



Global Political Trends Center  
Istanbul Kültür University

Istanbul Kültür University, Ataköy Campus,  
Bakırköy, 34156, Istanbul, Turkey  
Phone: (90) 212 498 44 76 | Fax: (90) 212 498 44 05  
[www.gpotcenter.org](http://www.gpotcenter.org)

# Regional Updates

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## REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

### CYPRUS

After unresolved rounds of meetings in Crans-Montana in July, Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı stated that, “Time was passing through separation not unification. If the solution is based on federalism, this should be politically equal and should involve rotating presidency. Both societies are sharing the same geography; it is inevitable to be in a relation somehow. So, this relation should be in a peaceful way as far as possible.”



On 8 August, Mustafa Akıncı attended the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Erenköy Resistance.. Erenköy is one of the few Turkish towns where Turkish Cypriots had access to the sea. Akıncı in a speech at the ceremony criticised the Greek Cypriots pursuant to the failed talks at Crans-Montana. He said Greek Cypriots came to the negotiations with the idea of “zero soldier, zero guarantees and left with the same ideology.” Greek Cypriots leader, Nicos Anastasiades also responded by criticizing Turkish Cypriots. He said, “Turkey should give up on its unacceptable demands and uncompromising dissertations over Cyprus.”

On 14 August, after UN-backed talks aiming to bring peace in the island ended in acrimony in July, UN Special Envoy on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide quitted his position to pursue a political career in Norway, the United Nations said. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will decide later who will be appointed for the next mediator role, his spokesperson Stefan Dujarric said.

On 16 August, Anastasiades replied a question about new initiatives for Cyprus; he said that it was break time for “recovery” for Cyprus. “For the moment, we do not see any initiative any time soon” he added.

On 20 August, after the breakdown of Cyprus negotiation talks, Deputy Government spokesman Viktoras Papadopoulos offered explanations both from the Greek authority and Turkish foreign ministry over “efforts to legitimize Turkey’s activities in Cyprus.” Papadopoulos asserted that Anastasiades was ready to get back to peace talks pursuant to a UN Security Council decision.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

On 25 August, Minister of Economy and Energy of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) Sunat Atun indicated that Turkish Cypriots would receive power from Turkey via underwater cable system in approximately two to two-and-a-half years. Atun said Turkey supplies nearly 30 million cubic meters of water per year to TRNC. He also stressed that this has given them great advantages in terms of pricing, sustainability and uninterrupted access to water.

On 28 August, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister, currently appointed Minister for Cyprus Affairs Recep Akdağ, replacement of Tuğrul Türkeş, met with TRNC Prime Minister Hüseyin Özgürgün and TRNC speaker Sibel Siber in Nicosia for the first time after he held power.

Akdağ pointed out that he is ready to increase prosperity in TRNC as well as to ease the life with sustainable education, health, road, water, and energy systems. He gave the message for cooperation to enhance those systems. Akdağ stressed that "Turkey as a guarantor power will do its best for Cyprus all the time. We demanded a society living in peace based on equal rights. This is what we wish for."

Akdağ mentioned "We will never give up on working for protecting rights of Turkish Cypriots as well as providing security for them." He said this after he stressed the importance of Turkey's position for hosting 3 million Syrian refugees.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

### EGYPT

On 2 August, the Foreign Minister of Egypt Sameh Shoukry indicated that the Libyan crisis should be resolved internally without any external interference. He said this when he hosted his Algerian counterpart, Abdelkader Messahel in Cairo as part of an Arab tour by the latter in which the latest regional developments including the Libyan crisis were discussed.



On 3 August, the South Sinai Criminal Court sentenced 50 Egyptian policemen in the southern peninsula to three years in prison and fined them up to 6000 Egyptian pounds. This was after they protested changes to their working days. Per the decision of Judge Mohammed Ounsawa, 40 other policemen were also fired. The policemen had earlier organized a strike in January to protest the Egyptian Interior Ministry's decision that allegedly altered their annual leave and working days. The new decision allows the policemen to work 20 days and take 15 days off instead of the previous 15 working days with 15 days off. The verdict can however be appealed.

On 5 August, Egypt dismissed Qatari accusations of using its membership in the UN Security Council to accomplish its own political agenda. The Egyptian UN Permanent Envoy, Amr Abu Al-Atta said the allegations were fallacies and should be ignored. Al-Atta in a complaint document to the President of the Security Council indicated that "It was normal that Doha, which supports terrorism and intervenes in the internal affairs of other countries as policy cannot understand the commitment of all states in the United Nations including Egypt, in the combat against terrorism in accordance with international agreement and the Security Council's resolutions that oblige all countries to counter all forms of terrorism."

The Qatari mission to the United Nations had earlier sent a petition to the Security Council expressing its deep concern towards what it explained as "Egypt's use of its membership in the Security Council to attain its private political aims that are not related to the Council's work."

## REGIONAL UPDATES: ISRAEL-PALESTINE

### ISRAEL-PALESTINE

On 4 August, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed a plan, which was reported by Israel's Channel Two News, to transfer some Arab villages to the Palestinian Authority's control and strip their citizenship. This would also allow Israel to annex some Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Around 1.7 million Palestinians live in cities, towns and villages across Israel and carry Israeli citizenship.



On 6 August, Israel moved to ban Al Jazeera, the Qatar state-funded news network, from operating in the country and the occupied territories. It is joining the boycott against Qatar by Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia accusing the network of “sponsoring terrorism”. According to The Independent, this has been condemned as an undemocratic attack on freedom of press. Moreover, Israel's Communications Minister Ayoub Kara said it would block all the Qatar-based channels in the region for their alleged support of religious radicalisations.

Al Jazeera has condemned the attitude of Israel against the media channel and indicated that it would take some legal measure towards it. The network has 80 offices around the world.

“Censoring Al Jazeera or closing its offices will not bring stability to the region, but it would put Israel firmly in the camp of some of the region's worst enemies of press freedom” the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Middle East and North Africa programme coordinator Sherif Mansour said in a statement.

On 9 August, at least four Palestinians were wounded after Israel carried out air attacks on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli military claimed it was in response to a rocket fired towards Israel.

U.S. White House Adviser Jared Kushner held separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to restart Mideast peace talks. This is Kushner's third trip to the region since May. Kushner said “President Trump is very committed to achieving a solution here that will be able to bring prosperity and peace to all people in this area.” The last round of peace talks broke down in 2014.

On 19 August, Palestinian Health Ministry confirmed that, a 17-year-old teenager was killed by Israeli police at a military checkpoint in the occupied West Bank. According to Al Jazeera, more

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than 294 Palestinians or Palestinian citizens of Israel and 47 Israelis have been killed since October 2015.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: LIBYA

### LIBYA

Amnesty International's Europe Director John Dalhuisen criticized the Italian plans to deploy warships in Libyan waters to combat illegal immigration. He indicated that it was a shameful attempt by Italian authorities to circumvent their responsibilities to rescue refugees and migrants at sea and offer respite and protection to those who needed it. He added that the strategy was not designed to end the spiralling death toll in the central Mediterranean but rather to keep refugees and migrants from Italian shores.



The UN Special Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame on the other hand said that, Italy's contested naval mission to help the Libyan coast guard in stopping migrant smugglers' boats while still in Libyan waters was on the "rights path". Libyan factions opposing the UN-backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli contend that the mission violates national sovereignty.

The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has welcomed the Libyan Constitutional Drafting Assembly's vote on the constitution draft. The UNSMIL indicated that it appreciated the Constitutional Drafting Assembly's effort and steadfastness throughout the process of writing, deliberating and voting on the draft. The UNSMIL added that voting on the constitution draft is the first milestone on the path towards a referendum for the Libyan people to determine a new constitution. The Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) in Al-Bayda city approved the Libyan constitution final draft by a majority of votes of 44 members representing the three Libyan regions.

Meanwhile, the Amazigh Supreme Council (ASC) in Libya has declared that the "so-called" Libyan Arab Army or the Libyan National Army (LNA) under the auspices of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar is a terrorist and racially-based militia; as such it does not represent the Amazigh people of Libya. The Amazigh Council further added that, "a real national army is an army that includes all the ethnic groups of the Libyan society and refrains from being affiliated with a particular ethnic group."

In other developments, France indicated that it would start processing asylum seekers' application in Libya to prevent illegal migrants from making the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. French President Emmanuel Macron announced this pursuant to talks with the two rivals Libyan political heads Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj and Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar. "The idea is to

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create hotspots to avoid people taking crazy risks when they are not eligible for asylum”, said Macron. Subsequently Germany, Italy, Spain and France all agreed on a new policy to grant asylum to vulnerable migrants who apply for protection while in Africa instead of their destination countries.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

### SYRIA

On 2 August, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson indicated that Washington was working with Moscow to prevent a new war between rebels and the Syrian government once the Islamic State is defeated. In laying out the State Department's Syria strategy, Tillerson added that President Bashar al-Assad had no role in the future of Syria. He further called on Iran to withdraw its forces from Syria.



On 7 August, Syrian government troops and allied fighters captured the last major stronghold of the Islamic State in Homs province according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Carla del Ponte, one of the Syrian war crimes investigators has quit her position on the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria. Commenting on her decision, she said, “I am quitting this commission, which is not backed by any political will. I have no power as long as the Security Council does nothing.” Her departure means only two commissioners now remain, namely Karen Koning Abu Zayd from the US and Paulo Pinheiro from Brazil.

On 21 August, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said in a televised speech that he would not work with western countries until they cut-off their support for rebel and insurgent groups in Syria. “Let’s be clear, there will be no security cooperation nor opening of embassies or even a role for some countries that say they want to play a role in ending the crisis in Syria before they clearly and frankly cut their relations with terrorism”, Assad mentioned.

On 22 August, the Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdrakhmanov announced that the Astana Talks, which was scheduled to take off in Astana at the end of August, had been postponed. He said according to information he had received from the guarantor states namely Russia, Turkey and Iran, they had indicated a preliminary plan for mid-September.

On 24 August, Amnesty International indicated that airstrikes and artillery attacks launched by the US-led coalition on the city of Raqqa had killed hundreds of civilians over the past three months. The rights group further added that, the Syrian government and its Russian allies had also launched “indiscriminate bombardments against towns, villages and displaced people’s helters full of civilians”

## **REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA**

south of Raqqa. Donatella Rovera, Senior Crisis Response Adviser at Amnesty International said that, “Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and US forces must redouble efforts to protect civilians by avoiding disproportionate or indiscriminate strikes and creating safe exit routes for civilians trapped in Raqqa.”

Meanwhile, on 29 August, Nowruz Ahmed, a Syrian Democratic Forces commander opined that the Raqqa battle would end in two months. “We cannot determine the time in which the battle of Raqqa will end precisely because war has its conditions. But we do not expect it to last long, and according to our plans the battle will not take longer than two months from now,” he said.

Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institution established under the auspices of Istanbul Kültür University in 2009.

GPoT Center was founded with the aim to support reconciliation and non-violent solutions to international as well as domestic issues through dialogue. Our mission is to contribute to stability, democratization and peace through organizing multitrack diplomacy meetings, conducting innovative and independent research, and encouraging informed debates in the media on key issues affecting Turkey and the world.

GPoT Center serves as a platform for the free exchange of views and information on political, social and economic matters concerning a variety of parties and segments of society. We aim to achieve our mission by routinely bringing together opinion leaders, government officials, policy makers, analysts, scholars, experts and members of the media from Turkey and abroad.

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## **CONTACT DETAILS**

### **Global Political Trends (GPoT) Center**

Istanbul Kültür University  
Atakoy Campus, Bakirkoy  
34 156 Istanbul, Turkey

[www.gpotcenter.org](http://www.gpotcenter.org)

[info@gpotcenter.org](mailto:info@gpotcenter.org)

Tel: +90 212 498 44 76/65

Fax: +90 212 498 44 05

