

Stability of North African Region

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Abstract

The events that began in Tunisia in January 2011 and spread to Egypt and then Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, Syria, and beyond, shook the security and stability foundations of the Middle East. The aftershocks of the revolution still loudly resonate throughout the region. The impact of the Arab Spring brought about a dormant, yet inherently alarming vulnerability to the region: preservation of domestic and regional stability. As the waves of the Arab Spring reach far beyond the countries in transition, local and regional powers are fast discovering that—through geography, history, national interest, or ideology—the Arab Spring is reshaping the entire region and its social and political sense of security.

Keywords: Africa, The Word Maghreb, North Africa, Middle East, Arab Spring, Islamist movement, Ethnic and racial conflicts, Civil War, Arabization, Sudan and South Sudan

1. Introduction

Studying the actual problems of security, combatting against new threats and challenges has always been one of the main challenges of every country. Such is the tendency in the Republic of Uzbekistan as the President Islam Karimov stated: "... totally new national and regional problems are turning into global disputable issues"¹. Particularly, events which have been particularly occurring in North African region are part of these tendencies.

Today, in the discipline of international relations, studying Arab Spring² and its effects on the economic, political, and social life of North African countries is regarded pivotal to every country. There are various factors that will have impact on the region's stability in North Africa. Studying these factors will unequivocally explain the reality and impact of this unique challenge.

Regional conflicts among the North African states, international terrorism, and religious extremism continuously pose threats to the regional security of both North Africa and Middle East. Maintaining a regional security is the basic principle element and a prerequisite to maintaining a global security. The security of the North African region is not only essential to this region alone,

but it is also equally essential to the rest of the world. North Africa – known in Arabic as the Maghreb³ – is a region of tremendous potential. The birthplace of the Arab Awakening⁴, it is currently undergoing a difficult but critical transformation. Tunisia continues its efforts to achieve the deliverance of the democratic promise of the 2011 revolution, even as it faces significant security and economic challenges. Libya continues to undertake a democratic transition following a successful revolution, yet confronts numerous challenges in the political, security, and economic fronts. Libya struggles with the daily threat of violence posed by a lack of security and political consensus, yet our continued engagement there is absolutely essential. Morocco and Algeria have undertaken more gradual reform processes. They remain key regional sources of stability and have assumed increasingly important roles in our global effort to combat terrorism and extremism. At the same time, the strained relationship between Algeria and Morocco also limits regional cooperation and development, which is essential if any regional bodies are to evolve into credible forces for regional stability – in the Maghreb and the Sahel⁵.

³ The Maghreb or Maghrib is the name given in pre-modern times by Arab writers on geography and history to the northern part of Africa, which Europeans often came to call Barbary. The Arabic word maghreb means "place where the sun sets", i.e. The west, in opposition to mashriq "place where the sun rises", i.e. The east. The Word Maghreb. // <http://www.maghreb-studies-association.co.uk/en/allhome.html>

⁴ The term "Arab Awakening" was used in Aljazeera in 20.04.2011. // <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>

⁵ Richard S. Political, Economic and Security Situation in Africa. November 21, 2013. // <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/217924.htm>

¹ Каримов И.А. Юсак маънавият - энгилмас куч. – Тошкент: Маънавият, 2008. – Б. 176.

² Particularly, the term "Arab spring" was used by English journalist Jackie Ashley in her article "The Arab spring requires a defiantly European reply" in The Guardian magazine in 06.03.2011. // <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/06/arab-spring-european-reply-labour>

Provision of international security is also important for Uzbekistan as the country often acts as one of the sovereign actors of international relations. Our peacekeeping policy supports peaceful relations among states. By supporting peace our country prefers developing all spheres. Furthermore, nowadays, strengthening bilateral relations with U.S.A., The Russian Federation, the countries in the Asia-Pacific Region, as well as, with the countries of the Middle East and the African continent is considered one of the foreign policy priorities of the Uzbek Government.

Uzbekistan considers the historical-cultural relations and region's intensive changes as important, and continues developing and strengthening comprehensive nexus, which are based on bilateral interests, with the countries of the Middle East. Moreover, widening and strengthening relations with the African countries both on the basis of bilateral relations and international organizations seamlessly align with the interests of Uzbekistan⁶.

Africa, for all its beauty and rich history, has always been a complex and often harsh continent. Hundreds of ethnic groups, some of which have hostilities that date back millennia, live in largely impoverished conditions in a forced co-existence dictated by colonial-era national borders. Although Africa's current security challenges are predominantly governance-related or intra-state conflicts, the continent's ill-defined national borders remain a potent source of instability. In fact, more than half of all African countries have engaged in boundary-related conflicts.

Today, there are number of reasons that are seen as threats to the security system and peace in North African countries. Generally, they can be sorted like internal and external threats. Internal threats are caused by domestic problems which bring about challenges to life and peace of both people and states. Internal threats can be divided into following categories:

- Ethnic and racial conflicts in one country or between countries;
- Interstate Islamist movement through the region;
- Terroristic activities throughout the region;
- Separatism and conflicts in countries.

In addition to internal causes, there are a lot of risks, which can also directly endanger the security and stability of all countries in the region. For instance, a desire of a country to exert its power through the region causes real danger to internal security and sovereignty of others. Also, the impact of the foreign mass media can also have a fair share of impact on the region's stability by creating a change in current system of security of the countries in the region.

Below is explanation of each reason that is endangering the security system of Northern African states.

⁶ Ўзбекистон Республикаси Ташқи сиёсий фаолияти Концепцияси. Олий Мажлис палаталарининг Ахборотномаси, 2012. № 9/1 (1437) – Б. 6-19.

One example is that of ethnic conflicts in North Africa. Such ethnic conflicts are so tense that it gave birth to the partition of Sudan into Sudan and South Sudan.

Sudan fought two civil wars between the Arab-dominated north and the black African south, the most recent being from 1983-2005 which resulted in autonomy and later the independence of South Sudan in 2011. The Sudanese Civil War spilled over into Chad from 2005-2010 as mostly a proxy war between Sudan and South Sudan utilizing the same ethnic militias from the Sudanese Civil War⁷.

As we see, the main cause of former Sudan's division was disagreement between two main ethnic groups of the country: Arabs who rule in North part of the country and Black Africans who conduct policy in Southern areas. Even after South Sudan gained its sovereignty the two countries remained in conflict for unclear border demarcation and the ownership of oil resources between the two.

Sudan and South Sudan are now on the brink of yet another war after less than a year of separation, feuding over border demarcation and oil revenues. Both sides are using proxy rebel forces and Sudan has conducted air strikes against targets in South Sudan. If history is any indication, the violence will slowly but surely spill over into Chad as rebel groups conduct cross-border raids. It is also likely that Uganda will intervene militarily and fight alongside South Sudan if necessary. This would escalate the conflict into looking very much like a disturbing, regional race war⁸.

Another problem in North African region is disputes between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara. Looking into history, 1975 Morocco occupied Western Sahara after it militarily pressured Spain out of the region. But today in Western Sahara the separatist political party, Polisario, which has its roots in a yearlong struggle for independence, continues to campaign for sovereignty of an independent Western Sahara (called the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic or SADR).

According to Moroccan news agencies, Algeria, today, is in favor of the independence of the Western Sahara. Particularly, there are some reasons to Moroccan approach to this issue in the meantime.

The ongoing struggle between Polisario and the Moroccan government, though, has never been a monogamous affair. In fact, Polisario received heavy assistance from Algeria both during the war and after, and many believe that an independent SADR would exist only as a puppet of Algeria⁹.

On the other hand, Algerian government regrets all above mentioned accuses.

⁷ Mali, Sudan, and Ethnic Conflict in Northern Africa. // <http://www.matthewvandyke.com/blog/mali-sudan-ethnic-conflict-north-africa/-25.04.2012>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Lyndsey H. A Hateful Love Triangle: Morocco's Relations with Algeria and Western Sahara. // <http://sites.davidson.edu/cis485/?p=3442/-11.04.2012>

However, these accusations are not supported by the facts. Firstly, the Algerian position has always been consistent throughout the Western Sahara conflict. Should a free and fair referendum be held, Algeria would support whatever choice the Sahrawis make, even one that meant Western Sahara's full integration with Morocco. Significantly, the Polisario Front, on the advice of Algiers, had accepted the Baker II Plan for a referendum in 2003, but it was turned down by Rabat. Moreover, as the American academic and co-author of *Western Sahara: War Nationalism & Conflict Irresolution* Jacob Mundy emphasizes, Algiers is not responsible for this conflict. Algeria's stake in the Western Sahara conflict has been one of the most contested yet little understood aspects of this old dispute between Morocco and the Sahrawi nationalists¹⁰.

But how many attempts are made by Algerian government to Moroccan government to prove that it has not any role in Western Sahara's separatist movement, the tension between two countries is not solved. For several times, these both countries have recalled their ambassadors from countries.

Another internal security dilemma in North African region is Libyan ethnic conflict. Ethnic mobilization in the context of collapsed and ethnically intermixed states will create perceptions of vulnerability among other groups, initiating a spiral of conflict escalation.

Today one the most important security problem of Libya is Toubou ethnically minority's life. Toubou people are ethnic group that live mainly in northern Chad, but also in southern Libya, northeastern Niger and northwestern Sudan. They speak Tebu, in the Saharan subfamily of the Nilo-Saharan languages language family.

In the last 10 years Toubou people had been repressed by Libyan government, particularly by Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

For decades, Gaddafi's regime pursued national policies of "Arabization" and sought to expel the Toubou, along with other minorities, from Arab Libya. The 1969 Constitutional Declaration defined the state of Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, as an "Arab nation and declared Arabic as the only official language." Subsequent policies deliberately denied basic human and political rights to non-Arab minorities in Libya, including the 2007 withdrawal of citizenship rights¹¹.

Tensions amounted along 2008, with Libyan officials urging Toubou tribes to depart to Chad, and finally

exploited on 2 November 2008 in Kufra, when a protest against the exclusion of Toubou children from education and health care ended with the government local office on fire. During the next days, Toubous clashed with Zuwayya tribes, who were known for having been armed by the Libyan government during the war with Chad. Finally on 8 November, the Libyan Army intervened to stop the escalating violence encircling the town with troops and helicopters, and as of 14 November the clashes had ceased, apart from some minor skirmishes¹². For all above mentioned reasons, Toubou people have lived with their hate and foe attitude to Libyan government as they were under discrimination and inequality. For example, in the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's dictatorship significant role was played by Toubou people. They expected that new government would guarantee freedom and equality to Toubou people, but the results were vice versa. They are still showing their objection to Libyan government. One of their leader said "We led the fight against Gaddafi in the south so we could leave all these divisions behind and build a Libya where everyone gets their rights. But the new government has so far not offered us any help".

Overall, all tension between Government and Toubou minority led Libyan civil war, and today mobilization of the Toubou has triggered fears among other ethnic groups – particularly the Zwai, who are the primary contenders for control of the smuggling routes – of potential Toubou predominance in the region. Fuelled by a surfeit of arms and a prior history of inter-ethnic hostilities, these conditions have set in motion an ethnic security dilemma between communities in intermixed areas such as Sabha. In the absence of a central authority to arbitrate between the parties, each ethnic group has taken to self-defense by way of armed militias, which in turn fuels hostilities and suspicions of adversarial aggressive motives.

The next major security issue in that region is naturally, terrorism in all region countries. Obviously, terrorism has been considered as the most dangerous threat to states' security system after terroristic attack in US in 2001. Today there are different active terroristic groups in North African region countries. As a result North Africa is amounting to one of the highest rates of terroristic attacks carried out around the world. Annual terroristic attacks that were carried out in 2009 and 2014 were amounted to 204 and 184 respectively.

The most dramatic terroristic acts occurred in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Amongst region countries Morocco was notably a more secure country last year. Several reasons account for such relative stability.

First, King Mohammed VI, the country's hereditary monarch, is still seen as legitimate by the vast majority of the population.

¹⁰ Abdelkader A. Western Sahara: Morocco Recalls Its Ambassador to Algeria. // <http://allafrica.com/stories/201311110792.html/-11.11.2013>.

¹¹ David C, Christina W, Philip M. Ethnic Conflict in Libya: Toubou. The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs. Carleton University, 2012. – P. 47.

¹² Toubou for the salvation of Libya. // http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toubou_Front_for_the_Salvation_of_Libya/-15.4.2014.

Second, gradual political reform, greater economic and investment progress, increased employment opportunities, more social and civic equality for women, and some crackdowns on corruption have all contributed to improved internal stability.

And third, counterterrorism efforts at home and strategic cooperation and partnerships in the Maghreb, Sahel, and elsewhere have been strengthened.

Recently, Algeria has been a place where most of terroristic groups have showed their potency. Nearly all of those groups have link with Al-Qaida terroristic group and they include representatives of various nations both local and foreign. In fact, in 2006, some 125 attacks in Algeria were perpetrated against officials, police, the military, civilians, and foreigners, thus undermining the country's political, social, and economic stability. For example, the governor of the Illizi region was kidnapped and brought to a hideout on the Algerian border with Libya. Similarly, three Spanish aid workers from a Polisario-run refugee camp in Algeria were abducted, reportedly with inside assistance from sympathizers in the camp. Organized criminals and regional terrorists have also been engaged in arms smuggling along Algeria's borders with Tunisia and Mali.

Unfortunately, most members of these groups are youth from southern Algerian provinces who are brought in to the cause in exchange for financial support for their poor families.

The most dramatic terrorist attack in Algeria in recent years began on January 16 in 2013, at the gas field of Tengtourine in In Amenas, a region close to the Libyan border, located some 1,300 km from Algiers. The Islamic Katiba (militia), the "Al-Mouthalimin", led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who split from Al-Qaida in Maghreb (AQIM) in 2012 and consisting of some 32 assailants of different nationalities (e.g. Algerian, Tunisian, Malian, Nigerian, Egyptian, and Canadian), took over areas of a large facility operated by companies from Algeria, France, Japan, Norway, and the U.K.¹³.

The following country is Tunisia. Two years after the "Jasmine Revolution" overthrew the autocratic regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and went on to inspire other countries to rise up in the Arab spring. Tunisia is still vulnerable to both domestic and foreign terrorist threats. Another country which plays the role of main position in North Africa is Libya. Over the span of 5 years time there were more than hundred terroristic attacks in which Tripoli Headquarter of Libyan interim prime-minister suffered significant damages and some Iranian citizens and American ambassador were brutally murdered by terrorists.

To sum up, current security challenges in North African countries are still urgent and require immediate actions to solve these problems. These risks differ from

inter-state, racial and ethnic conflicts to terrorism which can cause deaths of million people throughout the region. All above mentioned reasons are resulting in appearing vulnerability in peoples' lives and impoverishing the current economic, social and cultural life of local inhabitants and abuse of human rights. During the period of studying this topic I understood that all problems were consequence of irrational division of borders between countries by former Western colonists.

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