

[Aoun turns to diplomats in bid to break Lebanon's political deadlock](#)

Tue, 2021-03-23 23:15

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun asked for diplomatic assistance on Tuesday in an attempt to overcome the political deadlock surrounding the attempted formation of the country's new government.

The move came after Monday's meeting with Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri failed yet again to agree on a new cabinet as Aoun insisted on getting a "blocking third" in the proposed government.

Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Walid bin Abdullah Bukhari was one of two diplomats to visit with Aoun on Tuesday.

"I told President Aoun that the Kingdom is committed to Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity," Bukhari said after his first visit to Lebanon in almost two years.

"I stressed the importance of putting the national interest first in order to move forward with the implementation of drastic reforms that could restore the international community's confidence."

Bukhari also called on parties to accelerate the formation of a government capable of achieving the aspirations of the Lebanese people.

"Saudi Arabia has always expressed its support and solidarity with the brotherly Lebanese people, steadfast in the face of crises," he said.

French Ambassador to Lebanon Anne Griot also met with Aoun on Tuesday but did not make a statement.

Another failed attempt to form a government sparked more security and economic concerns on Tuesday. The dollar exchange rate reached 15,000 Lebanese Pounds (LBP) to the dollar, which was an increase of LBP4,000 in a single day.

I told President Aoun that KSA is committed to Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Walid bin Abdullah Bukhari, Saudi ambassador to Lebanon

According to a security source that spoke to Arab News, there has been an increase in armed robberies during the economic crisis, which has also led to the theft of government property.

Iron manhole covers have been stolen off the roads in several regions in an attempt to be sold for scrap, while a high-tension tower in Northern Bekaa

reportedly fell because the steel mesh corners supporting the tower were taken by thieves. The fall cut transmission lines between the Deir Ammar Power Plant and other power stations.

Lebanon's national electricity company, Electricite du Liban (EDL), said: "We found out that the corners of other towers were stolen, putting them at risk of falling. Repairs will require time and there is a difficulty finding the necessary financing in foreign currencies."

The country's critical situation prompted UN Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon Najat Rushdie to call on political leaders for action.

"Lebanese leaders should put their differences aside, assume their responsibilities, put an end to the current state of failure, listen to the people's desperate calls and provide them with solutions," Rushdie said.

"The UN remains committed to supporting the Lebanese people and the country's stability, political independence and sovereignty."

The Arab League, represented by assistant secretary-general Hossam Zaki, called upon the political parties "to put the national interest first and work urgently to overcome the political deadlock that has exacerbated the suffering of the people."

According to Sky News, Zaki said Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit is greatly concerned by the Lebanese political disputes and feels the country is headed toward a severe crisis.

"The Arab League is ready to do whatever is asked of it in order to bridge the gap and find an agreed-upon solution that would allow the prime minister-designate to form his government," Zaki said.

"It should be a government that operates through the skills of specialists in order to save Lebanon from its difficult current situation by implementing the necessary reforms that meet the ambitions and aspirations of the Lebanese people."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai on Monday and expressed "his great interest in the situation in Lebanon," stressing the importance of forming a government and keeping Lebanon away from all conflicts.



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Lebanon stalemate continues after 18th Aoun-Hariri meeting collapsesAoun and Hariri exchange accusations as Lebanon government hopes fade

[No clear winner in Israeli election, but Netanyahu could have edge – TV exit polls](#)

Tue, 2021-03-23 23:05

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to secure a solid parliamentary majority in Israel's election on Tuesday but a potential deal with a rival right-wing politician could make him the eventual winner, TV exit polls showed.

After a campaign in which he showcased Israel's world-beating COVID-19 vaccination rollout, Netanyahu's political survival appeared to rest with Naftali Bennett, a former defence minister and leader of the far-right Yamina party.

Israel's centre-left made a better showing than expected, according to the polls, but it also came up short of a 61-seat majority in the 120-member

parliament.

Bennett has said he would not serve under the centre-left group's most likely leader, Yair Lapid, head of the Yesh Atid party.

Bennett, a former Netanyahu aide who has long sought to replace him at the helm, remained noncommittal about his coalition intentions immediately after polling stations closed.

"I will do only what is good for the state of Israel," Bennett was quoted as saying by a spokesman.

Netanyahu, 71, had campaigned on his leadership credentials based on a programme that has enabled nearly 50% of Israelis to receive two vaccine shots already.

Corruption charges against him, in an ongoing trial, have weighed on his popularity, resulting in Israel's fourth election in two years. He has denied any wrongdoing.

The dominant political figure of his generation, Netanyahu, has been in power continuously since 2009. But the Israeli electorate is deeply polarised, with supporters hailing him as "King Bibi" and opponents holding up placards calling him "Crime Minister".

Israel's swift vaccine rollout allowed it to reopen much of its economy before the election, and Netanyahu had promised voters and businesses more cash stipends and millions more doses of vaccine.



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Houthis stuck in Marib military quagmire, experts say

Author:

Saeed Al-Batati

ID:

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Tue, 2021-03-23 22:50

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis find themselves embroiled in a costly military quagmire in Yemen's central province of Marib as their month-long offensive has stalled and they have not been able to recapture the province's capital.

The military deadlock has prompted the rebels into shifting their goal from taking Marib city to potentially using the offensive as a bargaining chip in future peace talks, Yemeni experts say.

"While the Houthis initially had momentum in their offensive on Marib, the battle has descended into a familiar stalemate," Samuel Ramani, an international relations researcher at Oxford University, told Arab News.

"On March 14, reports from the Yemeni government suggested that the Houthis were losing ground and that the government forces were turning the tide."

Earlier last month, thousands of Houthi fighters, including elite forces, rolled into Marib province from three directions: Sana'a, Jouf and Al-Bayda. The rebels' plan was to capture Marib, its oil and gas fields and expel the Yemeni government from its last bastion in the northern part of the country.

More than a month since the offensive began, the Houthis have lost hundreds of fighters and failed to make major advances toward the city of Marib, located about 75 miles east of Yemen's capital Sana'a.

"Houthis stumbled in Marib. Their offensive has been repelled," Nadwa Al-Dawsari, a Yemeni conflict analyst and a non-resident scholar at the US-based Middle East Institute told Arab News.

Yemen experts argue that the Houthis, stuck deep in a military stalemate and increased fatalities, have dropped their goal of seizing Marib and could use the offensive as leverage at behind-the-scenes negotiations.

"There's a possibility the Houthis knew the probability of taking Marib was low, especially given the power of the tribes and the terrain, which exposes

them to Saudi airstrikes,” Katherine Zimmerman, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, told Arab News.

“They may be seeking to use their new positions as a bartering chip at future negotiations.”

Despite pushing back consecutive Houthi assaults and inflicting heavy losses on them, the Yemeni government troops could not completely flush out the rebels from the city and surrounding areas.

The rebels are still close and pose a threat to the city, experts say.

“They are still sending reinforcements. While their offensive was stalled by the tribes and government forces, they are still a threat to Marib,” Al-Dawsari said.

The city’s geographical and societal natures, in addition to massive military support from the Arab coalition, have played roles in foiling the Houthi offensive.

The rebels’ assaults have pushed Marib’s powerful tribesmen into joining the battlefields and standing by the Yemeni army.

The province’s mountainous terrain has exposed rebel fighters to Saudi airstrikes, Zimmerman said. Experts and local government officials say that warplanes from the Arab coalition have disrupted Houthi attacks, targeting military reinforcements to the battlefields.

The coalition even published videos showing warplanes attacking Houthi military fighters, tanks and military equipment in Marib’s mountain and desert regions.

Marib’s governor, Sultan Al-Arada, said the Houthis would have successfully invaded the city if the warplanes did not take part in the fighting.

“The situation would have been different,” Al-Aradah said during an online press conference arranged by the Sana’a Center For Strategic Studies earlier this month.

Yemen experts predict three scenarios for the post-Houthi offensive on Marib: the Yemeni government forces and the Houthis plunge deeper into a military stalemate, the rebels break through and take full control of Marib, or the government forces completely push the rebels out of the Marib province.

The outcome of the offensive could decide the trajectory of the country’s political and military courses.

“If Houthis take Marib, the political process will officially collapse,” Al-Dawsari said. “Already, the rebels have demonstrated a lack of interest in political negotiations. They want an end to Saudi airstrikes and military intervention but they are not really interested in reaching a political agreement with other actors.”

But if the Houthis fail to capture Marib, they might pause the offensive and engage in talks with their opponents to buy time and regroup forces before renewing strikes.

“The unreliability of the rebels as peace partners makes it difficult to predict their response to a failed offensive in Marib,” Ramani said. “They might engage in dialogue with Saudi Arabia, perhaps facilitated by Oman, just to buy time and then escalate again.”



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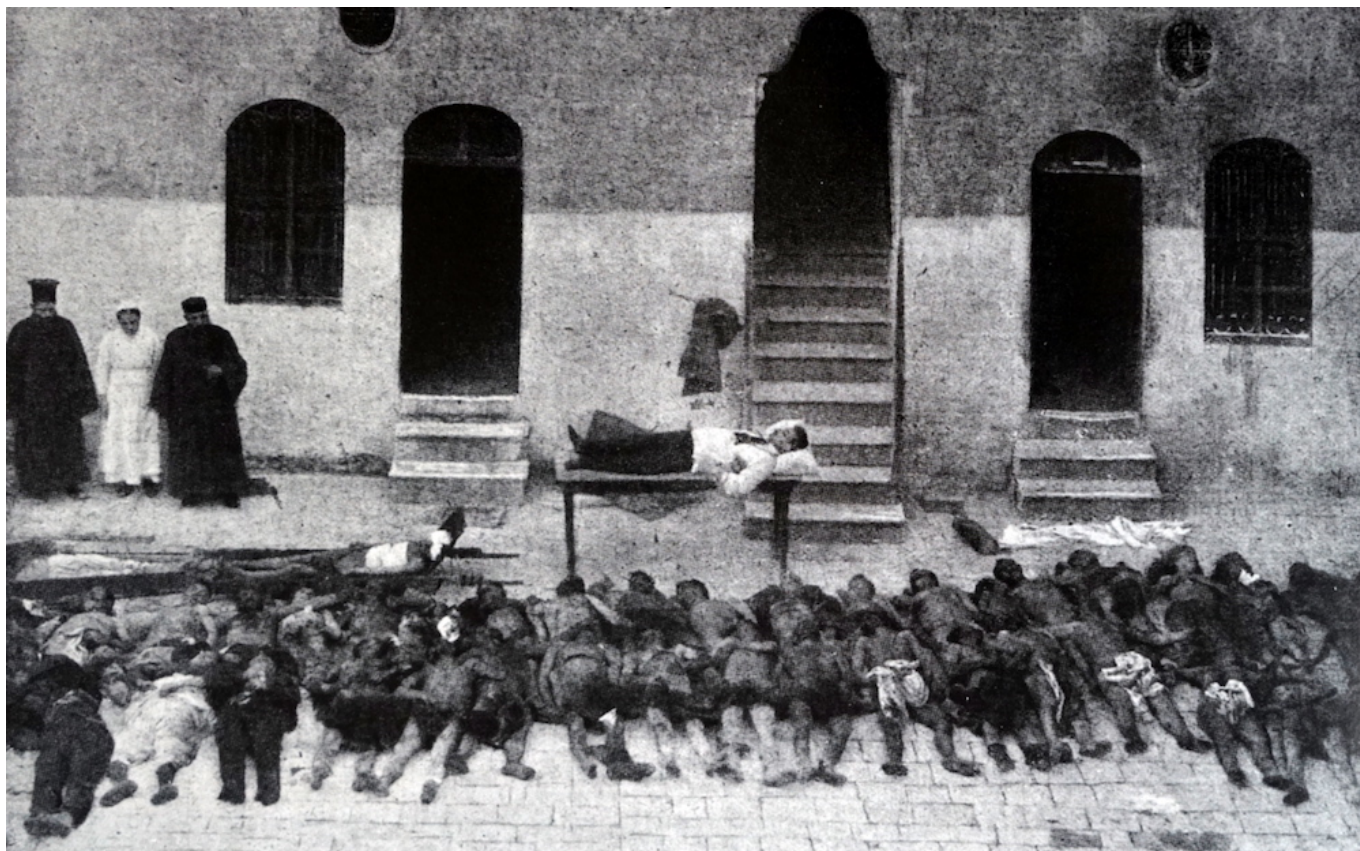
[Turkey on tenterhooks for Biden's decision on Armenian genocide recognition](#)

Tue, 2021-03-23 22:29

DUBAI: The Biden administration is considering acknowledging the genocide of ethnic Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, Ian Bremner of GZero Media has reported in the lead-up to Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, April 24.

In the event, Joe Biden would become the first US president to recognize the systematic killing of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians from 1915 onwards in

modern-day Turkey as a “genocide,” a step already taken by the Senate and the House of Representatives in 2019.



The genocide began with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople in 1915 and continued with a centralized program of deportations, murder, pillage and rape until 1923. (AFP/Getty Images/File Photo)

The adoption of that measure by the two US Chambers of Congress came at a time when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s military intervention in northern Syria had strained already tense relations between his government and the US political establishment. This time, in addition to continuing friction in US-Turkish relations, some 38 senators have sent a letter urging the president to recognize the genocide.

The genocide began with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople in 1915 and continued with a centralized program of deportations, murder, pillage and rape until 1923. Ordinary Armenians were then driven from their homes and sent on death marches through the Mesopotamian desert without food or water.

Ottoman death squads massacred Armenians, with only 388,000 left in the empire by 1923 from 2 million in 1914. (Turkey estimates the total number of deaths to be 300,000.)

TURKEY'S ARMENIAN COMMUNITY



Many Armenians were deported to Syria and the Iraqi city of Mosul. Today descendants of the survivors are scattered across the world, with large diasporas in Russia, the US, France, Argentina and Lebanon.

Turkey admits that many Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed in clashes with Ottoman forces during the First World War, but disputes the figures and denies that the killings were systematically orchestrated and constitute a genocide.

Getting access to vital Ottoman sources is a daunting challenge, while the language barrier makes access to Armenian sources hard for Ottomanists and comparativists alike.

Consequently, some scholars argue, Armenians have often been depicted as passive victims of violence, ignoring their active resistance during the genocide.

"This misrepresentation is due to a combination of political realities, methodological challenges, and the inaccessibility of crucial primary sources. The Turkish state's denial of the Armenian genocide was a major hurdle," Khatchig Mouradian, a lecturer in Columbia University's Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies, told the website Columbia News in a recent interview.

In a new book, Mouradian has challenged depictions of Armenians as passive victims of violence and mere objects of Western humanitarianism. "The Resistance Network" is a history of an underground network of humanitarians, missionaries and diplomats in Ottoman Syria who helped to save the lives of thousands during the Armenian genocide.

"I weave together the stories of hundreds of survivors and resisters as they pushed back against the genocidal machine in Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and in concentration camps stretching along the lower Euphrates," Mouradian said. "In doing so, I place survivor accounts in conversation with—and sometimes in rebellion against—the scholarship and accepted wisdom on mass violence, humanitarianism and resistance."

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN NUMBERS

*** 2m Armenians living in Turkey in 1914, when genocide started.**

*** 1.5m Highest estimate of deaths, by massacre, starvation or exhaustion.**

* **3,000 Years since Armenians made their home in the Caucasus.**

* **30 Countries whose parliaments have recognized the genocide.**

He said the Armenian case demonstrates how much is suppressed from the narrative when the actions and words of the targeted groups are relegated to the margins.

When historians use the term “Seferberlik” – the Ottoman word for “mobilization” – it is often assumed they are discussing the Armenian genocide. But it is also used to refer to another smaller but significant episode of mass displacement that occurred around the same time in what is today Saudi Arabia.

“Seferberlik: A century on from the Ottoman crime in Madinah” – by Saudi author Mohammad Al-Saeed – tells the story of the deportation of the holy city’s population by Ottoman General Fakhri Pasha.



Joe Biden looks set to become the first US president to recognize the systematic killing of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians from 1915 onwards.
(Getty Images via AFP)

History books tell of Fakhri Pasha’s “heroic defense” of the city in the 1918 Siege of Madinah, fending off repeated attacks by the British-backed Arab fighters of Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Makkah. However, the books prefer to gloss over what happened in 1915, prior to the siege, when Fakhri Pasha forced Madinah’s population onto trains and sent them north into present-day Syria, Turkey, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

“The Seferberlik crime was an attempt to transform Madinah into a military outpost,” Al-Saeed told Arab News in a recent interview. “The Turks tried to separate the city from its Arab surroundings and annex it to the Ottoman Empire to justify ruling what remained of the Arab world.”

He said history should not forget what happened in Madinah, particularly since the few historical sources that documented the events are in the Ottoman, English and French archives.

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Arab News Spotlight: Why the Armenian Genocide won't be forgotten. [Click here to read the full article.](#)



“Moreover, the sources of information are very limited and the grandchildren of those who were in Madinah at the time do not have many documents. A lot of the city’s inhabitants were displaced. Many of them did not return,” Al-Saeed said.

Speaking to Arab News in 2019 on the Armenians’ displacement experience, Joseph Kechichian, senior fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, said: “My own paternal grandmother was among the victims. Imagine how growing up without a grandmother – and in my orphaned father’s case, a mother – affects you.

“We never kissed her hand, not even once. She was always missed, and we spoke about her all the time. My late father had teary eyes each and every time he thought of his mother.”

Every Armenian family has similar stories, said Kechichian. "We pray for the souls of those lost, and we beseech the Almighty to grant them eternal rest," he added.



Armenian orphans being deported from Turkey in around 1920.
(Shutterstock/File Photo)

According to genocide scholars, denial is the final stage of genocide. Levon Avedanian, coordinator of the Armenian National Committee of Lebanon (ANCL) and professor at Haigazian University in Beirut, said that for Armenians, the denial of the Armenian genocide by Turkey is a continuation of the genocidal policies.

"In that sense, recognition by Turkey and by members of the international community is an essential step on the long path of restoring justice, which would inevitably include, in addition to recognition, reparations and restitution," he said.

As a Democratic presidential candidate, Biden tweeted on April 24 last year: "If elected, I pledge to support a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide and will make universal human rights a top priority."

In his "quick take" of March 22 on the possibility of Biden making good on his campaign promise next month, GZero's Bremner wrote: "A lot of things going wrong for Turkey right now. They just pulled their country out of the Istanbul Conventions, European agreement that meant to protect women. And (Erdogan) also just sacked his new central bank governor. ... The economy is not doing well. ... he's cracking down on the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, the HDP. ... But the big news, is that Erdogan is about to face another diplomatic challenge."



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[Egyptian president warns of coronavirus third wave](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-03-22 21:19

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has warned of an imminent coronavirus third wave and stressed that people should adhere to

precautionary measures.

Egypt had “survived” the first and second waves and was “on the cusp” of a third, he said during a Mother’s Day speech, adding: “We hope that it will pass (without significant harm).”

Adhering to precautionary measures and exercising extreme caution was important, he said, especially during the holy month of Ramadan when people would want to gather. “We want the situation to end safely.”

A few days ago the Ministry of Health warned of an increase in COVID-19 cases during the coming weeks, coinciding with the month of fasting.

Egypt’s Minister of Health and Population Dr. Hala Zayed said that, through the lessons learned from the first wave and the hike in last April’s cases, there was the expectation that this April may also witness an increase in cases, as the peak occurred in the seventh week of each wave.

Presidential adviser for health affairs, Mohamed Awad Tageldin, also anticipated the coming period to see more COVID-19 infections.

Egypt was in a state of COVID-19 case fluctuations, he said, and the numbers were rising and decreasing by 10 percent daily. The third wave had started in other countries, he added. “But we hope that we will not reach this stage. A third wave may occur in Egypt if we do not adhere to the precautionary measures.”

Islam Anan, a professor of health economics and epidemiology, expected Egypt to witness a third wave by next month. The country was still at the end of its second wave and there was an increase in the number of casualties, he said.

Anan added that countries were divided into parts where COVID-19 spread along the emergence of new waves, as they appeared first in Europe, then Asia, the US, and finally the Middle East and Egypt, pointing out that the third wave had begun in Europe.

But Dr. Hossam Hosni, head of the scientific committee to combat coronavirus, said Egypt was currently in a stage of epidemic stability, having controlled the second wave.

“The occurrence of a third wave of the virus is related to factors including low societal awareness, climate changes, and the lack of necessary caution, which is the basis for surviving the rise of infections again. We are currently in the stage of epidemiological stability.”

An official at Egypt’s Health Ministry said an update was being made to the treatment protocol in order to contribute to high recovery rates among the sick, following the previous update in November.



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Egypt government aims to vaccinate 250,000 in one week
Egyptian coronavirus vaccine to undergo clinical trials