

ARAB DISPATCH

Arab Dispatch - a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation

Issue n. 20

17th - 24th July 2019

North Africa

#Libya – Haftar’s second offensive on Tripoli repelled



Over the past week-end, the Libyan Air Force – headed by the Government of National Accord (GNA)’s Presidential Council – targeted several positions controlled by General Khalifa Haftar’s forces with heavy bombardment, among which Wadi Rabea and Tripoli International Airport. On early Monday, Haftar launched his second all-out offensive against Tripoli, dubbed “Zero Hour Attack”, in an attempt to penetrate the capital’s city centre. Yet, the Commander’s Libyan National Army (LNA) suffered major blows both in terms of fighters and military equipment, as the GNA forces repelled the attacks through an air cover. The first military campaign against the city, labelled “Burkan Al-Ghadab”

[“Volcano of Rage”], started on the 4th of April. Since then, over 1.100 people have been killed and 5.100 others injured, let alone the displacement of about 100.000 civilians.

To know more about this topic:

- *Libya Observer*, “Libyan Air Force carries multiple strikes on positions of Haftar's forces”, 07/21/19, available at: bit.ly/2Z98yYE.
- *El Watan*, “Bataille de Tripoli: Haftar se prépare à donner l’assaut final”,, 07/22/19, available at: bit.ly/2Y03bPf.
- *Libyan Express*, “Libya: Haftar’s second offensive on Tripoli ‘Zero Hour Attack’ repelled”, 07/22/19, available at: bit.ly/2K0o0jr.

Levant

#Syria - US Envoy in Ankara for ‘safe zone’ talks as Turkey threatens to invade Syria



On the 22nd of July, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu declared that his country would launch a new offensive into northern Syria if a so-called “safe zone” is not established and if threats against Turkey continue from the region. On the same day, James Jeffrey, the US Special Envoy for Syria, visited Ankara for talks aimed at resuming the long-running negotiations over the establishment of the abovementioned “safe zone” south of Turkish border, in a swathe of territory that is now under

the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is dominated by a Kurdish militia that Ankara considers as a branch of the illegal PKK group. For its part, Washington wants guarantees that Kurdish Syrians, whom the United States allied with in the campaign to defeat ISIL since 2014, will not be harmed. Although Turkey has long warned it could ender northeast Syria, where the US keeps an estimated 2.000 troops, it revived such threats this month and has reportedly sent military forces to the border. Jeffrey's visit comes at a time of heightened tensions after Ankara purchased a \$2,5 billion Russian-made missile system, that the United States says threatens NATO security.

To know more about this topic:

- *Hürriyet Daily News*, “US Syria envoy in Ankara for safe zone talks as Turkey mulls op”, 07/21/19, available at: bit.ly/2Z7ZEuC.
- *Bloomberg*, “Turkey Threatens Operation Against American-Backed Syrian Kurds”, 07/21/19, available at: bloom.bg/2Y0RCHg.
- *Al-Monitor*, “US envoy holds talks in Ankara as Turkey threatens to invade Syria”, 07/22/19, available at: bit.ly/2JLKsOu.

Gulf

[#GulfTensions](#)– UK seeks a European naval force in the Gulf after the seizure of British-linked oil tankers



Last Friday, Iran seized two UK-linked oil tankers in the strategic strait of Hormuz. Iran's Revolutionary Guards claimed to have taken the British-flagged Stena Impero into port because it had

infringed maritime regulations, whereas the ship's owners said the vessel was approached by unidentified small crafts and helicopter while it was in international waters. The UK Foreign Minister, Jeremy Hunt, qualified Iran's action as "unacceptable", however he clarified that "we are not looking at military options, but for a diplomatic way to resolve the situation". In the aftermath of the events, Hunt said Britain held discussions with several countries over launching a European-led international maritime protection mission. Yet, he clarified that the country would not join the US in its decision about the JCPOA, as it is willing to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal. The incidents constituted the latest escalation in three months of spiralling confrontation along the Gulf oil export routes that began when new, tighter US sanctions took effect in early May.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, "Iran stokes Gulf tensions by seizing two British-linked oil tankers", 07/19/19, available at: bit.ly/2GpiJ8v.
- *The Defense Post*, "UK seeks to form Europe-led Gulf maritime protection force", 07/22/19, available at: bit.ly/2SwQkxO.
- *Al Jazeera*, "UK seeks European naval force to counter 'piracy' in Gulf", 07/22/19, available at: bit.ly/2Z8y0xx.

#ArabInsight

#Tunisia – A look into the upcoming elections: the main issues at stake



Last Monday, Tunisia launched the registration process for the upcoming legislative elections, scheduled to be held on the 6th of October; the first round of presidential polls is set to take place

shortly afterwards, on the 10th of November. These dates will mark the fourth set of polls in which Tunisian citizens can vote freely, the previous having been the Constituent Assembly's elections in 2011, the 2014 legislative ones, and the 2018 municipal polls. According to many, the next popular vote will be historical and decisive for the country's transition towards democracy. Former President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki (2011-2014) went as far as to say these elections will "determine the future of Tunisia in the next fifty years". The parliamentary race is widely expected to be closely fought by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, the more secular Tahya Tounes of PM Youssef Chahed, Nidaa Tounes – led by the President's son Hafez Caid Essebsi –, and the social-democrat Courant Démocrate party. This week, we provide an insight into the main issues and latest developments related to the current electoral context, taking a cue from two articles recently published on *Al Araby* and *Al Jazeera Arabic*, titled respectively: "[Tunisia: Electoral surprises confuses political calculations](#)" and "[Will Ghannouchi become President of the Tunisian Parliament after the October polls?](#)".

In the first place, the electoral law amendments, voted by the Parliament on the 18th of June, continues to spark heated debate. Fifty-one MPs challenged the decision before the country's Provisional Authority monitoring the constitutionality of law, that rejected the claim. Yet, as the registration process starts, the Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi has not yet signed the revised law, which sets strict criteria for those willing to stand as candidates for both the legislative and presidential elections. In particular, the latter is said to be designated specifically to end the bid of the presidential campaign front-runner, i.e. the businessman Nabil al-Qarawi, owner of a private TV station critical of the government. Indeed, the amendments state – *inter alia* – that any personality who has benefited from political advertising through charity or TV channel shall be prevented from running the elections. Moreover, they establish that a legislative party must receive at least 3% of the overall vote to have representation in parliament; such measure has been harshly criticised by several grassroots citizens' movements, such as 3ich Tounsi. Commenting on the issue, the movement's leader Salem Ben Hassem argued that "the ruling parties (...) are trying to obstruct their rivals. This move comes after the decline in their popularity among voters against the rise of other figures in opinion polls". Concerning Essebsi's decision not to ratify the revised law, the author of *Al Araby's* article asserts that such a move "increases the accumulated problems and opens the way for constitutional interpretations on the implementation (or not) of these amendments". "By not calling for a referendum – the only alternative formula available to him constitutionally – he confused everyone, i.e. parties, experts, and lawmakers", he added. The writer further notices that the President's 'silence' did not only manifest itself at the constitutional level, but also at the political one, as he did not explain to the Tunisian people the reasons for his refusal. Through this attitude, "Essebsi changes the game again and imposes a new electoral reality".

The second, surprising development regards the candidacy of Rashid Ghannouchi – the head of Ennahda – as the top of the party’s list in the Tunis 1 constituency. As reported by *Al Jazeera*’s editorial, this decision reinforces expectations that he is seeking to play a leadership position in the country’s politics, possibly as Prime Minister or Speaker of Parliament – if Ennahda wins a majority in the legislative polls. The 78-year-old influential figure, exiled in London for two decades during Ben Ali’s rule, has been a prominent personality since the 2011 Jasmine revolution, however he had never run for any official position so far. Interviewed by *Al Jazeera*, Ennahda official Imed Khemiri said the move is aimed at letting the party’s leader “play a more important role at this crucial stage in the history of Tunisia’s democratic transition”. He pointed out that one of the main mistakes made in the wake of the uprisings was not to appoint parties’ leaders to fill the most sensitive state positions. Against this background, supporters of the movements have been complaining about their marginalisation in the nominations, also criticising the absence of youth elements from the electoral lists.

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