

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Libya – President Bouteflika to resign by the end of April after weeks of mass protests



Last Monday, Abdelaziz Bouteflika's office declared that the President will step down before the expiration of his fourth term on the 28th of April. On Sunday, Algeria's presidency had announced the formation of a new caretaker government in charge of overseeing the transition process. The cabinet is led by recently-appointed PM Noureddine Bedoui, who assumed his duties on the 11th of March amid widespread protests calling for the definitive departure of the President. As his former allies steadily dropped away, the final blow for the ailing President came last week when the Army Chief of Staff called on the country's Constitutional Council to declare the veteran politician unfit to hold office.

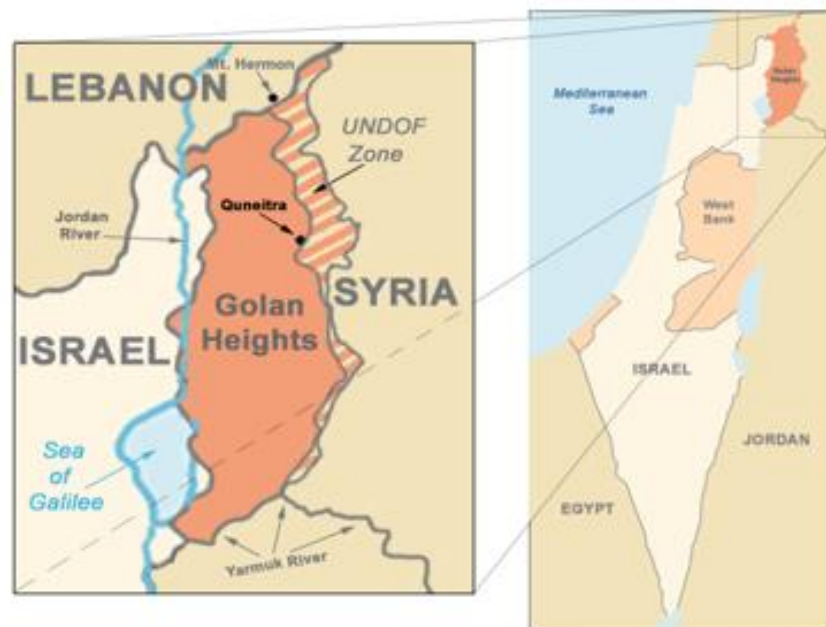
According to many commentators, protest movements are likely to continue despite his resignation. Indeed, much of the ruling elite he put in place – which demonstrators refer to as “the system” – is still in power.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, “Algeria's Bouteflika names new government amid ongoing protests”, 03/31/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2HPUCYk>.
- *The New York Times*, “Algeria’s Ruler, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Agrees to Resign”, 04/01/19, available at: <https://nyti.ms/2CQPWUB>.
- *France Info*, “Démission de Bouteflika: ‘Les Algériens ne veulent pas d’une succession organisée’ estime un politologue spécialiste du monde arabe”, 04/02/19, available at : <https://bit.ly/2U7Z4hU>.

Levant

#Syria: US isolated at UN Security Council over Golan decision



The United States came under sharp criticism from the other fourteen UN Security Council members last Wednesday for its decision to recognise Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The UNSC emergency meeting had been requested by Syria after Donald Trump signed a presidential proclamation on the issue in the presence of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on the 21st of March. Israel seized the

strategically-important Golan Heights from Syria in the closing stages of the 1967 Six-Day war, and effectively annexed it in 1981 – a move that triggered the Security Council Resolution 497 declaring the Israeli decision “null and void and without international legal effect”. Since 1974, a UN peacekeeping operation – UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) – is deployed across the territory. The Council’s members raised concerns about “broader consequences of recognising illegal annexation”, as well as about the future of the UNDOF mandate.

To know more about this topic:

- *World Israel News*, “UN Security Council criticizes US over Golan recognition”, 03/28/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2ODpP7U>.
- *Reuters*, “U.S. isolated at U.N. Security Council over Golan decision”, 03/27/19, available at: <https://reut.rs/2uDIkQD>.
- United Nations Website, “Security Council Members Regret Decision by United States to Recognize Israel’s Sovereignty over Occupied Syrian Golan”, 03/27/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2uwt73J>.

Gulf

[#SaudiArabia](#): State-owned oil company Aramco named the world's most profitable business in 2018



On the 1st of April, oil giant Saudi Aramco revealed it made the world’s biggest corporate profit in 2018. According to a rare glimpse into its finances, the company generated a revenue of roughly \$356

billion last year, racking up a net income of \$111.1bn. It handily surpassed Apple (\$59.5 billion in net income in 2018) and other major oil firms, such as Royal Dutch Shell (\$23.9 billion) and Exxon Mobil (\$20.8 billion). The details of Aramco's profits were disclosed as it prepares to sell bonds on the international market to help finance the purchase of a 70%-stake in Saudi petrochemical behemoth SABIC for \$69.1 billion, effectively merging the kingdom's two largest companies. In this context, Moody's Corporation rated the firm A1, a high evaluation but below that of large Western oil companies. Indeed, the lower rating reflects the concentration of most of Aramco's operations in Saudi Arabia and the government's dependence on oil and gas revenue.

To know more about this topic:

- *Bloomberg*, "Aramco Unveils Financial Secrets of World's Most Profitable Firm", 04/01/19, available at: <https://bloom.bg/2HZl4V4>.
- *Middle East Eye*, "Saudi Aramco now the most profitable company in the world, say credit agencies", 04/01/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2FT8Ewz>.

#ArabInsight

#ArabSummit: A 'League of their own'? A critical insight into the 30th Arab Summit



On the 31st of March, the Tunisian capital hosted the 30th annual Arab League summit. The meeting came against the backdrop of the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen, rival authorities in Libya, regional splits over Iran's influence in the Middle East, and a lingering boycott of Qatar by four fellow League members. What is more, among the eight absent leaders were Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika and the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, as they contend with massive demonstrations against their

longstanding rule. On the 1st of April, the Dean of the Jordanian Media Institute Basim Tweissi published on the independent newspaper *Al Ghad* an article titled “This region is devoid of politics”, where he critically analyses the content and outcomes of the summit.

Predictably, Arab leaders sought to paper over long-running regional tensions by condemning Donald Trump’s decision to proclaim Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights and by renewing a call for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Yet, echoing many Arab and international analysts, Tweissi takes a tough stand towards the participants’ declarations, blaming their alleged underlying hypocrisy. By alluding to the meagre Arab reaction to the US’ recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel in December 2017, the author affirms that the need to maintain a strong working relationship with the White House is bound to prevail over any concrete action. These criticisms are more likely directed towards GCC countries, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE. According to the writer, such an approach comes at the expense of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Besides, Tweissi highlights that protest movements in Algeria and Sudan received little if no attention, much in the same way the League responded to the 2011 Arab uprisings. In this respect, an Arab Civil Society parallel summit took place in Tunis, with the aim to put pressure on regional leaders regarding the urgent problems of Arab countries and people.

The journalist concludes by qualifying the Arab participants as “physical atoms”, who fail to represent the interests of a “real community”. As a result, “the summit of determination and solidarity” – as the Tunisian President Essebsi dubbed it – displayed much rhetorical solidarity and theoretical determination, reflecting the gap between written resolutions and effective policy implementation *a posteriori*.

[The article is available in Arabic at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2HR3tzi>]

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As a general disclaimer, the article does not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation