



"Bouteflika is Gone: What does the Future Hold for Algeria?"

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Carnegie Middle East Center

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In the wake of the historical protests that culminated in the resignation of Algeria's president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika on April 2, 2019, Carnegie Middle East Center held a very timely panel discussion to reflect on the country's current situation and its future prospects.

With millions of citizens taking to the streets to peacefully demonstrate against their president running for a fifth term, the recent events present a unique moment for the people of Algeria deserving of further examination. The topics explored during this discussion include the characteristics of the demonstrations, the role of the military in the Algerian state, the too often overlooked economic dimension of the situation, the regional context and relations with neighbouring countries.

Based on her first-hand experience of the protests, Dalia Ghanem identified some of their key characteristics, their peaceful nature being the most prevalent. A statement heard from a demonstrator "We don't want to be like the *gilets jaunes*" reflects the people's determination to remain peaceful. Furthermore, the protests have been nation-wide, and cut across generations and social classes. This unique moment of unity was reflected in another slogan "We are all Algerians". While the early claims of the movement remained focused on the removal of Bouteflika himself, they have since then grown to include broader demands against the regime as a whole, and show no sign of fading away. So far, the leaderless nature of the movement has been an advantage, however this may become an issue if the movement wants to stand the test of time. A level of institutionalisation is therefore



necessary for the movement's durability and its ability to negotiate with the government.

The resignation of president Bouteflika uncovered the predominant role of the military in the government, with Ahmed Gaid Salah, Algeria's army minister currently holding the reins of power. A quote by historian Mohamed Harbi illustrates the relationship between the military and the Algerian state: "All states in the world have a military, but in Algeria the military has a state".

Amel Belaid then contextualized the Hirak within the current economic "crisis in the making" which Algeria is witnessing. Although most of the discourse surrounding the protests have been focused on their political nature, the claims made by protesters are also economic in nature. The demand for the total dismantlement of the regime is motivated by its corruption, which prevented the development of a more diverse and inclusive economic system and permitted the concentration of the country's wealth in the hands of a crony business elite. Past economic measures mostly taken to achieve political gains and ensure social stability have led to the deterioration of the country's economy due in part to a dangerously generous subsidy system. Whoever takes over will need to propose a new social and economic contract based on deep economic restructuring to avert a crisis. The main priorities of these structural reforms include improved governance, the modernization of the financial system, and a revision of the over-centralised bureaucratic system.

In order to contextualize the protests within its regional context, Mr. Younes Abouyouf discussed the Algerian foreign policy towards Libya, which prioritizes stability above all. Algeria strongly rejects a military solution to the Libyan conflict, and insists on the territorial integrity of the country. It supports an inclusive political solution with Islamist movements, who should have the right to be represented in the power-sharing agreement in order to avoid an escalation of violence. These policies are based on Algeria's domestic history of political settlement based on dialogue and political representation following the "Black decade", which it sees as the best way to contain violence and maintain stability.

Finally Mr. Haizam Amirah-Fernández also discussed the regional and international context of the Algerian Hirak. The Maghreb lacks basic features of regional integration such as closed borders, intra-regional trade, relations and contacts. Nonetheless, and despite the fact that Algeria's role on the international scene has diminished over the past decade, Algeria remains the



largest country of the Arab League and Africa, and due to its economic, military and geopolitical importance, any abrupt changes in the country would have repercussions across the region. Regimes in the region have demonstrated strong resistance to democratic change, and populations witnessed very strong counter-revolutions supported by regional or international powers. But the ongoing Algerian and Sudanese protests show that the status quo is no longer guaranteed. The political maturity displayed by both Algerian and Sudanese populations in demanding their rights has made the fear factor employed by regimes, who warn against demonstrations leading down the path of civil war such as they did in Syria and Yemen, inefficient. Mr. Amirah-Fernández refers to this new wave of political mobilization as a resurgent "Arabellion" against systems no longer capable of delivering to their populations.

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Chair

Loulouwa Al Rachid. Visiting fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

Speakers

Dalia Ghanem. Resident scholar and expert on Algeria at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

Amel Belaid. Founder of APOTHEOX Consultancy and an oil and gas consultant.

Younes Abouyoub. Former political adviser to the UN special representative of the Secretary-General.

Haizam Amirah-Fernández. Senior analyst at the Elcano Royal Institute and an associate professor at the Instituto de Empresa (IE).