we-can-expect-stronger-algeria-iran-ties-as-israel-plans-to-establish-a-base-in-morocco/>
- *Israel Hayom*, Israel-Morocco ties: seize the opportunity, 25/11/21, available at:

<https://www.israelhayom.com/opinions/israel-morocco-ties-seize-the-opportunity/>

- *Middle East Eye*, Algerian team raise Palestinian flag after beating

Morocco, 12/12/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fifa-arab-cup-algeria-raises-palestine-flags-after-win-morocco>

LEVANT #Jordan

Jordanian MPs leave the parliamentary session to protest against the energy deal with Israel

On the 8th of December, the Jordanian MP Saleh Al-Armouti walked out of a parliamentary session in sign of disagreement with the Jordanian Minister for Water and Irrigation, Mohammed Al-Najjar, for signing a “declaration of intent” with the United Arab Emirates and Israel through which Jordan, in extreme need of water, could get 200 million cubic meters of water annually.

On the 12th of October Jordan, which is facing an unprecedented drought crisis due to scarcity of rainwater, booming population and mismanaged reforms, signed with Israel an agreement to buy 50 million cubic meters of water, in addition to the water that already obtains from Israel since the Wadi Araba Peace

Treaty, stipulated by the two countries in 1994.

The new water agreement between the two countries sparked popular protests and political tensions among those who oppose the deal giving the tense diplomatic relations between the neighbouring countries.

A month later, on the 22nd of November the Jordanian Minister for Water and Irrigation, Mohammed Al-Najjar, the UAE’s Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Mariam Al-Mheiri, and Israel’s Energy Minister Karine Elharrar signed a declaration of Intent at the Dubai Expo 2020. As underlined by Al-Najjar, the declaration of intent is not an agreement but it means that the

three signatories will carry out studies on the feasibility of megaprojects that might provide Jordan, the world's second water poorest country with additional 200 million cubic meters of water per year.

On the other hand, weeks earlier, the Times of Israel announced that the three countries were about to approve a megaproject to generate electricity for Israel. Under the forementioned deal, signed on the 22nd of November, Jordan will build a massive solar-energy farm that will generate power for Israel and, in return, Israel will provide Jordan with desalinated water. The solar-energy plant will be built by Masdar, the Abu Dhabi-based renewable-energy company.

The energy-solar farm will be operating by 2026 and will supply 2% of Israel's energy requirements by 2030. Israel will pay 180 million dollars per year that will be divided between Jordan and the UAE.

Following the water-for-energy agreement, Jordanians launched on-

line campaigns to invite citizens to march against the decision.

Hundreds of Jordanians marched across Amman, protesting against a deal that will most likely provide Israeli illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank with solar energy, and asked for the resignation of the government.

Additionally, according to Al Mayadeen newspaper, the deal represents a further attempt by the UAE to "indoctrinate lessons of normalisation".

Last month, the University of Jordan hosted a UAE delegation from the Mohammed bin Zayed University in Abu Dhabi. The delegation held an introductory symposium on graduate studies and scholarships available to students, however the attendees withdrew from the seminar as soon as they discovered that the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Hebrew University, were partners in the scholarship programme.



Source: *The Times of Israel* – Signing ceremony

To know more:

- *The New Arab*, Jordanian students protest against apparent UAE-Israel scholarship, 17/11/21, available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/jordan-students-protest-against-uae-israel-scholarships>
- *Arab News*, Jordanian politicians stage walk out over “energy-for-water” deal with Israel, 08/12/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1983456/middle-east>
- *Al Mayadeen*, Jordanian MPs reject water-for-energy project with Israel, 08/12/21, available at:

<https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/jordanian-mps-reject-water-for-energy-project-with-israel>

- *Middle East Monitor*, Jordan MPs walk out of session on Israel electricity-for-water deal, 09/12/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211209-jordan-mps-walk-out-of-session-on-israel-electricity-for-water-deal/>

Doha to start gas exploration in Eastern Mediterranean

On the 8th of December the Director of Qatar's Energy International Upstream and Exploration, Ali al-Mana, the Cypriot Energy Minister, Natasa Pilides, and Varnavas Theodosiou, CEO of the ExxonMobil Cyprus signed a contract in Nicosia for oil and gas exploration and production-sharing of the island of Cyprus.

By signing the forementioned agreement Qatar, a close ally of Turkey, will become the first Gulf country to explore oil and gas in Eastern Mediterranean and, most significantly, in waters claimed partly by Turkey.

The gas exploration license includes the Section 5 (or Block 5) of Greek Cyprus' self-declared exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which lies south, southwest of the island, and which Turkey says overlaps with its own continental shelf.

According to the agreement Qatar Energy will own a 40% stake of the Block 5 and ExxonMobil will own 60% and it will be the main operator in the area.

The companies are expected to start explorations the next year.

Following the agreement between ExxonMobil and Qatar Energy, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned that it will never allow unauthorised gas exploration in waters that it claims under its maritime jurisdiction and that Qatar Energy and ExxonMobil will stay out of its continental shelf. Pilides, Cyprus' Energy Minister, stated that the Cypriot government will proceed with its drilling program in line with international law.

Oil and gas exploration off Cyprus has been a source of tension since the first natural gas field was discovered in 2011. Since 1974, after a Greek-engineered-coup aiming at uniting

with Greece, followed by Turkey's invasion of the northern third of Cyprus, the island was ethnically divided between the Cyprus' internationally recognised government, seated in the South, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Since then, Ankara claims waters' rights, insisting that natural resources belong to both communities, while the Cypriote government says Turkey's claims are not recognised by international law.

From 2015, when the Italian Energy company, ENI, discovered, off the coast of Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean's largest natural gas field, Zohr, Energy cooperation between Egypt, Cyprus, Greece and Israel in eastern Mediterranean intensified. Turkey, instead, was intentionally excluded from the market of eastern Mediterranean gas halting, by doing so, Ankara's ambitions to use its pipelines infrastructures to become an energy hub for Middle Eastern and Caspian natural gas to reach Europe.

Ankara perceived the growing energy cooperation between Egypt, Cyprus, Greece and Israel (officialised in 2020 with the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum) as a wider multinational effort to contain Turkey's expansionism. Between 2018 and 2020 Ankara answered to the energy cooperation between its regional rivals in the region with its gunboat diplomacy.

In 2018 Ankara was accused of preventing a ship leased by Italy's ENI from reaching its drilling station in Cyprus' waters. In August 2020 a Turkish drilling ship was sent for gas exploration in the waters near the Greek island of Kastellorizo, which is at the heart of the Greece-Turkey maritime boundary dispute.

To break its isolation in Eastern Mediterranean Ankara also concluded a maritime boundary agreement in 2019 with Libya's Government of National Accord in order to continue its gas exploration.



Source: Turkish Minute

To know more:

- *The Daily Sabah*, Exxon, Qatar Energy to “stay out” of Turkey’s East Med jurisdiction, 14/12/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/exxon-qatar-energy-to-stay-out-of-turkeys-east-med-jurisdiction>
- *Asharq Al-Awsat*, ExxonMobil, Qatar sign Cyprus gas deal despite Turkey Opposition, 10/12/21, available at:

<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3352441/exxonmobil-qatar-sign-cyprus-gas-deal-despite-turkey-opposition>

- *Middle East Monitor*, Qatar to join gas exploration in Eastern Mediterranean, 08/12/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211208-qatar-to-join-energy-exploration-in-eastern-mediterranean/>

ARAB INSIGHT

#Palestine

Ce n'est pas une pastèque

Last May, amid the escalating situation in the occupied West Bank that triggered a violent 11-day-war in the Gaza Strip, activists and social media users started to share pro-Palestinian contents to spread awareness around the world on the decades-long Israeli occupation and to amplify the conversation over Palestinian rights.

With a very strict censorship over pro-Palestinian contents, social media users started to share images and symbols hinting at the Palestinian resistance.

Today more than ever, to bypass social media censorship that usually tent to delete pro-Palestinian contents, the support for the Palestinian cause spreads worldwide also through symbols whose meaning is either direct and material or leave space for interpretations.

Last summer, images and drawings of [watermelons](#) proliferated quickly on social media as a symbol of the Palestinian resistance and many activists around the world started to share posts on their social media accounts showing simply watermelons' images in support of the Palestinian cause.

But the use of the watermelon as a symbol of resistance against the occupying power is not new: it dates back to the [Arab-Israeli war in 1967](#) when Israel forbade the use of the word Palestine and to depict or display the Palestinian flag and its colours in Gaza and in the West Bank (Military Order 101). Thus the fruit, with its green skin red pulp and black seeds, became one of the most powerful symbols of the Palestinian resistance but, back then, it was absent from the Arab media.



Source: *The National*

According to [Al Arabi Al Jadid](#) the symbolism of the watermelon strongly emerged during the first Intifada when protesters, prohibited from raising the Palestinian flag, decided to carry instead, slices of watermelon. The Israeli forces arrested the protesters for raising watermelons slices and arrested merchants for distributing slices of the fruit to the protesters. Since then, the watermelon became a political motif.

In 2007 the Palestinian artist [Khaled Hourani](#) painted a slice of watermelon and titled his artworks "The watermelon flag". When asked about its artwork and the meaning behind it, the artist stated that he wanted to create an alternative flag for Palestinians denied of their national identity and culture and to present a new Palestinian flag with irony. As stated by the artist watermelon is a very popular summer fruit in Palestine, it grows abundantly in Jenin, Araba Al-Batouf and in the Jordan Valley. Combined with cheese is a Palestinian popular dish and every

Palestinian living abroad recalls eating watermelon and cheese with family in their home in Palestine.

Hourani, whose artwork travelled around the world, including Scotland, France, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, also revealed that he was inspired by a story circulating in Palestine about the appearance of the watermelon as a symbol of the Palestinian resistance. The story involves three famous Palestinian artists: Sliman Mansour, Nabil Anani and Issam Badr, whose exhibition at 79 Gallery in 1980 was shut down by the Israeli army as the artworks were deemed political and bore the Palestinian flag and its colours. Confronting the officer, one of the artists asked, “What if I just want to paint a watermelon?”, to which he got the reply, “It would be confiscated”. After hearing the story from the famous Sliman Mansour, Hourani decided to paint a watermelon to mock that unreasonable interdiction.

Last May, following the violent clashes in Shaikh Jarrah and al-Aqsa mosque that triggered a renewed confrontation between Hamas and Israel, along with social media campaigns in support for Palestine, Hourani’s Watermelon Flag received newfound attention with many users posting his artwork.

Young Palestinian artists, got inspired by Hourani message and produced art bearing the colours of the flag and the theme of the watermelon, to stimulate international awareness.

Arab protest movements have used the experience of Srdja Popovic, the founder of “Otpor!” (Resistance!), that played a key role in ousting the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic. He argues that humour is a key tool for successful social movements, because they gain popularity and grow exponentially while spreading revolution against the oppressors.

Popovich strongly believes in what he calls Laughtivism, the power of humour in non-violent movements and promotes humour as a strategy against oppressive

governments. Popovic's ideas and non-violent methods were exported also in Egypt and Tunisia among pro-democracy activists in 2011.

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