



ARAB DISPATCH

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NORTH AFRICA #Libya

Well-known political figures registered for presidential polls

On the 18th of November, the Former Libyan Interior Minister, Fathi Bashagha, registered to run in presidential elections to be held next 24th of December.

Bashagha, is not new to the Libyan political scene.

Since 2018 he served, as Interior minister, the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord before the UN-supported ceasefire halted (October 2020) the conflict between GNA's forces and the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar, and pushed the formation of an interim unity government.

Last year, Bashagha run for the election that led to nomination of Abdulhamid al-

Dbeibah as Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity.

While announcing his candidacy he stated that he aims at building a new Libya through reforms, reconciliation and reconstruction.

According to Libya's Electoral Commission 98 candidates registered to run for presidential election.

Along with Libya's former Interior chief, well-known political figures, including the former commander of the LNA Khalifa Haftar, the eastern-based parliament speaker Aguila Saleh, the former Prime Minister Ali Zaidan and the current Prime Minister, Abdulhamid Al-Dbeibah, will be running for presidential election.

The list of figures that seek to lead the oil-rich country includes also the head of the Peace and Prosperity Party, Mohamed Khaled Abdel Al-Ghweil, who previously competed with Dbeibah for the Prime Minister position; the former Minister of Education, Othman Abdel Jalil; the head of the Revival of Libya bloc, Aref Al-Nayed (seen by many as being close to Gulf countries) and the Head of the Steering Committee of the National Project Movement, Fathi Bin Shatwan, who served as minister of Industry and minister of Energy before the 2011 uprising.

Unsurprisingly, among the candidates, there will be also Gaddafi's son Saif Al-Islam, currently under accusation for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court.

The list includes only two women: Laila Ben Khalifa, 46, the president and founder of the National Movement party, and Hunayda Al-Mahdi, a social sciences researcher.

Libyans are generally eager to vote and rely on the next presidential and parliamentary elections to finally put an end to a decade of violence that has shaken the country since Gaddafi was captured and killed.

Although the UNSMIL urged factions to follow the political agenda and not to postpone the simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, there are still uncertainties on whether the elections will happen accordingly.

Furthermore, while the return of old and highly controversial political figures sparks fear about a political setback or even an authoritarian return, human rights groups are highly concerned about the presence of foreign militias in the country and the threat that these represent for inclusive and free elections.

The UN secretary-general, worried by possible coercion and intimidation during elections, threatened sanctions against anyone who impedes the vote. It is doubtful whether this threat alone will be sufficient.



Source: Voanews

To know more:

- *Libyan Express*, UNSMIL urges Libyan lawmakers vote on Dec.24, 31/10/21, available at: <https://www.libyanexpress.com/unsmil-urges-libyan-lawmakers-vote-on-dec-24/>
- *Al-Monitor*, Libya's ex-interior minister registers to run for president, 18/11/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/libya-as-ex-interior-minister-registers-run-president>
- *Al-Monitor*, Libyan strongman Hifter announces presidential run, 16/11/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/libyan-strongman-hifter-announces-presidential-run>
- *Arab News*, 98 candidates register for Libya's presidential poll, 24/11/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1974106/middle-east>

Jordan's water dams face unprecedented drought

On the 21st of November the first major rains of the season started to fill the dams in Jordan, sparking hopes among Jordanians, after an unprecedented drought crisis that left 6 out of 14 water dams dried up.

According to Al-Monitor, Jordan is currently facing its worst drought crisis due to scarcity of rainwater, booming population and mismanaged possible solutions, from fixing water pipes and to water desalination.

On the 10th of November Jordanian authorities warned that the country's water dams reached "critical levels".

Between the fall of 2020 and April 2021 due to climate change, causing an exceptionally dry winter, the dams received only 5,185 million cubic meters of rainwaters, the 63,3% of the kingdom's annual average.

In Jordan, the second most water-poor country in the world, agriculture relies on rainwater and, most

significantly, on water stored into the dams during winter to have good harvests.

Flows in the Jordan river and its largest tributary, the Yarmouk, have declined due to the upstream diversion to Israel and Syria, while groundwater levels have dropped by more than 1 meter per year. The major fossil transboundary aquifer along Jordan's border with Saudi Arabia, known as Al-Sag in Saudi Arabia and Al-Disi in Jordan, heavily pumped and exploited by both countries, has also significantly declined.

With a booming population and significant waves of refugees coming from neighbouring countries, including 1 million of Syrian refugees during the past decade, the demand of water in the kingdom has importantly increased. The increasing demand of water for drinking, irrigation and industrial needs, and last winter's modest

rainfall, led to a water deficit of 40 million cubic meters.

Access to Jordan's public water supply became highly unequal, with wealthier households and firms often supplementing rationed municipal supplies with costly deliveries from private tanker truck operators. Of course, low-income neighbourhoods are suffering the most, along with countryside farming villages, that are in extreme need.

Last month the Kingdom asked Israel for additional quantities of water and Tel Aviv agreed to double water supplies to Amman, sparking political tensions among those who opposed the deal giving the tense relations with the neighbouring country.

To address this unprecedented drought crisis, the government announced in early 2021 a major project, the "National Carrier" to desalinate the Red Sea water in Aqaba and to provide additional quantities of water to all regions of the kingdom. However, the strategic project is still under approval and

most importantly it will need at least 8 years to get started, after a € 2,5 bn significant financial investment.

As pointed out by many experts, water scarcity and wide disparities in public water supplies are "potential ingredients for instability and internal conflicts" and a driving force in migration flows.

Not to mention that Jordan also carries the role as a "bastion of peace" in the region which means that the (in)stability of the region depends also on Jordan's internal stability and security.

In this context it is important to highlight that the peaceful protests that sparked in Syria against Bashar al-Assad in 2011 were triggered in the first place by the unbearable living conditions and socio-economic inequalities, caused by a devastating prolonged drought that started in 2006.

The government failed to manage resources and to address reforms to overcome the drought's damages.

Farmers were forced to leave their farms for major cities that became quickly overpopulated. Urban infrastructures and services could not meet the growing demand and unemployment increased. Water scarcity, food insecurity and absent subsidies were indeed the driving

factors that pushed Syrians to raise against the government, setting the stage for massive uprisings and for a humanitarian catastrophe.



Source: Stanford - Jordanian circular irrigation system.

To know more:

- *Stanford News*, Stanford study reveals a deepening water crisis in Jordan, 29/03/21, available at: <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/03>

- [/29/jordans-worsening-water-crisis-warning-world/](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/jord)
- *Al-Monitor*, Jordan struggles with dry dams, water deficit, 12/11/21, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/jord>

[an-struggles-dry-dams-water-deficit](#)

- *The New Arab*, First big rains bring some relief to Jordan's dams, on the verge of drying out, 21/11/21, available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news>

[/first-big-rains-bring-limited-relief-jordan-dams](#)

GULF #Iraq

Iraq's political future under a Sadrist government

Although final results have not been announced yet the Shiite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, has emerged as the big winner of the October 10th legislative ballot, a result that has been rejected by pro-Iran military groups, among them Fatah, the political arm of Hashed al-Shaabi.

Following the elections, where Sadr won more than 70 out of 329 seats, tensions escalated among pro-Iran groups and their supporters that denounced the election's result as a "fraud".

Tensions peaked early this month when a drone hit the residence of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa Al-Kadhemi.

Although it was not claimed by any group, the drone attack was seen by Iraqi officials as an attempt by Iran-backed militant groups to overturn the victory of Sadr, highly critic on Iran and Iran's interference in the country.

In this tense atmosphere, with many political factions and militant groups rejecting the election's results, Sadr is expected to form a government that will lead Iraq, mired in corruption and economic crisis, towards a new path.

Many are questioning which kind of future will Sadr conceive for Iraq.

Sadr who previously led a militia against American and Iraqi forces, rejects the presence of US troops

inside the country but, in the meanwhile, he is well-aware that Iraq needs US military training as well as logistic support for the Iraqi Army. Furthermore, tackling Iran-backed militias, that he firmly opposes, will require a strong military effort and, therefore, foreign support.

Although Sadr spends long periods in Iran, he rejects Tehran's influence inside Iraq and will do whatever necessary to avoid the risk of a "Lebanisation" of the country, where Iranian proxies impose their will on Iraq at Tehran's behest.

On the other hand, while Hezbollah in Lebanon is heavily armed and could eventually threaten Lebanese federal forces, in Iraq federal armed forces are more cohesive and well-trained, compared to the Iran-backed militias. That said, there is still the risk of an intra-Shiite civil war in

Iraq and, if this will be the case, the future of Iraq will be highly uncertain.

According to the Middle East Eye, Sadr is also considering a possible coalition with the Sunni bloc. By establishing a coalition with the Sunni parties of Halbousi and Khanjar and Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, the government might overcome the sectarian divide and promote power sharing in the governance.

However, a possible coalition with Halbousi and Khanjar parties, and most significantly with Barzani's KDP, could attract once again foreign influence, notably Turkey, the USA and Israel.

An influence that collides with Sadr's plan to free Iraq from foreign interferences.



Source: *The Independent*

To know more:

- *Al Jazeera*, Muqtada al-Sadr: Iraq's kingmaker in uncertain times, 23/10/21, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/23/muqtada-al-sadr-iraqs-kingmaker-in-uncertain-times>
- *Middle East Eye*, Iraq elections: What Muqtada al-Sadr might do next, 15/11/21, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iraq-elections-muqtada-sadr-what-do-next>
- *Arab News*, How can Iraq's destructive Pro-Iran militia be tamed?, 17/11/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1969396/middle-east>
- *Arab News*, Iraq Shiite leader Sadr cautions vote "losers", 19/11/21, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1971041/middle-east>

ARAB INSIGHT

#MENA

A year since the “Abraham Accords”

More than a year has passed since the now ex-president of the United States, Donald Trump, [announced](#) on his twitter account that a peace agreement was reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, describing the deal as a “historic breakthrough”.

The deal was symbolically named by the signatory leaders the “Abraham Agreement” to imprint a peaceful connotation to the accords by recalling Abraham, an important religious figure for both Muslims and Jewish (and Christians), to inaugurate a new path in the diplomatic relations between Arab states and Israel.

Not an unusual choice if we think that Abraham, called Ibrahim by Muslims, is, according to Judaism, the father of Jewish people through his sons Isaac and Ishmael (Isma'il in Arabic) and according to Islam and the holy Quran a *hannif*, neither a Jewish, nor a Christian nor a Muslim, but a person that essentially knew that there is only one God, Islam's main principle.

To Abraham God asked to build a house, the Kaaba, and many Islamic rituals refer to the life of Abraham, that according to Muslims translated pre-Islamic traditions into Islamic rituals. During the Aid al-Adha, Muslims sacrifice a lamb or a sheep to re-enact what Abraham was going to do with his son. During the Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, many of the rituals that Muslims are expected to follow are Abraham's gestures.

After the announcement, Bahrain quickly joined the Normalisation Agreement and, on the 15th of September 2020, the former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Bahraini Foreign Minister, Abdullatif Al Zayani, and the UAE

Foreign Minister Abdullah Bin Zayed, normalised their diplomatic relations at the presence of the former US President Donald Trump in the White House.

The accords had a wide range of direct implications on the diplomatic front and on the economic sector, especially in the area of technology and tourism.

Following the accords Israeli embassies were opened in Abu Dhabi and Rabat and the UAE became the first Gulf state to open a diplomatic representation office in Tel Aviv.

As Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates are keen to diversify their economies from oil, major agreements across various sector were signed by the signatory countries, boosting economic relations and trade cooperation.



Source: Atalayar

After more than one year since the Normalisation agreement was signed by the three leaders, with Morocco and Sudan following the path, mostly in exchange of legitimisation and commercial cooperation, the results and the actual success

of the Accords are still to be seen. Certainly, the recognition by four Arab countries of Israel's right of statehood was a diplomatic and political success, especially for Israel, and it is true that commercial and trade relations with Israel are stronger than ever.

The agreement has encouraged significantly investments between Arab states and Israel. Israel has now a new promising export market in the Gulf while the region became a tourist attraction for Israelis. However, boosting trade cooperation, inaugurating commercial flights and opening embassies will not be enough to ensure stability in the region and are not bringing peace where needed or resolve the apparently forgotten Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as demonstrated by the renewed tensions flared up last May in Jerusalem and Gaza, weakening Israel internally and raising international criticism.

Despite the diplomatic success, the initial enthusiasm that followed the “deal of the century” [quickly slowed down](#). While Abu Dhabi has significantly increased its trade relations with Israel in many sectors, from food technology to cybersecurity, Manama significantly reduced its initial interest in dealing with Israel. For Morocco, normalising diplomatic ties with Israel so far seems to be a mere resumption of relations and a re-opening of direct flights between Rabat and Tel Aviv. However, the US official recognition of Moroccan sovereignty on Western Sahara in return of normalising ties with Israel, prompted dangerous developments in the region that might escalate in a renewed border war with Algeria, that supports the Polisario separatist movement and firmly rejects Morocco's recognition of Israel.

Recently, the normalisation process between Arab countries and Israel initiated by the former US President suffered a significant inflection with the new Biden's Administration.

As stated by [Al-Ghad](#) the driving force behind the accords were the Trump administration and his desire of creating a common front against Iran. Unlike his

predecessor, Biden seems less enthusiastic and, although he announced his commitment to promote new agreements between Arab states and Israel, he deprioritized the Arab region from his foreign policy agenda. To the extent that, last July, President Joe Biden decided to freeze the Abraham Investment Fund, launched by Donald Trump to support economic cooperation projects between Israel, UAE and Bahrain, while the State Department refused to call the deal “Abraham Agreement” and choose to replace its name with “Normalization Agreement”.

According to the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies ([MADAR](#)), an independent research centre focussing on Israeli affairs, it might be too early to witness significant geopolitical shifts in the region as analysts are still questioning if the Normalisation agreement, acclaimed by many as the deal of the century, will be a significant “game changer” for the region.

As pointed out by MADAR, the Accords have only officialised relations that already existed informally between some Arab states and Israel. Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are marginal countries that will most likely not be able to produce a significant change or a geopolitical shift in the region.

On the other hand, analysts from the same research centre believe that Israel’s entrance into the Arab region could potentially lead to a breakthrough by expanding the bloc against Iran and weakening Iran’s and Turkey’s influence in the region. Both Israel and Gulf states fear Iran’s influence in the region and have interests in containing Iran’s expansionism. Tehran on its side firmly rejected the normalisation agreements and urged Arab states to stop dealing with Israel as it fears Israel’s military and intelligence presence in the region. In this context, the Biden’s administration has already announced its willingness to rehabilitating the Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA), a challenging choice for Gulf states. On the 3rd of November the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action announced that talks on reviving the Iran nuclear deal will be resumed on the 29th of November in Vienna and Tehran promptly confirmed the date.

Certainly, we cannot underestimate that one of the major outcomes of these accords is Israel's increased legitimacy in the Arab region after decades of Arab boycotts. Not to mention that, the public recognition of Israel by the signatory countries was also supported by other Gulf countries such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, even though they haven't officially recognised Israel. Furthermore, we should also take into consideration that through the agreements the UAE have significantly strengthen their position and role in the region at the expenses of Saudi Arabia that might risk to lose the region's leadership.

What seems to be quite clear is that the accords did not bring any significant change for Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The agreements mainly aimed at isolating and [weakening Iran](#) rather than halting Israel's illegal annexations of Palestinians lands. The so-called Abraham accords were not intended to steer a [two-state solution](#) and the accords partners choose not to engage on this critical issue. The agreements left the Palestinians behind. The Palestinians themselves are not ready to accept an Arab-Israeli normalisation unless the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved. As a result, the Palestinian Authority refused to be involved in regional initiatives promoted by signatory countries and rejects any support coming from Arab signatories.

Divergences between Palestinians and the Arab countries that normalised ties with Israel further exacerbated last May during the 11-day conflict with Israel. Arab countries highly criticised Israel's crackdown on Palestinians and extensive use of force but, despite the Gulf Arab criticism, the agreement remained in place. Egypt and Qatar facilitated a ceasefire between the parties, while the UAE preferred to stay behind the scenes.

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