

Scholar Journal of Applied Sciences and Research

Beyond Conflicts and Terrorism in North Africa Since the Arab Spring: Global Risks and Implications

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Abstract

The 2011 Arab Spring disasters that swept through North Africa and the Middle East radically reshaped the region's security and political environment. As a result, Tunisia and Egypt, longstanding regimes fell in a matter of weeks although what remained largely intact are the political structures that underpinned these regimes. In North Africa, the conflicts hit the headlines of both local and international media. But, while the short-term effects were localised at that time, there appear to be long term risks that have pervaded the globe socially, politically and economically.

Objective: The study seeks to examine the politico-economical global implications after the disastrous Arab Spring in order to inform policy direction and mitigate risks.

Method: Some case studies of individual countries impacted particularly by terrorism and other forms of violence are examined in this paper. It focuses on the aftermath of the conflicts with respect to peace and security challenges obtaining in the Maghreb; Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, the adjacent areas like Chad, Mali, Niger and their regional and global strategic implications.

Results: In the absence of an effective menu of responses to the disastrous effects of terrorism and instability, threats and risks located in this region may continue to grow into the world community.

Recommendations: While policy recommendations are offered to the African Union, these can only be effective and sustainable through a holistic approach that requires an integration of global and local resolve and resources.

Keywords: Conflict, Terrorism, North Africa, Global implication, Risk.

Introduction

Some of the most militarily and economically powerful states in Africa are located in North Africa with Libya, Egypt and Algeria being among the five countries that contributed 65% of the member state portion of the African Union (AU) operational budget in 2014 [1]. In as much as positive developments have been witnessed in the last five years like the exit of long serving autocratic leaders in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, the security in the region has not been pleasing yet. There has been an outbreak of civil war in Libya. In Egypt, there has been a military coup and emerging insurgency. Terrorism problems in the region have gone to unprecedented levels coupled with the expansion of the Islamic State. Also, the decline in the prices of oil are likely to continue affecting the major producers like Algeria, Egypt and Libya.

Article Information

Article Type: : Research

Article Number: SJASR-140

Received Date: 16 June, 2018

Accepted Date: 05 July, 2018

Published Date: 17 July, 2018

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Citation: Chigudu D (2018) Beyond Conflicts and Terrorism in North Africa Since the Arab Spring: Global Risks and Implications. Sch J Appl Sci Res. Vol: 1, Issu: 4 (41 - 48).

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Egypt may however be cushioned by the recent massive natural gas finding. The study seeks to examine the politico-economic global implications after the Arab Spring disaster in order to inform policy makers.

Background and Context of The Study

As observed by [1], there are two important regional organizations in North Africa namely the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). The AMU was founded in 1989 and member states include, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. The CEN-SAD was founded in 1998 and members include Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The two institutions are African Union (AU) recognized Regional Economic Communities (RECs) which are part of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). But, the AMU has never made its relationship with the AU official by way of signing the Protocol on Relations between the RECs and the AU. North Africa is also home to the North African Regional Capability (NARC) which was founded in 2007 and the Regional Mechanism (RM). The North African Regional Capability member states include Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Tunisia, Egypt, and Western Sahara. The RM is tasked with matters of managing the North African brigade and contributes to the AU's African Standby Force (ASF).

Since September 2011, disturbing trends of security challenges have emerged in the Maghreb, Sahel, and other parts of Africa emanating from non-state actors with a global reach. According to Alexander [2], these security challenges have been brutally demonstrated by the escalation in violent attacks stemming from a mounting array of lawless transnational militant groups in countries ranging from Libya and Mali to Somalia and beyond.

Although the perpetrators in their diversity may be motivated by racial, ethnic, tribal, religious, and national ideologies, they include extremist groups like al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, Ansaru, Ansar Dine, Ansar al-Sharia, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MJUAW), al-Mourabitoun, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MLNA), al-Shabaab or other displaced persons and militant recruits [2]. The Soufan Group [3] contends that, what worries most is that under Ayman al-Zawahiri at al-Qa'ida Central, along with an AQIM led by Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, quite a lot of extremist groups regardless of their distinct ethnic and tribal affinities are expanding their regional and global networks.

Alexander [2] argues that, this tactical franchise is based on mutual goals and relationships, and includes shared finances, training, supply of weapons and joint operations. For example, on March 17, 2017, AQIM leadership congratulated its Mali-based subsidiaries for merging into the united entity named Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen. The participating factions included Ansar Dine, the Macina Battalion, and al-Murabitoun and Sahara divisions [3].

The strategic global challenge of defeating terrorism is made even more complicated by the emergence of the Islamic State variously known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh, whose objective is to establish a 'caliphate' across Africa, Europe, Asia and the

Middle East. In fact, quite a number of movements worldwide have affirmed allegiance and support to Daesh. In the Sahel, Maghreb and elsewhere in Africa, it is believed that over 20 groups have portrayed resemblance and acquaintances to this evolving network. These include [4]; the Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria, the Islamic State in Libya (Darnah), the Jund al-Khilafah in Tunisia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab Jubba Region, Cell Bashir Abu Numan in Somalia, al-I'tisam of the Koran and Sunnah in the Sudan, and Egypt's Jamaat Ansar Bait al-Maqdis in the Sinai.

Alexander [2] notes that, although the 2016 risk assessment report revealed that, "Terrorist attacks are down from the previous record high of 289 incidents in 2014, overall, terrorist incidents by AQIM and other extremist movements in the region have risen dramatically since September 11, 2011. The 235 total of incidents in 2016 thus represents a very real threat, particularly in the countries that have experienced large increases in violence in the past few years, such as Libya and Mali. During the 2016 survey period, the most affected countries were Libya (with 125 incidents), Mali (with 64 incidents), Tunisia (with 16 incidents), and Algeria (with 13 incidents)."

Other attacks were recorded across Africa in addition to these statistics in countries like Somalia, Nigeria and the Central African Republic. The spill over of jihadists going back to their home countries after fighting in Iraq and Syria with al-Qa'ida and Daesh affiliates add to the previously volatile security situation. Therefore, despite the lower number of incidents, the overall strategic impact regionally and globally appears to have been more dangerous in 2016 than previously. This trend is likely to continue for a while. Overall, Alexander [2] concludes that the number of social and radical political actors is both multiplying and becoming progressively more related formally and informally, in a 'holy alliance' of 'like-minded' movements, and 'strange bedfellows,' intent on kidnapping, trafficking and violent extremism. Alexander laments the apparent deadly transnational terrorist network that is expanding across a widening region of instability stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea into the Middle East, Asia, and beyond.

For Africa, it is disheartening when security interests are threatened by the increasing links and flow of recruits that manifest between the regional extremists and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, in addition to al-Qa'ida affiliates and allies across the region. For example, Aziz and King [5] reported in July 2016 that, Morocco announced it arrested dozens of people suspected of plotting for the Islamic State.

Also, Thoma and Weiss [6] observe that, in October 2016 the Islamic State released a video of Abu Walid al Sahrawi pledging allegiance to the 'caliphate'. Countries in the Maghreb and Sahel do not stand immune or safe to the wider threat of violence originating from Syria and Iraq. According to the HSC [7] Terror Threat Snapshot report for December's public data made available, some 40,000 fighters from over 120 countries including Africa have participated in the wars in Iraq and Syria. As many as about 6,500 extremists are reported to have been trained already for future attacks where terrorist camps exist in Libya only [2]. The HSC [8]

Terror Threat Snapshot for March 2016 reports that the question that remains is, when and where these operatives will strike and what are the strategic implications regionally and globally?

It is interesting to note that, terrorist attacks worldwide in 2016 totalled 24,202 of which some 45 percent occurred in countries such as Syria and Iraq, according to IHS Jane's 360 database [9]. But Alexander [2] argues that, the IUCTS statistics compiled for the same year covering the Maghreb and Sahel regions in Africa registered 235 attacks. He further argues that, yet this relatively low figure is undeniably misleading for two key security assessment considerations. One, that the figure is a reflection of a general upward trend of assaults recorded regionally since September 2011. Moreover, statistical analysis of terrorist threats should be premised on assessing the multiple impacts of each incident in terms of the political, social, humanitarian, economic and strategic costs.

The newly unstable regional environment seems to have created an array of challenges for African and European policymakers [10]. A number of prominent jihadist groups have thrived in post-revolutionary North Africa taking advantage of state weakness to fashion out spheres of influence. Libya's plunge into civil war has presented a supplementary boost to regional jihadist groups. However, this proliferation of jihadist actors in the region poses a direct threat to the European security [10]. The political instability afflicting North Africa after the Arab Spring also threatens the European strategic and economic interests. North Africa has rapidly shifted from being a bastion of continuity and consistency into a basket case, making European states to reconsider their interests while monitoring threats carefully in an attempt to limit spill over into Europe.

The violent conflict and political turbulence have both undermined North Africa's economic potential, consequently hampering European trade with its Southern neighbour. Some parts of North Africa have become springboards for criminal networks, drug traffickers and human smugglers, using the region as a base for gaining entry into Europe or down to some parts of Africa.

Political developments since the exit of long tenured autocrats of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia in 2011 have created a myriad of new threats that European policymakers may have to grapple with in years to come.

According to Gartenstein-Ros et al [10], the major challenges that will have an impact on Europe include:

1. The explosion of jihadist groups in North Africa, comprising al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) affiliates, danger to Europe's internal security and to European interests in North Africa.
2. The inflow of migrants leaving North African countries for Europe threatens to strain Europe's border security measures.
3. Terrorism and political instability threaten to impair trade between Europe and North Africa.

While there may be no 'silver-bullet' solution for the

crisis, this paper does not seek to advocate for a specific strategy or to provide policy prescriptions, but to objectively analyze the various available options in view of implications revealed in the case studies discussed below. Case studies of individual countries predominantly impacted by terrorism and other forms of violence are presented in an expository manner in order to enhance policymakers' ability to make educated strategic decisions.

Case Studies

The case studies of Libya, Mali, Tunisia, and Algeria in this paper are a representation of the countries that are mostly victimized. For other regional countries like Morocco, Mauritania, Chad and Niger a brief discussion is provided. In addition, security-related references are highlighted with regards to particular African nations from Somalia to Nigeria. All told, the cases examined in this paper are threats to the peace and security interests of the individual countries as well as implications for regional neighbors, Africa at large, the Middle East and beyond.

Libya

Libya represents the most insecure nation in North Africa due among other things to its unstable political institutions following the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, the increase in the number of foreign fighters reinforcing indigenous extremist groups, porous land and sea borders and the expanding refugee crisis [2]. After Gaddafi's fall, two rival governments have developed in the country's different regions. One is in the West and around the capital Tripoli, the Government of National Accord (GNA) backed by the international community [11]. Benghazi, Libya's second most populous city in the East is mainly under the control of Libyan General Khalifa Haftar, backed by Egypt and Russia [12].

Indeed, the failure to form a unified government contributes to greater instability, the mounting internal divisions and continuing violence throughout the country. There is also a growing number of armed factions that include indigenous and foreign operatives. Most of these ideological and lawless militias control their own neighbourhood while battling each other for increased power. For instance, BBC [13] reported that, fighting raged over control of Sirte, where Daesh had set up a jihad training ground, leveraging the country's instability and lack of unified government in 2016.

It became evident that Libya serves as a major base for Daesh in 2016, with allegedly some 5,000 fighters present in the country [14]. It is worrisome that the chaotic environment in Libya has threatened to export instability elsewhere in Africa and beyond. Wehrey and Wolfram [15] observe that, although considerable gains were made in 2016 by the Eastern-based Libyan National Army against Daesh and also against other Islamic operatives, security threats remain.

Alexander [2] observes that, in 2016 Daesh, AQIM and their affiliates as well as other groups resorted to a wide-range of attacks, including kidnappings, hijackings, arson, shootings, bombings, assaults, assassinations and summary

executions. Although, these attacks targeted military camps, checkpoints, ammunition depots, oil fields and hospitals, these incidents killed and maimed a cross-section of Libyan society. Among them were politicians, police, military personnel, clergymen, educators, journalists, and other civilians. Sadly, foreigners residing, working, or visiting in Libya were also targeted. The victims included nationals from Canada, Egypt, Eritrea, Italy, the Netherlands, the Sudan and Turkey [2].

Apart from the high human toll of foreigners and nationals in Libya, other costs resulted from the persistent migration crisis. In reality, some refugees and asylum seekers from different African countries living in Libyan detention camps who were captured by various armed groups have been subjected to extensive human rights abuses. Furthermore, smugglers of migrants to European countries have as well been accused of related human rights violations like rape and murder. Alexander [2] notes that, the severity of the migrant crisis is evidenced by the over 5,000 individuals (women, children, and elderly) who died on numerous small vessels from suffocating in overloaded holds, and from drowning in capsized boats in 2016.

During the same year IOM [16] reported that, a total of 181,436 successfully arrived in Italy via this Mediterranean route. However, the European Union has been considering a proposal advocating greater funding for programs returning migrants from Libya to their countries of origin, as of early 2017.

It is encouraging that, in the face of these security challenges in and outside Libya, there are some modest collaborative responses at national, regional and global levels. For example, the United States and its European allies are poised to engage in multilateral efforts meant to support a unitary government. Also, as reported by the Associated Press [17] Algeria, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Egypt, and the Sudan urged the different political factions in Libya to avoid using military power. It remains to be seen if this conciliatory message will be implemented on the ground.

Mali

Persistent instability in the war-torn Northern part of Mali highlighted continuing volatility some four years after French forces recaptured the major cities and other territories that had been seized by al-Qa'ida affiliate groups. As Conor [18] reports, two factors may have contributed to Mali's lingering instability namely; the failure of the government to find suitable political solutions for its internal security concerns and the continuing flow of combatants and weapons from Libya. Besides other groups, special attention should be focused on the expanding terrorist network of Daesh in Mali. This newest involvement in the country is cause for concern for more security vulnerabilities with fewer options for conflict resolution.

The al-Qa'ida, Daesh affiliates and the extremists have resorted to a wide range of operations [2]. These include shootings, kidnappings, ambushes, bombing and facility attacks. These have targeted security forces and civilians in 2016 and early 2017. Those affected have been members

of Malian police and army, African and U.N. peacekeepers, French soldiers, ordinary citizens and foreign aid workers. The Malian government extended a state of emergency several times and as part of the strategy to reduce jihadist violence in the country, the government brought into the cabinet new members of rebel groups. Also, some African countries are contributing forces, though modest to the UN (MINUSMA) Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali [19]. It is also heartening that the international community has made efforts to expand its regional efforts to combat terrorism. For example, the endeavours of the Sahel Multilateral Planning Group that includes the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Italy.

Tunisia

The country is still susceptible to both domestic and foreign terrorist threats more than six years after the Jasmine Revolution overthrew the autocratic regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and motivated other countries to rise up in the Arab Spring. Though an emerging democracy, Tunisia still faces security challenges [20]. Even though only 16 incidents were recorded in 2016, the weak government continues to face considerable potential threats from national extremists and from its chaotic neighbour Libya. It is exclusively AQIM (the Tunisia branch) and Daesh with its affiliates that are responsible for many security challenges in the country and beyond. Attackers in 2016 have targeted police, the military, politicians, civilians and visiting foreigners, but what is more worrying is the report that between 6,000 and 7,000 citizens have left the country to join the Islamic State abroad and 15,000 suspected recruits were banned from travelling [21].

Against these concerns that the government together with the international community have developed multiple counterterrorism responses, a 125-mile barrier was constructed along its border with Libya [22]. The Tunisian authorities improved security at tourist resorts meant to prevent recurrence of more massacres as was witnessed in June 2015 assault in Sousse where 38 people, mostly British, were killed [23].

In support of counterterrorism, the internationals have also expanded in 2016 and early 2017. For instance, the United States provided a training to improve capabilities related to intelligence and border security, British Special Forces have assisted in the fight against Daesh, and France organized a security package that included military and economic aid [2]. Tunisia requested the European Union (EU) and the global community to increase their help in the war against terrorism, after recognizing the added value of this and other support.

Niger

Despite the fact that Niger had a total of 12 terrorist attacks in 2016, lower than 16 incidents in the previous year, the country, under President Mahamadou Issoufou still faces threats from AQIM franchise, elements of the MUJAO, Tuareg and Boko Haram fighters [2]. According to Adamczyk [24], in October 2016 some unidentified operatives attacked a refugee camp in Tazalit killing soldiers guarding the

facility. And as Balima, Payton, Ross and Evans [25] report, it is noteworthy to mention that Niger is hosting tens of thousands of refugees mostly from Mali and Nigeria. Given that the country is unable to unilaterally confront terrorism threats, the multinational force made up of personnel from Niger, Chad, Benin, Cameroon and Nigeria is providing some military support. Other non-regional nations like France are also supporting the security concerns of Niger. However, there is need for the international community to focus on strengthening social and economic developments and the rule of law.

Algeria

Even though Algeria has suffered since September 2011 from terrorism, a lot more than other countries in the region, the fact that only 13 attacks were registered in 2016 is suggestive that President Bouteflika's government has been triumphant in improving its security capabilities in the past few years [2]. Without a doubt, apart from the continuing threats posed by AQIM and its affiliates like al-Mourabitoun, the country is facing other challenges [26] and the Islamic State has announced its continued intentions to be lively in the country [27]. The government's responses to terrorism included building fences and walls along its borders with Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, creating technical surveillance systems; arresting nationals and foreigners suspected of illegal activities; stopping new Daesh recruits from travelling to join the Islamic Caliphate wars; foiling attacks on the police, military, and civilians [28,29].

According to All Africa [30], Algeria hosted the 5+5 Defence Initiative meeting in October 2016. Participants were Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, France, Spain, Italy, Malta, and Portugal. Algeria declared its readiness to reinforce global efforts in order to combat expanding security threats. And in March 2017, Algeria, in cooperation with Morocco, tightened its border controls with the intention of curbing illegal migrant flows, predominantly toward Libya.

Chad

Only 5 incidents were recorded in 2016 in comparison to 15 attacks registered a year earlier, however, the country is still prone to civil unrest and terrorist threats [2]. The election of long-time President Idriss Deby winning his fifth term, for example, triggered accusations by opposition Chadians of government corruption, censorship, arrests, kidnappings and murder [31]. Since Chad country is a member of the African Union's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and participates in MINUSMA peacekeeping operations, Chadians were singled out as targets of choice in Nigeria, Mali, and other countries. Humanitarian crisis in Chad is another security concern. According to United Nations News Centre [32], in July 2016, United Nations refugee camps in Chad registered 5,643 people fleeing from regional conflicts, yet over a million Chadians are food- insecure, with the people potentially at risk of Zika virus outbreaks and other diseases. In dealing with the security challenges in Chad the government embarked on sealing its border with Libya and requested additional support from the U.S. and European community.

Results and Discussion

The environment of disasters and political hostility has further deteriorated in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings. Jihadi groups and transnational armed trafficking profited from the collapse of the Libyan state and the disorganisation of the Tunisian security forces [33]. In collaboration with Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), these groups have strongly reinforced their presence in the border regions. Targets of armed attacks and bombings by movements such as Ansar al-Shari'a have been particularly Libya and Tunisia.

However, as evidenced by the kidnappings in 2013 from the gas production sites in the South, Algeria has also revealed signs of weakness in the face of a growing jihadi threat. And following the break-out of war in Mali after the Tuareg insurrection and, later, with the jihadi-led uprising, involving groups such as al-Qaida, Ansar al-dine and Mojwa (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa), Morocco is exposed to both Saharan and Sahelian jihadism [34]. Thus, a poor security situation and political instability persist in North Africa, slowing down any political and economic development. The causes are many, both linked to the type of governance regime adopted in each case and processes of state formation. Notably, Libya and Algeria have developed economies that are built on the basis of oil and gas rents. Yet, internal struggles to take control over these resources have accordingly produced exceedingly fragile political balances.

For Libya, its fragility is also weakened because of a society that does not have a long established state tradition. Qadhafi's proposed mode of government during his rise to power was based upon a 'dismantling' of the monarchic state [35]. Tunisia and Morocco as compared to Libya have established some form of stability in their governments over a much longer period. As such, Tunisia and Morocco are more resilient than Algeria and Libya to destabilising factors, whether external or internal. Although North African States differ according to historical trajectory, their colonial heritage and internal political equilibriums still have some structural features in common, indicative of the difficulties they all encounter in overcoming the profound crises they meet.

Leaders have exercised a highly centralised state power leading to an unequal distribution of resources and corruption at national level. At a regional level, this appears to have delayed the constitution of a security cooperation and coordination agency. This has presented the North African governments to a precarious situation, finding themselves with no solutions to a deteriorating social and political situation in surrounding areas.

Baghzouz cited in Belhadj and Bocco [34,36] concludes that, "In general, the history of the contemporary North African states showcases the difficulty in establishing a model that reconciles both political and economic development. The Barcelona Process – tasked with overcoming this double challenge through Euro-Mediterranean cooperation – revealed its limits. The substance of the 'Euro-Med' partnership....., considered by the North African

governments as a form of interference in their internal affairs, and the plans to develop a free trade zone. Meanwhile, the Mediterranean Union – a regional integration process following on from the Barcelona Process – has come to a complete standstill”.

Indeed, a development path that combines political and economic liberalism has not come to fruition in North Africa after the Arab Springs. Briefly, what appears to have combined to prolong a climate of hostility across North Africa is highly centralised state politics and weak regional integration of security policies.

Global Risks and Implications

The trends in North Africa are deeply concerning, with Gartenstein-Ross et al [10] contending that, it is likely that this region to Europe’s South may in the future experience even graver problems. Attempting to predict the challenges of tomorrow can only improve reactions and foresight.

Economic risks and implications

European investment and operations in the region could be threatened by the instability in North Africa. North Africa is economically significant to Europe because of its role in supplying energy resources. There are three major European oil and gas companies operating in Libya [10] namely; Total, a gas company headquartered in France that is involved in oil and gas exploration and production in Libya, specifically in the Mabruk field, the Al Jurf field in the NorthWest of Tripoli on the border with Tunisia, the onshore El Sharaa field, and in the Muzruq Basin.

There is also an Italian company Eni S.p.A which has invested in Libya’s energy sector, being the largest international oil company operating in the country. A German company, Wintershall, has been active in oil exploration in Libya for more than fifty years. In Algeria, six European oil and gas companies are operating there; Britain has two, Spain, Italy, Norway and Ireland have one each.

In Egypt, four European oil and gas companies operate and invest in that country. On the whole, North Africa plays a significant role in providing oil and gas to EU countries. According to the European Commission [37], the EU has a unique Euro-Mediterranean partnership (including with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey) accounting for 8.6% of its external trade. Two of the top three African states from which the EU imports goods are in the North, as are half of the top eight, including Algeria (17%), Libya (14%), Morocco (6%), and Tunisia (6%).

The Eurostat [38] reports that, “As for EU exports, five of the eight largest African trading partners are in the North: Algeria (15%), Morocco (11%), Egypt (10%), Tunisia (7%), and Libya (5%)”.

Also, according to Simoes [39], France does rely on North Africa for imports, like tomatoes from Morocco (51.42% of France’s imports come from that country) and nitrogenous fertilizer from Egypt (21.76%). Spain relies on Egypt for nitrogenous fertilizer (30.78%). Some EU states import electric wire from Morocco, but most significantly Spain

(44.07%), and both Spain and Greece rely on Algeria for mineral tar imports (42.22% and 71.04%). Several EU states rely on Egypt for their supply of petroleum jelly (Germany 18.67%, Italy 17.09%) and acyclic alcohols (Greece 26.79%, France 9.95%).

Incitement to violence

According to Gartenstein-Ross et al [10] Jihadist actors in North Africa looking to strike Europe have several options including appealing to Muslim populations in Europe that have to conduct attacks in their host countries. Al-Qaeda figures such as Anwar al-Awlaki has popularised this approach, but the Islamic State later developed an extremely robust social-media campaign. Schmitt [40] reports that IS’s supporters posted an estimated 90,000 propaganda messages per day on such social media sites as Twitter, Face book, and YouTube. The jihadist group’s mastery of social media is particularly more important than the sheer volume of pro-IS social media posts. IS and its supporters have repetitively appealed via other platforms and social media to Muslims so that they launch attacks against the countries in which they are located. In part, the IS group got audience from their targets to carrying out violent acts in its name. While the North African jihadist groups could adopt this strategy at little cost, they may not present a unique threat in this regard, since calls to attack Western states can be issued from anywhere in the world. The proximity to Europe by North Africa is also unlikely to be uniquely helpful for such propaganda effort.

Externally-planned attacks

But, this North African proximity may permit jihadist groups to take a more practical approach by directly scheduling and devising operations, and infiltrating militants into Europe. One possibility of an infiltration plan could involve transporting militants on boats carrying migrants from Libya. As Winter hints [41], an online IS propagandist has broached this possibility, indicating that upon the arrivals of the operatives, they could conduct attacks in Southern European cities and target Mediterranean shipping routes. And as Silber argues [42], North African jihadist groups could as well look to provide training or direction to local cells in Europe, like the role al-Qaeda played in the attack that struck London on July 7, 2005.

The observation by Chrisafis et al. [43] may be worth considering. For instance, the Jihadist groups may also attempt to mount attacks against European interests in North Africa. The attack on the Tigantourine oil facility in January 2013, located near the South-Eastern Algerian town of Amenas, may provide a profile of potential attacks against Western facilities and interests. The attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt in September 2012 provide one set of examples. Additionally, Callimachi [44] reported that, for over a decade, North African jihadists have relied on the kidnapping of Europeans as a means of generating revenue through ransoms, and that in 2013 alone, jihadists could have made not less than USD\$ 66 million in ransom money with almost all of it coming from European governments.

Foreign fighter returnees

What seemingly represents the single greatest terrorist threat to Europe today are returning foreign fighters with latest estimates of Europe residents having gone to fight with rebel groups in Syria and Iraq being held at around 4,000 [10]. Yet, North Africa may soon become a new theatre for European foreign fighters. Above all, if the Turkish government embarks on tightening the border controls with Syria, prospective European foreign fighters may join jihadist forces on other frontlines where travel is less burdensome. Libya for instance, may become an attractive site for European foreign fighters. Analysts like Byman and Shapiro [45] worry that European foreign fighters are likely to avoid surveillance and carry out attacks, acting either on direct orders from jihadist groups or on their own initiative. Such returnees are prone to be better trained in weapons and explosives than their often inept home-grown counterparts.

Migration from and through North Africa

Poor economic conditions, political instability and civil conflict in North Africa have contributed to massive outflows of migrants to Europe from 2011 and beyond. Emerging as an important route for North Africans and sub-Saharan African migrant workers seeking economic opportunities and asylum in Europe is the Central Mediterranean route. This refers irregular migration from North Africa to Malta and Southern Italy. The first surge of migration from Libya to Europe was witnessed in the second quarter of 2011 (April-June). This is the period when Sub-Saharan African migrant workers left Libya for Europe to escape the violence of the uprising. That time, Qaddafi had also subjected most of the Sub-Saharan migrants to repression and forcible deportation, as he perceived the flow of migrants to Europe as a retaliation against NATO for intervening in his country [46]. Libya was the greatest single source of irregular migration to the EU at that time in point.

Altai Consulting, cited in Gartenstein-Ross et al, [10] argues that, "The majority of East African refugees had no plans to remain in Libya, and instead merely used the country as a departure point from which to reach Europe: A May 2013 report produced for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) found that 93% of Somalis and 71% of Eritreans living in Libya said the country was not their final destination".

A massive outflow of migration to Europe during the height of the revolution against President Ben Ali in early 2011 was also witnessed in Tunisia. This sudden influx prompted Italy to declare a humanitarian crisis in Lampedusa, leading the EU to increase pressure on the Tunisian government to crack down on irregular migration. In Egypt, the numbers of refugees increased significantly in late 2012 and 2013, when the country became a hub for Syrians fleeing the country's civil war. Sub-Saharan Africans have comprised a growing number of irregular migrants departing from Morocco to Europe, over and above the steady flows of Moroccan and Algerian economic migrants looking for work. Popp [47] notes that, the Moroccan government estimates that, as of September 2014, between 25,000 and 40,000 undocumented

migrants, the vast majority from Sub-Saharan Africa, reside in Morocco. Although some migrants work and settle in Morocco, others intend to live only temporarily as they plan a move to Europe.

Transnational crime

An assortment of criminal networks has established operations in North Africa. These have capitalised on weak state governments, endemic corruption, and poor security conditions [10]. For instance, drug trafficking cartels have been set up, in some cases cooperating with jihadist groups and other violent non-state actors (VNSAs) just to ensure safe shipment of their products. While Morocco has long been the major global supplier of cannabis to European markets, its cannabis production has gone down in recent years. In Libya, cocaine and heroin trafficking has grown noticeably in recent years, offering an alternative to sea-based and air-based smuggling routes. It has also provided a growing nexus between drug trafficking and migrant smuggling, with traffickers often utilizing migrants to ship products into Europe. Also, Egypt has become a hub for cocaine and heroin trafficking. Criminal enterprises that involve oil smuggling and illicit pharmaceutical trafficking, have emerged in North Africa as well. During the 2011 uprising, the looting of Qaddafi weapons stockpiles also has fuelled a booming black market weapons trade. The illicit antiquities trade in Egypt has surged with smugglers fencing Egyptian antiques in European markets.

Jihadist terrorism

In North Africa and the Middle East if jihadist groups gain a greater foothold as a result of state failure, Europe also faces a high risk of externally-planned terrorist operations. In North Africa, the eruption of civil conflict and dilapidation of security in Libya fosters a fertile environment for an assortment of extremist groups, including those affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Tunisia's mountainous Western border have become hotbeds of jihadist activity.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this study, will encourage greater strategic attention and enable the seeds of conflict resolution, political accommodation and national reconciliation to emerge and mitigate disasters and risks that may be looming. In the absence of an effective menu of responses to the security challenges of instability and terrorism highlighted, the risks will continue unabated globally. The situation in North Africa should not be resigned to fate. Instead, it is imperative that the African Union together with the international community, work diligently with regional authorities to expand and implement security capabilities. Further research is needed to determine the motive behind the terrorist groups before more grievous disasters are witnessed both in Africa and beyond.

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