

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Algeria - Courts paralysed by judges' strike



Starting from Sunday, 27th of October, Algerian judges and prosecutors embarked on an open-ended strike that has been paralysing the activities of courts all over the country since then. The action came after the Ministry of Justice carried out an unprecedented reshuffle of the judiciary earlier this month, with a move that affected 3,000 magistrates out of a total of approximately 6,000.

The National Union of Magistrates defined the shake-up as “[a stranglehold by the executive over the power of the judiciary](#)”, while the Ministry, for its part, defended the decision by claiming that such changes had been “[unanimously approved by members of the Judicial Council](#)”.

This resolution took place in a particularly complex moment for the country's politics and it might have an impact on presidential elections, scheduled for the 12th of December. Indeed, within the Algerian system, magistrates are responsible for overseeing the course of elections as well as for recording vote results in each municipality, thus playing a crucial role during the unfolding electoral process.

To know more about this topic:

- *Le Monde Afrique*, En Algérie, une grève « illimitée » des magistrats pour l'indépendance de la justice, 27/10/19: bit.ly/36n3uE4
- *Al Arabiya*, Algeria judges launch open-ended strike ahead of polls, 28/10/19: bit.ly/339pzUU
- *Middle East Eye*, Algeria judges launch strike ahead of contentious presidential polls, 27/10/19: bit.ly/2Nxxw8K2

Levant

[#Syria](#) - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi killed in a raid in northern Syria by US Special Forces



On Saturday night, 26th of October, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a raid carried out by US Special Operations forces in northwest Syria. He ignited his explosive vest and killed himself and three of his children after having run into a dead-end tunnel. The news was officially released by President Trump the morning after, in a press conference at the White House.

Baghdadi spent his last months in an isolated villa in Barisha, a village located in a part of the Idlib Province dominated by rival jihadist groups and hundreds of miles away from the Islamic State's

former territory. According to Kurdish intelligence, information on al-Baghdadi's location came from a source that was a very close confidant of the ISIS leader.

On Thursday, through its Amaq news agency, the Islamic State officially confirmed the death of its leader, also announcing the appointment of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi as his successor and new head of the group.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, Nowhere left to run: how the US finally caught up with Isis leader Baghdadi, 27/10/19: bit.ly/2pkmjHA
- *The New York Times*, Leader's Death Will Damage ISIS, but Not Destroy It, 27/10/19: nyti.ms/2NuYWD0
- *CNN*, A spy stole ISIS leader Baghdadi's underwear for DNA test, Kurds say, 29/10/19: cnn.it/2qdNcwD

Middle East

#Iraq - Protestors call for Prime Minister resignation while demanding for wide political changes



On Tuesday, 29th of October, tens of thousands of anti-government demonstrators amassed in central Baghdad and other Iraqi cities as one of the country's most powerful Shiite clerics, Moqtada al-Sadr, called for sweeping changes to the political system.

“Today, I will not hide it from you, I have reached a dead end. It is time for us to have a big shock to face the crisis”. With these words, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri announced his resignation on the 29th of October, 13 days after nationwide demonstrations broke out across Lebanon (see [#ArabInsight n. 25](#)). For less than two years, the three-time PM has led a national unity government, composed of most of the country’s rival factions, normally divided on sectarian lines. Soon after acknowledging Hariri’s departure, President Michel Aoun called for a new, “clean” government in which ministers would be “chosen according to their expertise and experience, rather than political affiliation”; in the meantime, the current cabinet will continue on a caretaker basis until a new executive is formed. In line with the Constitution, the President is now expected to launch consultations with the heads of parliamentary blocs to discuss the appointment of a new PM.

Hariri’s decision to step down satisfied one of the requests of the hundreds of thousands of citizens who took the street in the past weeks. What will be next? Before analysing the possible scenarios identified by the Arab press, we consider it interesting to present the points of view of four young Lebanese on the current situation in their country and future prospects.

“The WhatsApp tax idea was the straw that broke the camel’s back. But we are not experiencing a mere ‘WhatsApp revolution’. Also, calling it a ‘movement’ is underestimating our goals” – affirmed Jad Safwan, a 23-year-old policy analyst who took part to the demonstrations. “Now, the people of Lebanon want two things: the abolition of the confessional (i.e. sectarian) power-sharing system; and a functioning, non-corrupt judicial system”. Concerning the rationale behind the leaderless nature of the revolts, Jad observed that “putting all our hopes in one person would likely produce bad results, and Lebanon’s history is emblematic of this assumption. Indeed, the ruling class would be able to threaten or corrupt such a leadership body”. About future developments, he argued that: “Just like we will pressure the President and current parliament to appoint a new temporary Prime Minister who is not affiliated with the traditional parties, we will also pressure that PM to form a cabinet of technocrats not affiliated with the previous parties”. On this last point, Ahmad H., a post-graduate student at the American University of Beirut, said that “a technocratic government would be a satisfactory result for the people, however clear criteria for candidate selection has to be identified”. Nevertheless, he believes that “ironically, Hariri will still remain Prime Minister in the new-formed government”.

Amal H., aged 24, followed the demonstrations from Dubai, where she moved a year ago due to the lack of job opportunities in her homeland. She told us that “Rafic Hariri’s resignation is a first step, however there are other measures that need to be taken by the parliament for the revolution to succeed, notably the approval of early election. Yet, [the Shi’ite group, n.d.r.] Hezbollah and the [Maronite-Christian, n.d.r.] Free Patriotic Movement – who have the parliamentary majority – will keep trying to prevent these demands from happening, because they want to maintain their grip on power”. In this

respect, she referred to Hezbollah chief Nasrallah's fierce opposition to the government's departure, as well as the recent scenes of violence in Beirut that saw supporters of Hezbollah and Amal clashing with protesters and security forces, amid rumours of Hariri's decision to quit. In sum, "there is a victory on the one side, and a possible security issue on the other".

Finally, Ribal K., a 30-year-old Lebanese engineer, took a slightly critical stance towards the demonstrators, particularly underlying the negative effects of a likely political vacuum on the country's crumbling economy. "Despite fair social demands, the protests have led to adverse outcomes: 1. The PM's resignation weakens the current cabinet's role and freezes ongoing reforms necessary to obtain CEDRE's aids (Conference for international donors and investors to support Lebanon's economy), without a clear alternative; 2. The banks closure has led to a backlog in dollar demand from importers and other businesses; 3. This financial fact fragilised confidence, including Lebanese diaspora remittances (the fuel of the country's economy) and the USD/LBP peg". According to Ribal, "street pressure should be used to force the authority in place to meet social demands, while using it to change the authority itself might drag the country into economic collapse, chaos, and insecurity".

Based on the opinion of the four interviewees and articles published on Arab newspapers and online information platforms, we may single out three possible future scenarios. In particular, we will refer to three pieces of writing appeared, respectively, on [Al Jazeera](#), [Arabi21](#), and [L'Orient-Le Jour](#). Several commentators agree that the most likely scenario after parliamentary consultations is one of a new government headed by Hariri but composed of independent figures and experts to appease the street. In this regard, Sami Atallah, Director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, told Al Jazeera that Hariri's definitive resignation could make accessing the CEDRE funds extremely difficult, as the PM inherited from his father strong ties with Western nations. Moreover, the presence of a pro-Western figure at the head of the cabinet has also shielded Lebanon from collectively paying the price of increasing US sanctions on Hezbollah. In the second scenario, the current executive would remain as a caretaker government in the foreseeable future, with the ruling class hedging its bets on a waiting game. Finally, the formation of an independent government of experts headed by an independent would most satisfy protesters; however, this option is highly improbable, as it would exclude established political parties.

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