



ARAB DISPATCH

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NORTH AFRICA #Tunisia

Female cabinet members to hold the country's main portfolios

On the 11th of October, two months after dismissing the former Prime Minister and freezing the Parliament, the Tunisian President, Kais Saied, appointed a new cabinet, amid protests denouncing the President's seizure of power, described by the opposition as a coup.

On the 25th of July, claiming that the country was under “*exceptional circumstances*” and invoking the Article 80 of the Tunisian constitution, President Saied assumed all executive powers, to put an end to the political dispute between Rachid Gannouchi, leader of Ennahda, and the Prime Minister, Hichem Mechichi. The President's

decision came completely unexpected, raising fears, both domestically and internationally of a possible authoritarian shift and a step back for Tunisia's fragile political transition.

On the 29th of September the Tunisian President appointed the geological expert and professor, Najila Bouden-Romadhane as the first-ever women prime minister in the history of Tunisia, a choice that has been seen by some quarters as more symbolic than substantial.

While feminist groups have hailed Bouden's appointment as a step forward in women's empowerment,

not only in Tunisia but in the entire Arab region, questions remain on the scope and duration of her mandate in a context of “exceptional measures” and rule by decree

After 11 weeks since Saïed’s suspension of the Parliament, the President has appointed a new government with a record number of women members.

The new cabinet includes 24 ministers and one junior minister. Many of the appointed ministers are new faces outside of the political scene. Among them, ten are women. The female members will hold important portfolios. Leila Jaffel will

head the Ministry of Justice, for example, while Sihem Boughdiri Nemseya will continue in her role as Finance Minister.

During the swearing-in ceremony, the Prime Minister stressed the need to: fight endemic corruption, improve services and citizens’ living conditions and restore the country’s credibility in order to unlock foreign financial aid.

Speaking to the newly appointed cabinet members the President clarified that “women are not a cosmetic veneer” and he announced a “real new national dialogue”.



Source: Deutsche Welle

To know more:

- *Middle east Eye*, Tunisia's President Saied appoints first women prime minister, 29/09/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-romdhane-prime-minister-woman-first>
- *The Arab Weekly*, Saied appoints new cabinet dominated by fresh faces, more women, 11/10/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/saied-appoints-new-cabinet-dominated-fresh-faces-more-women>
- *Middle east Eye*, Tunisia: Prime Minister names cabinet loyal to Sayed, 11/10/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-new-government-named-ministers-loyal-kais-saied>
- *Deutsche Welle*, Tunisia: President appoints new government amid coup allegations, 11/10/21, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/tunisia-president-appoints-new-government-amid-coup-allegations/a-59472779>

LEVANT #Jordan

The largest water sale in history between Amman and Tel Aviv

On the 12th of October, the Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation, Muhammad Al-Najjar, and the Israeli Minister of Energy, Karine Elharrar signed a historic agreement that will secure Amman with an additional 50 million cubic meters of water.

During the Joint Water Committee that manages water relations between the two countries, Israel has agreed to double the water it provides to Jordan.

Since the peace agreement signed by the two neighbouring countries in 1994, Israel supplies Jordan, with 55 million cubic meters of water annually. With the climate crisis affecting the region and, most importantly, with the influx of about three millions of refugees coming from Syria and Iraq, Amman's demand for water has significantly increased.

While Jordan ranks as the world's second water-poorest country, Israel, also a hot, dry country, has developed

desalination technologies with new opportunities for selling fresh water.

The former Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has repeatedly denied additional water supplies to his neighbour and, after Jordan's denied the former Israeli PM to pass over Jordanian air space in response to the denied entrance to Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque to the Jordanian crown prince, diplomatic relations between the two countries reached a critical stage.

Last April, along with Biden's administration increasing pressure, the new Israeli government headed by Naftali Bennet, who was keen on strengthening ties with Amman, approved the additional sale of water to reduce tensions between the two countries.

The deal represents the "largest water sale in the history of the two countries" and, according to Karine Elharrar, it proves that Israel aims at "good neighbourly relations".

Upon the agreement, Benjamin Netanyahu commented on his twitter account: "while Jordan is strengthening its relations with Iran, Bennett today doubled the amount of water transferred by Israel to Jordan, without obtaining any political return for Israel". On the other hand, the agreement signed with Jordan will not tackle Palestinian access to water.



Source: The New Arab

To know more:

- *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Israeli PM approves 50 Mln cubic meters sale of water to Jordan, 03/07/21, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3060016/israeli-pm-approves-50-mln-cubic-meters-sale-water-jordan>
- *Arab news*, Israel signs deal to double water supply to Jordan, 12/10/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1946366/middle-east>
- *Middle East Monitor*, Ex-Israel PM slams providing Jordan with additional water without “returns”, 13/10/21, available at: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211013-ex-israel-pm-slams-providing-jordan-with-additional-water-without-returns/>

GULF #Iraq

Unsurprising elections

On the 10th of October, Iraq held its fifth national election since the 2003's war.

The voter turnout, 43%, marked a new record low compared to the 44% of 2018's election, that was already exceptionally low, underlining the increasing mistrust of Iraqis towards political institutions.

The turnout showed important gains for the Shiite Sadrist bloc, whose leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, appeared as the biggest winner, getting 73 out of the national parliament's 329 seats, 19 seats more from the 2018's elections.

Taqaddum, the biggest Sunni party in the parliament, led by the current parliament's speaker, Mohammed al-Halbousi, won 37 seats, and the State of Law Alliance, led by the former PM, Nouri al-Maliki, with 34 seats. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by the Masoud Barzani won 32 seats.

To lose consensus were the pro-Iran militant groups, highlighting that Iraqis no longer agree with their militant message and with the continuous interference of the Islamic Republic into Iraq's domestic affairs.

The Fatah alliance, previously the second largest block in the parliament, won only a dozen seats while the pro-Iranian Khataib Hezbollah did not win a single seat. Iran-backed Shia militias and armed groups have promptly rejected the results and called the elections “illegitimate”. The biggest loser of Iraq’s elections might be Iran that risks of losing its grip on the country. It is no coincidence that Iran’s Quds Force commander, Ismail Qaani, arrived in Baghdad, less than 24 hours after the elections.

Clearly the elections turned out to be a reshuffle of the current political class. The new parliament will most likely include the current ruling political class projecting the same fragmentation with no hopes for a political change, the main reason for calling for an early election in the first place.

However, even though the election turnout was a record low and Iraq’s next government will most likely lead the country to a new crisis, the new electoral law, ensured indeed a more transparent election system with voting machines, computerization of the voting process and better voting cards that restored the credibility of election systems and allowed the emergence of a class of independent candidates that could potentially form an opposition bloc.

Among them, Imtidad, a movement led by Alaa al-Rikabi, a pharmacist who gained prominence during the October 2019 protests won 10 seats.



Source: Reuters-Iraqi Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr in the Sadr City district of Baghdad

To know more:

- *Bas News*, Commander of Iran's Quds Force arrives in Baghdad a day after election, 11/10/21, available at: https://www.basnews.com/en/bat/717298?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=pmd_ZPoYh3Oyt7MkeJh2Y9NKJ5sJo7W869wbc7ZB.kkkG1s-1634316033-0-gqNtZGzNAhCjcnBszQkl
- *Al-Jazeera*, Pro-Iranian groups reject early Iraq election results as 'scam', 12/10/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/iraqi-pro-iranian-groups-reject-elections-a-scam>
- *Foreign Policy*, The biggest loser of Iraq's election could be Iran, 13/10/21, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/13/iraq-election-2021-iran-militias-al-sadr/>
- *Middle East Eye*, Iraq's elections 2021: A glimmer of hope, 12/10/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iraq-elections-how-change-political-landscape>
- *Shafaq News*, al-Sadr pledges to exterminate militias: even those who pretend resistance, 11/10/21, available at: <https://www.shafaq.com/en/Iraq-News/In-his-victory-speech-al-Sadr-pledges-to-exterminate-militias-even-those-who-pretend-resistance>

ARAB INSIGHT #MENA

The U.S. administration: MENA perceptions

According to [Arabi 21](#), the recent chaotic withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan, followed by Taliban's power-grab, caused great concerns in the Arab region, particularly among Gulf leaders, that are extremely worried about the withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East and about U.S. future plans for the region.

The vacuum left by the withdrawal of the American troops from Kabul shocked the leaderships of United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt and most significantly Saudi Arabia.

While the kingdom was still nervously watching at the U.S. withdrawal, on the 13th of September, President Biden announced the removal of the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system and the air defence Patriot batteries from Prince Sultan Air Base outside Riyadh, a move that has been perceived in the region as the end of American commitment to the Gulf.

Shaikh Turki bin Faisal al-Saud, former director of the Al-Mukhabarat Al-'Ammah (Saudi Arabia's intelligence agency), highly criticised Biden's decision and stressed the need of the American military support in the region, as the kingdom continues to face drone attacks from Iran-backed Yemen's Houthi rebels.



Source: AFP

The day after, Al-Quds al Arabi, stated that the U.S. administration decided to suspend part of the military aid to Egypt over human rights concerns.

Biden's administration made it clear that the U.S. will progressively reduce its involvement to a minimum in the Middle East's "forever wars", ending an era of major military operations. With that in mind, Arab leaders will have to take into account the

reduced import by the United States of Gulf oil and the Biden's administration intentions to decrease military commitment in the region.

The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have recently launched talks on security cooperation with their archenemy Iran; without the US umbrella, will need to reconsider their foreign relations and diversify their security providers. Eventually, they might turn to new players in the region or they might need to knock the door of Russia and China, the Gulf's biggest buyer of crude oil.

In recent years China and Russia have already strengthen their position in Maghreb, and are building stronger trade, security and diplomatic relations with Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

Furthermore, according to the [Arab Barometer](#), while the current U.S. foreign policies towards the region maintain a strong negative impact on Arab public opinion, China is emerging as a winner in the great-power competition within the MENA region.

According to [Al-Ahram](#), the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan represents the starting point of the collapse of the American superpower as it happened with the Soviet Union in 1989. Both superpowers left the conflict as losers, living behind an extremely chaotic situation. According to the newspaper the defeat of the U.S. in Afghanistan and its withdrawal from the region might lead to a self-isolation that could give to its rivals, especially China, the opportunity to challenge the White House.

Certainly, as pointed out by the [Doha Institute](#), it will be extremely difficult for the United States to permanently and completely withdraw its forces from the region without facing any consequence.

The growth of Russian influence in the region, Iran's hegemonic ambitions and the return of terrorism are only few possible scenarios that the US administration will have to face. The only way for the U.S. to tackle these scenarios, is through the support of its allies in the region, that, however, will be unable to handle the situation without America's military cooperation. Furthermore the U.S. withdrawal might lead to new challenges that will require the United States to re-engage even more intensively in the region and to re-allocate even more resources.

According to Al Masri al Youm the United States' defeat in Afghanistan, given its strong economy and its military power, will not lead to the state's collapse as it happened for the Soviet Union, however it will surely lose its diplomatic influence in the region and the role of its currency will dramatically decline with a significant impact on international trade transactions and international financial organizations. The country will remain a super power but it will certainly lose its dominant role and will have to share areas of influence.

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