



BRIEFING PAPER

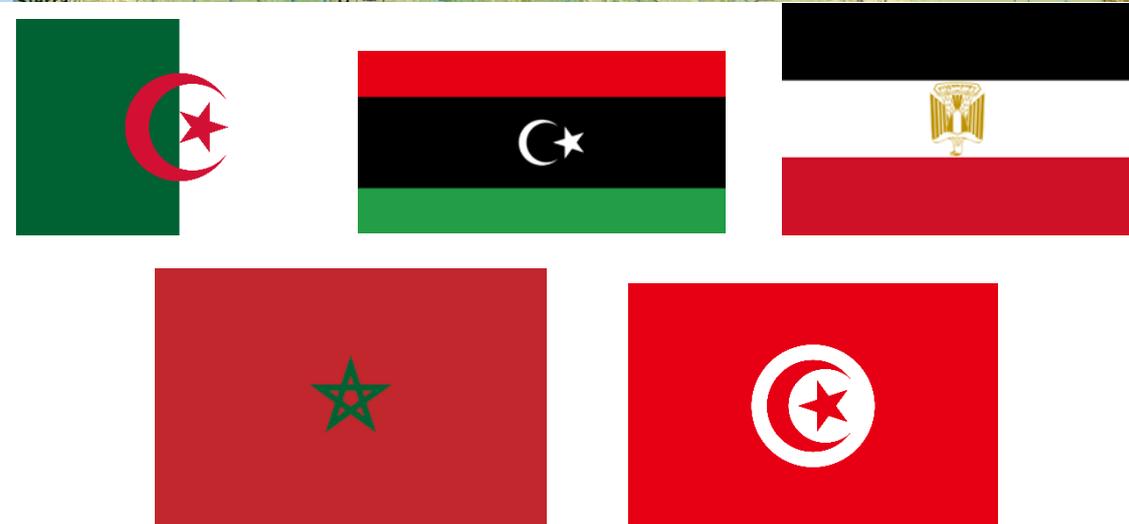
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North Africa

By Ben Smith

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Regional overview

Politics

Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco have had very different political trajectories since the Arab uprisings in 2011. Morocco and Algeria have seen relative stability. Tunisia's former regime was overthrown, and it is still considered the only country that installed genuine democracy after 2011. Now it may now be drifting back towards authoritarianism and the personalisation of politics.

The Libyan and Egyptian regimes fell but this has not resulted in real democracy. Egypt's government is running a repressive policy, particularly against the Muslim Brotherhood, severely violating human rights, according to rights groups. But while Egypt has very serious terrorism problems to deal with, it does seem to be bringing some order to the economy. Libya has become a failed state and there is no end in sight to the chaos, despite various initiatives sponsored by the international community.

Security

Parts of North Africa have long been troubled by insecurity and unrest; those problems have become far worse in Libya and Egypt, according to one widely-used source. There are many terrorist cells in the region, some local and some linked to external groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has strong links through the Sahel on the southern edge of the Sahara, and ISIS/Daesh, with its connections in the Levant.

Lack of cooperation

North African neighbours share many bonds of culture and history, but their political relations with each other are marked by distrust. The Western Sahara dispute, where Algeria supports the Polisario liberation front and Morocco claims the territory as its own, is the most obvious point of contention. But other factors, including the lack of any central authority in Libya, exacerbate the weakness of regional collaboration, leaving both intra-regional trade and cooperation on security very limited.

Most North African countries have porous southern borders and a deep tradition of land-based trade routes; smuggling, including of small arms, is endemic and essential to the livelihoods of the small populations who live in border areas in the Sahara. This environment is fertile territory for radical groups to spread their ideologies and to make money, as [commentators such as Jacques Rousselier have pointed out](#):

The patchy and under-resourced nature of the Maghreb states' security cooperation, marred by the Morocco–Algeria political rivalry and failed or weak governments in Libya and Tunisia, is particularly evident in the border regions' glaring vulnerabilities to transnational crime, terrorist networks, and illegal migration.

Economic growth

The region has achieved strong growth in the last few years, although a lot of this growth was the result of a recovery in Libyan oil production; much of the region remains dependent on hydrocarbon revenues. Economic reform programmes have been welcomed; the [African Development Bank predicts](#) that the region's economy will grow by 5% in 2018 and 4.6% in 2019, The region has also made strong progress reducing both poverty and inequality.

Nevertheless, unemployment remains high, particularly for young people, graduates and women, and there are many isolated rural areas that do not benefit much from economic growth.

Migration

North Africa is a source of migrants to Europe and several countries have sizeable North African diasporas. The region, particularly Libya, is also a transit route for migrants from Africa south of the Sahara, and there has been a lot of controversy about EU efforts to handle this, such as [EU Navfor Med Operation Sophia](#).

UK action

The UK Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office run the North Africa Regional Cooperation Fund and the [North Africa Technical Assistance Facility](#). Together [these funds aim to](#) bolster stability:

...designed to support the delivery of the North Africa [National Security Council] strategy, the objective of which is to achieve sustainable stability, security and prosperity in North Africa, including by tackling long-term structural issues.

The programmes receive Overseas Development Assistance ([ODA money](#)) from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, overseen by the National Security Council. The North Africa Regional Cooperation Fund's budget allocation for 2018/9 is £3 million, while the Technical Assistance Facility is spending £5 million.

Brexit

UK policy towards the region has been shaped by EU initiatives for the region, such as the [European Neighbourhood Policy](#). The [outline of the political declaration](#) setting out the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK, published in November 2018, suggested that the EU and the UK would coordinate policy where possible. The document calls for: "Close, flexible and scalable cooperation on external action at the bilateral and international level, ensuring that the UK can combine efforts with the Union to the greatest effect..." That suggests that the UK's approach to North Africa may not diverge too much from that of the EU after a withdrawal from the EU.

The UK Government wants to replicate the EU-negotiated free trade agreements with the North African countries. Asked how much progress there had been in replacing the existing trade agreement with Tunisia, for example, the [Government's answer](#) was not time-specific:

We have been in constant dialogue with all our trading partners to achieve continuity by replicating the effects of our existing EU trade agreements. They understand this must be primary objective, and securing continuity will be a strong foundation to build on our already successful trading relationship.

1. Algeria

Storm clouds?

Since the events of 2011 Algeria has remained largely stable, in comparison to many of its neighbours in the Arab world. That stability is under threat, however. Low oil prices have seriously exacerbated economic problems and Algeria suffers from the same dissatisfaction as in neighbouring countries: the relatively well-educated and growing young population lacks decent job opportunities.

The Government introduced an austerity policy in 2017, increasing taxes and reducing subsidies. These reduced standards of living and added to the general discontent; there were more protests in 2017 than in 2011, the year of the Arab uprisings. In the 2018 budget, the government backed off austerity policies and increased spending.¹

More protests in
2017 than 2011

A powerful business class, dependent on the State, is an obstacle to the thoroughgoing reforms that many commentators think are necessary to diversify the economy away from hydrocarbons and create more jobs. One reason for what has widely been described as “paralysis” is that Algerians remember the civil war of the 1990s, when hundreds of thousands died in battles between the State and violent *jihadi* groups.

The Algerian regime has in the past been relatively effective at managing security threats but those facing the country today are unpredictable, while the possibility of unrest, driven by economic stagnation and resentment at the unrepresentative government, is growing according to analysts:

The collapse of purchasing power, daily difficulties and the provocations of officials have turned many Algerians against the regime, There are signs we are sitting atop a volcano. You can sense it in chants against the regime in football stadiums, in protests in the south and in strikes.²

In a recent paper, the International Crisis Group suggested that the Government needs to be more open with the people on economic challenges, and to focus on more economic inclusion, especially for young people.³

Political transition

Probably the biggest threat to the country is achieving a peaceful transition from the present leadership generation, which derives legitimacy from its role the liberation struggle from France, culminating in 1962.

Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the incumbent since 1999, had a stroke in 2013 and was seen less in public, but then went on to win another term in 2014, although wheelchair-bound. It is not clear who is really wielding

¹ [‘Algerian government pursues high spending for 2019 as it eyes elections’](#), *Arab Weekly*, 16 September 2016

² [‘Bouteflika heads for fifth term as Algeria economy worsens’](#), *Financial Times*, 19 November 2018

³ [‘Breaking Algeria’s Economic Paralysis’](#), International Crisis Group, 19 November 2018

power in the country, however; President Bouteflika's voice has not been broadcast on television for years.

One thing keeping Bouteflika in at least nominal power is the fact that no clear successor has appeared yet.

Presidential elections are due in 2019. There had been some speculation that President Bouteflika might be declared unfit and constitutional provisions to replace him might come into force before the election. It now appears, however, is that Bouteflika will run for a fifth term. His National Liberation Front party announced in October 2018 that he would be their candidate, and he is likely to win.

Bouteflika to run again

Algeria has a more distributed and complex system of power than many other countries in the region,⁴ although the military remains probably the strongest actor. The power centres in Algeria seem to have been unable to agree on a clear transition path.

The powerbrokers' failure to agree on a new candidate bodes ill for their ability to agree much needed reforms.

Libya conflict

The chaos in Libya, with which Algeria shares a long and porous border, also threatens Algerian stability. Generally, the two countries have enjoyed stable relations, but Algeria's border with Libya has been officially closed since 2014 because of Algerian concerns that arms and unrest could spread from Libya.

Radicalisation

Algeria has a long history of fighting jihadism and a relatively sophisticated counterterrorism policy. Algeria has seen a steady decline in fatalities, falling from 153 in 2009 to nine in 2016.⁵ In recent decades, Algerians seem to have accepted an authoritarian government that offers stability, after the disaster of the civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002. Whether that acceptance will last is open to question.

Will acceptance of authoritarian government last?

UK

The Algerian programme funded by the Conflict Stability and Security Fund has a budget of £6.5 million for 2018/9. The biggest project is one encouraging economic diversification, youth employment and education and is being run by the International labour organisation, the World Bank and the British Council, among others. The other big project is one on political inclusivity and the media and is being implemented by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, United Nations Development Programme, National democratic Institute and BBC Media Action.⁶

As the UK leaves the EU, the Government is seeking to ensure continuity for existing EU trade agreements, including that with Algeria.⁷

⁴ Abdelillah Bendaoudi, '[Algeria's Succession Crisis: Plenty of Divisions, but No One Conquers](#)', Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 23 September 2018

⁵ Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, '[Specter of jihadism continues to haunt Maghreb](#)', Middle East Institute, September 2018

⁶ [CSSF Algeria Programme Summary, 2018/19](#)

⁷ [HL Written question - HL9650](#), 2 August 2018

2. Egypt

Politics

2018 election

In March 2018, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was re-elected President for his second term, with 97% of the votes. No significant opposition candidate was allowed to run. Some of the barred candidates had military connections, suggesting that his crucial support among the armed forces is far short of cash from unanimous. *Foreign Affairs* described the vote as “a theatrical performance, staged by the regime to contrive a popular mandate...”⁸

The next presidential election is due in 2022.

Campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood

In September 2018 the Egyptian Government confiscated the assets of thousands of individuals and organisations allegedly connected with the Muslim Brotherhood. The total confiscated amounted to several billion dollars,⁹ which was transferred directly to the Egyptian treasury.

The move was legitimated by an April 2018 law on the seizure of terrorist assets. This allowed the Government simply to appropriate the assets rather than freeze them. A committee to oversee and implement the confiscations is nominated by the Government, while the definition of terrorism in law is very broad.

Many of those affected by September’s action have little or no apparent connection to the Brotherhood, but the law does not require an open investigation, so no evidence has been presented.

The move was presented as part of the Government’s fight against terrorism, but may well have also had something to do with a shortage of cash. It could backfire, however, if it scares off investors who worry that their investments could be confiscated.

Short of cash

Also in September, the Egyptian authorities sentenced 75 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood to death after a mass trial of 739 people. Amnesty International described it as a “grotesque parody of justice”.¹⁰

Human Rights

This policy is characteristic of the present situation in Egypt; an authoritarian government using its counter-terrorist credentials to bolster its legitimacy, meanwhile being widely perceived to undermine due process and natural justice.¹¹ This risks increasing Muslim

⁸ Andrew Miller and Amy Hawthorne, ‘[Egypt’s Sham Election](#)’, *Foreign Affairs*, 23 March 2018

⁹ Khaled Mahmoud, ‘[Sisi’s Grab for Brotherhood Assets](#)’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 October 2018

¹⁰ ‘[Egypt: Verdicts expected for 739 defendants in grotesque mass death penalty trial](#)’, Amnesty International press release, 29 June 2018

¹¹ See for example [Human Rights Watch](#): “President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi’s government continues to preside over the worst human rights crisis in the country in decades.”

Brotherhood supporters' sense of victimhood – something which some argue is a pre-cursor to radicalisation.¹²

The extreme repression in Egypt is not just reserved for Islamists, however. Torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions are widely used against government critics and there is a widespread crackdown on civil society organisations, according to Amnesty International.¹³

Human rights
defenders arrested

Asked about its reaction to the detention of activists, the UK Government said recently that it was raising human rights concerns with Egyptian counterparts:

We are aware of reports about the recent arrests of journalists, activists and human rights defenders in Egypt. Egypt is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Human Rights Priority Country and the UK regularly raises concerns about human rights with the Egyptian Government both in public and private. On 18 September we issued a statement at the UN Human Rights Council in which we raised specific concern about the 'arrests of activists, bloggers and journalists'. I also raised our human rights concerns with the Egyptian Foreign Minister during my visit to Cairo on 14 October. We are tracking the cases in question and welcome the release of Abdel Khalik Farouk and Ibrahim el-Khateib on 29 October pending investigation.¹⁴

Security

Egypt faces very severe security threats. The country follows close on the heels of Libya in the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index 2017, which says that Egypt's security situation has deteriorated: "Both Egypt and Turkey recorded substantially higher levels of terrorism following government crackdowns".¹⁵

The local branch of ISIS/Daesh is the most active terrorist group and is based in Northern Sinai. ISIS Sinai mostly attacks Egyptian Government targets, including police and the armed forces, and religious minorities, but they sometimes target foreigners.¹⁶

ISIS in Northern
Sinai

Despite broad security cooperation with Israel and a concerted military campaign against militants, particularly in North Sinai, terrorism remains a serious problem. A spectacular attack against a mosque in February 2018, causing more than 300 deaths, drove the Government to step up its anti-terrorist campaign, with some successes, disrupting the internal communications of ISIS, for example.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) says that attempted terrorist attacks are likely across the country; these are most likely to be successful in Northern Sinai but there is a risk elsewhere too; there are "almost daily" reports of attacks.

¹² Lydia Sizer, [Libya's Terrorism Challenge Assessing the Salafi-Jihadi Threat](#), Middle East Institute, October 2017

¹³ Amnesty International, [Egypt 2017/18](#)

¹⁴ [HC Written question – 188071](#), 15 November 2018

¹⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace, [Global terrorism Index 2017](#), p3

¹⁶ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Foreign travel advice Egypt - terrorism](#)

The FCO advises UK citizens against all travel to the Northern Sinai and against all but essential travel to the rest of the Sinai and desert areas in the west of the country, too.¹⁷

Sharm

One of the most high-profile of recent terrorist attacks was the destruction of the Russian airliner in October 2015 over Northern Sinai. Since then, the UK authorities have suspended flights between UK airports and the holiday resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. In November 2018 the Government confirmed that flights were still suspended because of security concerns:

The UK Government continues to work closely with its Egyptian counterparts, sharing its expertise in establishing effective security arrangements at all Egyptian airports including Sharm el-Sheikh.

It is long standing government policy not to comment in detail on security matters. However, we look forward to achieving the return of flights once we can be assured that the necessary security requirements can be sustained.¹⁸

Sharm flights still suspended

Economy

The Egyptian economy has been hard hit by the political upheavals since 2011. It has been showing some signs of recovery recently, however, with growth at 5.3% in 2017/8 according to the Government. Egypt has enacted some painful reforms, partly at the instigation of the International Monetary Fund, which has provided a loan of \$12 billion.¹⁹ The balance of payments and the budget deficit were also showing signs of improvement.²⁰ Those gains are far from being evenly distributed, however, and ordinary Egyptians may be feeling little benefit amid subsidy cuts, sharply rising prices and unemployment that has fallen but is still high.

UK

The UK has dedicated significant sums and efforts to trying to foster economic growth in the country, as set out in a recent answer to a Parliamentary Question:

The UK is helping to address Egypt's economic and demographic challenges as part of our support for the transition to long-term stability in North Africa. The DFID/FCO North Africa Joint Unit is responsible for assistance provided through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund. This includes a £15 million partnership with the World Bank from 2016-2020 to create jobs and promote social inclusion; and a £2 million partnership with the International Finance Corporation over 2017-2020 to help support Egyptian start-ups and entrepreneurs. We are providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance and other parts of the Egyptian Government to help implement economic reforms. We are also planning to fund research into economic reform policy in Egypt.²¹

¹⁷ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Foreign travel advice Egypt - summary](#)

¹⁸ [Written question - HL11004](#), 5 November 2018

¹⁹ ['IMF Executive Board Approves US\\$ 12 billion Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility for Egypt'](#), IMF press release, 11 November 2018

²⁰ [Egypt's economy grows 5.3 percent, highest in 10 years: minister](#), *Reuters*, 25 July 2018

²¹ [HC Written question – 136151](#), 24 April 2018

The Egypt CSSF Programme has been allocated £9.5 million for 2018/9.²² The largest chunk of that is going towards the World Bank partnership, aiming to help with economic reforms. Another significant sum is going to UNICEF to help strengthen the education sector.

There is some UK support to the Egyptian military in its anti-terrorist activities, as set out in a PQ answer of April 2018:

The Ministry of Defence is supporting the Egyptian military to develop its capability to respond to the terrorist threat the country faces. Our programme of activity includes information sharing, senior bilateral Staff Talks, and bespoke training, including countering the threat from improvised explosive devices.²³

UK support to the
Egyptian military

16 Egyptian military officers were trained in the UK in 2017-18.²⁴

²² [CSSF Egypt Programme, 2018/19](#)

²³ [HC Written question – 136152](#), 25 April 2018

²⁴ [HC Written question – 133736](#), 28 March 2018

3. Libya

Politics

Since the conflict of 2014 Libya has become what most would accept is a failed state. It has broken up into competing political and military factions, with two separate authorities, one operating in the east of the country, centred on Tobruk, and the other in the west, centred on the official capital, Tripoli.²⁵

Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj is head of the internationally-recognised government in Tripoli, Khalifa Haftar is leader of the Libyan National Army, holding much of eastern Libya, including Beghazi. Aghela Saleh is Speaker of the House of Representatives based in the eastern city of Tobruk. Khaled Mishri leads the High State Council, an unrecognised government body in Tripoli, formed from the rump of the old elected body, the General National Congress.

Large areas of the country are under no effective control at all, with rival militias vying for influence. Libya is the North African country most affected by terrorism, according to the Global Terrorism Index 2017.²⁶

No effective control

Internationally-backed political negotiations aiming to bring about national reconciliation are based on the Skhirat Agreement, negotiated with civilian politicians representing both parliaments and aiming to form a unity government, signed in Morocco in December 2015. The Skhirat Agreement did not come to fruition. In 2017 a UN Action Plan was drawn up aiming to set up negotiations to amend the Skhirat Agreement, hold a national conference and organise fresh elections.

The national dialogue in pursuit of the Action Plan are now on hold, however. There is renewed violence in Tripoli, after militias failed to abide by a ceasefire agreed in September 2018. Elections were due to be held some time in 2018, despite the violence, but this plan has now been abandoned.

With the various outside forces influencing the conflict also at odds about how to proceed (see below), it seems likely that the conflict will continue. That poses a serious threat to neighbouring countries, especially given the huge number of small arms present in Libya and the region. It also signals a continued flow of illegal migrants to Europe, both Libyan and from Africa south of the Sahara.

Small arms

The UK Government set out its position on political developments in Libya in October 2018:

The UN Action Plan launched in September 2017 makes clear that elections and a referendum on the country's constitution will be important milestones in Libya's political transition. UN Special Representative to the Secretary General Ghassan Salamé has also been clear about the need for elections to be preceded by the necessary political, technical and security preparations, and for progress towards a new constitutional framework that commands

²⁵ For more information on Libya see the Commons Briefing Paper [Libya: the consequences of a failed state](#), May 2018

²⁶ [Global Terrorism Index 2017](#), Vision of Humanity, p104

sufficiently broad support among Libyans. The Libyans present in Paris in May this year set out an ambitious timetable in relation to these objectives, but further progress is needed. Italy will host an international conference on Libya in Sicily next month to discuss outstanding issues.

The UK is supporting the work of Libya's national and local election commissions – including by providing £1.2 million to UN Development Programme over two years to support fair and safe local and national elections in Libya.

Local and Municipal Councils and wider civil society will play an important role in any sustainable solution to Libya's problems. We support the UN-led National Dialogue process, which has brought together and consulted with a range of Libyans from across the country; and we are encouraged by recent exchanges between municipal representatives from east and west Libya.²⁷

The Sicily conference took place on 12-13 November. It was described as “in disarray”, as it closed.²⁸ General Haftar did arrive in Palermo but it was not clear whether he participated.

Palermo conference

The conference welcomed the UN's call for a conference on national conciliation in the first weeks of 2019 and agreed on the importance of finishing preparations for new elections by spring 2019.²⁹

Radicalisation

Radical *jihadi* groups have proliferated in Libya, including the local version of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Sharia and scattered cells of ISIS. There is competition and collaboration between groups and the scene is highly fluid.

Libyan nationals have featured strongly among the foreign fighters for al-Qaeda and ISIS in Iraq and Syria.³⁰ With ISIS territorial control almost gone in Syria, more ISIS fighters may follow the ISIS leadership's encouragement to regroup in Libya.

Al-Qaeda affiliates make large profits from their integration into Libya's illicit economy, which has grown strongly in the current chaos.

Controlling the violent *jihadi* threat in Libya depends on ending the civil unrest and re-building the state, underlining the importance of the national dialogue, presently suspended.

External forces

Egypt and the UAE share General Haftar's anti-Islamist stance; they and Russia have supported the House of Representatives in Tobruk and probably provided General Haftar with military support including arms and air power; at the same time they have formally supported the UN-led approach.

Qatar, Turkey and Sudan have supported Islamist factions close to the General National Congress and its successor the High State

²⁷ [HC Written question – 178481](#), 22 October 2018

²⁸ [‘Italy's Conference on Libya in Disarray’](#), Voice of America, 13 November 2018

²⁹ [Conference for Libya, conclusions](#), Italian Government, 12/13 November 2018

³⁰ Lydia Sizer, [Libya's Terrorism Challenge Assessing the Salafi-Jihadi Threat](#), Middle East Institute, October 2017

Council. They are reported to be less influential than the first group, however.

Neighbours to the west, Algeria and Tunisia, are trying to overcome their reluctance to collaborate with each other and to intervene in Libya, in order to keep their borders safe.

Western countries are backing the UN-backed government and the Skhirat-based process. There is a certainly rivalry, however, between France and Italy, with each vying to be the lead European country. The US has conducted airstrikes against ISIS targets in Libya.

Migration

There are around two-thirds of a million non-Libyan migrants in the country who originate from elsewhere in Africa (mostly) and aspire to reach Europe. There are many reports of migrants and refugees alike being systematically mistreated and exploited.³¹

Italy struck a deal with tribal representatives in 2017 and this has led to fewer migrants leaving Libya by boat for Italy. The Libyan Coastguard is reported to be overwhelmed, however,³² and as it has become more difficult to smuggle migrants across the sea. The policy of destroying smugglers' boats has led to more dangerous vessels, including rubber dinghies, being used.

The UN has also lost access to detention centres run by Libyan groups inside Libya. And the reduced flow over the Mediterranean has encouraged smugglers to make money by selling migrants to people in Libya making them vulnerable to forced labour or sexual exploitation.³³

In a statement in September 2018, UN Special Representative Ghassan Salame said that migrants are facing unimaginable suffering:

[...] groups in situations of particular vulnerability in Libya include migrants, who face unimaginable suffering including unlawful killings, rape, torture, slavery, forced labour, extortion and exploitation. Such abuses are perpetrated by criminal networks as well as State actors and armed groups. They are holed up in detention centres, formal and informal, in various cities.³⁴

Migrants' suffering
"unimaginable"

UK relations

In July 2018 Middle East minister Alistair Burt set out the UK's funding for projects in Libya:

The UK is at the forefront of international efforts to support Libya's political stability and reform. DFID programmes provide much needed humanitarian and healthcare assistance to the most vulnerable. As part of DFID's £75 million migration programme working along the Central Mediterranean route, up to £5 million will be allocated to humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants and refugees in Libya. In addition, a two-year programme worth £3.29 million focusses on multi sector

³¹ For more information see the Commons briefing paper [Libya: the consequences of a failed state](#), May 2018

³² 'Destination Europe: Demoralised', *IRIN News*, 11 July 2018

³³ 'Libyan militia cash in on EU's anti-smuggling strategy', *EUObserver*, 5 October 2018

³⁴ [Statement by Ghassan Salame, Special Representative of the Secretary General to Libya and Head of UNSMIL pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 37/45](#), UNSMIL, 26 September 2018

humanitarian assistance and building capacity of primary health care services. Alongside this, we continue to help fund the European Union Trust Fund, which works in a number of countries, including Libya, where it focuses on improving conditions for migrants in detention centres. The UK's total contribution to the North Africa window of the Fund is €18m.³⁵

The CSSF Libya Country Programme is funded by £11.8 million in 2018/19,³⁶ with an important element aiming to strengthen political and media institutions, with the participation of BBC Media Action, the UN and the National Democratic Institute. There is also a significant mine-clearing element.

Strengthening Libya institutions

Responding to concerns about the rise of modern slavery in Libya, the Middle East minister said in May 2018 that he had discussed this with the Government of National Accord and that the UK is dedicating funds to fighting it:

The UK is committed to safe, legal and well-managed migration. We need a comprehensive approach, addressing the root causes of migration, as well as their consequences. The Prime Minister has made eradicating modern slavery one of her top foreign policy priorities. Our new £75 million migration programme will specifically target migrants travelling from West Africa via the Sahel to Libya and will provide protection and critical humanitarian support to reduce suffering and exploitation. The UK also supports the Declaration from the EU-Africa Summit to address the situation in Libya, including efforts to sanction people smugglers, and the establishment of a UN-EU-AU Taskforce to facilitate the Assisted Voluntary Return for migrants in Libya. We support further efforts in this area, including by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.³⁷

In November 2018 the UK collaborated with the US and France on the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Salah Badi, described as "senior commander of the Al Somood Brigade, a militia opposed to the UN-recognised Government of National Accord".³⁸

IRA compensation

Some in Parliament and elsewhere have been pressing for compensation from the present Libyan authorities for UK victims of IRA terrorism, since the Qaddafi government collaborated with the IRA. The Government says that it wants to see a just solution for all victims of IRA terrorism and continues to press the Libyan authorities to engage with victims; the violence has disrupted that process, however.³⁹

³⁵ [HC Written question – 163744](#), 19 July 2018

³⁶ [CSSF Libya Country Programme 2018/19](#)

³⁷

³⁸ [‘UK, US & France secure UN sanctions against Salah Badi’](#), Foreign and Commonwealth Office press release, 19 November 2018

³⁹ [Written question - HL10869](#), 5 November 2018

4. Morocco

Morocco, along with Algeria, has enjoyed relative stability, compared with other Middle Eastern and North African countries since 2011. Constitutional changes introduced in 2011 promised to move the country towards a more constitutional monarchy, which seemed to pacify early unrest. Morocco in any case has a relatively legitimate leadership, in the form of a monarchy that has been in place since the 17th century. It has also existed as a state for centuries, unlike many in the region.

Although reforms in 2011 promised a much stronger role for the parliament, not much was delivered and the King retains a “dominant” role.⁴⁰

Dominant role for the Palace

The mainstream Islamist party, the PJD, won the 2016 election but incumbent Prime Minister Benkirane of the PJD was ousted after failing for months to form a government. Another PJD member, Saad Othmani, became Prime Minister, but many powerful ministerial posts went to pro-Palace technocrats rather than PJD members.

The events demonstrated the persistent power of the King over elected politicians. In October 2017 the King dismissed three ministers over their implementation of reforms for the impoverished Rif region. The Rif mountains, a stronghold of the Berber language, had been the scene of several demonstrations and remains prone to unrest.

Radicalisation

As well as a relatively legitimate regime, Morocco has an effective security apparatus, has co-opted mainstream Islamists into the government and exerted control over the practice of Islam in Morocco. In the Middle East and North Africa, Morocco has been one of the countries least affected by domestic terrorism.⁴¹

Nevertheless, many Moroccans have been radicalised and participated in conflicts such as Syria; Europeans of Moroccan descent too. Morocco remains a highly unequal society and the education system is widely criticised,⁴² and these factors may contribute to radicalisation of Moroccans.

Foreign policy

A major foreign policy initiative for Morocco has been to turn towards Africa, partly driven by an erosion of faith in ties with the EU. Morocco rejoined the African Union in 2017, having left its predecessor the Organisation of African Unity 30 years ago when the body recognised the independence of Western Sahara. Morocco has welcomed the OAU’s acceptance of UN leadership of efforts to resolve the dispute.

Turn to Africa

⁴⁰ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2018](#)

⁴¹ Vision of Humanity, [Global Terrorism Index 2017](#), p45

⁴² [‘How an education crisis is hurting Morocco’s poor’](#), *al-Jazeera*, 7 March 2018

Morocco broke off diplomatic relations with Iran in May 2018, accusing Iran of backing Hezbollah, its Lebanese protégé, to intervene in support of the Polisario in Western Sahara.

The Moroccan banking sector is particularly strong and has moved into neighbouring countries, leading a Moroccan drive to do more business with neighbours to the south.

Regional relations remain strained. Although diplomatic relations with Algeria, severed over the Western Sahara dispute, were restored in 1988, their mutual border was closed in 1994 and remains so. In 2017 the Moroccan Ambassador to Algiers was briefly withdrawn.

Morocco is a Sunni monarchy and supports Saudi Arabia and its allies in the regional competition with Iran. Rabat has tried to remain neutral, however, in the dispute with Qatar.

UK relations

In July 2018, the first UK-Morocco Strategic Dialogue was held on London. The then Foreign Secretary said:

The UK and Morocco have an illustrious 800-year old history of exchanges and friendship, so establishing this annual forum, alternating between the UK and Morocco, is a welcome and natural step. With many areas of interest, we agreed to focus our discussion on four themes: Political-Diplomatic, Security, Economic and Cultural.

Regional security and counterterrorism will be an important part of these discussions.⁴³

The Conflict Stability and Security Fund supports several projects in Morocco aiming to help build institutional capacity, implemented by such organisations as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British Council. The budget for financial year 2018/9 is £4.46 million.⁴⁴

⁴³ [HL Deb 27 June 2013, c280-4GC](#)

⁴⁴ [Morocco CSSF programme 2018/19](#)

5. Tunisia

Security

A woman blew herself up on avenue Habib Bourguiba, in the heart of Tunis, on 29 October 2018. The explosion killed her and eight policemen, her presumed targets.

The attack damaged an otherwise improved security scene in Tunisia, after the disastrous attacks of 2015, including the beach attack that left 38 dead, 30 of them British.

The UK [Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises](#) against travel to the far west and south of the country and a state of emergency, imposed in 2015, remains in place.

Nevertheless, despite skirmishes near the Algerian border from time to time, the rest of Tunisia had been relatively safe, and tourists have been returning. The Tunisian Government said in June that tourist revenues for the first half of 2018 were 40% higher than for the same period last year.⁴⁵

Radicalisation is, nevertheless, a problem in Tunisia: in one source the country came top of a table showing fighters with ISIS per 100,000 of the population.⁴⁶ Tunisia

Politics

The incident fed into the increasingly bitter stalemate between Beiji Caid Essebsi, the President, and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, both members of Nidaa Tounes party. It has resulted from the President appointing his son, Hafedh to the post of party leader. The divide crosses the other divide, between Islamists and non-Islamists, since Ennahda, the mainstream Islamist party, has transferred its support from President Essebsi and his son to Youssef Chahed and the combined effect has been paralysis in Tunisian politics.

On 24 September President Essebsi announced he was ending the pact between his Nidaa Tounes party and Ennahda, the centrist Islamist party. The two had been in a national unity government since 2014.

Also in September, Prime Minister Chahed announced he was leaving Nidaa Tounes and forming a new party.

Some commentators welcomed the end of the pact, arguing that it would invigorate Tunisian politics.⁴⁷ Others worried that the move could increase polarisation and might not improve the system's ability to take political decisions, especially with the Nidaa Tounes party split between supporters of Essebsi (including his son, Hafedh) and Chahed's backers.

Tourists returning

President's son

⁴⁵ ['Tunisia tourism revenues jump as Europeans return'](#), *Reuters*, 22 June 2018

⁴⁶ Vision of Humanity, [Global Terrorism Index 2017](#), p67

⁴⁷ Shadi Hamid and Sharan Grewal, ['Tunisia Just Lost Its Anchor of Stability. That's a Good Thing.'](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 12 October 2018

Observers see an increasingly authoritarian drift in Tunisia, particularly after the passage of the new anti-terrorism law in 2015.⁴⁸ They are also concerned about the old regime creeping back into power, pointing to the 2017 law that gave immunity to public servants implicated in corruption scandals under the regime of Ben Ali.

The increasingly personalised nature of politics, with little attention to setting out policies, combined with the elevation of the President's son, have done nothing to alleviate fears about a return to autocracy.⁴⁹

Economic problems

Just like its neighbours, Tunisia is beset by high (and rising) unemployment, generating dissatisfaction among a relatively educated young population. About a third of Tunisian graduates are unemployed.

UK relations

The UK has been funding programmes from the Conflict Stability and Security Fund. The budget allocation for 2018/19 is £10 million. The largest project is in education and economic development and is being implemented by the African Development Bank, the British Council, UNICEF and the World Bank.⁵⁰

Education and economic development

On security, the Government says

The UK will provide support to the Tunisian government on integrating strategic planning capabilities and increasing accountability to citizens to help build stability through security sector reform whilst protecting human rights.⁵¹

One of the good governance projects involved a Saatchi public relations company, which raised a question in Parliament. The Government answered that the Saatchi firm was not operating directly with Tunisian colleagues:

This CSSF project provides technical assistance to support the Tunisian civil service to transparently communicate with citizens in order to support the development of effective, accountable institutions that promote good governance. Cabinet Office civil servants undertake implementation of this project. M&C Saatchi were competitively appointed to offer creative services to the Cabinet Office and do not work directly with the Tunisian government. The value of this sub-contract is up to £275,000.⁵²

⁴⁸ For more see the Commons Briefing Paper [Tunisia 2018](#), June 2018.

⁴⁹ For more background see the Commons Briefing Paper [Tunisia 2018](#), June 2018

⁵⁰ [Tunisia CSSF programme summary 2018/19](#)

⁵¹ *Bid.*

⁵² [HC Written question – 162131](#), 18 July 2018

6. Western Sahara

Some 173,000 refugees remain in camps in Tindouf, Algeria, in the desert just over the border from Western Sahara. The camps are run by the Polisario, the organisation formed in the 1970s to fight for the independence of Western Sahara. Most of the territory is controlled by Morocco.⁵³

The camps have gradually become more established, with better infrastructure, but a lack of international interest means that aid to the Sahrawis is decreasing.⁵⁴ Increasing numbers of young people are leaving in search of a better future.

The UN created [MINURSO](#) to help refugees and oversee moves towards an agreed referendum on the territory's future. The referendum has not happened but a 1991 ceasefire remains intact. The Secretary General published the latest in a regular series of reports in October 2018. The report noted that calm generally prevailed but that underlying tensions between the sides remain a concern. Horst Koehler, the Secretary General's Personal Envoy, is trying to promote negotiations. Morocco considers Western Sahara to be an integral part of its territory, however, and a relatively sympathetic hearing for the Moroccan position in France and the US helps Morocco resist moves to change the current situation.

The UK Government set out its policy in relation to Western Sahara in answer to a PQ recently:

The UK considers the status of Western Sahara to be undetermined. We support UN-led efforts to reach a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to this issue that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.⁵⁵

⁵³ For more information, see the Commons Briefing Paper [Western Sahara](#), February 2018

⁵⁴ [The Youth Movement in Sahrawi Refugee Camps](#), International Crisis Group, 25 April 2018

⁵⁵ [HC Written question – 155190](#), 25 June 2018

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