

Weekly wire



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

December 4, 2020

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

US Ambassador confirms the Greek demands of purchasing F-35 fighter jets

On November 30, the United States Ambassador to Greece confirmed that Greece requested to buy F-35 fighter jets. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt stated that “The United States, at the highest levels, has welcomed Greece’s interest in acquiring the F-35 for the Hellenic Air Force.” He also added that “The US-Greece defense relationship is at an all-time high and is one of America’s strongest military relationships in Europe.” Following 18 French Rafales’ purchase, Greece is set to strengthen its military capacity amid the rising tensions in the Mediterranean.

Turkey takes legal measures after the IRINI Operation

After the IRINI operation incident last week, the Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar announced that Turkey took all necessary legal measures regarding the interception of the Turkish flagged ship Roseline-A in the Eastern Mediterranean near the Libyan port of Benghazi. Furthermore, Akar said that stopping a ship that only contained humanitarian aid is what increases the tension. He also added, “Unfortunately, our neighbor stubbornly refrains from talks on this issue and seeks solutions at other doors. Even though we have told them over and over again that a solution cannot be found in this way, they still insist on that issue. They are doing wrong.”

Turkey tries to mend ties with the EU

On November 30, Turkey called for returning its seismic research vessel Oruç Reis, which was conducting seismic research since October 12, to Antalya’s port. This was a critical action by the Turkish side ten days ahead of the EU summit. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed the move. The Chancellor said, “It’s a good signal that Oruç Reis now has returned to a Turkish port,” adding that they were not able to reach much progress in the past two months of negotiations with Turkey. Apart from the return of the seismic vessel from the disputed areas, recently the Turkish President Erdoğan has also sent signals to warm the relations with the EU. In addition to these, the Turkish Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin was also sent to Brussels in an attempt to smoothen the deteriorated relations with the EU countries in a time when the demands of sanctions on Turkey are increasing.

THE LIBYAN CRISIS

The second day of the fourth round of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to be held

The second day of the fourth round of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum began, on Wednesday, to discuss the proposals submitted regarding the selection of the prime minister and the Presidential Council.

This came according to a statement by a member of the Anadolu Dialogue Committee, coinciding with the start of the session, which is being sponsored by the United Nations, via a closed video session.

The proposed proposals include various mechanisms for candidacy and choosing the President and Vice Presidents of the Presidency Council and the Prime Minister.

Libya's National Oil Company agrees with Schlumberger Tech Transfer to reopen closed wells

The Libyan National Oil Company said, on Wednesday, that its Chairman Mustafa Sanallah and Schlumberger Ltd Chief Executive Olivier Le Peuch had agreed on technology transfer talks to help reopen closed wells and increase productivity in the presence of officials from the two companies via closed-circuit television.

"During the meeting, they discussed developing ways of joint cooperation between the two sides," the statement said.

They agreed to hold a series of intensive meetings with the other companies in the same sector in the coming period to "transfer the appropriate technologies to carry out the work in the closed wells and improve production rates."

Deputy Prime Minister of Libya Maiteeq says Turkey is the only country that has stood by Libya in its crisis

The Libyan Deputy Prime Minister, Ahmed Maiteeq, said that Turkey is the only country that has stood by his country in the difficult times it is going through, expressing his thanks to Ankara. This came in statements made by Maiteeq, on Tuesday, in an online dialogue, within the works of the sixth edition of the Mediterranean Dialogues Forum, in the Italian capital, Rome.

He stated, "Libya received support from several places when it was attacked by ISIS. However, this situation developed differently during the attack by the retired General Khalifa Haftar and his militia on Tripoli in April 2019."

He explained that the relations between his country and Turkey in the security, military and economic fields are going well.

Pentagon says UAE Possibly financing Russian Wagner Group mercenaries in Libya

The US Department of Defence, "Pentagon," announced that the UAE is helping to finance Russian Wagner mercenaries in Libya.

This came, according to what was quoted by the "Foreign Policy" newspaper, late Monday, on a report issued by the Inspector General of Anti-Terrorism Operations in Africa, affiliated to the Pentagon. The report, which the newspaper said was released last week, stated that the UAE appears to help finance the Russian mercenary group Wagner in Libya, which would complicate the United States' close relationship with the Gulf state.

This report is the first official public evaluation from Washington of the role the UAE plays in financing the Wagner Group, and it comes in the wake of the defeat of President Donald Trump and the victory of Democrat Joe Biden in the US presidential elections.

ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

ISIS targets Sunni community in Iraq

ISIS sleeper cells intensify its attacks against Sunnis in Iraq's Anbar and Salahuddin provinces in recent weeks. ISIS militants carried out a rocket attack on an oil refinery in Salahuddin and claimed responsibility for the attacks resulted in the death of security forces and civilians in Anbar in the last period. The attacks in Sunni populated regions came out following the decision to reopen Iraq's borders with Saudi Arabia. Two villagers were found killed in Salahuddin province just after the reopening border crossing. Although ISIS lost its territorial control, its militants aim at maintaining a low-level insurgency seeking to benefit from ongoing social, economic, and political tensions in Iraq. Moreover, it is known that Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and other pro-Iranian armed groups are also against the reopening of the borders between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

All armed groups will be withdrawing from Sinjar

A high-ranking officer from the Iraqi military stated that all armed factions would be withdrawing from Iraq's Sinjar province due to the agreement signed between Erbil and Baghdad. The deal aims to remove non-state armed groups from Sinjar and deploy the Iraqi security forces in the area. Although the PKK affiliated group, the Shingal Resistance Units (YBS), initially rejected the deal, it was reported to be accepting to relocate its forces. The YBS is among other six-armed factions currently exist in the district. Erbil- Baghdad agreement aspires to establish a new security force made up of locals living in Sinjar.

PKK affiliates begin leaving Northern Syria

According to the reports, the PKK cadres within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) started withdrawing from Syria. It is known that thousands of PKK cadres have moved to Syria from the Qandil Mountains with the Syrian Civil War outbreak. There have been several rumors that the United States and its Western allies are forcing the SDF to break its ties with the PKK. Turkey has significant concerns about the PKK presence in Northeastern Syria, and Turkish armed forces launched several operations due to its security concerns.

REGIMES IN TRANSITION

Lebanon

France and UN Held Second Donor Conference, World Bank says Lebanon is in a "Deliberate Depression"

On Wednesday, December 2, France and the UN co-hosted the second online international conference to plan a framework for the reform, recovery, and reconstruction of Lebanon after the Beirut Port Blast. A total of \$294.5 million were pledged in the first donor conference organized on August 9 by countries involved. French President Emmanuel Macron declared that the fund will be channeled through the World Bank and will be directly received by Lebanese citizens and trusted-NGOs.

Macron stressed that the authorities haven't implemented any of the reform measures suggested by the French initiative, and they have failed to conduct a forensic audit for Banque du Liban. He also added that the US-led sanctions on Lebanese politicians would not offer any solution to Lebanon's crisis.

A day before the conference, World Bank's economists notified that Lebanon's economy has been in a "deliberate depression," highlighting authorities' mismanagement. According to the Lebanon Economic Monitor report, Lebanon will face 19.2 percent economic constriction in 2020 and a further 13.2 percent for the next year, while a huge drop is expected in the country's debt to GDP ratio by 194 percent at the end of 2020. They added that "as things stand, Lebanon's economic crisis is likely to be both deeper and longer than most economic crises" by facing the human capital flight and rising poverty and unemployment rates in the near future.

Former Army Chief Charged over “Illicit Enrichment”

A Lebanese judge charged eight high-ranking former military officers over “illicit enrichment”, including the former army chief (Jean Kahwaji), the former intelligence chiefs (Edmond Fadl and Camille Daher), the former head of Kahwaji’s office (Mohammad Jaafar al-Husseini), the former head of army intelligence in Beirut (George Khamis), the former head of army Intelligence in North Lebanon (Amer al-Hosn), retired Brigadier General (Abdel-Rahman Shhaytli), and the former officer in Lebanon’s General Security agency (Ahmad al-Jamal). The proceeding is launched over illicit enrichment and embezzlement by using their official positions and accepting bribes. The file also includes favoritism and backscratching in exchange for money and personal benefits.

Tunisia

Tunisia Has Been Rocked by Series of Protests from Different Working Spheres

On Monday, November 30, the head of Tunisia’s General Labour Union (UGTT), Nouredine Taboubi, submitted a proposal to President Kais Saied to address the series of protests and labor strikes that has been ongoing during the recent weeks from various working sectors. The idea proposes the formation of a committee of “elders” that might bring the divided political parties into conciliatory dialogue in order to renew the faith of Tunisians in the political process.

Sudan

Sudan Threatens to Cancel Normalization with Israel unless the US Remove Sudan from Terrorism List

Sudan’s interim government warned the US that it would cancel the normalization agreement with Israel if not removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list and given legal immunity against terrorism cases by the end of 2020. Amid the economic hardship, Sudanese leaders see the removal from the list as the only way to do business with foreign investors. On October 23, Sudan became the third country, after UAE and Bahrein, that agreed to normalize ties with Israel under the US mediation in return for delisting from the terrorism list.

Algeria

Algeria Slams EU Resolution and French Role in It

Algeria's Minister of Communication and government spokesman Ammar Belhimer considered the European Parliament's resolution on the human rights abuses in Algeria as a pressure mechanism to undermine Algeria. The Head of the Algerian Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) Abderrazak Makri criticized the resolution for being "selective" in the choice of activists to defend and blackmail the Algerian state.

Last week on November 26, European Parliament issued a resolution on the human rights abuses in Algeria, condemning the worsening of arbitrary and unlawful arrests of journalists, human rights defenders, trade unionists, lawyers, and activists. It also warns Algeria to release journalist Mohamed Khaled Drareni, who filmed police attacks against protestors.



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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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