

# wire Weekly

'The MENA Region: Shared Insecurity in the Era of Multipolarity Taskforce'

October 9, 2020

## EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

### ***The EU Commission Released A New Report on Candidate Countries***

The EU Commission shared a new report that covers the candidate countries for the EU. The report underlined the following points concerning Turkey:

- Turkey is an essential partner in the region. Ankara is crucial regarding migration, counterterrorism, economy, trade, energy, and transportation. Thus, the continuation of relations with Turkey based on collaboration and mutual interest will be strategically beneficial for the EU.
- The EU expects Turkey to make reforms concerning the rule of law and human rights.
- The Turkish policies regarding refugees were praised, and it was underlined that Turkey is doing a good job in hosting more than 4 million Syrian refugees.
- Counterterrorism was also mentioned in the report. The report emphasizes that counterterrorism is Turkey's legitimate right and responsibility and asks for proportional action by reminding that PKK is on the EU's terror list.
- Additionally, the report endorses the theses presented by Greece concerning the Eastern Mediterranean.

### ***Turkey Criticized the Report Released by the European Commission***

Turkish foreign ministry has released a statement in which the EU commission's latest report is criticized. The ministry asserts that the report was biased, far from being constructive, and had double-standards. The statement also highlighted that the "report continues to criticize Turkey by means of unfounded arguments, while still not referring to its own unfulfilled responsibilities and commitments. Prejudiced, unjust, and disproportionate criticisms about our system of government, elections, fundamental rights, certain court rulings, administrative decisions, and legitimate measures taken while combatting terrorism, as well as our foreign, security, and economic policies, reveal how far the report is from being objective."

Furthermore, the statement underlines that the report endorses the Greek and Greek Cypriot theses on the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean, and this situation tarnishes the impartiality of the commission.

### ***Greece Declared Two New NAVTEX in the Eastern Mediterranean***

While Turkey is searching for the necessary steps for dialogue to resolve the problems with Greece, under the pretext of shooting training, Greece has released two new NAVTEX in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### ***Turkish Drillship Yavuz Returns to Mersin Port***

The Turkish drillship Yavuz was pulled back to Mersin port before the Erdogan-Stoltenberg meeting this week. Yavuz was expected to continue its activities until October 12. The Greek Cypriot Side welcomed the move.

## ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

### ***Syrian Democratic Council decided to free Syrians from the infamous al-Hol camp***

Ilham Ahmed, the president of the executive committee of the Syrian Democratic Council, declared that they are considering releasing all the Syrians from the notorious Al-Hol camp, which hosts more than 60.000 (including foreigners) ISIS-affiliated people who are mostly women and children. Ahmed stated that the camp had been an enormous burden for the PYD-led Autonomous Administration, and they want to release all the Syrians, leaving only the foreigners in it. Al-Hol camp has long been a matter of debate due to poor hygiene and health conditions. Although the camp has been alarming as a possible source of radicalization, any country or international organization does not seem to solve the problem. Moreover, how to distinguish ex-combatants and those affiliated with ISIS and civilians wait for an answer. It is feared that the release of Syrians can further exacerbate the security situation in Syria.

### ***Reports show that ISIS benefits from the outbreak of Coronavirus***

Security analysts warn that ISIS seems to be taking advantage of the COVID-19 crisis since the governments' focus has shifted towards the ongoing pandemic. ISIS has intensified its military activities in recent months in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the group's global network is also active. Although the group was defeated militarily and lost its territorial control in Iraq and Syria, its militants have recently carried out attacks targeting both the regime forces and other armed factions in Syria and Iraq. It is known that ISIS still has active operatives and sleeper cells throughout the two countries seeking to carry out bombings, assassinations, and hit- and- run attacks. While ISIS is exploiting the current situation, political actors- in Syria and Iraq- do not appear to have the capacity to respond to the present problems.

### ***Tension escalates in Sinjar as Turkey strikes the YBŞ***

The Turkish army has been targeting the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ) in Iraq over the past period. YBŞ, which consists of Iraqi Yazidis, operates under Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). However, Turkey considers the group as a PKK affiliate and targets it in Sinjar. It is thought that the PKK aspires to turn Sinjar into the second Qandil. The PKK has been based in Qandil mountains for many years and leads its affiliates from its headquarter.

Additionally, the YBŞ denies Turkey's claims and states that they are an officially recognized group by the Iraqi government. Apart from these, economically, socially, and politically the situation in Sinjar is very complicated. The tension between armed factions and the Iraqi government, worsening economic conditions, and competing political actors are ramifying the issue in Sinjar as seen in the other parts of Iraq.

## REGIMES IN TRANSITION

### Lebanon

#### ***Lebanon Demanded Interpol Detain Two Russians over Beirut Blast***

On October 1, Lebanon asked Interpol to issue arrest warrants of the owner and captain of the MS Rhosus ship that carried the ammonium nitrate to Beirut's port six years ago. Meanwhile, the Lebanese President Michel Aoun rejected the dismissal of port officials, who have been detained after the explosion, without a formal cabinet vote on the dismissal. Persons for dismissal include Director of Land and Maritime Transport Abdel Hafiz Kaissi, the port's Director-General Hassan Qureitem, and the Director-General of Beirut customs Badri Daher.

#### ***Lebanon and Israel Agreed to Negotiate on Maritime Disputes***

Despite being in a formal state of war, Lebanon and Israel agreed to a framework for United States-mediated talks around the land and maritime borders delimitation announced by the Speaker of Parliament and head of Shiite Amal Movement Nabih Berri on October 1. The talks are set to begin after October 15 and will address the dispute around three energy blocks in the Mediterranean.

#### ***Lebanon Deterred Oil Tanker Coming from Greece to Syria***

On October 7, Lebanese officials blocked an oil tanker coming from Greece to Syria. An investigation on the tanker has begun to determine if it violates the sanctions imposed by the Caesar Act against any economic activity with the Assad Regime.

### Tunisia

#### ***Mechichi Dismissed the Minister of Culture***

On October 7, Tunisian Prime Minister Mechichi announced the discharge of the Minister of Culture, Walid al-Zaidi, after his speech at an anti-government protest held by artists criticizing the suspension of cultural activities following a ban on public gatherings as measures against Covid-19. Al-Zaidi blamed the government for making decisions without meeting with the health committee and coordinating with sector representatives. The move taken by Mechichi can be seen as defying the power of the President, who forced Al-Zaidi to be in the cabinet.

## **Sudan**

### ***The Idea of Normalization with Israel Divided the Country***

In a joint press conference held in Khartoum on October 1; the head of the National Umma Party, Mubarak Al-Fadil Al-Mahdi, the head of the Sudan Liberation Movement–Second Revolution (SLM-SR), Abu Al-Qasim Imam, and the representative of the Eastern Front, Hamid Mohammed Hamed asked the government to accept the normalization with Israel in order to remove Sudan from the terrorism list.

Later, the Sudanese Islamic governmental authority issued a fatwa, religious legal opinion, against the normalization in the following day. On October 7, Tijani Hussein, a leader in the Forces of Freedom and Change, attacked the political forces that support normalization with Israel, saying that it will not exempt Sudan from paying off its external debts.

In this polarization, Sudan might wait until the end of the US elections to decide on the normalization process, which might help decrease the tension mounting inside the country regarding the issue.

### ***Sudan's Transitional Government and Rebel Groups Agreed on a Peace Deal***

The transitional Sudanese government and rebel groups formalized a peace agreement on Saturday, October 4, in the city of Juba, South Sudan. Two groups from Western Darfur and one group from the southern region, as well as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) agreed to end decades of deep-rooted conflicts that claimed the lives of more than hundreds of thousands and displaced millions.

The deal promises the integration of rebels into the security forces, granting them political representation, and new funds of \$750 million a year for ten years for the development and return of displaced people.



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#### **ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH**

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