



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

- Political situation deteriorates in Libya.
- Oil production suspended in major fields.
- Value of Libyan Dinar rises steadily through March.

Political situation deteriorates in Libya. On March 1st, the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) voted in Fathi Bashagha as Prime Minister with a majority vote of 92 out of 101. Bashagha, the country's former Minister of Interior, vowed to end the transitional periods in the country during his speech as he was sworn in.

However, the Tripoli-based Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity (GNU), Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, has refused to give up his office. Dbeibah accused the HoR of counting false votes and being part of Libya's problems, and cited a lack of quorum during the voting.

With the country seemingly inching closer to renewed fighting, the United Nations has stepped in to mediate between the two sides. Stephanie Williams, the top UN official in Libya, said that the solution to Libya's problems does not lie in the creation of rival administrations. Instead, she called on the HoR and the High Council of State - the Tripoli-based upper-house - to nominate six delegates to form a "joint committee dedicated to developing a consensual constitutional basis".

Oil production suspended in major fields. Libya's National Oil Company (NOC) announced on March 6th that production in two major oil fields in Libya's oil crescent were halted after an armed group shut down the valves delivering crude oil. The NOC officials noted that the closure was causing daily losses of around €32 million, corresponding to about 330,000 barrels per day. The pause comes at an inauspicious time. With oil prices around the world rising rapidly due to the Russian-Ukrainian War, oil-reliant Libya stands as one of the few MENA countries that could benefit from a windfall, or at least weather the rising commodity prices more effectively. However, the riches offered by the oil reserves have also frequently attracted armed groups who tried to leverage their control over oil production for influence.

Value of Libyan Dinar rises steadily through March. Despite political tensions in the country, the value of the Libyan Dinar against the US Dollar has climbed steadily since the start of March. Starting March just below a rate of LYD 4,5995 per \$1, the value of the Dinar rose steadily over the next two weeks, reaching a peak of LYD 4,6569 for \$1. The rise is likely related to anticipations of hydrocarbons windfall for Libya resulting from the aforementioned rises in crude oil prices. However, sustained disruptions to oil production and escalation of the political conflict stands to easily diminish confidence in the Dinar.

Yemen

- UNSC extends arms embargo to the whole of the Houthi movement.
- Red Cross and the UN plead with donors not to shift away from Yemen.
- Fuel crisis hits Houthi territories.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) extends arms embargo to the whole of the Houthi movement. The resolution, which passed on February 28th, was proposed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in response to the rising spate of attacks the country has faced. The vote was voted by 11 in favour and four abstentions. The vote saw dynamics of the conflict in Ukraine play out in the UNSC, with the UAE reportedly abstaining from backing a US resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine in return for securing Moscow's support in the UNSC.

The UNSC embargo came alongside a spate of new sanctions against the Houthis from the United States. These sanctions targeted a network that was accused of funnelling money to the Houthi movement. It is part of a wider UAE-led drive to take a "more aggressive stance" against the Houthis amidst battlefield losses by the group.

The US is now mulling designating the Houthis a terrorist group. However, there are fears such a move could negatively impact aid deliveries.

Red Cross and the UN plead with donors not to shift away from Yemen. Aid groups operating in Yemen are scrambling to ensure that the on-going war between Ukraine and Russia does not shift resources from Yemen. Katharina Ritz, the International Committee of the Red Cross' head of delegation in Yemen, warned that the world risks losing sight of the plight of the Yemeni people. While acknowledging the situation in Ukraine as severe, Ritz noted that aid to Yemen should not be dropped in favour of Ukraine. However, she did not offer solutions to the already-diminishing donor money to Yemen.

Ritz' calls were echoed by renowned actress Angelina Jolie, who travelled to Yemen, meeting displaced families being looked after by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). In a statement, Jolie described Yemen as one of the worst humanitarian crises and pledged to donate more money to support continued aid.

Fuel crisis hits Houthi territories. Houthi officials warned on March 2nd that the areas under its control are facing some of the worst fuel crisis since 2015. Issam Al-Mutawakel, a spokesman for the group's oil company, warned that the crisis is linked to the blocking of the oil tankers from reaching the port of Hodeidah and accused the Saudi-led Coalition of seizing ships.

The matter of oil deliveries has been a source of dispute between the Houthi authorities in Sanaa and the internationally-recognised government in exile. The latter requires all oil revenues to be deposited into a bank account not controlled by the Houthis, a condition Houthis reject.

As a result of the fuel crisis, there have been reports of protests in Sanaa, Saada, Amran, Hajjah, Taiz and Ibb.

United Nations warns that aid to Yemen will run out in March without funds.

According to the UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and UN Humanitarian Chief Martin Griffiths, nearly two-thirds of the major UN aid programmes are being scaled back or closed due to lack of funds even as the number of combat zones continue to multiply. Grundberg especially warned about rising incidents of civilian casualties, including a Coalition airstrike in a prison in Sanaa last month that left 70 dead, as well as the “alarming” rise of air raids in the residential areas of Sanaa and Hodeidah and warned that the conflict is spiralling amidst continued drone attacks by the Houthi Movement. Grundberg warned that despite these worsening conditions, aid agencies are running out of money, with 2021 already seeing the lowest level of funding received. In 2021, the UN humanitarian plan for Yemen received only \$2.27 billion out of its required \$3.85 billion.

Meanwhile, in a sign of further UN woes in Yemen, five UN workers were abducted in the Abyan Province while returning to Aden. The kidnappers are believed to be al-Qaeda linked. However, there have been no confirmations about their affiliations.

Saudi-led Coalition launches further airstrikes around Sanaa, gains ground near Marib.

The Saudi-led Coalition announced that it has destroyed a telecommunications system used by the Houthi movement to launch drones from Sanaa. Accusing the Houthis of using the facilities of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology in Sanaa for hostile operations, the Saudi officials called on civilians to vacate government buildings in the country’s capital.

In Marib, fighting continued, with the Houthi Movement still in the backfoot. The Saudi-led Coalition announced that its forces captured a number of sites in the Mala’a Mountains south of the city of Marib following airstrikes on Houthi positions in the area.

Lebanon

- Lebanon announces grain rations due to war in Ukraine.
- Lebanese Government condemns invasion of Ukraine.
- Candidates for upcoming Lebanese elections announced.

Lebanon announces grain rations due to war in Ukraine. The Lebanese Government announced that it would take rationing measures to limit grain usage in a bid to maintain bread supplies. The decision was made in response to the disruption of grain supplies from Ukraine as a result of the war, raising prices across the MENA region and threatening the already-fragile food security. Lebanon's Minister of Economy, Amin Salim, warned that Lebanon relies on Ukraine and Russia for some 50% to 60% of its wheat and warned that the situation could result in long-term disruptions to food supplies but warned against panic buying. He added that the country has enough grain reserves to last 45 days, should supplies be interrupted. Meanwhile, Minister for Industry, George Bouchkian, tweeted that Beirut is exploring alternative sources of grain imports, such as from Canada. Despite government efforts to quell worries, there are concerns among the public that wheat subsidies may no longer be available due to global price hikes.

Lebanese Government condemns invasion of Ukraine, is criticised by Hezbollah. Lebanon joined many countries around the world in joining the chorus of condemnations against Russia following the launch of the war against Ukraine. The statement by the Lebanese Foreign Ministry called on Russia to suspend all its military operations and withdraw its forces, returning to negotiations and a better means to finding a solution to the crisis. However, Beirut's stance was condemned by the Hezbollah, with Hezbollah MP and Minister of Labour, Mustafa Bayram, warning that the position violates Lebanon's neutrality and exposes the country to dangerous repercussions. Another Hezbollah MP, Ibrahim Al-Moussawi, called on the Lebanese Government to clarify what the country's foreign policy is. Indeed, the Russian Embassy in Beirut noted that it was "surprised" at Lebanon's stance on the matter.

Hezbollah's stance on the matter is unsurprising, given that the group has benefited from collaboration with Russian-backed forces in Syria, as well as Moscow's wider and generally-neutral approach to the so-called Axis of Resistance to which Hezbollah belongs. However, given that many neutral countries, most prominently Switzerland, have criticised Russia for the invasion, it is unlikely that Beirut will receive significant blowback over its stance. Nevertheless, factions friendly to Russia may make the matter into a rallying point for political support.

Candidates for upcoming Lebanese elections announced. Parties across Lebanon are announcing their parliamentary candidates as the March 15 deadline for registration draws closer. Already, around 100 candidates have registered for the 128 MP seats, with more candidacies expected as the deadline draws closer. The lists for candidates eligible to run will be announced in April upon which electoral campaigns will be launched. Elections

themselves are due to take place on May 12th, but Lebanese living abroad will cast their votes on May 6th and 8th.

Among the prominent names who announced their candidacy is Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who is running for another four-year parliamentary session. Indeed, initial reports suggest that the Amal Party he belongs to will retain most of their MPs, including those who are under suspicion for the Beirut Port blast of 2020. A similar statement was made by the Progressive Socialist Party, whose head, Walid Jumblatt, noted that the political conditions are not suitable for any significant changes to his parliamentary bloc. These will likely draw some criticisms from the Lebanese public hoping for a change in the Lebanese political establishment.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, announced that it will add more of the party's "young generation candidates" to the roster, likely in a bid to avoid these kind of criticisms directed at the country's political establishment.

Tunisia

- Tunisian President appoints judges to the Supreme Judiciary Council.
- Senior Ennahda official released from detention.
- Emirati investment group revives \$5 billion construction scheme.

Tunisian President appoints judges to the Supreme Judiciary Council. The Council replaced a previous body with the same name that was dissolved by President Kais Saied last month. The newly-appointed judges for the body, which is currently described as temporary, took their oaths on Monday, March 7th. The appointment of the judges is the latest in a series of moves which activists and opposition parties believe are aimed at empowering the President and curbing the rights gained following the Tunisian Revolution of 2011. Saied himself frame the battle as a battle against corruption that threatens to bring down the Tunisian state. He had accused the previous Supreme Judiciary Council of acting on behalf of political interests.

Senior Ennahda official released from detention. The Ennahda Party announced that its Vice President, Nouredine Bhairi, was released after being held in jail for two months, during which he went on hunger strike. According to the Tunisian Interior Ministry, Bhairi's arrest was lifted following the appointment of the new Supreme Judicial Council, and his case will now be investigated.

The Tunisian Government alleged Bhairi was held for illegal submission of passports and nationality documents and on suspicion of terrorism, without going into details. Ennahda claimed the charges were politically motivated.

Emirati investment group revives \$5 billion construction scheme. The Emirates-based Bukhatir Group announced on March 10th that it would relaunch a \$5 billion real estate project in Tunisia. Also known as the Tunis Sports City, the venture has been on hold for 15 years due to the 2008 financial crisis followed by the Tunisian Revolution of 2011. It would involve the construction of a golf course, sports academies, hotels and luxury villas in a lakeside northern suburb of the capital, Tunis. The decision is likely to be a boon for President Saied who linked his assumption of executive power to improving the country's economic prospects. The country has especially suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with unemployment reaching 18%. The first phase of the project is expected to be completed in 2026, and the third and final phase is expected to be completed by 2031.

Syria

- Syrian Government and Opposition trade accusations on sending fighters to Ukraine.
- Syrians face further cuts due to Ukraine conflict.
- Value of Syrian Pound Against US Dollar Drops.

Syrian Government and Opposition trade accusations on sending fighters to Ukraine. As the war between Russia and Ukraine escalates, there are growing rumours of Syrian fighters from both the Government and Opposition sides joining the conflict. On March 4th, a Russian intelligence brief claimed that the United States was using its presence in the Tanf region of the Syrian Desert to train Islamic State (IS) militants to send them to the Donbas region. Similar allegations were made by Damascus about the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) the next day.

Although the SNA has denied these allegations, there have been individual figures, such as Suheil Hammoud (better known as Abu TOW, in reference to his expertise with anti-tank TOW missiles) who have voiced interest in travelling to Ukraine in light of the Opposition factions' disunity and unwillingness to escalate in Syria. Some Chechens based in Idlib also voiced interest in travelling to Ukraine in response to the increasing participation of pro-Moscow Chechen fighters in Ukraine.

Similar allegations, however, were also made by the US which claimed on March 6th that Moscow is recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine. The allegations were seemingly based by local press outlets in Syria which reported that Russia was offering \$200 to \$300 to Syrians willing to "operate as guards".

While the exact numbers of those who have travelled to Ukraine to fight for either side is unknown, the announcement by the Ukrainian Government that it would create a foreign legion for anyone willing to support them was received positively by many prospective fighters, including from the US and the United Kingdom.

Syrians face further cuts due to Ukraine conflict. With the conflict in Ukraine causing widespread hikes to wheat and fuel prices across the MENA region, Damascus announced that it would make further cuts to its budget. Cuts will impact staples like wheat, sugar, oil and rice for the next two months, with rationing being put in place in a bid to make reserves last. The exchange market, already under tight controls, will also be further restricted. Muhammad Samer al-Khalil, Minister of Economy and External Trade, said that the Russian-controlled Crimean Peninsula had offered to export wheat to Syria and that Damascus was considering the offer. However, Crimea itself will likely be unable to meet the whole of Syria's needs, especially if the sea traffic in the Black Sea experiences further disruptions.

Value of Syrian Pound Against US Dollar Drops. After following a relatively steady trajectory of predictable dips and spikes over the past month, the value of the Syrian Pound against the US Dollar experienced some of its sharpest dips. On March 8th, the value of the

Syrian Pound reached a low of SYP 2,511.44 for \$1. Although the value of the Pound hovered around SYP2,511.79, its value has been fluctuating and it has so far failed to climb back to the average value of 2,512.50 that the Pound has been hovering around over the past month. It is likely that the anxieties over the conflict and anticipation of shortages were all factors in the drop.

Iraq

- Iraq attempts neutrality in Russia-Ukraine War.
- Federal court deems Anti-Corruption Committee unconstitutional.
- Iraqi Army announces plans for a border wall with Syria.

Iraq attempts neutrality in Russia-Ukraine War. The Iraqi Government has abstained from a United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In doing so, Iraq joins 31 countries, most prominently China and Iran, who abstained from the vote, as opposed to only five countries that supported Russia.

Iraq's position on the matter is indicative of the careful balancing act the country's political establishment has to engage in. The winner of the most recent elections, Muqtada al-Sadr, slammed the invasion as "absolutely useless". Iraqi officials participating in the Quartet Information Exchange and Coordination Centre – comprised of Russia, Iran, Syria and Iraq to coordinate intelligence against the Islamic State (IS) in the region – have reportedly expressed reservations that the war could disrupt the fight against the IS even as the country braces for possible attacks following the attempted prison break in the neighbouring Syria weeks earlier.

However, many militia factions in Iraq, especially those linked to Iran, are supportive of Russia and have made their support known in Baghdad and other major cities. These factions, especially those who fought in Syria, have positive views of Russia.

As a result, the Iraqi position likely highlights the need to prevent these external dynamics from impacting the country's domestic politics even as the country still grapples with government formation following the election.

Federal court deems Anti-Corruption Committee unconstitutional. On March 2nd, the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court ruled that the formation of the Anti-Corruption Committee mid-2020 by the Iraqi Prime Minister was unconstitutional and should therefore be dissolved. The Committee, formed to grapple with high corruption and terrorism cases, had already issued arrest warrants for 52 administrative and political officials suspects, 16 of whom received sentences. However, a challenge to the committee raised by the family of Ahmed Hamdawi Owaiedan, a Kataib Hezbollah member accused of killing Hisham al-Hashemi, a prominent anti-terrorism researcher, was accepted by the Federal Court, leading to the verdict.

In the aftermath of the verdict, Iraqi officials have accused the court of making politically-motivated decisions on sensitive cases, a charge denied by court officials. Regardless, the fracas surrounding the Anti-Corruption Committee will likely damage the country's long-standing fight against corruption that has hampered development and security across the country.

Iraqi Army announces plans for a border wall with Syria. The announcement was made by Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for Operations, Lieutenant-General Qais Al-

Muhammadawi on March 3rd. The announcement noted that the Iraqi Security Forces have been working on securing the porous border between the two countries, with new measures such as drones and thermal cameras installed. He further added that the concrete wall is intended to supplement these measures and will extend along the border. He further added that the wall will be maintained by the Iraqi Army, instead of the Border Guard forces of the Ministry of Interior.

Egypt

- Egypt braces for economic fallout of Russia-Ukraine war.
- Egypt criticises Sudan for establishment of Russian base.
- Value of Egyptian Pound sees sharp fluctuations.

Egypt braces for economic fallout of Russia-Ukraine war. Economic experts warn that the country, which is the biggest wheat importer worldwide and relies significantly on tourism from Russia and Ukraine, will result in significant negative impacts for the country. In particular, Russia and Ukraine make up 88% of Egypt's wheat imports. The fighting in eastern Ukraine, where many agricultural lands are located, has reportedly already caused supply disruptions. These disruptions were compounded by shipping disruptions along the Black Sea and payment disruptions resulting from the sanctions. Egyptian officials have, so far, noted that there is little cause for concern and the country has over four months of wheat reserves and will supplement them with local harvests in April. Officials also noted that they are exploring alternative options for purchase. However, rising costs due to many other countries also seeking alternative sellers will remain a problem. Indeed, the prices of wheat products in Egypt already rose by 22% since the war broke out.

The tourism sector faces similar challenges. In the resort city of Sharm al-Sheikh, booking from Russia and Ukraine had already declined by 30% over February, and this situation is set to worsen with the war in motion, hampering Cairo's hopes for recovery from COVID-19.

These losses will be compounded by rising energy prices and resulting inflation as the price of the Brent crude rises above \$100, forcing Cairo to adjust subsidies or outright remove them, resulting in further knock-on effects.

Egypt criticises Sudan for establishment of Russian base. Egyptian officials expressed that they are "displeased" with the Sudanese authorities after the deputy head of Sudan's ruling council, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, announced that a Russian naval base would be established in the country. Egyptian officials reportedly deemed the development a risk to security in the Red Sea, as well as its regional influence, despite reassurances from Sudanese officials that the base offers no security threats to Egypt. Egyptian officials are likely concerned that the construction of the base could make Khartoum less amenable to Egyptian demands as Cairo attempts to draw Khartoum to its side as part of the Nile Dam dispute with Ethiopia.

Value of Egyptian Pound sees sharp fluctuations. The Egyptian Pound's value against the US Dollar experienced sharp fluctuations over the past two weeks. The fluctuations, likely resulting from the Russian-Ukrainian War, saw the value of \$1 fall to lows of EGP15,6795 before spiking back to a two-month high of EGP15,8176. The value of the Pound fell sharply shortly afterwards and has since fluctuated daily between EGP15,7145 and EGP15,7495 for \$1.

Jordan

- Jordan's King meets Israeli Foreign Minister.
- World Bank confirms Jordanian grain stocks sufficient.

Jordan's King meets Israeli Foreign Minister. The Jordanian King Abdullah II met the Israeli Foreign Minister, Yair Lapid, on March 10th during which they discussed the bilateral ties that have recently been bolstered by a new water-for-energy deal. However, the two sides also discussed potential tensions in Jerusalem amidst upcoming Ramadan celebrations, as well as the spate of stabbing attacks by Palestinians in recent days. This year, the Muslim holiday of Ramadan is due to coincide with the Christian holiday of Easter and the Jewish holiday of Passover. As such, the Jordanian officials are expecting potential clashes in the vicinity of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

World Bank confirms Jordanian grain stocks sufficient. A statement from Jordan's Planning Ministry on March 10th noted that the Jordanian Government has been assessing strategic grain stocks to ascertain food security after the eruption of the war between Russia and Ukraine raised food prices across the MENA region, leading to fears of food insecurity. Officials noted that the Kingdom produces 100,000 tonnes of grain annually and added that the local production, in conjunction with the existing stocks, will be enough to help Jordan weather the fallout of the war.