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**Al Sharq Weekly**

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## TÜRKİYE

### **President Erdoğan's Phone Call with Vladimir Putin on the Grain Deal**

President Erdoğan had a phone call with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Wednesday and discussed the resumption of the Black Sea grain deal. During the call, Erdoğan underlined that he views the grain deal as a 'bridge of peace' and reiterated Ankara's decisiveness to exert intense efforts and diplomacy to reactivate the grain deal, whereby millions of people benefit. President Erdoğan stated that grain prices decreased by 23 percent during the deal's implementation. However, after the pause in the deal, the prices went up by 15 percent in the last two weeks of July. This situation poses serious risks for low-income countries, especially African countries. Last year, Türkiye signed the grain deal with Russia and the UN, which led to many countries' hailing of Turkish diplomacy, as it paved the way for the Ukrainian grain to flow to the countries in need. Yet, a year after the deal, President Putin suspended Russia's participation, stipulating new conditions for the resumption of it.

## SYRIA

### **Faisal al-Mekdad's Visit to Tehran**

The Foreign Minister of the Assad Regime, Faisal al-Mekdad, visited Syria with a large delegation on Monday. Reportedly, the visit aimed at launching a series of meetings between both sides to boost economic and political cooperation. The Syrian Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Mohammed Samer al-Khalil and many other high-ranking figures accompanied Mekdad. The minister's visit took place at a time when the economic crisis in Syria was deepening, and the living standards were deteriorating on a daily basis. The meeting also coincides with a number of political developments transpiring on Syrian soil, such as the Assad regime's legitimization attempts at the regional level, the increasing Israeli attacks against the Iran-backed militias in Syria, and Turkey's growing drone strikes against the YPG/PYD affiliates in Northern Syria.

For a long time, Russia and Iran, two staunch supporters of the Syrian regime over the course of the Syrian crisis, have been vying to increase their roles in Syria's economy through different projects. Due to the Russian preoccupation with the Ukraine crisis, Iran is upping its initiatives to increase its share in the war-ravaged Syria's economy.

### **The National Liberation Movement Convened in Syria**

The defected Syrian General Manaf Tlass's movement organized its first meeting inside Syria. In a statement, the movement claimed that a large gathering of the 'National Liberation Movement' took place in Syria with the participation of many dissident officers. The Tlass's movement claims to strive for a regime change in war-ravaged Syria. Moreover, the movement asserts that it wants to act as an inclusive national platform that serves the aspirations of the entire Syrian nation rather than a particular ethnic or religious group in the country.

The defected General Manaf Tlass, whose father (Mustafa Tlass) served as the regime's defense minister for more than 30 years, has previously proposed a transitional phase in the country through the Syrian Military Council. According to the statement, the National Liberation Movement was launched by the Syrian Military Council. Tlass has been living in France since his defection from the Syrian army. Despite defection from the Syrian regime in 2012, he failed to secure the Syrian oppositional forces' backing. Considering the abundance of Syrian opposition groups, the legacy of the Tlass family in Syria, and the regional re-legitimization of the Syrian regime, the new opposition venture is not expected to change the trajectory of the Syrian crisis dramatically.

### **New Audio Recording by ISIS's Spokesperson**

The terror group ISIS's new spokesperson Abu Huthayfa al-Ansari has released an audio recording and confirmed the death of the group's so-called former 'caliph' Abu Al-Hussain al-Quraishi. The new spokesperson claimed al-Quraishi was killed in clashes with Idlib's de-facto ruler group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). According to the recording, the group's previous spokesman Abu Omar al-Muhajir was also captured by HTS in Idlib. Moreover, Al-Ansari announced the group's new caliph, Abu Hafs al-Hashimi al-Quraishi.



### **Erbil Started Sharing Oil Revenues with Baghdad**

Iraqi Premier Mohammad Shia al-Sudani announced on Tuesday that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) started sending the daily oil revenues of 55,000 barrels to Baghdad in line with the recent agreement struck between Erbil and Baghdad. Erbil had sent its oil through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline starting in 2014, taking advantage of ISIS's rise in Iraq without sharing the revenues with Baghdad or even getting approval for the sale. In line with this development, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil filed a complaint with the arbitral tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris to object to Erbil exporting oil without the approval of the ministry through the Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline. The arbitral tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris issued, on March 25, 2023, a decision against Erbil and Turkey. Following the court's decision, Turkey stopped oil flow through the pipeline as it was sentenced to pay compensation of more than 1.4 billion USD for the oil flow during the 2014-2018 period. Stopping the oil from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq led to billions of dollars in damage for the KRG. As a result, Erbil, after tense negotiations, agreed to send the oil revenues to Baghdad under certain conditions.

## IRAN

### **The Dispute Over the Dorra Gas Field Between Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia**

The conflict over the Dorra gas field fuels an Iranian dispute on one side and a Kuwaiti-Saudi dispute on the other, stemming from the investment of its wealth and the distribution of shares in it. However, Arab Gulf countries believe Iran has no rightful claim to the field's resources. Despite the notable Saudi-Iranian rapprochement and both sides agreeing to restore normal relations gradually, the relationship has escalated clearly, especially in July. The dispute over this gas field, which Tehran sees as a jointly invested field, while the Gulf side views it as "purely Kuwaiti-Saudi," has been rising.

On March 26, 2022, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs deemed the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for the development of the Arash/Dorra gas field as "illegal," affirming Iran's right to invest in the field, which is considered a shared field among the three countries. It was noted that certain parts of the field fall within the undefined waters between Iran and Kuwait. The ministry called for the three countries to engage in negotiations regarding the manner of investing in the shared field. On March 29, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, stated, "Iran is not a party to the Dorra field, as it is purely Kuwaiti-Saudi." He clarified that his earlier remarks, made during a press conference with the French Foreign Minister on the same day, regarding the Dorra field referred to "negotiations to demarcate the continental shelf boundaries between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran."

## LEBANON

### **Fighting Between Armed Palestinian Groups in Ain al-Hilweh Camp, Lebanon**

A cautious calm prevailed in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh in Lebanon on Monday evening, following the signing of a ceasefire agreement after three days of clashes that resulted in 11 fatalities and 60 injuries. The caretaker Prime Minister of Lebanon, Najib Mikati, defended the intervention of the army to restore security in the camp. The camp witnessed a state of cautious calm after clashes erupted between Islamic factions and the Palestinian National Security Forces affiliated with the Fatah movement.

## PALESTINE

### **Palestinian Factions Convene in Cairo for Reconciliation Talks**

Several Palestinian political factions convened in Egypt over the weekend to form a "reconciliation committee," mainly in response to the recent Israeli attack on the West Bank city of Jenin; the raids killed at least 12 Palestinians and wounded over 150. Chaired by President Mahmoud Abbas, the meeting aimed to restore unity among the Palestinian factions, with "resistance strategy" against Israel being top on the agenda, as stated by Fehmi Sahin, political chief of the Palestinian People's Party. However, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was not in attendance, who allegedly boycotted the meeting due to political arrests by Abbas's authority.

This gathering comes after Abbas and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh met in Türkiye last week for a joint discussion with President Erdoğan. Abbas agreed with Haniyeh, who currently resides between Qatar and Turkey, to hold a broad meeting of factions in Cairo at the end of July to discuss the conflict with Israel and ways to end internal divisions. The parties involved affirmed their commitment to reconciliation, hoping to narrow the divide between the separate administrations—Hamas, in the besieged Gaza Strip and Abbas’s Palestinian Authority, in the Palestinian-controlled regions of the occupied West Bank. Haniyeh called for a new, inclusive parliament based on free democratic elections. According to participants at the meeting, Haniyeh appealed to “comprehensive resistance” and called on Abbas to end “security collaboration” with Israel and “political arrests.” Meanwhile, Abbas called for “peaceful popular resistance” and the unanimous protection of the PLO — which, notably, does not include Hamas or Islamic Jihad.



### **“One Israel” Project: Bridging Israel & Saudi Arabia**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has announced the launch of the “One Israel” project – a high-speed rail that will bridge Israel and Saudi Arabia. The railway line will extend from Kiryat Shmona, a city in Israel’s north, down to the southernmost city of Eilat, and it will operate as a passenger train for citizens looking to travel domestically. In its second phase, however, the rail project will branch out to cargo transportation and add an overland, cross-border rail extension to the nearby Arabian Peninsula. The 100-billion-shekel (\$27 billion) project comes about just as speculation of Israel-Saudi normalization increases, with some seeing a rapprochement on the horizon. Broader Gulf normalization with Israel has increased since the Abraham Accords’ introduction in late-2020. Two weeks ago, Israel’s Foreign Ministry confirmed plans for a trade land bridge (unrelated to the rail) linking Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, running from the Persian Gulf through the Peninsula and concluding in Eilat.

Unlike some of its Gulf neighbors, Saudi Arabia has remained strategically noncommittal in its engagement with Israel, particularly under current political conditions. Although Netanyahu hoped that Saudi Arabia would join the Accords and has seemingly been working toward that goal, recent Israeli incursions such as raids on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, continued settlement building, and the ongoing use of violent force on Palestinians have led the Saudis to retreat—despite reports of intelligence cooperation between the two countries. Israel’s domestic politics have also weakened its appeal in the region, with the parliament’s recent overhaul of judicial authority provoking months-long protests throughout the country and weakening public confidence in the administration. Moreover, on Sunday, the New York Times reported, citing an anonymous Israeli source, that King Salman’s position on the normalization is shifting and now hinges on Israel making “significant concessions” to the Palestinians. It is uncertain whether One Israel’s Saudi ambitions can materialize without a normalization agreement.



### **Tunisia Contemplates Criminalizing Normalization with Israel**

The Tunisian parliament announced on Monday that its Rights Committee is studying a draft law that will criminalize the normalization of ties with Israel. The committee expressed its initial support for the proposed law, emphasizing its importance to the Tunisian people and its unwavering backing for the Palestinian cause. Tunisia has never maintained diplomatic ties with Israel since its establishment in 1948. In August 2022, following reports of commercial interactions between Tunisia and Israel, the Tunisian Ministry of Trade and Export Development reaffirmed its commitment to non-engagement with Israel, aligning with the Arab League's stated principles. While Tunisia has remained distant from Israel, several other Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, signed normalization agreements with Israel in 2020. In its statement after the meeting, the committee confirmed that the draft law needs to be reviewed for accuracy and clarity, and some of its content needs to be screened for compliance with current criminal laws.

Tunisia's proposed law may follow Iraqi precedent, as the Iraqi parliament approved a bill last year "criminalizing normalization and establishing relations with the Zionist entity." This legislation aims to deter citizens and institutions from initiating any type of relationship with Israel, with punishments as severe as the death penalty. In a statement following the bill's approval, Deputy Speaker of Iraq's House of Representatives Hakim al-Zamili called on "all Arab and Islamic parliaments to pass similar legislation that meets the aspirations of their people." With the substance of the draft law being ambiguous and still under review, it remains to be seen whether the Tunisian parliament will fulfill Iraq's call to action.

### **Kais Saeid Dismisses the Tunisian Prime Minister**

Last Tuesday, the Tunisian president Kais Saeid dismissed Najla Bouden and appointed Ahmed Hachani as the new prime minister. Bouden, who made history for being the first woman prime minister in the Arab World, was appointed in September 2021 after the "presidential takeover." Although this move was expected, as Saied showed his dissatisfaction with the government's performance on many occasions, choosing a politically unknown candidate, such as Hachani, to fill this position was met with criticism from the opposition.

## ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH

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