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برلمان البحر الأبيض المتوسط

1st Standing Committee on Political and Security-related Cooperation

“Security challenges affecting the PAM region”

Rapporteur: Sen. Lhou Lmarbouh (Morocco)

Report

Executive Summary

1. This report provides a brief overview of the current key security challenges in the PAM region, and highlights the work of PAM in support of conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.
2. In **Libya**, recent developments, including the creation of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and of a new Government of National Unity (GNU), constitute promising steps in the process of national reconciliation. The support of the international community, including that of PAM, is needed to ensure the success of the Libya-owned process.
3. After ten years of conflict and instability, the situation in **Syria** remains a source of major concern. Adding to the crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a severe economic slowdown, worsening the humanitarian situation amidst a volatile security context.
4. In the **Middle East**, there has been no significant progress towards a sustainable Two-State solution, despite the recent establishment of new diplomatic and economic ties in the region. Meanwhile, the Palestinian elections, announced to be held for the first time after 15 years, have been postponed. The United Nations encouraged the Palestinians to continue on the democratic path and hold the polls as soon as possible, expressing hope that the elections could pave the way to a strengthened Palestinian unity and advance peace in the region.
5. The **Sahel region and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa** continue to experience insecurity and violent extremism. Environmental degradation, lack of access to services, targeting of aid workers, and the rising violence, have stressed the need to address the root causes of instability, and provide support to local institutions and populations.
6. The seven-year conflict in **Yemen** has turned the country into one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet. However, there is concrete hope that a ceasefire agreement, accompanied by a political process, are at reach. PAM countries and the international community can reinforce the political momentum in support of the UN-mediated peace efforts and to ease humanitarian suffering of the civilian population.

7. In light of the current challenges, parliamentary diplomacy, exercised through the platform of PAM, is recognized as a key asset of flexible dialogue, confidence building, and essential support for humanitarian and peace efforts.

Libya

8. On 21 August 2020, President al-Sarraj and the President of the Libyan House of Representatives Aguila Saleh jointly announced a ceasefire and called for the lifting of the oil blockade, paving the way for diplomatic talks and a revival of the political process.¹ Consequently, a series of discussions on institutional and leadership matters were facilitated by Morocco. Meanwhile, in the framework of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, several rounds of talks took place to achieve a permanent ceasefire. The cease-fire was signed at the end of October 2020. The first round of Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) took place in November 2020 in Geneva and agreed that elections would be held on 24 December 2021.²
9. On 5 February 2021, UNSMIL announced the results of the vote to establish an interim executive authority within the LPDF. On that occasion, a strong commitment to the peace process was expressed by the forum, with only one abstention among the 73 voters. The winning list reached 39 votes: Mohammed Younes Menfi was elected as President of the new Presidency Council; Mossa al-Koni and Abdullah Hussein al-Lafi, members of the new Presidency Council; and Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, new Prime Minister-designate. The winning list won by a slight majority (39 vs. 34 votes) over the competing list, composed by other key Libyan political actors, such as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, and the Interior Minister of the Government in Tripoli, Fathi Bashagha.³
10. On 6 March 2021, Prime Minister Dbeibah proposed a cabinet of 27 ministerial portfolios to the House of Representatives (HoR), including 2 Deputy Prime Ministers and 6 State Ministers.⁴ Dbeibah also outlined a vision of his priorities in the coming period: completing the national reconciliation process, managing the Covid-19 pandemic and assuring electricity access and related services.⁵ The confidence vote confirmed the mandate for Dbeibah and was welcomed by Aguila Saleh as “a historic day for the House of Representatives”⁶ and by the whole international community.
11. As noted by the UN, one of the key factors that would lead to the success of the Libyan political process is the disengagement of foreign military actors and the full implementation of the arms embargo, as mandated by the UN Security Council.
12. Also, substantive international support to Libyan parties is needed to strengthen national democratic institutions, the rule of law and respect of human rights.

¹ <https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/21/libya-s-rival-authorities-declare-ceasefire/>

² <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-11-09/secretary-generals-video-message-launch-of-the-libyan-political-dialogue-forum>
<https://unsmil.unmissions.org/unsmil-announces-lpdf-approves-proposal-selection-mechanism-executive-authority-preparatory-period>

³ <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/acting-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-stephanie-williams-remarks-following-closing>

⁴ <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/dbeibah-submits-libyas-unity-government-cabinet-hor-presidency>

⁵ <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/dbeibah-unveils-details-about-libyas-unity-government>

⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/10/libyan-lawmakers-endorse-govt-of-pm-designate-dbeibah>

Syria

13. In 2021, Syria has entered its 11th year since the beginning of the conflict, and the current context still represents one of the greatest concerns in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing fragilities, leading to worsened socio-economic living conditions, including food insecurity, insolvency and inflation, and restricted access to basic needs. Moreover, the resurgence of terrorist activity has contributed to further deteriorating an already unstable security context.
14. During the last year, the Syrian Pound has lost three-quarters of its value, further reducing the purchasing power of salaries and rocketing up the cost of imports.⁷ The price of basic supplies has increased by 236%. As a result, 60% of Syrians, or 12.4 million people, are food insecure, as reported the World Food Program. Moreover, the number of people, who are severely food insecure, meaning they cannot survive without food assistance, has doubled in just one year to stand at 1.3 million people.⁸ More than half a million children, under the age of five, in Syria suffer from malnutrition, and these numbers are expected to increase along with the worsening of the economic situation.⁹
15. To face this economic distress, thousands of children are forced to work instead of going to school. This has a negative impact on their development and learning, further jeopardizing the socio-economic recovery of the country.
16. Moreover, ISIL is resurging in many areas of the country, taking advantage of the reduced capacity to fight back by the government, strongly impacted by the economic crisis and by the international sanctions. This trend is particularly worrying, especially in light of the numerous people still displaced throughout the country, accounting for more than 6 million.¹⁰
17. The geopolitical situation in northern Syria remains complicated and the security context remains fragile. Parts of the territory remain under the control of anti-Assad rebel forces, while a large part is controlled by the US backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey continues to exercise military control over a border area of the Syrian territory. Meanwhile, mercenaries and military forces of several countries are reported to operate in support of various local actors on the ground.
18. Moreover, throughout the recent months, large areas of North-Eastern Syria, including the IDP camps in the region, continued to face the risk of water shortages, which is administrated from the area controlled by the Turkish army. The UN reported the concern that this affects close to half a million people in, inter alia, Al-Hasakeh, including in al Hol detention camp. The UN has recorded more than 20 of these water supply interruptions over the last year.¹¹ These shortages further exacerbate the emergency of the population at large and increase the

⁷ <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2604/2604726/>

⁸ <https://www.wfp.org/news/twelve-million-syrians-now-grip-hunger-worn-down-conflict-and-soaring-food-prices>

⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-112>

¹⁰ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria>

¹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-114>

risk of riots within the camps, compromising humanitarian agencies' ability to deliver humanitarian assistance and protect vulnerable communities.

19. Meanwhile, the talks of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, representing the Syrian government and the opposition, continue to work on setting the ground for a new constitution, however with minimal results so far. On 29 January 2021, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, conveyed his disappointment for the lack of political commitment during the fifth session of the talks between the two Co-Chairs of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, and warned that a new approach to the talks is needed.¹² In March, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Turkey, and Qatar held a meeting to renew their support for the work of the Committee. However, they did not formalize new approaches to the talks nor a date for the sixth session of the Committee.¹³
20. On 18 April 2021, Hon. Sabbagh, the Speaker of the Syrian Parliament, announced that presidential elections are to be held on 26 May 2021. However, the UN indicated that the announcement was not part of any political process established under UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), and that the Office of the UN Special Envoy had no role in that decision.¹⁴ It is the second presidential election since the beginning of the conflict. The previous one was held in 2014 and resulted in a victory by President Assad.¹⁵

Israel-Palestine

21. In September 2020, supported by the mediation of the Trump Administration, Israel formalized diplomatic and economic relations with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain.¹⁶ Sudan and Morocco signed similar agreements with Israel, respectively in December 2020 and January 2021.¹⁷ As a sign of protest to these developments, Palestine renounced its chairmanship of the Arab League.¹⁸ The international community expressed its concerns over the agreements, warning that they may represent a setback in the negotiations towards the Two-States solution.
22. Despite the lack of political progress in the negotiations, in 2020 and 2021, there has been a remarkable decrease in casualties compared to recent years. This reduction in hostilities on the ground is an opportunity for the resumption of direct dialogue.
23. Following a meeting between the representatives of Fatah and Hamas, in January 2021, the Palestinian Authority announced the decision to hold elections after 15 years from the last

¹² <http://webtv.un.org/watch/special-envoy-for-syria-press-conference-geneva-29-january-2021/6227415469001/>

¹³ https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4616426

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210421.doc.htm>

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56791930>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/15/uae-bahrain-and-israel-sign-historic-accords-at-white-house-event-formal-relations-trump-netanyahu>

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/10/world/middleeast/israel-morocco-trump.html> ; <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/sudan-signs-deal-to-normalize-relations-with-israel/2100349>

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/22/palestine-quits-arab-league-role-in-protest-over-israel-deals>

ones held.¹⁹ The election process builds on three stages: the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), the President of the State of Palestine, and the Palestinian National Council (PNC).

24. During the run-up to the first stage of the elections, many doubts were raised about the holding of free elections in East Jerusalem. On 29 April, President Mahmoud Abbas announced the postponement of the elections over this issue.
25. According to the UN, the Palestinian elections represent a historic opportunity to unify Palestinian political parties and pave the way for peace in the region,²⁰ and their postponement was a disappointment for many Palestinians. The holding of elections throughout Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, in line with prior agreements, is essential to strengthen Palestinian institutions and pave the way for constructive negotiations to arrive at a Two-State Solution in the Middle East.²¹

Security threats and humanitarian emergency in parts of Africa

26. Over the last year, a drastic deterioration of the living conditions and increasing impediments to humanitarian access have been reported in several parts of Africa. Particularly affected have been the Sahel region, Lake Chad Basin, East Africa, and Mozambique.
27. In the Western Sahel, alarming rates of violent acts are coupled with a severe humanitarian crisis. Aid organizations report that 13.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, a 60% increase throughout 2020.²² Insecurity also triggered new population displacements, with a cumulative figure of 5 million people, which is currently 1.4 million higher than in 2019, including 4.1 million internally displaced persons and 870,000 refugees.²³
28. In the Lake Chad Basin, NGO officials warn that the "three Cs: COVID-19, conflict and climate" are likely to trigger a new wave of famine. In this area, 27.1 million people could face a food crisis by June-August 2021, representing an increase of 10 million from June-August 2020.²⁴ Due to violence, farmers cannot access their lands, causing a strong impact on households, and humanitarian access remains limited due to insecurity and the targeting of aid workers. In 2020 and early 2021, at least 36 aid workers were victims of targeted attacks by non-state actors.²⁵
29. On 20 April 2021, Idriss Déby, who had been President of Chad since 1990, was killed during clashes with rebel groups, leading to the suspension of the Constitution and to the dissolution of the Parliament.²⁶ Déby was seen by many international actors as a strong ally in the fight against terrorism, and his death may serve as an opportunity for terrorist organizations to

¹⁹<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/1602162640-turkey-offers-help-in-organizing-future-palestinian-elections> ;
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/15/palestinian-authority-announces-legislative-presidential-polls>

²⁰ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-adviser-palestinian-elections-very-likely-to-be-postponed/>

²¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1091072>

²² <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/civilian-deaths-sahel-states-increase-1870-percent-military-response-fails-stop>

²³ https://unowas.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_1293_e.pdf

²⁴ <https://westafrica.oxfam.org/en/latest/press-release/aid-organisations-call-governments-give-single-day%E2%80%99s-military-spending-fight>

²⁵ <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/search?start=2020&end=2020&detail=1&country=CM%2CTD%2CNG>;

<https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/search?start=2021&end=2021&detail=1&month=1%2C2%2C3&country=CM%2CTD%2CNG>

²⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56815708>

further destabilize the region.

30. Meanwhile, the insurgencies in North-Eastern Nigeria and in the Central African Republic continued to pose a serious threat to the stability of the region and of neighboring countries.²⁷
31. In Mozambique, 2020 and early 2021 have been marked by increased rates of violence and recurrent climatic shocks, which continue to drive massive displacement and food insecurity. In 2020 alone, around 580,000 people were uprooted from their homes, out of a total of 670,000 internally displaced people in the Northern province of Cabo Delgado.²⁸ A recent report states that more than 2.7 million people currently face severe acute food insecurity in Mozambique.²⁹ Moreover, 8 million students were affected by the school closure due to violence and to the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰ The instability in Mozambique is driven by a dramatic surge in terrorist activity by local ISIL affiliates, which is likely to represent security implications beyond southern Africa.
32. Recent developments in the many parts of Africa show the multidimensional character of these crises. The international response in the region cannot be entirely based on a security approach. Indeed, effective responses in the area need to address the root causes of instability, such as the lack of opportunities, the lack of access to education, governance vacuums and environmental degradation.

Yemen

33. Since the beginning of the Yemen civil war in 2014, the UN has often referred to this conflict as the "worst humanitarian crisis in the world"³¹, with close to 80% of Yemeni population of nearly 30 million needing some form of assistance.³² Civilians continue to be the main victims of armed confrontations and unlawful practices of states and non-state armed groups. They suffer from the destruction of critical infrastructures, food insecurity, lack of fuel, lack of basic services, and governance vacuums.
34. According to the UN Integrated Food Security Phase Classification projections from December 2020, 54% of the population (16.2 million) may experience high levels of acute food insecurity in the coming months.³³ Moreover, nearly 2.3 million children under the age of 5 in Yemen are at risk of acute malnutrition in 2021, and 3500 children have been recruited by armed forces and militant groups.³⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has added an additional suffering to the local population.³⁵

²⁷ <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html>

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/11-boko-haram-terrorists-killed-in-northeastern-nigeria/2199236>

<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/humanitarian-crisis-in-the-central-african-republic/>

²⁸ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/mozambique>

²⁹ https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC_Mozambique_AcuteFoodInsec_2020Oct2021Sept_English_summary.pdf

³⁰ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/mozambique>

³¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1032811>

³² <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis>

³³ <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1152947/>

³⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/media/88321/file/2021-HAC-Yemen.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-02-2021-acute-malnutrition-threatens-half-of-children-under-five-in-yemen-in-2021-un>

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_COVID%20Monthly%20Report_December%202020.pdf

35. The conflict also has implication on environmental security. An oil tanker named “FSO SAFER” has been abandoned off the west coast of Hodeida Governorate since 2015. The oil tanker has 1.14 million barrels on board and its conditions are deteriorating day-by-day. FSO SAFER poses a grave risk to the environment and could cause a disaster that will affect countries beyond Yemen. The tanker has become a bargaining chip in the conflict, and this has impeded UN efforts to assess the damage to the hull and make the necessary repairs to prevent a disaster.
36. In mid-February 2021, the Houthis intensified their offensive operations in Marib, making it the epicenter of the conflict. This attacks escalation led to the displacement of some 8,000 civilians. This situation is putting millions of lives at risk, as the UN estimates that this region is already hosting over one million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).³⁶
37. As of March 2021, the UN, under the leadership of Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, continues its efforts to mediate among national and international actors to achieve a nation-wide cease-fire that would ultimately lead to the launch of a political process of national reconciliation.
38. In support to the UN ceasefire initiative, the international community is reacting by limiting, suspending, or blocking arms exports to actors involved in the conflict. For instance, Germany re-extended the arms export ban for Saudi Arabia for all 2021.³⁷ Similarly, since the beginning of 2021, many countries have decided to halt the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.³⁸ In February 2021, also the new US Administration, led by President Biden, put on halt its support to Saudi Arabia and, reversed the decision of Trump by removing the Houthis from the “terror list”.
39. In mid-March 2021, Saudi Arabia announced a plan to offer the Houthis a nationwide ceasefire under the auspices of the United Nations, a plan which could potentially bring the rebels to the negotiations table. A strong and united engagement of the international community is needed to support the peace efforts and the political process.

PAM and Parliamentary diplomacy

40. PAM continues to monitor and study security challenges in the region. Its efforts have demonstrated the value of parliamentary diplomacy, as an alternative and flexible tool of dialogue, confidence building, and critical political support for humanitarian and peace efforts. PAM strongly values its cooperation with other international organizations, and sees these partnerships as strategic in the facilitation of political dialogue, security and peace.
41. Concerning Libya, PAM remains committed to provide its full support to the Libyan parties to promote the success of national reconciliation and to strengthen Libyan institutions. At the

³⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ma%27rib%20Situation%20Update-Final27022021.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/germany-extends-arms-export-ban-on-saudi-arabia/2072316>

³⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/29/italy-makes-permanent-arms-sale-freeze-to-saudi-arabia/> ; <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/02/04/its-time-to-stop-us-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia/> ; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/04/australia-freeze-arms-sales-saudi-arabia-uae> ; <https://controlarms.org/blog/halt-arms-sales-for-use-in-yemen/>

request of the UN, PAM initiated its backing of the Libyan political process through a parliamentary track of dialogue, and readiness to provide support for the next national elections. Moreover, PAM is working to expand support for Libya in post-crisis reconstruction by leveraging his partnerships with international financial institutions; to address environmental challenges and water security issues; and together with civil society partners, to re-enforce the capacity of Libyan institutions in upholding international human rights obligations; and to support cooperation in the education sector.

42. PAM closely monitors the evolving situation in Syria, and regularly supports international and national efforts to ease the humanitarian crisis and address security issues. In this regard, during recent months, PAM has been involved in several humanitarian initiatives in different parts of Syria, facilitating requests for assistance and conducting closed-door consultations with international actors, including the UN and neighboring countries. Moreover, during PAM-UNOCT meeting held on 15 February 2021, delegates highlighted that battlefield detention of ISIL survivors in Syria is not a sustainable solution, and countries must take measure in compliance with UN Security Council resolutions to bring terrorists to justice, and adopt comprehensive repatriation, prosecution, deradicalization and rehabilitation strategies for ISIL survivors, including women and children.
43. Regarding the Middle East, PAM continues to actively promote the Two State solution as the only way to achieve a lasting and stable peace, and to realize the aspirations of each nation. The Assembly, as needed, continues to serve as a dedicated channel of dialogue between Israel, Palestine, and all their neighbors, with the aim to contribute to the political momentum necessary to resume direct negotiations at the intergovernmental level. Moreover, at the request of the Palestinian authorities, PAM is dispatching an observer missions to monitor the forthcoming elections.
44. Regarding the situation in those areas of Africa impacted by deterioration of security and socio-economic conditions, PAM continues to collaborate with key actors, such as the World Bank, the EU, the African Union, NATO and the UN. The resulting exchange of information supports a comprehensive and cooperative regional approach between political actors, military and civil society. There is a consensus that a strategy combining both security and development, including the allocation of sufficient financial resources, is strongly needed to restore security in these areas and to pave the way for future economic opportunity and stability.
45. The Yemen crisis is on the periphery of the PAM region, however, it has significant implications for PAM countries. At the request of the PAM Bureau, the Secretariat has started closely monitoring the crisis and initiated a series of direct consultations with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, to follow the political process to implementing an immediate nationwide ceasefire, followed by national elections. Furthermore, following an earlier UN request, PAM has intervened in support of UN experts in their mission on FSO SAFER oil tanker. As the next steps, PAM will continue to closely coordinate with the UN to identify areas where its actions could be most effective in supporting the political resolutions to end the crisis.

46. In light of the security challenges facing the PAM region, the Assembly remains committed to the principles of peace, security and dialogue, and the exercise of parliamentary diplomacy to achieve these aims.