



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

- Electoral roll for Libyan elections to be released
- Thousands of migrants and refugees in Tripoli hold sit-ins to protest conditions

Libya Moves Closer to Elections. On October 24th, the head of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), Dr Emad al-Sayeh, announced that the electoral roll will be released in the coming days, opening nominations for the post of the president. He said that each presidential candidate will need 5,000 nominations. Despite attempting to gain momentum towards holding elections, the HNEC has not yet set a date for the two rounds of elections. The move comes amidst on-going concerns around election security and integrity. In addition to fears of bloodshed during or after the elections, some activists warned that several individuals who benefited from corruption in recent years are trying to put a brake on the elections. On October 30th, the United Nations' Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) reiterated its call for elections on December 24th, as set out in peace talks earlier this year.

Thousands of refugees and migrants in Tripoli held sit-in protests as the anti-migrant clampdown in the country continues. Many of the protesters spoke against the state of indefinite detentions and mistreatment and called on the United Nations to evacuate them from Libya. More than 5,000 people have been rounded up by security forces since October 1st. Since the round-ups started, however, there have been a number of incidents including six deaths in an overcrowded detention centre known as Ghot Shaal. However, the UN's refugee agency is unlikely to be able to attend the situation, given that it has suspended operations in the country on grounds of security risks. The UN had warned earlier in October that the treatment of the migrants could constitute crimes against humanity in the first fact-finding report published by its Human Rights Council.

Yemen

- Heavy fighting continues around Marib, with no signs of calming down
- International aid agencies warn of economic collapse and famine

Heavy fighting across Yemen continues, especially in Marib Province where the Houthi Movement continued its offensive against the Saudi-led Coalition. The Coalition has escalated its airstrikes, particularly around Jawba and Kassara south and northwest of the city of Marib itself. The Coalition claimed that around 260 Houthi fighters were killed in the last week of October alone. Despite these strikes, however, Houthi forces continue to push around Jawba, with heavy fighting witnessed around the town. In Marib itself, a Houthi missile struck a tribal leader's home, killing 13. Another missile, reportedly hitting a mosque and madrassa, killed 29. Responding to the escalating violence, the United Nations Security Council called for a de-escalation, warning of large-scale famine. However, the clashes show no sign of abating so far.

Aid agencies are warning of economic collapse in the country amidst worsening humanitarian conditions and increasingly-violent fighting. Speaking at a UNSC briefing, the UN's deputy humanitarian chief, Ramesh Rajasingham, warned that two-thirds of the country is in need of humanitarian assistance but added that aid agencies are running out of money. He warned that the number of people receiving aid rose from three to 13 million and that as many as five million people could see famine by the end of the month as food aid is unable to keep up with the demand. He also warned that far from conditions conducive to a ceasefire, the gap in trust between the parties of war are growing. The economic collapse in the country has reached a point where a dollar is worth 1,270 Yemeni rials, putting immense strain on a country whose economy imports most goods.

Lebanon

- Lebanon experiences worst bout of intercommunal violence since the civil war
- Beirut Port investigation interrupted once again after former Prime Minister Hassan Diab refuses questioning
- Lebanon's ties with Gulf experiences tensions after it emerges that new information minister criticised the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen

Lebanon witnessed its worst bout of intercommunal violence since the civil war following clashes in Beirut on October 14th. The clashes took place against the backdrop of the Beirut port blast investigation where the political parties Hezbollah and Amal accused the leading judge Tarek Bitar of politically-motivated prosecutions. The incident took place during a protest by Hezbollah near Tayoneh where unknown snipers opened fire on the crowd, with the Hezbollah returning fire, resulting in street battles that left seven people dead. The Hezbollah has since accused the Lebanese Forces, the second largest Christian party, of carrying out the attack. Although the fighting calmed, many Lebanese are concerned that the incident could be a prelude to a civil war in the country that is already dealing with numerous crises that has plunged living standards. Indeed, Kuwait has since called on its citizens to leave the country, becoming the first country to do so. Many pundits critical of Hezbollah, meanwhile, accused its leadership of trying to impede the investigation due to suspected links to the Beirut Port blast.

The investigation into the Beirut Port blast was interrupted again after former Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who was called in for questioning in relation to the incident, filed a lawsuit questioning Judge Bitar's authority. The incident is the latest in a series of interruptions that have impeded the progress of the investigation into the 2020 Beirut Port Blast. Although Hezbollah and Amal have accused the investigation of disproportionately focusing on their affiliates, nearly every faction across the political spectrum has tried to put obstacles before the investigation, causing growing consternation among the victims of the families.

Lebanon's ties with the Gulf suffered a further strain after it emerged that George Kordahi, the country's information minister, made several comments critical of the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. Kordahi's comments, which were made before he assumed his ministerial position, suggested that he viewed the war in Yemen as futile and that the Houthis movement are defending themselves. In response to the comments, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have both summoned the Lebanese ambassadors in protest. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Najib Mikati deflected the criticism, emphasising Kordahi made the comments before assuming his post. While Mikati likely aimed to avoid further tensions, the deflection will likely be viewed negatively in the Gulf. Indeed, officials from the UAE already warned about "Lebanon's growing distance from its Arab brotherly countries". Many Lebanese officials who were banking on financial support from the Gulf to improve the country's economic outlook may find such hopes dashed.

Tunisia

- President Kais Saied appoints new government
- Signs of fracture within the opposition Ennahda Party
- Tunisian Dinar exchange rate remains stable

A new government has been appointed by Tunisia's president, Kais Saied. The formation of the new government comes 11 weeks after the previous government was dissolved amidst accusations of a presidential power grab. The formation of the new government will see the swearing-in of Najla Bouden, the country's first female prime minister. Other notable names include political veterans, Samir Saied as the economy minister and Sihem Boughdiri as the finance minister. Although Bouden is a relative political newcomer, the appointment of veteran finance officials to economic posts may ease some fears, given that the public dissatisfaction with the previous government was primarily on economic grounds which were further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing unemployment to 17.8%. Perhaps in a bid to further allay fears of renewed authoritarian rule, Saied also announced that he would make efforts to launch a "genuine national dialogue". So far, however, the country's opposition protest movement remains sceptical.

There are signs of fractures within the country's main opposition party, Ennahda. The pan-Arab *Asharq al-Awsat* newspaper reported that several figures from the party are preparing to launch a new political party. The party, while echoing some of Ennahda's views, intends to be a more "middle ground" party for "Arab Islamic Tunisian people". Among the figures expected to partake are Abdelfattah Mourou as the party chairman, as well as several lawmakers such as Abdellatif Mekki, Mohamed Ben Salem, Samir Dilou. Former speaker of the parliament, Rached al-Ghannouchi, may also partake in light of his recent resignation from Ennahda. While it is possible that the party may invigorate the opposition and move past some of the more negative public associations around Ennahda, it will also split the opposition vote further. In addition, the new party will need to differentiate itself from the dozens of political parties founded since 2011. This is especially pertinent given that previously prominent parties like Nidaa Tounes have seen their fortunes fade.

The Tunisian Dinar has remained relatively stable over the past two weeks. After briefly reaching a peak dollar exchange rate of 35.5 (following a drop to 35.3), the exchange rate has fallen to 35.4 and has not experienced any significant changes, suggesting that the political climate is, so far, having limited impact. Indeed, a small rise in the exchange rate since Monday suggest that the government formation had a reassuring impact on the markets.

Syria

- Turkish Parliament extends mandate for cross-border military operations for another two years
- Infighting and arrests between HTS and independent Chechen factions
- SNA factions merge in an attempt to block HTS overtures
- Syrian Pound rebounds but Damascus accused of currency manipulation and aid siphon.

The Turkish Parliament extended the mandate of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) to launch cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq for another two years. The motion, passed on October 26th, will authorise military operations to any group deemed “terrorist organisations” by Ankara. The motion came after clashes between the TSK and Kurdish insurgents suspected to be linked to the People's Protection Units (YPG). However, the bill was rejected by the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP) for the first time, with the CHP leader questioning the reasons behind the operations. Since the motion passed, there has been significant activity along the Turkish border, with both the TSK and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) seemingly preparing for deployments. However, the prospects for an operation remains up in the air, especially since US forces operating in the region have not only moved away and, according to a statement by the White House's National Security Council, have no plans to withdraw.

Opposition-held regions of Latakia Province witnessed several instances of infighting between various factions at the end of October. The main focus of the infighting seems to be between local Chechen factions and the dominant Hayy'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) faction. Social media reports suggested that the HTS arrested Abu Musa, the brother of a prominent commander of the Jund al-Sham faction named Muslim Shishani. Abu Musa and two others were reportedly arrested while fleeing to Turkey. Since then, there have been numerous reports that Abu Musa was planning to join a faction to fight against the HTS which has recently clamped down on foreign militant groups in Idlib, with Jund al-Sham among the groups called in to join the HTS or leave the region. In the subsequent days, the HTS launched several operations against what it referred to as criminal groups but has been widely interpreted as referring to groups that did not accept the authority of the HTS. The HTS has since announced that it has defeated Jund al-Sham and another faction named Jundallah and there have been no new reports of infighting. Although the move may help the HTS consolidate, it may also weaken the group's flanks in northern Latakia where the local factions have been able to repel government-led offensives towards Kabani.

The SNA has announced that six of its factions would be merged into a new Third Legion. The factions include the formerly Ghouta-based Jaish al-Islam, Jabhat Shamiya, Faylaq al-Majd, Saraya al-Salam (not to be confused with the Iraqi group of the same name), Sultan Malik Shah Brigade and the 51st Brigade. The move appears to be part of the SNA's long-term plans to consolidate disparate factions until a solidified authority. However, past attempts to merge other factions together have had mixed successes, with many groups still retaining their individual associations and hampering SNA unity. With many of the factions, even the formerly-prominent ones such as Jaish al-Islam, now of negligible capacity, this merger appears to be insignificant. However, it is notable that the

HTS has attempted to make overtures towards some of these groups recently, suggesting that the mergers should be viewed within the larger prism of the rivalry between the SNA and the HTS, especially in light of what has taken place in the Turkmen Mountains the same week.

The value of the Syrian Pound rebounded over the past two weeks, with its exchange rate against the dollar climbing from 0.0795 to 0.0796 and remaining stable since. While the margins of the improvement are small, the rebound is nevertheless notable for the Pound which has depreciated significantly over the past two years as the economy of the neighbouring Lebanon collapsed. A report published by *The World* published on the last week of October claimed that the rebound is owing to Damascus siphoning aid money in a bit to manipulate exchange rates while circumventing Western sanctions.

Iraq

- Iraqi elections yield wins for Sadrists, suggests Sunni parties are becoming increasingly cohesive
- Two “most wanted” IS officials arrested

Iraq held general elections on October 10th, with the outcome showing some surprise results. Among the notable winners were Speaker of the Parliament, Mohammad Halbousi’s Taqadom Party which received 37 seats. Representing one of the bigger wins for a Sunni party, the outcomes of the election could suggest that the country’s Sunni politics are finally coming under a cohesive umbrella after being in a relative state of flux, uncertainty and division since 2003. The main winner of the election, however, was the popular Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr who won 72 seats. Notable losers were Shia parties closer to Iran such as the Fatah Alliance led by Hadi al-Amiri and Alliance of National State Forces led by Ammar al-Hakim, both of which lost significant portions of their seats, suggesting Sadr’s nationally-oriented rhetoric has gained wider appeal. Despite the sceptical outlook of the Iraqi protest movement regarding the elections, the party affiliated with the protesters, the Emtidad Movement, gained 10 seats, a relatively small amount but notable given the uphill battle the party faced. However, with heavyweights such as Sadrists in control of the parliament, the prospect for the protest movements will be limited.

Notably, the elections took place in an environment of relative stability, witnessing none of the incidents, such as the suspected arson attacks on electoral centres, that characterised the previous election. While some of the losing parties have sought to challenge the results on grounds of irregularities, the Iraqi electoral commission has so far accepted only seven appeals, rejecting 174. Iraq will now face the arduous path of government formation. While the stability of the elections may increase the legitimacy of the new government, this will be tempered by the low turnout.

A “Most Wanted” Islamic State (IS) financier has been arrested in an operation by the Iraqi Security Forces. The official, Sami Jassim Mohammed al-Jabouri, was the group’s chief finance official. No details were released as to where he was arrested, but some speculation suggested he was arrested in Turkey and was “lured into a trap”. Another operation captured Ghazwan al-Zawbaee, a militant originally affiliated with al-Qaeda. Al-Zawbaee was reportedly the mastermind behind the Karrada bombing in Ramadan 2016 that killed 346 people dead.

Egypt

- Egypt lifts State of Emergency in place since 2017
- New investment to water resources announced as Cairo takes conciliatory stance towards Addis Ababa over the GERD dispute
- IMF forecasts Egyptian economy growth
- Egypt joins the AFC.

The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced the lifting of the State of Emergency in place since 2017. The State of Emergency was announced following a series of IS attacks that targeted the country's Coptic Christian community and allowed security forces to make arrests and search homes without warrants. Constitutional rights relating to freedom of speech and assembly were also curtailed. Although the use of emergency state security courts will stop, some high-profile cases already in these courts will remain so. The move may suggest that the Egyptian Government is feeling secure enough in its position vis-à-vis domestic unrest, as well as the on-going IS insurgency in the Sinai. It is possible that the relatively positive economic outlook and the on-going détente with Turkey, which, in the past, supported the Egyptian Opposition to Sisi, has also played a part in Cairo's calculus.

President Sisi announced new funding for water resources as the dispute with Ethiopia drags on. On October 24th, al-Sisi announced that his government will spend at least \$50 billion until 2037 to better manage and improve its water resources. Such funding, he said, would be spent on water treatment centres and developing new water sources through improved irrigation and desalination. The announcement comes as Egypt's water dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) continues without apparent resolution. In a departure from earlier aggressive postures, al-Sisi said that he would like to see Ethiopia fulfil its development aspirations through GERD but warned that Egypt is one of the most water-poor countries in the world and that the construction of the dam should take it into account the existential risks it could cause to Egypt and the neighbouring Sudan. He further said that he wants to see a binding agreement on the matter "as soon as possible".

Egyptian economy forecast to grow by 3.3% in 2021. This is the prediction of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which raised its previous forecast of 2.5% issued last April. Further Gross Domestic Production (GDP) growth of 5.2% is projected for 2022. Among the recent improvements to the economy was a banking reform to address the impacts of the pandemic and a rise in minimum wage for public sector employees. Meanwhile, a number of consumer goods sectors, especially automotive sectors, have recorded impressive growths as the pandemic wanes. The Egyptian market for car parts and components is now estimated to be around \$1 billion, with the government increasingly focusing on dual-fuel and electric vehicles to combat pollution.

Egypt becomes the 32nd member of the Africa Finance Corporation (AFC). A pan-African multilateral development institution focusing on infrastructure improvements through financing, has already dedicated \$100 Million to infrastructure projects across the country, especially the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation and Carbon Holdings. With the country now an AFC member-state, it has the possibility of raising foreign investments

as much as \$1 billion. According to the Prime Minister of Egypt, Dr Mostafa Madbouly, there are talks with the AFC on pipeline projects, vaccine manufacturing projects, and high-speed rail and monorail projects, among others. With the IMF already making optimistic economic predictions, Egypt's accession to the AFC may further improve the country's business prospects.

Jordan

- Jordanian intelligence accused of intimidation campaign against Syrians in the country
- Unemployment declines but remains high
- Jordanian dinar exchange rate against dollar fluctuates

Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate (GID) is accused of a campaign of intimidation against Syrians in the country. The staff of Syria Direct, a prominent pro-Syrian Opposition outlet based in Amman since 2013, announced that they would be moving their operations to Berlin. While the staff did not elaborate, there have been numerous speculations, including a journalist who requested anonymity, that the GID has ramped up the pressure on pro-Syrian Opposition activists as part of Amman's thawing ties with Damascus. These developments may chill the large Syrian refugee community in Jordan which has already been under some pressure to return to their homes – mostly in southern Syria – despite many such areas, such as Daraa, remaining unstable. Indeed, numerous refugees have already reported an increase in hostility towards Syrians from the security forces.

Unemployment declines but remains high. Jordan's department of statistics announced that the country's unemployment rate reached 24.8% for the second quarter of 2021, showing a drop of 0.2% compared to the first quarter but remaining significantly higher compared to this time last year. Unemployment among higher education graduates is especially high, with 31.1% of such people without jobs. With the country grappling with economic troubles and small but sustained bouts of protests, continued unemployment could prove to be a deeply destabilising factor.

Jordan's exchange rate with the dollar has fluctuated over the past two weeks. Starting from a peak exchange rate of 141.05 in mid-October, the value of the Jordanian dinar fell to 141.035 before climbing back up and falling again over the course of the subsequent two weeks. Indeed, this pattern has repeated for much of the month of October. Thus, while the value of the Jordanian dinar against the dollar currently sits at 141.05 again, this will likely drop in the coming days before rising again.