

Arab world comes to Ivy League

Sat, 2019-04-06 23:03

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts: The venue could not have been more “Ivy League” America, but the topics under discussion, and the thought leaders discussing them, could not have been more Arab.

The Arab Conference at Harvard, the largest Arab conference in North America, hosted by one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the world, began on Friday.

“This conference is actually very timely,” Amin Awad, director of the Middle East and North Africa bureau at the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told Arab News.



Amin Awad. (Supplied)

“It’s very important, and I think we should have more of this, because it illustrates that solutions can be found in discussion around issues of concern to youth today in the Arab world in regards to political, military and security elements ... the whole massive movement of people, the phenomenon of these radicalized groups, which is really at the heart of the youth’s future.”

As the three-day “(Re)Imagining Home” conference began, Awad took part in a discussion on Arab refugees with Middle East analyst Ibrahim Al-Assil, Director General of the Institute for Palestine Studies Salma El-Yassir, and the communication and youth development specialist at Education Above All, Hani Shehada.

INNUMBERS

17

Average years of displacement.

40%

Percentage of globally displaced who are in the Middle East and North Africa.

68.5m

Total number of people displaced worldwide.

6%

Percentage of global population who are displaced.

6

People per day who die crossing the Mediterranean.

“Millions of refugees are found in the Middle East in terms of internal displacement, 40 percent of the total number of 70 million displaced globally,” Awad said.

“Those who left home as internally displaced refugees, from Syria let’s say, in 2011 when they were babies, today they are 8 (years old) and don’t have any sense of belonging to any area,” he added.

“Those who left at 8, today they’re 16. You can imagine moving from 8 to 16 with no education. Or if they left at 12 they’re 20 today. A lot of them lost a big part of their childhood, very important and formative years.”

Shaden Khallaf, a senior policy adviser at the UNHCR, chillingly summarized the refugee situation in terms of debate and discussion: “When it comes to talking about the movement of people, we’ve never been as polarized as we are today.”



Shaden Khalaf. (Supplied)

A discussion on social media and influence, held before a packed room of students, considered how platforms such as Twitter and Instagram had replaced traditional media and allowed individuals to present themselves and their stories to the world.

Speakers Hadia Ghaleb, Karen Wazen, Ahmed Shihab-Eldin and Amy Mowafi urged the audience to “tell your stories.” Shihab-Eldin told students, who crowded around him afterwards: “Change is happening.”

Social media is allowing the Arab story, such as in Palestine and Syria, to come to Americans, who “are hearing more and more from us,” he said. “We’re changing people’s perceptions over time.”

Ghaleb, a marketing expert from Dubai and CEO of Ghaleb Production House, said social media had attracted many Arabs and was changing the traditional methods of marketing, presenting Arab culture in a different, more impactful way.



Amy Mowafi

Mowafi, a communications activist from Egypt and CEO of the M04 Network, said: “Social media is our greatest weapon to tell our story and change our narrative.”

Leading speakers at the event include American University of Beirut President Fadlo Khuri, and property tycoons Mohamad Hadid and Mohamed Morshedy.

Other panelists include Emirati Middle East art expert Sultan Sooud Al-Qassebi, Mashrou’ Leila frontman Hamed Sinno, BuildPalestine CEO Besan Abu-Joudeh and UN Commissioner Alaa Murabit.

Adel El-Adawy, a professor at the American University in Cairo, told Arab News: “It’s very interesting times in our region, so to see different people from the Arab community who are living abroad coming together – experts from various fields such as governance, health care and so on – to give their input on what’s going in the region, is fascinating.”

There will be discussions on refugees and human rights, influence and governance, and health care.



Dina Masri (Supplied)

“The theme ‘(Re)Imagining Home’ speaks to every Arab,” the conference co-chair, Dina Masri, told Arab News. “It speaks to the Arab in their homeland trying to imagine a better future, the Arab-American who is working through questions of identity in their new home, and pushes both the Arabs in their homeland and the diaspora to discuss what home means to the millions of displaced Arab refugees in the region,” she said. “The conference is intended to empower Arabs in their homeland to continue to work toward a better future, as well as foster a sense of responsibility to the region in those who are part of the diaspora,” she added.

“We hope that through this conference, our attendees will meet others who are understanding of their identity struggles, and who will push them to do better for our part of the world.”



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Arab refugees in sights of Berlin's crime 'clans'UN: Money or not, world cannot drop Palestinian refugees

Algeria's tidy revolutionaries: Cleanup after mass protests

Author:

By AOMAR OUALI | AP

ID:

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Sat, 2019-04-06 02:54

ALGIERS, Algeria: Here's one way Algeria's protest movement is unlike any other: After massive pro-democracy demonstrations every week, the protesters themselves roam the streets picking up bottles, papers and other detritus left behind.

It's a powerful symbol of the movement's peaceful, hopeful spirit.

And it's no small task after events like the latest protest on Friday, when the boulevards of Algiers thronged with so many people that it took hours to traverse a few blocks.

After the protests started Feb. 22 against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his entourage, organizers started sending messages on Facebook calling for demonstrators to stay peaceful and clean up after themselves.

Now the cleanup operation is a fundamental part of the Friday protest ritual, including individual volunteers pitching in around the city, along with more organized crews wearing orange vests.

"We're volunteers. We organized ourselves after appeals on social networks. The shop owners give us free garbage bags. We have formed several groups," said Abdellah Debaili, 36, a cleanup worker from the working class Algiers neighborhood of Hussein Dey Est.

He stands on a boulevard leading to the central post office, the most iconic gathering point of the movement, cajoling passersby to discard their orange peels, coffee cups or newspapers in the black plastic bag at his side. Each time they do, he smiles and says, "shukran," or thank you.

"We're happy," he told The Associated Press, "because people congratulate us for doing this work."

The peaceful nature of the protests is especially important to Algerians after the horrors they lived through in the 1990s, when an Islamic insurgency fought the energy-rich country's security services for years and around 200,000 people were killed.

Today's protests are a family affair. Young couples come out to march with babies in slings or strollers and small children on their fathers' shoulders. Even in crowded streets, protesters make way for demonstrators in wheelchairs. On the edges, families sit on benches and eat picnic lunches – and clean up after themselves.

The tidy revolutionaries have drawn attention in France, where yellow vest protesters have been holding their own weekly protests for 21 weeks, and where protest violence has left stores and restaurants trashed or burned out or boarded up.

By contrast, in Algeria – once the jewel in France's colonial crown –

protesters and local businesses are on the same side, and police rarely intervene.

The Algerian movement succeeded in forcing Bouteflika from office this week, and is continuing to keep up pressure on a political elite seen as corrupt and repressive.

As Algeria's Friday protests wind down, volunteers walk backwards along the march route, scooping up water bottles, protest signs or anything else left behind.

By Saturday morning, little sign is left of what happened the day before.





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Algerians abroad return home, seeing hope in protest movement
Bouteflika seeks forgiveness from Algerians

[Erdogan's ruling AKP ready to accept Turkey's election recount results](#)

Sat, 2019-04-06 20:17

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP will accept the results of local election recounts in Ankara and Istanbul no matter which party is declared the winner, a party spokesman said on Saturday.

The AKP won most votes nationwide in last Sunday's election, but results showed the ruling party lost Ankara and was also narrowly defeated in Istanbul in what would be one of their worst setbacks in a decade and a half in power.

Electoral authorities are conducting a recount in scores of districts in Ankara and in Istanbul where tallies showed the opposition CHP candidate Ekrem Imamoglu with a very slim lead over the AKP.

“At the end of the day, we will accept the final result regardless of whether it is to our advantage or disadvantage,” AKP spokesman Omer Celik told a briefing for the foreign press in Istanbul.

Voters may have punished the AKP at the ballot box, with Turkey’s economy in recession after a currency crisis last year that hit Turkish households hard when the lira lost 30 percent of its value.

Losing Istanbul would be a blow to Erdogan, who built his political career as mayor of the city before becoming prime minister and later president.

In Istanbul, CHP candidate Imamoglu and the AKP’s Binali Yildirim both declared victory when preliminary results showed them in a dead heat.

The AKP later appealed saying it had found irregularities in tens of thousands of votes.

Imamoglu’s party said on Saturday he was still ahead by close to 18,000 votes with half of the recount completed. He has said he expects the recount to be finished by the end of the weekend, but the AKP could still appeal again to the Supreme Electoral Council.

Celik said the AKP would still control districts and municipal councils in both of the key cities even if they lost the mayor’s offices. But he said the party would not deliberately block opposition mayor’s agendas.

Erdogan, in power for 16 years, fought hard before the vote, holding rallies across Turkey where he described the election of mayors and district councils as a battle for the nation’s survival.



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Erdogan accuses US and Europe of 'meddling' after Turkey vote
Erdogan's AKP challenges Istanbul results in Turkey election

[UN chief issues stark Libya warning as fighting rages south of Tripoli](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Fri, 2019-04-05 09:28

TRIPOLI: UN chief Antonio Guterres pushed Friday to avoid a military escalation in Libya, as commander Khalifa Haftar's forces clashed with pro-government fighters south of the capital Tripoli. Haftar on Thursday launched an offensive to take the capital, held by a UN-backed unity government and an array of militias. The lightning assault was met with international appeals for restraint and an emergency UN Security Council meeting was set to be held later Friday.

I leave Libya with a heavy heart and deeply concerned. I still hope it is possible to avoid a bloody confrontation in and around Tripoli.

The UN is committed to facilitating a political solution and, whatever happens, the UN is committed to supporting the Libyan people.

– António Guterres (@antonioguterres) [April 5, 2019](#)

Guterres met Haftar in the eastern city of Benghazi at the end of a visit to the chaos-hit country, but neither his self-proclaimed Libyan National Army or the UN gave details of the talks.

"I leave Libya with a deep concern and a heavy heart," Guterres said in a statement.

"I still hope it will be possible to avoid a bloody confrontation in Tripoli."

Eastern Libyan forces seized the former Tripoli International Airport on the southern outskirts of the capital, a spokesman said.

Ahmed Al-Mesmari also told reporters his forces were in control of Tarhouna and Aziziya, two towns near Tripoli. He said five of his troops had been killed.

Militias in western Libya fought forces under rival army commander Khalifa Haftar on Friday, capturing 100 of his soldiers.

Earlier, LNA forces clashed with a pro-government alliance less than 50 kilometers south of the capital, a unity government source said. Haftar's press office confirmed there had been "violent fighting on the edge of Tripoli with armed militias."

LNA forces had been pushed back Friday from a key checkpoint less than 30 kilometers from the capital, checking their offensive, a security source said.

Pro-government militiamen from the coastal town of Zawiya, west of Tripoli, retook the base after a "short exchange of fire," the source said on condition of anonymity.

The head of the UN-backed unity government, Fayez Al-Sarraj, visited the checkpoint on Friday accompanied by military commanders.

The Zawiya militia is one of dozens that have proliferated since the 2011 overthrow of dictator Muammar Qaddafi and are variously aligned with Sarraj's government and a rival administration in the east backed by Haftar.

Most of the pro-Haftar fighters who briefly captured the checkpoint late on Thursday were rival militiamen from the town of Sabratha, further west along the Mediterranean coast.

Dozens of them were captured and their vehicles seized, the security source said.

The Tripoli Protection Force, an alliance of pro-government militias in the capital, said its fighters had taken part in the recapture of the checkpoint. A convoy of vehicles from Haftar's forces on Thursday pushed toward the city of Gharyan, some 100 kilometers south of Tripoli on Thursday, witnesses and military sources said.

Haftar said "the time has come" to take Tripoli in an audio message released on Thursday, pledging to spare civilians and "state institutions."

Sarraj condemned the strongman's "escalation" and said he had ordered loyalist forces to prepare to "face all threats."

The announcement of the offensive came as Guterres was in Tripoli for talks with Sarraj ahead of a planned conference later this month on organizing elections.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said that despite the flare-up preparations were continuing for the April conference.

The United States and its allies issued a joint statement urging "all parties to immediately de-escalate tensions."

"At this sensitive moment in Libya's transition, military posturing and threats of unilateral action only risk propelling Libya back toward chaos," they said.

Russia called for "all possible efforts to fully resolve the situation with peaceful political means."

"We believe that the main thing is for any actions not to lead to renewed bloodshed," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Analysts say the advance by Haftar's forces comes at a key moment as the UN bids to get elections back on track after an abortive effort last year. "The risk of a flare-up has increased," said Jalel Harchaoui, a researcher at Clingendael Institute in The Hague.

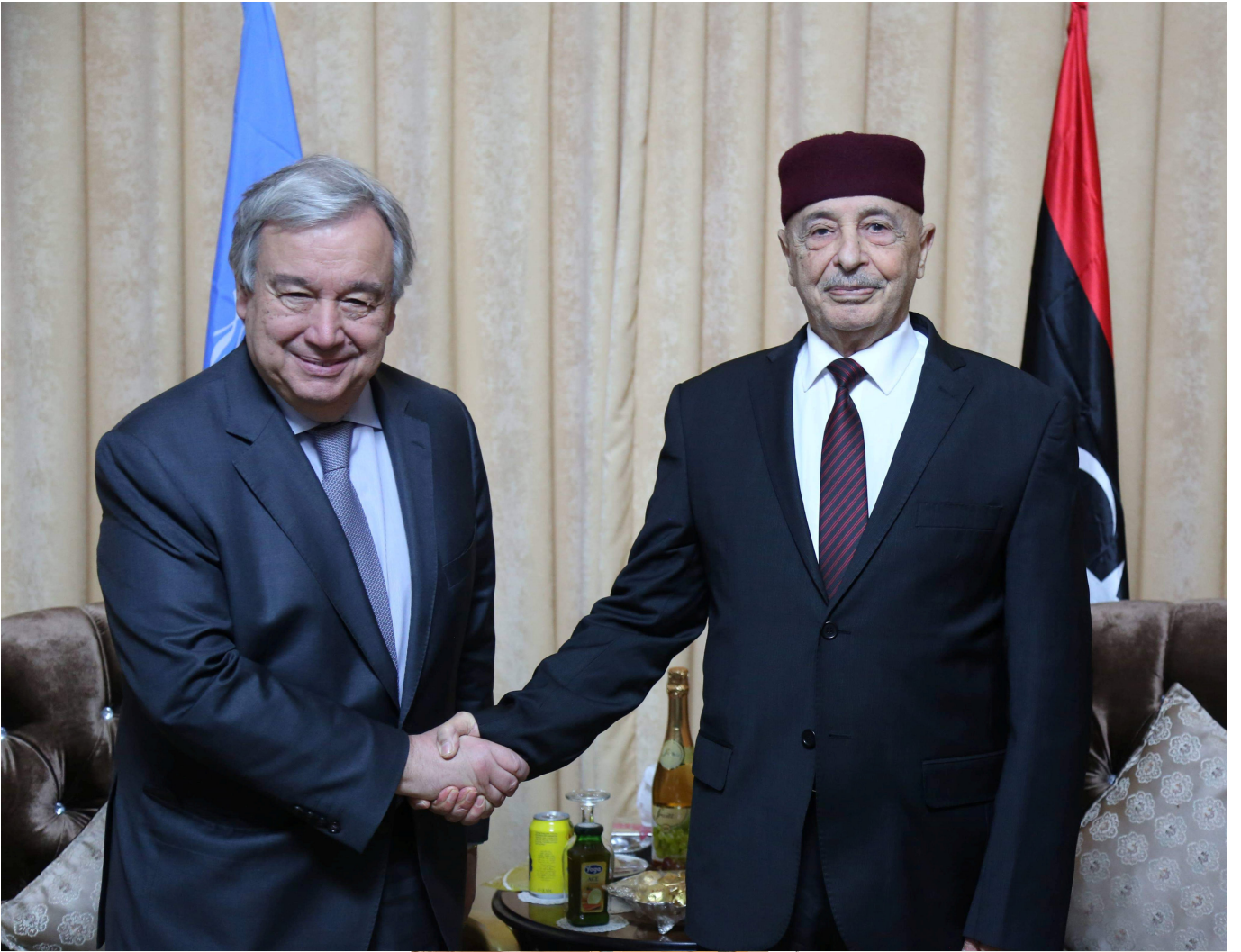
"Capturing Tripoli... remains a possibility" for Haftar, with the support he receives from Saudi Arabia and its allies Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, he said.

Haftar held talks in Riyadh late last month and his forces have reportedly received major arms deliveries from the UAE, including aircraft, despite a UN embargo.

They already overran most of the remote oil fields and oasis cities of the desert south during an offensive earlier this year.

The government's writ is now largely confined to the narrow coastal strip around Tripoli and third city Misrata to its east.







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Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar orders troops to advance on Tripoli
Eastern Libyan forces ordered to move west to fight militants

[Chronology of protests that led to ouster of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-04-05 23:24

ALGIERS: Here is a timeline of the political drama in the north African nation:

- On Feb. 22, tens of thousands of people demonstrate in several cities in

the first major protests against Bouteflika's candidacy in planned April 18 elections. After rallying calls on social media, thousands turn out to chant "No fifth mandate!" – including in Algiers, where demonstrations have been banned since 2001. Police fire tear gas to block a march on the presidential palace, prompting some demonstrators to respond by throwing stones.

- On Feb. 26, thousands of students rally peacefully in Algiers. Two days later, a dozen journalists are detained for several hours as they participate in a rally against alleged censorship of protest coverage.
- On March 1, tens of thousands protest across the country, including in second and third cities Oran and Constantine. In Algiers, some protesters chant: "Regime murderers!"
- On March 2, Bouteflika, in Switzerland for nearly a week undergoing "routine medical checks," sacks his veteran campaign manager. The next day, state television airs a letter from the president in which he vows not to serve a full term if re-elected, and to organize early polls in which he will not stand. Shortly afterward, his new campaign manager formally submits the president's candidacy, just ahead of the deadline.
- On March 5, as thousands march again, the army chief pledges to guarantee national security, accusing unidentified groups of wanting a return to the "painful years" of Algeria's 1992-2002 civil war.
- Bouteflika on March 7 warns of "chaos" if troublemakers infiltrate the demonstrations.
- On March 8, tens of thousands in several cities take part in the biggest rallies yet against Bouteflika's candidacy.
- On March 10, Bouteflika returns from Switzerland. The next day, he pulls out of the race and cancels the elections. "There will not be a fifth term," he announces on official media. Interior Minister Noureddine Bedoui is named prime minister, replacing unpopular premier Ahmed Ouyahia.
- On March 15, a huge crowd marches through Algiers for a fourth consecutive Friday, demanding Bouteflika's departure. Major protests rock other key cities.
- On March 18, Bouteflika issues a statement confirming he will stay on as president beyond the end of his term on April 28 and until new elections are held, following a constitutional review.
- On March 22, exactly a month after the protests started, hundreds of thousands of Algerians again stage demonstrations across the country.
- On March 26 army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah demands Bouteflika step down or be declared medically unfit to rule. A day later the ruling party's long-time coalition ally, the National Rally for Democracy (RND) of former Prime Minister Ouyahia, says it "recommends the resignation of the president."
- On March 28, the president of Algeria's Business Leaders Forum, Ali Haddad,

close to Bouteflika, resigns. The next day, hundreds of thousands of anti-government protesters throng the streets of Algiers and other cities. Demonstrators say top loyalists' moves to abandon Bouteflika do not go far enough.

- On March 31, Bouteflika names a new government headed by Bedoui. Salah, the armed forces chief who has called for the president to step down, remains as deputy defense minister.
- On April 1, a statement on state media says Bouteflika will resign before his mandate expires on April 28.
- On Tuesday, Salah demands immediate impeachment proceedings against Bouteflika. Shortly afterward, state television reports that the president has informed the Constitutional Council that he is resigning effective immediately.
- On Wednesday, the Constitutional Council officially accepts his resignation and informs Parliament that his post is vacant. The new government makes a series of conciliatory moves toward the press, opposition, NGOs and unions. Bouteflika apologizes to the Algerian people, in a letter published by state media, but says he is "proud" of his contribution.



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Bouteflika seeks forgiveness from Algerians Algerians demand 'radical' change despite Bouteflika's vow to quit