



ARAB DISPATCH

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NORTH AFRICA #Libya

UNSMIL urges simultaneous parliamentary and presidential elections

On the 1st of November, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, that is following the legal framework of Libya's national elections urged the leaders to maintain the political roadmap and to hold credible parliamentary and presidential elections simultaneously on the next 24th of December.

According to the UNSMIL, respecting the principle of simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021 is needed to preserve the integrity of the electoral process, enhance credibility, and the right and aspirations of the Libyan people to democratically elect their representatives and leaders as well as the acceptance of the results of the elections.

The Mission further called on Libyan institutions to facilitate and ensure the equal participation of women and youth in the upcoming elections as they are essential to the democratic process.

Foreign powers and the UN mission have so far pushed for elections to be held on the same day to ease integrity during the electoral process, but disagreements between the Tripoli's government led by the Prime Minister Dbeibah and the Parliament in Tobruk led by Aguila Saleh remain and risk to create obstacles.

Earlier in October the House of Representatives issued separate laws for the presidential elections that will be held on the 24th of December and for the

parliamentary election that will be held later. A move that was seen by rival Libyan political institutions as an attempt to delay election and to maintain the power of the chamber's leadership.

After the calls of the UNSMIL for simultaneous selection, 44 Libyan Members of Parliament announced their rejection of the interference of the UN in the electoral laws issued by the House of Representatives and expressed their concerns on what they called a "political imposition" to the elections' laws.



Source: Anadolu Agency

To know more:

- *Libyan Express*, UNSMIL urges Libyan lawmakers vote on Dec.24, 31/10/21, available at: <https://www.libyanexpress.com/uns-mil-urges-libyan-lawmakers-vote-on-dec-24/>
- *Daily Sabah*, Libya's Presidential, parliamentary votes should be taken on Dec. 24: UN, 01/11/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/libyas-presidential-parliamentary-votes-should-be-taken-on-dec-24-un>
- *Libya Review*, Libyan MPs reject UN Mission's interference in elections, 01/11/21, available at: <https://libyareview.com/18257/libyan-mps-reject-un-missions-interference-in-elections/>

LEVANT #Lebanon

Beirut pays the consequences of the Lebanese information Minister's criticism

On the 1st of November Saudi Arabia extended its ban on some goods from Lebanon to all country's imports following the diplomatic crisis between the two countries after critical comments were made by the Lebanese Minister of Information, George Kordahi, on the kingdom's involvement and role in Yemen's conflict.

At the end of October Kordahi, nominated by the Christian party allied to Hezbollah, Marada, slammed as "futile" the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen and accused the coalition of "external aggression".

Following the Minister's remarks, Saudi Arabia expelled immediately the Lebanese Ambassador and recalled its ambassador from Beirut. Bahrain and Kuwait followed while the United Arab Emirates recalled its diplomats and invited its citizens to leave. The Saudi Foreign Minister, Shaikh Faisal bin Farhan, after extending the ban over Lebanese goods, stated that "dealing with

Beirut is pointless due to the Iran-backed Hezbollah's dominance in the country".

The recent ban launched by Riyadh will importantly affect the Lebanese economy already in severe struggle.

Although the two countries had wavering diplomatic ties, Saudi Arabia was indeed a major market for Lebanon.

Last April the Kingdom already temporarily blocked some food imports after amphetamines were discovered hidden in pomegranates coming from Lebanon at the Jeddah port. The latest ban, that applies to all the goods and, most significantly, to the remittances of Lebanese expats living in Saudi Arabia, will produce an even harder damage to the already battered economy.

According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), during 2019 Lebanon exported products worth 282 million dollars to Saudi

Arabia while in 2020 the exports decreased to 246,71 million dollars.

If diplomatic relations between the two countries remain tense, Lebanon, that is not able to shift these exports to new markets, due to its import standards way faraway from other countries, will lose 250 million dollars in revenues, further escalating the contraction of Lebanon's economy.

Furthermore, if other Gulf countries follow Riyadh's lead and launch bans on Lebanese exports, the impact on Lebanese economy will be unprecedented.

Not to mention that the bans might be extended on the remittances

being sent from the 400.000 Lebanese citizens living in the Gulf to Lebanon leading to a significant loss impacting thousands of families relying on remittances from the diaspora now more than ever.

Nevertheless, many experts see Saudi Arabia austerity towards Lebanon an attempt to pressure the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement.

Even though the economic impact of Kordahi statements will be very serious, the consequences will be more political rather than economic, because the overall situation is already extremely hard.



Source: Zawya

To know more:

- *Middle East Eye*, Minister's criticism of Yemen war sparks diplomatic crisis with the Gulf, 27/10/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-yemen-war-minister-criticism-diplomatic-crisis-gulf>
- *Middle East Eye*, Saudi import ban spells more trouble for Lebanon's economy, 04/11/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-saudi-import-ban-economy-crisis>
- *Daily Sabah*, Diplomatic row between Lebanon and Gulf states, 08/11/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/diplomatic-row-between-lebanon-and-gulf-states>

GULF #SaudiArabia

Biden approves its first major arms deal to Saudi Arabia

On the 4th of November the US State Department approved its first major arms deal to Saudi Arabia under the US President Joe Biden.

After increasing air-attacks by the Iran-backed Houthis against the Kingdom, the new US administration has approved the sale of 280 air-to-air missiles worth 650 million dollars.

After the Trump administration, President Biden recalibrated diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and vowed to support the Kingdom only for defensive purpose adopting a policy of selling only defensive weapons.

However, after the escalating air attacks against both Saudi and US forces and after the recent advances on the Marib front at a huge humanitarian costs the Pentagon has approved the sale.

The sale will include 280 AIM-120C-7/C-8 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM), 596 LAU-

128 Missile Rail Launchers (MRL) along with spare parts, US Government and contractor engineering and technical support. No contract to date has been signed.

The sale, which comes months after President Joe Biden confirmed his intentions to end supporting Saudi Arabia's offensive military operations in Yemen, sparked controversy on the media and among Saudi Arabia's critics.

Marianne Williamson, former presidential candidate, highly criticized the US State Department decision and tweeted that "America's economy should not be built around merchandising death", underlining the dangerous influence of military industries over Washington's foreign policy.

Human rights organizations have slammed the deal pointing out that the arms sales of the Saudi-led coalition have been the driving force behind the continuation of the

military campaign in Yemen at the costs of Yemeni people.

Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of DAWN, a human rights group that promotes democracy in the Middle East severely condemned the arms deal that she defined an “insult to injury”.

On the other hand, the Pentagon’s spokesperson clarified that the arms deal “will support US foreign policy and national security by helping to improve the security of a friendly country that is an important force for political and economic progress in the Middle East”.

The State Department’s bureau of military affairs further underlined that the missiles will not be used to engage ground targets but to

intercept Houthi rebels air-attacks that threaten US forces deployed in Saudi Arabia along with around 70.000 US citizens living in the Kingdom.

According to political analysts, the proposed arms sale reflects the Biden’s wiliness to soften his approach to the Kingdom. After the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States need to assure Saudi Arabia and regional allies about the US commitment to maintain security and strategic relation in the Gulf.

Especially considering Biden’s desire to revive nuclear deal with Iran that might require Saudi Arabia’s lift of anti-Iran sanctions.



Source: CNN

To know more:

- *Al Jazeera*, Biden administration approves \$650m weapon sale to Saudi Arabia, 04/11/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/4/biden-administration-approves-650m-weapon-sale-to-saudi-arabia>
- *The Arab Weekly*, US adjusts policy to sell advanced air-to-air missiles to Riyadh, 05/11/21, available at: <https://thearabweekly.com/us-adjusts-policy-sell-advanced-air-air-missiles-riyadh>
- *ABNA24*, Will new US arms sales to Saudi Arabia tip scales in Riyadh's favour?, 09/11/21, available at: https://en.abna24.com/news/analysis-will-new-us-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-tip-scales-in-riyadh's-favor_1196929.html

ARAB INSIGHT

#MENA

Al Jazeera celebrates its Silver Jubilee

On the 1st of November Al Jazeera, the first independent news channel in the Arab World, celebrated its 25 years of covering the human story in the Arab region and not only.

The origins of the most controversial Arabic News Channel in the region date back to 1995 when the Qatar's emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani announced the creation of the first Arabic-language satellite news channel. One year later, Al Jazeera launched its first TV broadcast in Modern Standard Arabic to provide to the entire Arab region news and debates and to finally satisfy the thirst for knowledge of the Arab people.

A series of lucky events helped Al Jazeera to emerge as the only free Arabic News Channel in the Middle East.

In 1995, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), that was already operating in the Arab region with Arabic-language news coverage, was could not renew its contract with the Saudi-owned, Orbit Communications company, due to a reportage broadcast in Saudi Arabia discussing human rights and showing scenes of capital punishment in the Kingdom.

After the mediatic "incident" the BBC lost its contract with Orbit and Al Jazeera promptly jumped in and hired the highly qualified journalists that were previously working in the region for the BBC. The same year Canal France International was excluded from Arabsat for broadcasting a porno-movie in the afternoon slot. Canal France International was shut down and Al Jazeera Channel took the channel's daytime slots becoming one of the most-watched televisions. The turning point that pushed Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to launch the revolutionary news channel was indeed the Gulf War. In 1991, although the Arab

Tv Channels had correspondents in loco, the invasion of Kuwait from the Iraqi Forces was announced to the Arab World three days later, showing the backwardness of the Arab News Channels and the strong censorship weight that governments were playing on them.



Source: Al Jazeera

Arabs from all over the world choose to keep themselves informed through the popular CNN instead of getting news from censored Arab Media means that, to comply with the Government's propaganda could potentially announce a false victory, as it happened in 1967 during the six-day war, when the famous Egyptian Radio Saut Al Arab announced the victory of the Egyptian Forces over Israel.

Even though the channel remains until today highly controversial, Al Jazeera represented for the entire Arab region a mediatic and, most significantly, a cultural revolution. To make the Arabic news channel a game changer was indeed a team of dedicated Arab journalists with a multi-national education and, most importantly, the freedom of the Channel from the government's censorship and control (in 1996 Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani abolished the Ministry of Information). Al Jazeera was the only all-news independent channel ever to

guarantee news *Mubashir* (Direct) from all the Arab countries, providing a comprehensive censor-free coverage.

Another significant aspect of Al Jazeera was indeed its strong pan-Arabic character. Given the fact that the news were broadcasted in Modern Standard Arabic and that the TV broadcasts were in no way inferior to the high standard offered by the most famous western broadcast channels, both Arabs from the diaspora and Arabs from the most remote villages of the region started watching Al Jazeera instead of watching the CNN.

With Arab correspondents all over the world, Al Jazeera offered Arab people a new refreshing perspective on global events that surprisingly was not coming from a Western channel. The channel reflected the Arab point of view and became a cultural bridge and a cultural shelter for the Arabs living in western countries experiencing alienation and social exclusion. The TV Shows discussed very sensitive topics, carefully respecting the Arab-Islamic point of view. A choice that helped grow the sense of Ummah among the new generations of Arabs and among the Arabs of the diaspora living in non-Arab countries.

The ratings further increased when the TV Channel launched talk shows and debates covering topics considered off-limits in the Arab region. The debates would tackle sensitive topics such as Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, human rights, corruption of the political entourage in Arab governments, feminism and so on. Talk shows like "*Al-ittijah al-muakis*" (the opposite opinion) and "*Akthar min Ra'i*" (more than one opinion) help to partially bring back the art of debating that characterizes the classic Arab poetry and literature. Provocatory debates and talk-shows helped indeed create a public opinion so far completely absent.

Many experts gave to Al Jazeera the credit of starting a democratisation process in the region - that led years later to the Arab Spring - by destabilising the relationship between authority and citizen in Arab countries. With the advent of internet, the TV channel's internet page gave the audience the opportunity to share personal opinions about the topics debated, allowing them to speak loud.

During the Arab uprisings Al Jazeera promptly shared the videos made by the so-called “citizens journalists” showing to the world the popular unrests against the regimes, creating consciousness within the entire Arab region.



Source: Arabian Business

Al Jazeera somehow created awareness in the Arab region of a long-needed modernisation and yet it is true that it brought out into the open what used to be strictly confidential, however many Arabs as well as many experts from the region remain sceptical and suspicious on the real goals of the channel and the solid links that it undoubtedly keeps with Qatar and its regional allies. The channel has been repeatedly accused of being not only a media project, but of being a political project in the pay of Qatar authorities to tear apart a region that was already ticking time bomb.

Since the 2011's Arab uprising, journalists highly criticised the channel for quickly escalating the chaos and internal divisions in the Arab region by spreading non

accurate videos, at the costs of Arab people and their legitimate calls for democracy. By spreading the chaos and adopting a “[risala al-tadmiir](#)”, a destructive message, the television station was said to further deteriorate an already wavering religious and tribal coexistence in the region that turned quickly in a playground for civil wars. Not to mention that many authoritarian regimes exploited the narratives offered by Al Jazeera and the chaos spread by the channel to stay in place.

The journalist [Fauzia Rashid](#), declared even that Al Jazeera, under the slogan of “*al-Ittijah al-muakis*” (the opposite position), opened its doors to criminals and terrorists for discussions and debates. By giving them a platform to express their point of view and exchange opposing opinions normalised them in the popular discourse. She further criticised the methods of the TV channel adopted during the Arab uprisings and criticised the Qatari-owned TV for siding, in the name of democracy, any group that was opposing the regimes in place, even though they were armed and violent opposition groups, opposing, in the reality, a democratic dialogue.

On the other hand, as highlighted by [Al Arabi Al Jadid](#), the Arab countries that openly oppose the methods adopted by the channel should establish equivalent channels that could potentially compete with Al Jazeera: a delicate balance that it is difficult to find between *raison d'état* and free-flowing information.

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