



wire

# Al Sharq Weekly

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## **IRAN**

### **Iranian Foreign Minister Abdollahian Visits Saudi Arabia**

Last Thursday, the official Iranian news agency IRNA announced that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian arrived in the Saudi capital Riyadh with a high-ranking delegation accompanying him. During his visit, the Iranian Foreign Minister met with his Saudi counterpart Faisal Bin Farhan and other high-ranking Saudi officials to boost bilateral ties. According to IRNA, the Iranian Minister “spoke about issues such as holding the joint meeting of chambers of commerce of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the launching of their flight lines, joint ventures, scientific and research cooperation, knowledge-based companies, fighting against drug trafficking, exchange of elite and scientific delegations and also sports teams of the two sides, which were welcomed by the Saudi side.”

This meeting is the first of its kind after China brokered a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023, leading to discussions about sidelining the USA and declining US influence in the Middle East as the global order is taking a multipolar shape amidst great power competition. The last meeting of an Iranian Foreign Minister to Saudi Arabia took place in 2015 during the tenure of Mohammad Zarif. Riyadh severed its diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016 after its diplomatic missions in Iran following Saudi Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr’s execution in Riyadh. Almost seven years later, both sides mended ties and appointed new ambassadors to the other side.

### **The Agreement Between Washington and Tehran Includes the Nuclear File and the Militias**

The recently announced prisoner exchange agreement between Iran and the United States includes provisions relating to Tehran’s nuclear activities and the conduct of militias operating in Syria and Iraq. Within the framework of this agreement, Iran has committed to not enriching uranium beyond 60%, in addition to its pledge to prevent the Shia militias operating in Syria and Iraq from attacking US forces there. Despite Tehran’s denial of such commitment, the reality indicates otherwise.

A significant disappointment prevails in Israel following the conclusion of this agreement, as it allows funds to flow into Iran’s treasury while preserving its nuclear program. It is emphasized that what exacerbates Israeli frustration is the fact that this agreement practically guarantees Iran against attacks on its nuclear facilities.

### **Terror Attack in Shiraz Leads to Casualties**

Iranian state media announced that an assailant attacked the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz last Sunday, killing at least a person and wounding three others. The assailant who conducted the attack with a rifle was arrested at the crime scene. Although no organization has claimed responsibility

for the attack, it is believed that ISIS may be behind it. With this attack, Shah Cheragh shrine comes under the second deadly assault in less than a year. The shrine was previously attacked by ISIS in October 2022, leading to the death of 13 persons and the wounding of 40. Iran executed two convicts following the attack due to their alleged links to ISIS. The group also attacked the Iranian Parliament and the tomb of the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Khomeini in 2017.

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **Saudi Arabia Seizes More Than 2 Million Captagon Pills**

Saudi Arabian authorities have seized more than 2 million Captagon (a type of drug) pills hidden in baklava boxes at the Jeddah airport. Although the source country for the pills was not mentioned, the pills are thought to be shipped from Syria. Over the course of the Syrian Crisis, Syria has become a primary producer of Captagon. Moreover, one of the motivations behind many Arab countries' (specifically Jordan and Saudi Arabia) recent normalization process with Syria was preventing Captagon flow to their soils from Syria. Nevertheless, neither Jordan nor Saudi Arabia could stop the Captagon flow coming from Syria thus far.

## **TÜRKİYE**

### **In Response to Assad's Interview, Turkish Defense Minister Rejects Withdrawal from Syria**

Turkish Defense Minister Yaşar Güler has dismissed the possibility of Turkish troops' withdrawal from Syria until Türkiye's border security is established. Last week, in an interview with Sky News Arabia, Syrian regime leader Bashar al-Assad refused to meet with President Erdoğan until Turkish troops leave Syrian soil. In response to Assad's comment, Minister Güler rejected the long-voiced precondition stimulated by the Syrian regime and said that withdrawal from Syria would be unimaginable before securing Türkiye's national security.

## **SYRIA**

### **Faisal Mekdad's Visit to Cairo**

Last Tuesday, the Syrian regime's Foreign Minister, Faisal al-Mekdad, met with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Cairo. During the meeting, which was held before the Arab Ministerial Liaison Committee, the progress of Syria's normalization process with the Arab countries was reviewed. The 5-member-liaison committee comprised Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon and was set up by the Arab League. Following the meeting with Shoukry, Mekdad addressed his counterparts at the Liaison Committee in Cairo and reiterated the importance of strengthened Arab unity, Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Mekdad also underlined the significance of initiating early recovery projects for Syria in the meeting. The Syrian regime minister's meeting in Cairo has been another step in the Syrian regime's regional normalization process.

### **New Protests in South Syria**

Protestors have taken to the streets in Syria after the regime's recent decision to increase fuel prices. The regime has recently doubled the public servant and military personnel salaries through a new legislative decree. Nevertheless, it also cut the fuel subsidies, leading to transportation strikes in the regime-held areas. Due to the severe economic crisis, the public servants' average monthly salary even with the recent increase is less than 25 USD. Especially on Thursday, strikes were organized in South Syria. In the Druze-majority-province Suwaida, protestors have blocked some roads and chanted, 'Syria is ours, not the house of Assad's.' In Dar'a, where the first protests broke out in 2011, people also organized a general strike, protesting the living conditions in the country. All these protests show that Syria remains a boiling cauldron, although the regime projects itself as the triumphant of the war amid a regional normalization process.

### **HTS Confirms Abu Mariya al-Qahtani's Arrest**

Last Thursday, Idlib's de facto authority Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) confirmed the arrest of Abu Mariya al-Qahtani, one of the leading figures of the group. The group also announced that Qahtani was stripped of his duties. Al-Qahtani, an Iraqi jihadist, joined Jabhat al-Nusra, the predecessor of HTS before it split from Al-Qaida. The arrest of al-Qahtani came amidst the rumors of the jihadist's alleged espionage for the US-led coalition. Although, HTS tried to belittle the arrest of al-Qahtani in the statement it released, it confirmed that Qahtani mismanaged his contacts with indifference to the sensitivity of his position. Qahtani's arrest came amidst of a sweeping arrest campaign initiated by HTS. The Iraqi Jihadist and a fierce opponent of ISIS was seen as the second most powerful person within HTS after the group's leader Abu Mohammad Al-Jolani, up until a short while ago.

## **JORDAN**

### **Contentious Water-for-Energy Deal Brings Jordan & Israel to the UAE**

Israeli, UAE, and Jordanian officials met in Abu Dhabi on Monday to advance a water-for-energy deal first introduced by the UAE and the US in 2021, known as "Project Prosperity." The agreement involves Jordan building 600 megawatts of solar power to export to Israel in return for providing Jordan with 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water. This controversial pact addresses Jordan's severe water scarcity issues, which have raised criticism of both Jordan's leadership and Israeli PM Netanyahu for lacking stronger water diplomacy. Also on the meeting agenda was the global climate crisis. Israel's Energy Minister Israel Katz's office stated they discussed promoting the "Prosperity" initiative's final stages, involving purchasing green electricity from a UAE-built solar farm in Jordan. The UAE's involvement in mediating this deal aligns with its role in normalizing relations between Israel and Arab states as well as its recent attempts to lead the global discussion on climate change and reform.

## **SUDAN**

### **Renewed Fighting in Khartoum**

On Thursday morning, the Sudanese army shelled the neighborhoods of Riyadh, Taif, Al-Mamoura, and the Sports City in Khartoum. At the same time, the army fighters flew over the cities of Khartoum, Omdurman, and Khartoum North, coinciding with heavy weapons fire from the Rapid Support Forces in different directions in the capital.

The army was also bombarded with artillery at the positions of the Rapid Support Forces in the center of Omdurman, and an exchange of artillery shelling took place southeast of the city of El-Obeid, North Kordofan. Military sources in El-Obeid said that a force from the 5th Infantry Division repelled an attack by the Rapid Support Forces.

## **LIBYA**

### **Violent Clashes Break Out Between Rival Factions in Tripoli**

After months of relative stability, violent clashes erupted in Tripoli on Tuesday, 15 August, leaving several people killed and many injured, in addition to much property damage and destruction. The outburst followed the arrest of Mahmoud Hamza, the commander of the powerful 444 Brigade, by the Special Deterrence Force (also known as Rada). The arrest occurred at Tripoli's Mitiga Airport on Monday while Hamza was en route to Misrata. The respective parties — the 444 and Rada — began fighting in southern Tripoli, Ain Zara, al-Hadbha, and Khalet al-Furjan, with troops and heavy weaponry being deployed. Initial attempts by Prime Minister Dabaiba to negotiate with Rada leader Abdurraouf Kara for Hamza's release were unsuccessful, with fighting and violence intensifying on Tuesday in and around Ain Zara. In response to the violence, airlines suspended all flights to or from Mitiga Airport, where the most intense fighting took place — but flights reportedly resumed the following day. City elders stepped in and eventually were able to broker a deal for Rada to hand over Hamza to a third faction — the Stabilisation Support Apparatus; this group then released him to the 444 Brigade. As of Wednesday, Tripoli health officials have reported the death toll to be 55 , with an additional 146 people injured.

## 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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