

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## North Africa

**#Libya** – Erdogan declares that Turkey could send troops in support of Tripoli's government



On Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that, if asked, Turkey could deploy troops in Libya, siding with the UN-supported government in Tripoli. Erdogan, in the last months, has become the main sponsor of Fayeze al-Sarraj's government supporting it against Khalifa Haftar's forces.

Erdogan's comments came after Russian support enabled Haftar's army to renew its advance on Tripoli after it was stalled at the outskirts of the city in mid-April. The presence of Russian contractors in the

country and their use of advanced air power and guided artillery, as well as trained snipers, is tipping the balance of war in favour of the Libyan National Army (LNA).

This announcement also came weeks after a series of security and military cooperation agreements were reached between Turkey and the Tripoli-based government. Among them paramount has been a maritime border agreement that was signed last week and that outraged Greece, Egypt and Cyprus while giving Turkey a new economic stake in the country.

Find out more about the presence of Russian contractors in Libya in our *Arab Dispatch* [n°23](#) and [n°27](#).

*To know more about this topic:*

- *New York Times*, As Rivals Fight for Control of Libya, Erdogan Says Turkey May Jump In. 10/12/19: <https://nyti.ms/35fZHr7>
- *The Guardian*, Libya arms embargo being systematically violated by UN states. 9/12/19: <https://bit.ly/2Ec7bjm>
- *Al Jazeera*, Multiple foreign armed groups involved in Libya conflict: UN. 11/12/19: <https://bit.ly/35hGENc>
- *Associated Press*, Concerned EU weighs response to Turkey-Libya border deal. 9/12/19: <https://bit.ly/36tmP5J>

## Levant

### #Lebanon – Political crisis continues after the main candidate drops out



On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> of December, the businessman Samir Khatib declared that he was not available to lead the country's next government. President Aoun decided to postpone for a week consultation with the country's political parties in order to find a new candidate for the post of Prime Minister. Mr Khatib's decision came after he realised he did not have the backing of the Lebanon's Sunni Muslim establishment.

This decision further deepens Lebanon's political crisis that started in October with mass protests against the entire political class. Lebanese elites are being blamed for state corruption and for the worst economic crisis since the civil war.

Meanwhile on Wednesday the Members of the International Support Group for Lebanon (ISGL) met in Paris where they affirmed the necessity for the country to form a stable and credible government in order access international financial aid.

Find out more in our *Arab Dispatch* [n°23](#), [n°25](#) and [n°26](#).

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Associated Press*, Main Lebanon PM candidate withdraws from consideration. 9/12/19:  
<https://bit.ly/2Phi1ur>
- *Le Figaro*, Liban: le nom de Saad Hariri ressurgit pour le poste de Premier ministre. 8/12/19:  
<https://bit.ly/38BNzDa>
- *Al Jazeera*, Nations urge Lebanon to form 'credible' government to unlock aid. 11/12/19:  
<https://bit.ly/2EgeJ4k>

## Gulf

### #Saudi Arabia – Aramco becomes the most valuable company in the world



On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> of December, Saudi Aramco started trading 1,5% of its shares on the Riyadh's stock exchange. The company quickly surpassed its \$1,7 trillion initial valuation when shares in Saudi Aramco shot up by 10% to \$9,38, the maximum daily increase allowed by the exchange. The market listing kept rising on Thursday with shares reaching the value of \$10,29. This drove the company to a more than \$2 trillion valuation making Aramco, by far, the world's biggest company.

While most commentators recognised the success of the IPO, they also pointed out that, in order to achieve its goal, Aramco sold shares of the company almost exclusively to local actors because of the enduring scepticism of foreign investors. The surge in trading could also be linked to pressures made by the government to investors close to the throne in order to make succeed the listing.

Big foreign investors were sceptical, not only about the company's finances and very high valuation, but also of the global trends in the price of oil related to the broader geopolitical situation. A western intelligence official in the region stated that: ["To be blunt, investors in Aramco are not just gambling on the future price and production of oil, but they are betting on the future of security in the region"](#).

Find out more in our Arab Dispatch [n°25](#).

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Al Jazeera*, Saudi Aramco shares surge 10 percent on stock market debut. 11/12/19: <https://bit.ly/2smp2B8>

- *The New York Times*, Saudi Aramco Stock Surges, but Questions Loom. 11/12/19: <https://nyti.ms/2YORTdO>
- *Al Arabiya*, Saudi Aramco touches \$2 trillion mark amid strong investor demand on day two. 12/12/19: <https://bit.ly/34clIpK>
- *Business Insider*, Aramco's IPO may look like a glittering success - but it has painted a target on Saudi Arabia's back that Iran will be happy to exploit. 11/12/19: <https://bit.ly/2PxNAiw>

## #ArabInsight

By [Elena Tosti Di Stefano](#)

**#Algeria** – December’s presidential election: a ‘national salvation’ or a reproduction of the previous regime?



On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, Algerian protesters have marched for the 42<sup>nd</sup> consecutive week, on the final Friday before a contentious presidential election they widely perceive to be an attempt by the ruling class to maintain its hold on power, despite months of demonstrations demanding an overhaul of the country’s political system. Indeed, all five candidates in the 12<sup>th</sup> December vote – among whom are former PMs Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Ali Benflis – are considered to be part of the political elite linked to Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The day before, Army Chief Ahmed Gaid Salah, who has emerged as Algeria’s main powerbroker since Bouteflika’s departure, called for massive turnout in the poll, saying that those who reject the election are “plotting against their fatherland”.

As the election campaigns entered the stage of electoral silence, Arab newspapers have devoted great attention to the Algerian presidential poll, providing different viewpoints on the upcoming event.

In an editorial published on the Algerian newspaper [Echorouk](#), journalist Habib Rachedine affirms that “the popular movement has already toppled the government system based on a *‘façade democracy’*” and weakened the “traditional incubators for spawning corrupt political elites”, even if [long-established] institutions have not yet been dismantled”. He makes reference to the trial and arrest of several officials and businessmen associated with Bouteflika during the past months, saying that “the incoming President will inherit a bureaucratic apparatus that has undergone a partial cleansing by the *interim* authority”. Therefore, he will be responsible for completing this process in the political, economic, and administrative domains, and the consolidation of a “sustainable popular movement” is crucial to pressure him in this sense.

Professor Salim Qalala, writing [on the same newspaper](#), criticises the call to cancel the presidential poll by recalling the annulation of the first multi-party elections since Algeria’s independence, held on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1991. These elections were cancelled “under the cover of saving the Republic” after the military expressed concerns that the Islamic Salvation Front “would produce extremism, fundamentalism and religious dictatorship”. Yet, this led to “bloodshed, tears, and the ‘black decade’ [the Algerian Civil War, 1991-2002 *n.d.r.*]”. Qalala argues that today’s Algeria “really needs an *interim*, constitutional rescue phase that can only be achieved through ‘national salvation elections’ [...] in order to lay de foundation of a new political system”.

An article appeared on the Algerian [El Bilad](#) points out that next election will differ from the previous ones, where “it was almost certain who would win [...] as the balance of power was extremely clear, to the point that the term ‘consensus candidate’ entered our political dictionary”. Instead, at the present time, “no one can say for sure who will reach El Mouradia palace”. On the contrary, in an editorial appeared on [Al-Quds-Al-Arabi – published online by BBC Arabic](#) – Syrian writer Subhi Hadidi sides with protesters, saying this election will be nothing but a “diversification of previous political farces used by authoritarian and arbitrary regimes”. Indeed, “after the protest movement succeeded in excluding Abdelaziz Bouteflika from a fifth term [...], presidential elections are now imposed upon the Algerian people, and candidates are united by a common denominator: they were prominent figures of the Bouteflika regime”. Hadidi concludes that last Friday’s demonstrations “reaffirmed the rejection of this ‘circus’ [and showed that] the street has learnt – and continues to learn – the lessons of the Arab uprisings”, notably with respect to Egypt, where “the ruler fell, but the regime quickly reproduced itself, and not with less ferocity”.

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