



# ARAB DISPATCH

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## **NORTH AFRICA** #Algeria #Morocco

### **Tensions between Algeria and Morocco become more acute**

Since the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, when the Algerian Foreign Minister, Ramtane Lamamra, officially cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, accusing the neighbour of hostile actions and of supporting the independence movement of the Kabylie region, relations between the two countries deteriorated quickly, raising fears of a possible new border war.

Algeria and Morocco have a long history of tense relations revolving around border demarcation and competition for regional influence. After Algeria's independence from France, in 1963, the two North African countries fought a border war and, since 1994, the land border has been officially closed.

Furthermore, Algeria is the main supporter of the Polisario Front, the liberation movement founded in 1971, by

Sahrawi people claiming the Western Sahara, that had been controlled by Spain and Mauritania until 1979, currently under Moroccan administration. Last year, the Trump administration officially recognized the Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara in a diplomatic move that has been seen by many as in exchange of Morocco's decision to normalize relations with Israel.

Earlier in July, tensions between the two countries reached a critical stage after the Moroccan envoy to the United Nations, Omar Hilal, openly accused Algeria of denying the right of self-determination for the Tamazight-speaking minority living in the Kabylie region while supporting the self-determination for Western Sahara. After

the comments made by the Moroccan envoy during a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Algerian Foreign Minister, Lamamra, recalled his ambassador to Morocco.

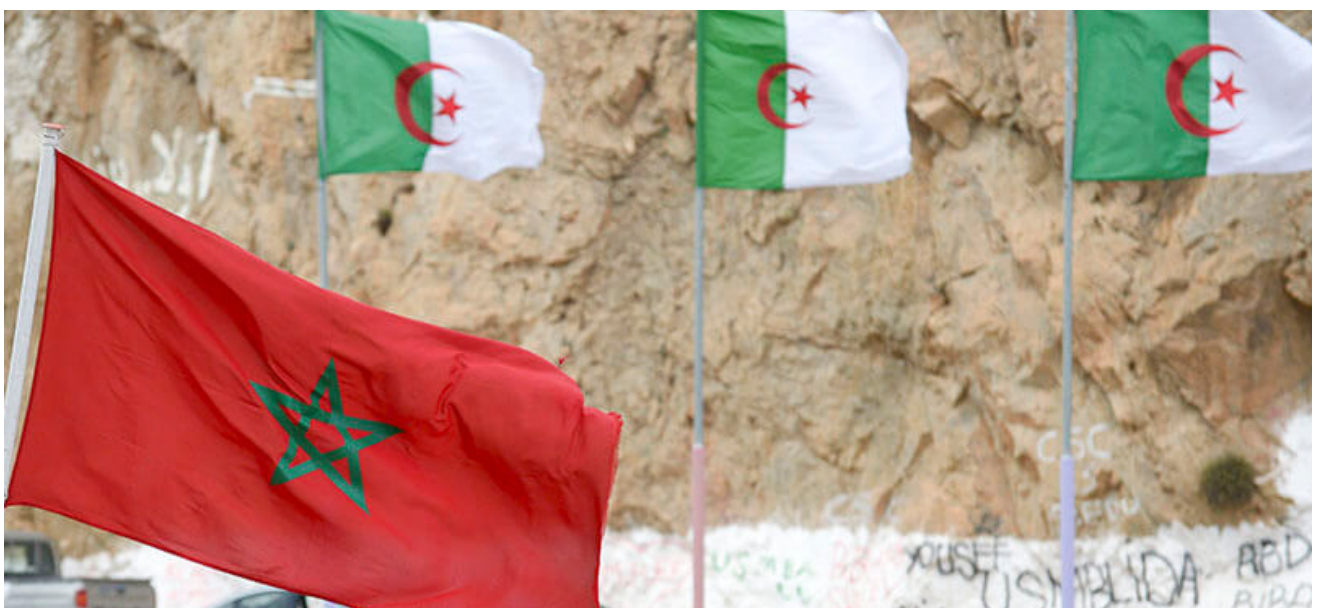
More recently, as tensions escalate, the Algerian Energy Minister, Mohamed Arkab, announced the suspension of a major pipeline, the Maghreb-Europe Gas (MEG), operating since 1996, that exports gas to Spain and Portugal crossing through Morocco which receives in return 7% of the gas transported as royalty. Halting the MEG transit agreement will deprive Morocco of a key source of energy.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, after months of heightened tensions between the two North African countries, Algeria's High Security Council, chaired by President

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, decided to close the airspace immediately to all Moroccan planes.

The turns of the events and the recent accusations of conspiracy by the Algerian Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Said Chengriha, against the Moroccan Kingdom, might dangerously lead to a military clash. Both governments increased their military deployments along the border.

Moreover, the recent appointment by King Mohammed VI of Lieutenant General Belkhir al Faruk, whose credentials include several military campaigns in Western Sahara, as general inspector of the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces, seems to be a clear sign of Morocco's willingness to military respond to Algeria's latest moves.



Source: Atalayar

To know more:

- *France 24*, Algeria severs diplomatic ties with Morocco, citing hostile actions, 24/08/21, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210824-algeria-severs-diplomatic-ties-with-morocco-citing-hostile-actions>
- *Al Jazeera*, Algeria closes airspace to all Moroccan planes, 22/09/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/22/algeria-closes-airspace-to-all-moroccan-planes>
- *MEI*, What is driving escalating tensions between Algeria and Morocco? 01/10/21, available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publication/s/whats-driving-escalating-tensions-between-algeria-and-morocco>
- *Middle East Eye*, Morocco and Algeria: Is a military showdown coming?, 05/10/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/morocco-algeria-tensions-military-showdown-coming>

## LEVANT #Lebanon

### Lebanese PM to resume talks with the IMF

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, the recently appointed Lebanese Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, expressed the interest to resume negotiations with the International Monetary Fund on a financial programme after discussions fell apart one year ago.

According to the PM's cabinet, resuming talks with the international organisation is a key priority to end the economic dire crisis that turned about three-quarters of the population into poverty amid extended power outages and shortages

in fuel and made the Lebanese pound to drop about 90%.

However, the Lebanese severe economic crisis, described by the World Bank as one of the worst the world has witnessed since mid-1800s, will not recover without proper economic reforms and without ending wasteful spending and financial crimes. The root causes and drivers of the country's economic collapse, faced by previous government and unfolding since 2019, are still present and the IMF expects the Lebanese government to begin discussing policies and reforms

that will address the economic and financial crisis.

The United Nation's humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, Najat Rochdi, urged the government to take actions and to adopt much-needed reforms to unlock foreign assistance. She further underlined that humanitarian actions and financial aid are only short-term solutions, stressing that the country's future lies in the hands of the newly established leadership.

Last month the European Union threatened to launch sanctions against the country if the Lebanese government did not implement structural reforms.

Prime Minister Mikati, who formed a new cabinet only last month after a year-long political deadlock, and who is already involved along with other Lebanese politician in a financial fraud, vowed to implement reforms and to restructure the energy sector in order to rediscuss negotiations with the IMF.



Source: Reuters - Lebanon's new Prime Minister Najib Mikati during an unofficial ceremony

#### To know more:

- *The Middle East Eye*, UN calls on Lebanon to carry out economic reforms as poverty levels rise, 01/10/21, available at: [https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-calls-lebanon-carry-out-](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-calls-lebanon-carry-out-economic-reforms-poverty-levels-rise)
- *Al Jazeera*, Lebanon and IMF to restart technical talks on rescue funds, 04/10/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/4/lebanon-and-imf-to-resume-technical-talk>



- *MENA Affairs*, Technical talks between Lebanon and IMF to restart in coming days, 05/10/21, available at: <https://menaaffairs.com/technical-talks-between-lebanon-and-imf-to-restart-in-coming-days/>

- *Middle East Eye*, Pandora Papers: Lebanon's prime minister says family wealth is legal, 05/10/2021, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/pandora-papers-lebanon-mikati-family-wealth-legal>

## **GULF #UnitedArabEmirates**

### **UAE to reconsider rivalry with Iran and Turkey**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October the President's diplomatic adviser and former Foreign Minister, Anwar Gargash, announced at the 14<sup>th</sup> World Policy Conference (Abu Dhabi), that the United Arab Emirates are eager to manage regional rivalries and to de-escalate tensions with its non-Arab enemies - notably Iran and Turkey – to avoid new confrontations within the region that could affect the country's post-COVID-19 economy.

According to UAE officials the United States' commitment to the region is highly uncertain. The vacuum left by the United States will surely impact the stability of the entire region, as it happened already in Afghanistan with the Taliban's return. Consequently, the country needs to re-think the region and to re-design its strategic and business partnerships as well as to de-escalate tensions with its enemies.

As reported by Arab News, the Presidential diplomatic adviser is highly concerned about the economic and strategic competition between the United States and China and the extreme pressure that this will represent for Gulf States. He stressed that the geopolitical rivalry between the two major powers will force Gulf countries to make impossible decisions and to reconsider historical enemies. The UAE, along with other Gulf countries are close US allies but, at the same time, China is a major economic player in the region as it is the Gulf's biggest buyer of crude oil. China offers economic partnerships to Gulf countries while the US are a more strategic ally.

Already last month the Emirati Foreign Minister, Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, and his counterpart,

Javad Zarif, discussed bilateral relations, pointing out the importance of consultations on diplomatic issues despite tensions in the area. The two countries went through long-standing tensions, including the recent UAE's normalization of ties with Iran's archrival Israel. However, while diplomatic relations between the two countries are progressively improving, de-escalating tensions between Turkey and UAE might be more challenging.

Ankara and Abu Dhabi are engaged in a decade-long confrontation on different levels that has deeply impacted the

region, while helping both of them to bolster their credibility on a domestic and international level. The two countries have been backing opposite sides in every regional conflict since 2011. Ideologically, Turkey has shown its support for Muslim Brotherhood parties while the UAE has presented itself as the torch-bearer for moderation against Islamist forces.

However, with the normalization of diplomatic ties between Qatar, Turkey's closest ally in the region, and UAE, relations between Ankara and Abu Dhabi might slowly improve.



Source: *The Jerusalem Post* - President's diplomatic adviser and former Foreign Minister, Anwar Gargash

To know more:

- *Daily Sabah*, A new era for Turkey-UAE relations with normalization, 09/09/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/a-new-era-for-turkey-uae-relations-with-normalization>
- *Arab News*, US-China rivalry forces Arab Gulf states to make impossible choices UAE's Anwar Gargash tells World Policy Conference, 02/10/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1940446/middle-east>
- *Al Jazeera*, UAE official says time to manage rivalry with Iran and Turkey, 03/10/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1855546/saudi-arabia>
- *Daily Sabah*, UAE tries to manage regional rivalry with Turkey, Iran: Gargash, 03/10/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/uae-tries-to-manage-regional-rivalry-with-turkey-iran-gargash>

## ARAB INSIGHT

### #Egypt

### A fight for women rights through music and lyrics



Source: Cairo Scene

The Egyptian sister duo Marina and Mariam Samir, known as Al-Boumah (the owl), are at the forefront of Arab female music bands, denouncing with their powerful music and lyrics the patriarchal culture of Egypt and the Arab world. Previously known as Bint al-Masarawa (daughter of the Egyptians), the two Egyptian sisters from Cairo are promoting feminist music production as a tool to fight misogyny and as a platform for women to share their experiences in an extremely oppressive and brutal society.

Starting from the band's name, "Al-Boumah", "the owl", an expression often used in the Egyptian and Arab culture to address moody women, the two sisters are using their music to fight against "something bigger than themselves" – as the owls usually do – by covering a range of very sensitive topics and gender-related taboos, from child marriage, still practiced in Egyptian rural areas, to sexual harassment and to female genital mutilation, which 87% of Egyptian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone.

As reported from [al-Araby](#) the duo has become one of the few artistic groups that creates a continuous powerful debate on the role of women within a male-oriented society and give space to an intellectual discourse based on refusing and refuting the patriarchal structure of the Arab society, which is halting since the Medieval period, the progress of Arab countries.

The female music band began writing music in 2015 and became quickly famous in the Egyptian underground music scene for breaking taboos on the Egyptian-Abyssinian patriarchal society by tackling gender themes including women's legal rights, freedom, virginity and female body. Contributing to grow awareness on gender issues, unfolding since the 2011 Arab Springs, they are committed to fight a patriarchal culture that reduces the value of their women to just their dimension as reproductive body and house working force.



Their songs are immersed in the Egyptian popular folklore, both in sound and lyrics. By listening to their songs, the audience is immediately overwhelmed by the unique Egyptian lyrical heritage, the typical sound of the 90-minute songs of Umm Kulthum (1924-1973). This Egyptian singer until now remains, with her "incomparable voice" – as Maria Callas said about hers – the most respected and beloved singer in the Arab world, with Egyptian calling her "Egypt's fourth pyramid" or the "mother of the Arabs".

However, after a lyrical prelude, the music leaves the space to the sharpening words of Marina and Mariam, denouncing and condemning with audacity tribal practices of



traditional weddings that violate women's body, dreams and freedom under the name of purity, virginity and honour, as it is well described in the songs: "[Qulu li abuha](#)" (Tell her father) and "[Ya Arusa](#)" (Oh bride).

Swinging between contemporary musical forms and Egyptian folklore music, they create spontaneous songs that narrate the real stories of hundreds of women living in Egypt, highlighting the horrors and the inequalities they face in their daily life.

Al-Boumah aims at making Egyptian women's experiences available to everyone, through music and through documentation.

At the beginning of 2015 the band launched a project called "[Bint al Masarawa in Upper Egypt](#)" to document, through music, the stories of 34 women living in Minya, Assiut and Aswan. For three days the band facilitated storytelling circles and composing workshops during which local women were invited to tell their stories and divulge the obstacles they face as women living in a male-oriented society through music. The workshops produced 18 songs, and ten of them were included in the group's second album called "Mazghuna", the old name for the village where Al-Boumah held its first storytelling workshop. At the end of the storytelling workshops, the result was a powerful music album documenting women's daily life in Egypt's marginalized areas, way faraway from middle class Cairene women's life.

Through its music the group tries to create alternative artistic spaces to discuss and debate gender discrimination and to promote equality that does not trap individuals in specific roles dictated by the society. As stated from the female band: "Al-Boumah doesn't claim artistic excellence, on the contrary, they want to engage people on very sensitive themes and music is a pivotal pillar in the process of strengthening social awareness".

Maria Bagnara