



# **NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION**

**GREATER MAGHREB**  
(Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya)

## **STRATEGIC TRENDS**

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## **In depth analysis**

### ***Egypt***

#### **Morsi's first 100 days in office: a hard track**

Since the victory of President Mohamed Morsi Isa El-Ayyat, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (MB), that beat last June his runoff competitor (former military Ahmed Shafik) by a narrow margin, Egypt has been facing an ideological and political standoff between the liberal secularist and the Islamist, as it happens also in other countries where the ruling authoritarian regimes were overthrown.

During the ongoing transitional political process the debate is fierce regarding the rule of Islam in the political and socio-economic spheres. On 12 October, after the Friday prayer, some rallies in Cairo's main streets ended in clashes between supporters and opponents of Mr. Morsi that left more than 100 people injured. On one side, a peaceful demonstration organized by the opponents of Mr. Morsi against his policies and to denounce the Islamist control over the body that is drafting the country's new constitution; while on the other side, Muslim Brotherhood's supporters went into Cairo's Tahrir Square to criticise the decision made by the High Court to acquit 24 former regime officials, who had been accused of organizing one of the most dramatic attacks on protesters during last year's uprising, the so called "Camel Battle," in which assailants on horses and camels charged the crowds in Tahrir Square.

The fight became intense as more supporters of the liberal-secular rally poured into the square and both sides hit each other violently.

A few days later, Morsi asked Mr. Mahmoud to step down, but the Prosecutor-General refused because the order would have infringed on the judiciary's independence. The institutional conflict ended after a meeting in which both parties decided that Mr. Mahmoud stays in office.

The political debate between the two sides is centred on the wording of Shariah's role (Islamic Law) in the Constitution, the role of unelected religious scholars in reviewing laws as well as the protection of women's rights and religious minorities. Liberals and secularists have expressed concern with what they see as a growing role of conservative Islam in the charter, while ultra-conservative Islamists, such as Salafis of the fragmented al-Noor Party, are pushing for a stricter implementation of Shariah.

The parliamentary elections of last December paved the way to the rising influence of the Islamists, giving them more than 70% of seats in parliament, and consequently, the control over the composition of the Constitutional Assembly, which was drawn up by the Parliament.

The current composition of the 100-member Constitutional Assembly has stirred a heated debate. In particular, since June the liberals have raised objections with 40 appeals, drawing the attention to the fact that some members of the panel have been appointed to government positions. An earlier panel also dominated by Islamist members, was dissolved by the same court in April, which ruled its composition did not comply with the constitutional declaration drafted by the country's former military rulers.

The current panel released a partial first draft of the charter in which most of the provisions related to the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) are akin to the outgoing constitution: such as the president's right to appoint the head of the court and the rest of its 15 members after receiving nominations from lower courts. Also included in the draft are rules that would restrict the executive branch's ability to dissolve parliament and assign that power to public referendums as well as the article that would give to Al-Azhar University, the country's highest Islamic authority, unprecedented powers to review forthcoming laws.

Supporters of the panel drafting the constitution say it was set up by an elected parliament and broadly represents Egypt's political factions. On the other hand, opponents such as some judges from the Egypt's Highest Court harshly criticized the constitutional panel stating that the process is dominated by an Islamist majority.

Tahani el-Gibaly, a member of the SCC, said that these provisions are "disastrous" and that the panel ignored proposals to allow other courts, rather than the president, to select the members of the SCC as well as its chief judge. One new article introduced by the panel would strip the SCC of the authority to rule about the constitutionality of laws after they are passed by parliament, leaving it only the power to rule on them beforehand. El-Gibaly added that "*the revolution was about ensuring a democratic system, with balanced powers to protect the rights of the Egyptian citizen, but these clauses violate these rights*". However, this issue will be hard to resolve because even if the current panel will be dissolved again for the second time, Morsi holds the power to appoint a new one.

It is worth noting the decision made by Mr. Morsi to issue a decree pardoning all revolutionaries charged with or convicted of acts "*in support of the revolution*" since the beginning of the popular uprising that forced Hosni Mubarak from power. This decree showed that the President is far from the position of military establishment. This action could create new frictions between the new political leader and the military institution in the near future.

The military is the strongest institution that has guaranteed the secularism of the State since 1952. And now the alliance between the MB and the ultra-conservative Muslim coalition tend to shape the country in a different manner, downgrading the role of the military establishment. For instance, the Salafis are too politically active in the country and are launching a strong media offensive on new TV channels to earn more ministries in the upcoming elections, increasing theirs 25 percent of parliamentary seats.

The increasing role of Salafis in the society has emerged to the world opinion during the assault against the US embassy in Cairo in the last September, when angry protesters violently demonstrated over a film insulting the Prophet Mohammad climbed the walls and tore down the US flag, raised a black flag that symbolizes the Islamic religion and is used by al Qaida followers as well.

Morsi's position towards the protesters has been lukewarm, and the US complained about Egypt's lack of protection for the embassy. President Barack Obama harshly described Egypt as "*neither an ally nor an enemy*", even if the country has a strong relationship with the USA, as enshrined in Major non-NATO Ally agreement. Even the Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton showed her concern for what happened, saying "*extremists are clearly determined to hijack these wars and revolutions to further their agendas and ideology, so our partnership must empower those who would see their nations emerge as true democracies*". The message from Washington to Cairo was clear: you are either with us or against us.

Morsi's policies should not become a headache for Washington in the long run: first of all, the main Salafi party, al-Noor, has split into two groups, showing a political rift between the two main leaders, Emad Abdel-Ghafour and Yasser Borhami; secondly, President Morsi is under strong criticism from the public opinion due to its failures in achieving only 4 out of 64 promises during his first 100 days in office. Egyptians are struggling with piles of garbage in the streets of the capital, strikes over salaries, and therefore newly empowered voters want fast solutions for a shrinking economy and the worsening security conditions, that brought also the Egyptian Football Federation to postpone the domestic league games.

Both Egypt and the US have a strong interest in keeping their long partnership intact and strong. USA aids are crucial to Egypt's weak economy, and Egypt is a key Arab power broker in the Middle East as well as a counterterrorism partner.

### **Sinai: Achilles heel or strategic outpost?**

The Sinai Peninsula has become a base for arms smugglers and a new jihadists' launching pad for attacks both against Egypt and Israel. On 5th August, a group of militants attacked the check point Karm Abu Salem, killing 16 guards near the border with Israel before stealing two armoured vehicles and crossing into Israel where one vehicle was destroyed by an Israeli helicopter.

As reaction, President Morsi launched a military campaign to wipe out criminal elements from the restive area as a part of a bigger operation called "Operation Eagle", in which the government aimed at keeping secure the populated desert area that borders Israel. For the Bedouins that dwell into the area the security problems remain the same: apart from a few ineffective raids, the new central government is not doing enough to stop the increasing criminal activities.

Bedouin leaders are pushing to take matters in their own hands and urging the central government to arm their tribesmen by creating a local security force. Bedouins, who are mainly in the impoverished towns and villages in the North of Sinai, are about three-quarters of total population (400.000), and decades of government neglect have exacerbated the resentment.

In recent months, militants have launched bold attacks against Egyptian installations and have sabotaged at least 12 times the Arab Gas Pipeline that delivers natural gas to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Israel.

On September 21 a cross-border attack killed an Israeli soldier and the following days an organization called Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis claimed responsibility. The group said it was behind an attack on the Arab Gas Pipeline and the firing of rockets into Israel's Southern city of Eilat in August. Some counterterrorism experts think that there are newly established links between some Salafi jihadists in Sinai and al-Qaeda members based in Yemen.

Although President Mohamed Morsi has recently approved a tough crackdown in the area, he has at the same time granted pardon to several jihadists imprisoned by former President Mubarak. For instance, in September, Mostafa Hamza, a leader of the terrorist group Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiyya, was freed from an Egyptian prison, after being accused of involvement in the massacre of 60 foreign tourists in Luxor in 1997 and a failed assassination attempt against Mubarak in 1995. Also a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Muhammad Jamal Abu Ahmad has been set free, while he was jailed for nine years without trial during the Mubarak era.

The government's main way of dealing with the Bedouin in the past was through the security forces, which launched heavy-handed crackdowns over smuggling and militant activity and recruited some Bedouin to work as informant.

Some analysts think that the aim at securing the area is no longer a question of capability, but it's a question of determination. Now Mr. Morsi has to show his willingness to curb the militants, bring the peace in the area and guarantee the security of the border with Israel, which is speeding up the construction of a wall fitted with an electronic alert system along its 240-km border with Egypt to stop any attacks and illegal cross-border activities towards its territory. Unfortunately this wall is also against wretched African migrants that try to reach more viable countries and that are regularly captured and ransomed amidst horrible torments by local marauders.

The latter apart, these issues are vital for both Israel and the US counterterrorism in the region; therefore President Morsi cannot escape from dealing with them. On the other hand, Mr. Morsi has to be careful to not compromise the relationship with Israel, which is not prepared to accept an increase of Egypt's military presence along this border area.

# **Tunisia**

## **Security at stake**

The coalition led by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party that won the elections last year for the formation of the Constituent Assembly, which was supposed to write the new rules of the country's political system, is struggling with many political, socio-economic and religious issues.

The security conditions are worsening and the assault against the US Embassy last September has worsened the relations with Washington. On 14th September thousands of Islamist protesters stormed the American Embassy compound and chanted anti-American and pro-al Qaeda slogans. This action led the US to withdraw nonessential embassy personnel, advising all Americans to leave the country, which was once seen as one of the most stable and secular in the region.

This situation has brought the President Moncef Marzouki to extend the state of emergency in Tunisia, at first until October 31 to ensure the security of diplomatic missions, and then, after repeated attacks by the Salafis, for three more months.

The French weekly Magazine "Marianne" added more fuel to the fire with the publication of a report on Tunisia in mid-October affirming that "*Islamist groups are training at least in two jihadist camps, in North and South Tunisia, for the continuation of the Holy War and fight in Syria or in Mali*"<sup>1</sup>, but the Interior Ministry has promptly denied the allegation. The ultra-conservative Muslims are becoming stronger in fighting the new leadership, especially due to increasing economic difficulties. They use the economic crisis that is gripping the country to spread a radical Islamic credo. Salafi movements are increasing their attacks against Sufi shrines, Shia Muslims, alcohol sellers and campaigning for the imposition of wearing veils for women (niqab). Wearing Islamic veils in the institutional buildings was banned under the regime of President Ben Ali, but today the government is shutting its eyes to the violation of this rule.

Some analysts think that the ruling party is not really trying to curb the Salafists, when it is not covertly doing a similar activity. In a recent report, Human Rights Watch said that the authorities were unable or unwilling to protect individuals from attacks by Salafis.

The position of Ennahda's president, Rasheed Ghannouchi, remains ambiguous and calls for dialogue with the Salafists. As he declared on the French press, "*if we demonise the Salafists, in 10 to 15 years they will rule the country,*" adding that they should be encouraged to get to know democracy. Rasheed Ghannouchi's approach is supported by the Popular Association for the Defence of the Revolution that is the front of a number of Islamist movements, while the Movement for Tunisia is the front-runner liberal movement founded last summer by Beji Caid Essebsi, who shortly served as Prime Minister after the

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<sup>1</sup> According to the magazine, one camp is located in the north in the region of Tabarka and the other in the South, near Tunisia's border with Libya and Algeria, not far from the Libyan oasis of Ghadames.

revolution and was an important civil servant under the Bourguiba's presidency. The Movement for Tunisia is becoming increasingly popular and extending its influence on people dissatisfied by Ennahda's behaviour.

The secular parties are trying to unite their forces. In particular those that were defeated in the last elections, such as the Progressive Democratic Party, decided to merge with two other small parties creating a new party known as al-Joumhouria (The Republic) that is actually the largest opposition party in the Constituent Assembly. These secular groups could become a stronger counterpart vis-à-vis the Islamists, especially after this first year term, in which the interim government is not doing much to redress the economic situation, and the unemployment rate has increased since the revolution, with young people being most affected by an estimated 25% rate.

### **The widening rift around the Constitutional Charter**

The national assembly's mandate expired in mid October, and now the ruling coalition, led by moderate-Islamist Ennahda Movement with two other parties, the leftist Ettakatol and the secular centre-left Congress for the Republic (CPR), has agreed to hold presidential and parliamentary elections next year as part of a compromise aimed at balancing governmental powers between the president and lawmakers. As declared by Ennahda, general elections will be held on 23 June 2013, with a presidential runoff scheduled for July 7, but the agreement must be approved by Tunisia's Constituent Assembly, which is drafting the new constitution.

The ruling party pushed for a political system in which parliament holds most of the power, but the secular opposition groups filibustered, fearing the Islamist party was trying to bolster its power and make the country more religious. After a tough debate, Ennahda has agreed to a concerted system under which powers will be shared between a directly-elected president and the parliament.

In many aspects is perceptible a more inclined religious trend in the new governance. Ennahda has said that it would never impose Islamic law and is comfortable with parties seeking to govern in a secular manner. It has compromised with other parties in keeping references to Islamic law out of the first article of the constitution and abandoned attempts to change language about men and women from being "equal" to being "complementary" within the family, which had worried women's rights movements.

Although the draft of the constitution should have been published by the end of October, a lot is going on behind the scenes and a reference to blasphemy is apparently being taken out to satisfy public opinion. In any case, even though the Constituent Assembly is likely to adopt the text, the referendum could repeal it.

Yet in many instances Ennahda has showed its willingness to strengthen the Islamic values, but has also let the Salafi movements down by agreeing with the secular parties not to write in the constitution that all legislation must be based on Shariah, which is common in almost all Muslim countries but is unprecedented in Tunisia.

Private conversations leaked by Tunisian social media had showed Rasheed al-Ghannushi discussing how to Islamise gradually the society. During the conversations he referred to banning alcohol and the imposition of religious law as well. These leaks could have been manipulated by secular oppositions for boosting discredit against the ruling party or to show that the leading party may not be as moderate as it appears.

Anyway, the situation has changing a lot since the beginning of the so called “Arabic Spring” and Muslim movements and charities are emerging as the best-organized groups to help and provide assistance to marginalised people in the rural areas. Therefore, the radical Islamists in an era of economic crisis can fill the vacuum or lack of action by the political institutions, to gain consensus ahead of next year’s elections.

## ***Algeria***

### **New concessions but the same old system**

The electoral victory of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in May has not changed the country’s political system, and the opposition appears fragmented and not so strong to be a problem for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and his government.

Bouteflika, in office since 1999, persistently sick during recent years, is unlikely to stand for another term in the presidential election scheduled for May 2014. So a lot of speculation is mounting around the political future of this country, which has contained the risk of an immediate resurgence of Arab Spring-inspired domestic protests through political overtures such as offering to the new parliament the opportunity to draft a new constitution by the end of 2012.

The new Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal, a technocrat not affiliated to any political party and considered close to the president, got in October a confidence vote by the parliament to form a new government that replaced the outgoing leader of National Rally for Democracy (RND), Ahmed Ouyahi. In May elections, the National Liberation Front obtained 221 of the parliament’s 462 seats. This political change can be read as a victory by the president over his rivals for his succession. As first political action, Mr. Sellal with his cabinet planned many reforms including the revision of the constitution, as a path to guarantee a political stability after the future exit of Mr. Bouteflika.

As such, Algeria’s leaders have contained very well the risk of an immediate resurgence of Arab Spring-inspired domestic protests. As some observers say, the drafting of a new constitution, is considered the biggest concession ever made by the president that will ensure a growing competition and division within Algeria’s variegated opposition, and creating a high chance of survival for the current regime under the guise of political reform. Moreover, the government is constantly monitoring with anxiety the possible spill over effects on the Southern Tuareg community linked to the extremist forces that actually control the North of Mali.



Although, Algeria continues to witness periodic socio-economic turmoil, the country's regime and security forces remain largely in control of the country, with little prospects for an organized mass uprising in the near term. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, the government response towards the popular discontent was tackled with subsidies for basic foodstuff and improving the well-established internal security measures combined with local intelligence along with the deployment of well-trained security personnel on a scale that outnumbered the first protesters.

As some analysts have stressed, the principal causes of unrest stem from the high unemployment rate that is over 21%, and within the younger generation the rate is even higher. This is an important factor in a country where more than two-thirds of its 35 million population is under the age of 35. Moreover, despite the substantial gas and oil revenues, the lack of a welfare system, coupled with a complicated duty and tax system has made daily life expensive for the average Algerian, as well as the unfulfilled promise to build new affordable houses.

During the sporadic rallies that have been taken place in Algiers, the protesters showed a lack of cohesion either demographically or ideologically, making it easy for Algeria's security services to keep each group separated from the others. The protesters are usually composed by secular trade unions groups demanding increased salary and benefits, groups of Islamists, students or political groups such as leftists and ethnic minorities.

This composition has not created any problem to the political system, but the government opened up the space to allow the Islamists, banned from the political process since 1991, to run the parliamentary elections in May despite a decision in December 2011 to keep the two-decade ban in place. So, during the elections, the Green Algeria Alliance, an Islamist coalition headed by Bouguerra Soltani, obtained 49 seats, positioning only as third political force in the country.

After the first major rallies, Mr. Bouteflika decided promptly to lift the 19-year-old state of emergency, with the exception of Algiers, which allowed for peaceful demonstrations. Those political overtures and concessions to the opposition are motivated by the new reality in the Arab world, where new Islamist political parties are emerging in many neighbouring countries and any action taken by the Algeria's government to put a lid on protesters can be considered counterproductive in the long run.

Algerian policy, unlike other Arab spring countries, faced a long struggle for independence in the 1950s, which gives to the regime a continuing postcolonial instinct to defend Algerian sovereignty from external actors. The European Union and the US look carefully at Algeria's political stability as well as on counterterrorism cooperation, especially now that the Islamist extremists have taken the control of Northern Mali and are speedily wide spreading around the region.

### **The question of Mali: what role for Algiers?**

If on one side, the country has recently got the local cooperation from the inhabitants of Algeria's rugged Kabylie mountains to hunt down the network of al-Qaida fighters; on the

other, namely in neighbouring Mali, a bigger dilemma is emerging for Algiers on how to counter its regional security threats.

The idea to launch the first U.S-Algeria Strategic Dialogue that took place in Washington on October 19 can be seen as the increasing importance of this country for the US and its role in the Sahel region. But in spite of the pressures from the White House, the regime continues to be reluctant to agree to any direct role in Northern Mali, which could have both direct and indirect consequences on internal stability. That said Algiers calculation is to avoid ceding its own influence on its Southern border to other actors, such as the US and France.

For this reason, the country is pushing for an increasing diplomatic process led by the Africans themselves and continuing to oppose any military intervention in Mali. Its position aims at strengthening the diplomatic talks actually being led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which Algeria is not a member, but whose actions concerning Mali are followed by the African Union, which does include Algeria.

Nevertheless, on October 12 the U.N. Security Council adapted the Resolution 2071, which supports an ECOWAS-led foreign intervention in Northern Mali, Algeria showed its firm stance against a foreign operation, complicating the US and European decision-making.

The US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, met again with Mr. Bouteflika on October 29 in Algiers, to discuss the Malian crisis and a possible Algeria's policy shift regarding a support for a foreign intervention. As such, Algiers tried to assert its leading and importance role in the region in order to avoid a unilateral intervention by Western countries.

Algerian fears that an international military intervention in Mali will wipe out terrorist groups in the North of Mali, leaving the Tuareg-rebel group of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) stronger militarily and politically; and therefore strengthening both the Malian and Algerian Tuareg minority. For this reason, the Algerian government is trying to draw a difference between the two most prominent terror groups, the Islamist Ansar Dine<sup>2</sup> and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Algiers follows this approach, negotiating with the Islamist terror groups to counter-balance the MNLA in order to avoid in the future the Tuareg minority's right to self-determination.

Other observers think that probably in the near future Algerian independence and leadership in the region will be best guaranteed by facilitating and partnering with the decision of the West, which has recognized that the ongoing developments in Mali are critical to the security of the region and beyond.

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<sup>2</sup> According to some news agencies, the leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghali has met President Bouteflika a couple of times since the beginning of the Mali crisis.

## ***Morocco***

### **Rabat looks to the Gulf**

King Mohammed VI has been deeply involved in foreign affairs, particularly with its counterparts of the Gulf countries. King Mohammed visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in October, to seek further economic assistance, which might also help to contain political opposition by enabling economic reforms, creating of jobs and increasing of salaries.

Despite the political reforms enacted last year that brought for the first time the moderate-Islamist Justice and Development Party to become the first party in the parliament and its leader, Abdelilah Benkirane, as Prime Minister, Morocco continues to suffer from many of the same problems that led to the so-called Arab Spring, such as high youth unemployment, widespread corruption and increasing poverty. So, economic aid from the Gulf donors, increased by 50% in a single year, can contribute significantly to Morocco's development and stability.

In 2009 and 2010, European Union's financial support to Morocco exceeded that of the Gulf countries, but in the long run, due to the Europe's financial crisis, Morocco can find a major economic sustainability from the Gulf instead of Europe. This shift could be both political and economic. Firstly, the Gulf monarchies can help the King Mohammed VI to hold on power and preserve a political stability; and secondly, through aid aimed at poverty alleviation and education, they can inject into the society more Islamic values compared to the past.

Although, Morocco still needs to pursue political reforms to maintain social stability, probably the role of the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party will increase its influence in the ongoing political process of the country.

### **Is terrorism still a problem?**

The security services have arrested some members of the terrorist groups Ansar Al-Sharia in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar Al-Mahdi, active in the country for allegedly plotted attacks against sensitive buildings, security headquarters and tourist places.

The radical Islamic groups were seeking material and military support from their al-Qaeda allies in Northern Mali and intended to create a training camp in the Rif Mountains, after having attacked Moroccan institutions. Analysts think that the increasing presence of terrorist groups, such as Ansar Al-Sharia, is linked to the changing political landscape in the Middle East. First of all, due to the Arab Spring, which brought moderate Islamists to power, and many countries are still in the phase of political transition; secondly, the new al Qaeda leadership headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri is focusing more on combating local regimes and Arab rulers, instead of targeting Western powers, like Osama Bin Laden did.

## **Western Sahara: an unsolved issue**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's envoy for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, met the king and government officials in Rabat in the end of October, before visiting Laayoune, Western Sahara's main town, for his first time since taking over the post in 2009. Ross monitored the cease fire between the Saharawi and Moroccan armies, and held a series of talks with the Sahrawi civil society at the headquarters of UN peacekeeping Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Last May, the representative was spurned by Morocco's authorities after Rabat accused him of being biased and partial on this issue.

On one side, Mr. Ross vision for resolving the conflict is based on the referendum, as demanded by the Polisario Front, backed by Algeria; while on the other side, Rabat proposes to offer a broad autonomy to the Sahrawi community, a plan backed by France as well.

Mohammed VI also reiterated Morocco's desire to "*establish brotherly relations with Algeria*" in order to "*build a united Maghreb, amid security threats for the Sahel-Sahara region*", while the recent UN report on Western Sahara stated that Morocco's behaviour had undermined the UN efforts to verify on events in the territory, such as the Saharawi human rights condition.

The overtures made by Moroccan authorities to the UN's envoy show the willingness of all parties concerned to resolve this long-standing dispute, but the solution seems still far from being achieved. Moreover, Morocco appears more ready to be involved in the Syrian conflict-resolution than the Western Sahara one. The fourth meeting of Friends of Syria group will probably take place in Morocco, during which Rabat will confirm its strong support for a regime change in Syria alongside the West, but in the meanwhile it will divert the attention of the West from its domestic issues.

## ***Libya***

### **In search of leadership**

Libya, like other post-Arab spring countries, is moving toward a new democratic political process with uncertainty and many difficulties.

On October 7, the General National Congress (GNC) passed a no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Mustafa Abushagur, after failing for the second time to secure the GNC's approval for a new cabinet. Some suggest that due to his former US citizenship and employment at NASA, his figure was viewed with suspicion by many Libyans since he took office on September 12.

On October 14, the General National Congress elected former diplomat Ali Zeidan as the country's new Prime Minister, but the political stalemate continued again on the names of

the new cabinet members. Critics objected to several nominees in Prime Minister's proposed 27-member cabinet, including the minister of Islamic Affairs, who was accused of secularism.

The ongoing political impasse is mainly rooted in the power struggle among towns, tribes, Islamists and liberals for the new post-Mohammad Gaddafi order. Libyans voted on July 7 to elect a General National Congress (GNC) committed to appointing an interim government, overseeing the drafting of a constitution and managing national elections for the formation of a new government based on the constitutional charter. The GNC is made up of 200 seats, which 80 are allocated to the members of political parties and the remaining 120 assigned to independent candidates.

As some analysts affirm, many of these independent candidates were elected on the basis of local connections or tribal affiliation as opposed to Islamic ideology. The liberal-coalition National Forces Alliance, led by Mahmoud Jibril got 39 seats, while the moderate-Islamist Justice and Construction Party headed by Mohamed Sawan won 17 out of the total 80 seats available for the parties. Therefore, the political standoff is principally caused by the active role among the independent candidates for the support to the leading National Forces Alliance or other political parties. The consequence is that narrow interests of different voting blocs are slowing the political process for the formation of a government.

The lack of a working cabinet is due to the continuing the security void in which a myriad of militias operate with impunity and slowing the government's investigation of the attack on the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi on September 11 that killed ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans officials. Moreover, there is widespread concern that Islamic parties like the Justice and Construction Party are influenced by forces from outside Libya, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Thus, as some analysts think, the democratic political process of the country depends on whether the General National Congress will succeed in disarming the militias or the militias will influence the parliament by buying off independent legislators.

The former Libya's National Transitional Council decided to ban parties based on tribal, ethnic, religious affiliation from participating in the parliamentary elections, and consequently gave more seats to independent candidates than political parties. Although these new rules stem from the fabric of Libya's multifaceted society and the previous dominant role of former dictator colonel Gaddafi, have also brought to the parliament individual candidates with unknown or unclear agendas.