

NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL REPORT

High-level overview and brief analysis of regional political, economic and security activity, distributed every fortnight.

MOROCCO

On 28 April, the Moroccan Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (CBJI) announced the dismantling of a terrorist cell composed of 13 individuals who were members of the Islamic State. Preliminary investigations show that that Islamist movements in the Sahel and Western Sahara regions had financed these members. Morocco has accused Algeria of encouraging terrorism by exploiting separatist groups in the Sahara and Sahel. Morocco is a strategic crossing point between Europe and Africa, therefore the terrorist organizations are drawn to the area. However, Moroccan authorities are well equipped in dealing with the threat.

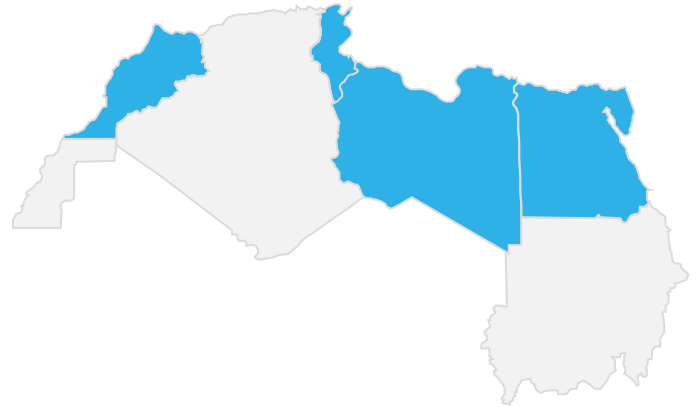
TUNISIA

On 8 May, two worshippers attending a Jewish pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue on the island of Djerba were killed in an attack by a radicalized gendarme. The gendarme also killed two of his colleagues before being shot. Following the attack, the French embassy in Tunis announced that it had opened a crisis unit. The attack comes when Tunisia, which is going through a financial crisis, is also facing a rise in xenophobia and racism. The unstable situation in Tunisia could see a weakening of the security sector as authorities contend with multiple issues contemporaneously. This allows lone terrorist actors with a better chance of conducting attacks on vulnerable populations and assets.

ALGERIA

On 8 May, Algeria organized the eleventh meeting of defense ministers of the member states of the North African Region Capability (NARC) organization. In attendance were representatives from Egypt, Libya, and the Polisario Front. This meeting is part of Algeria's efforts to seek support for the Western Sahara issue. Morocco's recent diplomatic isolation could deepen if Libya and Egypt were to align themselves with Algeria on this issue. However, most Arab states support an autonomous region under the Moroccan administration, not an independent state as requested by Algeria.

The Region at a Glance



EGYPT

On 8 May, Egypt strongly condemned Israel's deadly strikes in Gaza hours after the launch of Operation Shield and Arrow by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Jordan also condemned the strikes in Gaza and an IDF raid in Nablus in the West Bank. Egypt is one of Israel's most important allies in the Middle East. A spokesperson for the Egyptian Foreign Ministry stressed the need for the international community to act immediately and effectively to stop this aggression and ensure the protection of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and all occupied Palestinian territories. This is not the first time Israel's Arab allies have condemned its actions, but recent geopolitical shifts towards appeasement with Iran will likely drive a wedge between Israel and its allies in the Middle East.

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ALGERIA'S REPOSITIONING IN NORTH AFRICA

The appeasement between Saudi Arabia and Iran has impacted North African countries, namely Algeria. Once regionally isolated and has maintained positive relations with Iran, an opening with Saudi Arabia and changes in Tunisia are elevating the country to become a more powerful player in the region.

On 8 May, during an official visit to Algeria, KSA's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Faysal bin Farhan Al Saud, expressed that there was a full convergence of the views of Algeria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on various issues of common interest. The statement indicates a rapprochement between Algeria and KSA. For decades, Algeria's relations with other countries in the MENA region were fought. The issue left Algeria politically isolated from its neighbors and made it difficult for it to achieve its regional ambitions. The rapprochement with Saudi Arabia has provided Algeria with greater political capital to engage with neighboring states.

As a result of KSA and Iran's rapprochement, there is a growing risk that Morocco gets sidelined in regional negotiations. Morocco strongly opposed the reintegration of Syria into the Arab League, which was initiated by KSA. Additionally, Morocco maintains a tense relationship with neighboring Algeria that actively supports Sahrawi separatists in Western Sahara. As a result of Algeria's strengthened position thanks to Saudi alignment, Morocco' has lost relative diplomatic power which could impact its position on the Western Sahara issue. Initially the status quo in the Western Sahara benefited Morocco as it maintained power over the separatists. This reality was largely accepted by many North African states. This status quo could change as more and more Arab states realize that granting Western Sahara with certain autonomy provides a more credible alternative in ending dispute between the separatists and Morocco. While this position is not entirely in line with Algeria's vision on the issue, it still balances away from Morocco's desire of power over the region.

The recent geopolitical developments in North Africa have allowed Tunisian President Saied to solidify his grip on power. On 17 April, Tunisian authorities arrested Ennahda movement leader Rached Ghannouchi at his home. Algeria has long supported Saied's continue consolidation of power in Tunisia and the news indicates that Algeria will gain greater cooperation with Tunisia as Saied solidifies is more authoritarian model.

While Algeria, has a lot to gain from its warming relations with KSA, it remains a challenging partner to engage with for most north African states. While the promise of Algeria increasing its share of power in the region exists, it will still have to tread carefully in a region that is engaged by other international actors such as the United States, the EU, Turkey, and Russia.

