

ARAB DISPATCH

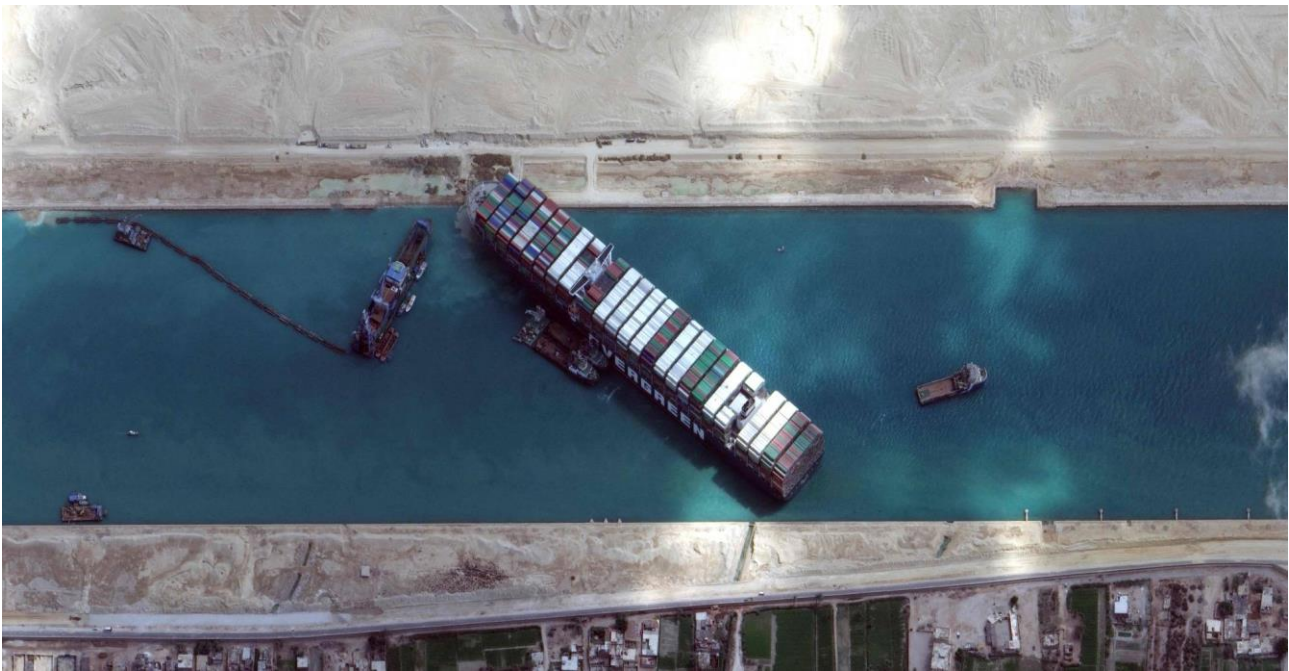
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North Africa

#Egypt – Al Sisi to deal with two major disasters



Source: The Japan Times

Last week Egypt witnessed two major disasters caused by the neglect of the political class. On the 26th of March a train crash in southern Egypt, about 500km south of Cairo, killed more than 30 people. Few days earlier, on the 24th of March, the Japanese container ship, Ever Given, remained stuck in the Suez Canal for almost a week, causing a block in a maritime choke-point of global economy.

These two major disasters, occurred almost simultaneously, highlighted the long-neglected mismanagement of the current government. The Suez Canal and the Egyptian railways are two of the

oldest and more important infrastructures in Egypt. Not to mention that the canal produces every year an income of about 6 billion dollars.

Upon his appointment, the Egyptian president Al Sisi pledged the renovation of the railway network and the expansion of the Suez Canal by digging a second channel alongside the existing northern section of the canal. In 2015, a new canal was opened at the cost of 4 billion dollars while the railway network was renovated for 9 billion dollars. Unfortunately, both mega-projects did not prevent these accidents to happen and Egyptians will have to face the consequences. The renovation of the railway mainly concerned the locomotives and not the rest of the system, while the new canal, actually improving the movement of the ships, only allows a single shipping line with a high risk of blocking the entire traffic as it actually happened.

After these major disasters that cost the life of more than 30 Egyptians and a major loss of incomes with vessels diverted to other routes, Egyptians raised questions on the mismanagement of these mega projects that apparently aimed primarily at bolstering support for Al Sisi new administration.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Train collision kills 32 after emergency brakes triggered, 26/03/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/26/egypt-train-crash-kills-dozens-media-reports>
- *The Guardian*, Suez Canal: Japanese owner of stricken ship talks of plan to re-float it, 26/03/21, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/26/suez-canal-ship-stuck-crisis-shipping-companies-rerouting-blocked-ships>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Facing two disasters, Egypt's President Sisi pledges tough action, 27/03/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/facing-two-disasters-egypts-president-sisi-pledges-tough-action>

Levant

#Palestine #Israel – Israeli and Palestinian elections a few months apart



Source: Middle East Eye

Early this year, [Tor Wennesland](#), Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, emphasised the opportunity offered by the Israeli and the Palestinian elections scheduled in 2021 few months apart, to pave the way for a real peace process in the Middle East. However, both elections seem to be far away from leading to a resumption of negotiations between the two sides.

On the 26th of March the results of the fourth Israeli elections that took place on the 23rd of March were finally announced spreading disappointment among Palestinians worried about the consequences that results might mean for their political reality.

According to Israel's Central Elections Committee the right-wing camp led by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu won 52 seats while his opponents, namely the Blue and White Party, Labour party, Yesh Atid, New Hope party and the Arab Joint List won 57 seats out of the 120 of the Knesset.

Although neither Netanyahu's alliance nor his opponents gained the 61-seat majority needed to form a government, right-wing parties gained significant results revealing that Israelis are keep going towards

the right-wing, more interested in the annexation plan rather than restoring negotiations between the two sides.

As reported by Haaretz newspaper coalitions negotiations are underway. On the 5th of April President Reuven Rivlin is expected to meet with parties' leaders before deciding who will be forming the next Israeli government.

As the Israeli elections results are not indeed promising for Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership will need to intensify its political efforts with the international community and popular resistance on the ground to assert its rights. However, neither the Palestinian Authority's legislative elections are unlikely to produce a strong political change. According to observers the next elections scheduled for the 22nd of May will probably confirm the power-sharing between the two ruling parties Fatah and Hamas since it is almost impossible for new young personalities to run the elections. The PA has in fact recently changed electoral laws by introducing the age requirement for candidates to 28, among the highest in the world, and a 20.000 dollars fee for candidates, an amount almost impossible to pay in a country with very high unemployment rates.

To know more about this topic:

- *The Guardian*, The Israeli and Palestinian elections offend democracy-each in their own way, 17/03/21, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/17/israeli-palestinian-elections-democracy-polls-palestinians>
- *Al-Monitor*, How Palestinians reacted to Israeli election results, 29/03/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/how-palestinians-reacted-israeli-election-results>
- *Haaretz*, Lapid to meet with Arab Joint List leaders today, 01/04/2021, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/israel-election-results-lapid-to-meet-with-joint-list-leaders-today-1.9673175>

Gulf

#SaudiArabia – MBS launches the Saudi and Middle East Green initiative



Source: Al-Arabiya

On the 29th of March Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed with Arab leaders the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiative. The plan announced by the Crown Prince few days earlier aims at creating partnerships with other countries in the region to tackle environmental and social challenges posed by climate change in the region and in the world.

As reported by Arab News the initiative aims at progressively reducing carbon emissions in the region by 60%, enhancing the efficiency of oil production, and increasing the contribution of renewable energy. By 2030, the world's top crude oil exporter, is expected to reduce carbon emissions by generating 50% of its energy from renewable sources.

As part of the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiative, Mohammed bin Salman, announced that about 10 billion trees will be planted in Saudi Arabia over the coming decades, with a further 40 billion trees to be planted in the Middle East to tackle deforestation. Planting 50 billion trees will represent the world's largest reforestation program.

Leaders of Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iraq and Sudan welcomed the initiative and expressed their willingness to actively support the efforts made by the Kingdom.

Kuwait's Cabinet praised the initiative and the "*ambitious road map*" that will contribute to protecting the environment and fighting climate change challenges. Adding that "*positive effects will be seen throughout the Gulf and Middle East regions*".

Despite the general enthusiasm, the initiative has been highly criticised on social media and described as an unrealistic plan for a country that is way too far from being consistent with the Paris Agreement target to limit global warming to 1,5 degrees. Not to mention that in order to start "The Line", the Kingdom's new eco-city with no carbon emissions, local tribes living in Northwest Saudi Arabia have been brutally displaced.

To know more about this topic:

- *Middle East Eye*, Saudi Arabia to plant 10 billion trees, as MBS launches ambitious climate plan, 28/03/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-arabia-billion-trees-climate-change>
- *Asbarq Al-Awsat*, Saudi Crown Prince discusses Middle East Green Initiative with Arab leaders, 29/03/21, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2887616/saudi-crown-prince-discusses-middle-east-green-initiative-arab-leaders>
- *Arab News*, Saudi Arabia's crown prince discusses green initiatives with world leaders, 29/03/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1833991/saudi-arabia>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#UAE #Israel – First crisis between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi



Source: The Times of Israel

On the 18th of March Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed suspended plans to hold a Summit with Israel and the US, angered by the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, for exploiting the Abraham accords and invoking UAE rulers during his election campaign.

The Israeli Prime Minister was eager to visit the UAE in March to booster its diplomatic credential in time for the elections but the meeting has been repeatedly postponed; the latest postponement happened after Jordan did not approve Netanyahu's flight over its airspace due to a dispute with the Jordanian crown prince's denied entrance, on an Islamic festivity, to the Temple Mount in the old city of Jerusalem by Israeli security guards.

According to [Al Quds](#), the Israeli Prime Minister during an interview with the Israeli Army Radio, declared that the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed volunteered to invest 40 billion shekels in Israel, adding that Abu Dhabi is committed to economically support several projects that will contribute to revive Israel's economy severely hit by the pandemic. Mohammed bin Zayed on his side did announce

significant investments and funds in Israel, however he highly disapproved entangling the UAE in domestic Israeli politics and in Netanyahu's electoral campaign.

After announcing the Summit's cancellation the UAE Foreign Minister [Anwar Gargash](#) stated on his twitter account that his country is willing *"to provide a robust strategic foundation to foster peace with the State of Israel and in the wider region, however the UAE will not take part to any internal electioneering in Israel, now or ever"*.

According to the [Arabi21](#) newspaper, in several occasions Netanyahu dragged the UAE and its rulers in internal political affairs, making them an essential point of Likud's electoral campaign. Revealing Crown Prince's economic investments for political consensus was the *"straw that broke the camel's back"*.

After only six months since the Abraham accords were signed a [first major diplomatic crisis](#) between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is breaking the idyll.

According to [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) the Summit will take place in a later time after the political situation in Israel becomes clearer and after the Israeli PM will find a way to reconnect with Abu Dhabi's crown prince.

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