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# Political Risks for Russian-Egyptian Cooperation in North Africa



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This report aims to analyze political risks for Russian-Egyptian Cooperation in North Africa and summarizes joint findings by experts from the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA). Russia and Egypt have important stakes in the region; both are actively engaged in international efforts to provide for peace and stability in North Africa. Russian and Egyptian experts pay specific attention to political risks, social and economic challenges in the North Africa; water and food sustainability in the region; unresolved conflicts and cross-border threats.

The views and opinions of authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of RIAC.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Risks and Opportunities</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Limitations on and Opportunities for Government and Businesses	9
1.2. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Challenges and Opportunities	15
<b>Chapter 2. Water and Food Sustainability in North Africa</b>	<b>27</b>
2.1. Water and Food Deficit in North Africa	27
2.2. Water and Food Sustainability in North Africa	36
<b>Chapter 3. Unresolved Conflicts and Cross-Border Threats to Regional Security</b>	<b>44</b>
3.1. Unresolved Conflicts and Cross-Border Threats to Regional Security in North Africa	44
3.2. Protracted Conflict Patterns, Cross-border Threats, and Regional Security in North Africa	52
<b>About the Authors</b>	<b>60</b>

# Introduction

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Over the past ten years, the crises and security challenges with which the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is congested have become more intense. One could mention such burning problems as terrorism, illegal immigration, civil wars, regional conflicts, and external interference in the affairs of the states of the region, in addition to the common phenomenon of central state weakness, which implies the emergence of models of failed or highly fragile states. There are also other challenges such as climate change, water shortages, the spread of diseases and epidemics, and related problems that these threats pose in the field of health security. Highly uneven and potentially unsustainable development models in many states of the region make the management of these issues more complex. Most of the MENA governments are constantly paying more attention to urban development and improving the infrastructure of metropolitan cities at the expense of rural and small towns' integration.

One should note at the outset that most of these crises were caused by a combination of various historical factors. The most important of which is arguably the negative Western role in this region, through the adoption of purely selfish strategies and interests that did not consider the MENA states' and peoples' priorities. Even when Western countries declared their support for the demands of the Arab revolutions under the pretext of defending human rights and freedoms, they did not provide the appropriate assistance to the countries in question to preserve their unity and territorial integrity. Rather, their interventions and their preference for one party over the other led to the worsening of the situation. The resultant transformation of the situation in Syria, for example, into a conflict between regional and global powers, has given the opportunity for the emergence of the ISIS terrorist organization, as well as the infiltration of the affiliates of terrorist organizations into several states in the region.

External interference is considered as a factor of political instability in the region. From a historical perspective, Western states and their actions contributed to a fragile identity and a strong fragmentation of societies inside of states' boundaries. Western interference in North African states' internal affairs under the pretext of protecting local people's interests is, in fact, aimed at supporting of one party or another and regime changes, which only escalates the violence and conflicts between regional powers and gives an opportunity for terrorists to emerge. Many "Arab spring" crises were characterized by large-scale interference by foreign forces that exacerbated problems, which are still relevant to many states in the region.

The report on political risks for Russian-Egyptian Cooperation in North Africa summarizes joint findings by experts from the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA). Both countries have important stakes in the region; both are actively engaged in international efforts to provide for peace and stability in North Africa. While going through the report, it is not hard to trace converging and diverging assessments made in Russia and in Egypt on the situation in the region.

Russian and Egyptian experts pay specific attention to social and economic problems which remain the main challenge on the road to political stability in North Africa. Corruption, poverty, high unemployment rate, lack of education and health care, all require adopting comprehensive social development programs. All these problems exacerbate unbalanced and disproportionate integration and lead to further public discontent and potential political instability. The challenges are hindered by the weakness of state authorities and ineffectiveness of government institutions that crystalizes political disagreements among armed groups, political parties and tribesmen.

Against the backdrop of political instability, lack of security and several unresolved internal problems, North Africa remains a favorable place for proliferation of terrorism. Furthermore, the defeat of the ISIS (banned in Russia) displaced from Syria and Iraq, is paving a way for the Islamic State's branches to North African countries. Along with the threat coming from international terrorist groups, internal extremism also triggers local instability. In order to counter the spread of radical ideology, international cooperation is needed, as well as efficient local strategies to combat it. In this regard Egyptian side observes: «we must note the significant success of the Egyptian state in defeating terrorism in its territories in general and in Sinai in particular».

The differences between Russian and Egyptian positions on the role of external players in North Africa are not irreconcilable, but they are worth noting. The Russian expert sees the solving of a wide range of the problems in international support and financing, considering cooperation between Russia and Egypt the most effective and perspective one, which can be maintained in the fields of politics and security, combating terrorism and extremism, military and economic cooperation. The Egyptian expert, though underlying the need to strengthen inter-state cooperation, highlights the inability and the lack of guarantees of international agencies to increase financial allocations concerning internal regional issues. Real guarantees for the establishment of effective development projects are needed from international players, but their actions are usually limited by their narrowly defined national or even institutional interests. In this regard, more attention is needed to be drawn to the strengthening of inter-regional cooperation among governments and peoples of the states.

According to the Egyptian expert, there are already some positive changes regarding international business activities improvement. Thus, the countries of the region should continue to maintain economic development aimed at supporting of small and medium enterprises, increasing technological advancement, improving infrastructure, governance and workforce skills. Such improvements are necessary for international trade development and attracting foreign investment. It is on a contrast to the Russian expert's opinion, for whom international cooperation is the starting point to the effective internal changes of the region.

The same mix of converging and diverging perceptions we can find in chapters on water and food sustainability in North Africa. Both Russian and Egyptian

experts emphasize that water, agricultural and energetic resources are linked to each other. As for agriculture, water scarcity leads to the reduction of crops, vegetables, fruits, berries etc. The reduction causes inner use shortages and decrease in the level of export to foreign countries. As for energy, water scarcity leads to the production of less electricity, which in turn necessitates investing in more expensive energy cooling options that are also low-carbon power sources in order to provide an opportunity for gains.

Both experts agree that regional cooperation and partnerships on water, agriculture and energy can help with enhancing development and confidence in North Africa. So, it is needed to develop innovative and comprehensive solutions. Moreover, the governments of North African countries are seeking the most sustainable solutions to solve these problems. Talking about the ways to save more water, both experts note that North African countries can use energy in order to do it. For example, Russian expert offers to use El Dabaa nuclear plant for nuclear desalination. Egyptian expert says that ‘Waterless electricity generation technologies could grow tenfold by 2050’.

Talking about groundwater as the way to solve water scarcity problem, the Russian expert writes, on the one hand, ‘Considering the levels of water stress in North Africa, these countries might take more advantage of groundwater, the extraction of which comes at a great financial and environmental cost. In fact, there are plenty of trans-boundary aquifers that North African countries share with each other and with their Sub-Saharan neighbors’. Otherwise, this water will become depleted or salinized. The Egyptian expert, on the other hand, argues that using groundwater is not an appropriate solution because its depletion causes the decrease of its quality and increase its exploitation cost. So, its extraction gets uneconomic for food security.

Concerning undernourished people in North African countries, the Russian expert notes political reasons of that – such as wars, conflicts and regional turmoil. For example, he reminds about the Libyan civil war, and the Sudanese political crises. The Egyptian expert doesn’t mention them at all concentrating more on economic component of food security crisis. The Russian expert views desalination positively. He speaks about the nuclear plant in Egypt as an example for it and says that the plant can work with a big amount of water. The Egyptian expert says that desalination will have negative effects on nature – as examples, on the stopping the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and on the increase of brine waste in the marine waters. He also marks that if you work with a large amount of water, it will make the process of desalination more expensive.

The domain of unresolved conflicts and cross-border threats to regional security in North Africa arguably remains one of the most sensitive and controversial issues for both Russia and Egypt. No wonder that experts approach this domain from different angles. The position of the Russian expert focuses on three key issues: the ongoing Libyan conflict; the unstable post-crisis situation in Sudan; and conflicts in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. All these issues are analysed by the Russian expert through the prism of Russian-Egyptian relations.

The Egyptian expert, in his turn, also focuses on a detailed analysis of the situation in Libya. However, he views this conflict through the positions of all conflicting parties, and not through Russian-Egyptian cooperation. The Egyptian expert, in addition to the Libyan crisis, also considers conflict situations in other Arab countries – Palestine, Syria and Iraq.

Based on the material, for comparison of positions on general security related matters, two themes can be distinguished. The first concerns the unstable situation on the borders of the so-called triangle of Egypt with Libya and Sudan, and the second directly concerns Russia's position on the issue of conflicts in North Africa. Both the first and second points are considered by both Russian and Egyptian experts, so it is possible to highlight similar points of view and disagreements.

The Russian expert argues that the participation of third parties undermines national security in Egypt. In particular, the smuggling of weapons and militants across the border with Libya and Sudan complicates the fight against terrorists in the Sinai Peninsula. He also notes that ensuring security is the main focus of the political career of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. In turn, the Egyptian expert also emphasizes that the position of his country is based on ensuring the security of the long borders of Egypt with Libya, in connection with the threat of strengthening terrorist groups and the smuggling of weapons across the vast Libyan borders. It can be noted that both experts hold similar positions on this issue.

Ultimately, Russia and Egypt face different challenges when it comes to the conflicts in North Africa, and they each have a different set of diplomatic tools for wielding influence in the region. Their end goals, however, are complementary, which means that cooperation in this area is inevitable: “and we should expect the dialogue between the two countries to result in closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism, as well as joint work in related areas, which have a stabilizing effect on the socioeconomic situation in the country”. These words are quoted in the analysis by the Russian expert. His main idea revolves around the tasks which Russia is facing in this region including the following clause: “It needs to adopt an impartial stance, which will allow it to participate in the settlement process without having to ‘take sides’”. As such, we can conclude that, according to the Russian expert, Moscow will have to adhere to neutrality or a position without having to “take sides.” In the text of the Egyptian expert, we are talking about the fact that the Russian side adheres to a clear policy, for example, in relation to Libya, supporting the Libyan army. He also points out that despite Moscow's denial of the presence of Russian mercenaries in Libya who support the Libyan army; there were repeated references to the fact that some of these mercenaries were captured. In addition, he argues that Moscow needs to beware of Turkey being drawn into the conflict so as not to repeat the Syrian scenario, which will create a negative image of Russia in the region.

Based on these facts, we can conclude about the different positions of the parties on this issue. While the Russian expert emphasizes that Moscow needs to



maintain an impartial position and a kind of neutrality, the Egyptian expert points to clear support from Russia, for example, if we consider the conflict in Libya, the Libyan army of General Haftar. As for the rest of the issues considered by the experts, they have a different focus, so we can only analyse their opinion on some particular topics they have tackled, however, without comparing these points of view, because both experts focus, besides Libya, on different countries.

In sum, a comparative outline of Russian and Egyptian views on problems of North Africa reveal many similar approaches and narratives, but also a number of important differences. The former and the latter, taken together, constitute multiple opportunities for further expert cooperation.

# Chapter 1. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Risks and Opportunities

## 1.1. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Limitations on and Opportunities for Government and Businesses

Nikolay  
Surkov

### Introduction

North Africa, certainly a region of opportunities, boasts two major competitive advantages – rich energy resources and an excellent geographical location. Algeria, Libya and Egypt are major hydrocarbon producers and exporters, and they have two more things going for them – their quite favourable production conditions, especially if they work in close cooperation, and their proximity to European markets. Their sustainable energy source potential is huge too. The region has excellent conditions for developing wind and solar power. In the future, renewable energy will allow North Africa to meet its own demands and export energy on a large scale.

North African states' geographical situation allows them to profit from freight transit between Asia and Europe and from tourism: its proximity to Europe makes North Africa an attractive holiday destination. Being close to the EU also opens up opportunities for developing the manufacture of industrial and agricultural products for export to European markets. Additionally, shorter logistics chains coupled with cheap energy and a large young, educated local labour force may give North Africa a competitive edge even over China or Southeast Asia.

Theoretically, these factors should have ensured North Africa's prosperity and should have made it highly attractive for foreign investors decades ago. Yet, in practice, we see quite the opposite: declining quality of life, poverty, unemployment and foreign businesses' low interest in the region. This situation has mostly stemmed from the high degree of uncertainty and the constant risks of various conflicts erupting. These risks have only grown over the last decade against the background of the so-called "Arab Spring."

### Challenges to Political Stability in North Africa

The events of the last decade have vividly shown that North African states continue to face a broad range of challenges and threats to their political stability. These challenges can be provisionally divided into a few categories: military, political and terrorist (coming from external groups).

The military challenges to stability stem from armed conflicts and military activities with and by non-regional (the U.S. and European states) or peripheral (primarily Turkey) powers. Currently, North Africa is essentially going through turf wars, with

European powers being gradually pushed out by new actors. In particular, Turkey has markedly stepped up its activities as it stakes a claim to being the hegemonic power in the Eastern Mediterranean and attempts to increase its influence in North Africa, this resulting in growing tension. A broad anti-Turkish coalition is emerging,<sup>1</sup> which in the future can generate a regional confrontation and arms race.

Yet, in today's situation, conventional international conflicts have already become a rarity in North Africa. In discussing external threats, we need to focus less on direct military aggression and more on interference in North African states' internal affairs involving whipping up domestic protests, attempts at regime changes, or financing local armed groups. Many "Arab Spring" crises were characterised by large-scale interference by foreign forces, which escalated the violence and unleashed protracted and hard-to-resolve civil wars, as in Libya. Currently, it is becoming clear that the Libyan conflict cannot be settled without arrangements and compromises between external forces. Foreign actors are also highly influential in the Sudanese situation.

The threat coming from international terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, al-Qaeda, banned in Russia) or the Islamic State (IS, banned in Russia), deserves special mention. This threat is present in North Africa. Although these groups are not particularly effective against strong states, they take active advantage of the instability stemming from other factors and exacerbate it. What is more, international terrorist organisations apparently view North Africa and the Sahel as areas to expand into following their crushing defeat in Syria and Iraq.<sup>2</sup> AQIM militants are very active in Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Mali. So far, the IS is not very active in the region, but relatively large "branches" of this group have been detected in Sinai, Libya, the Sahel and Tunisia.<sup>3</sup>

Internal challenges and threats to stability make up another major category. These include extremism, socioeconomic problems, unstable government institutions and national identities.

For starters, we should mention the religious extremism that triggers local terrorist activities and creates favourable conditions for terrorists to come to the region from abroad. Russian diplomats rank terrorism, both local and international, as "problem No. 1" for post-revolutionary Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Similar problems are evident throughout North Africa and to the South of it, in the Sahel. Russian scholars and diplomats alike observe that radical Islamic movements are gaining strength in Africa, while moderate Islam remains weak.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> More detail on the five-party Egypt-led coalition intended to deter Erdogan (from a competent source) (in Arabic) (تفاصيل التحالف الخماسي بقيادة مصر لردع أردوغان (خاص)) // Al Dostor News. 06.01.2020. URL: <https://www.dostor.org/2962275>

<sup>2</sup> Specter of jihadism continues to haunt Maghreb // Middle East Institute. 14.09.2018. URL: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/specter-jihadism-continues-haunt-maghreb>

<sup>3</sup> Hulmet C., Warner J. The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent. CTC Sentinel, Aug. 2018. vol. 11, i. 7. 30 p.

<sup>4</sup> Russian Ambassador in Egypt: Terrorism Remains Problem No. 1 in Egypt (in Russian) // Interfax News Agency. 31.07.2018. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/623096>

<sup>5</sup> Zelenev V.I., Ozerov O.B. The Islamic Factor in the Middle East and North Africa: The "Re-Islamisation" Phenomenon (in Russian) // *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'* (International Affairs). 2019 (12).

Instability is often caused by ineffectual government institutions weakened, above all, by the fact that statehood in many regional countries is still young. As a result, these countries are prone to mass protests or attempted coups, as happened in Libya. Frequently, in order to maintain stability, the authorities dismantle important parts of their states' political systems by, for instance, prohibiting any opposition activity and banking on the repressive power of the state, as happened in Tunisia on the eve of the "Arab spring". The authorities thus deprive their citizens of a means for expressing discontent peacefully and legally. These circumstances undermine the flexibility of political systems, thereby triggering internal conflicts.

Chronic socioeconomic problems also continue to cause instability in North Africa. Many of these problems stem from rapid population growth, high unemployment and a shortage of economic development resources. Disproportionate development results in states finding it increasingly difficult to keep up their part of the social contract, this being an almost certain way to foster public discontent. Sergey Kirpichenko, Russia's Ambassador to Egypt, says, "What happened in Egypt in 2011 was probably logical. The thing is, Egypt had clearly manifested stagnation, deteriorating socioeconomic indicators, and consequent discontent among the people, the masses."<sup>6</sup> China treats the socioeconomic instability factor with all seriousness since it has made the "security through development" principle the cornerstone of its Middle Eastern and North African policies.<sup>7</sup> Socioeconomic instability is exacerbated by some North African states' economies being dependent on energy resource exports (Libya, Algeria and Sudan prior to 2011) or other external revenue sources. They become vulnerable to external shocks, this causing sharp vacillations in the quality of life and increased social tension.

Another factor contributing to instability and domestic conflicts is that some states are essentially artificial constructs set up after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by the efforts of Western states, this explaining their weak national identities. As a result, when a crisis hits, the population quickly fragments into religious, tribal or ethnic groups. The need to bolster the national identity or construct a new post-conflict identity has been obvious in Libya and Syria. A fragile identity often makes it easier for external forces to interfere and provoke a state's collapse.

## Russia and Egypt: Jointly Counteracting Challenges to Stability

Russia's leaders are well aware of both the difficulties North Africa is facing<sup>8</sup> and its potential. Moscow is constantly building up its regional presence and views Egypt as its main North African partner in both politics, trade and economics. Russian officials emphasise that Egypt has a major influence on deve-

<sup>6</sup> Russian Ambassador in Egypt: Terrorism Remains Problem No. 1 in Egypt (in Russian) // Interfax News Agency. 31.07.2018. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/62309>

<sup>7</sup> Xi offers development as a 'new path' for resolving the Middle East crises // China Daily. 22.01.2016. URL: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-xivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/22/content\\_23205273.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-xivisitmiddleeast/2016-01/22/content_23205273.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with TASS News Agency // President of Russia. 21.10.2019. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61858>

lopments in the Middle East and North Africa, above all playing a major role in the attempts to effect Syrian and Libyan settlements. Moscow also views Cairo as its partner in countering the financing of terrorist groups and the spread of extremist ideologies. Russian authorities see Egypt as one of North Africa's main economic centres with a well-developed industry, major logistics opportunities and a dynamically developing energy sector.<sup>9</sup> In the future, Egypt may become the driver of the region's economic growth. Thus Russia is interested in developing business ties with Egypt but wants these ties to have a pragmatic foundation and is not ready to provide non-reimbursable aid as the U.S. does. Instead, Moscow is banking on cooperation that would be mutually profitable for both parties. Russia attaches great significance to increasing trade, particularly in agricultural products, and sees Egypt as a logistics hub for promoting its goods on African markets.<sup>10</sup> Even so, Russian businesses still consider the markets of Egypt and other North African states to be high risk, owing to the remaining danger of large-scale destabilisation.

There are several areas where Russia and Egypt can collaborate with a view to boosting stability in North Africa. Political cooperation is key in this. For instance, in international affairs, Moscow and Cairo can join efforts to counter external challenges by, for instance, combatting sovereignty violations and destructive external interference in regional affairs. Russia consistently advocates non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, believing this principle to be a cornerstone of today's international law. In 2019, Russia even proposed an international convention on countering interference in the affairs of sovereign states.<sup>11</sup> These issues are relevant for Egypt as well, and the country vigorously condemns external interference in the affairs of neighbouring Libya. Accordingly, Russia and Egypt could jointly advance this agenda at various international organisations.

Regionally, Russia and Egypt could attempt to build a new collective security system/architecture, allowing tensions in international relations and the risk of military conflicts and hybrid wars to be reduced. In 2019, Russia proposed creating a new security architecture in the Persian Gulf analogous to the OSCE. Such a solution is also needed in the Eastern Mediterranean, which currently lacks any basic rules for interaction between various actors, a situation fraught with a sharp exacerbation of tension or even open military confrontation.

As for political cooperation, Russia and Egypt could consider providing direct assistance to states in crisis to prevent them from degenerating into failed states. For instance, Moscow could act in the UN and Egypt could act in the League of Arab States to concertedly channel the Libyan settlement along diplomatic lines

<sup>9</sup> In Cairo, Russia and Egypt discussed expanding the potential of their trade and economic relations (in Russian) // Russia's Ministry of Industry and Trade. 09.10.2019. URL: [https://minpromtorg.gov.ru/press-centre/news/#rasshirenje\\_potenciala\\_torgovoekonomicheskikh\\_otnosheniy\\_rossii\\_i\\_egipta\\_obsudili\\_v\\_kaire](https://minpromtorg.gov.ru/press-centre/news/#rasshirenje_potenciala_torgovoekonomicheskikh_otnosheniy_rossii_i_egipta_obsudili_v_kaire)

<sup>10</sup> Russia to Invest RUB 12 bn in creating an economic zone in Egypt (in Russian) // Russia — Africa Shared Vision 2030. 12.03.2019. URL: <http://ravision2030.com/page5036521.html>

<sup>11</sup> Russia is drafting a Convention on countering interference in states' sovereign affairs (in Russian) // *Parlamentskaya gazeta* (Parliament Bulletin), 18.11.2019.  
URL: [https://www.pnp.ru/politics/v-rossii-gotovyat-konvenciyu-po-borbe-s-vmeshatelstvom-v-suverennye-dela-gosudarstv.html?utm\\_source=pnpru&utm\\_medium=block&utm\\_content=164821&utm\\_campaign=also\\_block](https://www.pnp.ru/politics/v-rossii-gotovyat-konvenciyu-po-borbe-s-vmeshatelstvom-v-suverennye-dela-gosudarstv.html?utm_source=pnpru&utm_medium=block&utm_content=164821&utm_campaign=also_block)

to procure a political rather than military resolution to the conflict. Previously, Russia was highly complementary about Egypt's role as an intermediary in the Syrian crisis settlement. Russian diplomats stressed that Egypt was in touch with both the Syrian leadership and the opposition and had used its contacts "in a positive vein."<sup>12</sup>

Combatting extremism and terrorism is the most obvious and relevant area for cooperation between the two states. This collaboration could develop in many areas: suppressing movement by militants between states, arms smuggling, the spread of radical ideology (including via the Internet) and the financing of radicals. Russia is involved in combatting terrorists in Syria, so is capable of preventing militants who had previously joined terrorist groups in Syria from returning to Egypt and other North African states.

It is of the foremost significance to counter the spread of radical ideology. For Russia, Egypt is an important partner in promoting moderate, peace-loving Islam. The shortage of well-educated imams helps spread radical views, and Russia believes that educating Russian Muslim theologians in Egypt would help counteract the spread of radical ideology among Russian Muslims. It is also important to set up a more active exchange of information and to coordinate the activities of the two states' secret services. Egyptian professionals have extensive knowledge of the activities of international extremist organisations, of their ideology and the propaganda methods they use. Egyptians could assist their Russian counterparts in developing more effective measures for counteracting religious extremists. Moscow, in turn, is ready to share its experience accumulated during the counter-terrorist operation in Syria with Cairo. Finally, Russia and Egypt can jointly combat extremist groups.

International information security, working against radicals in cyberspace, is of major importance for precluding the spread of radical ideology. Russia and Egypt could jointly track extremist and terrorist content on the Internet. Special attention should be paid to the resources used to spread extremist materials, primarily social networks and messengers.

Military technical cooperation is another way to enhance stability. When the number of external challenges and security challenges is large, countries need to improve their defence potential. The 2014 Iraq case showed that state-of-the-art weapons and military equipment could play a major role in combatting terrorist organisations such as IS. Sometimes, the preservation of a country's statehood depends directly on these weapons and equipment. Russia and Egypt have well-developed military-industrial complexes and are consequently capable of assisting regional states facing various threats.

Economic cooperation could become an additional factor in strengthening stability in North Africa, as it would be conducive to resolving such crucial issues as food and energy security and, to some degree, a better quality of life and reduced unemployment.

<sup>12</sup> Russian Ambassador in Egypt: Terrorism Remains Problem No. 1 in Egypt (in Russian) // Interfax News Agency. 31.07. 2018. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/623096>

Russia is a promising market for North African agricultural products. Foodstuffs account for the bulk of Russian imports from the region and those of North African vegetables and fruits have increased significantly since the West imposed sanctions on Russia. Moscow, in turn, is ready to provide the region with grain, thereby ensuring that the population has reasonably priced flour even during droughts, which is important for preventing “bread” riots and reducing social tension. Egypt could act as a grain hub for delivering Russian grain to neighbouring states. Russian economists estimate that the country’s total trade with North African states has grown more than 12-fold in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the growth pace is kept up, North African countries’ share in Russia’s foreign trade might top 7 per cent by 2030.<sup>13</sup>

Russia could contribute significantly to developing North Africa’s oil and gas sector. For instance, Egypt is among Africa’s top three gas producers, but it needs investment to develop its natural resources, including infrastructure. Rosneft is already participating in developing the Zohr shelf gas field,<sup>14</sup> considering future Middle Eastern projects as a strategic development area. Other energy majors, such as Gazprom and Lukoil, are also interested in Egypt.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise, North Africa is facing grave and comprehensive challenges and threats. Internal ones are hard to overcome since, as a rule, this demands that North African governments introduce long-running and in-depth structural reforms, revise their development strategies or attract major external resources. Even so, problems such as religious extremism can be handled fairly promptly, provided smoothly running international cooperation is in place.

Given today’s circumstances, combatting external challenges and threats appears, oddly, to be a more realistic endeavour since, instead of painful reforms, it requires political will and a willingness to engage in negotiations with neighbouring states. Foreign powers interested in maintaining stability in North Africa could play a positive role in counteracting external threats. For instance, Russia is banking on bolstering regional states’ sovereignty, defending the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, jointly countering common threats, preventing states from failing and on mutually advantageous economic cooperation. External actors’ joint efforts and close cooperation with North Africa’s leading states hold a promise of the most urgent crises being overcome and negative trends being partially neutralised.

<sup>13</sup> Markina A.N. “Analysing Mutual Trade between Russia and North African States” (in Russian) // *Ekonomika i biznes: teoriya i praktika*. (Economics and Business: Theory and Practice). 2020. 7 (65). P. 147-149.  
DOI: 10.24411/2411-0450-2020-10610

<sup>14</sup> The Zohr Project, Egypt (in Russian) // Rosneft.  
URL: [https://www.rosneft.ru/business/Upstream/ProductionAndDevelopment/Proekt\\_Zohr\\_Egipet/](https://www.rosneft.ru/business/Upstream/ProductionAndDevelopment/Proekt_Zohr_Egipet/)

## 1.2. Political Risks and Instability in North Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

### Introduction

Ezzat Saad  
Al Sayed

Over the past ten years, the crises and security challenges with which the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is congested have become more intense. These include terrorism, illegal immigration, civil wars, regional conflicts, and external interference in the affairs of the states of the region, in addition to central state weakness, which implies the emergence of models of failed states. There are other challenges, such as threats of climate change, water shortages, the spread of diseases and epidemics, and the threats they pose in the field of health security, as well as the issue of uneven development in many states of the region, including paying more attention to urban development and improving the infrastructure of cities at the expense of rural development.

It should be noted at the outset that most of these crises were caused by several historical factors, the most important of which is the Western role in general in one way or another, through the adoption of purely selfish strategies and interests that did not take into account the interests of the states of the region or the aspirations of their peoples. Even when these countries declared their support for the demands of the Arab revolutions under the pretext of defending human rights and freedoms, they did not provide the appropriate assistance to the countries in question to preserve their unity and territorial integrity. Rather, their intervention and preference for one party over the other led to the worsening of the situation, and the resultant transformation of the situation in Syria, for example, into a conflict between regional and global powers. This gave the opportunity for the emergence of the ISIS terrorist organization and the infiltration of the affiliates of terrorist organizations into a number of states in the region. Egypt still suffers the repercussions of this matter at home (North Sinai). About the dangers of terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula, we must note the significant success of the Egyptian state in defeating terrorism in its territories in general and in Sinai in particular. There is indeed a remarkable decline in the pace of terrorist operations in the country following the control of the Egyptian-Libyan borders on the one hand, and the dismantlement of most terrorist and extremist networks on the other hand.

One explanation behind these crises could be the regional parties' policies, more specifically Iran's and Turkey's. In fact, some Arab parties have fuelled these conflicts since the beginning. Moreover, the continued deterioration in these crises and the peoples' hard conditions is due, to some extent, to the transformation of the region into an arena of international and regional rivalry that does not consider neither the region's stability nor its peoples' interests. A thorough analysis of all the files of these crises, whether in Libya, Syria or Yemen, reveals that the consequences of rivalries and foreign interferences hinder reaching settlements, ignore life necessities of these countries' populations, and increase the risks of regional instability, which is reflected on Egyptian and Russian interests.



Most of the crises and challenges facing the region remain open with no signs of being eliminated, whether in the short or medium term. These challenges include: weakness of the central state; political Islam and acute polarization; terrorism and political violence; illegal immigration, refugees and human trafficking; marginalization and uneven development; technological and technical backwardness; and challenges to health and food security, in the manner detailed below.

### **The Weakness of Central State Authority**

The situation in some countries of the region is characterized by a state of instability; moreover, regional and international footprints are still strongly present in these countries according to special interests and agendas, leading to conflicts of intentions and interests as well as complicating the dossiers more than they already are. And, of course, largely lying behind this is the weakness or absence of the role of the central state, which means the possibility for more failed states to emerge.

Perhaps one of the most important examples that can be mentioned in this regard is the complex developments taking place in Libya due to the complete absence of central state institutions. The Libyan crisis has been crystallized with the emergence of conflicting parties, the most prominent of which is the government of Fayed Al-Sarraj, based in Tripoli, which is the internationally recognized government, and the government of Abdullah Al-Thani, based in Tobruk, which enjoys the support of General Khalifa Haftar, commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA). Now the crisis is intensifying with the continuing security chaos, political disagreements and the absence of a national unity government. Fears are increasing that the current division of the country will be a fait accompli imposed by the dominant powers and their supporters from abroad, foremost among them being Turkey, which has already intervened militarily to side with Al-Sarraj government and brought militias and mercenaries from Syria to support it.

In this regard, it must be emphasized that the growing strength of armed militias exceeding the authority of the state, and the fight between armed groups and criminal elements over economic interests, are all challenges facing Libya's neighbouring countries, particularly Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. It should also be noted that the field influence enjoyed by the militias under the cover of arms represents one of the main obstacles to political settlement and stability in Libya. The seriousness of this situation appears in light of what the United Nations has indicated in a report on May 20, 2020, that Libya contains the largest stockpile of weapons that are not subjected to supervision and which are estimated to range between 150 and 200 thousand tons across the country, ranging between light, medium and heavy weapons, despite the resolution of the international ban on arms exports. In other words, the proliferation of loose weapons in some countries of the region expresses in one of its dimensions the militarization of societies in the face of national state weakness. This requires state agencies to formulate national plans that would urge citizens to cooperate to hand over their weapons and reach an understanding with tribesmen.

On the other hand, the Tunisian case gives an example that is no less important than that of Libya, particularly since the situation in Tunisia is still witnessing successive setbacks since the outbreak of its revolution in late 2010. This means that the seeds of deterioration and chaos continue to exist with further tensions and complications regarding the extent of the central state's strength therein. The relationship between parties in Tunisia can be reduced to the phrase "war of all against all," as there is a government coalition that can explode at any moment, and opposition parties are fighting a fierce war to regain their position on the political scene by escalating the war of words and mutual accusations, predicting a political deadlock that may destabilize any government. This opens the door widely to severe renewable political crises, especially in light of the delicate economic and social conditions in the country.<sup>15</sup>

### **Political Islam and Acute Polarization**

In connection with the previous point, it is possible to say that the basis that threatens the role of the central state in the countries of North Africa is the non-constructive role played by political Islam movements within those states. Such movements have become an integral part of most of the political scene configurations in the countries of the region since the beginning of the second decade of the third millennium. But it is possible to assert that the main focus of interactions in the region as a whole revolves around the future of these movements, through the sharp political polarizations they impose in an attempt to enhance their stature and allies.

It is no secret that Egypt had a bitter experience with the movements of political Islam in the wake of the January 2011 revolution, which resulted in the deterioration of the situation in the country to a great extent. Yet contrary to the Egyptian state's success in overcoming the plight of political Islam in the country in general, situations in the rest of North Africa are not as such. Rather, some of them need to exert a lot of effort to ward off the threats entailed by the infiltration of the forces of political Islam into their interior.

In Libya, the political polarization taking place therein, as a result of the practices of the forces of political Islam represented by the leadership of the Libyan Government of National Accord and its regional supporters, led to the outbreak of many rounds of conflict among the Libyan parties, to the extent that the prestige of the central state has faded and chaos has been generalized as a result of that. It goes without saying that the forces supporting political Islam now view the battle of Libya as a crucial battle for their existence, especially after their crushing defeat in Egypt as well as their international and regional retreat, which explains their alignment with each other in Libya to support the Turkish stance in this regard.

In Tunisia, despite the attempt of Ennahda Party to benefit from the lessons learned from the Egyptian situation, which received a great Western welcome to the party's participation in power and political organizations, on top of which

<sup>15</sup> Zahra Fodla Between a grappling government coalition and a parliament tossed about by disagreements. Tunisia, where to? // Almayadeen website. 08.07.2020. URL: <https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/1408985/>

is the assumption of the Parliament's leadership, the Libyan crisis has reignited discord and polarization within the Tunisian arena. This resulted in widespread concerns among many Tunisian movements regarding the consequences of this phenomenon, especially in light of the affiliation of many Tunisian fighters with Al Qaeda and ISIS.<sup>16</sup> And perhaps the recent silence of the acts of violence in Tunisia in association with the participation of Ennahda in power draws attention, a phenomenon which deepens anxiety and fears that this truce is conditional.

On the other hand, the relative calm in Algeria is related to some extent to the space of freedom given to political Islam organizations in Algerian society, provided that they are not active in political and societal demands. This is also the case in Morocco, with more visible participation of political Islam in government. It should be noted that the Moroccan situation itself is a special experience, as the Islamist political movement therein has many unique characteristics. This includes its dynamic and ideological diversity which has shaped its experience with many alliances and divisions. It has also enriched that experience with abundant theoretical production, characterizing it with a great deal of "localism." The level of practice has provided it with a great deal of privacy, as it has not been radically affected by what is happening in the regional environment, nor is it practically proceeding to extend its ambitions beyond the borders of its geographic scope. However, its general ideology is characterized by "globalism" and "internationalism," like other Islamic movements.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, it can therefore be argued that the practices of the forces of political Islam in the Moroccan scene are consistent with rules and limits agreed upon with the ruling palace to avoid any opportunity to bring political unrest and instability to the country.

Thus, it is possible to say that Egypt is the only country that has so far managed to control violence without offering concessions to such organizations. Still, it shares with all North African countries the non-crystallization of an inclusive civic and intellectual political mainstream capable of attracting a popular base and overcoming the plight of the dangers associated with this political polarization.

## **Terrorism and Political Violence**

Despite the announcement of the demise of the ISIS terrorist organization by the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism in the Middle East region, the remnants of terrorist groups are still present in the region. Egypt is still facing these remnants over various parts of its borders. Almost all North African countries have witnessed, and are still witnessing, continuous terrorist acts by political violence organizations, and every country has had a unique experience in this regard.

In the Kingdom of Morocco, operations carried out by Al-Qaeda are addressed with a degree of security effectiveness. In addition to that, the regime also depends, as has been previously mentioned, on some sort of containment of

<sup>16</sup> Kamal bin Younes. The Libya war deepens the division of the political scene in Tunisia: Calls for overthrowing Ghannouchi and accusing "Ennahda" of siding with Turkey and "AFRICOM" // Middle East website. 03.06.2020.  
URL: <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2316041/>

<sup>17</sup> The Islamist movement in Morocco. A publication of Al-Mesbar Center for Studies and Research. 13.09.2013.  
URL: [https://www.almesbar.net/11\\_الحرارة\\_الاسلامية\\_في\\_المغرب-](https://www.almesbar.net/11_الحرارة_الاسلامية_في_المغرب-)

the forces of political Islam, as well as the reliance on the religious status of the Moroccan throne among the Moroccan Sufi circles whose pillars have not yet been lost. In Algeria, a number of policies are being adopted, including the imposition of strict restrictions on political Islam organizations therein, as well as adopting a security mechanism to control the levels of violence. As for Tunisia, the situation therein is much more so in terms of the greater political openness to these organizations so far, noting that the magnitude of the underlying threats is greater in light of the widespread belief that there are large numbers of Tunisian-nationality fighters present within the ranks of ISIS and Al Qaeda. They are deployed in Tunisia, Libya, Syria and a number of European countries, particularly France. For its part, Egypt has recently managed to relatively control the level of violence and to curb terrorist operations without completely eliminating them, especially in light of the threats associated with the continuing political polarization and the risks associated with Libya.

In this context, it is possible to particularly refer to three of the developments that occurred in the middle of this year, which will undoubtedly affect the future of terrorist groups in North Africa, namely:

**Firstly:** ISIS statement to its followers about its future intentions; the statement urged the followers of the organization to continue the war of attrition, especially against the weak armies, with the aim of controlling the lands in which they are located in the future, by killing, injuring, seizing captives, capturing spoils of war, and destroying property. It seems that the organization has benefited from the lessons learned in Syria and Iraq, as it calls upon its followers to double the raids and surprise attacks, as well as avoiding the anti-terrorist operations carried out by national armies, which are effective operations that have inflicted severe damage on terrorists.

**Secondly:** The assassination of Abdelmalek Droukdel, Al-Qaeda chief in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), on June 3, 2020, in northern Mali. This assassination is to be added to a long list – Osama bin Laden was killed; on January 20, 2020, the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Qasim al-Rimi, was assassinated; later Anwar al-Awlaki was assassinated in Yemen. What must be pointed out here is that their assassination did not bring about any change at the level of the organization, because such groups expect their leaders to be targeted at any moment, so alternatives are ready.

**Thirdly:** Turkish ambitions in the Mediterranean as Libya is currently undergoing a pivotal moment. The successive developments revealed that Erdogan, supported by Qatar, considers Libya as the gateway to North Africa.<sup>18</sup>

In short, Africa seems to be a fertile ground for the spread of terrorism due to instability and chaos in many places therein. It also represents an alternative environment after the fall of the monarchies of extremist organizations, and at the same time representing a launching platform for practising terrorism in Europe and Asia as well. On this continent, due to its geographical nature, where these

<sup>18</sup> José Luis Mancia. A new stage for terrorists in Africa // Al-Ain news website. 11.06.2020.  
URL: <https://al-ain.com/article/new-stage-terrorists-africa>

extremists receive training and then move to conflict areas or their remote goal to carry out terrorist operations, in light of the lack of strong political systems capable of confronting such organizations and imposing security and order. If we look closely, we will find that the most extreme organizations, such as Qaidat al-Jihad, have long been rooted in this continent, and that ISIS is trying to exist on this continent after the fall of its state on March 22, 2019.

### **Illegal immigration, Refugees, and Human Trafficking**

These issues are still highly controversial within the research community and in practice, and they remain to be a constant danger so far, as their main roots have not been addressed. Only temporary solutions have been provided, which will not be able to control the exacerbation of the severity of such issues in the future. The situation is getting worse with the inability of the international agencies concerned with the affairs of refugees and displaced persons to increase the financial allocations necessary to fund and provide the basic requirements they need, the disinclination of the United States of America to pay its share of these allocations, and the lack of guarantees that the rest of the countries will fulfil their financial obligations. This is despite focusing on discussing this issue during the United Nations General Assembly summit, held in December 2016, and at that time the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees was adopted as a non-legally binding document.

As for the North African region, the issue of illegal immigration is strongly present there, as immigration journeys of that type are still launched from the Maghreb countries to Europe. However, what attracts the most attention in this regard are the journeys made by immigrants from Libyan territories, which have become the first gateway to European countries, for thousands of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers who come from the depths of the African continent and some Arab neighbouring countries. Needless to say, smugglers exploit these migrants to gain from them through their shipping towards Europe on dangerous, life-threatening sea journeys.

For their part, and despite the efforts made by European institutions and states that are particularly concerned with this matter, they are still mainly focused on the security dimension. To this end, meetings are held between European and North African countries to agree on ways to reinforce border security in order to limit the arrival of immigrants and asylum seekers from African gates to the shores of Europe, while making economic promises that in no way enable the setting up of development projects for eliminating the causes of immigration or solving the political crises that lead to the flight of hundreds of asylum seekers. This situation is becoming more difficult in light of the rise of far-right populism in Europe with anti-immigrant and anti-refugee prejudices. Such worrying phenomenon that has preoccupied Europe, particularly France, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Poland and Sweden, amongst others. This means that it is expected that the engagement of European countries in many of the region's crises will be excluded, and limiting that only to the issues that directly affect their interests.

In fact, dealing with such issues depends on the provision of genuine European and international guarantees for the establishment of effective development, social and cultural projects, and a true and goodwill engagement to resolve the region's existing political problems.

## Marginalization and Unbalanced Development

The MENA region is characterized by having maximal rates of social and economic marginalization, not to mention the related unbalanced development rates that affect the nature and characteristics of these societies. Regional growth has been unbalanced since the global financial crisis of 2008/2009 due to a combination of factors, which resulted in static income levels, insufficient employment opportunities (especially for young people and women) and persistent frustrations regarding the quality and availability of public services. Experience has shown that inequality and inability to sustain economic growth often represent two sides of the same coin, and that making growth more inclusive of all segments of society can make it more sustainable as well.<sup>19</sup> However, much work remains to be done in the context of the movement of the countries of the region towards implementing inclusive growth supportive policies in order to achieve important economic success for these countries.

The social situation in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia is characterized by rising disparities. While living standards are relatively high near the coast, in capitals and economic centres, development rarely occurs in the South and the interior of these countries. These regions lack jobs, education, health care, culture and security.<sup>20</sup> As for Egypt, it cannot be denied that it is still far from achieving equality among its citizens, as well as on the issue of internal development. However, it must be recognized that it has adopted several distinct national programs over the past few years, indicating its full insistence on eradicating poverty, marginalization, inequality, corruption, waste of money and resources, unemployment, illiteracy and disease. Egypt has succeeded in achieving the highest growth rates in the North African region for several consecutive years, and has also been able to establish a modern infrastructure that would help it complete its economic take-off, in addition to its success in limiting the negative effects of the novel coronavirus crisis, and it has provided measures amounting to LE 100 billion from the state's public reserves allocated for dealing with exceptional circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

Forecasts for economic growth rates in North African countries by most international economic institutions have not been as expected for the fiscal year 2019/2020, as a result of the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the global

<sup>19</sup> Inequality – Bridging the Divide // United Nation's Database. URL: <https://www.un.org/en/un75/inequality-bridging-divide>;  
Guy Ryder. Reducing inequality will boost economic growth // Website of the International Labor Organization (ILO). 24.01.2014. URL: [https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-center/comment-analysis/WCMS\\_234482/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-center/comment-analysis/WCMS_234482/lang-en/index.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Time for Justice: Marginalization in the Maghreb // The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. 02.06.2017.  
URL: <https://www.fes-mena.org/events/e/theme-week-time-for-justice-marginalization-in-the-maghreb/>

<sup>21</sup> Khaled Al-Minshawi. Would the risks of COVID-19 annihilate the "weak" economic growth of the dark continent? // Independentarabia website. 13.04.2020. URL: <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/111101/>

economy and the flow of international trade in general.<sup>22</sup> However, hope cannot be lost in the ability of these countries to maximize employment opportunities, equality and observance of the rights of marginalized groups. A 2014 conference held in the Jordanian capital, Amman, with the participation of the Jordanian government, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) laid the basis for a discussion on justice and inclusion policies in the Arab world, including North African Arab states.<sup>23</sup> After four years of convening this conference, representatives and experts from more than 20 countries in the Arab region met in Morocco in January 2018 to discuss their experience in adopting policies that aim to encourage “opportunity for all” and ensuring that no one lags behind.<sup>24</sup>

### **Technological and Technical Backwardness**

This issue occupies an extremely sensitive position at present, particularly concerning the issue of artificial intelligence (AI), which has become a top concern among practitioners and researchers alike. One of the signs of the new “Artificial Intelligence Spring” is the huge investments that have been allocated for this field, which have reached record levels. This is evidenced by the investment of more than 50 billion dollars in AI related companies in 2018 alone, which represents double the size of investments in 2017.<sup>25</sup>

Several countries have made the AI issue a strategic priority. The United States and China are leading investments in this field, in addition to a second group of countries, including Canada, Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom. Needless to say, the key factors of economic growth based on areas of artificial intelligence, such as investment and research rates, digital interdependence and labour-market structure, which vary from one country to another, will all determine who will lead this fertile field in the future. Some countries will likely lag behind due to the backwardness of their digital infrastructure, which could affect the geopolitical balance for decades to come, particularly in light of the growing and complex military applications based on the most sophisticated and innovative forms of AI. On the other hand, the inherent characteristics of artificial intelligence, in terms of its reliance on software and algorithms as well as its dual-use capabilities, challenge the traditional concept of “arms control,” thus maximizing the likelihood of future conflict escalation.

Regarding the position of North African countries concerning this issue, they, as is the case in most, if not all, developing countries, are still far from this increas-

<sup>22</sup> The previous reference; And - Samir Darwish and Muhammad Ali. Fitch: Egypt leads North African economies to grow 4.2 per cent in 2020 // Al-Ain news website. 01.01.2020.  
URL: <https://al-ain.com/article/fitch-egypt-leads-north-african-economies-2020>

<sup>23</sup> Conference of “Building the Future: Jobs, Growth, & Fairness in the Arab World”. Held by the Government of Jordan, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development and the International Monetary Fund in Amman, Jordan, on May 11-12, 2014.  
URL: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2014/act/index.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Statement by the International Monetary Fund, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and Arab Monetary Fund at the Conclusion of the Conference on Promoting Growth, Jobs, and Inclusiveness in the Arab World, 30.01.2018.  
URL: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/01/30/pr1831-statement-by-imf-arab-fund-for-economic-and-social-development-and-arab-monetary-fund>

<sup>25</sup> Munich Security Report 2019: The Great Puzzle: Who Will Pick Up the Pieces? // Open Repository Base on International Strategic Studies (ORPIS). 15.02.2019. P 62. URL: <https://espas.secure.europa.eu/orbis/node/1356>

ingly important and influential evolution. In other words, they still lack the modern technological tools necessary to achieve a progressive and developmental boom in their societies, not to mention their inability to compete with the countries that have the lead in this regard. This is linked to many factors, including the weak funding allocated to education and scientific research in those countries as compared to the large increase in resources allocated to military affairs, as well as the pervasiveness of bureaucracy, corruption and waste of public money. Moreover, the failure to provide the minimum infrastructure necessary to contain advanced technological mechanisms.

## Health and Food Security Challenges

Research published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in 2012 recognized that food insecurity is the main driver of conflicts in the MENA region.<sup>26</sup> Thus, addressing the triple burden of malnutrition, i.e. food insecurity, malnutrition, weight gain and obesity, is necessary to prevent and build resilience to conflicts, improve food security and nutrition, and support macroeconomic development.

In contrast to other regions of the world, the number of undernourished people in the region has risen from 16 million in 1990-92 to 33 million today. Micronutrient deficiencies are very high in Iraq, Oman, Sudan and Yemen, where the prevalence of anaemia among children exceed 50 per cent. Iodine deficiency is similarly common, affecting more than 60 per cent of children in Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and Sudan. The rates of childhood stunting in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Yemen exceed the regional average of 28 to 58 per cent. Overweight and obesity are also widespread in the region. As of 2013, the prevalence of overweight and obese men and women has nearly exceeded 50 per cent in all countries of the MENA region.<sup>27</sup>

It goes without saying here that the triple burden of malnutrition leads to great social and economic losses, and that malnutrition has detrimental health effects on humans. Obesity, for example, increases the risk of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. More than 350 000 deaths in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were attributed to diabetes in 2013. In a related context, the direct health care costs of the triple burden of malnutrition also have adverse effects on the economy as a whole, as countries of the MENA region spent nearly seven per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on health care costs in 2009. In a country like Egypt, undernourishment among children has led to gross domestic product (GDP) decreasing by about 2 per cent or 7.3 billion dollars yearly.<sup>28</sup>

In a related context, the Global Health Security Index indicates that none of the Arab countries, including North African countries, could reach the status of coun-

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Francois Maystadt, Jean-Francois Trinh Tan and Clemens Breisinger. Does Food Security Matter for Transition in Arab Countries? // International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Discussion Paper 01196. July 2012. P. V.

<sup>27</sup> Zhenzhen Van. Overcoming the three-dimensional burden of malnutrition in the Middle East and North Africa // International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). 13.10.2014. URL: <https://egyptssp.ifpri.info/2014/10/13/>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



tries that are most prepared to face health security risks, and that some of them lie within the medium preparedness status and the others lie within the status of least preparedness. Among the states lying within the medium preparedness status, Morocco ranks 68<sup>th</sup>, Egypt – 87<sup>th</sup> and Tunisia – 122<sup>nd</sup>, while Libya and Algeria come in the list of the least prepared countries, ranking 168<sup>th</sup> and 173<sup>rd</sup> respectively, out of 195 countries in the world.<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting that this classification entails unpromising indications of the ability of these countries to meet the health challenges they face, particularly in light of the current COVID-19 crisis. It also reveals the existence of many obstacles to accessing high-quality and affordable health care, such as the lack of transparency and adequate medical equipment, in addition to a general lack of human capital in the health care sector.

### **Opportunities**

Despite the many challenges facing North African countries, there are still a number of opportunities that these countries can use to overcome their multiple crises. It is worth noting that it is first necessary to work towards getting rid of the security threats and risks that undoubtedly affect the stability and security of countries, thus threatening investment opportunities and public sector's ability to play its role in order to achieve economic advancement generally. It seems that the above-mentioned challenges overlap in one way or another. Thus the continued absence of transparency and accountability, the prevalent role of the deep state, corruption and weak political participation in most North African countries, lacking development plans based on the use of modern technological means that would improve the living conditions of citizens and lacking good health status all lead to finding gaps that terrorist and extremist groups rely on to spread their ideologies and beliefs. This, in turn, results in continued unrest and instability, and consequently the outbreak of military confrontations and the continuation of violence, leading to the continuing phenomenon of illegal immigration, asylum and human trafficking.

All of the above requires the governments and peoples of the region to cooperate in good faith and coordinate jointly to solve their problems and crises. It also pushes the influential think tanks in the region to play their role in this matter. There are common risks requiring the unification of efforts in order to confront and eliminate them. Adherence to special agendas or selfish interests will undoubtedly undermine these efforts, and the danger posed by such matter lies in its contribution to increasing the pace of challenges and threats in that part of the world to an extent that would make it difficult for the entire international community to confront or control.

Moreover, among the opportunities that can be exploited to strengthen the business sector in North African countries are the following:

- 1. To move forward with the implementation of the economic reform programs**

<sup>29</sup> Among Arab countries...Who tops the 2019 Global Health Security List? // CNN Arabic site. 22.03.2020.  
URL: <https://arabic.cnn.com/health/article/2020/03/22/global-health-security-index-2019>

adopted by some countries in the region in order to keep pace with global standards, in a way that leads to maximizing opportunities and returns as well as achieving economic prosperity, including an increase in investment operations and promoting their effectiveness. In this context, the Doing Business reports issued by the World Bank indicate remarkable progress in North African countries over the past few years as a result of their efforts to improve their business climate by adopting a number of reforms that would facilitate the process of carrying out business and various economic activities. For example, Egypt's reforms that facilitated the procedures for starting a business by establishing a one-stop-shop system, improving access to credit, facilitating tax payment and insolvency resolution, and taking measures to help the enhancement of corporate transparency. Similarly, reforms in both Morocco and Tunisia included an easing of the companies' registration procedures. According to the Doing Business data, the rate of doing business in the MENA region has increased from 58.4 per cent in 2019 to 60.2 per cent this year. In Egypt, the rate has reached 60.1 per cent in 2020, with an increase of 1.6 per cent as compared to the previous year, and has reached 68.7 per cent and 73.4 per cent in Tunisia and Morocco respectively, while it has risen by only 0.1 per cent in Algeria to reach 48.6 per cent, remaining constant at 32.7 per cent in Libya.<sup>30</sup>

**2.** Building on the events that were held to discuss the policies of justice and inclusion in the Arab world, especially the conference held in the Jordanian capital, Amman, in 2014, as well as the conference held in Morocco in January 2018 with the aim of encouraging the idea of "opportunity for all." Moreover, in order to achieve the policies of inclusion and equality in the countries of North Africa, it would be a must to work on four directions:

**The first:** Establishing a regulatory environment that guarantees equal treatment for all and expanding the availability of financing so that private companies, as well as small and medium enterprises, would be able to grow and create the jobs necessary to employ young people.

**The second:** Harnessing trade and technology so as to establish a large regional market that has better potential for international competition in light of the rapid technological advancement that brings about fundamental changes in the markets.

**The third:** Adopting comprehensive policies to improve skills, enhance flexibility, and provide workers with job-qualifying capabilities, including the necessity of improving educational systems and rendering them compatible with the needs of the labour market.

**The fourth:** Adopting measures to improve governance, addressing problems of wasting money and resources, corruption, and expanding social safety nets.

**3.** Exploiting the significant strategic advantages of North African countries in promoting regional and international trade, including the ease with which they

<sup>30</sup> Doing Business: Measuring Business Regulations // The World Bank Database.  
URL: <https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/data/doing-business-score>

represent the link between European countries and the rest of the African continent. This implies the necessity of moving forward with strengthening the infrastructure of North African countries and adopting the necessary strategies in this regard.

4. Similar to the major discoveries achieved by Egypt in the field of energy and gas over the past few years, the possibility of similar discoveries by its North African neighbours is not excluded if the necessary means are taken, which will greatly benefit the economies of these countries.

5. With significant exposure to food insecurity, North African countries can work towards reforming ineffective food policies and practices, support investments in high-return healthy nutrition, and can adopt long-term strategies to address their food crises. This includes the establishment of a regional food reserve and the provision of improved infrastructure and services. In this regard, it is possible to achieve optimum utilization of the population density of these countries by using it for land reclamation so as to provide quality produce.

6. Working towards ensuring water efficiency and raising awareness of the need to rationalize its use, particularly as North African countries are already classified as one of the most water-scarce regions of the world. This is an extremely important issue, particularly in light of the increasing competition for water resources and climate change, which is expected to deepen the already existing high water stress.

## **Conclusion**

The North African region still suffers from many challenges that impede its path towards the development that would enable it to overcome its multiple crises, as outlined above. However, a good number of opportunities that can help countries eliminate their sources of turmoil and achieve their development endeavours continue to exist, thereby strengthening their business sector and increasing investment and prosperity opportunities. In light of lessons learned from the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of the need to strengthen inter-state cooperation and to seek common ground rather than dissonance, the following is necessary to achieve the common good of humanity – cooperation with international donors to help achieve development strategies in North African countries, collaboration with various international powers to achieve the maximum possible mutual benefits and reduce the various political risks and threats in the globally important region.

# Chapter 2. Water and Food Sustainability in North Africa

## 2.1. Water and Food Deficit in North Africa

As North Africa addresses the growing threat of water and food insecurity, it is crucial to analyse the full extent of the problem. Egypt is currently seeking the most sustainable solutions to these threats while spearheading regional initiatives (i.e. Cairo Water Week). Russia and Egypt have already established a solid basis in bilateral relations with promising projects like the El Dabaa nuclear plant. Bilateral cooperation in tackling food and water security would not be an exclusive option for Egypt, but it would be a significant contribution in solving the aforementioned problems. Besides, for Russian companies, it is a good opportunity to demonstrate their products and technological solutions to other actors in the region.

Lari Basangov,  
Lora Chkoniya

### Water Scarcity in North Africa

North African countries are a part of the MENA region that is considered to be the most water-scarce region in the world.<sup>31</sup> There are a plethora of metrics that show the extent of the problem.

The internal freshwater resources per capita are scarce. None of the countries meet the cap of 1000 m<sup>3</sup>, not to mention that the world average for this indicator is almost six thousand cubic meters of water per capita. Besides, the amount of available freshwater per capita is on a constant decline due to the growing population, economic growth and climate change<sup>32</sup>, which indicates that in business-as-usual scenario countries are in risk of facing worsening water scarcity.

However, water scarcity itself does not reflect the whole extent of water insecurity in North Africa. In fact, there are some water-scarce countries in the world that have achieved improved efficiency of water management<sup>33</sup>.

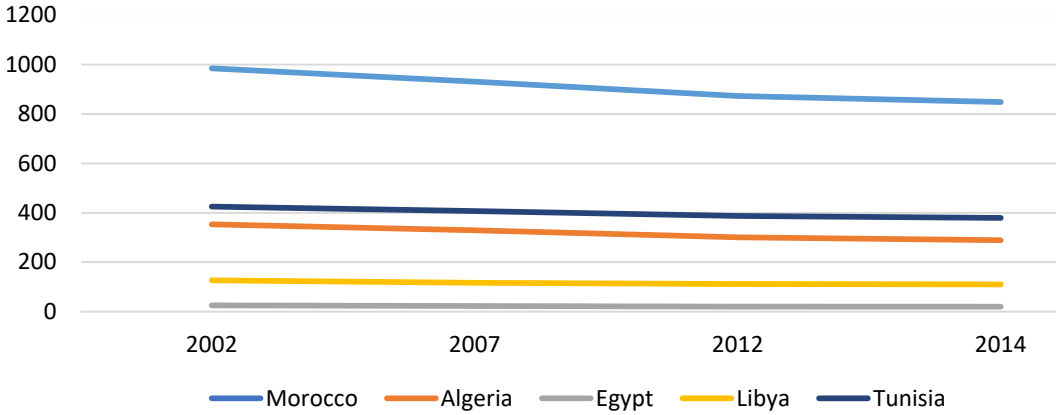
The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization monitors the implementation of the Sixth Sustainable Development Goal, Clean Water and Sanitation, and specifically collects information on the change in water use efficiency over time (SDG Indicator 6.4.1) and the level of water stress (SDG Indicator 6.4.2). Both of them serve as a transparent illustration of the great extent of current water-related issues.

<sup>31</sup> Zafar S. Water Scarcity in MENA // EcoMENA. 13.02.2020. URL: <https://www.ecomena.org/water-scarcity-in-mena/>

<sup>32</sup> Beyond scarcity: Water Security in the Middle East and North Africa // World Bank. 2018.  
URL: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27659/9781464811449.pdf?sequence=14&isAllowed=y>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.8.

**POLITICAL RISKS FOR RUSSIAN–EGYPTIAN COOPERATION IN NORTH AFRICA**



**Figure 1. Renewable Internal Freshwater Resources per Capita From 2002 to 2014 (m³)**

Source: World Bank Database. URL: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ER.H2O.INTR.PC?end=2014&locations=EG-SD-MA-TN-DZ-1W-LY&most\\_recent\\_year\\_desc=true&start=2000&view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ER.H2O.INTR.PC?end=2014&locations=EG-SD-MA-TN-DZ-1W-LY&most_recent_year_desc=true&start=2000&view=chart)

Water stress is the ratio of freshwater withdrawal to available freshwater resources. As for this indicator, only Morocco showed a certain degree of sustainability, with the ratio of 50,8 per cent (which is still an alarming indicator of potential issues). As for other countries, the percentage of water stress is over a hundred per cent, which means that these countries are dependent on outside water resources, desalination or other non-conventional ways of water abstraction. In fact, 2/3 of the Arab region’s water supplies are from outside the region.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 1. Water Stress in North Africa in 2017 (per cent)**

Algeria	Egypt	Libya	Morocco	Sudan	Tunisia
137,9	117,3	817,3	50,8	118,6	121,1

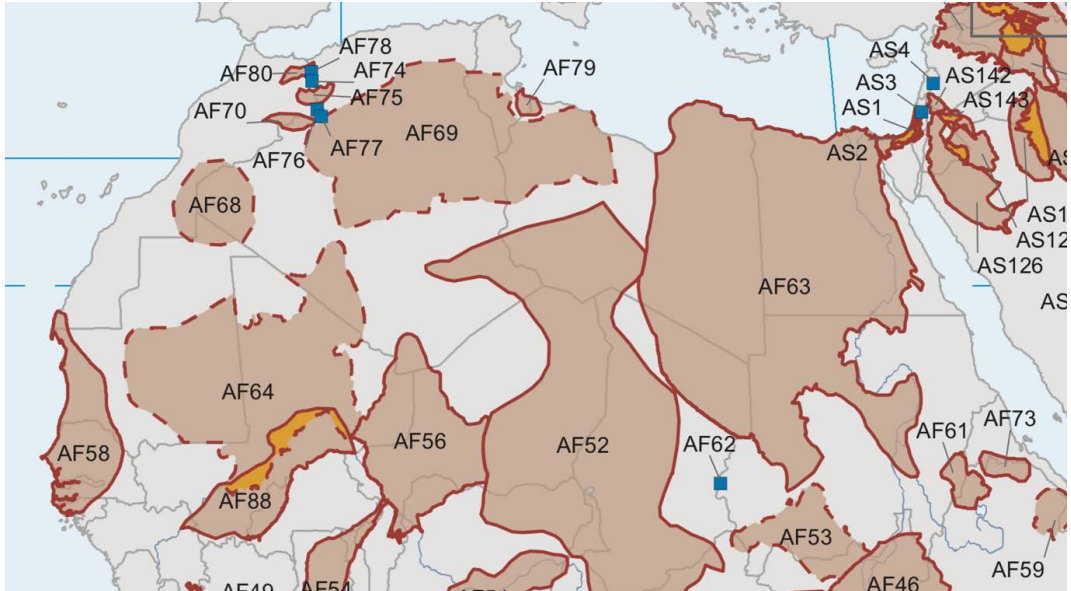
Source: FAO Website. URL: [https://public.tableau.com/shared/5QM5SFXT7?:display\\_count=y&:origin=viz\\_share\\_link&:embed=y&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/shared/5QM5SFXT7?:display_count=y&:origin=viz_share_link&:embed=y&:showVizHome=no)

It is also important to mention that the majority of water withdrawal is related to agriculture. This is one of the signs of the interconnected nature of water and food problems. Besides, water and energy issues are interrelated as well: desalination requires energy, while fracking and other oil-related activity is water-intensive.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, any approach to tackling water scarcity shall not neglect food and energy, which is why the water-food-energy nexus is an integral part of a holistic and sustainable solution.

<sup>34</sup> A New Paradigm to Achieve Water Security and the SDGs in the Arab Region // UN Convention to Combat Desertification Knowledge Hub. 21.10.2019. URL: <https://knowledge.unccd.int/publications/new-paradigm-achieve-water-security-and-sdgs-arab-region>

<sup>35</sup> Sleet P. Water Protests in Algeria Are Giving Cause for Concern about its Long-Term Stability // Future Directions International. 01.05.2019. URL: <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/water-protests-in-algeria-are-giving-cause-for-concern-about-its-long-term-stability/>

Considering the levels of water stress in North Africa, these countries might take more advantage of groundwater, the extraction of which comes at a great financial and environmental cost.<sup>36</sup> In fact, there are plenty of transboundary aquifers that North African countries share with each other and their Sub-Saharan neighbours.



**Figure 2: Transboundary Aquifers in North Africa**

Source: International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre.

URL: [https://www.un-igrac.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/TBAmmap\\_2015.pdf](https://www.un-igrac.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/TBAmmap_2015.pdf)

In his report “The Political and Economic Consequences of Groundwater Depletion in the Arab Region,” Dr Hazim El-Naser posits<sup>37</sup> that in a business-as-usual scenario, where countries do not strive to conserve groundwater as a strategic reserve, this water will be either depleted or salinized. Both of these scenarios would affect people and economies, as 71 per cent of GDP in the Arab region (North Africa included) is threatened by water scarcity.<sup>38</sup>

For example, southern and central parts of Algeria heavily rely on groundwater, and it is overexploited, as the withdrawals exceed the recharge rate, which causes contamination and salinization.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Water, Food and Energy // UN Water. URL: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-food-and-energy/>

<sup>37</sup> Dr. El-Naser, Hazim. The Political and Economic Consequences of Groundwater Depletion in the Arab Region // Middle East Water Forum. 08.07.2019. URL: <https://www.mewf.de/social-post/the-political-and-economic-consequences-of-groundwater-depletion-in-the-arab-region-by-dr-hazim-el-naser>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Sleet P. Water Protests in Algeria Are Giving Cause for Concern about its Long-Term Stability // Future Directions International. 01.05.2019. URL: <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/water-protests-in-algeria-are-giving-cause-for-concern-about-its-long-term-stability/>

As for surface water, it is already a disputed topic on the regional agenda. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was not supported by Egypt, as this project would lead to an increased deficit of freshwater for the Republic. Therefore, several rounds of negotiations were launched, yet Ethiopia refused to sign the Renaissance Dam Agreement in late February 2020.<sup>40</sup> The existence of potential peril to water security motivated Egypt to modernize its legal framework and take steps to tackle water scarcity.<sup>41</sup> It has also implemented the National Water Resources Plan in 2017 to mitigate potential freshwater losses.<sup>42</sup>

It is also important to mention that there are several factors that are likely to exacerbate current problems: climate change, population growth, and an increasing demand for water will put more pressure on national governments and local communities to find sustainable solutions to water scarcity.

Thus water-related issues should not be neglected, as they directly affect the well-being of people. Water shortage already spurs social unrest in North Africa: such protests have already happened, for example, in Algeria<sup>43</sup>, Egypt<sup>44</sup>, and Sudan<sup>45</sup>. Without significant changes, water shortage will cause more instability in the region heavily dependent on rare precipitations and outside sources.

Besides, it is important to acknowledge that water-related issues are worsened by ongoing internal conflicts and civil wars. War in Libya and the ongoing conflict in Sudan's Darfur worsen water problems, as people in these areas have much less access to drinking water and sanitation, which in turn might cause water-borne diseases.

Therefore, water scarcity issues pose a substantial threat to stability in the region; environmental risks and political unrest could exacerbate already existing challenges. Yet, it is also an opportunity for North African countries to tackle these issues, develop national and regional initiatives, and cooperate with international actors.

## **Food Security in North Africa**

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the North Africa region is struggling to achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal – zero hunger by 2030. As of today, there are approximately 820 million people globally who don't have enough food to eat. Seventeen million of them live in North Africa, which makes up 2.07 per cent of the overall amount.

<sup>40</sup> Youness A. Egypt takes measures in response to collapse of Renaissance Dam talks // Al-Monitor. 05.03.2020.  
URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/renaissance-dam-effects-egypt-water-rationalization-use.html>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Egypt's National Water Resources Plan // FAOLEX Database. 01.01.2017.  
URL: <http://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/r/c/LEX-FAOC147082/>

<sup>43</sup> The unrest caused by water crisis continues in several Algerian provinces (Arab.) // As-Shorouk Online. 14.08.2019.  
URL: <https://www.echoroukonline.com/تواصل-الاحتجاجات-على-أزمة-المياه-بعدة/>

<sup>44</sup> IRIN: The number of water protests in Egypt is increasing. The crisis is expected to exacerbate (Arab.) // Almasryalyoum. 29.07.2010. URL: <https://www.almasyalyoum.com/news/details/89505>

<sup>45</sup> Protest against the lack of water in Al-Fatihah (Arab.) // Al-Rakoba. URL: <https://bit.ly/2y5SP44>

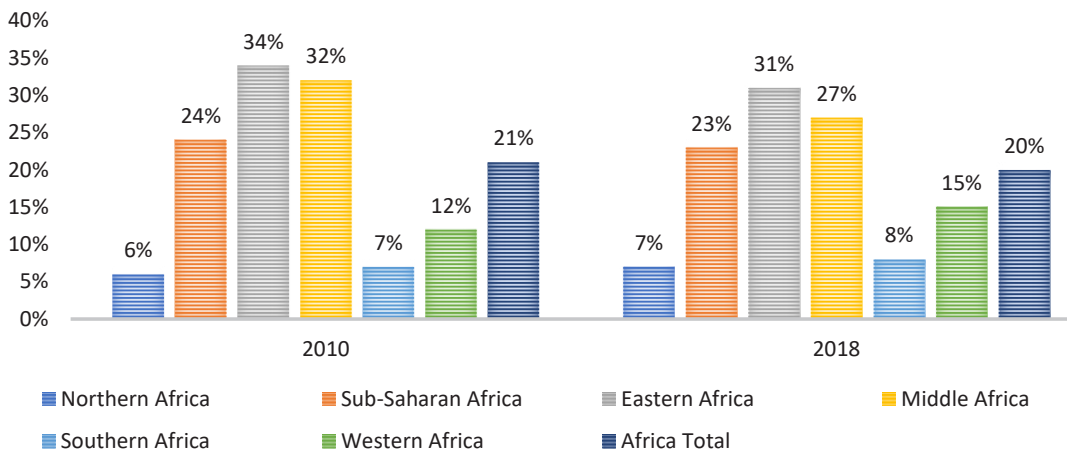
Analysing the extent of the problem, as well as finding possible solutions, is no easy feat. Although there is no single tool that can provide a comprehensive assessment of the level of food security in a country, there are several instruments that, used in conjunction with one another, can help assess the many dimensions of food and nutrition security.

Two of those often referred to by FAO are the *Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) indicator*<sup>46</sup> and the *Food Insecurity Experience Scale Survey Module (FIES-SM)*<sup>47</sup>.

The first, PoU, is used to measure progress towards the SGD target 2.1, which is to “end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular, the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.”<sup>48</sup> PoU is, in essence, the percentage of the population that lacks food security.

FIES-SM, on the other hand, is a survey of eight carefully worded questions that comprise the basis of different types of population surveys. The questions revolve around so-called “self-reported food-related behaviours,” including questions about how often respondents run out of food at home or are forced to skip a meal, amongst others. Answers to these questions provide a deeper look into the level of food insecurity in a country or community.

If we look at the PoU indicator in North Africa, the regional average was about 7 per cent in 2018. This is the lowest level in comparison with all other African regions, with the average result for the continent at 19.9 per cent.<sup>49</sup>



**Figure 3. Comparison of PoU in Africa in 2010 and 2018 (per cent of population)**

Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World // FAO,  
URL: <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition>

<sup>46</sup> Sustainable Development Goals, Indicator 2.1.1 - Prevalence of undernourishment // FAO. 02.04.2020.  
URL: <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/211/en/>

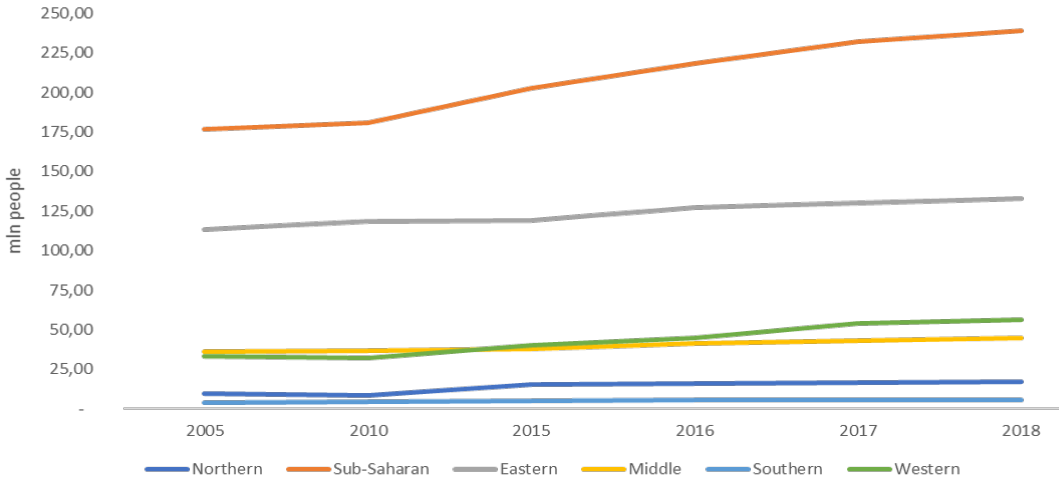
<sup>47</sup> The Food Insecurity Experience Scale // FAO. 02.04.2020. URL: <http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>

<sup>48</sup> Target 2.1: Food for all // UNCTAD Stats. 07.04.2020. URL: [https://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/people/goal2/target\\_2\\_1.html](https://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/people/goal2/target_2_1.html)

<sup>49</sup> The state of food security and nutrition in the world // FAO. 2019.  
URL: <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>



Although North Africa seems to show more promising results than the rest of the continent, its figures are still higher than in both Latin America (5.7 per cent) and Central Asia (5.7 per cent). Additionally, a comparison of Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that despite the modest-looking 7 per cent of North Africa’s population in the risk category, that still makes up 70 million people.



**Figure 4. Undernourished People in Africa from 2005-2018 (million people)**

Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World // FAO.  
 URL: <http://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition>

A closer look at the data exposes a more complex picture in terms of a fairly lopsided geographical structure of hunger in the region itself. Almost half of North Africa’s undernourished population is in Sudan – 8, 2 million people. With a population of 41.8 million<sup>50</sup>, that accounts for a startling 20 per cent of the population. Egypt accounts for approximately one-quarter of undernourishment in the region – 4.4 million out of its 98.4 million population<sup>51</sup>. In Algeria, the figure is 1.6 million (out of 42.2 million<sup>52</sup> citizens), for Morocco – 1.2 million (out of 36 million<sup>53</sup>), and for Tunisia – 0.5 million (out of 11.6 million<sup>54</sup>).<sup>55</sup>

There are several reasons for the disproportionate distribution, the most prominent of which can be considered economic shocks, conflicts, and regional turmoil, as well as climate change.

<sup>50</sup> Population, total – Sudan (2018) // World Bank Development Indicators.  
 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SD>

<sup>51</sup> Population, total - Egypt, Arab Rep. (2018) // World Bank Development Indicators.  
 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=EG>

<sup>52</sup> Population, total – Algeria (2018) // World Bank Development Indicators.  
 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=DZ>

<sup>53</sup> Population, total - Morocco (2018) // World Bank Development Indicators.  
 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=MA>

<sup>54</sup> Population, total - Tunisia (2018) // World Bank Development Indicators.  
 URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=TN>

<sup>55</sup> FAO Stat. URL: <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en> (no data available for Libya)

As for the link between conflict and food security, international organizations have established a clear link between the increase in the number of armed conflicts in North Africa with the deterioration of food security.<sup>56</sup> The ongoing Libyan civil war, Sudanese political crises, as well as overall regional instability have stunted progress.

In the paper “The Food Crises and Political Instability in North Africa and the Middle East,” authors were able to establish<sup>57</sup> that “food prices are the precipitating condition for social unrest” and even go as far as “identifying a specific global food price threshold for unrest.” This idea is backed up by the fact that, according to FAO, undernourishment has not risen in countries unaffected by conflict. This concept creates a vicious cycle of food insecurity, laying the ground for conflict and various military interventions, which then lead to the further deterioration of food security.

Nonetheless, there is promise for North Africa to be able to break the cycle. The 2018 FAO Near East and North Africa (NENA) Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition notes that “improvements in hunger and food security and nutrition are positively associated with the degree of rural transformation.” This entails boosting agricultural productivity, fighting rural poverty and overhauling rural infrastructure and services. Nonetheless, North African governments have not done enough to facilitate such transformation, focusing, instead, on the availability of staple foods. Such policies have done a considerable amount to limit undernourishment levels but fail to decrease the local population’s malnutrition levels and promote agricultural and rural transformation.

## **The Morocco Green Plan: An Example of a Successful Agricultural Strategy**

Although the issues of water and food scarcity are pressing, North African countries strive to improve the current situation. Morocco aims to be at the forefront of food security and climate discussions in Africa. The country hosted several international events that underlined the importance of the agricultural and climate agenda. For example, in 2016, Morocco hosted the UN Climate Change Conference, during which the Adaptation of African Agriculture initiative was launched.<sup>58</sup>

Besides, the Kingdom exceeds in fertilizer production, and Morocco’s OCP Group has signed several deals with African countries. A chemical plant in Ethiopia is to be launched in 2023/2024, while an ammonia plant will be built in Nigeria.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition // FAO. URL: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca3817en/ca3817en.pdf> (page 3)

<sup>57</sup> Marco Lagi, Karla Z. Bertrand and Yaneer Bar-Yam. The Food Crises and Political Instability in North Africa and the Middle East // New England Complex Systems Institute. 19.07.2011 (revised 10.08.2011). URL: <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1108.2455.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> How is Morocco Contributing to Achieve Food Security in Africa? // The North Africa Post. 17.05.2017. URL: <http://northafricapost.com/17889-morocco-contributing-achieve-food-security-africa.html>

<sup>59</sup> Eljechtimi A. UPDATE 1-Morocco's OCP plans African chemical plants, fertiliser blenders // Reuters. 04.03. 2019. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/morocco-phosphate/update-1-moroccos-ocp-plans-african-chemical-plants-fertiliser-blenders-idUSL5N20R4TG>

Morocco also has succeeded in implementing its “Green Morocco Plan” (PMV), which aimed to use agriculture as a catalyst for socioeconomic development.<sup>60</sup> Since the year of the Plan’s implementation in 2008, the average growth of agricultural production was 7 per cent, leading to increased productivity and investments.<sup>61</sup>

Despite its success in providing jobs for 11 per cent of the population, PMV did not tackle the dependence of irrigation on rainwater. Nonetheless, Morocco showed a holistic approach to the problem by introducing the National Irrigation Water Saving Programme (PNEEI) in 2009. While achieving its objectives, Morocco gained technical and financial support from international institutions, like the World Bank<sup>62</sup> and the African Development Bank<sup>63</sup>. For example, cooperation with the World Bank provided tangible results, and more local farmers were able to increase the number of irrigation technologies implemented.

Although a lot of work still is to be done, Morocco could serve as one of the examples of progress in tackling water and food-related issues.

## **Opportunities for Russia and Egypt**

Plans to intensify cooperation between the two countries are complemented by the following factors: a history of political cooperation, successfully launched Russian projects in the country, and Egypt’s growing desire to spearhead development initiatives and assume the role of regional leader. Additionally, the Russia-Egypt cooperation model could serve as an example for future Russian cooperation strategies in the field of water and food security with other countries of the region.

**Nuclear desalination.** The construction of the El Dabaa nuclear plant provides opportunities for enlarging Egypt’s desalination capacities by 170 000 m<sup>3</sup>/day, as it is planned that desalination facilities will be integrated into the plant.<sup>64</sup> IAEA considers nuclear desalination to be a viable option, given that it meets all the requirements and assessments.<sup>65</sup> In fact, ROSATOM actively participates in regional events that cover this matter. For instance, during the 5th Arab Forum on the Nuclear Energy Prospects for Electricity Generation and Seawater Desalination.<sup>66</sup> However, nuclear desalination should not be the only way to cooperate in water security.

<sup>60</sup> Vartanyan A.M. Morocco: growing ambitions for regional leadership in food security and climate (Рус.) // The Institute of the Middle East. 04.11.2019. URL: <http://www.iimes.ru/?p=62856>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Moroccan Farmers Save Water on Irrigation and Increase Agricultural Production // World Bank. 16.10.2019. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2019/10/16/moroccan-farmers-save-water-on-irrigation-and-increase-agricultural-production>

<sup>63</sup> A Focus on Green Growth: the Green Morocco Plan // AfDB. 19.05.2013. URL: <https://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/selected-projects/a-focus-on-green-growth-the-green-morocco-plan-77>

<sup>64</sup> Russia offers nuclear desalination bundle // World Nuclear News. 04.03.2015. URL: <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Russia-offers-nuclear-desalination-bundle-0403151.html>

<sup>65</sup> Nuclear Desalination // IAEA. URL: <https://www.iaea.org/topics/non-electric-applications/nuclear-desalination>

<sup>66</sup> ROSATOM took part in the 5th Arab Forum on the Nuclear Energy Prospects for Electricity Generation and Seawater Desalination // Rosatom, 10.12.2019. URL: [https://rosatom.ru/en/press-centre/news/rosatom-took-part-in-the-5th-arab-forum-on-the-nuclear-energy-prospects-for-electricity-generation-a/?sphrase\\_id=1300153](https://rosatom.ru/en/press-centre/news/rosatom-took-part-in-the-5th-arab-forum-on-the-nuclear-energy-prospects-for-electricity-generation-a/?sphrase_id=1300153)

**Wastewater treatment.** Russia has expertise in the implementation of wastewater treatment technologies in the MENA region. For example, ECOS Group is successfully operating using its technology in Saudi Arabia,<sup>67</sup> where treated water can be used for irrigation. Egypt's first public-private project was the construction of the New Cairo Wastewater Treatment Plant.<sup>68</sup> Russian companies could take part in wastewater treatment by establishing their plants in Egypt.

**Cooperation in agriculture.** As for agriculture and food security, the Russia-Egypt partnership presents a multitude of mutually beneficial opportunities.

**First,** Egypt is a key importer of Russian agriculture produce, particularly grains, and the world's largest wheat importer. Additionally, bilateral trade is set to grow in the future, with the increase in livestock products exports<sup>69</sup>. Another interesting prospect could be the creation of joint agricultural ventures, as one has already seen on the example of the Russian EFKO and Egyptian United Oil in the fat-and-oil market<sup>70</sup>.

**Second,** the Russian Industrial Zone in Egypt could become a unique platform for the expansion of Russian business not only in Egypt but on the broader markets of the entire African continent and the Middle East. Russian companies working in the zone will be localized under favourable conditions with access to updated infrastructure and services. This could open the door for the more widespread implementation of Russian agricultural technologies in the region, cementing Russia's role as an up-and-coming global agricultural giant.

**Third,** opportunities arising from the pioneer Russian Industrial Zone in Egypt stand to be enhanced by African economic integration movements, particularly the African Continental Free Trade Area. Since "the country's main foreign markets for its grain are the Middle East and North Africa,"<sup>71</sup> the FTA and consequent simplified trading regulations could boost the regional export of Russian produce and technologies in Africa.

<sup>67</sup> Russian Technologies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia // ECOS Group.  
URL: <https://www.ecosgroup.com/press/articles/rossiyskie-tehnologii-v-ksa/>

<sup>68</sup> New Cairo Wastewater Treatment Plant // Water Technology Website.  
URL: <https://www.water-technology.net/projects/new-cairo-wastewater/>

<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Putin called Africa a promising food export destination // Agriinvestor. 23.10.2019.  
URL: <https://www.agriinvestor.ru/regions/news/32640-putin-nazval-afriku-perspektivnym-napravleniem/>

<sup>70</sup> Russia and Egypt will create a joint venture for the production of fat and oil products // Ministry of Agriculture. 24.10.2019. URL: <http://mcx.ru/press-service/news/rossiya-i-egipet-sozdadut-sovmestnoe-predpriyatie-po-proizvodstvu-maslozhirovoy-produktsii/>

<sup>71</sup> Liefert W.M., Liefert O. Russian agricultural trade and world markets // The Russian Journal of Economics. 6 (2020) 56–70.  
URL: <https://rujec.org/article/50308/>

## 2.2. Water and Food Sustainability in North Africa

Shaimaa  
Magued

The water crisis in North Africa is an early warning sign. Water availability and volatility affect all economic activities, and the increasing water scarcity results in undermining food and energy security. With increasing restrictions on water and increasing demands for food and energy, North Africa suffers the consequences of unmanaged trade-offs among these sectors. Groundwater depletion due to excessive pumping, dependence on cheap energy sources for desalination, and over-abstraction of surface water to maintain irrigation for food self sufficiency; are all examples of such interactions that can place stress on social, economic and environmental systems, if left unmanaged.

Taking action to address the water crisis requires looking beyond the water sector – understanding the synergies and managing the risks arising from the link to energy and food policies. Water, energy, and agriculture are traditionally dealt with in investment planning. For each of these sectors, regulatory frameworks, organizations and infrastructure have been established to address the specific challenges and demands of each sector. While the North African region works towards building a more sustainable future and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a need for a different approach that views the relevant demands and policies arising from different sectors as interdependent and emerging as a joint response to social, economic and environmental trends. To enable planning and identification of these synergies and risks in the long term, this paper focuses on the Water-Energy-Food Nexus in North Africa to help policy-makers develop long-term visions of sustainability and security, and analyse cross-sectoral impacts via a range of potential future scenarios for global social, economic and environmental change.

### Challenges and Risks

Water scarcity is expected to increase, and non-renewable groundwater reserves may disappear by the year 2050, which is commonly referred to as “demand-driven scarcity” or “use-to-availability ratio.” Focusing on demand-driven scarcity means comparing the amount of renewable freshwater drawn from rivers and aquifers with the total available renewable freshwater resources. During the coming decades, increasing water scarcity will affect all economies. The estimated water scarcity index for 2015 and 2050 shows an increase throughout the region. Groundwater resources are subjected to stress, as non-renewable groundwater reserves are expected to disappear in most parts of the region by 2050 under a “business as usual” scenario.<sup>72</sup> Non-renewable groundwater resources consist of water that seeped into the underground thousands of years ago when climatic conditions were different, and which remained stored underground until

<sup>72</sup> Falkenmark M., Bertell A., Jägerskog A., Lundqvist J., Matz M., and Tropp H. “On the Verge of a New Water Scarcity: A Call for Good Governance and Human Ingenuity.” SIWI Policy Brief. Stockholm International Water Institute, Stockholm, Sweden. 2007.

humans began to withdraw it. Non-renewable groundwater is counted as a strategic resource for resilience to shocks, and its depletion ultimately undermines livelihoods and economies. Groundwater counts as an important source of supply and is often used as a buffer against drought. With groundwater depletion, its quality also decreases and its cost becomes increasingly higher. This leads to the increased cost of exploitation and ultimately the depletion of resources, rendering groundwater extraction uneconomic with significant implications for food security, as well as large-scale farming systems. Most economies show that non-renewable groundwater reserves would be depleted by 2050. Water scarcity will not disappear, so it is important to understand its effects on multiple sectors and develop strategic responses. As a result of the increased stress on water resources due to population growth and development, along with the region's arid and highly variable climate, there would be an upward trend in water scarcity. The region's high demand for water is the main factor behind this upward trend.

If human impacts and demands are the main drivers of the increasing water scarcity, they are also the areas where interventions aiming at addressing such scarcity challenges are the most urgent. Increasing water scarcity will cost the region hundreds of billions of dollars due to the missing agricultural production by 2050 and requires shifts in electricity generation as a result of water scarcity and the increasing cost of groundwater exploitation. Agricultural production is expected to decline significantly, by as much as 60 per cent in some economies.<sup>73</sup> Water supplies will be affected due to the increased cost of pumping groundwater from greater depths and the availability of surface water. In view of the essential role of water as a factor of production in agriculture, reducing its supply has significant negative effects on crop production, and the production of wheat and other grains is expected to suffer more from the constraints of water availability.

The declining agricultural production will have consequences for food security and self-sufficiency. The demand for food is relatively inflexible, so an increase in food prices within the region due to a decrease in domestic production will not lead to a similar drop in demand. To address this decline in supply, the economies of the region should increasingly rely on importing food to meet domestic consumption. This requires strong international trade and safety nets to protect the most vulnerable from global food price fluctuations. Projected reductions in agricultural production promote the interest in large-scale land acquisitions outside the region, although such practices can have negative effects on affected communities if not done in a reasonable manner and by following the Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI or PRI).

The decline in agricultural production involves significant agricultural commodity exports revenue losses, which will cost the region hundreds of billions of dollars by 2050. The decline in agricultural production has significant economic consequences, which would lead to a drop of about USD 50 billion in total net agricultural exports by 2050. Water scarcity affects electricity generation in addition to

<sup>73</sup> Dozier A.Q., Arabi M., Wostoupal B.C., Goemans C.G., Zhang Y., and Paustian K. 2017. "Declining Agricultural Production in Rapidly Urbanizing Semi-Arid Regions: Policy Tradeoffs and Sustainability Indicators." *Environmental Research Letters* 12 (8).

the cost of facing the increasing scarcity, which is estimated at tens of billions of dollars. Investments in less water-intensive electricity generation technologies, such as solar and wind energy, are required to deal with groundwater depletion and surface water scarcity. These investments are far less than required to ensure food security in the water-stressed North African region, mainly because the region already heavily relies on cooling technologies for generating electricity with the limited withdrawal of freshwater. However, the shift towards less water-intensive electricity generation is estimated to cost USD 50 billion by 2050 and USD 150 billion by 2100.<sup>74</sup> Economies facing conditions of extreme scarcity will have to invest in more expensive energy cooling options that are also low-carbon power sources in order to provide an opportunity for gains.

Increasing water supplies along with desalination may impede progress towards the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly with the use of non-conventional water resources that will need to be significantly enhanced in order to meet the anticipated demands. Supply-side responses include developing a variety of solutions; including recycling and reuse of sewage, rainwater, stormwater collection, and desalination of water. The cost of these investments will depend on available technologies. If these are assumed to be the current technologies and production cost of the present time, more than USD 40 billion will need to be spent on non-conventional water resources by 2050 with this number rising to USD 110 billion by 2100.<sup>75</sup>

There are trade-offs between increasing supplies and decarbonising the economies of the region. Providing water to farms, industries and households is already an extremely energy-intensive job. Pumping for irrigation and drainage consumes about 6 per cent of total electricity and diesel in North Africa. On average, desalinated water provided to domestic users requires 23 times more energy than that required for the extraction and treatment of surface water and costs four to five times more than treating freshwater.<sup>76</sup> Unless water recycling is integrated into water supply systems and the use of renewable energies for desalination becomes prevalent, increasing water supplies with fossil fuels may make it difficult for economies to reach the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets expressed in the Paris Agreement.

## **Opportunities**

Reducing water demand and reliance on food and energy sectors help reduce water scarcity.

Reducing water dependence and demand in the food and energy sectors should be the overarching goal of water and food energy policies in the water-stressed North Africa region. When the region becomes drier and is exposed to rising temperatures, policies that reduce the economy's reliance on water and have less effect on

<sup>74</sup> Burchi S. 2012. "A Comparative Review of Contemporary Water Resources Legislation: Trends, Developments and an Agenda for Reform." *Water International* 37 (6): 613-27.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Bazilian M., Rogner H., Howells M., Hermann S., Arent D., et al. 2011. Considering the Energy, Water and Food Nexus: Towards an Integrated Modeling Approach." *Energy Policy* 39 (12): 7896-906.

the climate are essential for development and stability. To achieve this overarching goal, multiple strategies can be developed and implemented to enhance the use of non-conventional water resources and transform energy systems.

Agricultural and food production systems play a key role in valuing water and using it in a more productive manner. Some of these measures include monitoring usage, modernizing irrigation systems, increasing farm water productivity, and reducing losses in food supply chains. Using satellite data to find land areas where water use does not lead to optimal agricultural production is a means of water assessment and can be used to improve agricultural decisions or to change irrigation techniques. Modernization of irrigation systems is another important measure, as evidenced by the low ratio of water required for water withdrawal in many of the region's economies and the significant losses due to leakage and evaporation. Another method of water assessment is by increasing farm water productivity, such as by increasing farmers' skills in managing irrigation timing and investing in accurate delivery techniques, such as drip or bubbler irrigation.<sup>77</sup> The abandonment of using water-intensive cooling technologies in the generation of thermal energy and improvement of efficiency can reduce water needs for generating electricity. Power plants that use single-use cooling technologies are likely to be phased out and replaced by lower recycling technologies for seawater or dry cooling.

## **Switching to renewable energy sources can reduce water scarcity**

The trend towards adopting renewable energy contributes to reducing water use in the energy sector. Despite the varying adoption extent of the various renewable energy technologies, comprehensive studies by the International Energy Agency (IEA) have shown that it is possible for the region to depend on renewable energy. Waterless electricity generation technologies could grow tenfold by 2050, largely as a result of the continued expansion of wind and solar photovoltaic technologies.<sup>78</sup> Depending on the level of commitment, climate change mitigation policies are likely to accelerate this energy transition in North Africa. Nationally identified bodies describe the mitigation measures that economies plan to take to meet the Paris Agreement's goals. Several economies in the region have made unconditional commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Arab Republic of Egypt has not officially expressed any unconditional emission reduction targets but has provided some form of mitigation. This lack of voluntary commitments indicates that reducing greenhouse gas emissions may not be a driving force of regional energy policy.

Cooperation tools can support the policies addressing Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus Challenges.

<sup>77</sup> Falkenmark M., Bertell A., Jägerskog A., Lundqvist J., Matz M., and Tropp H. 2007. "On the Verge of a New Water Scarcity: A Call for Good Governance and Human Ingenuity. SIWI Policy Brief. Stockholm International Water Institute, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>78</sup> Hejazi M.I., Edmonds J., Clarke L., Kyle P., Davies E., Chaturvedi V., Wise M., Patel P., Eom J., and Calvin K. 2014. "Integrated Assessment of Global Water Scarcity over the 21st Century under Multiple Climate Change Mitigation Policies." *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences* 18: 2859-83. URL: <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-18-2859-2014>.



Increasing cooperation among sectors is essential to address the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus Challenges. Cooperation and partnerships on water, agriculture and energy add value to government and the technological measures needed to meet such challenges. Regional partnerships along with national, regional and global actors work towards enhancing development and confidence in North Africa, as well as benefiting from the resources and knowledge needed to develop innovative and comprehensive solutions. Regional initiatives, such as the Interdependence Dialogue Program of the League of Arab States, provide platforms to guide the development of policies that address water, food and energy challenges. Similarly, partnerships between bilateral and multilateral development institutions, such as the Arab Coordination Group, can enhance coordination to create more effective policies for linking water, energy and food in a nexus.

### **Recommendations**

Results show an increase in water scarcity over the coming decades. The estimated water scarcity index for 2015 and 2050 shows an increase throughout the region. Long-term measures are required to deal with this permanent scarcity in terms of ensuring sustainability and improvements in water use efficiency, but most economies still face an increase in water scarcity ranging between 25 per cent and 50 per cent.<sup>79</sup>

### **Valuation of Water**

Addressing the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) nexus in the twenty-first century requires the evaluation of water. Water evaluation is a difficult task due to the physical, economic, social and cultural characteristics of water, yet it is a necessary step towards improving resource management and improving water-related outcomes. Governments must report conditions of water scarcity using tools such as Transparent Allocation of Resources and pricing or waiving water rights. Although there is widespread recognition of water scarcity in North Africa, its productive value is rarely recognized. Many economies have some of the lowest water productivity rates in the world, and low productivity occurs when water is not reliably delivered to where it can be used in a more productive manner. Preparing the region for some of the inevitable consequences of water scarcity implies the recognition of the productive value of water.

Water assessment efforts can take many forms, such as economic and administrative tools. At the level of domestic users in North Africa, domestic users only pay a small fraction of the cost of service provision, although this situation is now reversed as many economies phase out water subsidies. Water tariffs must be carefully increased to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable populations have access to water. At the level of agricultural uses of water, there are multiple methods of evaluating water and using it in a more productive manner. Some of these measures include monitoring usage, modernizing irrigation systems,

<sup>79</sup> Verner, Dorte. 2012. *Adaptation to a Changing Climate in the Arab Countries: A Case for Adaptation Governance and Leadership in Building Climate Resilience*. MENA development report. Washington, DC: World Bank.

increasing farm water productivity, and reducing losses in food supply chains. For example, satellite data can be used to find areas where water use does not lead to optimal agricultural production and this information can then be converted into improved agricultural decisions or changes in irrigation techniques. Modernization of irrigation systems is another important measure, as evidenced by the low ratio of water required for water withdrawal in many economies and the significant losses due to leakage and evaporation. Another method is to increase farm water productivity such as by improving farmers' skills for better irrigation timing management and investing in accurate delivery techniques such as drip or bubbler irrigation.<sup>80</sup>

Improving water assessment and management requires strengthening legal frameworks. When it comes to water, most economies in North Africa have legal frameworks that are less comprehensive than the global average. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity as the legislation provides a fundamental tool for sustainable water resources management. Government legislation to support sustainable water management may include describing the maximum permissible withdrawals to conserve water quantities (especially groundwater), establishing impact assessments of the proposed withdrawals, and implementing water resource plans. In quest of improving water distribution to maximize its productive value, strong legal frameworks would be essential to ensure the equitable allocation of resources while providing the opportunity for efficiency gains.

### **Increasing Non-Conventional Supplies**

Non-conventional water resources, including desalination and recycling, provide opportunities to alleviate water scarcity, especially for high value-added water uses. With moderate improvements in agricultural productivity and land-use practices, the region will still need to increase supplies by 35 per cent of the current levels by 2030 and by 60 per cent of the current levels by 2050. In terms of water volumes, this means that the region is expected to reach additional supplies of about 12 million cubic meters per day by 2025, 68 million cubic meters per day by 2050, and currently 34 million cubic meters per day. Advanced technologies for wastewater recycling and water desalination are viable alternatives to increase supplies, especially for the growing urban centres and adjacent irrigation areas.<sup>81</sup> Moderate efficiency measures are implemented only by the demand side. Under a more efficient scenario, the expected levels of supply would be somewhat lower owing to the long-term effects of the demand management and water reallocation processes. Integrating water reuse into the water supply portfolio will be the key to meeting the growing demands and achieving water security. About 80 per cent of the region's wastewater is discharged to the environment without being reused. At present, some treated wastewater is recycled into agricultural systems or injected into coastal aquifers, especially to prevent saltwater intrusion. Positive experiences in the region, for example in Tunisia, show that wastewater can be

<sup>80</sup> Kim S.H., Edmonds J., Lurz J., Smith S.J., and Wise M. 2006. The Objects Framework for Integrated Assessment: Hybrid Modeling of Transportation." *Energy Journal* 2: 51-80.

<sup>81</sup> Kajenthira A., Siddiqi A., and Anadon L.D. 2012. "A New Case for Promoting Wastewater Reuse in Saudi Arabia: Bringing Energy into the Water Equation." *Journal of Environmental Management* 102: 184-92.

safely recycled for use in irrigation and for managed aquifer recharge (MAR). When wastewater is already treated according to high standards or investments in wastewater treatment are planned, recycling must be considered as a part of integrated water management strategies to meet known demand.

Water recycling also provides opportunities in the Hydropower Association. Water recycling can be achieved by capturing and reusing wastewater treatment by-products. This contributes to reducing emissions from the water sector and reduces the overall energy demand. Water recycling in the energy sector offers a more economically attractive alternative to expensive desalination or overexploitation of freshwater, especially when the full cost of depletion is taken into account. Desalination offers a reliable water supply potential, and recent advances in membrane technology have made desalination an increasingly viable alternative to conventional freshwater resources. However, the environmental impacts of brine disposal on marine ecosystems increasingly constrain the expansion of desalination. When seawater is desalinated, brine waste is produced and is usually disposed of into the surrounding marine waters. In enclosed and shallow seas, these impacts can be significant and may exceed the negative impact on marine ecosystems to weaken the desalination processes as well. Higher levels of salinity make desalination more expensive; in the long run, desalination plants need more energy to desalinate the same volume of water due to higher salinity levels.

Adoption of unconventional sources of water supply is deemed to be a challenging issue, especially if they have to replace the depletion of groundwater resources. Depletion of groundwater resources means that previously met demands for groundwater must be met through alternative supply sources. Groundwater is a widely abundant resource in many parts of North Africa and is a crucial source of supply in rural areas. Its replacement with alternative supplies is a difficult issue; especially because unconventional resources, such as desalination and wastewater reuse, require large-cap investments for water treatment and transportation. With the depletion of groundwater and the gradual increase of unconventional supplies, economies will face challenges related to the cost of such more common water supply options.

Promoting water recycling requires awareness of the real cost of depleting freshwater resources. If the real cost of depleting freshwater resources is taken into account, integrating water recycling into supply systems will have an economic sense. The economic cost of depleting freshwater resources, and its related effects on livelihoods and ecosystems, is not traditionally included in food and energy policies. This renders the economic situation of water recycling somewhat less urgent and spurs overexploitation.

## **Progressing Towards Less Water-Intensive Renewable Electricity Generation**

Restructuring energy systems for shifting towards renewable energy sources contributes to water sustainability. The shift towards less water-intensive power

plant cooling technologies and investing in renewable less water-intensive technologies, such as solar photovoltaic and wind energy-based technologies, is estimated to cost 1 000 billion dollars by 2050. Gas and biomass, as well as solar photovoltaic cells, play an important role in adapting the electricity generation system to increased scarcity and competition for water resources. The shift towards renewable energy sources also means reducing the demand for water resources to generate electricity and the progress towards a less water-intensive energy sector that also depends on changing incentives. Raising groundwater pumping prices can reduce improper irrigation practices. In some cases, this can reach the limit of influencing national food policies, which would lead to turning away from food self-sufficiency policies towards greater reliance on global markets. Importing food products can help reduce energy and water consumption in the agricultural sector, as long as farmers have access to alternative livelihoods and income opportunities. The potential for increasing energy efficiency, which would provide an added benefit that needs to be integrated into water, energy, and food planning, is untapped yet. Cumulative investments through electricity generation technologies are also counted as an important source of meeting North Africa's projected demands in 2050. Several economies are already developing energy efficiency programs, including turning away from more energy-intensive desalination technologies such as the multi-stage flash distillation. These efforts need to be expanded and integrated into national strategies to reduce carbon emissions and sustain resources. Even if the transition to less water-intensive energy systems is costly, renewable energy sources still make economic sense. That is because when the availability of regional water and the cost of infrastructure are taken into account; in other words, when water scarcity is priced; less water-intensive energy technologies begin to make them economical. The shift towards renewables having low power density makes sense from the perspective of mitigating the effects of climate change. Economies will have to invest in less water-intensive technologies such as solar and wind energy if they are to achieve a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

# **Chapter 3. Unresolved Conflicts and Cross–Border Threats to Regional Security**

## **3.1. Unresolved Conflicts and Cross–Border Threats to Regional Security in North Africa**

Dmitry  
Tarasenko

When analysing cross-border threats in North Africa through the prism of Russia-Egypt interaction, the most logical approach would be to focus on three topics: the ongoing Libyan conflict; the fragile post-crisis Sudan; and the phenomenon of “rogue territories” in the North of the Sinai Peninsula. Of course, the problem of security in this region is not limited to these conflict spots. But the issues of Western Sahara, Berber and Kabyle separatism, the return of thousands of fighters to Tunisia and even the potential radicalization of the protests in Algeria are outside the scope of the Russia-Egypt agenda. At the same time, a number of issues that do have a direct impact on the situation in Egypt and the region as a whole, such as the crisis surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam or the struggle for oil and gas resources in the Mediterranean, formally extend beyond North Africa.

The countries of North Africa are not known for their extensive networks of interstate ties, effective supranational structures or stable internal hierarchies.<sup>82</sup> That is, they do not have even the rudiments of an autonomous security architecture. In these conditions, the politics of the local proto hegemon comes at an increased price, and the region becomes vulnerable to outside influence. A well-considered policy regarding the crises in North Africa will allow Russia to strengthen its positions in Africa and Western Asia.

### **Local Challenges for Russia–Egypt Relations**

Adherents of the geopolitical school tend to use such expressions as “soft underbelly” and “geographical determinism.” Despite the widespread criticism of the now obsolete discourse of Alfred Mahan, Nicholas Spykman and Halford Mackinder, security experts agree that stability in the border states is of tantamount importance.

The sheer scale and proximity of the crises in Sudan and Libya, as well as the involvement of third parties, undermine national security in Egypt. In particular, the smuggling of weapons and fighters across the border with Libya (1115 km) and Sudan (1276 km) with Sudan) complicates the fight against terrorists in the Sinai Peninsula. The threat of instability in the Egypt-Libya-Sudan triangle is forc-

<sup>82</sup> The countries in question are more inclined towards cooperation with states outside the region. They fear that instability in neighbouring countries will overflow into their territories: Tunisia, for example, keeps interactions with Libya to a minimum, while Morocco has closed its border with Algeria.

ing the Egyptian leadership to search for a formula for intervening in the affairs of its neighbours, both of which are teetering on the brink of collapse, in an acceptable manner. It should be noted that ensuring security is a central element of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's political career. Additionally, we should be mindful of the fact that aggressive interference in its neighbour's affairs does not really fit in with the cautious, non-expansionist policy pursued by Cairo, which has put a lot on the line to increase foreign investment.<sup>83</sup> As a result, Cairo is forced to limit its support for Khalifa Haftar in Libya to advising the Libyan National Army (LNA) and promoting the interests of the Tobruk Parliament at international venues.

Under President Omar al-Bashir (1993–2019), the problems inside Sudan often coincided with renewed interest in the disputed Halayib Triangle, military manoeuvres and the appearance of Muslim Brotherhood camps near the border with Egypt. The change of power in Sudan has given the Egyptian side the opportunity to build a new *modus operandi* on these issues. Understanding and accepting Cairo's natural concerns about the situation on the southern borders, the new Sudanese leadership has, during a time of instability, found legal ways for the Egyptian side to keep its "finger on the pulse" – namely, through meetings and consultations. For example, top Sudanese officials visited Egypt for consultations before the announcement of the Transitional Military Council and the subsequent Sovereignty Council, and before plans for a peaceful settlement in Darfur and South Kordofan regions were developed.

As for the Sinai Peninsula, it is quite obvious that this hotbed of instability on Egyptian territory needs to be dealt with. All we can say is that, not only do the militants in North Sinai pose a threat to the lives of the local population and impede the implementation of large-scale development projects on the peninsula, but they also hamper the development of the pillars of the Egyptian economy – tourism, construction and the energy sector. The costs of the incessant terrorist attacks to the image of a state that positions itself as an architect of the pan-African fight against terrorism are also high.

In today's conditions, security is being transformed into a dynamic category, involving constant efforts to compensate for emerging threats in dozens of areas – from the environment to the economy. It is no coincidence that providing the 100-million Egyptian population with jobs is officially just as important as the fight against the country's criminal underground.<sup>84</sup> Egypt is interested in securing construction contracts in post-conflict Libya, which would involve demonstrating its strengths, from infrastructure construction to the export of labour. Libya is so attractive to investors that oil and gas companies chose not to stop their activities even amid the unstable situation in the country.<sup>85</sup> Cairo has repeatedly expressed

<sup>83</sup> Egypt's Sisi Appeals for Foreign Investment // Al Arabiya News. 13.04.2015.  
URL: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2015/03/13/Sisi-appeals-to-world-for-more-investment.html>

<sup>84</sup> As Egypt's Population Hits 100 Million, Celebration Is Muted. // The New York Times. 11.02.2020.  
URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/world/middleeast/egypt-population-100-million.html>

<sup>85</sup> Oil Firms Will Return Despite Security Risk // Oxford Analytica. November 28, 2018.  
URL: <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/ES240224>

its interest in the restoration of its Arab neighbour, and has even estimated the first phase of work at USD 20 billion.<sup>86</sup>

The challenge here is the competition for preferential access to Libyan resources. The experience of armed conflicts demonstrates that a country can secure a concession to operate by sending its troops in time. The decision of the Turks to provide military assistance to the Favez al-Sarraj government following the signing by Tripoli and Ankara of an agreement on diversifying the borders of the Eastern Mediterranean vividly illustrates this thesis. Not only do solutions such as these serve as an additional barrier to resolving the conflict, but they also add fuel to the fire across all of western Asia. Another challenge is replacing the ruling elites following the collapse of regimes, especially if an antagonistic ruler is likely to stay in power in a neighbouring country. Relations between Tripoli and Cairo were far from ideal when Gaddafi was in power, but they were at least somewhat predictable.<sup>87</sup> History had drawn the “redlines” and the sides tried to stay behind them. Now, despite the lack of support for the Justice and Development Party among Libyan voters, it is widely represented in the power structures of the internationally recognized al-Sarraj government, as well as in the associated financial<sup>88</sup> and administrative state institutions.<sup>89</sup>

The challenges and cross-border threats in North Africa that directly affect Egypt’s national security are not nearly as important for Russia. First of all, we should mention the potential damage to the trade and economic interests of Russian companies that have a presence in Egypt and are engaged in everything from agriculture to nuclear energy. What is more, instability in Africa’s largest country will send shock waves throughout Africa and western Asia, where Moscow has been busy investing political capital over the past few years. Any large-scale crisis threatens to render these efforts meaningless.

## **The Possibilities for Russia–Egypt Relations**

So far, none of the projects for the peaceful settlement of the Libyan crisis have produced the desired result. The dozens of international mediators, negotiation platforms and road maps have proved to be no match for the chaotic negotiation process, the antagonistic approach of local players, the sheer size of the arsenals of local militias and the destructive influence of external actors. As for political and diplomatic efforts, Cairo, as an active participant in all the formats for resolving the crisis, has exhausted all of the usual options. The most important thing here is to get the point across that any form of independent and direct intervention

<sup>86</sup> Egyptian Firms Ready to HELP with USD 20bln First Phase to Rebuild Libya, Says FEDCOC Chief // Al-Ahram. 14.04.2019. URL: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/328207/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-firms-ready-to-help-with-blm-first-phase-.aspx>

<sup>87</sup> Egorin, A. Z. Modern Libya. Moscow: Institute for Israeli and Middle Eastern Studies, 1996, pp. 243–245.

<sup>88</sup> Libya’s Haftar Accuses Tripoli of Funding Muslim Brotherhood Militias // National. 28.10.2018. URL: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/libya-s-haftar-accuses-tripoli-of-funding-muslim-brotherhood-militias-1.754362>

<sup>89</sup> Sisi’s Ambitions in Libya // Carnegie Endowment. 30.11.2018. URL: [https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77847?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss](https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/77847?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss)

in the conflict by third parties is simply unacceptable.<sup>90</sup> Falling into the trap of exponentially growing outside support will only prolong the acute phase of the conflict, giving the parties false hope that a swift military victory is in the offing. At the same time, the conditional use of force to achieve a settlement to the crisis removes the possibility of forming a stable and inclusive system of state governance at the initial stage of the country's rebuilding, which would create the conditions for a new crisis and thus sharply increase the risks associated with any long-term investments in Libya's future.

The Egyptian side will be able to return to more specific measures during the post-conflict reconstruction of Libya, when one of the key tasks of the new authorities will be to integrate the population into a single legal and social whole. Population groups that have been excluded from the centralized socio-political system often turn to illegal activities and radical ideologies in their search for means of self-organization. What is more, radical Islam is likely to gain traction in a post-crisis society, mobilizing and dividing the population in equal measure.<sup>91</sup> To prevent such a scenario, Egypt could turn to the influential Al-Azhar University, the oldest centre of Sunni Islam learning in the world, especially since it has already been mentioned in Egypt's Africa strategy.<sup>92</sup> It is extremely likely that events could develop in a similar vein given the breakdown of the traditional social structure in Libya, which is losing its tribal identity as a result of the widespread urbanization of the country and the demographic rejuvenation of the population.

The army, which plays an important role in the West African region, will also need to undergo reforms in order to integrate the previously illegal armed units into society. What is more, national service in heterogeneous societies is a powerful *melting pot* for various social, ethnic and religious groups, which ultimately form the backbone of the regime. It could prove useful for Libya to hold consultations with its Egyptian partners, given the highly developed organization of the Egyptian Armed Forces and the fact that Egypt has trained high-ranking Libyan officers in the past.

It is worth noting that the main reason the initiative launched by Cairo in July 2017 to unite the Libyan armed forces failed was because the numerous centres of power in Libya were unwilling to part with the influence that they had for the sake of unclear benefits in the future. Egypt's efforts to create a unified army were also frustrated by the concerns of external observers, who believed that placing such an asset in the hands of Khalifa Haftar could disrupt the system of checks and balances in Libya moving forward.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> This principle was written into the Cairo declaration adopted on November 15, 2017 following consultations on Libya between the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs of Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria, and has been reiterated on numerous occasions by the Egyptian leadership at various regional and international venues, from the African Union to the United Nations.

<sup>91</sup> *Radical Islam and International Security: Challenges and Responses* / Edited by Hillel Frisch and Efraim Inbar. NY.: Routledge, 2008, pp. 71–93

<sup>92</sup> *Egypt's Role in Africa* // Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 20.03.2018. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/ForeignPolicy/EgyptianAfricanRelations/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>93</sup> *Can Cairo Talks Succeed in Uniting Libya's Divided Armed Forces?* // Al-Monitor. 15.02.2018. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/libya-army-spokesman-egypt-unite-elections-hifter.html#ixzz5hxvELXgZ>



The change of regime in Sudan gives Cairo the chance to build ties that ensure that such important issues as the activities of fugitive members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood cell in the territory of its southern neighbour, negotiations on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the political positions of Turkey and Qatar not taken off the agenda. In this narrative, the following steps taken by the Egyptian side warrant scrutiny: the launch of a new electric power transmission system during the crisis;<sup>94</sup> the flattering rhetoric with regard to the new authorities; the mediation efforts in Darfur; and the involvement in the resolution of contentious issues between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan.

The project to integrate the markets in the region and on the African continent as a whole will certainly benefit from the stabilization of the situations in Sudan and Libya. Activity is being stepped up in this area for Egypt and other countries that use Egypt as a logistics hub or a manufacturing base (including Russia) now that the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement has come into force.<sup>95</sup> The emergent cross-border trade in Ben Gardan<sup>96</sup> (on the Libya–Tunisia border) and Tamanrasset (on the Algeria–Libya border)<sup>97</sup> is indicative of the untapped potential of economic cooperation within the Maghreb. A striking example of how armed hostilities paralyse the beginnings of such activities is the worsening socioeconomic situation in Southern Tunisia and Western Libya after Haftar launched his offensive in Tripoli in April 2019.<sup>98</sup>

For Cairo, the restoration of statehood in neighbouring countries is closely related to the improved situation on its own job market.<sup>99</sup> The speed with which the security-obsessed Egyptian leadership agreed on the procedures for exporting labour to Libya as soon as there were signs in early 2019 that the situation might stabilize and a settlement could be a reality indicates exactly how important these projects are.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Egypt, Sudan Run Electricity Linkage Project at a Voltage of 220 KV // Egypt Independent. 05.05.2020.

URL: [https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-sudan-run-electric-linkage-project-at-a-voltage-of-220-kv/?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=32ee0c8bcd0e1dab43c1a7427489e4cf018ac2ee-1586419746-0-ASfsCY6gKNcbd\\_IFYyF\\_QZgkaOglfqcmCIZa qKcOVtkk6Z8v8Wqn6Sqe\\_f7P15mtiCx8z9ZQLiNNYkYD2R0GQ7eVXt1Zl6qPOqUXv-17jijjwcdAA8zm61oSPfEsQ-zR70Y8wggsVu83LtiVIXqwBOnZBujxy7XPP7WCiumCwnllrhctpy4fus6SHjOf04u92gBq5QJog1XSodEfIKBd3lpaMRKV qa9yDNOsnQ93QdGAsYFkPA3iX2su44hU2Afm7ysi89C7kSOFW3aJsJqZN4Aza7jOyV217LPaU6VtTxXCfT8sMlkQf qt\\_oFcM93xvxt8SM6PzO78iy9Byl\\_lqelUvT38-e761D1MG\\_VC-SY](https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-sudan-run-electric-linkage-project-at-a-voltage-of-220-kv/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=32ee0c8bcd0e1dab43c1a7427489e4cf018ac2ee-1586419746-0-ASfsCY6gKNcbd_IFYyF_QZgkaOglfqcmCIZa qKcOVtkk6Z8v8Wqn6Sqe_f7P15mtiCx8z9ZQLiNNYkYD2R0GQ7eVXt1Zl6qPOqUXv-17jijjwcdAA8zm61oSPfEsQ-zR70Y8wggsVu83LtiVIXqwBOnZBujxy7XPP7WCiumCwnllrhctpy4fus6SHjOf04u92gBq5QJog1XSodEfIKBd3lpaMRKV qa9yDNOsnQ93QdGAsYFkPA3iX2su44hU2Afm7ysi89C7kSOFW3aJsJqZN4Aza7jOyV217LPaU6VtTxXCfT8sMlkQf qt_oFcM93xvxt8SM6PzO78iy9Byl_lqelUvT38-e761D1MG_VC-SY)

<sup>95</sup> African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) // African Union. 01.01.2019.

URL: <https://au.int/en/videos/20190101/african-continental-free-trade-area-afcta>

<sup>96</sup> Photo Report: Ben Gardan as the Path to Libya (مقال مصور: خط بنفردان إلى ليبيا) // Carnegie Endowment. 30.04.2020. URL: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/81398>

<sup>97</sup> Breaking North Africa's Border Security Conundrum. // Carnegie Endowment. 05.03.2019.

URL: <https://carnegie-mec.org/sada/75998>

<sup>98</sup> Tunisia's Wake-Up Call: How Security Challenges From Libya Are Shaping Defense Reforms. // Carnegie Endowment. 18.03.2020. URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/tunisia-s-wake-up-call-how-security-challenges-from-libya-are-shaping-defense-reforms-pub-81312>

<sup>99</sup> Cairo expects the number of expats working in Libya to rise from 663 000 to 2 million in the short term (using 2011 indicators). This area of cooperation is extremely important for the Egyptian side in the context of the inflow of foreign currency into the country.

<sup>100</sup> Details of the Egypt–Libya Talks in Cairo on the Procedure for Egypt Exporting Labour to Libya

(تعرف على تفاصيل اتفاقية القاهرة وطرابلس لتنظيم دخول المصريين إلى ليبيا) // Shorouk News. 17.03.2018.

URL: <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=17032019&id=92dceed1-2f40-4477-b035-1875cc580edf>

Russia's geographic remoteness from North Africa, as well as the fact that it is less immersed in the dynamics of the conflicts in the region, mean that it has fewer opportunities for pursuing a nuanced policy there. Despite the fact that Moscow has been able to forge political capital in the centre of the crises (thanks to its ability to build pragmatic ties with several opposing actors at the same time), the real opportunities will likely only present themselves once the acute phase of the conflict is over – when, having exhausted all options involving the use of force, the parties will be forced to develop new rules of the game.

In the current situation, Russia can take part in developing the “new normal” of inter-state behaviour, which is being tested in regions of increased conflict potential. For example, in Western Asia, Russia can be involved in determining what constitutes sufficient or excessive interference in the affairs of states that are losing control over their domestic political processes. Those countries that defend the immutability of the principle of sovereignty are at the same time ready to change the international legal framework to state the opposite through UN Security Council Resolution 1373.<sup>101</sup> For example, in 2015, Cairo (a staunch supporter of the concept of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states) called on the Arab League members to sanction attacks on terrorist groups outside its borders after Islamic State militants carried out the mass execution of Egyptian Copts in Libya.

Egypt's interests in North Africa are deeply entrenched and thus transcend periods of instability. Russia too needs the situation to de-escalate – as well as a legitimate partner – if it is to realise its commercial aspirations. It is important to note here that, even after the peacebuilding projects were launched, the problems of ensuring the stability of formal constructs will remain relevant. External actors will have to convey the idea to the post-crisis elites that the results of socio-political modernization are no less tangible than the fruits of industrialization, which many countries in the East have already tasted. Ultimately, Russia and Egypt face different challenges when it comes to the conflicts in North Africa, and they each have a different set of diplomatic tools for wielding influence in the region. Their end goals, however, are complementary, which means that cooperation in this area is inevitable.

## Risks and Recommendations

1. The biggest risks to cooperation between Russia and Egypt result from the volatile security situation inside Egypt, since it concerns several strategic areas of cooperation at once – from the industrial zone on the Sinai Peninsula to the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant. Projects of this scale and complexity require security guarantees from the host country: the damage that a successful terrorist attack can do to bilateral relations and specific areas of interaction was clearly demonstrated by the fallout from the Airbus A321 disaster over the Sinai Peninsula in 2015.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> In 2001, the Resolution expanded the concept of armed attack to include “acts of indirect aggression” and, consequently, the boundaries of the right to self-defence.

<sup>102</sup> Mohamed, Tamer Z.F & Elseyoufi, Tamer S. “Terrorism in the Middle East: Implications on Egyptian Travel and Tourism,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 6: Issue 3, Article 7. 2018.

In this context, we should expect the dialogue between the two countries to result in closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism, as well as joint work in related areas, which have a stabilizing effect on the socioeconomic situation in the country. The modernization of the Egyptian agricultural sector should bring a sizeable payoff.<sup>103</sup>

2. Much like with Libya, prolonging the crisis increases the risk of the “tyranny of the status quo,” where the current situation starts to be seen as the only viable option. In these conditions, external players are shifting their focus from conflict resolution to exploiting the state of affairs to their own benefit. In the context of cross-border threats, while Russia and Egypt have different *a priori* motives, they pursue the very same goals. The immediate threats to Egypt’s national security force it to exercise a reasonable level of self-restraint and responsible leadership with regard to Libya and Sudan, while at the same time maintaining a level of instability in neighbouring territories. Russia, in turn, traditionally bases its policy on the export of security “on-demand,” the principle of the sovereignty of its partners in their domestic affairs, and cooperation to maximize the economic benefits of bilateral trade and to eliminate extremist threats.

The Russian Federation faces the following tasks if it is to deal with cross-border crises and threats in North Africa successfully:

1. It needs to adopt an impartial stance, which will allow it to participate in the settlement process without having to “take sides.” This is due to the risk of responsibility being shifted onto an “external sponsor” for the autonomous actions of a local centre of power. Building its presence in the region on the support of just one of the sides in the internal conflict, very much depends on the dynamics of that conflict (and the influence of the external actors in the cases we are looking at is extremely limited) and may very well render all the efforts null if the opposing camp emerges victorious.

2. It needs to keep an eye on what the parties to agreements are capable of, especially when it comes to transactions in countries where the legitimacy of those in power is questionable. Some of Russia’s largest companies learned this lesson the hard way when their obligations under certain contracts were revised following regime changes in Libya,<sup>104</sup> Iraq,<sup>105</sup> and Nigeria<sup>106</sup>. In the Middle East, contractual obligations do not always bring about commensurate opportunities, since local players are quick to sign agreements with influential foreign powers in order to both boost their legitimacy and ensure that the time and money invested by their new “sponsor” will force them to continue their support even if the situation of the local partner starts to deteriorate.

<sup>103</sup> Agriculture is the largest (12 per cent of GDP) and most profitable (USD 32.2 billion in 2019) sector of the Egyptian economy. One third of the workforce is employed in the agricultural sector, which provides a livelihood for 55 per cent of the population. At the same time, agriculture is the most backward sector in terms of technology and the production processes used. It is also vulnerable to natural disasters and volatility on the international markets.

<sup>104</sup> Russian Railways Could Lose Over 15 Billion Roubles Over Libyan Contract // RBK. 14.09.2011. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/14/09/2011/5703ec2b9a79477633d37c28>

<sup>105</sup> Rosneft Opens Up About Venezuela and Iraqi Kurdistan Debts // RBK. 06.11.2019. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/business/06/11/2019/5dc2c69a9a79474e0c1b9f09>

<sup>106</sup> Don't Go to Africa // Lenta.ru. 07.09.2012. URL: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2012/07/09/alscon/>

3. It needs to concentrate its efforts on counteracting those who “profit on instability.” The exacerbation of conflicts as a result of the opportunism of regional players and their desire to remain involved during periods of instability only serves to marginalize the problem of crisis settlement in the Middle East and world politics. This complicates Moscow’s activities in Western Asia as a whole. The best way to fight such practices is through diplomatic channels, or by exposing the most egregious violations of the relevant UN resolutions.

4. It needs to counteract growing instability through humanitarian and non-specific support on the ground. Sometimes the player who devotes its resources to “treating the symptoms not the disease” ends up in the most advantageous position, as the returns are greater. That is, at a time when the sides are at a “political impasse,” it is important to take measures to counterbalance the consequences of the conflict for the people inside the country: for example, improving food security or mitigating the impact of external sanctions on vulnerable population groups. This reduces the risk of Russia squandering its political capital as a successful mediator in the settlement of conflicts that are not susceptible to the “non-force” solutions of external actors.

## 3.2. Protracted Conflict Patterns, Cross–border Threats, and Regional Security in North Africa

Mohamed Badr  
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Despite the multiplicity of international conflict hotbeds in the world, it is noticeable that the most acute and tense of them are still located in the Middle East region. Despite the wide array of such hotbeds in the same region itself (Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen), the pace of conflict in Libya has recently escalated and has moved to an unprecedented level of polarization and attracted attention. On the other hand, a number of risks continue to exist in North Africa, with their danger increasing in light of the Libyan developments, the top of which are terrorism, risks related to the employment of political Islam in general, illegal immigration, as well as the challenges of development and poverty.<sup>107</sup>

This paper presents two main themes, the first of which is the conflict in Libya, and the second one addresses the other threats and risks, as well as the correlation between the two themes.

### The Libyan Crisis Theme

This paper discusses the various dimensions surrounding this crisis, as it sheds light on their outcomes and how they generally reflect to a large degree the state of risks threatening North Africa.

### Key Features of the Libyan Conflict

- A review of the development of the Libyan crisis since the NATO intervention to topple President Gaddafi in 2011 indicates that many of the developments that followed resulted from this initial stage. It is true that there was a state of widespread discontent among Libyan society against Gaddafi's rule, but the process of getting rid of him took place in a hasty manner with NATO's intervention, launching an air war under the leadership of France, while leaving the battlefield on the ground for a broad and mysterious spectrum that has been moved by Qatar, arming tribal elements, political Islam and even other opposition elements. This took place in light of the structural weakness of the Libyan national institutions. Qatar took advantage of this political vacuum to give impetus to the militias of political Islam, which quickly attempted to impose their control on Libyan society, known for its traditional tribal character. However, the state of chaos and liquidity in Libya led to wide and varied reactions and even to the defeat of all political Islamist movements in the first parliamentary elections. This led the armed factions and militias to resort to another approach, which is terrorism and intimidation of Libyan society, its leaders and its symbols, not only the political ones but also the intellectual and social leaders. This brought about the dismissal of Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in an illegal session of the parliament, the details of which have been complex, in the presence of political Islam representatives, thus achieving

<sup>107</sup> Zayed M. B. The conflict in Libya from a strategic perspective // Egyptian newspaper of Al-Ahram. 08.06.2020.

their complete control over the capital Tripoli under a noticeable international absence.

- With continuing internal and external pressures, a new round of parliamentary elections was held in mid-2014, which witnessed a limited electoral turnout. Still, its results were also against the forces of political Islam, which led to the transfer of the new parliament (the House of Representatives) to the coastal city of Tobruk in the far East of Libya, to be further from the control of the militias. This was rejected by the forces of political Islam and associated members. With the increasing pressure of these factions and the frequent assassinations of army and police officers at the hands of the militias, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar appeared with a specific message to unify the army and confront these militias. He received Egypt's and UAE's support, followed by French and Russian support.
- Before reviewing these developments, the increasing political polarization in the country was the subject of international and regional communications, whether within the framework of the United Nations or that of the neighbouring countries mechanism. These communications included many details, which might be discussed separately in another paper later. These interactions ended with a UN move led by the United Nations envoy Bernardino Leon, who took office in the fall of 2014. These efforts resulted in the holding of an international conference in the Moroccan city of Skhirat, which was based on the formula of political arrangements between the Libyan Parliament and the forces of political Islam. After the conference came the withdrawal of the President of the Libyan House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, together with a significant bloc of representatives from the signing procedures. The second group of members supported the establishment of the Government of National Accord (GNA), that has been called "internationally recognized," which was formed of multiple political parties at the beginning, and we will return to presenting what happened to that later in this paper.
- As domestic and foreign alliances supporting Haftar have been mounting, the latter has gradually gained control of eastern and southern regions from the hands of armed militias that have been particularly controlling the cities of Benghazi and Derna. Meanwhile, a seemingly new international political reality surrounding Libya has risen.
- In April 2019, the Libyan army troops moved towards the capital, Tripoli, where they tightened their control over a number of cities and sites in the western region, especially the strategic city of Tarhuna, which turned into a centre for Libyan army operations in the western region. The Libyan army tried, in vain, to enter Tripoli for more than a year, and when the resistance of the Government of National Accord (GNA) weakened, Prime Minister Al-Sarraj resorted to concluding an alliance agreement with Turkey, in violation of the law in several aspects. This included giving the right to Turkey to call in troops for assisting the Government of National Accord (GNA), followed by the demarcation of borders between the two sides that also included legal violations. Nonetheless,

it allowed Turkey to transfer a number of extremist militias from Syria to Libya, which it had previously done in mid-2014. This allowed the extremist forces led by Fajr Al Islam Brotherhood militia, funded by Qatar, to control Tripoli Airport and its surroundings. The recent blatant Turkish intervention in January 2020 turned the tide of battle, forcing the troops of the Libyan army to retreat to their positions in the East; where the fortifications of both sides are currently centred on the city of Sirte, in the middle of Libya's Mediterranean coast, between eastern and western regions.<sup>108</sup>

- This was followed by developments in the Egyptian position by hosting the President of the Libyan parliament, Aguila Saleh, and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) in Cairo on June 6, 2020. The Cairo declaration Initiative for Peace and Dialog in Libya was launched and gained significant international acceptance. This was followed by President El-Sisi's warning that Sirte and Jufra represent a red line and that Egypt will not allow their fall into the extremist militias' hands. Such an event would further increase the Libyan conflict's crystallisation, where information indicates that the two camps are still mobilizing their forces to resolve the battle for Sirte, with some uncertainty to which we will return later.

## **Stances of the Parties**

The Libyan crisis turned into an apparent state of international and regional polarization. It crystallized around two themes in order to control the Libyan arena – the Turkish project<sup>109</sup> that currently leads the forces and factions of political Islam supported by Qatar's funding and its propaganda machine, in the face of another axis that includes Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, France, which is supported by the UAE, and the political support of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to some extent. The following is a focused presentation of each party's position in this regard.

### **The Turkey–GNA Camp**

It is believed that it is not accurate to view this camp as being limited to Turkey and the Government of National Accord (GNA), because all the forces of political Islam with all their sects in the region have aligned themselves behind Turkey, defending its intervention in Libya and justifying all its actions. This camp equally includes organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood as being the main supporting force, more radical organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, or other small radical Libyan factions. This camp has been receiving Qatar's great support for years. It plays, together with funds and intelligence, a profound role in this regard.

### **The Parliament–Libyan Army Camp**

This camp also includes a significant number of Libyan tribes which are hostile to political Islam and to the intervention of Turkey and Qatar in the country. The

<sup>108</sup> Zayed M.B. Sources of confusion and ambiguity regarding the international conceptions of the Libyan crisis // Independent Arabia. 17.06.2020.

<sup>109</sup> Zayed M.B. Turkish intervention in Libya and the bankruptcy of a political speech // Al-Masry Al-Youm.01.06.2020.

Parliament-Libyan Army Camp is supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, France and Russia. At a time when all of these parties have reportedly provided support and arms to the Libyan army, Turkey and the channels of political Islam have been spreading that Russian “Wagner” mercenaries are present in Libya, which has been recently adopted by the United States. This will lead us to the following developments in the U.S. position.

## **The Stance of the United States**

The United States played a relatively marginal role in Gaddafi’s overthrow in favour of a larger French role. Despite the assassination of its ambassador at the hands of a militant organization in 2012 in Benghazi, the Obama administration at the time continued to content itself with supporting the positions of the United Nations envoys. Meanwhile, France and Italy played a leading role in this regard, especially during the stage that led to the Skhirat Agreement. The Trump administration has continued this role, which was based on initially giving political Islam factions a chance to play a role in the beginning. With the increasing polarization in the Libyan arena and Haftar advancing towards Tripoli, President Trump made an encouraging call to the military commander Haftar, describing his campaign as being against armed militias. It was said that this was achieved with the support and encouragement of Egypt and the UAE. Whatever the motivation is, this call has clear indications. This was the case until Haftar’s campaign faltered due to Turkey’s intervention, which succeeded in highlighting the Russian intervention to obtain Washington’s blessing. It is clear that this is what has clearly happened in recent months. However, the U.S. position underwent a limited change in the direction of openness to the Egyptian position. With pressure by France, which we will discuss in the following point addressing the support of the Egyptian move, the cease-fire, and not encouraging a confrontation that may be difficult to control in Sirte, confirmed that Washington’s stance towards Libya is governed mainly by the Russian role and not the support of Turkey and its project in Libya.

## **The Russian Stance**

An analysis of the Russian stance towards the developments of the Libyan crisis indicates that Russia has a rational and clear policy, which is achieved mainly via support for the Libyan army. Russia considers the Libyan experience as an example of NATO’s mismanagement of crises and as an excuse to overthrow a former Moscow ally, without taking into account the full nature of the Libyan society and the countries particular circumstances. Moscow is also of the opinion that the introduction of international and regional parties that support political Islam poses a risk both for Russia and for international security. Although Moscow continues to deny the deployment of Russian mercenaries in support of the Libyan army, it is fairly evident that such support exists. This is evidenced by the fact that many mercenaries have in fact been captured. This may explain the barter that has been achieved between Moscow and Ankara, which has provoked Libyan, regional and international concerns that Libya would turn into another area for Russian-Turkish deals to take place, similar to those that occurred in Syria. In fact, evidence indicates that Moscow should be



aware not to be dragged by Turkey into a Syrian scenario that would be more complicated in the long run, and would lead to the creation of a negative image of Russia in the region. Moreover, it must continue the policy of supporting civilian forces in Libya without further using the support of Washington and Ankara, as well as participating in the broad international and regional front that includes Egypt, France, the Eastern Mediterranean States, and the UAE to stop any progress of political Islam. Bargaining may push the Russian camp to support Haftar and suffer losses in a way that would not be in Moscow's long-term interest.

### **The Egyptian Stance**

It is possible to say that securing Egypt's long borders with Libya, which extend for more than 1 200 kilometres, is at the forefront of Egypt's mind. Especially in light of the threats that it witnessed after the end of the Muslim Brotherhoods rule, which lead to an increase in terrorist operations and arms smuggling through the vast Libyan borders. The following developments, which occurred after the Libyan army took control of most of eastern Libya, and a number of dangerous Egyptian and other terrorist elements were arrested, proved the veracity of the concerns, and thus the integrity of the Egyptian approach towards Libya. Egypt has recently shown its muscle, put forward its peace initiative, and stated that Sirte and Jufra are a red line; being well aware of the risks posed by the return of extremist militias to areas near its borders.<sup>110</sup>

### **The French Stance**

France is currently leading a campaign to counter Turkish intervention for clear strategic considerations. It seeks to protect its future interests in Libya to prevent the political Islam camp from controlling a country located in North Africa, lying at the heart of the Mediterranean and thus, threatening French interests in both regions. It also is wary of the risks of illegal immigration. Paris is not expected to back down from its anti-Turkish stance in this regard.

### **The Italian Stance**

The Italian stance has been governed from the beginning by its aspiration for economic influence in Libya and its fear of illegal immigration and terrorism by extremist groups wrapped in religious garb. It can be said that, so far, what Rome has achieved from its stance correlates more to the last two points. However, in the beginning, its attempt to build influence to support the empowerment of political Islam until it had reached the Skhirat formula, ended up reducing its opportunities in Libya due to Turkish intervention. Something very much to the chagrin of Italy. In recent years, Rome has accentuated its attack on France for supporting the Libyan army and Haftar, and has been late in opening channels of communication with the latter. In general, the Italian-French political and media competition was an illusory drain for both sides, although played an interest to

<sup>110</sup> On the experience and subject of irregular migration in Egypt, Kindly refer to: Dr Amr Hashim Rabie, Editor, Irregular Migration, Egyptian Case Study, Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo 2018.

the parties which did not create a stir. Rome is now trying to return to the scene and is drifting towards the Turkish side in the affair on the coattails of Germany's mediation role, who is still an important actor.

### **The German–European Stance**

With its positive openness to all parties, Berlin was able to convene its conference on January 19, 2020, to try to bring back calm and establish a ceasefire. Although the conference has failed to achieve its objectives so far, the equilibrium of the German stance still gives Berlin the status of a possible mediator in light of the continuing state of polarization within the conflict.

### **The Stances of the Arab Countries of the Maghreb**

Algeria's stance has recently been shaped by its understanding of the risks posed by the policies of the Government of National Accord (GNA) which led to Turkish intervention and began to raise the issue of legitimacy in Libya. A stance that is likely to develop and will have a significant influence on the map of external balances of the crisis. This draws contrast from its previous aims concerning the conflict: the containment of political violence, the bartering of the Libyan crisis in exchange for leniency towards the militias and the GNA, and its constant call for dialogue reconciliation. On the other hand, Algeria's previous stance was closely linked to that of Morocco, which considers Skhirat one of its diplomatic achievements. However, this is slightly limited as Morocco continues to adhere to it in form without considering the lack of the implementation of the roadmap drawn up by the political process.

As for the Tunisian stance, the Libyan issue has turned into a factor of internal conflict between Ennahda and its opponents after Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, Ennahda's leader and president of the Tunisian parliament, took Turkey's side. This revealed the true interests of the Brotherhood party and signalled the beginning of an increasing disagreement between the party and many political forces in the country. The President of the Republic, Kais Saied, is no exception, and although he tended to be neutral at first, Ghannouchi's biased diplomacy pushed him to express different stances. The Libyan issue is expected to continue as one of the determinants of Tunisia's internal conflict, which could escalate as the Libyan crisis continues to intensify.

### **Final Conclusions on the Libyan Crisis**

1. The Libyan crisis has turned into a major theatre of international and regional conflict between two clear agendas.
2. This will prolong the duration of conflict and the chances of settlement.
3. Much will depend on two factors, the first of which is the mobilization around Sirte and Jufra by the two parties and whether such an issue will turn into a relatively prolonged stalemate or will be resolved by one of the parties. The second consideration is the potential role of tribal forces in Libya, in case Egypt expands its provision of weapons to the already armed tribes, and the extent

of participation of these tribes. They have always been active participants on both sides, but a greater vista still exists in this regard.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Arab Mashreq Crises Between Stalemate and Escalation**

It can be said that the situation in the Arab East or Arab Asia has witnessed a noticeable deterioration with respect to the attempts of settling the multiple crises witnessed in this region; stalemate in some cases and escalation in others:

- In Yemen, the inability of Saudi Arabia and its allies to impose its will was noticeable, just as other party's attempt to impose their own will in the country also led to no avail. The matter ended with something like an actual division of Yemeni territories between the two forces. The first one being the legitimate government which faces serious challenges with the continuing mobility of the southern movement towards secession of the south. However, although it continues to enjoy international legitimacy in the world, it does not really impose its will, even over the areas it controls. And the second one is the Houthi power that controls most of the northern regions and is supported by Iran and the pro-Iranian Shia factions in the region such as Hezbollah and the Popular Mobilization militia in Iraq. This is addressed by International efforts for reaching a settlement without arranging a specific legal status.
- The same played out in Syria, where the Syrian forces, supported by Russia and Iran, retreated from their attempts to restore the regime's control over the country, Turkey succeeded, however, in enforcing its actual military presence via the settlement it made with Russia regarding Idlib. It is estimated that at about 20 thousand Turkish soldiers are in the region of Idlib, controlled by Turkey on the one hand, and extremist militias on the other. The Syrian-Russian influence does not extend to many areas in Northeast Syria, where several U.S., Western, and Turkish bases are situated, and the latter continues its intermittent operations against Kurdish forces.
- The final outcome on the Syrian scene is the almost complete division between the government of President Bashar Al-Assad, together with Russian-Iranian support for Hezbollah, and the largest proportion of the Syrian state on the other side existing in two pockets. Both in Idlib and in Northeast Syria, which can be described as a Turkish presence or occupation due to the extremist forces and militias associated with it
- Thirdly, the state of stalemate in the Palestinian affair is of a different nature. Whether with respect to the negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, or through the Arab initiative, Israel, together with strong U.S. support, continues to entrench its regional stature. Especially after the recent Israel-UAE agreement. The stalemate could, therefore, be described as an extension to the settlement process. However, in reality, it has led to a significant rise in Israel's stature and a decline in that of the Palestinian side.

<sup>111</sup> Zayed M. B. Libya's many questions between the bizarre nature of the international scene and the nature of the conflict // Independent Arabia. 10.06.2020.

- As for Iraq, the situation has passed the stage of escalation and is now moving towards a state of calm and attempts for an easing of tensions are being encouraged. There are several dimensions of the conflict in Iraq that can be summarized as follows:
  - The U.S.–Iran rivalry.
  - Sunni–Shiite polarization.
  - The conflict between reform and corruption.

Although Al-Kadhimi's government is seen as an attempt at overcoming these dimensions, whether his government will be successful is yet to be known.

- If we add the complex scene in Lebanon to the overall scene in the Arab Mashreq, we find that the dimensions of the crisis revolve around several themes:
  - The conflict with Iranian and Turkish projects.
  - The conflict with projects of both Sunni and Shiite political Islam.
  - Problematic issues related to political reform and economic development.

Substantive extrapolation indicates that the rise and progress of the Israeli role and its increasing acceptance by the Gulf Arab States is linked to the seriousness of the Turkish and Iranian projects and their threats, along with the threat of political Islam with its Sunni and Shiite sides. Employing either of these two projects by international parties to serve short-term interests is ultimately in favour of maximizing the regional influence of Turkey and Iran, which needs to be seriously addressed by the major powers.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Amer A.I. Libya beyond the Tripoli Clashes // International Politics, Issue 214. October 2018, pp. 216-218.

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## Russian International Affairs Council

The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) is a non-profit international relations think tank on a mission to provide policy recommendations for all of the Russian organizations involved in external affairs.

RIAC engages experts, statesmen, entrepreneurs and members of civil society in public discussions with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of Russian foreign policy.

Along with research and analysis, RIAC is involved in activities aimed at creating a solid network of young global affairs and diplomacy experts.

RIAC is an active player on the public diplomacy arena, presenting Russia's vision on the key issues of global development on the international stage.

RIAC members are the leaders of Russia's foreign affairs community – diplomats, businesspeople, scholars, public leaders and journalists.

RIAC President Igor Ivanov, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation from 1998 to 2004 and Secretary of the Security Council from 2004 to 2007.

Andrey Kortunov is the Director General of RIAC. From 1995 to 1997, Dr Kortunov was Deputy Director of the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

## **Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA)**

The Council is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 1999 by a diverse elite interested in regional and international foreign policy. Its membership includes a distinguished group of former diplomats, academics, military, business people, writers and a number of public figures, including Mr Ibrahim Mahlab, Mr Amr Moussa, all former foreign Ministers.

The Council's mission is to promote an objective and deep understanding of all external issues at the regional and international levels in order to serve Egypt's strategic, economic and political national interests.

The Council has been in the consultative capacity of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2006 and, through its representatives, participates in its meetings.

## Notes



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