

# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **North Africa**

**#Libya** – GNU to integrate militias in a unified national army



*Source: Reuters*

After the formation of a unity government, the Libyan Joint Military commission, which includes 10 representatives from both the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the Government of National Accord (GNA), wants to unify the Libyan military establishment and remove mercenaries. However, integrating militias into the army might be a difficult task and a risky move.

After a decade of war and two rival administrations ruling independently eastern and western regions, last month, the Libyan Government of National Unity (GNU) took office to guide the country towards national elections scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March Fayeze al-Sarraj, head of the outgoing internationally recognised GNA, officially transferred power to the interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and Mohammed Younes Menfi, head of the three-person Presidential Council. Dbeibah's government includes two deputy prime ministers, 26 ministers and six ministers of state, with the ministries of culture and knowledge development, the ministry of justice, foreign affairs, social affairs and the ministry of women's affairs headed by women.

As stated by the Libyan interim prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, after having unified central institutions the state will tackle the hard task of creating a single national army. Militias must be dissolved and integrated into the country's security forces or police. However, despite the hopes represented by the new unified government, on the streets power is still held by local armed groups. Furthermore, foreign powers backing the two rival sides have not yet withdrawn their forces from the ground, leaving around 20.000 foreign fighters and mercenaries.

The plan to integrate militias in a Libyan unified army raised concerns in Egypt and in the LNA headed by commander Khalifa Haftar.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Al Jazeera*, Libya's interim government takes power after handover in Tripoli, 16/03/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/16/libyas-interim-government-takes-power-after-handover-in-tripoli>
- Al Monitor, Libyan women make history in new government, 26/03/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/libyan-women-make-history-new-government>
- *Arab News*, Libyan PM says he can unify country, 30/03/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1834446/middle-east>
- *Al Monitor*, Egypt criticizes plan to integrate militias into Libyan army, 06/04/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/egypt-criticizes-plan-integrate-militias-libyan-army>

## Levant

### #Jordan – An alleged coup threatens the monarchy



*Source: The New Arab*

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April about 20 people were arrested by Jordanian authorities for being linked to an alleged coup to the monarchy. Between the detainees Bassem Awadallah, a former finance minister, a confidant of the king and an influential force in Jordan's economic reforms, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family. The two Jordanian officials have been arrested with the accuse of conspiring with foreign elements and criticizing the monarchy together with disaffected tribal leaders.

Simultaneously, Prince Hamzah bin Hussein, half-brother of King Abdullah was denied to leave the house and to communicate with the outside world due to, his criticism against the government and the royal family. Jordanian authorities banned any publication reporting on the plot.

After he was put under house arrest, the BBC released a video of Prince Hamzah denouncing indirectly the mismanagement of the government, the high level of corruption, incompetence and nepotism that has been prevalent in Jordan for the last 15 to 20 years, leading Jordanians to lose faith in their institutions. During the video he added that no-one is allowed to speak or express opinions without being arrested, harassed or threatened.

Prince Hamzah was named Crown Prince in 1999 however, at King Hussein's death, he was retained too young and inexperienced to guide the country and, instead of him, Abdallah ascended the throne. Few years later, in 2004, Prince Hamzah was dismissed as heir to the throne by King Abdullah and replaced with his son Prince Hussein, current Jordanian crown prince.

The coup attempt alarmed immediately key western allies, namely the USA, and Gulf countries that sent messages of support to King Abdullah II. The stability of the Kingdom and the status of the King has always been a concern throughout the region as its destabilisation would certainly affect neighbouring countries, primarily Israel. Although Jordan has reached a peace agreement with Israel in 1994 and the two countries have close security ties, diplomatic relations have been difficult in recent years. A destabilised kingdom might exacerbate even further their diplomatic relations and produce consequences in the entire region.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *Haaretz*, Alleged Jordan coup: former crown prince says is under house arrest, 03/04/21, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/jordan/jordan-s-former-crown-prince-reportedly-arrested-on-suspicion-of-plotting-coup-1.9678978>
- *The Times of Israel*, Jordanian press warns stability is a “red line” after alleged coup attempt, 04/04/2021, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordanian-press-warns-stability-is-a-red-line-after-alleged-coup-attempt/>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Jordan face-off continues with regionally-supported king, defiant prince, 05/04/21, available at: <https://the arabweekly.com/jordan-face-continues-regionally-supported-king-defiant-prince>
- *BBC*, Jordan's prince Hamzah bin Hussein “under house arrest”, 05/04/2021, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56626370>
- *Al Jazeera*, Jordan bans reporting on plot; labels palace feud a familiar affair, 06/04/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/6/jordan-justice-bans-publishing-information-on-royal-rift>

## Gulf

### #SaudiArabia #Yemen – MBS looking for an exit strategy in Yemen



*Source: Wall Street Journal*

With the increasing drone and missile attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Saudi energy infrastructures, Riyadh is now looking for a strategy to exit this destructive conflict and to put an end to the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The rebels have shown a surprising political and military skill and the Saudi-led coalition's objective to oust the Houthis turned to be unrealistic, with the rebels controlling the capital Sana and Yemen's northwest.

Previous peace plans and ceasefires have failed, including last year's ceasefire offered by Saudi Arabia. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March the kingdom's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, proposed a new nationwide ceasefire, under the supervision of the United Nations, and the reopening of Sana's Airport. A proposal that it is clearly driven by the attempt of Riyadh to finally leave a conflict that turned into a quagmire for the Kingdom, especially now that the USA may seem to be slowly abandoning its old ally.

Unfortunately, the UN-brokered peace efforts have made no-progress as the Houthis demanded, during negotiations, unchecked direct flights to Iran, Syria and Lebanon, the freeze of Arab coalition airstrikes and the easing restrictions on traffic to and from the seaport. The government refused Houthis' demands as it fears the entry of fighters and armies from Iran. Furthermore, there is the high risk that the rebels

might exploit the absence of the Arab Coalition to gain more territories, for instance the strategic city of Marib, and go further South.

Despite Saudi Arabia's efforts to bolster the internationally recognised government, the battle for Marib, a city crucial for the country's oil and gas production, will most likely be the turning point of the Yemeni civil war and determinate any political developments, if any, in Yemen. If the Houthis manage to seize it, the three most important cities (Sana and Sadaa) will be lost for an already weak Yemeni government.

*To know more about this topic:*

- *BBC*, Saudi Arabia puts forward peace plan, 22/03/21, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56491503>
- *Arab News*, Yemen peace efforts falter as Houthis demand direct flights to Iran, 05/04/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1838036/middle-east>
- *Al Jazeera*, Saudi Arabia's scramble for an exit strategy in Yemen, 05/04/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/5/saudi-arabias-scramble-for-an-exit-strategy-in-yemen>
- *Al Jazeera*, 'Bullet in the head': Battle for Yemen key to Iran-US tension, 07/04/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/7/battle-for-yemen-desert-city-now-a-key-to-iran-us-tension>

## #ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

### #Egypt – Arabs remove Ottoman-era names from streets and buildings



*Source: Egypt Today*

According to the Egyptian News Agency [Akhbarak](#), Helmy al-Namnam, a former Egyptian Minister of culture, commenting on the “Pharaohs’ Golden Parade”, organised to transfer the ancient Egyptian royal mummies to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation in Fustat, (the old Egyptian capital under the Umayyad dynasty), renewed his calls to get rid of manifestations of the Ottoman occupation in Egypt and to enhance the Egyptian cultural heritage.

Few weeks earlier as reported by [Al-Masry al-Youm](#), on the 504<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrest of Tuman Bey, the last Mamluk sultan and leader of the Egyptian resistance against the Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1517-1914), Al-Namnam called to abolish the use of some Ottoman words and titles and to change streets names that recall the Ottoman occupation. During an interview for the “Ra’i ‘am” (Public Opinion) TV program, al-Namnam urged the need to eliminate some of the manifestations of the Ottoman occupation and to stop using titles that belong to the Sublime Porte like “bay”, “pasha”, “Aga Khan” etcetera.

He highlighted that the title “Mufti al-Diyar al-Misriyya”, the government’s primary source of religious authority and responsible for the Dar al-Ifta, one of the most important Islamic institutions, should be

change in Grand Mufti of the Egyptian Arab Republic, since the word “al-Diyar” (House) is a term adopted by the Ottomans to denote their authority over Egypt.

According to the newspaper the former minister of culture has been calling since 1992 to change the name of Sharia’ Salim al-Awal in Cairo which is parallel to Sharia’ Tuman Bay killed by Sultan Salim, however the municipality has never taken into consideration his proposal.

While it might be difficult to remove titles, surnames, streets and villages names that are indeed Turkish in origin, observers believe that the repeated calls to get rid of Ottoman references from the Egyptian history represent an answer to the attempts of the Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to re-establish a Turkish influence on Arab countries, previously under the Ottoman Empire’s control.

Calls to delete Ottoman names from streets and cities were heard not only in Cairo but also in other Arab countries.

According to [Al-Arab](#) last year, the decision taken by the Riyadh’s municipality to change the name of one of its main streets known as Suleiman the Magnificent Street has been welcomed with enthusiasm by the citizens. The announcement echoed in many other Arab cities that started to call for removing the remnants of what Saudi Arabia calls the “Ottoman colonialism” from their streets and buildings, in response to the Turkish intervention in Syria and Libya and to Erdogan’s repeated interferences in their internal affairs.

Although the move got a lot of attention and support locally and among Arab countries, this was not the Kingdom’s first attempt to delete its Ottoman reminiscence. In 2019 Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Education has made a series of modifications to history school textbooks altering the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and its rule over parts of the Arabian Peninsula. One of the major changes concerned the term “Ottoman Caliphate” later changed in the “Ottoman occupation” or “colonialism”. The decision was further justified by the fact that Muslims according to the Islamic law are allowed to conquer non-Muslim populations only, while Ottoman Sultans occupied the Levant and the Maghreb establishing de facto a colonisation.

What is interesting is that despite the wide support to Riyadh’s decision to change the name of one of its main streets, straight after the announcement, the municipality of Tajoura, east of the Libyan capital Tripoli, named one of its main roads Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent triggering a “street war” in the



region with designations and counter-designations between opponents and supporters of the Turkish military intervention in Libya.

Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been battling against Turkey in Libya and Syria but also against Turkish cultural influence over Arab countries.

Specifically, both countries accused Erdogan of exploiting the glorious Ottoman past and the religious discourse to achieve political gains locally and in the region. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, Egypt's Dar al-Ifta, considered among the pioneering foundations for fatwas in the Islamic world, highly criticised Erdogan's manipulation of the issue of converting the Hagia Sophia museum into a mosque and accused him of using religious and Ottoman symbols for his political propaganda.

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