

# Libya standoff could lead to parallel governments: UN

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1647442410036978100

Wed, 2022-03-16 17:56

NEW YORK: Libya is facing a new phase of political polarization that risks dividing its institutions once again and reversing the gains achieved over the past two years, the UN undersecretary-general for peacebuilding and political affairs warned on Wednesday.

Rosemary Dicarlo asked Security Council members to convey to Libyan parties the UN's conviction that credible, transparent and inclusive elections are the only solution to the stalemate.

She also called on Libyan leaders to demonstrate responsibility and remain united behind UN efforts to assist the North African country on its path to peace and stability.

"We know from experience what unilateral actions, divided government and an unending transition may hold in store for Libya," said Dicarlo, who was briefing the council on the latest developments in the country.

Political turmoil has again engulfed Libya after the failure to hold presidential elections that were scheduled to take place on Dec. 24 and were meant to be followed by parliamentary elections a few weeks later.

The elections were postponed due to controversy over electoral laws, including the voting timetable, the eligibility of the main candidates, and the eventual powers of the next president and Parliament.

The current division is the result of the establishment of a rival government to the Government of National Unity following the appointment by the House of Representatives last month of former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha as interim prime minister to replace incumbent Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, who was elected in 2021 by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to head the interim GNU.

The HOR cited Dbeibah's failure to hold the elections, but the latter has challenged the legitimacy of Bashagha and vowed to stay in his post and continue to steer the country toward elections, which are now slated for June 2022. But Bashagha's government was further cemented by the HOR's March 1 vote of confidence in his Cabinet.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, however, said the vote of confidence was marred by procedural flaws, a lack of transparency, acts of intimidation and threats of violence against members of the chamber and their families prior to the session. Dicarlo said: "These shortcomings impacted the credibility of the process."

Stephanie Williams, Guterres's special advisor on Libya, said without elections both the authorities of Tripoli and Tobruk "lack popular legitimacy."

Dicarlo said: "Since the March 1 vote, the situation on the ground has remained relatively calm. However, we have observed increasingly threatening

rhetoric, growing political tensions and divided loyalties among the armed groups in western Libya.”

She added that the GNU leadership “has rejected the legitimacy of the vote, stating that they will only transfer power to an elected government. Mr. Bashagha, meanwhile, insists he is heading the legitimate government.”

Russia is the only UN Security Council member to have openly supported Bashagha’s appointment.

UNSC members France, the UK and the US reiterated that any disagreement on the future of the political process must be resolved without resorting to violence, and expressed support for UN mediation efforts through Williams. Council members also voiced concerns over the tense security situation in Libya after pro-Bashagha forces had deployed in recent weeks on the edges of Tripoli, prompting the UN mission in the country to warn against any escalation.

But Bashagha’s office said early Friday that the groups had “opted not to use arms, and to return to their bases.”

Council members called for calm and stability across the country, and reiterated their calls for the immediate and simultaneous withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries in line with the Oct. 23 Berlin ceasefire agreement.

Dicarlo warned that as long as the standoff over executive legitimacy continues, Libya could again see two parallel administrations.

“This could lead to instability and possibly unrest, and deal a severe blow to the prospect of elections,” she said, adding that the UN continues to urge both parties to engage in constructive dialogue to resolve the political impasse, and to refrain from unilateral actions that could result in further divisions.

“The UN is exerting significant efforts to resolve this crisis. We aim to bring together Libyan stakeholders to agree on a constitutional basis for the holding of elections as soon as possible,” she said, outlining several UN initiatives to bring the parties together.

“We aim to convene a joint committee of members of the House of Representatives and the High State Council with the objective of achieving agreement by both bodies on a constitutional basis that would lead to elections this year,” Dicarlo added.

“Our priority is to focus on fulfilling the aspirations of the more than 2.8 million Libyans who have registered to vote.” “They should be able to choose their leaders through credible, transparent and inclusive elections according to an agreed upon constitutional and legal framework.”



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Libya armed groups step back after Tripoli escalation Rival Libyan premier says he plans to be in Tripoli in days

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## [Lebanon's Fransabank closes all branches after judicial order, source says](#)

Author:

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1647439920036770400

Wed, 2022-03-16 17:14

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Fransabank on Wednesday closed all of its branches in the country following a judicial order freezing its assets based on a lawsuit filed by a depositor, a Fransabank source told Reuters.

Lebanese banks have frozen most savers out of their hard currency deposits

since a financial meltdown in 2019, but the controls were never formalized in law and have been challenged in courts.

The judicial order required Fransabank to reopen the account of Egyptian depositor Ayad Ibrahim and pay out his deposit in cash, or else the bank's assets would be seized, his lawyer Rami Ollaik said.

The judge who issued the order and Ibrahim could not be reached for comment.

The Fransabank source said that following the order the bank would not be able to make any payments, including of salaries, because its assets have been frozen. The bank has roughly 50 branches, the source said.

"We closed because the order is on all the belongings of the bank, including the safes, at the tellers, where you can get the cash. I can't get (cash), and I can't receive," the Fransabank source said.

Fransabank had issued Ibrahim a cheque for the value of his deposit and he was therefore no longer a client, the Fransabank source said, adding that he had signed for the cheque at a notary.

A spokesperson for United For Lebanon, an anti-corruption group that is representing Ibrahim in the case, said he had "signed for the cheque but with reservation."



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Depositors seek justice from Lebanese banks

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## Aid to Yemen prevented starvation but more is needed, says UN humanitarian chief

Tue, 2022-03-15 23:43

NEW YORK: Nearly \$14 billion of international aid donated to Yemen in the past seven years has made an “enormous difference” to the people of the country, according to the UN’s humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths.

It has helped to prevent mass starvation and stabilized morbidity and mortality rates in the war-ravaged country, he said.

However, he told the Security Council on Tuesday that 75 percent of that “exceptional, extraordinary and generous” sum came from only six donors: the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, Germany and the EU. He thanked all donors and stressed the importance of taking stock of the contributions and the humanitarian benefits in Yemen they have helped to achieve.

“First and foremost ... there has been no mass starvation in Yemen, as we were so often reminded might be coming,” Griffiths said as he called for continued efforts to prevent starvation and famine amid rising food insecurity.

“The country has started down that dark road several times, including early last year, only to be pulled back by timely, well-funded humanitarian action. That is an important success.”

He also stated that the aid effort has helped keep morbidity and mortality rates steady during the conflict.

“In other words, without the level of the response, many more people in Yemen would have fallen sick and many, died,” he said. “That is another critical result. These and other achievements are the result of collective action, not the action of one.”

He was speaking during a meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in Yemen ahead of a high-level pledging event for the country on Wednesday that will be co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland. Aid agencies are seeking almost \$4.3 billion of funding so that they can continue to help more than 17 million Yemenis across the country.

“Tomorrow’s event is not just about the money, though that is hugely important,” said Griffiths. “It is also an opportunity for the international community to show we are not giving up on Yemen, even after all these years and with new crises emerging – and that is a very important message.”

He said that the situation in Yemen continues to represent a “chronic

emergency,” as hunger, disease and “other miseries” rise faster than aid agencies are able to ease them.

“23.4 million people now need some form of assistance,” Griffiths said. “That is three of every four and that is the astonishing figure which is so deeply troubling.

“Among them, 19 million will go hungry and that is an increase of almost 20 per cent since last year. And we believe – and I use these words carefully – that more than 160,000 of these people will face famine-like conditions.”

Despite many international calls for a ceasefire and peace talks to resolve the conflict in Yemen, hostilities persist along nearly 50 front lines, Griffiths said, includes Marib, where a Houthi offensive has continued for two years.

“Last year, hostilities killed or injured more than 2,500 civilians and forced nearly 300,000 people to flee their homes,” he said, adding that 4.3 million people have been displaced in Yemen since 2015.

Yemen imports a third of its wheat supply from Ukraine. The war raging in the latter country after the Russian invasion last month might restrict imports and push up the cost of food, which has already almost doubled in Yemen in the past year, Griffiths said. Fuel shortages are also contributing to rising food prices, he added.

Hans Grundberg, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s special envoy for Yemen, told the Security Council that the people of the country have been denied the chance to live in peace for too many years and a concerted joint effort by the international community is needed to break “this never-ending cycle of violence and lay the foundation for a sustainable peace.”

Briefing council members on the latest developments in the security situation, Grundberg said that hostilities continue unabated on many fronts. Among other examples, he highlighted the continuing Houthi offensive in Marib which “has caused enormous harm to civilians” for two years.

“The violence also continues to spill into the region,” he said. “On Feb. 21, shrapnel from a drone intercepted over Jazan city’s King Abdullah Airport wounded 16 civilians.”

The fact remains that there can be no sustainable military solution to the conflict, the envoy said, and “as always, we see civilians paying an unacceptable price for choices they have no influence over.”

UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, reported this month that at least 47 children were killed or maimed in Yemen during the first two months of this year alone. More than 10,200 children have been confirmed killed or injured in the past seven years, but the actual number is probably much higher, the organization said.

Grundberg also warned that the economic crisis continues to escalate and is likely to get worse. The value of the Yemeni currency has fallen by 20



percent against the dollar in Aden and the surrounding governorates, raising concerns of another sharp decline in the exchange rate, rising prices and a deepening of divisions in the national economy. He called for tangible measures to help stabilize the currency.

Fuel shortages are particularly acute in Houthi-controlled areas, Grundberg said. These shortages, in combination with currency depreciation, will affect civilians even more as households prepare for Ramadan. Yemenis also continue to live with severe restrictions on freedom of movement, he added.

“The closure of Sanaa airport prevents many Yemenis in the north from traveling abroad,” he said. “Ongoing fighting, the proliferation of checkpoints and the closure of access points, especially in Taiz, impede the movement of Yemenis within the country.”

Grundberg said that he aims to explore with various factions the options for immediate deescalation measures that could reduce violence, ease the fuel crisis and improve freedom of movement.

“With Ramadan approaching, I hope the parties will engage swiftly and constructively with my proposals to bring the people of Yemen some much needed hope and relief,” he added.

“In this regard I am looking forward to the opportunity to engage with the leadership of Ansar Allah (the official name for the Houthi movement) in Sanaa on this issue and on how we can move the political process forward.”



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GCC offers to host peace talks between Yemeni factions, including Houthis, in Riyadh  
Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders

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## [Iraq MPs to vote for president on March 26](#)

Author:

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1647369630340219400

Tue, 2022-03-15 21:42

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi parliament on Tuesday scheduled a March 26 session for deputies to hold a delayed vote on the country's president.

Parliament also released a final list of 40 candidates for the post, a largely ceremonial role reserved for the Kurds.

Among the frontrunners are Barham Saleh, the incumbent and member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and Rebar Ahmed of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the PUK's rival.

Lack of a quorum and legal issues have held up the contest, adding to war-scarred Iraq's political uncertainty because the president has to name a prime minister backed by the largest bloc in parliament.

On February 13, the supreme court ruled out a bid by veteran politician Hoshiyar Zebari backed by the KDP to run, after a complaint filed against him over years-old corruption charges.

Iraqi politics were thrown further into turmoil following the October 2021 general elections, which were marred by a record-low turnout, post-election threats and violence, and a delay of several months until final results were confirmed.

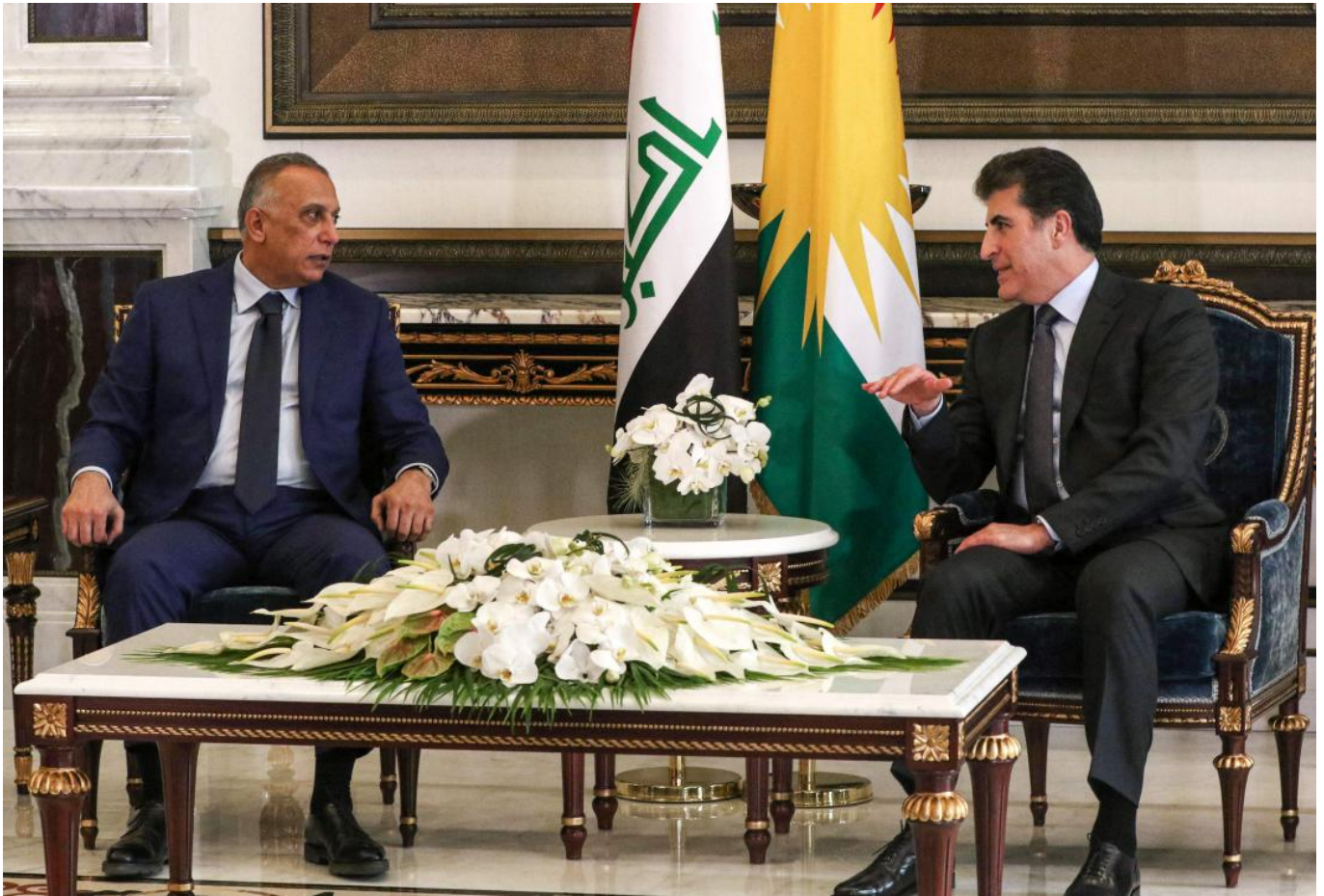
Intense negotiations among political groups have since failed to form a majority parliamentary coalition to appoint a new prime minister to succeed Mustafa Al-Kadhemi.

The largest political bloc led by firebrand Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, had backed Zebari for the presidency.

Tensions rose Sunday with Iranian missile strikes on Irbil, capital of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.



Tehran said the attack targeted Israeli sites, but Kurdish authorities denied any such presence.



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## [Ex-PM Siniora won't run in Lebanese elections](#)

Tue, 2022-03-15 20:10

BEIRUT: With the candidacy deadline for the Lebanese parliamentary elections ending on Tuesday at midnight, over 875 applications had been submitted as of Tuesday afternoon.

Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi said that work is underway "to secure IDs and personal status extracts, and all other voter needs.

"We are working to secure electricity during the voting process and until the sorting of ballots ends."

The elections are scheduled to be held on May 15 amid a severe economic collapse that Lebanon has been enduring for two years and the possibility of the country slipping into further deterioration in the coming months.

According to Mawlawi, 7,000 polling stations will be allocated throughout Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Fouad Siniora has become the latest former premier to announce that he will not be running in the elections.

In January, former premier Saad Hariri announced his withdrawal from political life, expressing his conviction that "there is no room for any positive opportunity for Lebanon in light of the Iranian influence, international confusion, national division, rise of sectarian tensions, and the deterioration of the state."

Hariri had also instructed members of the Future Movement, which he heads, to not contest the elections under the movement's name, but he did not call on his supporters to boycott them.

Former premier Tammam Salam and the current Prime Minister Najib Mikati also announced that they will not stand along with Lebanon's former ambassador to the UN, Nawaf Salam, who is currently a permanent member of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Siniora told a press conference: "My decision not to run for the elections does not mean that I will be boycotting; on the contrary, I hope my position makes room for the new generation. I will be fully invested in the elections in all their aspects, without running for office."

He urged citizens to turn out to vote "so as not to allow opportunists to gain ground amid calls not to participate in this national duty."

According to sources close to Siniora, he is seeking "to prevent Hezbollah from penetrating the Sunni environment, through Sunni figures close to the axis of resistance led by Hezbollah, the strategic ally of Iran."

Siniora said: "I call on our people in Beirut, Sidon, the north, the Bekaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, and all over Lebanon to participate in these elections.

"The Lebanese people's uprising showed us the need to renew political blood, support promising faces, and facilitate the way for experts who had not been given the chance to serve the nation."

Dar Al-Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni religious authority, said it would not interfere with the elections, adding that it will neither support a candidate

nor a list.

"Our role is limited to advising people to choose the best candidate for the state-building project and strengthening the unity of the Islamic ranks based on national foundations," Dar Al-Fatwa said.

With Hariri's withdrawal from political life, Siniora has been trying to fill the void in the Sunni community. However, the Future Movement is not pleased with his actions and is even accusing him of treason.

Meanwhile, Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt tweeted on Tuesday: "In this suffocating social and economic crisis that Lebanon is experiencing, we are paying for the Arab countries abandoning us. We are reaping the fruits of the petty and absurd statements made by senior leaders against the Gulf," in reference to briefings from Hezbollah leaders about the Gulf states in recent months.



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Lebanon political factions gear up for May electionsLebanon PM Mikati says he

will not run in May parliamentary election