

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **North Africa**

**#Libya** – As LNA troops clash with GNA loyal forces in Tripoli, the UN postpones the Libyan National Conference



On the 4th of April, General Khalifa Haftar, who leads the Libyan National Army (LNA) in the eastern part of the country, ordered his troops to enter the capital Tripoli, where the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) headed by PM Fayeza al-Sarraj is seated. The move came ahead of planned UN-backed talks – set for the 14th to the 16th of April – aimed at developing a ‘road map’ towards political reconciliation for the divided country. In response to the LNA’s offensive, the

GNA has authorised a military campaign dubbed “Volcano of Rage”, supported by several militias in the western cities of Libya. In this context, an array of international leaders – including the G7 members – have urged both parties to de-escalate tensions. Yet, on the 9th of April, the UN Special Envoy to Libya Ghassan Salamé was forced to indefinitely postpone the Libyan National Conference as “the renewed violence undermined the minimum confidence to launch any fruitful dialogue”.

To know more about this topic:

- *Atlantic Council*, “Libya: Back on The Brink of a Civil War?”, 04/05/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2YZAIWt>.
- *Al Jazeera*, “Libya: Air raids target Haftar's advancing forces near Tripoli”, 04/06/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2UhX8nf>.
- *The Guardian*, “UN postpones Libya national conference amid fighting in Tripoli”, 04/09/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2P2rtAq>.

## Levant

[#Lebanon](#) – Russia expands influence in Lebanon’s energy sector



Last Thursday, Russian Ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Zasytkin declared that his country was interested in building modern power plants in Lebanon, in order to help it solve its longstanding electricity crisis. The announcement came shortly after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo concluded his Middle East tour, during which he labelled Russia as an adversary of US regional allies – in addition

to Iran and China – in terms of energy and security in the eastern Mediterranean. Pompeo also reportedly planned to set “red lines” on Moscow projects in Lebanon while in Beirut on the 22nd-23rd of March. Although the United States maintains a significant degree of diplomatic clout in Lebanese energy matters, Russian investments in the sector have far outpaced the Americans’ ones. Indeed, the Levantine country and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate on oil and gas in October 2013, and since then cooperation in this field has steadily intensified.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Daily Star*, “Russia willing to help build power plants in Lebanon: envoy”, 04/04/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2VBxyGa>.
- *Al Monitor*, “Russia expands ties in Lebanon’s oil and gas sector”, 04/10/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Z3yQw3>.

## Gulf

[#SaudiArabia](#) – Riyadh strengthens ties with Iraq to curb Iranian influence



Last Thursday, during the second meeting of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council, Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Commerce and Investment, Majid Al-Qasabi, announced a one-billion-dollar aid package for Iraq. On this occasion, Al-Qasabi inaugurated a new Saudi consulate in Baghdad, pledging stronger bilateral relationships after decades of no diplomatic links. Indeed, the Kingdom cut off ties with Iraq after former ruler Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait (1990) and only reopened its embassy in Baghdad in 2015. Yet, the ambassador was soon recalled to Riyadh in protest over the influence of

Iran-backed Shiite militias on the Iraqi territory. Saudi Arabia's pivot to Iraq is presumably aimed at curbing Teheran's deep-rooted political leverage in the country. The diplomatic re-engagement came just a few weeks after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Baghdad in an attempt to cement his country's clout in Iraq.

To know more about this topic:

- *Bloomberg*, "Saudi Arabia Makes Inroads in Iraq to Curb Iranian Influence", 04/04/19, available at: <https://bloom.bg/2VvYQxL>.
- *Al Jazeera*, "Saudi Arabia reopens consulate in Iraq, pledges \$1bn in aid", 04/04/19, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Kmg7bI>.

## #ArabInsight

#Algeria – What is next after Bouteflika's resignation?



On the 2nd of April, Abdelaziz Bouteflika decided to step down. Just a few days before, he had announced the formation of a caretaker government, which included the recently appointed PM Nouredine Bedoui. Bouteflika's resignation triggers Art. 2 of the Algerian constitution, according to which presidential election should now take place within ninety days. In his article titled "The army and the popular movement in Algeria", Adel Nasser Jaby, Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Algiers, provides a portrait of the two key players of the country's current developments and discusses future prospects.

As far as the protest movement is concerned, the author notices that its main strength resided in its clear strategic vision – i.e. the departure of Bouteflika and his entourage – instantiated in the slogan *Yetna7aw Ga3* (“Clear them all out”). If the first step has already been achieved with the President’s resignation, much of the opposition rejected the transitional executive, calling instead for a government made up of people with no prior involvement in politics to organise future elections. According to Jaby, a potential risk for the movement is the difficulty of remaining unified in a power *vacuum*.

The final blow for the ailing President came when the Army Chief of Staff called on the Constitutional Council to declare him unfit to rule. Since Algeria’s independence, the army has played a significant role in choosing the country’s civilian leaders. After Bouteflika’s resignation, the military sought to paint itself as a neutral actor that could act as a guarantor for a transition process within the existing constitution. However, it is unclear how much the army is willing to concede to the demonstrators. Inevitably, comparisons have been drawn with the Egyptian case, where General al-Sisi took power by ousting Mohammad Morsi in 2013. Yet, the author takes a more nuanced stand, underlining that the Armée Nationale Populaire – as its name tells – is made up of *people*, not only privileged citizens, and has benefited from the sociological and demographic transformations experienced by the country in terms of education and even feminisation. Furthermore, it is perceived as less corrupt than its Egyptian counterpart and not nearly as dominant in the economy.

In a nutshell, Algeria’s political direction will much depend on the evolving relationship between the protest movement and the powerful military. Besides, long-term impediments may still prevent meaningful change, notably the increasingly precarious state of the economy.

[The article is available in Arabic at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2I2W0xn>]

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