



ABOUT INTEGRITY UK

Integrity UK is an organisation committed to challenging hate and empowering communities through innovative approaches to promoting integration, cohesion and social reconciliation within the MENA region and the UK.

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Libya

- Registration for presidential and legislative candidates opened ahead of December elections.
- Presidential council suspends Foreign Minister, Najla Mangoush.
- Libyan Dinar's exchange rate against US Dollar falls slightly, remains relatively stable.

Registration for presidential and legislative elections have been opened in Libya as the country inches closer to landmark elections in a bid to secure lasting peace across the country. The registrations opened on November 8th and will continue until November 22nd for presidential candidates and December 7th for legislative candidates. At present, the elections are still expected to take place on December 24th, in line with the United Nations-backed talks that took place last year.

According to the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), 2.83 million Libyans have registered so far. Among those who put their candidacy forward is the former interior minister Fathi Bashagha. The head of the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar, and Saif al-Islam, son of former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, who is wanted for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court, are also among those expected to run. Other possible candidates include the current Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity (GNU), Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh; the head of the Peace and Prosperity Party, Mohamed Khaled Abdel Al-Ghweil; former Prime Minister of Libya, Ali Zaidan; former Minister of Education, Othman Abdel Jalil; and former ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Aref al-Nayed, among others.

Libya's Foreign Minister, Najla Mangoush, has been suspended by Libya's ruling presidential council over "administrative violations". According to a council spokesperson, Mangoush was suspended on November 6th for carrying out foreign policy without coordination with the council. However, no more details were provided. However, some experts believe that the Foreign Minister's suspension is linked to the comments she made about the 1988 Lockerbie bombing during an interview with the BBC. During the interview, Mangoush had hinted at the potential extradition of the man wanted for the bombing, Abu Agila Mohammed Masud. However, it is possible that the suspension is linked to behind-the-scenes tensions within the transitional government. Indeed, supporting this, the GNU rejected the decision to suspend Mangoush, warning that the council has no legal right to appoint members, cancel their appointments, or suspend and investigate them.

The exchange rate of the Libyan Diner against the US Dollar fell from 22.05 to 21.9 over the final week of October, after experiencing some sharp rises over the early weeks of October. Following the drop, the dinar has remained relatively steady, experiencing minute drops and rises around the 21.9 but no significant shifts otherwise.

Yemen

- Houthi movement seizes US embassy in Sanaa, arrests workers.
- Rumours emerge of Saudi-led Coalition withdrawing from Hodeidah, Aden.
- Bombings, rocket attacks and airstrikes around Marib, Aden.

On November 10th, the United States' State Department warned that the Houthi movement had breached the US Embassy in the Houthi-held capital of Sanaa, detaining a number of Yemenis working for the embassy. Although the majority of the embassy staff was vacated in 2015 and relocated to Riyadh, a number of staff, mostly Yemenis, had still been working and called for their immediate release. In the hours since, the State Department announced that the majority of the staff have been released, but a number of staff including security guards, are still being held. So far, no explanations have been given for why the incident took place. The Biden administration in Washington has been critical of the Saudi-led intervention in the country. Earlier in 2021, Washington announced that it would end US support for the Saudi-led Coalition. It subsequently announced the restoration of food aid. Thus, targeting the embassy at this point could only backfire on the Houthis, prompting renewed US pressure on the group.

Rumours emerged of Saudi withdrawal from Hodeidah and Aden after activists reported on social media that Saudi troops had withdrawn from their base in the Burayqah District in the port city of Aden. Subsequently on November 11th, similar reports emerged from the contested port city of Hodeidah in the western coast, with the Houthis reportedly taking a number of positions south of the city after they were vacated by the Coalition. Commenting on the developments, the spokesperson for the Coalition, General Turki al-Malki, told reporters that the news of withdrawal is baseless and that the movements were just redeployments to support Yemeni forces in other fronts. Although the general did not comment where troops would deploy, it is likely that Marib, where the Saudi-led Coalition has been facing a steady Houthi offensive over recent weeks. Despite making gains over October, Houthi gains in the first two weeks of November have been minimal. With the Houthis banking on capturing Marib before a new round of peace talks take place, and Washington pressuring Riyadh to remove some blockades from Houthi-held ports, it is possible that the redeployment aims to fulfil these conditions while breaking the momentum of the Houthi offensive.

Clashes, shelling and bombing continue across Yemen. Over the past two weeks, Yemen witnessed numerous incidents of shelling and bombings. On November 1st, the Saudi-led Coalition accused a Houthi rocket of hitting a mosque, killing 29 civilians. The Houthis did not claim the attack. Subsequently on November 11th, the Coalition announced that it targeted Houthi artillery and air defence systems around Marib, announcing that around 115 Houthi fighters were killed in Saudi airstrikes last week while another 125 were killed this week. Airstrikes also targeted Sanaa City. In Aden, an explosion near the city's airport resulted in the deaths of 12 people on October 30th. Officials said that a truck carrying petroleum products was the source of the explosion but could not confirm if the incident was a bombing or accident. Subsequently on November 9th, a bombing targeted the car of a journalist, Rasha Abdullah al-Harazi, killing her and her child. No group claimed the attack.

Lebanon

- Lebanon's political crisis with the Gulf escalates.

Lebanon's foreign affairs crisis with the Gulf worsened over the past two weeks. The crisis, which started after it emerged that the newly-appointed Minister of Information, George Kardahi, had made comments critical of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen, has seen Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates withdraw their ambassadors from Lebanon over the past two weeks. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, also issued a blanket ban on all Lebanese products and expelled the Lebanese ambassador to Saudi Arabia while the UAE also issues a travel warning to its citizens.

In the days that followed the initial spat, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati declared that Kardahi's position is not representative of the government and reiterated that the comments were made before Kardahi took his post. However, such comments were accompanied by critical comments from the Lebanese Foreign Minister who said that Saudi Arabia, the UAE nor Bahrain had contacted the ministry about the crisis prior to expelling the Lebanese ambassadors. The Lebanese Government has since announced that it has contacted the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United States to help manage the crisis. Qatar and Oman, who have not recalled their ambassadors yet, also called for greater restraint. Subsequently on November 4th, Prime Minister Najib Mikati and President Michel Aoun announced that they had agreed on a roadmap to ease tensions with the Gulf states. However, with Kardahi refusing to resign and Iran's influence via the Lebanese Hezbollah, which observers suggest is the real cause behind the aggressive Gulf pressure, any roadmap will struggle to make any moves that address the status quo that led to this point. Indeed, even with traditional Saudi allies such as the Lebanese Forces party supporting Prime Minister Mikati's position over the crisis, there is a risk that the current situation could lead Iran, as well as Gulf rivals such as Qatar, to gain more influence over the country.

Tunisia

- Arrest warrant issued for Tunisia's former president, Moncef Marzouki.
- Talks between Tunis and the IMF resume.
- Discovery of IS-linked cells raises fears about security in the country.
- Tunisian Dinar exchange rate with US Dollar experiences sharp drop.

Tunisia's former President, Moncef Marzouki, has been issued an arrest warrant. The warrant, raised on November 5th, was reportedly issued in relation to Marzouki's comments about the failures of the Francophone summit in Tunisia. Marzouki had vehemently opposed the summit, viewing it as an endorsement for President Kais Saied's "dictatorial regime". The summit has since been postponed from October to the end of November. However, no official explanation has yet been given, raising further concerns about the transparency of the government.

Since the issue of the arrest warrant, opposition politicians across Tunisia have criticised the decision, describing it as a "setback and disgrace" and warning that this is yet another step of President Saied consolidating power. Marzouki himself said that he was not surprised by the warrant and described it as a "threatening message to all Tunisians" and accused Saied of importing the "Egyptian model", referencing the overthrow of President Mohammad Morsi by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Indeed, in a statement that alarmed activists, Tunisia's newly-appointed Prime Minister, Najla Bouden Romdhane, praised Egypt under al-Sisi as a "success story" during talks with Cairo.

Marzouki has been one of Saied's most vocal critics since the latter sacked the government on July 25th. Prior to 2011, he had lived in France in exile due to his opposition to the rule of former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been restarted as Tunisia continues to grapple with an economic crisis. The talks, which were suspended following President Saied's suspension of the government in July, were reportedly restarted on November 6th per an official request by Prime Minister Romdhane. While the talks could suggest that Tunisia's economic recovery process is underway, the president will find it difficult to retain his legitimacy over the IMF talks, given that his suspension of the parliament was linked to the public discontent about the unpopular reforms demanded by the IMF. Furthermore, the IMF had stipulated the need for broad support for any aid package, which will be difficult given the sharp opposition he faces over the suspension of the government. Perhaps in a bid to reduce some of the criticisms he's faced, President Saied announced prior to the resumption of IMF talks that the period of extraordinary measures would be shortened, though declined to offer a specific date.

Security officials in Tunisia warned that the jihadi scene remains active in the country after a cell of female operatives affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) were arrested on October 28th. The cell, discovered between Kef and Tozeur, was not a terror cell but appeared to focus on recruitment, especially of women, and was connected to the IS-affiliated Jund al-Khilafa group present in the Tunisian mountains. The same week saw the arrest of a cell based in Tataouine, reportedly planning to attack security forces in the area.

In Tunis, a tunnel was found near the French Ambassador's residence. The tunnel was reportedly linked to a house frequented by known extremists.

The Tunisian Dinar's exchange rate with the US Dollar fell sharply to 35.2 where it remained since after following a steady high of 35.6 over the past week. The sudden sharp coincided with the discovery and arrests of the IS cells, suggesting that the security environment may have had an impact, as opposed to the political developments. The fact that the exchange rate has not improved even after the IMF talks resumed suggest that confidence on the future of the talks is still low.

Syria

- Arab capitals continue to push for greater normalisation with Damascus.
- A reservoir in northern Syria dries for the first time in its history, raising fears of worsened drought and resulting instability.
- Skirmishes and airstrikes across Syria continue, but no new signs of escalation.

Efforts by the Arab countries to reintegrate Syria back into the Arab fold appear to be underway. On November 9th, the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, visited Damascus where he met the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad. The Foreign Minister is the most recent UAE official to visit Syria in a decade, suggesting that the efforts to normalise relations between Damascus and the rest of the Gulf are gaining momentum. An official readout indicated that the talks focused on bilateral ties and stability in the country. This comes following announcements from the UAE's Ministry of Economy announcing that it had agreed with Damascus on future plans to enhance economic cooperation. Although Washington criticised the visit, it does not appear to be mulling sanctions, suggesting the UAE-led normalisation efforts will be tolerated. On the same day of the visit, Egypt's Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, said that Syria can re-enter the Arab League if it is able to play its "traditional role" in supporting Arab regional security. These developments come following increased talks between Damascus and Amman.

A key reservoir in northern Syria dried up for the first time in its 27-year-history. The reservoir formed by al-Duwaysat Dam in Idlib has been a key source of irrigation since it was built. However, experiencing historically-low rainfall this winter, which was also recorded as one of the hottest years, has resulted with the reservoir drying up. With the country having already grappled with severe wildfires in recent years, this development raises the fears of drought and numerous knock-on effects. Syria was already in the grips of a multi-year drought in the 2010s, which is believed to have had an exacerbating effect on the civil war. A new bout of drought and water shortages could result in more pressure on the remaining few resources, as well as clashes for access to these meagre resources.

Clashes and bombings continued across Syria. In Idlib and Aleppo, the pro-Government and Opposition factions exchanged artillery fire near the towns of Saraqib and Atarib. The exchange was accompanied by Russian airstrikes around Idlib City, as well as the town of Kafraya to the north. In Homs and Tartous, positions of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) were targeted by a new round of Israeli airstrikes in the late hours of November 7th. In the northern Raqqa countryside, a post controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was targeted by a Turkish drone on November 8th, killing a number of fighters. Despite the incident, however, Turkish-backed forces have not shown any signs of launching a long-awaited military offensive against the group. In Jarablus, controlled by the Turkish-backed forces, a drone strike targeted a car on November 8th, killing one person. The targeted individual was reportedly an Islamic State (IS) commander from Idlib and the strike appears to have been conducted by the US-led International Coalition based on the remnants of the missile.

Iraq

- Iraqi Prime Minister survives assassination attempt.
- Sectarianized IS attacks in Diyala and retaliatory attacks by militias raise the spectre of intercommunal fighting.
- Iraq eyes oil contracts with Saudi Arabia as oil revenues for October rise.

Iraq's Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, was targeted in an assassination attempt that used bomb-laden drones. The attack, which took place in the early hours of November 7th, saw the Prime Minister survive relatively unscathed. Marking an unusual escalation, the incident was commonly attributed to Iran-affiliated groups such as Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq whose members were camped outside the Green Zone to protest the recent election results alongside the supporters of the wider Fatah bloc. On the Friday before the attack, the sit-in had witnessed violence between the protesters and security forces, with two protesters reported dead. However, despite widespread agreement among regional security officials about the culprits, both Baghdad and Washington have, so far, refrained from attributing direct blame for the incident. Indeed, in the days that followed, talks took place between Iraqi security officials various militia groups in a bid to avoid escalation. While Baghdad has indeed remained calm, new round of protests took place in Basra criticising last Friday's violence on the protesters.

Islamic State (IS) attack in Diyala raises fears of the group's resurgence.

Militants belonging to the group killed 11 members of the predominantly Shia Bani Tamim tribe in the village of al-Rashad on October 26th. It appears that the IS was looking to stoke sectarian tensions with targeted killings, and this appears to have succeeded, as in the days that followed, militias allegedly linked to the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) attacked the predominantly-Sunni village of Nahr al-Imam in retaliation for the killings, accusing the villagers of "collusion" with the IS. On social media, reports of sectarianised tit-for-tat violence have also been picking up. If the situation continues as it does, it could lead to a new round of intercommunal fighting that could bolster the IS' recruitment.

Iraqi oil exports rose from 3.081 million barrels per day (bpd) in September to 3.12 million bpd in October. According to the Ministry of Oil, the majority of the exports were from the Basra terminals, by 3.012 bpd, with the rest sourced from Kirkuk via Ceyhan, averaging at 98,000 bpd. These new exports bring Iraq's oil revenue to \$7.68 billion. With the country looking to maximise its oil revenues to fund reconstruction and ease the on-going economic crisis, Iraq's Oil Minister, Ihsan Abdul Jabbar announced on November 1st that there are plans to sign a multi-billion contract with the Saudi flagship oil company Aramco. The contract would aim to develop the oil fields in the western deserts. In addition to joint petrochemical projects, the two countries are looking to build solar energy stations and desalination plants in Iraq.

Egypt

- New amendments to counterterrorism laws incorporate emergency law-like provisions despite the lifting of State of Emergency.
- Global surge in wheat prices hits Egypt.
- New oil and gas discoveries raise hopes for self-sufficiency by 2023.

The Egyptian Parliament passed several amendments into counterterrorism laws. The amendments notably incorporate numerous emergency law-like provisions into the law despite the lifting of the State of Emergency last month. Among the amendments provisions to allow the President to impose curfews, evacuate areas or restricting freedom of movement. Fines for filing, recording, broadcasting or reporting on any terrorism-related case also increased from a minimum of 100,000 Egyptian pounds to 300,000. The jurisdiction of military prosecutors and courts over civilians – especially in cases relating to protests and infrastructure damage – have also been permanently extended. The Human Rights Watch cited these laws as proof that the Egyptian Government has no intention of releasing its harsh restrictions on public life and political expression.

The global surge in wheat prices is having severe impact on Egypt's purchasing power. Global wheat prices have reached their highest levels since 2012 owing to strong international demand and tightening supply amidst a low spring harvest. According to Egypt's General Authority for Supply Commodities, the country paid \$332.55 for a tonne of Russian milling wheat, representing a \$5 increase from its main suppliers compared to last week alone and \$80 higher than government projections for the fiscal year of 2020/2021. A spokesperson for the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture warned that climate change is having an impact on the supply and consumption patterns. While farmers in Egypt are being incentivised to grow wheat, the country itself is suffering from the effects of climate change, limiting what can be achieved. Indeed, Egypt, the world's largest wheat consumer, is currently able to cover less than 50% of its consumption through domestic production.

The oil and gas sector, in turn, is expected to boom amidst continued oil and gas discoveries. Last week, Italian oil company Eni announced that it has made three new oil and gas discoveries in Meleiha, western Egypt. These discoveries are among the latest slew of discoveries recorded over the last decade, totalling to about 372 million barrels of oil and 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The discovery of the new fields and their development – reportedly due to be a joint venture between Eni and the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation – will help Egypt achieve its plans to become self-sufficient in oil by 2023. However, with the move away from hydrocarbons in progress, expectations of a Gulf-like windfall should be tempered.

Jordan

- Teacher's Syndicate wins appeal over closure case but is prevented from holding protests.
- Foreign workers not vaccinated against COVID-19 by mid-December to be deported.
- COVID-19 cases and deaths rise but situation "not alarming."

Jordan continues to witness protests by teachers linked to the Jordan

Teachers' Syndicate, the country's largest labour union. The Syndicate was shut down in mid-2020 following claims of funds being misappropriated, though officials of the organisation claimed the charges were politically motivated. On October 31st, 2021, Jordan's court of appeals overturned one of the court cases against the Syndicate, with a decision on the second case expected soon. However, with the organisation still banned, efforts to hold protests by its members in Amman on November 8th were countered by the capital's governor. As an organisation formed in the wake of Arab Spring protests, the Syndicate has been active in numerous protests against the government, especially on matters of corruption and unemployment. Indeed, opponents of the government accused Amman of using COVID-19 laws to prevent protests.

Jordan's Government announced on October 30th that it will deport any foreign workers still unvaccinated against COVID-19.

The deportations will start from December 15th and is expected to impact Filipinos and Egyptians most, as they make the greatest roster of foreign workers. Jordan's Interior Ministry said that workers are allowed to receive vaccines free of charge and without the need to present residence or work permits. It remains to be seen if the country can actually follow through with the enforcement of deportations, given the size of informal economic activities. However, the announcement may help increase vaccination rates which have remained relatively low despite rising cases in the country. It is possible that Jordan, like many Arab Gulf countries, is also looking to reduce the size of foreign workers to offer more employment to nationals, with vaccinations offering a convenient avenue.

Rising COVID-19 cases, however, remain a concern, especially in Amman. On November 10th, Jordan announced 11 new deaths and 2,503 new cases, bringing the total death toll to 11,167. The majority of these cases were in Amman, by 853, with the next closest regions Irbid by 564 and Zarqa by 284. Responding to the situation, the Secretary-General of Epidemiological Affairs at the Ministry of Health, Adel Al-Belbisi, called for Jordanians to be more cautious but described the situation as "not alarming", suggesting that it is unlikely to implement new measures such as lockdowns.