



NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

STRATEGIC TRENDS

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MAGHREB

Libya

Developments in Libya are at best worrisome. In the midst of the battle between the loosely Islamist Operation Libya Dawn faction and the anti-Islamist Operation Dignity faction, the collapse of oil exports and the lack of control over the Libyan Central Bank, the fall of Derna in eastern Libya to Salafi jihadis and attempts to establish an Islamic emirate have been overlooked.

The Shura Council of Islamic Youth, which is loosely affiliated with Ansar al-Sharia and has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has steadily increased its control over Derna, ostensibly establishing an “Islamic Court” and an “Islamic Police”. While the fight has managed to attract some non-Libyans, it has not become the kind of magnet for Salafi jihadis that Iraq and Syria are. As a matter of fact, Salafi sympathisers in Libya represent a minority.

Regardless of how the dispute between Islamists and anti-Islamists will play out, we can expect a protracted mix of clashes and negotiations while those portions of Libya will remain unstable and insecure for the foreseeable future.

Political and military activity by the international community to help stabilise Libya has been continuous but keeping a very low profile. The most significant initiative seems to be at the moment the UN

mediation process. Aside from this effort, a significant international intervention is unlikely, given the limited strategic implications the Libyan chaos has for other countries:

- there are few Western critical infrastructure in the country except for those linked to Italy's energy security;
- illegal migration is only a major concern for Italy and Spain and
- the terrorist threat may be held in check remotely and controlling specific transit and choke points.

Tunisia

On October 26th, Tunisians went to the polls for the second free parliamentary vote since the fall of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011.

The liberal Nida Tunis party has taken the most seats in Tunisia's parliamentary elections, running on an explicitly anti-Islamist platform. The Ennahda party, which had previously dominated the parliament on a platform of moderate Islamism, ranked second, in what seemed to be a punishment for a poor economic performance, inability to oversee the security situation and unfulfilled expectations of the revolution.

The new ruling party, which includes businessmen, trade unionists and politicians from the old regime, will now name the prime minister and lead a coalition government. The hypothesis of forming a coalition with the Islamists has already been ruled out by the Nida Tunis leadership. The party will then turn to a collection of smaller parties to garner the necessary 109-seat majority.

The security outlook is still risky. A few radical militant groups operate inside the country and authorities have led several counter-terrorism operations across the country ahead of the elections. Moreover, Tunisia is the largest source of foreign fighters joining ISIS and other extremist groups in Syria and Iraq, Algeria, Libya and Mali. By some estimates, the total number could be as high as 3.000.

Algeria

Despite a few positive developments, such as the emergence of an autonomous private sector and the perspective of a partial liberalization, and although the country has a certain degree of fiscal stability – largely due to oil revenues – the Algerian economy remains sluggish.

At a political level, the Algerian regime has shielded itself from the emergence of competing forces through the outright ban on all political activity occurring outside state apparatuses. Given this context, it is even more worthy of consideration that 300 Algerian police officers marched through Algiers the 14th of October in a rare public protest over working conditions coupled with the difficulties in keeping the peace

between warring Berbers and Arabs communities competing over jobs, houses and lands. The regime managed to quell the riots but the situation should be watched closely.

However, the main security concerns are related to the threats coming from the Sahel-Saharan region, in particular along the borders between Niger and Mali. In a bid to strengthen cooperation with these states, Algeria is outlining plans for the creation of AFRIPOL, a joint African police mechanism.

Morocco

To counter allegedly rising extremist activity in the country, Morocco launched “Hadar” (Vigilance), an anti-terror strategy that will see army, gendarmerie, police, and auxiliary forces cooperate more closely to deal quickly with any emerging security threats in sensitive locations, particularly at the country’s airports.

Within the framework of this strategy Morocco is set to provide the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with military assistance in the fight against ISIS. Rabat is seeking greater and security and military cooperation with the UAE to “reinforce” long-term security and military cooperation with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, following the signature of the strategic partnership agreements between Rabat and several GCC states in 2011.