

Wire Weekly

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

October 16, 2020

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Turkey's seismic research vessel Oruç Reis Returns to the Mediterranean

After pulling back Oruç Reis, Turkey's seismic research vessel, Ankara had claimed that the move was made only for the vessel's planned maintenance. Greece perceived this move as a positive action. However, Turkey applied its claims on the field and sent back Oruç reis from Antalya to Eastern Mediterranean to continue its seismic explorations accompanied by two other ships (Ataman and Cengiz) for the next ten days as declared in the new NAVTEX, despite the sanction threats of the EU.

Greek Government Declared a New NAVTEX

As a response to Turkey's recent NAVTEX announcement, the Greek government declared a new NAVTEX from the island of Crete on Monday.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass Cancelled His Visit to Turkey

In response to Turkey's new NAVTEX announcement in the Eastern Mediterranean, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas canceled his visit to Ankara, which was planned to be held on this Wednesday. Following the cancellation of the visit, the German Minister adjusted his schedule. The German minister will be visiting Nicosia, Cyprus, to meet the Cypriot president Nikos Anastasiadis and his Greek Cypriot counterpart Nikos Christodoulidis. After his trip to Cyprus, Maas will be heading to Athens to meet the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias.

Ibrahim Kalin Signals Rebuilding of Ties with Egypt

Ibrahim Kalin, the Turkish Presidential Spokesperson, made an expected statement regarding rebuilding the political ties with Egypt. Over the last month, there have been numerous discussions, news, and suggestions that the Turkish-Egyptian relations should resume, and such a move would be beneficial for both sides. Regarding this issue, Ibrahim Kalin said that although the Turkish government cannot forget how Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power in the country, the military coup, and the killings and arrests in the Rabaa square, the Turkish government will respond to Egypt positively if the Egyptian side acts with a positive agenda regarding the regional issues.

The Libyan Crisis

The Government of National Accord found two mass graves in Tarhuna

On Monday, The Libyan government said it had found two mass graves in the city of Tarhuna, 90 kilometers northeast of the capital Tripoli, likely left behind by forces of retreating warlord Khalifa Haftar.

It was announced that the first grave contains four bodies, and more bodies are expected to be found in the second grave given that Khalifa Haftar once controlled this area.

The General Authority for Research and Identification of Missing Persons said in a statement that “the first grave contains four corpses, where Authority’s teams are still working to exhume the bodies.” The authority also added that “work will start on the second grave, which is expected to include a number of corpses.”

After Haftar’s forces were driven from western Libya, crimes that were committed in the areas once under his control were discovered almost on a daily basis.

The largest oilfield in Libya resumes production on Monday

The administration of Libya’s El-Sharara oilfield said in a statement carried by Libyan Al-Ahrar TV that “the first stage of pumping general stock from the main pumping station of the field to the oil port of Ras Lanuf has started.”

The oilfield administration also said that its operation would raise Libya’s oil production to about 350,000 barrels per day.

Libya’s Government of National Accord has detained Abdalrahman al-Milad

On Wednesday, the interior ministry of Libya’s internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) declared that Abdalrahman Al-Milad, a coastguard commander sanctioned by the United Nations for alleged human trafficking and migrant smuggling, has been detained by its forces. According to the ministry, Al-Milad had been detained at the request of the U.N. Security Council. The case was also referred to the public prosecutor for it to take legal measures against him.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi ratifies maritime demarcation agreement with Greece

A decree authorizing the maritime demarcation agreement between Egypt and Greece to create an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) between the two countries was released by the Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi on Saturday.

The decree specifies that if natural resources, including hydrocarbon stocks, are discovered extending from the EEZ of one of the parties to the EEZ of the other, the two countries should cooperate to agree on how these resources will be exploited.

This is for the first time that Cairo has announced the details of the maritime demarcation deal for establishing an EEZ between Egypt and Greece since it was signed on August 6.

ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

Erbil and Baghdad agreed on the removal of the armed groups in Sinjar

After long-continued negotiations, the Iraqi federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have declared a deal backed by the UN on the Sinjar district. According to the agreement, a new security force consisting of the local population will be established to provide the district's security. The deal also aims to remove the armed factions, particularly the PKK out of Sinjar. Ankara welcomed the agreement and stated that Turkey supports efforts presented by the federal government and the KRG to expel the PKK. Turkey has been accusing the PKK of trying to get a foothold in the district and targeting groups affiliated with the PKK in Sinjar for a while. However, in Sinjar, there are also various armed factions apart from the PKK, such as groups that are operating under the banner of Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) as well as federal security forces and Kurdish peshmerga fighters. This complicated situation in Sinjar makes the agreement difficult to be put into practice. In 2014, ISIS seized the Sinjar district and committed a genocidal massacre against the Yazidi population. As a result, it is thought that around 400.000 Yazidis fled from the region. Sinjar district, in Iraq's Nineveh province, is among the disputed areas between Baghdad and Erbil since 2017 when the Iraqi federal government took control of the region after the Kurdistan Region's independence referendum.

Pro-Iranian armed factions targeting US forces in Iraq declare a temporary ceasefire

Armed militias backed by Iran stated that they have agreed to stop targeting US presence in Iraq as the United States is withdrawing its forces from the country. Iranian proxies have attacked US and Western assets in Iraq since Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were killed in a drone strike carried out by the US military. However, the armed factions stated that the ceasefire is conditional, and unless the United States withdraws its troops, the groups will relaunch attacks targeting the US presence in Iraq. The ceasefire statement came after the USA warned Iraq that Washington would close its embassy if Baghdad could not stop pro-Iranian militias' attacks. Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi had declared that Iraqi federal forces would take actions against armed factions destabilizing the country. Moreover, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani announced his support for al-Kadhimi's efforts to restore and maintain law and order in Iraq. Although pro-Iranian armed factions frame the US withdrawal decision as a grave victory, they might be concerned about the current developments. While tension seems to be easing for now, yet Iraq is still far from finding a solution. Also, the ceasefire is very fragile since there are various armed factions with different agendas and priorities in Iraq.

Syrians start leaving the infamous al- Hol camp

The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)- the political wing of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-stated that the process of removing Syrians from the al-Hol camp in Syria's Hasakah province has started. Last week the SDC announced that detainees who hold Syrian nationality would be released from the al-Hol camp since running it is a massive burden on the Kurdish-led administration. The camp hosts more than 60.000 people that at least half of them are taught to be families of ISIS militants. The majority of the camp detainees are children and women who live in poor conditions that have been alarming for a while, particularly since the outbreak of COVID-19. The SDC declared that while Syrian nationals will be given amnesty, foreigners will be kept in the camp. Although conditions in the camp, including health and hygiene, provide a favorable environment for radicalization, many consider that releasing thousands can pose a significant security risk for the region.

REGIMES IN TRANSITION

Lebanon

Ex-PM Saad Hariri Announces His Candidacy for the Next Premiership

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who resigned from his post under street pressure following the October protests last year, declared his candidacy on October 9, stressing his compliance with the French initiative and assertiveness to stem the collapse of the economy and state.

Hariri held "encouraging" and "very positive" meetings with President Michel Aoun and the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. However, the President of the Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt, the Head of Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil, as well as the head of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea, strongly criticized Hariri's efforts as a self-appointed candidate.

However, on Wednesday, October 14, President Aoun postponed the parliamentary consultations to choose a new prime minister until October 22, saying the "difficulties that require work to be resolved."

First Meeting Held between Israel and Lebanon for Negotiations Over the Maritime Disputes

Lebanese and Israeli government representatives met on Wednesday, October 14, to launch negotiations over maritime border disputes. The first meeting, held in the Lebanese border town of Naqora, was mediated and facilitated by the US team, led by Assistant Secretary David Schenker and Ambassador John Desrocher, and hosted by the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis” according to the Joint Statement on the Launch of the Israel-Lebanon Maritime Talks. The Lebanese delegation was headed by Brigadier General Bassam Yassine, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Lebanese Armed Forces, while Udi Adiri, Director General of the Ministry of Energy, headed the Israeli delegation. After the first meeting on Wednesday, Brigadier General Bassam Yassine said that “it is the first step in the thousand-mile march towards the demarcation”. Lebanese officials insist that these talks are not implicated in any normalization process.

Tunisia

PM Mechichi Dismissed Governor and Delegate After Violent Street Protests in the City of Sbeitla

On October 13, violent protests erupted in the city of Sbeitla in western Tunisia following the death of a 50-year old shop owner during the demolition of his “unlicensed” street shop by the municipality.

Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi dismissed the governor of Kasserine and three other officials.

Sudan

Deadly Clashes in East Sudan After the Signing of Peace Deal Between the Government and Rebel Groups

Inter-tribal clashes reached their peak on Wednesday, October 14, with six people killed in the city of Suakin, after Prime Minister Abdulla Hamdok dismissed the governor of Kassala province, Saleh Ammar, on Tuesday.

The Beja tribe had ignited a series of protests and clashes in July, against the appointment of Saleh Ammar, a member of the Beni Amr tribe, as the new governor. However, tensions escalated after the signing of the peace deal on Saturday, October 3, by the transitional government and rebel groups in the South Sudanese capital, Juba. Protestors from the Beija tribe blocked the Port Sudan container sea terminal claiming that the region’s representatives who signed the deal came from the Beni Amer while their tribe was excluded from the peace process. The seaport was closed for three days.



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ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH

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