

ARAB DISPATCH

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North Africa

#Egypt – Muslim Brotherhood still pressures the ruling class



Source: Egypt Today

The lawyers of the family of Egypt's former President Mohammed Morsi has stated that his youngest son was poisoned by a lethal substance and did not die for a heart attack, as authorities claimed upon his death on the 4th of September 2019.

Abdullah Morsi was imprisoned last year for belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Sunni Islamist organisation founded by the Islamic scholar, Hassan al-Banna, in 1928 in Egypt, and classified as a terrorist organisation by the White House in accordance with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Abdullah Morsi is one of the many Muslim Brothers to have experienced persecution, detention and eventually death under al-Sisi government. Fact that underlines the fears of the government over the consensus that Muslim Brothers keep garnering in Egypt, also as a result of a strong diaspora in Turkey and Qatar.

Only one month ago, Essam el-Eriam, a senior leader in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and former deputy during Mohammed Morsi Presidency, died in Cairo's Tora Prison. El-Eriam was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment after the 2013 military coup led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, at that time Defence Minister, against the democratically elected Mohammed Morsi. Morsi himself died last year too in detention.

After the military coup that brought al-Sisi to power, the Egyptian government has strongly repressed the opposition, mainly represented by the Muslim Brotherhood. Thousands of members have been detained and persecuted while, as a result, many others migrated to more radical factions.

In April 2019 President al-Sisi has urged the White House to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a foreign terrorist organisation, but to no avail.

To know more about this topic:

- *The New York Times*, Trump Pushes to Designate Muslim Brotherhood a Terrorist Group, 30/04/19, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/us/politics/trump-muslim-brotherhood.html>
- *Middle East Eye*, Senior Muslim Brotherhood politician Essam el-Eriam dies in prison, 13/08/20, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-muslim-brotherhood-essam-erian-dies>
- *Al Jazeera*, Lawyers say Morsi's son killed by 'lethal substance', 07/09/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/egypt-lawyers-morsi-son-killed-lethal-substance-200907194812314.html>

Levant

#Syria – Kurdish political forces condemn PKK and YPG military action in Syria



Sources: The Telegraph

On the 8th of September, the former president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani, has heavily condemned the PKK and indirectly his Syrian offshoot People's Protection Unit (YPG) for having destroyed hundreds of villages across Iraq. His statement came after Nechirvan Barzani, President of the KRG and cousin of the former president, visited Ankara on the 6th of September, raising many concerns between the pro-PKK media that publicly blamed the President of *"being at the service of Erdogan"*.

Even though Nechirvan Barzani has been sending medical equipment to the PKK to fight the pandemic, lately the relationship between the PKK/YPG and the KRG has been very tense, a situation further demonstrated by the unilateral economic blockade implemented by President Barzani against the YPG.

President Barzani had strongly condemned the YPG and PKK "terrorist groups" to put in danger Kurds living in Syria and accused the Party of using Syrian Kurds to legitimize itself. Furthermore, on the 5th of November 2019, Barzani during the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) Forum declared that the

KRG had warned in several occasions the Syrian Kurdish authorities to distance themselves from the PKK, adding that the PKK's struggle for legitimacy in the area led to the Turkish invasion.

In the meantime, also the head of the Syria-based Kurdish association, Abdulaziz Tammo, condemned the YPG as terrorist group stating that the Syrian Kurds “*does not make a distinction between the (Democratic Union Party) PYD, YPG*” adding that “*there is simply the PKK, that are the same as Daesh terrorists*”. He further declared that association group is fighting to free Northern Syria from YPG terrorists.

Nevertheless, on the 11th of May, the same association firmly opposed a reported French-American mediated talk between the Syrian Kurdish National Council (ENKS) and the PKK with his Syrian offshoot YPG and call for the withdrawal of the terrorist organizations from Syria adding that they reject any kind of dialogue with terrorist forces that are using Syrian Kurds to legitimate themselves.

According to Abdulaziz Tammo Syrian Kurds maintain their commitment and adhere to the principles of the Syrian revolution, accepting only negotiations that will lead to the departure of all terrorist forces.

To know more about this topic:

- *Daily Sabah*, Syrian Kurds say YPG no different than Daesh, 12/10/19, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2019/10/12/syrian-kurds-say-ypg-no-different-than-daesh>
- *Rudaw*, President Barzani: PKK struggle for legitimacy led to Turkish operation at expense of Syrian Kurds, 05/11/19, available at: <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/051120193>
- *Daily Sabah*, Syrian Kurds reject ENKS-PKK/YPG mediation talks, call for PKK withdrawal, 11/05/20, available at: https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/syrian-kurds-reject-enks-pkkypg-mediation-talks-call-for-pkk-withdrawal/news?gallery_image=undefined#big
- *Daily Sabah*, Former KRG president Barzani slams PKK terrorists for being a burden on Kurds, 08/09/20, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/war-on-terror/former-krp-president-barzani-slams-pkk-terrorists-for-being-a-burden-on-kurds>

Gulf

#Yemen – The Saudi-led coalition fears the fall of Ma'arib under the Houthis



Source: Yemen Online

On the 13th of September the Saudi-led coalition launched 11 new raids against the Iran-backed Houthi military bases in Sanaa in response of ballistic missiles and explosive drones' attacks carried out against the kingdom.

Since the beginning of September, military operations intensified. On the 4th of September the group has launched military attacks against the strategic city of Ma'arib, leading Saudi Arabia to respond with new airstrikes targeting specifically high-ranking commanders and military officials.

Saudi Arabia's raid attacks have been focusing against the central province of Ma'arib, 170 kilometres far away from the capital, which is a key city for the Houthis.

Since 2015 the Houthis have been trying to capture Ma'arib with no success. However, in 2019 the movement gained ground in the Nehm district of Sana and Al-Jawf, making pressure on the adjacent city of Marib. The city represents the last stronghold of the Yemeni government in the North and its fall could eventually give to the group almost full control over northern Yemen. Most importantly the city, located on a strategic crossroad between Al-Beydha, Al-Jawf, Sanaa, Shabwa and Saudi Arabia, has

significant fuel resources which would surely help the movement to reorganise the army and to gain further military victories, shifting the war in its favour.

In the meantime, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Yemen's southern separatists, announced the withdrawal from the Riyadh Agreement, a Saudi-sponsored power-sharing deal that aims to bring together the Yemeni legitimate government and the STC in the war against the Houthis, due to the ongoing military escalation in the province of Abyan and the rupture of the agreed ceasefire.

To know more about this topic:

- *Inside Arabia*, Why Have the Houthis Failed to Seize Yemen's Marib Province?, 21/07/20, available at: <https://insidearabia.com/why-have-the-houthis-failed-to-seize-yemens-marib-province/>
- *Arab News*, Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia aimed at stopping coalition airstrikes, 02/09/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1728216/middle-east>
- *Al Araby*, Houthi offensive on Marib could determine country's future, 04/09/20, available at <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2020/9/4/yemen-in-focus-the-battle-for-marib>
- *Al Jazeera*, Saudi-led coalition attacks Houthi positions in Yemen's Sanaa, 13/09/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/saudi-led-coalition-attacks-houthi-positions-yemen-sanaa-200913105014830.html>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Arab World – The recent wave of neo pan-Islamism reveals a power struggle in the region



Source: The Cairo reviews of Global Affairs

Within the last decade we have witnessed a renewed interest by the majority of Islamic countries towards the Pan-Islamist ideology.

Pan-Islamism and its capturing narrative of a comprehensive union of all Muslims into one cultural and geographical entity, that could restore the early Islam, had been advocated since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D. as the only possible way for Muslims to embrace the religion.

The Pan-Islamic rhetoric of a possible return to the first caliphate, led by prophet Muhammed, acquired a political significance at the end of the 19th century, and became an important tool in the hands of Islamic countries' leaderships to attract consensus from their people, easily inclined towards a religious discourse, and to fight against Western empires and the European imperialism.

Later on, with the failure of Arab Nationalism, the dream of an Islamic unity that could eventually break non-Arab borders, re-emerged inspiring different local movements with different characteristics depending on the peculiarities of the countries. On the other hand, the Pan-Islamic movement inspired also radical movements and transnational terrorist organisations.

After the 2011 Arab uprisings, the ideology returned translating the need of people to redirect the political discourse of the *ancient régime* into Islam. In Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt, after the so-called Arab Spring, political Islam strongly re-emerged and Islamic parties gained power.

More recently, Pan-Islamism has been exploited by Arab countries to gain power in the leadership of the Arab World especially with the latest changes in geopolitical dynamics.

The withdrawal of the United States from the Arab world has strongly impacted the geopolitical order in the Middle East, recalibrating and redefining powers in the region. The vacuum left by the United States in the region has been exploited by other superpowers. This new geopolitical order with the emergence of new regional powers has also led to a leadership race for the Umma al-Islamiyya (Islamic community) and this is quite clear in Turkey's foreign policy. President Erdogan which is currently involved in many conflicts in the region is trying with his foreign policy to replace Saudi Arabia leadership in the Islamic world.

On the 29th of November 2019 the Arab news agency [Roayah News](#) published an article titled “ ما هي خطوات أردوغان نحو عرش الخلافة الإسلامية؟ ” – “*What are Erdogan's next steps to the leadership of the throne of the Islamic Caliphate?*” using specifically the word “*الخلافة*” (*al-Khilafah*, caliphate), an institution created by Prophet Muhammad and abolished by Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkey and, most importantly, a word that carries a strong reference to the government's institutions of the early Islam.

The article underlines Erdogan's ambitions to ideologically recreate a new Islamic caliphate with Turkey as a leading country. It reports a meeting held in Istanbul and organised by the Turkish President with Islamists from different countries to discuss and encourage the establishment of a new Islamic corporation, by the end of 2023, guided by Turkey.

During the meeting, Nureddin Nebati, a former parliamentarian, very close to President Erdogan, made a very strong statement by saying: “*فإن العالم الإسلامي الآن في حالة فوضى، لكن الأمة التركية قُتِمتُ أردوغان كإمام – وهو لا يمكن أن يُهزم لأن الله يدعمه*” – “*Surely the Islamic world is going through very dark times but Turkey has proposed Erdogan as the imam that will lead the Muslims. He will not fail because God is supporting him*”. The

reference to Erdogan as the Imam of the future Islamic community is very clear. Moreover, the word used to indicate the Turkish nation is not “وطن” (*watan*, nation) but “أمة” (*ummah*, community) which carries a strong meaning for Muslims as in Islam there are no nations, but only an Islamic community that doesn't fit into nations or borders.

Furthermore, according to Roayah News, the meeting was sponsored by the Justice Defenders Strategic Studies Center (ASSAM - Adaleti Savunanlar Stratejik Arařtırmalar Merkezi derneęinin dmacı), an Islamic think-tank founded by Brigadier General Adnan Tanrıverdi, a controversial figure in Turkey for his role in creating the private Turkish security contractor, SADAT International Defense Consultancy (Uluslararası SAVunma DANıřmanlıęı inřaat sanayi ve Ticaret A.ř.).

General Tanrıverdi, who also attended the meeting, has been strongly criticised in 2018 for delivering a speech during which he revealed the plan of the Turkish government to establish an Islamic authority that will include 60 countries and 1,6 billion Muslims, controlling 12,8% of the total area of the world and, consequently, the natural gas resources of this area.

With this background it does not surprise that Saudi Arabia decided not to attend last year's Islamic Summit held in Kuala Lumpur and sponsored by Turkey, Malaysia, Iran, and Qatar to tackle the challenges that the Islamic community is facing and the need for a stronger Muslim fraternity. According to the [Arabic Post](#), the Kingdom has refused to attend the summit not only for the presence of Iran at the conference, but also for the role that Turkey is trying to impose as a new leading country within the Islamic world and for the ambitious plan of Erdogan to be recognised as the new Imam of the Umma al-Islamiyya.

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