

ARAB DISPATCH

Arab Dispatch - a project by the NATO Defense College Foundation

Issue n. 14/20

24th September – 1st October

North Africa

#Egypt – Salafists lose popular consensus



Source: Marsad

On the 16th of September the results of the Senate elections uncovered a drastic change in Egyptian voters showing a possible demise of political Islam and Islamist forces in Egypt.

Already the elections of 2013 with the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest Islamist force, have shown the weakness of this political trend on the political scene. After the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2014, Islamists parties were still present in the political scene but with an almost non-existent electoral weight.

Among them the Salafists, the second largest political force winning 128 seats during the first post-Mubarak parliamentary elections in 2011. By distancing them from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and demonstrating support to the al-Sisi government, Salafists survived the regime's repression of political Islam. However, in the 2015 elections they gained only 12 seats out of a total of 596, showing to have lost credibility among voters.

Both in the first round of the Senate elections held on the 11th and 12th of August and during the runoff held on the 8th and 9th of September, Al-Nour, the main Salafist party running the elections, lost the opportunity to be represented in the Senate. The failure of Al-Nour at the Senate elections confirms that Egyptian voters are no longer willing to have such political forces.

According to Al-Monitor, the rapid collapse of popular consensus has been partially caused by the pandemic and the closure of the mosques, essential for Salafists to collect popular consensus, in addition to the hostile propaganda of Muslim Brotherhood that still remembers their support to the army-backed popular uprising against Mohammed Morsi, the former Egyptian MB President affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Egypt's elections could herald Islamists' demise, 05/01/20, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/egypts-elections-could-herald-islamists-demise>
- *Daily News Egypt*, Egypt to hold Senate runoff elections for locals on 8-9 September, 07/09/20, available at <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2020/09/07/egypt-to-hold-senate-runoff-elections-for-locals-on-8-9-september/>
- *Al-Monitor*, Uncertain future for Egypt's Salafists following Senate election defeat, 27/09/2020, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/09/egypt-salafist-political-parties-lost-senate-elections.html>

Levant

#Jordan – The risk of radicalism pressures the monarchy



Sources: Jordan Times

Jordan's severe economic crisis, exacerbated by the global pandemic, might favour a return of Islamic radicalisation and extremist groups that often exploit youth unemployment and young generations' frustration to make new adepts.

In addition, there is also the risk represented by Palestinian refugees living in Jordan below the poverty threshold with no future perspectives that could potentially take part to criminal networks often inspired by radicalism and transnational Jihad with links in Israel and the Occupied Palestine Territories.

Fuelled by the trade blockade imposed by the global pandemic and the government's austerity, popular discontent keeps growing along with the risk of Jordanians to turn to political Islam and radicalised groups that often attract new adepts by offering better living conditions and Islamic redemption.

The Jordanian government, that previously demonstrated a tacit tolerance towards the Muslim Brotherhood, perceived the high risk of radicalisation and started a harsh crackdown campaign against

the movement. The measures adopted by the government against radical groups and against Muslim Brothers may also indicate Jordan's desire to deepen its relationship with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in order to eventually benefit from financial assistance from Gulf countries. Jordan is still pending member of the GCC since 2011.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Eye*, Jordan's rising economic challenges in the time of COVID-19, 27/08/20, available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/jordans-rising-economic-challenges-time-covid-19>
- *Stratfor*, COVID 19 Tests Jordan's Stability, 24/09/20, available at <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/covid-19-tests-jordan-s-stability>

Gulf

#Saudi Arabia – King Salman bin Abdulaziz strongly attacks Iran at UNGA



Source: Hawar news Agency

On the 23rd of September, during the 75th session of the United Nation General Assembly, King Salman made a strong video statement, attacking the Islamic Republic of Iran and his regional allies in the region: Hezbollah and Houthis.

During the session, the King of Saudi Arabia called for a comprehensive war against the Islamic Republic and the disarming of Hezbollah in Lebanon. This statement represents the first direct attack against Iran at the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

The King accused Iran of targeting oil installations via Houthi militias, threatening maritime security and killing civilians in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. He added that the monarchy's priority is to secure its national security by securing international support against Tehran.

During the statement, the King also expressed his concerns over the critical political situation in Lebanon severely exacerbated by the blast that hit Beirut on the 4th of August, escalating even further the

humanitarian crisis. He explicitly that what is happening in Lebanon “*came as a result of the domination of the pro-Iranian terrorist Hezbollah on decision-making in Lebanon, leading to the disruption of the institutions of the constitutional state*” adding that Lebanese will achieve stability and prosperity only by disarming this terrorist party.

The speech was a major opportunity to redress the image of the kingdom, assert its role in the region against competition from Tehran and Ankara, and express support to US maximum pressure policy in order to end favourably a war in Yemen that is currently a costly stalemate for Riyadh.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Arab Weekly*, Saudi monarch slams Iran and calls for disarming of Hezbollah, 24/09/20, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/saudi-monarch-slams-iran-and-calls-disarming-hezbollah>
- *Eurasian Times*, Saudi Arabia fully supports US’ efforts to get Israel, Palestine on negotiating table, 23/09/20, available at: <https://eurasianimes.com/saudi-arabia-fully-supports-us-efforts-to-get-israel-palestine-on-negotiating-table/>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#Palestine – Rare meetings between Palestinian leaders for reconciliation, again



Source: Times of Israel

On the 22nd of September, Saleh al-Aroui, Deputy leader of the *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* (HAMAS, the Islamic Resistance Movement), and Jibril Rajoub, Secretary General of the *Harakat al-tahrir al-watani al-Filasini* (the Palestinian National Liberation Movement), commonly known as Fatah, met in Istanbul to create a [unified front](#) to defend Palestinian rights and to bring an end to the dispute dating back to the 2007 and to discuss the formation of the next Palestinian government.

As reported by [Al-Jazeera](#), the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, called for Ankara's support and urged his Turkish counterpart, Tayyip Erdogan, to help with the negotiations between the two parties.

Jibril Rajoub announced in Ankara that Palestinians are heading to hold free elections, underlining that the final decision will be in accordance with Palestinians without any political influence or pressure by regional parties. On the other side, a member of Hamas' political bureau, Khalil al-Hayya stated that

Hamas is keen to achieve and create a unified front capable to tackle the current threats that Palestinians are facing, making a specific reference to the Abraham accords.

However, despite the initial enthusiasm shown by many Arab and international media over the political reconciliation between the two factions, Mousa Abu Marzouq, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, declared to [Al-Quds Al-Arabi](#) that the parties did not set a date for the legislative and parliamentary elections and that the talks held in Istanbul did not tackle any detail concerning the future elections.

Although he confirmed a general consensus over new elections, he underlined that what was discussed in Istanbul was only an “idea” of a possible reconciliation between the parties adding that details are still to be defined. The two parties announced their “vision” of a comprehensive national dialogue that will bring together Palestinians forces and factions following a series of meeting held at the headquarters of the Palestinians Consulate General in Istanbul that brought together the two movements. He also added that during the meeting held in Istanbul the matter of holding legislative and presidential elections has been largely discussed but he denied setting a date or any regulation, warning that regional parties will have a significant influence on the decision of holding elections.

As reported from Al-Quds a Fatah movement’s delegation is also expected to travel to Doha, where many Hamas’ leaders reside, to brief Qatari officials on the reconciliation’s talks.

What is still unclear is the position and the role that Turkey, and eventually Qatar, will assume in the reconciliation process of the Palestinian factions. By hosting rare meetings between rival factions and helping the formation of a unified front Turkey might emerge like a strong defender of the Palestinian cause while Gulf countries are turning their backs to the Palestinians.

This is not the first time that the two factions try to reconcile themselves: since 2005 at least 15 political events have marked a process that at each occasion unfortunately resulted stillborn.

**As a general disclaimer, the articles do not necessarily reflect the view of the NATO Defense College Foundation or any institution of or associated with NATO.*