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# Regional Updates

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## REGIONAL UPDATES: CYPRUS

### CYPRUS

On 1 January, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades was interviewed by Politis newspaper; he mentioned presidential elections in Cyprus as well as Cyprus question. In case of winning, he said he believed there would be fresh new efforts and achievements. Anastasiades opined that the UN Secretary General has high importance and priority that Turkey's actual intentions need to be identified.



On 7 January, parliamentary elections were held in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in order to elect 50 new members of the Assembly of the Republic for a five-year term. Prime Minister and the leader of National Unity Party (UBP) Hüseyin Özgürgün secured over 35% which meant that there would be a coalition government. The main opposition party Republican Turkish Party (CTP) took second place and recently established People's Party (HP) took the third place.

On 10 January, the Fourth Summit of the Southern European Union Countries (Med7) was held in Rome with the participation of Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Malta and Cyprus. The seventh paragraph of the joint declaration titled “Bringing the EU forward in 2018” adopted at the summit. However, a statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry indicated that the declaration contained non-constructive statements, which was addressed to the Cyprus settlement process. “These statements reflect the Greek Cypriot stance that was the main reason for the failure of the negotiation process which began on the Island in 2008 and ended in 2017 with the closure of the Conference on Cyprus without an outcome” the announcement said.

On 16 January, the leaders of Southern Cyprus, Greece and Jordan pledged a new partnership in areas such as renewable energy, the maritime sector and the fight against the illicit trade and refugee issue. In the first Trilateral Summit, Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades said that the three-way talks with Jordan leader King Abdullah II and Greece Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras aimed to bolster security in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On 28 January, presidential elections were held in Southern Cyprus. Nicos Anastasiades' party DİSİ secured 35.5% and won in the first round. After Anastasiades, the closest rival as Stavros Malas from AKEL party who took the second place with 30.2% votes. Nicos Papadopoulos came third with 25.7%. The second round of elections is held on 4<sup>th</sup> February, between Anastasiades and Malas.

On 30 January, The UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for six months until July 31 and welcomed efforts by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leadership to reach a comprehensive and durable settlement.

## REGIONAL UPDATES: EGYPT

### EGYPT

On 2 January, Egypt extended by three months its nationwide state of emergency. The extension was issued by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and is aimed to “take measures necessary to confront the dangers and funding of terrorism and safeguard security in all parts of Egypt”. Subsequently, on 12 January, Egypt imposed curfew on parts of North Sinai. The curfew included areas at the border town of Rafah near Gaza from and around the town of El-Arish.



On 7 January, former Egyptian Premier Ahmed Shafiq announced he would not contest the 2018 elections. Shafiq was appointed Premier by former President Hosni Mubarak shortly before his overthrow in 2011. He was seen as the main challenger for Sisi, who is expected to cruise to a new term despite.

On 8 January, Lasheen Ibrahim, chairman of Egypt’s national election authority indicated in a news conference that 26 – 28 March would be the dates for presidential elections in Egypt. There would be a runoff in April if no candidate secures more than 50 percent of the vote, he added.

On 11 January, General Sami Anan, ex-military chief of staff accepted that he will run for the presidency in Egypt’s upcoming elections. “The party leaders took a decision for General Sami Anan’s candidacy and informed him of the decision and there was no problem at all and no objection,” from him, said Sami Balah, the secretary general of the Arabism Egypt Party.

Subsequently, Anan was accused of incitement against the Egyptian military. The Egyptian military general command said in a statement on that it could not “turn a blind eye to the legal violations” by Anan. It said he would be interrogated on charges of running for election without prior approval from the military, forging documents stating that he had left the military and “inciting against the armed forces”.

Mahmoud Refaat, a spokesman for Anan’s campaign abroad, said: “I hold the regime of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi entirely responsible for his wellbeing. 30 members of the campaign were also arrested as well as some of their family members”. Pursuant to these alleged incidents, Anan dropped out of the contest.

Furthermore, Khalid Ali, a prominent human rights lawyer also stated that, despite “unfair competition conditions”, he would also contest for the presidential elections. He however, subsequently quit on his intention to contest allegedly claiming that his supporters were being intimidated and the electoral process too was corrupt. Ali, never officially submitted his candidacy. He added that from the start his intention to run “was met with an angry and irresponsible reaction, manifesting in the arrest of a large number of his campaign's youth.”

### ISRAEL-PALESTINE

On 3 January, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to cut financial aid to Palestinians unless they come to the negotiating table with Israel to broker a peace deal. On his Twitter account, Trump stated that, “we pay the Palestinians hundred of millions of dollars a year and get no appreciation or respect. They don’t even want to negotiate a long overdue peace treaty with Israel.”



On the same day, Mahmoud Abbas’ Spokesperson Abu Rudaineh slammed Trump’s statements by saying Jerusalem was “not for sale, neither for gold nor silver”. Also, Rudaineh indicated that, “serious negotiations first required the other side to believe in the two-state solution and negotiations and not dictates. We affirm that we did not refuse any offer for negotiations that sought to implement the two-state solution. We remain committed to serious negotiations as a way to establish a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital along 1967 lines.”

On 9 January, Israel Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman approved new settlements in the West Bank, which is one of the most contradictory issues between Israelis and Palestinians. In a statement by Lieberman, the construction of 1.285 housing units were planned to be built in 2018 in addition to 2.500 has been announced currently.

On 15 January, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in Delhi. Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel since diplomatic ties were restored 25 years ago. Parties signed key deal in defence, agriculture and aviation sectors. Netanyahu noted that, “We are proud that we are seizing the future so we can make a better life for our peoples and for others around the world. Our commitment to do so is reflected in the manifold agreements that we sign today.”

On 25 January, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley gave a speech over the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the Security Council. Haley followed Trump’s speech and said, “Real peace requires leaders who are willing to step forward, acknowledge hard truths, and make compromises.” Also, she opined that, “It requires leaders who look to the future, rather than dwell on past resentments. Above all, such leaders require courage.”

## REGIONAL UPDATES: LIBYA

### LIBYA

On 11 January, the head of Libya's High Council of States (HCS) Abdelrahman Al-Sweihli indicated that the UN should eschew all parties that are obstructing the onward implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA).

He also added that Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, the eastern Libyan Commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) should be excluded as he described him as “the first hindrance to national unity and peace.” He said this when he met the UN Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman and the head of the United Nations Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salame in Tripoli.



On 12 January, “the United States congratulated Libya for destroying the last remnants of its Qaddafi-era chemical weapons stockpile and satisfying its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.” The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) ascertained the total destruction of these materials in Germany on 23 November 2017. Around 500 tonnes of Category 2 chemical agents were removed from Libya in 2016 and transferred to Germany. Category 2 connotes toxic materials that pose “significant risk”.

On 15 January, the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) declared a local state of emergency around Tripoli's Mitiga airport. This was after a coalition of militias aligned to it repelled an attack on the airport compound.

On 17 January, Libya's UN Envoy Ghassan Salame indicated that the “spectre of violence still remained present” as he pointed to clashes between rival forces in the country. Salame who was delivering a video conference to the Security Council further added that, Libya needed a government that could deliver in terms of public services, unify the country's institutions, provide order and justice as well as preside over elections that would bring the current transition government to an end. He further added that, the arms embargo on Libya should continue.

On 20 January, the foreign ministry of Libya's UN-backed government, GNA requested clarification from Italy concerning its increase of forces in Libya. The Italian Parliament had earlier on approved an increase of Italian troops in Libya.

According to the Italian Prime Minister, this was to combat illegal migration and counter terrorism threats emanating from Libya. The National Defense and Security Committee of Libya's eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) however, condemned the decision and called it a “violation of sovereignty”. However, Italy maintained that its military presence in Libya was approved by the GNA.

## **REGIONAL UPDATES: LIBYA**

On 23 January, Libyan mayors agreed on holding parliamentary and presidential elections in their first gathering of the year at Shahat in east Libya. The mayors emphasized the unity of Libya and rejected foreign intervention and also renounced all kinds of terrorism and radicalism. They further called on the House of Representatives and the High Council of State to assume to end the current divisions in the quest for a unified government.



## REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

### SYRIA

On 2 January, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad replaced his government's ministers of information, defense and industry. General Ali Abdullah who was previously chief of staff of the army replaced Fahad Jassim al-Frej as defense minister while Imad Abdullah Sarah, former head of Syria Radio and Television became the new Information Minister. Mohammed Mazen Ali Yousef also became the new Minister of Industry.



On 4 January, Syrian civil society groups under the umbrella of The Working Group for Syria rejected the Russian-sponsored Sochi Conference. The Group, which comprises of about 120 civil society organizations issued a joint statement allegedly accusing Russia of using the talks in Sochi to bypass UN-sponsored talks in Geneva.

On 5 January, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the Syrian army and allied forces pushed insurgent rebels including the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance from around 10 towns in Idlib's southeastern countryside. Meanwhile, clashes continued in the eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus.

On 8 January, Zohair Mojahed, a “cultural official” in the Fatemiyoun Brigade of Afghan recruits indicated to an Iranian media that his group had been fighting in Syria for five years with more than 2,000 Afghans killed.

On 18 January, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson indicated that there would be no total withdrawal of US troops in Syria. Tillerson laid out five US goals in Syria during his speech at Stanford University, according to The Guardian.

The goals he outlined were, “the defeat of the Islamic State and al-Qaida, a UN-brokered resolution for Syria that involved Bashar al-Assad's departure, a curb on Iran, conditions for the safe return of refugees, and the complete elimination of remaining chemical weapons.”

Meanwhile, Turkey is looking to clear Afrin of YPG-linked Kurdish militia under its Operation Olive Branch. YPG-linked Kurdish militias are an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK, designated as terrorists by the Turkish government, has carried out a number of attacks inside Turkey in recent years.



## REGIONAL UPDATES: SYRIA

It is based on this legitimate concerns that Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced plans for its military to be dispatched against the Kurdish enclave in northern Syria. Turkey also indicated that, the US had not satisfactorily addressed Turkish concerns over US-led plan to establish a Kurdish-led border security force in Syria.

On 12 January, Jan Egeland, UN Humanitarian Adviser called for a pause in fighting in eastern Ghouta. He said the pause was necessary to permit the delivery of aid to tens of thousands of civilians besieged by government forces.

On 23 January, the Syrian government allegedly launched a chemical weapons attack on the besieged Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. “Regime forces fired rockets into the western part of the city of Douma, with alleged white smoke spread, causing 21 cases of suffocation,” according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. US subsequently on 24 January, blamed Russia for this chemical weapon attacks on Douma.

On 25 January, representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition met in Vienna for a fresh round of UN-backed negotiations over ending the Syrian conflict.

On 29 January, the Russian-sponsored Syria peace congress in Sochi sought a new constitutional commission. The two-day talks also “called for the Syrian people to decide their future by popular vote without external pressure.”

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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