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Algeria

The Algerian people reiterate their rejection of military rule

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What was really at stake was the extent of the Algerian people's participation in these elections, compared to the previous ones held at the end of 2019, which the military establishment imposed in the face of the Hirk's rejection and boycott. The result then was not what the establishment wanted, as the turnout was less than 40% (39.51% to be exact, with 9,755,340 people voting, according to official figures, out of 24,474,161 registered voters). This low turnout occurred even though the authorities had allowed for greater diversity in candidates, with five men running in 2019.

As for the result of last Saturday's elections, the turnout was lower than that of 2019, which was itself lower than the official figures for previous elections. According to the official count, the total number of votes cast last Saturday for the three candidates in the contest was only 5,630,196, a serious decline from the total votes cast five years ago, while the number of registered voters is almost unchanged (24,351,551), so that the turnout dropped to only 23.12%! The attempt by the head of the "Independent" National Election Authority, Mohamed Charfi, to camouflage the government's defeat by claiming that the "average" turnout was 48%, a figure obtained by dividing the turnout by the number of electoral districts (like saying that the average turnout between 10% in a city with 100,000 voters and 90% in a town with less than 1,000 voters is 50%) failed to the point that Tebboune's own campaign had to protest the confusion it caused.

In the face of this disastrous political defeat, the 94.65% of the votes won by Abdelmadjid Tebboune, according to official figures, seem very meagre, not to mention that the two other candidates were quick to accuse the authorities of falsifying the results. According to the official count, Tebboune received 5,329,253 votes, compared to 4,947,523 in 2019, a slight increase. But contrary to some comments that saw the percentage obtained by Tebboune as an iteration of the well-known tradition of regional dictatorships, which requires granting the president more than 90% of the votes, the percentage of 94.65% in the last Algerian elections was not combined with a high participation rate as is usually the case in dictatorships, whether by falsifying the figures or imposing participation on citizens or both.

Rather, the low participation confirmed that the 2019 Hirk – even if the military rule and the security services were able to crush it through repression and arbitrary arrests, initially seizing the opportunity provided by the Covid pandemic in 2020 and continuing the same approach to this day – the Hirk is still alive like fire under the ashes, waiting for an opportunity to ignite again. There is no doubt that the ruling military-security establishment will see the election result as a source of concern, as it happened despite the fact that the government had increased the social spending with which it tries to buy the people's acquiescence, taking advantage of the rise in fuel prices and the consequent increase in its income, along with the increasing need of Europeans for Algerian gas to compensate for Russian gas. Hydrocarbons constitute in fact more than 90% of the value of Algeria's exports, a percentage that is much more significant than all electoral percentages, as it indicates the military's abject failure to industrialize the country and develop its agriculture, a goal they declared to be a priority since they seized power in 1965 under the leadership of Houari Boumediene, especially after the nationalization of the hydrocarbon sector in 1971.

It is to be feared that the ruling establishment's reaction to its obvious political failure will be further infringement on freedoms and taking the country down the traditional path of regional dictatorships, with more electoral fraud, instead of fulfilling the Algerian people's clear desire for the military to return to their barracks and make way for a democratic civilian government based on free and fair elections. On the contrary, there is evidence that the country is following the Egyptian model in expanding the scope of the military institution's intervention in civil society, as manifested in the decision issued by the presidency early this summer to allow army officers to hold positions in the civil administration under the pretext of benefiting from their qualifications.

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The bottom line is that, from the two waves of uprisings that the Arabic-speaking region witnessed in 2011 and 2019, the existing regimes have only learned repressive lessons in tightening their grip on societies. In doing so, they are only paving the way for even bigger and more dangerous explosions than what the region has witnessed so far, as the structural economic and social crisis that formed the basis of the two previous revolutionary waves is still worsening and will inevitably worsen as long as the regimes of tyranny and corruption remain in place.

PS:

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