

Timing of Barzani's visit to Turkey is telling, experts say

Mon, 2020-09-07 23:35

ANKARA: Turkey has sent a clear signal of its intentions to challenge France's ambitions in the region by holding meetings with the Iraqi Kurdish leader Nechirvan Barzani on Sept. 4.

The timing of Barzani's visit was telling, just two days after French President Emmanuel Macron visited Baghdad to show his support for Iraqi sovereignty. Turkey and France are becoming regional rivals in their diverging moves in the Eastern Mediterranean and the battle for offshore gas rights.

Barzani, the president of Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) led a delegation for a series of meetings.

"Both sides stressed the desire to develop relations between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey especially in enhancing trade volume and joint economic coordination. They voiced the significance of Turkish investment across various sectors in the Kurdistan Region," the Kurdistan Region Presidency said on Friday.

The oil deal between KRG and Turkey allowing exports to the Turkish market has triggered conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over oil revenue-sharing mechanisms.

According to Iraqi Kurdish media, Barzani conveyed the Iraqi prime minister's message to Erdogan requesting the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Iraq and sharing the details of a bilateral oil deal with Baghdad. Ankara has not commented on the outcome of the visit.

Samuel Ramani, a Middle East analyst at the University of Oxford, thinks that Turkey's relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan is independent from its military hostilities toward Syrian Kurds and also from the broader Turkey-Iraq relationship.

"Engagement between Barzani and Turkey is not overly surprising. The important factor is France. France under Macron has tried to reprise its role as an arbiter between Iraq and KRG. Paris sought to capitalize on Turkey's recent cross-border strikes in Iraq, which were poorly received by Baghdad and viewed as a violation of sovereignty, as an opportunity to advance this historic agenda," he told Arab News.

Turkey's relationship with Iraqi Kurdistan is independent from its military hostilities toward Syrian Kurds and also from the broader Turkey-Iraq relationship.

Samuel Ramani, Analyst at the University of Oxford

According to Ramani, France hoped that diplomatic engagement – with three separate meetings between Iraqi and French officials this month – would bring the KRG and Iraq into its fold and further away from Turkey.

“But the KRG has long prized its foreign policy independence, balancing between various actors. The KRG praised Qassem Soleimani after his death and cultivating ties with Iran, as well as Israel, and is now emulating its Israel-Iran balancing strategy with France and Turkey,” he said.

However, Barzani’s visit aroused criticism from the Kurdish community in Turkey for focusing on strengthening trade relations rather than contributing to the settlement of the country’s longstanding Kurdish issue.

Ankara launched a cross-border operation to northern Iraq in mid-June against the hideouts of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which infuriated Baghdad, while Barzani was recently threatened by the PKK due to his relations with Ankara.

Abdulla Hawez, an independent researcher from Erbil, said: “The visit appears to have been planned abruptly following Macron’s visit; it is a clear message from Erdogan that Iraqi Kurdish leaders will stay within his orbit and that they cannot be used by France in its regional feud against Turkey.”

Bekir Aydogan, a Turkish expert on Iraqi Kurdistan, agreed.

“Considering French President Macron’s Baghdad meeting with Iraqi officials, including Barzani, and Macron’s emphasis on Iraq’s sovereignty during the visit, it is not far-fetched to say that Turkey, by hosting Barzani in Ankara, wanted to remind France of its close relations with the KRG,” he said.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry also drew harsh criticism for hiding the Kurdish flag in social media posts about the meeting in order to satisfy government’s nationalistic coalition partner MHP.

While the photographs shared by Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Twitter, featuring only Turkish and Iraqi flags, pictures posted by Barzani showed a Kurdish flag as well as.

For Aydogan, Barzani’s close ties with Ankara and his opposition to PKK’s presence in KRG indicate that Turkey’s hold on KRG is strong.

“Despite the anti-Kurdish sentiment in Turkish domestic policy, as seen in the debates over the presence of the official KRG flag during the meeting, this visit reminded Ankara that Iraqi Kurdistan Region is still an indispensable actor in the region,” he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Nechirvan Barzani](#)

[Iraqi Kurdistan](#)

Turkey begins military exercises in north Cyprus
NATO sets up talks in search for solution to Turkey-Greece conflict

[Armed clash erupts at Beirut's Tariq Al-Jadida district](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-07 23:30

CAIRO: Several injuries have been reported after an armed clash erupted in Beirut's Tariq Al-Jadida neighborhood on Monday evening. The Lebanese army deployed to the area and cordoned off Karam Darwish street where the clash took place, the state National News Agency said. Machine guns were used in the clash, a correspondent for the agency said. The injured were rushed to hospital as army attempted to restore security.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Beirut](#)

Bisri: Lebanon's dam of contention

[Egypt sends flood aid to Sudan](#)

Mon, 2020-09-07 23:30

CAIRO: Egypt has sent two military transport aircraft containing food, medicine and rain-resistant tents to Khartoum amid heavy flooding in Sudan.

Egyptian Armed Forces spokesman Tamer Al-Rifai said that preparing the aid came under the direction of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi as part of Egypt's solidarity with the people of Sudan.

Faisal Mohammed Saleh, Sudanese minister of culture and information, said that there are feelings of sincerity from the people of Egypt toward the Sudanese.

"We have been immersed in the love of the Egyptians since yesterday, and their solidarity on social media," Saleh said.

"We know the depth of the relations between the two countries and due to political circumstances, the two countries have been affected, but the

relationship between them remains strong. We are grateful to the Egyptian government for sending urgent aid to Sudan,” he added.

In the country, 16 states have been affected by flooding, seven of which have been severely hit, resulting in about 100 deaths.

Sudan’s capital Khartoum was most impacted by the floods.

The minister said that damage is worsening due to the amount of buildings and the large population. He added that the flooding is the most extreme in over a century.

“We harnessed all the available resources and everyone is working as a team, but there is severe damage that will take a long time to repair,” Saleh said.

President El-Sisi declared his solidarity with the government and people of Sudan due to the rain and floods.

“My sincere solidarity with our Sudanese brothers, the government and the people, as a result of the rain and floods sweeping through Sudan, which led to tragic losses of individuals and property,” he said in a Facebook post.

I affirm Egypt’s constant readiness to provide all means of support to our Sudanese brothers in this critical period, to deal with the effects of the floods.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of Egypt

“I affirm Egypt’s constant readiness to provide all means of support to our Sudanese brothers in this critical period, to deal with the effects of the floods,” he added.

After heavy rain fell on southern Upper Egypt, the Red Sea mountain ranges and South Sinai, Egyptians feared that they too would face similar flooding.

“These days we are affected by the seasonal trough of Sudan, which causes torrential flow in the Red Sea, South Sinai and South Sudan. If we are affected by it, then how can we not think about its impact on Sudan,” said Ahmed Abdel-Aal, former head of the Egyptian Meteorological Authority.

He added that Egypt has taken precautions to prevent potential flooding.

A source in the Egyptian Meteorological Authority denied that Egypt was affected by the heavy rainfall.

On Saturday, several roads in the southern Red Sea governorate saw severe rain, including desert valleys in the 85 km area of Safaga-Qena road.

The Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation said it monitored the quantity of rain that fell on some of Upper Egypt’s governorates, and that they are concerned with rainfall at the Nile’s headwaters.

“We are in the beginning of a water year. The floods will reach Egypt over three months in August, September and October,” said Mohammed El Sebaei, the ministry’s spokesman.

He said the High Dam will protect Egypt from flooding, as the dam can discharge surplus water if its storage capacity is reached.

El Sebaei said the situation in Egypt is different from Sudan and that flooding is unlikely.

Russian news agency Sputnik quoted Abdel-Fattah Mutawa, former head of the water resources sector at the Egyptian Irrigation Ministry, who said Egypt should empty part of Lake Nasser’s water to the Toshka spillway and purify the inlets at the end of the Rashid and Damietta branch.

Mutawa added that agricultural drainage stations must be kept in a state of readiness.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sudan flood](#)

Saudi Arabia sends aid to Sudan's flood victims Sudan declares state of emergency over deadly floods

[Pandemic put Algeria's protests on pause – will they now resume?](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-09-07 02:07

ALGIERS: For over a year Algeria's defiant anti-government "Hirak" protesters seemed unstoppable, but weekly demonstrations skidded to a halt due to restrictions to end the coronavirus crisis.

With two months to go before a key referendum on constitutional reform – a vote the government hopes will meet their demands – many expect the protests to soon return.

"The will to change the mode of governance is still present," said political scientist Louisa Driss Ait Hamadouche.

While the mass demonstrations in the North African nation may be on hold, the anger remains and, many believe, could soon rekindle the street protests.

"Although both hypotheses are possible, the most likely is the resumption of demonstrations," Hamadouche said.

Anti-government protests led by Hirak – meaning in Arabic, “the movement” – last year swept ailing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power. But the rallies continued afterwards, demanding the ouster of the entire state apparatus, which is reviled by many Algerians as inept and corrupt. “By remaining peaceful and civic-minded, Algerians have shown surprising maturity,” Hamadouche said.

“This spirit of civic protest means that, with or without popular demonstrations, Hirak is here to stay.”

Mahrez Bouich, another political analyst, believes Hirak protests will continue “until the people’s demands are met.”

Not only do the original grievances driving protests remain, frustration has grown.

Anger has been compounded by a government crackdown against demonstrators, a rise in unemployment and a slumping economy.

“It is a popular phenomenon ... caused by a buildup of frustrations and attacks on freedom, by a political system that refuses to change,” said Mansour Kedidir, a political science researcher.

SPEEDREAD

With two months to go before a key referendum on constitutional reform – a vote the government hopes will meet their demands – many expect the protests to soon return.

Yet while Hirak is a grassroots movement whose lack of a formal leadership structure gives it the resilience to continue, it is weakened by internal arguments.

Ideological splits between progressives and conservatives, as well as between secularists and Islamists, mean its divisions can be exploited by the authorities.

“Twenty years of Bouteflika’s rule have damaged society to the point that no party can claim to be an alternative force,” Kedidir said.

A government crackdown on critics – including journalists, opposition politicians as well as Hirak members – has stifled some of those willing to speak out.

Last month, two journalists were jailed for 2 and 3 years respectively, including for covering Hirak protests as reporters, in sentences criticized by international rights groups.

On Sunday, Human Rights Watch condemned the treatment of detained activist Abdellah Benaoum, a 54-year Hirak protester in poor health held by police since December, on charges including “undermining national unity” and inciting an unauthorized “unarmed gathering.”

He is one of some 45 Algerians held for their role in the movement, the New York-based group said.

“His imprisonment epitomises the authorities’ determination to crush a nationwide, peaceful movement for democratic reform,” HRW’s Eric Goldstein said.

“Charges that criminalize criticism of government institutions violate the right to freedom of expression,” HRW added.

While the six months suspension due to the coronavirus crisis stripped the momentum from the movement, the pandemic also fostered the creation of community and online solidarity networks.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in December, has promised to break with the Bouteflika years, an era seen as synonymous with authoritarianism, corruption and nepotism.

Tebboune, formerly a prime minister under Bouteflika, has backed a constitutional referendum due on November 1, ostensibly as an answer to the popular protest movement.

But many groups linked to Hirak fear the referendum will simply be a means to paper over problems, without making the deep-rooted reforms they believe are needed.

It will keep the old system in place to “reproduce itself,” said political analyst Mahrez Bouich.

For many Algerians struggling to pay rent and purchase daily food, the intricacies of constitutional reform might seem of little immediate interest. But protests against poor living conditions, especially among young people in the south of the country, may dovetail with Hirak demonstrations.

They just need a spark to light the flame, “like dry tinder,” Kedidir warned.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algiers](#)

Thousands hit streets of Algiers on protest movement anniversary
Neighbours to meet in Algiers on Libya crisis

[UAE records 513 new coronavirus cases](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-09-06 23:59

DUBAI: The UAE's health ministry on Sunday reported 513 new coronavirus cases, bringing the total number of registered cases to 73,984.

The ministry said different nationalities are infected, all of whom are in "stable (condition) and subjected to the necessary health care."

It also said no deaths have been recorded and 2,443 cases have recovered from the virus, bringing the total number to 66,095.

The number of cases detected is attributed to an intense campaign to increase the scope of examinations in the country to count and detect early Covid-19 cases, and isolate anyone who has been in contact with them, the ministry said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[UAE](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

[COVID-19](#)

Abu Dhabi reopens non-Muslim places of worship UAE reports over 500 new COVID-19 cases for second consecutive day