

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Algeria - Abdelmadjid Tebboune sworn in as new President



On the 19th of December, Abdelmadjid Tebboune was sworn in as the new President of Algeria after winning a widely controversial election. Mr. Tebboune, a former senior official and minister under Bouteflika, won the race outright with 58% of the vote, ensuring there will be no second round.

The election was strongly contested by the Hirak protest movement that has been taking the streets of the North African country since February. Protestors boycotted the election and rejected Tebboune's victory affirming that the vote was a sham and no real change will come from this election, since the newly elected President is seen as member of the apparatus that governed the country for the last twenty years. In this regard, particularly important for the legitimacy of the new President was the

turnout. Authorities affirmed it was 40%, a figure that, in their view, vindicated the decision to hold the election, while protestors believed the data had been widely falsified by the government.

Find out more in our *Arab Dispatch* [n°30](#)

To know more about this topic:

- *The New York Times*, Military's Preferred Candidate Named Winner in Algeria Election. 13/12/19: [nyti.ms/36XTmRV](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/13/middleeast/algeria-election.html)
- *Le Monde*, La permanence d'un système fossilisé paralyse l'Algérie. 14/12/19: [bit.ly/35HidZN](https://www.lemonde.fr/algérie/article/2019/12/14/la-permanence-d-un-systeme-fossilise-paralyse-l-algerie_1611164_1611164.html)
- *Al Jazeera*, Algeria swears in new president as opposition debates response. 19/12/19: [bit.ly/36RiU2W](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/19/algeria-swears-in-new-president)

Levant

#Lebanon - Saad Hariri withdrew his candidacy as next Prime Minister



On the 19th of December, Hassan Diab was nominated by President Aoun as Lebanon's new Prime Minister. Mr Diab, a 60 year old engineering professor at the American University of Beirut and former Minister of Education, was nominated to the post after obtaining the support of Hezbollah and its allies.

The nomination came after Mr Hariri, who was expected to be selected again, stepped aside on Wednesday, saying that other parties had not agreed to his conditions to form a technocratic government. Diab received support from Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), a group of five pro-Hezbollah Sunni MPs and several other allied groups obtaining a total of 69 votes, enough to become Lebanon's new Prime Minister.

The new PM will have to address one of the worst economic crises in the country's history with daily protests in the streets. The reaction of the protestors to this news was summed up by an activist on Facebook where he wrote: "*The revolution: We want a prime minister from outside the political establishment. The state: did you mean 'a former minister'?*"

Find out more in our *Arab Dispatch* [n°26](#) and [n°30](#)

To know more about this topic:

- *BBC*, Lebanon protests: University professor Hassan Diab nominated to be PM. 19/12/19: bbc.in/2EEEU1q
- *Financial Times*, Hassan Diab appointed Lebanon PM with Hezbollah backing. 19/12/12: on.ft.com/2SdUr3M
- *Haarteç*, Hezbollah-backed Candidate Tapped as Lebanon's New PM in Bid to End Deadlock. 19/12/12: bit.ly/2Z9ZJ1S

Gulf

#Qatar – Talks between Doha and Riyadh: results to be seen



This weekend news came out regarding talks taking place between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The two countries have severed diplomatic relations since June 2017 when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt imposed a blockade on Qatar accusing the country of being a sponsor of terrorism. Moreover, Doha has, up until now, refused to accept demands from these countries like ceasing its relations with Iran, shutting down Al Jazeera, and closing a Turkish military base.

During last week's GCC summit Qatar's foreign minister admitted of the talks affirming that there had been "*a little progress*". "*There is some progress ... because we have [broken] the stalemate with the Saudis*".

While all the actors in region recognised the importance of the talks in order to mediate in the current dispute, Saudi Arabia and its allies were sceptical of Qatar's intentions and stressed that *“nothing has changed”*. They also reaffirmed their unity with the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs affirming that: *“The recent Qatari leaks regarding resolving Doha's crisis with Saudi Arabia, without the three other countries, are a repetition of Doha's quest to divide ranks and evade commitments”*.

To know more about this topic:

- *Reuters*, Qatar foreign minister says early talks with Saudi Arabia have broken stalemate. 16/12/19 reut.rs/2S8Hat7
- *Al Arabiya*, UAE's Gargash: Qatari leaks on 'resolving dispute' are attempts to divide ranks. 14/12/19 bit.ly/38VG0Yb
- *Al Jazeera*, Egypt's el-Sisi says position on Qatar “unchanged”. 18/12/19 bit.ly/35EikW8
- *Reuters*, Why didn't Qatar support Saudi Aramco's big deal? 16/12/19 reut.rs/38R2Gsl

#ArabInsight

By [Elena Tosti Di Stefano](#)

#Libya – What is behind Turkey-GNA deal?



Last Sunday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosted talks with the head of the Libyan GNA Fayez al-Sarraj, during which the two parties strengthened their security commitment just days after LNA's Commander Khalifa Haftar announced a “decisive battle” to wrest Tripoli from the internationally recognised government. During their previous meeting on the 27th of November, Erdogan and al-Sarraj had agreed on a deal on security and military cooperation, as well as delimitation of maritime jurisdiction. According to the first MoU, Ankara is prepared to protect Libya's sovereignty by helping the country develop its security and training systems and, most notably, by sending troops into Libya if requested; as for the maritime part of the deal, Erdogan declared that it would make joint Turkish-Libyan gas explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean possible and allow Turkey to drill in Libya's continental shelf, with Tripoli's approval. This aspect of the agreement was strongly condemned by several countries, particularly Greece and Cyprus that labelled the accord “a blatant violation of international law”. In recent days, Arab newspapers have discussed at length the reasons and possible consequences of the bilateral deal, providing different viewpoints on the issue.

The Libyan [Al-Wasat](#) argues that, with the signing of the two memoranda of understanding, the Libyan crisis “has entered a new chapter” characterised by increased “*regional and international interference*”. The author adds that “*the harsh reactions about the maritime agreement were not enough to stop the Turkish President, who poured oil on the fire by announcing his country's readiness to send soldiers to Libya, thus further aggravating the situation*”.

Writing on [Al-Arab](#), journalist Tariq Al-Qayzani affirms that “*the internationalisation of the conflict on the ground in Libya represents the most dangerous stage in the war-torn country*” that could lead to “*the complete collapse of the remaining institutions*”. In this regard, the accord between Ankara and the GNA “*not only puts Libya on the volcano’s crater, but also exacerbates existing tensions related to the Eastern Mediterranean waters*”, especially with the Republic of Cyprus. At the same time, al-Qayzani reminds that Ankara has recently concluded similar trade and military agreements in Sudan and Qatar, noting that this latter would constitute an additional “*vital step for Ankara’s aspirations [...] of securing energy resources [...] and reviving the historical influence of the Ottoman fleet in the Mediterranean waters*”. He concludes that the Turkish-Libyan deal is likely to “*undermine the longstanding efforts*” made by neighbouring Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia to find a comprehensive political solution in the country.

In an editorial published on the Egyptian newspaper [Akhhbar El Yom](#), writer Muhamad Hassan al-Banna denounces the “*Turkish incursion*” and praises the “*courageous decision*” taken by Libya’s diplomatic mission in Egypt that distanced itself from the Government of National Accord in the wake of the deal between al-Sarraj and Erdogan. Indeed, the GNA’s leader is said to be “*loyal to Turkey and hostile to the Libyan nation and people*”.

In this context, many observers draw a parallel between the Libyan and the Syrian crisis. In an article appeared on the Saudi [Al-Jazirah](#), Mansour Al-Thiyabi refers to the “*complications*” of the Libyan file as a result of the protracted civil war, saying that because of such complications “*Russia and Turkey intervened to fight alongside the two [rival] parties to the conflict in the hope of obtaining a new foothold in the African continent*”. This way, “*Russian and Turkish companies can enter [the country] ‘under military cover’ and ‘suck’ Libyan oil for free, just as they did in Syria and Iraq before*”. In fine, political analyst Mohamed Bwissir argued on the news website [Ean Libya](#) that Turkey has benefited from two main factors characterising the international position towards Libya, i.e. “*the inability to achieve any progress in the political file and the US-British disquiet over Russia’s incursion into the country*”.

Find out more in our *Arab Dispatch* [n°29](#) and [n°30](#)

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