



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

- Uncertainty over elections continues as HNEC gives timeline of six to eight months for new elections.
- National Oil Corporation announces highest earnings in five years.
- IS engages in attacks against the LNA in southern Libya.

Uncertainty continues around postponed elections. On January 17th, the head of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), Emad el-Sayeh, said that six to eight months are needed to relaunch the electoral process in the country. Speaking at the House of Representatives (HoR), el-Sayeh noted that the process will need rescreening of candidates and new voter registration, stating that the HNEC was unable to fulfil its goals due to time constraints. He added that the judgements of appeal committees and local courts were inconsistent and that the appeals process should be centralised to a HNEC-led committee.

Meanwhile, the United Nations' General Advisor on Libya, Stephanie Williams, said that the UN will push for elections in June, describing the timeline as "very reasonable and possible". Williams added that elections are needed to offer credibility to its institutions.

The National Oil Corporation (NOC) publishes 2021 revenues. According to the NOC, oil revenues over the course of 2021 reached \$21.5 billion, as well as another €30 million in non-dollar sales, representing the highest earnings in five years. The NOC's head, Mustafa Sanallah, said that the rise in revenues were a result of global recovery. Despite revenues, however, Sanallah warned that infrastructure modernisation remains weak and that new, outside-the-box initiatives are needed to address infrastructure deficiencies.

Meanwhile, Libya's Minister of Oil and Gas, Mohamed Aoun, announced that his ministry managed to recover more than \$2.3 billion in taxes and royalties owed by ConocoPhillips, Hess, and TotalEnergies. The minister said that the amount recovered is about half of the \$5 billion that companies defaulted on since October 2020. Aoun blamed Sanallah for giving these companies cover.

Islamic State (IS) attacks reported in southern Libya. Over the past week, the Jabal Asida region located near the southernmost city of Qatrun witnessed intense clashes between IS militants and Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). The IS claimed several attacks against the LNA around Qatrun, including IED attacks against LNA patrols that resulted in the deaths of three LNA fighters. The LNA has since announced launching operations in the south, claiming that some 19 militants were killed in the subsequent clashes.

IS attacks remain relatively rare in Libya since the group lost its holdings in Sirte. The newest bout of attacks raise concerns about the group's rising activities in the Maghreb and Sahel regions, especially within the context of the group's latest spate of attacks in Iraq and Syria.

Yemen

- Abu Dhabi targeted by Houthi drones first time since 2018.
- UAE-backed forces make gains against Houthis south of Marib.
- Clashes between the Coalition and the Houthi Movement erupts around Taiz.

Houthi attacks in Abu Dhabi signal escalation of the Yemeni conflict. On January 17th, a suspected drone attack near the Abu Dhabi International Airport killed at least five people, marking the first Houthi attack on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2018. The drones struck three oil tankers in the area, resulting in a series of explosions. Subsequently on January 24th, a missile targeted al-Dhafra Airbase outside Abu Dhabi. The base, which houses US soldiers, intercepted the missile without casualties.

The move represents a major escalation by the Houthi movement, which has, so far, refrained from targeting the UAE. It is believed that the latest bout of escalation came after the UAE-backed Giants Brigade intervened in the battle around Marib, making significant gains against the Houthis. Indeed, Brigadier-General Yahya Saree of the Houthi-aligned segments of the Yemeni Army, dubbed the strikes as part of a new operation called “Hurricane Yemen”. The Brigadier-General warned the UAE against further military escalation. However, the UAE has shown no signs of backing down and vowed retaliation.

Houthi offensive in Marib reversed amidst gains by UAE-backed forces. Since intervening in the battle around Marib, the Houthi offensive appears to have come to an end, with the Saudi-led Coalition making significant gains along the southern frontlines of Marib. The Giants Brigade reportedly pushed towards the district of Abdiya south of Marib and made gains around the Houthi-held town of Judaydah. Although Houthi rocket attacks towards Marib continued, these attacks appear to be doing little damage to Coalition capabilities.

Fighting breaks around Taiz; heavy Coalition airstrikes reported in Sanaa. In addition to Marib, the frontlines around Taiz have also shown new movements, with the Coalition ground forces announcing the capture of Maqbanah, west of the city of Taiz. Small skirmishes were also reported in the neighbouring al-Dhalea governorate where the Coalition announced repelling a Houthi infiltration attempt.

Amidst these clashes, the Coalition escalated its airstrikes on Sanaa City, particularly around the Sanaa International Airport. The Houthi movement accused the Coalition of hitting a prison in Saada, central Yemen. Some 100 people were reported dead, but the death toll is expected to rise.

Lebanon

- Draft budget for 2022 released.
- Bilateral agreements signed with Iraq, Jordan and Syria.
- Saad al-Hariri announces withdrawal from politics.

Lebanon releases draft budget for 2022. According to the draft copy of the budget shared with select media outlets, the Lebanese Government is considering hiking customs duties and fees – such as import and trade fees – to make up for its budget shortfall. In particular, the budget foresees the tripling of VAT. Parliamentarian Ali Darwish, who advises Prime Minister Najib Mikati, also said that the budget will function with three exchange rates to the United States dollar: The first being the official exchange rate which is currently at LP1,500 for \$1, and will be used in state contracts. The second rate of LP8,000 for \$1 will be applied to customs duties, phone and internet bills. The third, corresponding to the market exchange rate, will apply to state expenditures that require payment in foreign exchange. Overall, the budget foresees a deficit of 20.8%.

The budget was criticised for failing to address or reform the root causes of the crisis and piling the misery on Lebanon's poor and diminishing middle class. In particular, criticisms were raised over the lack of timeline or lack of clear framework on how the different exchange rates would function. That a number of barely-functional industries, such as the power sector, is still due to receive large advances of LP25 trillion (\$3.5 billion) despite failing to provide power to much of the country.

Lebanon signs bilateral agreements. Lebanon's Industry Minister George Boushekian visited Iraq on January 14th, meeting with his Iraqi counterpart to discuss improving bilateral ties. The two sides, in particular, signed a memorandum of agreement to share manufacturing expertise amidst fears that factories in Lebanon are moving their operations elsewhere. The signing of the agreement comes shortly after the two sides signed an agreement for defence cooperation.

Lebanon also signed an agreement with Jordan and Syria for the provision of electricity. According to the deal, which was signed with US assurances that Jordan would not be impacted by sanctions on Damascus, will see Jordan providing Lebanon with electricity via Syria. The deal will see Lebanon receiving 150 megawatts (MW) from midnight to 6:00 and 250 MW throughout the day. While it amounts to only about two hours of electricity, it may nevertheless offer a lifeline to the country. Egypt is also due to provide gas to Lebanon to help make up for the power shortfall, with the signing of the agreement expected due February.

Saad al-Hariri withdraws from politics. Lebanon's former Prime Minister and one of the most notable Sunni politicians, Saad al-Hariri, announced he will suspend all political activities and not run as a parliamentarian in the upcoming elections. He added that he would also not sponsor a list of candidates. Although Hariri's withdrawal does not equal to a full retirement from politics, as he could conceivably return, it nevertheless represents a culmination of his political misfortunes that saw him detained by his main political patron, Saudi Arabia, in 2017. Hariri's most recent efforts to form a government in 2019 and 2021

were met with failures as he struggled to balance the domestic demands with that of his patrons, finally throwing in the towel in July 2021. With a number of Hariri's companies, including the Saudi Oger company, going bankrupt, and his primary funders leaving Lebanon, it is clear that Hariri would have faced an uphill battle if he decided to continue his political activities.

His decision, however, leaves the country's Sunni community at a vacuum. While the Sunni community in Lebanon has other leading figures, few retain Hariri's recognisability. As such, some analysts predict that the Sunni community will either be demobilised or see its votes fragmented that could be exploited by Hariri's rivals, including Hezbollah. The move could also signify that Saudi Arabia is washing its hands of Lebanon or otherwise looking for alternative representatives.

Tunisia

- 11th anniversary of Arab Spring protests sees clashes on the streets of Tunis.
- State of emergency extended until February.
- Activists warn of growing repression and attempts to clamp down on judicial independence.

Tunisia observes turbulent 11th anniversary of the revolution. Hundreds of protesters took to the streets across Tunisia to observe the 11th anniversary of the revolution that deposed President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. In Tunis, protesters attempted to reach the Habib Bourguiba Avenue, which was the epicentre of the 2011 protests. Drawing explicit parallels between the protests then and the rule of current President, Kais Saied, today, protesters demanded the resignation of the president, accusing him of seizing power through a coup. The protesters were met with tear gas and water cannons as they tried to reach the avenue, resulting in clashes. At least one protester was killed due to what activists described as “excessive violence” by the police. Lofti Ezzedine, an official from Tunisia's independent anti-torture body, announced that it opened an investigation into the “suspicious death” of the protester.

State of Emergency extended for a month. On January 18th, President Saied announced that the country's state of emergency will be extended for another month, until February 18th. Under the state of emergency, the Interior Ministry is granted additional powers including to stop meetings and gatherings and impose curfews, as well as clamping down on media organisations. The current state of emergency was declared on 24th July for six months.

Activists warn of growing repression in Tunisia. Alongside the extension of the state of emergency, Tunisia witnessed several developments that raised alarm among activists regarding the independence of the judiciary. On January 19th, President Saied issued a decree to “limit the awards and privileges” granted to the members of the Superior Council of the Judiciary. The decree came on the heels of an on-going controversy after the Minister of Justice Leïla Jaffel and President Saied made comments alluding to the judiciary as a state function, which was interpreted by many as an intent to limit judicial independence. Subsequently on January 22nd, the head of the National Bar Association, Abderrazak Kilani, was put under military investigation without charges. It is believed the investigation relates to his call for the security forces to respect human rights.

In addition to the decree, activists warned of several other developments that raises concerns of a repressive climate in the country. In particular, the Tunisian Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty announced that the number of death penalties rose significantly, with 11 sentences carried out within 15 days in January. The coalition warned that the executions may put Tunisia in a negative light ahead of the vote in the United Nations General Assembly over death penalties.

Syria

- The IS launches major attack on prison in northern Syria where 3,500 militants are held.
- Unusually heavy snowfall in northern Syria worsens humanitarian conditions.

Islamic State (IS) launches major attack on northern Syria prison. On Thursday, January 20th, the IS launched a major attack on the Sinaa Prison (also known as Ghwayran Prison) in Hasakah City. The militants managed to take partial control of the prison where some 3,500 IS militants, many of whom are foreigners, are held. In the aftermath of the attack, the International Coalition and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) mobilised, establishing a cordon to prevent the prisoners from escaping. In the days that followed the initial attack, clashes around the prison continued, with the SDF gradually regaining control of the area. The final tally for deaths and escapees has yet to be determined. However, the attack nevertheless represents a watershed moment in the IS insurgency, which has gone on ever since the SDF captured the group's final holdout at Baghuz in early 2019. It is the heaviest and most brazen attack to take place and has raised fears that the group may be preparing to escalate its insurgency as the international community remains focused on other crises such as that which is developing in Ukraine.

For more in-depth analysis of the attack, click [here](#).

Humanitarian conditions in camps worsen following unusually heavy snowfall.

Activists warn that the unusually heavy snowfall has caused many tents in the camps for displaced peoples to collapse, as well as isolating some of the camps entirely. With some 97% of Syrians in northwest Syria living in extreme poverty, the cold conditions have left many people unable to purchase essentials. The crisis was further worsened by the on-going currency crunch in Turkey that has already causes prices to rise sharply in Opposition-held parts of Syria that have grown reliant on Turkish Lira. According to the United Nations, it is working to clear roads leading to the camps, but many camps remain isolated. At least one child died as a result of the cold.

Iraq

- Iraqi Government formation goes ahead after legal objections to Parliament Speaker appointment rejected.
- Water tensions erupt between Iran and Iraq.
- Rising intensity and frequency of attacks linked to IS raises security concerns.

Government formation to continue after federal court rejects legal objection to al-Halbousi appointment. In the days that followed the “chaotic” first session of the Iraqi Parliament on January 9th, political blocs continued to grapple over the election of Muhammad al-Halbousi to the position of Speaker of Parliament. In particular, the Coordination Framework bloc (consisting of Nouri al-Maliki’s State of Law Coalition and Hadi al-Amiri’s Fatah Coalition) filed objections against al-Halbousi’s election, citing “irregularities” allegedly committed by Muqtada al-Sadr’s supporters. However, the lawsuit filed by the Coordination Framework was rejected by the federal courts, meaning the Sadrist movement will be able to form a government. Indeed, the office of the President announced that the President’s election would take place February 7th.

Water tensions erupt between Iran and Iraq. Iraq’s Minister of Water Resources, Mahdi Rashid al-Hamdani, announced that his country would be filing a lawsuit against Iran over a severe drop of water flow from the country. The tensions relate to the Arvand River which flows from Iran to Iraq and has dropped to one-tenth of what used to be available. Hamdani has been raising the matter of water insecurity over the course of 2021 and has accused Iranian officials of violations over the agreement over the two countries’ shared water resources. He had warned that the water restrictions were already causing severe drought in Diyala. Iranian officials, however, warned that the cause for water unavailability is not deliberate action by Iran, but drought conditions that are impacting Iran as well. Iranian officials, instead, suggested Iraq sue Turkey after the damming of the Tigris and Euphrates, which have reduced water availability in Iraq from these rivers by two-thirds.

Attacks by the IS and pro-Iran groups raise fears over security. On January 21st, an Iraqi army outpost near the town of al-Udhaim in Diyala was attacked by the IS and subsequently overrun, resulting in the deaths of all 11 soldiers present. Marking the bloodiest IS attack to take place in 2022 and one of the bloodiest attacks since the group lost its Iraqi territories, the attack which took place concurrently as the attack in the Sinaa Prison in Syria, raised fears of a coordinated IS campaign against the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in the coming weeks, including prison break attempts by imprisoned IS militants.

In addition to the IS attacks, there have been a number of attacks unclaimed by the group and suspected linked to pro-Iran factions instead. Among such attacks were bombings in two Kurdish-owned banks in Baghdad on January 16th. Bombings also targeted the Baghdad headquarters of the Azm Alliance headed by prominent Sunni politician Khamis Khanjar. The US Embassy in Baghdad and the Baghdad International Airport were also targeted with rockets, marking the latest such incident. It is widely believed that the attacks are a result of the electoral losses suffered by the pro-Iran parties, with some groups looking to act as spoilers.

With the pace and intensity of IS attacks rising, however, attacks within Baghdad by pro-Iran factions can worsen the security climate and distract the ISF from effectively targeting the militants.

Egypt

- Cairo announces support for UN mediation in Sudan.
- US sales for military cargo aircraft and air defence radars approved.
- Suez Canal expansion due to finish July 2023.

Egypt announces support for United Nations mediation in Sudan; extends diplomatic contacts with Sudan and Ethiopia.

Following the announcement by the UN that it would form an intra-Sudanese political process aimed at ending the political crisis in the country, Egyptian officials expressed they would support the efforts and called for the parties in Sudan to choose a consensual transitional prime minister. The statement from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry noted that dialogue between the Sudanese sides would solve the current crisis.

Egyptian officials also said that they are willing to resume the Nile Dam talks with Ethiopia if the country has “political will” for a solution. Speaking in Muscat, Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry noted that his side is keen to reach a binding legal agreement over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). However, it appears that reaching an agreement will be harder than it seems. Speaking on January 24th, Ethiopian President Abiy Ahmed affirmed his country’s ambitions for a modern new economy and called on Egypt and Sudan to change their rhetoric regarding GERD.

Washington approves sale of C-130J aircraft and air defence radars to Egypt.

The US State Department announced on January 25th that it will sell a dozen C-130J aircraft and equipment to Egypt worth \$2.2 billion; as well as sale of SPS-48 air defence radar systems and related equipment worth \$355 million.

The sale, however, came with a warning from Secretary of State Antony Blinken, that the state of human rights has deteriorated and continues to worsen amidst arbitrary detentions, torture and other harsh measures against political dissidents. The Secretary called on US President Joe Biden to reassess the military cooperation between the US and Egypt and, where necessary, withhold funds that would go towards military aid.

Suez Canal expansion expected to finish July 2023. The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) announced that the project to expand parts of the Suez Canal would reach completion by July 2023, two years after it was launched. The expansion plans were accelerated following the grounding of Ever Given for six-days, during which traffic in the Canal reached a standstill. It is expected that the new expansions would increase the Canal’s capacity by six vessels.

Jordan

- World Bank warns of debt hampering Jordan's economic growth.
- New investment law promises to bring Jordan up to international standards but economists warn that effective implementation will be essential.
- Clashes erupt along Syrian border after Jordan's army encounters drug smugglers.

World Bank warns Jordanian economic growth to be hampered by debt. The latest Global Economic Prospect report published by the World Bank in early January noted that there are no expectations of acceleration of economic growth due to high levels of debt. The report warned that the debt levels are undermining the effectiveness and ability to implement policies that would address volatility. The report anticipated a growth rate for 2022 and the foreseeable future at 2.3%, below the anticipated global growth rate of 4.1% in 2022 and 3.2% in 2023.

Economists describe new investment law as a positive step; call for effective implementation. The changes to investment law are being developed by the Steering Committee for the Development of the Legislative Environment Regulating Investment, will aim to enhance investments by cutting red tape. Its main goal, according to Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh, is to attract Arab and foreign investors and put Jordanian businesses in line with best international practices. According to the Prime Minister, the changes in the law envisage creating a single window for establishing, registering and licensing economic activities, so that companies obtain a business licence within one day. It also pushes for reduction in production costs and regulates the investment and business environment in Jordan, in a way that contributes to promoting investment and reducing obstacles facing investors.

While economists praised the initiative, they noted that implementation will be more important. They noted that legally, Jordan has seen "great developments" in recent years but such developments did not translate to increases in investments.

27 killed in Syrian Border during clashes with drug smugglers. The Jordanian army announced on 27th January that its troops engaged in clashes with drug smugglers in Syria along the country's border, resulting in the deaths of 27 smugglers as they attempted to transport narcotic goods into Jordan. A Jordanian officer was among the dead. In the aftermath of the clashes, officials said that the army confiscated a large quantity of drugs.

Drug smuggling attempts from Syria into Jordan picked up significantly in recent years due to a combination of militias and criminal actors reappropriating pre-war pharmaceutical facilities for drug production and economic deprivation that makes such enterprises especially profitable. Jordanian officials have often accused Hezbollah and pro-Iran militias of facilitating the trade, a charge that has been denied by Hezbollah in particular.