

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **North Africa**

**#Algeria – French supports the controversial referendum on constitutional amendments**



*Source: The Nation Press Arab – The Algerian President Abdelmajid Tebboune and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron*

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, the Algerian President, Abdelmajid Tebboune, met with the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, to ask support for the referendum on the constitutional amendments, scheduled for the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, after unprecedented popular protests, arrested only by the global pandemic emergency, the office of President Tebboune announced a referendum on a revised constitution, in response to the protest's movement. The constitution's amendments are expected to foster democracy and to give the parliament a greater role. Additionally, the revised constitution should reduce the authority of the Presidency, limited to two mandates, and guarantee the separation and balance of powers. However, protesters rejected the proposal asking for more effective reforms.

During Bouteflika's two-decade presidency, the constitution has been modified several times in accordance with the president's requirements. In February 2019, protests erupted all over the country, after the former president announced his plan to keep the presidency for his fifth term.

The Algerian army Chief of Staff, Said Chengriha, urged for wide participation, since the referendum represents the only opportunity for the Algerians, especially for the youngest generations, to determinate the future of their country and asked them to stand united with the army and to reject any external conspiracy.

The Army has repeatedly accused local parties of supporting foreign conspiracy that risks to sabotage any political project, while the opposition parties blamed the military authorities of interfering in politics.

Simultaneously, Abderrazak Makri, leader of the main Algerian Islamic party, Movement of Society for Peace, commenting on the two-days visit of the French Foreign Minister, said that the former colonial power "*keeps meddling on Algerian political, economic and cultural affairs*". Moreover, the party urged to vote against constitutional changes, arguing the lack of opposition's figures in the drafting process.

Additionally, many Algerian activists and political parties, given the low inclusion of political actors in the drafting process, fear that the constitutional changes will be mainly a cosmetic gesture to soothe protesters' anger and give them the impression of a possible change.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Stratfor*, Opposition party urges supporters to vote against Constitutional changes in Upcoming referendum, 30/09/20, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/algeria-opposition-party-urges-supporters-vote-against-constitutional-changes>

- *Asbarq al-Awsat*, Algeria receives French support for New Constitution, 17/10/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2569691/algeria-receives-french-support-new-constitution>
- *Asbarq al-Awsat*, Algerian army calls for supporting Constitutional Referendum, 18/10/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2571361/algerian-army-calls-supporting-constitutional-referendum>

## Levant

### **#Jordan – King Abdullah II appoints a new Prime Minister to tackle the Kingdom’s challenges**



*Sources: China Daily – Newly appointed Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh*

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, the King of Jordan Abdullah II, approved the appointment of the senior Hashemite court adviser, Bisher Al-Khasawneh, as Defense Minister and as the new Prime Minister succeeding the outgoing Omar al-Razzaz.

The King dissolved the parliament on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September at the end of its four-years term. Now that the Prime Minister has been appointed, a new cabinet will need to be formed. Elections will be held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November.

After appointing the new PM, King Abdullah stressed the need of tackling the COVID 19 pandemic that has severely ravaged an already wavering economy. The newly appointed PM will have to address many challenges starting with enhancing healthcare services and improving the economic sector.

Since 2009 the country is witnessing a severe economic crisis, complicated by an unstable neighbourhood and more recently by the pandemic that affected local industries but also foreign investments, remittances, trade and tourism, with the latter representing an important sector of local economy providing jobs to many Jordanians. Worth mentioning that this year the country has recorded the highest unemployment rates in history. Youth unemployment rates continued to grow for the sixth consecutive year reaching, during the pandemic, an impressive 25%.

Additionally, the Kingdom is situated in a very unstable region, with Lebanon, facing an unprecedented political and socioeconomic collapse, and Syria, stalled in a never-ending civil war, is facing growing challenges that led King Abdullah to make new strategic choices. Recently the Kingdom has in fact deepened its ties with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates by abandoning the Muslim Brotherhood and by tacitly supporting the UAE's normalisation deal with Israel. As evidence of this, Jordan has already provided military equipment to the UAE-backed Libyan National Army and, more recently, has signed an aviation agreement with Israel that will allow each country to fly over the other's airspace.

Most likely, the country will also endorse the UAE and Saudi Arabia against Turkey, which supports Islamists movements in the region. On the other hand, Jordan has decided not to join the blockade implemented by GCC countries against Qatar, hoping to benefit from its natural gas reserves.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Middle East Institute*, 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>

- *The Jordan Times*, Jordan unemployment rate reaches historic high, 16/09/20, available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-unemployment-rate-reaches-historic-high'---jef>
- *Arab News*, Jordan's king appoints veteran diplomat Bisher Al-Khasawneh prime minister, 07/10/20, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1745651/middle-east>
- *Al-Monitor*, New Jordanian prime minister takes office amid virus spike, struggling economy, 13/10/20, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/10/jordan-new-prime-minister-khasawneh-king.html>

## Gulf

### **#Iraq – Baghdad reaches an historic deal with the Kurdistan Regional Government over Sinjar administration**



*Source: Basnews*

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, reached an historic deal with the Interior Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Reber Ahmed, over the administration of the district of Sinjar, in the Nineveh governorate.

Sinjar falls in the “disputed territories” of Iraq, a region in Northern Iraq stretching from Iran in central east to Syria in north west and populated by different ethnic groups: Kurds, Arabs and Yazidis. The region has been disputed and claimed by different actors due to its ethnically mixed population and its oil and gas reserves. In 2014 ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-‘Irāq wa-sh-Shām (DAESH) took control of the territories and the oil fields, while in 2017 the Iraqi Army with the support of the Popular Mobilization Units pushed DAESH out of the territories.

The deal reached by the central government of Baghdad and the KRG is expected to return the governance and the security of the district under the coordination of the two parties in accordance to the article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution and the article 58 of the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law (TAL). A federal governance in the disputed territory of Sinjar will remove the authority of armed groups that

are still controlling the area, notably the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK) and the Iran-backed Shiite Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF).

Since 2014 the PKK took control of the area with the pretext of protecting the Yazidis, an ethno-religious community living mostly in the disputed territories of northern Iraq ferociously persecuted and exterminated from DAESH because of their specific religious precepts that made the community also known as the “devil worshippers”.

If implemented, the agreement will also jeopardise the Iranian plan to establish a Shiite corridor in northern Iraq, linking the Shiite populated territories between Iran and Syria, using the PMF as buttress. The removal of the PMF from the governorate will de facto threaten Teheran’s plan of enlarging its influence (what by Arab elites is called the “Shiite Crescent”) in the area: a region, including Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, Yemen and western Afghanistan, that connects Shiite Muslims under Iran’s religious authority and political clout.

Turkey has expressed his hopes towards the agreement that will help to eradicate DAESH and PKK terrorists from the area and will facilitate the return of Yazidis, particularly oppressed by the Islamic State, to their lands.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Crisis Group*, Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s disputed internal boundaries, 14/12/2018, available at, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/194-reviving-un-mediation-iraqs-disputed-internal-boundaries>
- *Daily Sabah*, Baghdad announces “historic deal” with KRG over Iraq’s Sinjar, 09/10/20, available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/baghdad-announces-historic-deal-with-krq-over-iraqs-sinjar/news>
- *Asharq al-Awsat*, Iraq’s Sinjar deal threatens Iranian regional ambitions, 10/10/20, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2556311/iraqs-sinjar-deal-threatens-iranian-regional-ambitions>

## #ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

**#SaudiArabia** – Arab countries witness calls for popular boycott against Turkey's foreign policy



*Source: DAWN – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meeting with the King of Saudi Arabia Salman Al Saud*

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, [Asharq al-Awsat](#) published an article reporting a general boycott adopted by many Arab countries against Erdogan's aggressive foreign policy.

Turkish foreign policy, that is clearly perceived as a visible attempt to expand its authority in many countries that were former Ottoman provinces, led to a popular rejection and calls to boycott Turkish goods and products.

Erdogan's intervention policy in many regional conflicts turned very quickly in an bid to consolidate his hegemony in the Middle East and to replace the role of Saudi Arabia in the Arab Muslim world, revealing Erdogan's desire to return to the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire, when Selim I obtained the title of *خَادِمُ الْحَرَمَيْنِ الشَّرِيفَيْنِ* - *Khādim al-Haramayn as-Sarifayn* – *Custodian of the two Holy Mosques*, a very significant title within the Islamic Ummah (community), now detained by Saudi Royal Family.



The boycott campaign started in Saudi Arabia in response to Tayyip Erdogan's interference in the internal affairs of the country and reached its peak in recent weeks, after the Chairman of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ajlan al-Ajlan officially stated that *نحن كمواطنين... لا استثمار ولا استيراد ولا سياحة... حتى الشركات التركية العاملة بالسعودية أدعو إلى عدم التعامل معها، ورجال أعمال لن يكون لنا أي تعامل مع كل ما هو تركي، وهذا أقل رد لنا ضد استمرار العداء والإساءة التركية إلى قيادتنا وبلدنا – there won't be any investment, import or tourism with Turkey... we as citizens and entrepreneurs will not establish any deal with whatever is related with Turkey. Even Turkish companies based in Saudi Arabia are invited not to deal with the country. This is our answer against the continuous Turkish aggressive policy against our country and leadership.*

After Ajlan's statement, all the main retails chains stopped selling and importing Turkish goods. It is the second time that a group of Arab countries carries out a commercial boycott: the first, clearly etched in collective memory, was the one against Denmark during the Islamic cartoons crisis (2005-2006).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not the only Arab country to adopt a commercial boycott against Turkey. Tunisia witnessed popular calls and Parliament's pressure to stop trading with Turkey, although its recently strengthened ties with Rashid Gannushi, leader of En-Nahdah, the main Tunisian Islamist Party.

The Iraqi government too has adopted the economic pressure weapon to address Turkish military intervention in the north of the country, while Morocco decided to void the free trade agreement with Turkey.

A similar step was taken by Jordan, that cancelled its agreements with Turkey due to its dramatically exacerbated economy that led the kingdom to make new strategic choices more in line with the United Arab Emirates' vehement anti-Islamists stance.

According to [Sada](#), Ajlan Al-Ajlan revealed that the Kingdom is an important economic partner and that the boycott of Turkish goods will have a significant economic impact. He added that many Turkish companies based in the kingdom were already seriously hit by the boycott campaign with losses that may exceed 20 billion dollars.

He made it clear that *بلدنا وقيادتنا خط أحمر، هذا موقف ندلل عليه اليوم بصفر تعامل م تركيا.. صفر منتج تركي، صفر – the kingdom and its leadership represent a red line. Saudi Arabia is showing its position by adopting a zero-trading policy, zero Turkish products, zero investment and zero tourism in Turkey.*

Turkish companies confirmed that they were severely affected by the boycott campaign of 'Turkish goods' imports. In Turkey, exporters affirmed that they faced growing difficulties with the Saudi Arabian market and that the request for Turkish products has almost stopped due to the boycott campaign. They urged the government to de-escalate tensions with the Gulf in order to resume regular trading, stressing the fact that the country does not have the ability to bear further losses.

The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) warned Tayyip Erdogan, that his aggressive foreign policy will bankrupt the country if he continues to ignore the ongoing boycott campaign adopted by Arab countries against his policies. According to the Turkish Ministry of Trade last year's exports to Saudi Arabia amounted to 2,3 billion dollars while this year barely reached 1,9 billion dollars with a loss of 400 million dollars for the trade economy.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October [Baladna el-Youm](#), published a video showing the anger of a Turkish citizen struggling to support his family. During the video, the man in his fifties accused the Tayyip Erdogan of starving Turkish citizens with a brutal foreign policy that is isolating the country while heavily damaging the economy.

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