



(SANA News, 2019)

## Bi-Weekly Insights From the Middle East

*Events in Syria this week revolve around the announcement of the United States to recognize the Golan Heights as part of Israel. Reactions from the international community have been quite critical of this decision, and discussions have been brought up to the United Nations Security Council. Fighting continues in Yemen, marking the fourth anniversary to the escalation of the conflict.*

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## Syria

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On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, United States President Donald Trump shared that the US would recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, an area captured from Syria in 1967.<sup>1</sup> Israel then annexed the area again in 1981, which has been strongly condemned by Syria. The international community has been quick to respond, denouncing this action. Turkish President Erdogan said shortly after Trump's announcement that he would bring the issue up to the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> Syria has strongly condemned this action, and said that by making this call, Trump is violating international law.<sup>3</sup> Syrian officials remain confident that the people of Syria will speak for themselves on this action, and that the Golan Heights will remain an entity of the Syrian state.<sup>4</sup> Protests all around the country have been going on for days following the US announcement, demonstrators have been gathering in front of government buildings.<sup>5</sup> Following the statement saying this action violates international law, Syria has also called on the UN Security Council to hold an urgent meeting to discuss this topic.<sup>6</sup> All members of the UN Security Council have strongly denounced this action by the United States following days of the international community calling on the UN Security Council to make an announcement.<sup>7</sup>

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) declared that ISIS has lost its stronghold in Syria, and the city of Baghouz was finally liberated from ISIS control earlier in the week.<sup>8</sup> There is now concern however, that ISIS has launched a new offensive in Northern Iraq.<sup>9</sup> This comes at a time where Syria and Iraq have been looking to increase trade and movement between the two countries, while simultaneously securing the joint borders between the two countries.<sup>10</sup> Movement through parts of liberated and controlled areas of Aleppo has also begun to take place. The goal of opening a major crossing in rural Aleppo is to increase trade and the movement of people throughout the area.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1108772952814899200>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/turkey-will-take-golan-heights-issue-to-un-erdogan-25223>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47664529>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47664529>

<sup>5</sup> <https://sana.sy/en/?p=161830>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/syria-requests-urgent-security-council-meeting-golan-190327065204978.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/blasted-recognising-israeli-sovereignty-golan-190328033237476.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/23/middleeast/isis-caliphate-end-intl/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/23/middleeast/isis-caliphate-end-intl/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://sana.sy/en/?p=161657>

<sup>11</sup> <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2019/03/abu-al-zendain-the-first-crossing-to-connect-areas-of-syrian-regime-and-those-run-by-turkey/>

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## Yemen

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This week marked the fourth anniversary of the start of the war in Yemen. Millions of people are in need of humanitarian assistance, medical care and food. Reports have shown that the economic impact of this war is devastating; the economy in Yemen has shrunk by over 50 percent in the last four years.<sup>12</sup> Today, Houthi rule throughout the North of Yemen has shifted from a once isolated militia, to a local state controlling millions of people.<sup>13</sup> Fighting continues throughout the country, despite multiple attempts to uphold the ceasefire agreement that was made in December 2018. Reports have noted that fighting has actually increased in different parts of the country, and civilian casualties have doubled in Hajjah and Taiz since the Stockholm Agreement was signed.<sup>14</sup>

The Yemeni Petroleum Company (YPC) staged protests outside the United Nations office in Sanna, demanding an end to the siege on the ports of Hodeidah and Ras Issa.<sup>15</sup> Much of the vital aid that millions of people rely on cannot enter the country because of a naval blockade in the port of Hodeidah. Members of the international community also recognize the importance of bringing aid into Yemen, and finding a lasting solution to end this conflict. The head of the EU's Delegation in Yemen, Antonia Calvo, met with the Yemeni Prime Minister on March 24<sup>th</sup>, to discuss economic, political, and security developments in Yemen.<sup>16</sup> The head of the EU Delegation to Yemen reaffirmed the EU's support to bring peace to Yemen, and called for continued collaboration between the two groups.

Until the International Community and the forces in Yemen are able to reach a solution in Yemen, fighting will continue. The Houthis have smuggled ballistic missiles into Hodeidah this week on trucks, from the northern part of the country.<sup>17</sup> Previously, the Houthis have been unable to successfully move heavy military equipment without being caught by coalition forces. Missiles have repeatedly been used from both sides as a mechanism in the fighting. An airstrike near a hospital in the rebel-held North killed eight people earlier this week, five of whom were children.<sup>18</sup> Actions like this are a daily occurrence in Yemen, thousands of civilians have been killed because of the fighting, and millions more have been impacted by the conflict.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/years-yemen-war-leaves-economy-ruins-190324125423441.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/yemen-war-years-houthi-rule-190323080134193.html?fbclid=IwAR2IvgRXb4x3AGP4ZI3K8yFa1hFCV-6FIbq3jBbHebzIguPh-FKfQ0sFS1E>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/yemen-war-ceasefire-stockholm-agreement-death-toll-a8828866.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sabanews.net/en/news530646.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/47358>

<sup>17</sup> <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1642241/houthis-transfer-ballistic-missiles-hodeidah-trucks>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47711413>

## BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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