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Weekly **wire**

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



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EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Turkey Declared a New NAVTEX in the Eastern Mediterranean

In the beginning of November, Turkey declared a new NAVTEX in the area surrounding the Kas Island. In the announcement, Turkey warned all the mariners to sail at least 6 miles away from the Turkish seismic research vessel Oruç Reis. Moreover, the announcement also said that the research would continue until November 14.

Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesman Responds to the Greek Criticisms

The Spokesman of the Turkish Foreign Ministry Hami Aksoy replied to the Greek criticisms regarding the new Turkish NAVTEX declaration in the Eastern Mediterranean by saying that the Greek claims are baseless, and Turkey would continue to protect both the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey under the international law. Aksoy also added, "On this occasion, we once again invite Greece to an unconditional dialogue with our country to address both the Eastern Mediterranean maritime jurisdiction issue and other interrelated issues between the two countries."

The Libyan Crisis

Dujarric: The issuance of a UN resolution supporting the ceasefire will benefit the stability of Libya

Stephan Dujarric, the spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, confirmed, on Wednesday, that the issuance of a resolution in support of a ceasefire would benefit the achievement of peace and stability in Libya.

This came in a press conference held by Dujarric at the permanent headquarters of the international organization in New York, regarding the position of United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres regarding the issuance of a resolution by the Security Council to support the ceasefire agreement in Libya.

Dujarric said, "The unified voice from the Security Council is always beneficial to the (Libyan) parties and our efforts to achieve peace and stability."

On Tuesday, the Libyan Military Committee (5 + 5) called on the Security Council to expedite the issuance of a binding resolution to implement what was discussed in the Geneva Agreement, in reference to the decision of the permanent ceasefire in Libya.

Libya's Rival factions agreed on a plan for implementing a ceasefire

Rival military factions in Libya have agreed on the ceasefire implementation deal last month, the United Nations' acting envoy to Libya Stephanie Williams has said.

Tuesday's announcement came a day after a meeting of the Joint Military Commission opened for the first time on home soil to discuss the deal's implementation.

The meeting was preceded last month by a "permanent" ceasefire signed in Switzerland by the warring factions, aiming to pave the way for a diplomatic settlement to the crisis.

Egypt clarifies the possibility of its cooperation with Turkey on Libya

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry confirmed that Turkey is not currently among the countries that Egypt can cooperate with to settle the crisis in Libya.

In an interview with the Russian "TASS" agency published Monday, in response to a question about the possibility of Egypt's cooperation with Turkey in this context, Shoukry said: "We believe that all issues concerning Libya should be raised in the dialogue between the Libyan parties. These include Russia, the United States, Western Europe, and of course, the UN Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General to Libya." "We reject foreign intervention in Libya and the presence of foreign forces in Libya, and we do not find any justifications for the attempts of countries outside the region and outside the Arab lands to interfere in Libya," Shoukry said.

The Egyptian Foreign Minister also added, "All of these factors add to the complexity of the situation, and the international community must address them. Therefore, we will continue to cooperate with our friends, with the countries that follow a position close to ours, and at this stage, I cannot say that Turkey is from among them."

ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

Tension escalates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as the PKK attacks Peshmerga forces

A peshmerga was killed and two others wounded in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack carried out by the PKK in Amedi district, Duhok province in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The incident came out after a long-term tension between the PKK and the KRG following Turkey's intensifying military operation and increasing military presence against the PKK in Iraq. Last week, the PKK launched an attack on an oil pipeline in Turkey's Mardin province, which carries oil from the Kurdistan Region to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. Masoud Barzani, the former president of KRI, stated that the KDP forces do not seek to escalate tension and want to fight with the PKK, but the PKK militants must leave the KRG's border areas. The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack and said it was a warning to the KDP to stay away from its camps. The Baghdad government condemned the attack and regarded it as a violation of Iraq's sovereignty.

Ankara withdraws troops from the Morek base in Idlib

The Turkish forces were reportedly evacuated from the Morek military observation post, one of twelve Turkish bases established to monitor ceasefire violations in Syria's Idlib province. According to reports, the troops will be redeployed to remaining Turkish observation posts in the region. Some analysts were concerned about the troops' situation since the Morek base was encircled by regime forces in 2019. Also, Ankara is expected to evacuate more bases left in the regime-controlled areas. Moreover, Ankara is increasing its military presence in Idlib in an effort to turn the province into a de facto safe zone.

Hurras al-Din figures targeted by the US reported killed in Idlib

Two prominent figures of Hurras al-Din, Abu Dharr al-Misri, and Abu Yousef al-Maghribi, were killed in a US drone strike in Syria's Idlib province. While al-Misri was identified as a former shura member, al-Maghribi was declared as a security official. The US-led coalition has been targeting Hurras al-Din senior members, al-Qaeda affiliated group, in Idlib with drone strikes in recent months. The question of who has been providing intelligence for the drone strikes is crucial since HTS and Hurras al-Din are two rivals competing over Idlib's control.

REGIMES IN TRANSITION

Lebanon

Lebanese Investigator Found No Top-level Official as Suspect of the Explosion

The Lebanese judicial investigator overseeing the investigation on the August 4 Beirut Port blast found no top-level administrative and security officials responsible for the explosion that killed over 200 people. The indictment will cover mainly 25 low and mid-level officials that were arrested previously including current and former customs chiefs (Badri Daher and Shafik Merhi), the former port director (Hassan Koraytem), the director of land and maritime transport at the public works ministry (Abdel Hafiz Kaissi), and the head of military intelligence at the port (Anthony Salloum). The officials will be charged of “willful negligence that led to the death of civilians and causing massive destruction to public and private property”. Caretaker Justice Minister Marie-Claude Najm expressed her confidence in the course of the investigation and said that she is in the position of waiting to see the results.

France launched its own probe into the explosion since French people were among those killed and wounded. While the French report is expected within two weeks, the preliminary report stated that the investigation remains inconclusive as to whether the explosion was due to negligence or to an international security operation.

Lebanon Customs Chief Formally Arrested in the Saudi ‘Captagon Prince’ Case

On November 3, the Lebanese customs chief Badri Daher was accused of “accepting a bribe, wasting public funds and misusing his position to allow a drug-smuggling Saudi prince to leave Lebanon without paying a multimillion-dollar fine.” A formal arresting warrant was issued by Beirut Investigative Judge Charbel Abu Samra against Daher for allowing a Saudi Prince to illegally travel without paying a 65 billion Lebanese pounds fine after attempting to smuggle about two tonnes of the amphetamine-based drug Captagon, to Saudi Arabia in 2015.

The Saudi prince Abdel Mohsen Bin Walid Bin Abdulaziz was sentenced to three months prison and was banned from traveling before paying the fine. The case was brought to attention by the investigative journalist Riad Kobaissi who filed the complaint against Daher along with several lawyers.

Tunisia

Coronavirus Losses Reached \$US 2.9 Billion in Tunisia

Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi stated yesterday that Tunisia's economy has been going through difficult times since 2011, but the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the situation with losses due to the pandemic reaching \$US 2.9 billion. This situation requires "unconventional solutions," he mentioned.

This statement comes after the government's controversial announcement that the Central Bank of Tunisia would be pumping 3 billion Tunisian dinars to bridge the fiscal deficit in the state budget.

A Former Political Adviser to Ennahda's Ghannouchi Resigns

Amidst the heated debate within the Ennahda party around the candidacy of Rashid Ghannouchi to the position of the head of the party, a former political adviser to Ghannouchi, Lotfi Zaitoun, announced his resignation from the movement and hinted at the possibility of forming a new party. He also indicated his refusal of presiding over the movement's political bureau after being nominated by Ghannouchi.

On September 17, a petition signed by 100 leading members of Ennahda demanded Rashid Ghannouchi to vow to not amend the internal guidelines of the party and run for a third term as president of the party. Ghannouchi condemned this demand as an exclusionary precondition that aims to overstep the electoral and democratic procedures.

Algeria

The Revised Algerian Constitution Won the Most Votes in Referendum

Algeria's revised constitution was approved with 66.8 percent of the votes in the referendum held on November 1, 2020. However, the turnout is considered the lowest ever in Algeria's history of majority polls with the announced 23.7 percent voting turnout. The revisions on the constitution were presented in the hope to appease the weekly protests that were ongoing since the spark of the Hirak movement in February 2019. While the campaign for "Yes" and "New Algeria" dominated the state-backed media coverage, the youth-led Hirak movement boycotted the election considering the changes as a "facade" and a manoeuvre to neutralize the Hirak movement.

Although the revisions restrict the presidential tenure for two five-year terms and commit the president to choose a prime minister from the majority bloc in parliament,

the new constitution is criticized for giving the head of state unrestricted powers that jeopardize the principle of the divisions of power, specially threatening the neutrality of the judiciary.

The new constitution also gives the army powers to intervene outside Algeria's borders, given the security concerns in neighbouring Libya and Mali.

Sudan

Nile Dam Talks between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia Failed Second Time

The week-long negotiations between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) were concluded without reaching any agreement on the filling and operation of the dam.

Egypt also opposed the Sudanese proposal supported by Ethiopia to maximize the role of the African Union (AU) experts.

The US Renews the State of Emergency against Sudan despite the Agreement to Restore Sudan Sovereign Immunity

On October 30, Friday, Washington and Khartoum signed a bilateral agreement to "restore Sudan's sovereign immunity to settle the cases filed against Sudan at U.S. courts, including the bombing of the United State (US) embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998." The agreement consists of the dropping of the judicial decisions released against Sudan amounting to over \$10 billion to compensate the victims of the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the avoidance of potential legal claims against Khartoum. Sudan had agreed on October 19 to pay \$335m in compensation for victims and accepted the normalization deal with Israel on October 23.

The bilateral agreement is effective after completing the procedures of removing Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. However, and despite US president Trump's promise last month to remove Sudan from the list, Trump signed an executive order on October 31 extending the state of emergency against Sudan. The national emergency was declared on 3 November 1997 by former US President Bill Clinton.

On November 3, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that the US would seek to end UN sanctions on Sudan over the Darfur conflict. Previously on October 4, the Sudan government and rebel groups formalized a peace agreement to end the conflict in Darfur.



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ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH

A think tank that looks to undertake impartial, rigorous research to promote the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue and social justice.

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