



NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

STRATEGIC TRENDS

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MAGHREB

Libya

The crisis in Libya deepened during the last month and it had serious impacts on the economy of the country. On December 14th a force allied to the General National Congress (GNC) in Tripoli moved to seize eastern oil facilities and fight troops of former general Khalifa Haftar, loyal to the Parliament in Tobruk. The internationally recognised Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni sent jets to bomb rival forces in Es-Sider and Ras Lanuf where clashes forced the closure of the biggest oil export terminals. According to figures released by the National Oil Corporation (NOC), oil production shrunk further in the following days to 128.000 barrels a day (bpd), a fraction of 1,6 million bpd it produced before the 2011 civil war.

Headquartered in Tripoli where GNC has its own Oil Minister, NOC is currently disputed by the two rival factions. Challenging the Tripoli Parliament, the government in Tobruk appointed al-Mabrook Bou Seif as the new chairman of the oil company. However, the 18th of December NOC published a statement affirming its independence in the current conflict and considering that it is crucial for the future of the country not to be involved in the dispute.

Despite initial expectations, United Nations-backed peace talks did not produce any relevant result in December. Talks between main factions were postponed again mainly because of interferences by different Middle Eastern countries. United States officials defined them meddling powers that are promoting a war by proxy in Libya.

Nevertheless, UN envoy Bernardino Leon affirmed that the new round of talks would include members of the GNC, further expanding the participants to the process known as “Ghadames II”. It is foreseeable that further efforts will be promoted and that more pressure will be put on the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) not only to produce the first part of its draft, but also to act as potential game-changer in the Libya crisis.

Tunisia

The runoff election of December 21st gave Tunisia its first democratic elected President after the Jasmine Revolution: the leader of Nidaa Tunis party, Beji Caid Essebsi, won with nearly 56% of the votes compared to 44% for the interim President Moncef Marzouki. In the immediate aftermath, Marzouki refused to admit the defeat, asserting that his rival’s premature declaration of victory was undemocratic. However, in the following days the former President was obliged to concede the defeat, favouring a smooth democratic transition of powers and increasing the political stability of the country.

The new President took advantage the from support by minor parties, such as Free Patriotic Union. Furthermore, Marzouki profited from the difficulties of Islamist Ennahda party: on December 11th former Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali resigned from Ennahda, since he was in disagreement with party’s leadership decision to let its electoral base free to vote for any presidential candidate. Jebali preferred an open support for Marzouki.

Ennahda’s crisis will not contribute to resolve Tunisia’s incoming problems, because the Islamist party is a major stakeholder in Parliament. Structural reforms are expected in the coming months, but they will be approved only if the opposition will give its contribution to them. In particular, security sector reform will be a key issue in the future due to regional instability in neighbouring Libya.

Algeria

On December 23rd the Algerian Defence Ministry confirmed the killing of three alleged terrorists in Issers (60 km from Algiers). Among them there was Gouri Abdelmalek, leader of the Jund al-Khalifa organisation affiliated with the Islamic State group (Dawla). Abdelmalek was responsible for the kidnap and the execution of the French tourist Hervé Gourdel in September 2014. The success of this operation followed the dismantlement of several group’s support cells and confirmed the increased capability of Algerian security forces against jihadist organizations in the country. The ongoing conflict in Libya and the

increasing convergence between terrorist cells and Latin American drug smugglers are not likely to reduce the terrorist risk level in the next months.

With regard to economic issues, the government announced that public sector job hiring would be frozen in 2015; the sector is the largest Algeria employer, covering 60% of the job market. The decision was dictated by the falling oil price that is creating concerns in Algeria. Oil Minister Youcef Yousfi calls on OPEC to cut production were unanswered. Thereby, further austerity measures are likely to be introduced and this will impact on the political stability of the country.

Morocco

In Morocco Prime Minister's decision to remove all subsidies on petroleum products by the end of 2014 confirmed government's efforts to improve the national budget. In the short-term this measure will probably erode the spending power of the middle and low classes. To address this issue and support the economic growth, on December 16th Morocco's Central Bank cut its interest rate from 2,75% to 2,5%. Moreover, in the next months the government will be probably forced to take further measures, such as starting the production of liquefied natural gas and the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union.

Protests against the restriction of liberties spread in the last month and activists denounced an increasing erosion of freedoms. It is predictable that Morocco's authorities will continue to restrict the country's political space by using the threat of rising regional instability and the resurgence of jihadist groups.