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# Regional Updates

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## REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

### CYPRUS

Even though the agenda of Cyprus was disrupted by the coup attempt in Turkey in July, it was still very busy in August and September in terms of the continuation process between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders.



On 21 July, upon his meeting with the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades, U.N. Special Adviser on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide stated, “There is no sign as of right now that there is any change in the Turkish government’s position, which is consistently supportive of the talks”.

On 26 July, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said that both the Turkish and the Turkish Cypriot governments had always been constructive, calling on the Greek Cypriot side not to miss this “last chance,” while adding that Turkey backed the peace talks.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said in a joint press meeting with Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akıncı, the Turkish Cypriot Leader on 17 August said that Turkey and Turkish Cypriots have been always supportive for a lasting and comprehensive peace in the island. In the same meeting, Erdoğan thanked the Turkish Cypriots for providing solidarity with the Turkish people following the failed coup attempt.

On 23 August, Cyprus leaders Nicos Anastasiades and Mustafa Akıncı held the first meeting in the second round of the intensified talks for Cyprus. Seven meetings were planned to be concluded on 14 September. After the meeting Nicos Anastasiades gave a statement to the press and said that the Greek Cypriot side does not reject the idea of a tripartite meeting in New York while Mustafa Akıncı said in a statement that they are hoping to conclude the talks in a positive way.

On 31 August, Cyprus and Egypt signed an agreement paving the way for a gas pipeline. Greek Cypriot Energy Minister Giorgos Lakkotrypis and Egypt’s Petroleum Minister Tarek el-Molla said the deal sets the political framework for additional commercial agreement. Giorgos Lakkotrypis added “essentially today we signed an agreement that provides that the two countries will respect the provisions of any trade agreements to be made in the near future ... We hope that this agreement will assist and accelerate trade agreements ... creating a secure investment framework for the sale of natural gas from Cyprus to Egypt.” It is envisaged that the new pipeline will reach Egypt sometime between 2020 and 2022, but officials will try to speed up the timetable.

Also on 31 August, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu separately met with Turkish Cypriot Prime Minister Hüseyin Özgürgün and President Mustafa Akıncı. After the meetings, Çavuşoğlu said to the reporters, “we will continue to give support to a solution that would be accepted by both parts” and he also emphasized that the aim is to ensure a permanent peace and solution. He added that, Turkey is ready to make any kind of contribution, including trust-building steps and measures.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

In September, the round of intensified talks was concluded and the talks were to be moved to New York where the UN General Assembly had met. On 14 September, after the 7th of the second round of intensified talks, UN Special Envoy Espen Barth Eide said “cognizant of the remaining challenges, the two leaders are committed to continuing and intensifying their efforts in these leader-led negotiations in the coming months with the aim of reaching a comprehensive settlement agreement within 2016.” Eide also added that the two leaders exchanged views and positions on the two of the most controversial topics which are the chapters of security and guarantees, and territory. The Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı said in a TV interview on 15 September that, “we have come to a point where the willpower, political courage and decisiveness factors weigh more heavily than the time factor. If there is will and decisiveness then 90 days is enough to reach a peace deal on the island,” Mustafa Akıncı said in a TV interview on 15 September. Speaking about the details of the federal state that will be formed if a deal is reached, Akıncı said the new state would have two founding states but its international identity, sovereignty and citizenship would be one.

Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades, who held meetings in New York, briefed on the speedy implementation of the various aspects of the agreement. He said “I do believe that this ambitious goal is achievable, provided that all interested parties and stakeholders, and in particular Turkey, show a similar degree of commitment, engage constructively and proceed with concrete and tangible steps which will positively reinforce the negotiating process,” while also emphasizing on the differences that remained on a number of issues in the chapters of governance, the EU and economy.

On 25 September two leaders of Cyprus met UN Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon in a tripartite meeting. During the meeting, the leaders discussed the prospects of the Cyprus issue. Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı put forward the question of the timeframe for the solution of the dispute to be until the end of 2016. However, his Greek counterpart Anastasiades said no deadlines or timeframes should be imposed on the negotiations.

In a joint press meeting with the UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon and Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders, respectively, Akıncı and Anastasiades, Ban-ki Moon indicated that the period ahead would be crucial for Cyprus and time is of the essence.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

### EGYPT

In the beginning of July, former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's trial on charges for inciting the murder of protesters was said to be due to start on 4 November according to Aljazeera.

It was also noted that people leaving Egypt to Italy increased in comparison to the previous year according to Fabrice Leggeri, head of EU's border agency Frontex.



Commenting on the trial of three top journalists, Amnesty International said the world must not 'sit aloof' for Egypt to curtail the freedom of its media and civil society, they also reported the forcible disappearance of some Egyptians according to their mid July Report.

Moreover, the detention of Human Rights Lawyer Malek Adly and three others were renewed for 15 days by the Shubra Al-Khaima Prosecution over the charge of inciting anti-government protests among other charges. Mohamed Al-Sadat, Head of Parliamentary Human Rights Committee in a letter called on President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to hold a meeting with his committee potentially to discuss human rights in Egypt. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights raised concerns over the heightening sectarian violence in Minya and warned of the state's approach to these violations.

Additionally, towards the end of July, the Egyptian Parliament extended the state of emergency in North Sinai. The curfew hours were first imposed in 2014 and have been renewed every three months as a counter-terrorism measure.

On the international front, breaking of diplomatic ties was suggested by Ireland over Mr. Halewa's case, an Irishman who was detained in Egypt for the past three years amidst Egypt's uprising whilst the Italian Parliament moved to cut military supplies to Egypt over unfruitful investigations into Regeni's death.

In the month of August, the Egyptian Military announced it killed Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, leader of the Islamic State cell Abu Duaa al-Ansari and a number of his aides. They claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian passenger jet which killed 224 people.

The Human Rights Watch also reported that, the dismissal and subsequent conviction of the country's anti-corruption official for "disseminating false news" violated his free speech and set a dangerous precedent.

Meanwhile in mid August, the Egyptian Parliament passed a law that puts restrictions on the police from providing information to the media. Journalist Amr Badr was however released on bail pending further investigation by a criminal court in Egypt according to Lawyers Tarek el-Awady and Khaled Ali.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

Moreover, Egypt's Christians staged a rare protest in Cairo to demand that, the government recognized their rights as they claim they are being treated as second class citizens.

Towards the end of August, the Egyptian Government said it was assisting in the repatriation of Egyptian expatriate workers who had been detained among numerous other nationalities by Saudi authorities for the violation of the country's labor laws.

Also, Egypt abstained from voting on a UN Security Council Resolution on a regional protection force in South Sudan. On the other hand, according to the Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia had addressed their disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and are in a new cooperative phase in economic, political and security-related fields

In early September, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said that, "Turkey had started serious attempts to normalize ties with Egypt and Syria". No timeline was however given according to the Middle East Monitor.

As a follow up to the death of Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni, the Al Arabiya reported that an online petition was launched asking the Italian government to withhold the sending of Italy's new ambassador to Egypt.

In mid September, Human Rights defender, Malek Adly was released from police custody in Shubra al-Khaimah. The court rejected an appeal against his release by the Public Prosecution according to Amnesty International. The Guardian also reported that, Human Rights' activist Ahmad Abdullah had been freed after days in pre-trial detention.

On its role in the African Union's Peace and Security Council, Egypt has begun its one-month term as head according to an official statement by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the end of September, there was increased bilateral military cooperation talks between Russia and Egypt. Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoygu in a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart Sedki Sobhi said Russia supports Egypt in combating terrorism in its Sinai region.

Finally, at least 43 people were left dead with 154 rescued after a boat carrying refugees sank off Egypt's Kafr al-Sheikh coast according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies (IFRC).

## REGIONAL UPDATES: LIBYA

### LIBYA

The month of July recorded 3,346 migrant casualties in their attempt to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea off Libya's coast according to figures from the International Organization for Migration, Italian emergency workers and Médecins sans frontières (MSF).



Also, 143 casualties were recorded in clashes in Libya according to figures from the UN Human Rights Report and The Libya Observer.

This includes casualties suffered between pro-Haftar forces and forces loyal to the Shura Council.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi is safe in Libya after being released from death row according to his Lawyer Karim Khan. Meanwhile, Saadi Gaddafi's trial for murder and war crimes is scheduled to begin on 2 October according to The Libya Herald. The two are both sons of former Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In a move seen to assert its authority, Libya's UN-backed Unity Government moved into official premises in Tripoli after previously operating from a naval base according to Aljazeera. UN Envoy to Libya Martin Kobler added that, the government was protected by militias as there was no official army. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on other hand has reiterated his concerns about Islamic State's activities in Sirte and the potential for it to spread to other parts of Africa. The Security Council has however authorized countries to help Libya destroy its remaining category 2 chemical weapons according to 2016 UN Security Council Resolution 2298.

Towards the end of July, a Libyan dialogue was also held in Tunis and Egypt respectively where President al-Serraj of Libya including 6 members of his Presidency Council commented there had been frank discussions concerning the state of Libya in an attempt to resolve disputes among the country's top military and political figures.

Moreover, commenting on the 3 killed French soldiers in the shooting of their helicopter, Libya's Presidency Council said the presence of the soldiers was a breach on Libya's sovereignty.

In August, the Libyan Parliament casted a vote of no confidence in the UN-backed Government of National Accord. The government will however present a new Cabinet for approval from the former.

The US Africa Command reported 9 US bombing missions in its Operation Odyssey Lightning in support of the Libyan Government of National Accord. On the other hand, the Russian Foreign Ministry said, US airstrikes in Libya should be in line with International Law. Also, according to The Guardian, the Italian Foreign Ministry will consider any US requests to open its Sigonella Military Airbase in Sicily for anti-ISIS strikes in Libya. NATO allies on the other hand have expressed support for political activities in Libya.

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The UN Envoy to Libya, Martin Kobler, also on World Humanitarian Day reiterated UN's continuous monitoring of the movements of internally displaced people in Libya as the Islamic State drives more families away from Sirte. He added the number of people who need humanitarian assistance in Libya to be around 2.4 million.

Moreover, EU's comprehensive approach to assist in the transition to a democratic, stable and prosperous Libya has seen EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM Libya) extended until 21 August 2017 with a 17 million Euro budget being approved for its operations by the Council. Also, according to Newsweek, US backed Libyan forces took over Islamic State group's headquarters in Sirte. In addition, a small group of UK and US troops are operating in backing roles to the Libyan forces.

Furthermore, according to Mustafa Sanalla, Head of Libya's National Oil Company, UN set a bad precedent when Martin Kobler, Head of UN's Mission in Libya met with one of the militias, Petroleum Facilities Guard, blocking Libya's oil ports. A UN report also criticized the Streit Group, a Canadian firm for the 'illicit transfer' of 131 armored vehicles in 2012 to Libya.

On migration, the International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrants Project reported Mediterranean migrant arrivals to have reached 264,513 with deaths at sea reaching 3,151 for the first eight months of 2016. They however aided the evacuation of 241 Nigerians upon voluntary request to be repatriated to Nigeria.

In the beginning of September, the UN Envoy to Libya, Martin Kobler said, the UN had already opened investigations about the supply of arms to Libya.

According to the Washington Post, the flow of fighters has plummeted as Islamic State continues to loose ground in Libya. Meanwhile the Middle East Eye and the Global Research Centre reports that, Islamic State fighters have launched a new round of suicide attacks as government forces battle to liberate Sirte. 19 people have been left dead so far in September in clashes with the Islamic State in Sirte.

On the other hand, forces loyal to Eastern Libyan Commander Khalifa Haftar launched attacks at ports in Libya's oil crescent and clashed with guards who control the terminals of Zuetina, Ras Lanuf and Es Sider per Aljazeera report in September.

Also, according to Al-Arabiya, US, UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain condemned the attacks on Libya's oil export terminals by the pro-Haftar forces. Khalifa Haftar and his forces have a strong presence in Eastern Libya and have refused to recognize Libya's UN-backed government.

Towards the end of September, the Prime Minister of Libya's UN-backed government, Fayeaz al-Sarraj said he was open to talks with the Eastern Libya Commander, Khalifa Haftar irrespective of his army's attacks on oil facilities.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

### SYRIA

In early July, Russia and Turkey were set to coordinate their policies on Syria according to Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

US also offered a new military partnership in Syria hoping a unified campaign against the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. This was alongside a Russian commitment to ground Syria's bombers which was purported to halt a five year civil war according to US Secretary of State John Kerry. President Vladimir Putin of Russia added that he looked forward to 'tangible results'.



In mid July, Stephen O'Brien, UN Humanitarian Chief told the Security Council that the situation in Syria was 'medieval and shameful' as eastern part of Aleppo risked becoming the largest besieged area in Syria. Additionally, UN Syria Envoy Staffan de Mistura said Russia needs to improve its plans to assist over 300,000 civilians besieged in Aleppo and consider allowing the UN to take over parts of the aid operation.

Towards the end of July, Ahrar Al-Sham rebels launched an offensive targeted at breaking the government's siege of eastern Aleppo where the UN said around 300,000 people are trapped with dwindling food and medical supplies. The Syrian government also said it was ready to resume UN sponsored peace-talks with the opposition in Geneva at the end of August without any preconditions and any external interference, according to talks in Damascus between Deputy UN Special Envoy Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramy and Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Fayssal Mikdad.

Tehran maintains that a political solution is the sole way out for Syria and any political solution must be acceptable to the Syrian people. This was according to Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Jaber Ansari in a meeting with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. Meanwhile, per Newsweek report, Lebanon's Hezbollah Movement said there is no solution to the Syrian conflict without President Bashar al-Assad according to its Deputy Leader Sheikh Naim Qassem.

Also, according to the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights death tolls and casualties continue to increase in Syria as a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) supported hospital that serves around 70,000 people was destroyed by aerial bombings in Idlib.

A United Nations commission investigating human rights abuses in Syria called the situation in Aleppo's rebel-held east "critical" and wants immediate action to protect civilians living there, including a reported 100,000 children. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe". UK and France also called for UN sanctions to be imposed on Syria

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after UN-led investigation found the regime had used chemical weapons against its citizens according to The Telegraph.

The Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) affiliated with the PKK, a terrorist organization recognized as such by the EU, Turkey and the US; also paradoxically an ally of the US in the fight against the Islamic State group said they would 'not be silent' over what it said was an act of aggression. This came at the backdrop of Syrian government fighter jets bombing Hasakah for the first time in the civil war according to Aljazeera.

Furthermore, Amnesty International reported that, almost 18,000 people have died in Syrian prisons since the beginning of the civil war in 2011.

Also, Turkey's military has launched a military intervention in Syria. The operation called Euphrates Shield has a dual purpose of dislodging the Islamic State from Jarablus and containing the expansion of Kurdish militias in northern Syria. Turkey's military said three of its soldiers were wounded in northern Syria when their tank was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade according to Hurriyet Daily News.

Towards the end of August, the US Department of Defense said it was frustrated with Turkish operations in Syria. Meanwhile, Turkey had asked US to drop support for Syrian Kurds according to Hurriyet Daily News.

The main highlight of the month of September was the US and Russia ceasefire agreement on Syria. The deal was announced by Foreign Ministers John Kerry and Sergei Lavrov of US and Russia respectively in Geneva and further approved by the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad according to the Swissinfo.

Skirmishes were however recorded when some Syrian soldiers were killed in an air strike prompting an emergency UN Security council meeting which was subsequently cancelled according to the Associated Press. The Financial Times on the other hand reported that, the deal was shaky as Russia accused US of being behind the airstrikes.

Aside these, there was an attack on 18 trucks of a 31 UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy killing 12 aid workers according to the Business Insider. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called the attacks "sickening" in his remarks at the United Nations General Assembly. He added that, the fate of Syria could not depend on the 'future of one man' according to Euronews. Amidst international reaction to the attacks, the US government through its Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes blamed the Russian government for the incident. Meanwhile, the Russia Ministry of Defense denied their involvement in the attacks. However, US Secretary of State John Kerry maintained that, the ceasefire agreement is not dead according to the Daily Beast. On the other hand, whilst the UN initially halted its aid operations due to the attacks, it was set to resume aid convoys to Syria according to Aljazeera.

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The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported that the death tolls and casualties continue to increase in Syria as 2 hospitals were among recent hit places in Aleppo. Also, at least 73 civilians were killed by airstrikes in the Syrian village of Tokkhar, according to the New York Times. Moreover, according to the Independent, aside dozens of civilians being killed, almost 2 million people have been left without running water in Aleppo. Several are also in dire need of medical assistance. This follows three days of relentless bombing campaigns according to the Syrian Civil Defence Forces also known as the White Helmets. The Local Coordination Committees put the death toll at 49, a figure which was expected to increase.

Finally, according to ARA News, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Kurdish Yekiti Party in Syria have rejected the transition plan of the High Negotiations Committee although it is still part of the Syrian National opposition bloc. Their main basis for rejection hinged on the fact that the transition plan does not accommodate any form of federalism.

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