



# Peace & Security Council Report

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## Can the AU–UN efforts in Libya pave the way for elections in 2019?

In recognition of the dire situation in Libya, AU leaders discussed the situation in the country at the recent 32<sup>nd</sup> AU summit in Addis Ababa. According to estimates by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, there are 170 490 internally displaced people in Libya. The humanitarian situation remains critical for both citizens and, particularly, migrants in the country.

The AU summit requested, among others, that the AU Commission ‘take all necessary measures’, in collaboration with the United Nations (UN), to organise an international conference on reconciliation in Libya in July 2019. It also asked the AU Commission to help with the preparations for presidential and legislative elections planned for October 2019. Doubt remains, however, about the viability of this deadline.

Following the summit, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui met with Libya’s Prime Minister Fayeza Mustafa al-Sarraj, UN Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and UN Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Ghassan Salamé to discuss ways to support Libyan parties to unlock the status quo. According to sources, in all these endeavours the importance of inclusive reconciliation has been central to the AU’s message.

A joint AU–UN delegation, led by DiCarlo and Chergui, travelled to Libya from 12–13 March 2019. They met several important Libyan stakeholders, including military strongman Khalifa Haftar, civil society groups and Khaled al-Meshri, the chairperson of Libya’s High Council of State. The visit sought to prepare the ground for the international conference on reconciliation.

### Significance of the joint visit

Even though many actors have doubts about what the joint AU–UN visit can achieve given the complexity of the current situation in Libya, the significance of such a high-profile endeavour cannot be over-emphasised. First, the collaboration with the UN operationalises the AU’s recent call for ‘synergy of action and joint efforts’ on Libya and is also in line with the 2017 joint UN–AU framework for enhancing partnership on peace and security.

The varying levels of leverage the AU and UN have with the different stakeholders in Libya could increase their collective impact. Working together, the AU and UN can push different actors to sit at the negotiating table, thereby rekindling the peace process while complementing each other’s legitimacy.

It also affirms the AU’s role in the Libyan peace process, given perceptions that the continental body’s contribution has been inadequate or that it has neglected the Libyan crisis. This perception exists despite the numerous initiatives the AU has taken in the quest for a political solution to the conflict. Both the AU High-Level Committee on Libya and the AU High Representative

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### Current PSC Chairperson

**Her Excellency Ms Catherine Muigai Mwangi**, ambassador of Kenya to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union.

### PSC members

Angola, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe

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for Libya for the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation have interacted with Libyan stakeholders.

Most importantly, the visit provided an opportunity for the AU and UN to examine possible actions that can be taken immediately to revive the peace process and secure buy-in from relevant political actors.

### **Areas of focus for the AU**

The quest for peace in Libya should aim at two critical outcomes. Firstly, it should work towards securing the buy-in of the various regional, tribal and linguistic groups for the planned reconciliation conference. Secondly, it should seek to identify the right set of ingredients that can constitute a framework that will satisfy the various interests behind existing tensions in Libya. The content of such a framework should subsequently inform the agenda and approach of the planned reconciliation conference.

Achieving these outcomes require an appreciation of the prevailing challenges in Libya. According to Salamé, the country is currently seeing a 'complex web of narrow interests, a broken legal framework and the pillaging of Libya's great wealth'. At the heart of this reality are three challenges that need to be taken into consideration.

First is the lack of a viable political solution acceptable to the various factions, despite the numerous international attempts to bring the different parties to the negotiating table. The failure of successive agreements has been centred largely on the inability of political processes to secure the commitment and inclusion of powerful political and military elements in the country. The resultant divergence of positions on the means of implementing the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement and the pending negotiation of its revision are major hindrances to the peace process.

The lack of a political settlement has also been caused by the proliferation of armed groups in the country and the associated lack of internal cohesion among those groups. Even the two most powerful factions are themselves internally divided, thereby making it difficult to reach a political settlement that satisfies the interests of the bigger groups and the sub-interests within them.

Second is the contestation over access to Libya's resource wealth by the different factions in the country. The capture of the Al-Sharara oil field (located around 900 km south of Tripoli) by Haftar's army in

December 2018, for instance, illustrates the contestation over control of oil-rich territories in order to access oil revenues and other sources of revenue to finance war efforts. Successive peace agreements have failed to find an acceptable framework for resource sharing, which remains a major challenge.

Third is the lack of political will to change the status quo, which currently favours various factions that are taking advantage of the war economy. Consequently, some parties are content with the state of affairs and are not ready for the restoration of control to a unitary state, either through a peace process or through an election.

In addition to this complex mix of issues, there is the presence of extremist groups and external interferences. This underlines the need to find the right framework for discussions that addresses all these issues and secures the buy-in of all the stakeholders.

### **The visit and the 2019 elections**

Despite the international push for elections in 2019, the prospects of their taking place are grim given the current lack of consensus, insecurity and deep-seated divisions in the country. However, the outcome of the joint AU–UN visit and successive actions could address these issues and pave the way for the 2019 reconciliation forum. The potential success of the forum could in turn create an environment more conducive to holding elections and meeting all the relevant milestones preceding such elections.

### **Options for the PSC**

The joint AU–UN visit is an important opportunity for the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to follow up on the 32<sup>nd</sup> summit decisions by requesting a briefing on the situation. On the basis of the first-hand information received, the PSC can consider featuring the Libyan crisis for detailed discussion, taking into consideration ongoing UN processes and diplomatic engagements by Libya's neighbours. Important issues such as the revision of the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement, the constitutional referendum and the need for AU member states to speak with one voice may be considered.

In addition, the AU's role in the Libyan peace process and mechanisms to collaborate with the UN should be properly defined. Following these discussions, the PSC should remain involved in the situation in Libya, beyond addressing the plight of migrants in the country.

## Streamlining the AU's rapid response capabilities

Over the past five years, there has been a great deal of debate about the AU's ability to rapidly deploy a combat force in crisis situations. Neither of the two bodies intended for this purpose – the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) and the African Standby Force (ASF) – have ever been deployed. This raises major questions about their relevance and viability in Africa's fast-changing peace and security environment.

On 9 January, the PSC adopted a matrix to 'harmonise' ACIRC and the ASF. This long-awaited integration is a step forward but could add to existing misunderstanding and uncertainty.

### Competing for resources

As two distinct, but in many ways overlapping, tools for peace support operations, ACIRC and the ASF have competed for resources, capacity and attention. Bringing them together into an effective force will take time and skilful political negotiations.

One of the main stumbling blocks at this stage is getting buy-in from the 14 states that signed up to participate in ACIRC. There is a strong sense that members will not let go of the initiative without proper consultation.

This long-awaited integration is a step forward but could add to existing misunderstanding and uncertainty

Three influential member states (Angola, Egypt and Rwanda) are currently on the PSC which is scheduled to address the matter again on 26 March. They have an important role of linking discussions in the PSC to those among other ACIRC members. The biggest challenge the three PSC members will face is Nigeria, which has been outspokenly negative about ACIRC from the very start.

Established by the AU in 2003, the ASF was designed as a continental force composed of standby contingents. These were to be multi-disciplinary, with civilian, police and military components ready for rapid deployment at short notice.

Ten years later the AU set up ACIRC, partly due to frustration around the delays in getting the ASF off the

ground. It was also seen as a reaction to France being called in when the West African regional force failed to stabilise Mali in early 2013.

### A voluntary stopgap

ACIRC was initially led by South Africa and later joined by countries such as Senegal, Rwanda and Angola. It was designed as a voluntary stopgap solution until the ASF became fully operational. But rather than remaining an interim measure, ACIRC developed a life of its own, diverting attention away from debates about how the AU ought to implement peace support operations. At a time when strong and swift decision making was required, ACIRC muddied the waters.

According to the PSC's new matrix, the completion date for integrating ACIRC within the ASF framework is February 2020. The model sets out the logistical, legal, operational and tactical steps required, but doesn't spell out what exactly is meant by 'harmonisation'.

For example, according to the matrix, 'the ASF structure in the PSD needs to be revitalised with the appropriate staffing and job descriptions 31 May 2019'. Does this mean ACIRC headquarter staff will be transferred to fill vacant staff positions in the AU's Peace and Security Department (PSD)?

### Clarifications needed

The financing and sustainability of an integrated ASF and ACIRC also needs to be clarified. Like other AU entities, both have depended on external donors for their development and implementation.

Most ACIRC headquarter staff are funded by the European Union (EU) African Peace Facility. The EU has also paid for several ASF continental exercises. ACIRC has been rightly criticised for drawing EU funding away from the more permanent ASF, as well as the unnecessary duplication of functions and efforts.

In the process of bringing the two forces together, the AU also needs to ask why African states have on several occasions opted to deploy their own coalitions rather than call on the ASF or ACIRC. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram is a good example.

‘In the case of the MNJTF, Nigeria was unwilling to cede operational command and control to anyone but its own army,’ says Stephanie Wolters, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). ‘Even today, the MNJTF remains mostly Nigerian-led, with the other countries having significantly less influence and control over the force.’

ISS senior researcher Liesl Louw-Vaudran told DefenceWeb in 2016 that ACIRC was not even considered for deployment when the MNJTF or the African regional protection force for South Sudan were set up. Nor for that matter has the ASF been called on in similar circumstances, despite being declared operational in 2015. The AU must reflect critically on the ASF’s intended role and the circumstances in which it should be used.

## Regional dynamics

The MNJTF case shows how important regional dynamics and capabilities are to the AU’s plans for peace operations. The ASF was always intended to operate through its regional standby forces. It has become clear though that while certain regions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can effectively deploy, others such as the North African Regional Capability have lagged behind.

Whether or not ACIRC and ASF are successfully harmonised, the AU needs to relook at its approach to peace operations more broadly. More than 15 years have passed since the ASF was established, and the environment in which it is expected to operate has changed considerably. Current conditions demand the rapid deployment of civilian, police and military components. Specialised skills and equipment are needed to deal with transnational crime, terrorism and counter-insurgency tasks.

According to the PSC’s new matrix, the completion date for integrating ACIRC within the ASF framework is February 2020

Globally, peace operations are being reshaped to better match current threats and risks. This is a golden opportunity for the AU to fine-tune its approach to peace operations. If ACIRC is to be incorporated into the ASF, the AU will need to deal with two considerably different structures. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that needs to be confronted. Merging these existing capabilities is necessary for the AU to respond effectively and quickly to Africa’s conflicts.

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2013

THE CREATION OF ACIRC

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# Lessons from AU election observation in Nigeria and Senegal

Africa is experiencing a busy electoral year. Two important polls took place last month, in Nigeria and Senegal, both under the watchful eye of the African Union election observer missions (AUEOM).

The AU, tasked with ensuring that its member states abide by the democratic principles of free and fair elections – as per the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance – deployed electoral observer missions to both countries.

Ideally, the AUEOM assesses the transparency and fairness of electoral processes, with the view to ensure that the election results are credible. The reports produced by the observer missions should confirm the results and propose areas of improvement. However, AU observer missions have often lacked credibility.

## Surprise postponement in Nigeria

Responding to a request from the Nigerian government and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the AU deployed a short-term observer mission to Nigeria from 9–28 February. The AUEOM was led by Hailemariam Desalegn, former prime minister of Ethiopia, and assisted by Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. Four core team members as well as 50 short-term observers from AU member states and institutions took part in the AUEOM.

INEC announced, just hours before the election was scheduled to take place on 16 February, that it had been postponed by a week – a surprising move that cast doubt on the credibility of the electoral process. INEC itself said it was postponing the election to ensure it remained credible.

The AUEOM appeared as surprised by the postponement of the election as all the other observer missions present in Nigeria. This should not have been the case, had the AU ensured – as per its mandate – that it was closely collaborating with INEC.

INEC did well in reassuring the AUEOM and others that the polls were to be conducted as planned. However, this move points to the shortcomings of AUEOMs, both in their working methods and in the timing of their deployment.

## Contradictions in the preliminary report

The preliminary statement produced by the AUEOM has been criticised for its apparent inaccuracies and contradictions. The preliminary report talks of election-related violence, including bomb blasts in regions such as the North East, South-South and Middle Belt and the destruction of election material. However, it concluded that it was generally a ‘*violence-free*’ electoral process, even though it was reported that over 50 people had died as a result of election-related violence.

The question, then, is how much violence constitutes a ‘violent electoral process’. In the 2011 Nigerian elections, post-election violence caused the death of 800 people, while in 2015 the lower estimate was 160 casualties.

The preliminary statement on Nigeria has been criticised for its apparent inaccuracies and contradictions

It is also clear that election observers can do little to prevent electoral violence as it occurs; they can only observe and report incidents. The mandates of the AUEOM as agreed by the AU and member states in most cases do not allow for AU intervention unless laws are severely violated. Again, the significance of the violation is subject to interpretation. AU intervention in cases of electoral violence has, in any case, been limited to releasing statements and, in rare instances, sending an envoy to deal with a post-election crisis.

Another contradiction in the report concerns the rights of voters. The AUEOM states that ‘fundamental rights of association, free speech and assembly’ were observed. The report, however, negates this statement by saying that there was intimidation of political opponents during the campaign period. The report seems to try to cater to the concerns of all stakeholders who can interpret it in any way they want, as an endorsement for some or condemnation for others.

## Timing of deployments

AU long-term and short-term missions are typically deployed a month and half or a week before elections, respectively. This raises questions about how well acquainted AUEOMs are with the realities on the ground, when incumbents, opposition parties and electoral bodies often start preparing for elections a year or two before the election date. An earlier, perhaps year-long monitoring and action plan might be more appropriate and could have helped them to pick up on the challenges INEC said it faced in Nigeria in the run-up to February 16.

In fact, election monitoring by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), for example, is based on a year-round monitoring of the political situation in these countries and is more extensive and detailed. Those election observers also have a thorough understanding of the political situation and potential hot spots, as well as access to remote areas, through civil society networks on the ground.

This contrast with AU observers, who are from all over Africa and can participate in their capacity as their country's permanent representative to the AU or as a representative of one of the AU's many different organs (Pan African Parliament, AU staff etc.). Despite receiving pre-deployment training, they may not have an understanding of the nuances of the relevant political space and situation. Their mission does not give the observers a lot of time on the ground (including the long-term month-long mission), and typically amounts to merely ticking boxes.

Another key issue is that election observers cannot fully scrutinise digitalised electoral systems. This was cause for concern in Nigeria, as technical challenges arose where polling staff also had limited understanding of the technology. System malfunctioning also hindered voting in some areas.

## Coordination between the AU and RECs

Although there was a joint statement on the postponement of the elections, signed by both the ECOWAS election monitoring mission and the AUEOM, it appears that the two missions run independently of one another, each led by a former head of state and government. It is thus not clear to what extent the AU and ECOWAS coordinated in discharging their duties. The organisations have also released separate preliminary reports by their EOMs in Nigeria.

## Long-term observation needed in Senegal

Albert Pahimi Padacké, former prime minister of Chad, led the AU EOM in Senegal. The EOM had 50 members from 26 African countries, made up of technical experts and officials from the AU. The EOM took place from 17–28 February.

During the elections, delays in the distribution of voter cards were observed. Because only ECOWAS biometric identity cards can be used, as stipulated by law, some questioned the independence of the National Electoral Commission and the National Audiovisual Regulatory Council responsible

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50

OFFICIALS OBSERVED  
ELECTIONS IN SENEGAL

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for distributing the cards. These issues point to the possibility that electoral mismanagement was more widespread, with the AUEOM having limited capacity to discern the problem.

Beyond the conduct of the polls, more than a year before the elections many complained that the political environment in Senegal had been ‘sanitised’ to favour incumbent Macky Sall. Two of his major opponents – Karim Wade and Khalifa Sall – were sentenced on charges of corruption in trials that ECOWAS and the United Nations deemed to be in violation of due process and were prevented from contesting the election. After Sall’s victory in the first round, with 58% of the votes, he called for the resumption of a political dialogue.

Many complained that the political environment in Senegal had been sanitised to favour incumbent Macky Sall

The measures Sall took before the elections, including amending the electoral law, also heightened tensions. This was not addressed by the AUEOM, as it was deployed only after these announcements and events. Sall’s desire to engage in a political dialogue after having ensured his victory has been seen as indicative of the political *malaise* in the country.

### What can be done going forward?

Clearly, AUEOM reports should be conflict sensitive so that they do not trigger further violence. At the same time they should hold political parties accountable for the actions they take following the announcement of the election results.

While the AU observation missions have come a long way since the first mission in Namibia in 1989, there is room for improvement.

The AU should help to enhance the capacity of electoral bodies and improve the electoral laws in member states through an engagement that takes place earlier on in the electoral process. This will allow for a level playing field and enhance the credibility of the elections. One such example is that of Madagascar, where the practice of the incumbent’s leaving the presidential palace and relinquishing command of state resources three months before the elections seems to have had the desired effect.

Another key takeaway from the recent Nigerian and Senegal elections is that the AU should closely collaborate with regional economic communities, especially those such as ECOWAS that have greater capacity in undertaking election observation. Similarly, the AU could involve local civil society organisations in the AUEOM, as they can be great sources of information.

Finally, the AU must find ways to hold actors accountable for tampering with the electoral process and causing violence. It must also ensure practical actions are taken to implement AUEOM recommendations after each election. This could be done in collaboration with the African Peer Review Mechanism or other AU organs that have the capacity to follow up on implementation.

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1989

THE FIRST ELECTION  
OBSERVATION MISSION

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## Restructuring Africa's partnerships easier said than done

African leaders are again asked to travel to a 'partner' country in October this year for an inaugural Russia–Africa summit in Sochi. The planned summit was announced by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov during a visit to Rwanda last year.

This comes at a time when the AU is trying to better coordinate Africa's engagements with other continents and countries. Instead of a loose gathering of all Africa's leaders with one partner country, the AU Commission proposes that it should take the lead and represent the continent.

A decision was taken at the level of ministers during the 32<sup>nd</sup> AU summit in Addis Ababa recently to review all 'strategic partnerships' and draw up guidelines on how the continent should engage with them. This is part of the ongoing AU reforms aimed at ensuring Africa 'speaks with one voice' on the world stage.

Over the years Africa has been largely on the receiving end of such initiatives from outside the continent. France–Africa summits have been instituted by France since 1973 and initially occurred on a yearly basis. They were increasingly criticised for symbolising *Françafrique* – France's policy of keeping a hold on its former colonies. United States (US) presidents have also convened summits with African leaders – mostly hand-picking those leaders it wants to showcase. These were rather ad hoc gatherings with little follow-up.

The more institutionalised Forum for China–Africa Cooperation and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development are somehow in another league

The more institutionalised Forum for China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) are somehow in another league, with various levels of engagement between summits and detailed roadmaps on implementing the various agreements signed at these meetings.

Still, it has not been clear who should chair the meetings on behalf of the continent and why African leaders should all have to be mobilised when, for example, the leaders of Turkey, India or South Korea want to engage their counterparts. The agendas of these summits are also more often than not dominated by the host country or by issues that might be of paramount interest to one part of the continent and not the collective.

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Turkey  
India  
Korea

HAVE ORGANISED  
SUMMITS WITH AFRICA

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## Continent to continent partnerships

The AU–European Union (EU) partnership, referred to by AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat in a report tabled at the AU Assembly and seen by the *PSC Report* as a ‘C2C [continent to continent] partnership’, is at this stage the only one where the AU Commission is an integral part of the planning and agenda setting. Even there, some believe the focus on migration at the 2017 AU–EU summit in Abidjan, for example, shows that the priorities are mostly driven by the Europeans.

Some commentators see these summits and partnerships as the continuous ‘scramble for Africa’ by big powers eager to exploit Africa’s resources and benefit from Africa’s growing consumer market. The summit organised in 2017 by US President Donald Trump, for example, was seen as a reaction to the growing Chinese ties with the continent, institutionalised through FOCAC.

Some see these summits and partnerships as the continuous scramble for Africa by big powers

The perception is created that Africa has little agency in determining the direction of these engagements. Clearly conscious of these sensitivities, the AU ministers stress in their draft decision that ‘the principles of dignity and respect should guide the participation of AU member states in partnership meetings’. The decision also ‘reiterates the need to approach all engagements with the AU Strategic Partnerships in a more robust purpose-driven, result-orientated manner and focusing on common African interests’.

The AU Commission proposes that in future Africa be represented at partnership meetings by the AU Troika – the current, past and incoming chairpersons of the AU – the chairpersons of the regional economic communities (RECs) and the chairperson of the NEPAD Agency. There is also a suggestion to enlarge the troika to include the AU Bureau, comprising representatives of the five AU regions.

Currently, the decision notes six partnerships: that between the AU and the EU, the AU–League of Arab States partnership, the AU–South America partnership and the partnerships between the AU and India, Korea and Turkey. The ministers are also asking the AU Commission and ambassadors in Addis Ababa to agree on mechanisms to make sure the AU has greater involvement in both FOCAC and TICAD.

## Divisions over post-Cotonou negotiations

This is, however, not yet a done deal. The confusion and disagreement among member states concerning the post-Cotonou agreement are indicative of the problems such a proposal could encounter. Initially, African countries had agreed in July 2018 to allow the AU Commission to negotiate a new agreement with the EU for when the current African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) accord expires in 2020. The argument made by Mahamat, Rwanda’s Paul Kagame and others was that a new relationship with Europe should be

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2020

THE COTONOU  
AGREEMENT EXPIRES

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negotiated by Africa as a continent and that the ACP framework is now outdated. The ACP also excludes North Africa.

However, at the AU summit in November last year, divisions emerged among member states and it was decided that the ACP framework should be maintained in the negotiations with the EU.

In a report presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Assembly of the AU, Mahamat stated that an agreement had been reached on a two-track approach to relations between Africa and the EU post-2020. On the one hand, there will be the ACP–EU framework and, on the other hand, the AU–EU framework, building on the previous Africa–EU meetings and the AU–EU summit of November 2017. Mahamat stressed that the future C2C negotiations would focus on issues such as peace and security, trade (within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area), migration and the promotion of multilateralism.

In this regard, it will be important for African countries to strategise and agree on common positions before each of these summits so that the continent can truly ‘speak with one voice’. With 55 member states that have vastly different development trajectories, interests and historical ties, this is exceedingly difficult.

## **A common foreign policy**

In the long run, for the strategy on partnerships to work it would also in effect mean agreeing on a common foreign policy for the continent. In a fast-changing global environment, African countries will have to decide on the principles that guide their engagement with the rest of the world. If a number of African member states are opposed to a certain partnership, should this be discussed within the AU? And on what basis?

Efforts by Israel, for example, to organise an Israel–Africa summit in Togo in 2017 did not materialise, on the surface because of the internal political crisis in Togo, but also because of the traditional pro-Palestinian stance of many member states and the AU as an institution.

Linked to the strategic partnerships (beyond simple trade and economics), the growing foreign military presence on the continent has also been a worrying sight. This is one area where the AU will have to step in. It is no small conundrum, as it touches directly on the sovereignty jealously guarded by many AU member states. In effect, the political, economic and military sovereignty of AU member states remains the main stumbling block to the continent’s speaking and acting as one.

Regulating Africa’s strategic partnerships is clearly a necessity – for ensuring peace, prosperity and development on the continent – but one that comes with considerable challenges and pitfalls.

Urgent discussions around this issue will have to take place at the upcoming mid-year summit of the AU between the AU leadership and RECs for the continent to make progress on its nascent foreign policy.



THE AFRICA–ISRAEL  
SUMMIT NEVER  
MATERIALIZED

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## **PSC Interview: ‘Outsiders should refrain from meddling in Algeria’**

For the past several weeks, Algerians have taken to the streets to protest against the extension of ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s mandate. These events will have a major impact on the North African oil producer and on the region. *PSC Report* spoke to Tunisia-based ISS senior research consultant and partner at Maharbal, Matt Herbert, about the implications of these protests in Algeria.

### **Why are these protests seen as unprecedented in Algeria’s recent history?**

The past few years have seen routine, though localised, protests in various parts of the country around issues such as jobs, education or even housing, which is a huge issue in Algeria. Young people sometimes have to live with their parents into their thirties and even forties because of limited housing availability.

These protests, however, are far more widespread geographically. The movement is also very much grassroots and not led by any single political party, labour movement or civil society organisation. Finally, what makes this unprecedented is their duration. People are persistent and continue to take to the streets week after week.

### **Why have the concessions made by Bouteflika to postpone elections and withdraw his candidacy for a fifth term not been sufficient to end the protests?**

The Algerian street certainly believes this is just a strategy of Bouteflika and those behind him to stay in power. After a brief euphoric night, they realised that postponing elections for one year, until the national dialogue is expected to wrap up its work, is very similar to a different offer he had proposed in a letter a few weeks earlier. Bouteflika’s ‘concessions’ don’t truly address the underlying grievances, and so there is really no reason to abandon the protests.

One has to remember that it is also not just about Bouteflika. It is about getting rid of a whole clan power structure around him that profits from its access to presidential power. The current leadership is old – much older than the majority of people in the streets. One of the reasons Bouteflika is still in power is that he represents, in a way, the last link to the legitimacy derived from the war of independence against the French. What legitimacy looks like after the independence-era generation passes from the scene is unclear, but it is a central question for the country.

What people want is a more equitable system where the needs and dreams of all Algerians are taken into account.

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4 terms

SERVED BY  
PRESIDENT BOUTEFLIKA

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## **So far, there has been very little reaction from the international community. Why is that?**

There have been some statements. France's President Emmanuel Macron applauded Bouteflika's decision not to run for a fifth term, while the US [United States] has indicated it is supportive of dialogue-based efforts to 'chart a path forward'. But the international community has largely been silent in part because it really doesn't know what is coming next. I don't think anybody knows.

But this silence is actually good. Algeria is a country that is proud and insular, with a strong sense of self and sovereignty. Any perception of foreign meddling, even rhetorical meddling, is actually counterproductive for the protests, for the protestors and for any transition to a more equitable, democratic regime.

## **You have said elsewhere that those who fear that these protests will spark increased migration from Algeria are misreading the situation. Why do you say so?**

Such a reading assumes that there is not already a rise in migration, and yet there has been a very sharp increase in the last three years. This has been reported very widely in the Algerian press, especially throughout 2018. It's also not just young men migrating, but entire families. This has caused huge societal consternation in Algeria. People are saying the status quo can't go on. The protests won't exacerbate the decision by Algerians feeling they need to leave; however, they can offer hope to those trying to sort out the decision that the status quo can change.

Any perception of foreign meddling is actually counterproductive for the protests, for the protestors and for any transition to a more equitable, democratic regime

Secondly, fears that security gaps will lead to increased migration are not really accurate. The Algerian coast guard and gendarmerie's arrests account for just 30% of Algerians apprehended trying to cross the Mediterranean illegally. Some of this is due to capacity constraints – it's a long coast – although as I argued in an ISS article in February, there likely is a political element limiting apprehensions. Due to the fairly low apprehension rate, even a worst-case scenario in which Algerian security forces radically reduce their efforts to stem migration isn't likely to have a huge impact.

Finally, the drivers of the protests and the drivers of migration are largely the same. Because this is the case throughout North Africa, regional governments have quietly tolerated irregular migration by their nationals to lessen unrest. The flip side of this is that political solutions to social frustrations in North Africa can have a significant impact on migration. So, what we need in Algeria is a political and economic situation that gives people hope and opportunities – addressing what has brought them into the streets and what drives them into the migrant boats.

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2018

MIGRATION FROM  
ALGERIA INCREASED

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**There are fears, though, that this unstable situation could lead to a renewed rise in violence and terrorism. Do you think these fears are justified?**

There are certainly fears that there could be a relapse into violence, but I think this is unlikely. The residual terror groups [that were present in the 1990s] are small and under huge pressure, and their ability to act is quite limited, even less than in countries like Tunisia.

So it is unlikely that this particular dynamic we see now will increase opportunities for those terrorist groups to increase their activities.

**But if there is an opening up of the political space, could Islamist parties win an election as they did in Egypt and then even provoke a backlash from the military?**

This is a good question, because dynamics around Islamists in government have shifted dramatically in Algeria and North Africa since the early 1990s. In Tunisia the Ennahda party has been in a governing coalition with secular parties. While this initially created some anxiety among security forces in Algeria, the impact has to a degree allayed fears, as there hasn't been a whole-scale revolution in societal affairs or political affairs.

There are a number of Islamist parties in Algeria that have operated there for some time and are tolerated by the government. So the role that they can potentially play as a popular opposition has decreased since the emergence of Islamic parties in the 1990s, when they really were a very new and untainted force in the Algerian body politic.

**What do you think the eventual outcome will be of these protests?**

I am hopeful about the present movement. Algerians have always been very forthright on political issues and do not hesitate to speak out about what they see as unjust and problematic. You see this now in the streets. This bodes well for a future democracy if this is the direction this ultimately goes in.

But I think just the act of the protests and the peaceful way in which it is going on is the most hopeful sign. The youth feel that they are now finally being heard, their voice was choked off for a long time, but this is a recognition of their needs and views by Algerian society. This is tremendously important.

I think this will continue to bear dividends in whichever way the country goes forward. At this stage we can't say what exactly that could be and what precisely will happen in the next few weeks. Algeria constantly surprises us and the best thing international observers can do at this stage is just watch and not impose any preconceived ideas, whether it is the fear of increased migration or a resurgence of terrorism.

I do think this is certainly one of the most significant developments in North Africa since the coup by Abdel Fattah al-Sissi in Egypt five years ago.

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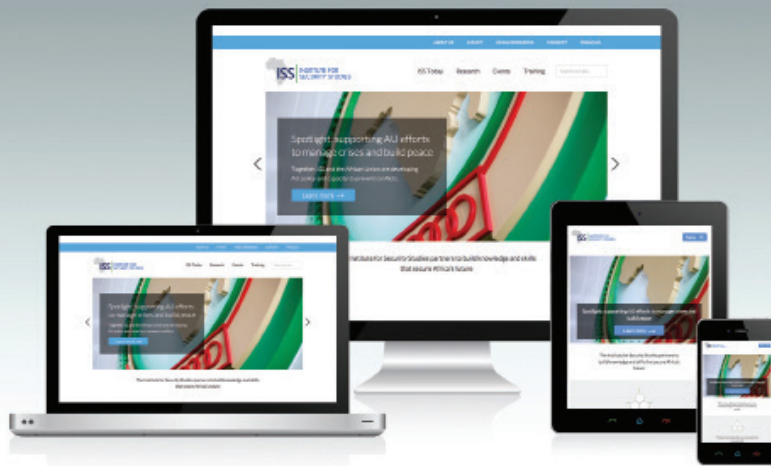
The 1990s

THE EMERGENCE OF  
ISLAMIST PARTIES

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The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

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