



(Esam Omran Al-Fetori/Reuters, 2019)

North Africa: News from the Region

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The military escalation in Libya has been a key event this week. Haftar's advance towards Tripoli has left a disunited international community struggling to respond, as divisions in the EU approach and lack of a strong response from states such as the US has caused the UN-backed National Conference to be postponed, whilst casualties from the fighting continue to increase.

There has been evidence of instability across the region, with a continuation of protests in Algeria, a suicide bombing in Egypt, the Hirak movement in Morocco regaining publicity, and the call for a new general strike expected to cause major disruption in Tunisia.

Meanwhile, Mauritania, the next country regionally to have Presidential elections, continues to preoccupy itself with the election campaigns of its candidates, with fears that issues like corruption may prompt public demonstrations soon.

Algeria

Protests are still ongoing in Algeria despite the resignation of Bouteflika last week. Military chief, Gaid Salah, has accused ongoing protests of being influenced by foreign actors, especially former colonial power France (*Le Monde*)¹. In some places, water cannons have been deployed to suppress ongoing protests (*Algérie Focus*)².

Regarding the timetable of the political transition, according to authorities, the postponed Presidential elections have been rescheduled to 4th July 2019 (*Le Soir*)³.

There are also reports that the Algerian intelligence service, who were previously under direct control of the President, has been brought under direct control of the Ministry of Defence (*Le Monde*)⁴.

Egypt

There have been mixed signals regarding Egyptian-US relations this week, as President El-Sisi visited Washington. President Trump has stated that he is satisfied of Sisi's work, and that Egypt continues to be an important partner for regional security (*France Info*)⁵. However, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, warned Egypt that the US would pledge sanctions if Egypt purchases Russian fighter jets (*Egyptian Streets*)⁶.

There has been other mixed news in Egypt. Egypt has announced an economic growth rate of 5.5%, the highest it has been for a decade (*Egyptian Streets*)⁷. However, in an indication of some of the ongoing restlessness, there were also reports of a 15-year old suicide bomber in North Sinai who killed 15 people in a marketplace (*Egyptian Streets*)⁸.

Additionally, Egypt announced that it "will repeal" its controversial 2017 NGO law, insofar as non-compliance with the law in the future will not amount to criminal penalties such as prison sentences (*Human Rights Watch*)⁹.

¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/04/10/en-algerie-l-armee-valide-la-transition-de-90-jours-et-met-en-garde-les-manifestants_5448521_3212.html

² <https://www.algerie-focus.com/2019/04/algerie-lusage-des-canons-a-son-pour-reprimer-les-manifestations-pacifiques-la-laddh-denonce/>

³ <https://www.lesoir.be/217723/article/2019-04-10/elections-en-algerie-la-presidentielle-aura-lieu-le-4-juillet>

⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/04/09/en-algerie-l-armee-reprend-la-main-sur-les-services-de-renseignement_5447873_3212.html

⁵ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/egypte/egypte-donald-trump-satisfait-du-tres-bon-travail-du-president-sissi_3274181.html

⁶ <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/04/11/us-pledges-sanctions-on-egypt-if-purchasing-of-russian-fighter-jets-occurs/>

⁷ <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/04/07/egypts-economic-growth-rate-soars-to-5-5-the-highest-rate-in-a-decade/>

⁸ <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/04/10/six-year-old-among-seven-killed-by-15-year-old-suicide-bomber-in-egypts-north-sinai/>

⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/05/egypt-make-public-new-draft-ngo-law>

Libya

Fighting between Tripoli-Government of National Accord (GNA) forces and forces loyal to Haftar has continued with at least 56 reported casualties, and the displacement of more than 6,000 civilians from their homes, but these totals could be much higher (*Reuters Africa*)¹⁰. 46 members of the eastern-based administration, the House of Representatives, have formally declared their support for Haftar's push on Tripoli (*The Libya Observer*)¹¹.

Meanwhile international responses have been mixed. Members of the GNA have suggested that the GNA retains support from many international states, such as the US, UK, Italy, Germany and Kuwait (*The Libya Observer*)¹². Yet, US forces based in Tripoli withdrew from Libya as Haftar's fighters approached the city (*CNBC*)¹³. Additionally, France, a key ally of Haftar, blocked an EU resolution condemning Haftar (*Reuters*)¹⁴, and the UN-led political process has been dealt a severe blow, as the announced National Conference in Ghadames has been postponed due to the surge in fighting (*The Guardian*)¹⁵.

Mauritania

There have been multiple reports regarding the campaigns of various candidates for the upcoming Mauritanian Presidential elections. Biram Dah Abeid has accused authorities of wanting to sabotage his candidacy by preventing sponsorship from some inland, local councilors (*Sahara Media*)¹⁶. He later accused the G5 Sahel grouping of being a "club of dictatorships" imposed on the Saharan people using the visage of the fight against terrorism (*L'Authentique*)¹⁷ and called for a "popular outburst" to guarantee the transparency of the election process (*CRIDEM*)¹⁸.

Three opposition parties have formed a coalition, *coalition des forces du changement*, to support the candidacy of Mohamed O. Maouloud (*L'Authentique*)¹⁹. For his part, Maouloud has publicly declared change to be inevitable in Mauritania and said that the authoritarian regime will soon end (*L'Authentique*)²⁰.

¹⁰ <https://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFL8N21T20P>

¹¹ <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/46-hor-members-voice-their-support-war-tripoli>

¹² <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/pc-member-amari-confirms-support-us-britain-germany-italy-and-kuwait-government-tripoli>

¹³ <https://www.cnbctv.com/2019/04/08/us-pulls-forces-from-libya-as-fighting-approaches-capital.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-eu-tajani/eu-to-call-on-libyas-haftar-to-stop-offensive-draft-idUSKCN1RM1DO>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/09/un-postpones-libya-national-conference-amid-fighting-tripoli>

¹⁶ <https://www.saharamedias.net/fr/mauritanie-biram-o-abeid-accuse-les-autorites-dentraver-sa-candidature-aux-presidentielles/>

¹⁷ <http://www.lauthentic.info/Politique/article/Birame-Dah-Abeid-le-G-5-Sahel-c-est-le-choix-entre-les-dictatures-d-Etat-et-le>

¹⁸ http://www.cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=722172

¹⁹ <http://www.lauthentic.info/Politique/article/Soutien-a-l-candidature-de-Ould-Maouloud-a-la-presidentielle>

²⁰ <http://www.lauthentic.info/Politique/article/Mohamed-O-Maouloud-le-changement-est-un-imperatif-tout-comme-la-fin-du-regime>

Morocco

Morocco has continued its recent push in strengthening international relations with other states. Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Nasser Bourita, met with Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, in Kuwait this week (2M)²¹. During these talks, five bilateral conventions between Morocco and Kuwait were signed (H24 Info)²².

However, in unwelcome news to the state, two members of Rif's Hirak, who had been detained by Moroccan authorities in Oukacha prison in Casablanca, sewed their mouths shut in protest of their situation and treatment by authorities (Yabiladi)²³.

Tunisia

Beji Caid Essebsi announced he will not be running for upcoming Presidential elections and appealed to Youssef Chahed to reintegrate Nidaa Tounes (France TV Info)²⁴. Meanwhile, the UN expert, Moncef Kartas, appeared before an anti-terrorist court in Tunisia on suspicion of espionage on the behalf of foreign parties (Jawhara FM)²⁵.

In indications of ongoing volatility, a general strike has been announced for 12th-13th April to protest rising fuel prices (Espace Manager)²⁶. There was also reports of an exchange of gunfire between the military and suspected terrorist in the region of Kef (Tunisie Numérique)²⁷.

About:

This is a weekly, non-exhaustive snapshot of regional, and international news regarding the politics of the North African region. Selections demonstrate varying perspectives and opinions from French, Arabic and English media sources. Taking such an approach enables regional trends to be observed and documented so they may be used and applied in our detailed research projects.

²¹ <http://www.2m.ma/fr/news/nasser-bourita-sentretient-au-koweit-avec-le-ministre-de-la-defense-et-lancien-premier-ministre-koweitien-20190409/>

²² <https://www.h24info.ma/actu/commission-mixte-maroco-koweitienne-cinq-conventions-signes/>

²³ <https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/76830/hirak-nasser-zefzafi-mohamed-haki.html>

²⁴ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/tunisie/elections-en-tunisie/presidentielle-en-tunisie-le-chef-de-letat-beji-caid-essebsi-dit-jeter-leponge_3274295.html

²⁵ <https://www.jawharafm.net/fr/article/aujourd'hui-l-expert-onusien-moncef-kartas-comparaît-devant-le-ministère-public-du-pôle-judiciaire-antiterroriste/90/68559>

²⁶ <https://www.espacemanager.com/tunisie-greve-generale-dans-le-transport-du-carburant-demain-et-apres-demain.html>

²⁷ <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-coups-de-feu-contre-des-elements-terroristes-au-kef-et-decouverte-dun-fusil-kalachnikov/>

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