

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Egypt – Tensions growing between Egypt and Ethiopia over Renaissance Dam Project



Egypt and Ethiopia's leaders have agreed to restart discussions aimed at finding a deal over the hydropower dam Ethiopia is building along the Nile, an Egyptian presidency spokesman said. The announcement came after this Thursday's meeting between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, on the sidelines of a Russia-Africa summit in the Black Sea resort of Sochi.

Last week had seen tensions growing between the two countries with both sides declaring that, if a negotiated agreement could not be found, the military option is on the table.

The main issue regarding the Renaissance Dam is the time needed for the artificial basin to be filled with water. In this regard, the Ethiopian government hopes that the dam, which is nearly two-thirds complete, will start generating power by 2021 at the latest - then meeting its growing energy needs. Egypt, instead, fears the project will allow Ethiopia to control the river's flow, thus reducing the quantity of water the country drains from it. Keeping in mind that Egypt draws almost all of its fresh water from the Nile, this issue becomes particularly sensitive for the country, which is expected to witness a water shortage soon. According to predictions made by the United Nations, Egypt will start suffering from water scarcity by 2025 - even without the dam being built.

To know more about this topic:

- *Associated Press*, Egypt's options dwindle as Nile talks break down. 22/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2pQx9VD
- *BBC News*, Abiy Ahmed: No force can stop Ethiopia from building dam. 22/10/19, available at: bbc.in/32OpANQ
- *Reuters*, Egypt to press for outside mediator in Ethiopia dam dispute. 20/10/19, available at: reut.rs/31RBchO
- *International Crisis Group*, Calming the Choppy Nile Dam Talks. 23/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2pWE7YX

Gulf

#Saudi Arabia – Aramco IPO Delayed for the Second Time in a Year



Last Thursday Aramco, the world's biggest oil company, was expected to launch the domestic sale of a one-to-two percent stake, but the formalisation of the Initial Public Offering has been hampered by

continuing valuation concerns - exacerbated by September attacks on Aramco's Abqaiq and Khurais plants. Indeed, market estimates do not match the \$2 trillion valuation desired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's, assessing the value of the company at approximately \$1,5 trillion. This is the second delay since Riyadh pulled its first attempt at an IPO last year.

There are three elements that investors are mainly taking into account. The first is the price of oil, the second are the geopolitical tensions in the region and the third regards the governance of the company that would remain in Saudi government hands.

The delay is now also raising doubts about the sustainability of Vision 2030, an investment program that aims at diversifying the Saudi economy in order to make it less dependable on fossil fuels. To achieve its goal, the project needs investments for at least \$100 billion and the only way for the Saudi government to raise such an amount of money, apart from introducing taxes, is to hit its \$2 trillion valuation in the Aramco IPO.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Was Aramco listing delayed to rope in anchor investors? 22/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2BJWG5v
- *Reuters*, Aramco's latest IPO delay is a triple fail. 18/10/19, available at: reut.rs/2PkoCoq
- *The Washington Post*, Saudi Aramco Needs to Get Realistic About Its IPO. 21/10/19, available at: wapo.st/2JmBlmH
- *Al Arabiya*, Aramco IPO to shakeup Saudi market, long-term positive. 17/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2p3kLLD

Levant

#Syria – A Deal Between Russia and Turkey Halts Military Offensive in Northeast Syria



On Wednesday morning, the Turkish Army stopped its incursion into the Kurdish controlled area of northern Syria. The decision came after the Tuesday's agreement between President Erdoğan of Turkey and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, centred on the retreat of Kurdish fighters from the Turkish-Syrian border.

The deal calls for Russian and Turkish troops to fill a military vacuum created by the sudden United States withdrawal from northern Syria this month. Moscow and Damascus will supervise the relocation of Kurdish fighters and weaponry to the depth of 29 km from their current positions. Starting from the end of the month, a joint Russian-Turkish force will then begin patrolling the entire border area, with the exception of the *de facto* Kurdish capital, Qamishli.

Kurdish authorities were not involved in the talks and have yet to respond to the deal, while President Trump saluted the deal on Twitter as a “[big success](#)”.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, Turkey and Russia agree on deal over buffer zone in northern Syria. 22/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2Pl5d6H
- *France 24*, Russian military police deploy in Syria's Kobani as part of deal with Turkey. 24/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2qJS1OK

- *Associated Press*, After withdrawal, Trump shifts focus to Syria's oil fields. 25/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2Jlp5TD
- *The Times of Israel*, Syria says Turkish-led forces attacked its troops, killing some. 25/10/19, available at: bit.ly/2JlpwNL

#ArabInsight

By [Elena Tosti Di Stefano](#)

#Lebanon – A look into the slogans of the Lebanese protests



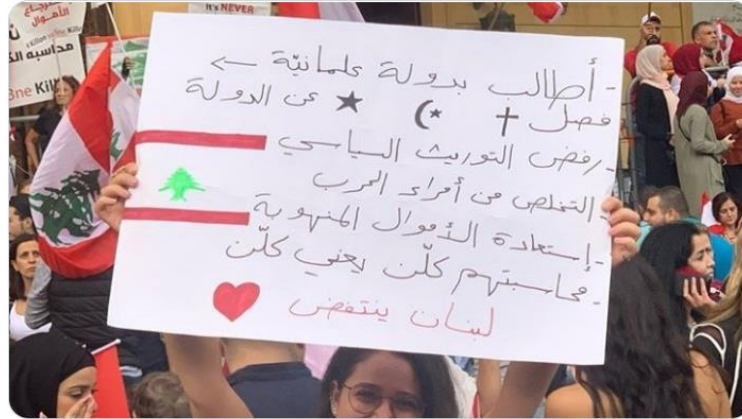
After a week of mass demonstrations, Lebanese protesters are refusing to abandon the streets. The popular refrain of the 2011 Arab uprising “*al-shaab yurid isqat al-nizam*” (“the people want to topple the regime”) reigns supreme among the hundreds of thousands of people who have poured into Beirut and multiple cities across the country, triggering the largest protests Lebanon has seen since 2005. The mobilisations broke out on the 17th of October over the government’s now-abandoned initiative to impose new taxes, including on WhatsApp voice calls. Since then, the scope of protests widened, turning into calls for the entire political class to step down. This week, we provide a short account of the current scenario drawing on ingenious street slogans and contents appeared on social media platforms, that convey a mix of defiance, humour, and resilience.



naghamb @naghamb · 1h

I dream of a secular lebanon

#العلمانية_هي_الحل #كلن_يعني_كلن #لبنان_ينتفض



The Twitter post above is emblematic of the Lebanese requests. The text reads: “I demand a secular country; separation of religion from government; rejection of political inheritance; removal of the warlords [the current political figures who were warlords during the civil war (1975-1990), *n.d.r.*]; retrieval of stolen money; holding everyone accountable”. The picture is accompanied by the most popular hashtags used by protesters: لبنان_ينتفض (“*Lebnan_yantafid*”), meaning “Lebanon revolts”; كلن_يعني_كلن (“*killon_ya’ne_killon*”), i.e. “everyone means everyone”; and, finally, العلمانية_هي_الحل (“*almaniya_hiya_al-hall*”), namely “secularism is the solution”.

“We need leaders not in love with money but in love with justice. Not in love with publicity but in love with humanity”, says a banner brandished in Martyrs' Square, in central Beirut. The demonstrators point the finger at a discredited political elite accused of rampant corruption, inability to improve crippling economic conditions as well as to provide basic public services. In a (vain) attempt to defuse the protests, PM Saad Hariri had unveiled last Monday an emergency economic reforms package, including a 50% cut in salaries of current and former politicians and the imposition of tax banks to help reduce public debt.



The image above shows a placard held by a protester during a rally in the capital; it states: “When we say all of you [should leave *n.d.r.*], we mean all of you. You [the political class *n.d.r.*] are sectarian. We are for coexistence”. Remarkably for a society divided along sectarian lines, Sunni, Shia, Christian and Druze have united in their anti-government opposition. Thirty years after the Taif Accord, demonstrators are now asking for an end to Lebanon’s sectarian political system, which they say has created networks of patronage and clientelism. As noted by constitutional lawyer Lara Saade on [Al Jazeera](#), "constitutional crises and political deadlocks have frequently jeopardised the viability of the Lebanese power-sharing [arrangement] in the years that followed [Taif]", echoing the frustrations expressed by many Lebanese protesters.



In conclusion, the slogan “Happiest depressed people”, carried by young Lebanese, succinctly captures the conflicting emotions experienced by protesters; amid distress, it brings a message of resilience and hope for the future.

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