Security Challenges and armament requirements in North Africa: Stakes of international rivalries?

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Abstract

North Africa is a geopolitical space in constant security challenges. Its needs of weapons make it a parade ground for the international weapon-producing powers. In fact, it remains dependent on these powers' supply of weapons due to the lack of autonomy in arms production in North African states.

Keywords

North Africa Arab revolts - terrorism - Sudan's division - United States - France - China - Russia - defense industries - arms sales.

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Over the years, Africa represented a geopolitical space where the degree of conflicts is high. However, since the emergence of the

new world order until today, the African continent knew fluctuations related to the place and the nature of conflicts. As regards the place of conflicts, it should be underlined that since the Nineties up to 2010, the ward and the conflicts took place in

Sub-Saharan Africa, while from 2011 and on, all these elements which threatened global peace in Africa were more concentrated in North Africa. Regarding the nature of conflicts, Africa has become a space of birth of terrorist groups like AQMI (Al Qaeda in The Islamic Maghreb) and Boko Haram (Sunni Group for Preaching and the Djihad). Terrorism forms today one of the main threats to the global peace of the continent.

In the case of North Africa, the purchase of heavy weapons, small arms and light weaponry (conventional weapons) is part of the primary measures carried out by the States for the re-establishment of peace. Vis-a-vis this situation, the dependence of those countries on weapons originating from abroad created a certain competition between arms producers. Thus, what are the security challenges in North Africa? And, how did it become a parade ground for the international weapon-producing powers such as France, The United States, Russia and China?

I. Security Challenges in North Africa: Arabs' revolts against the regime, terrorism and division of Sudan.

If the security challenges appeared in Sub-Saharan Africa, since 2011, these challenges have been moved to another area which is North Africa. In this part of the world some new challenges have arisen such as the Arabs' revolts against the regimes, terrorism and the division of Sudan.

1. Arabs' revolts and regression of global peace.

Based on "The Institute for Economics & Peace" data (www.visionofhumanity.org), the peace level in some North African states has considerably increased, since 2011 (see the tables below).

Classification of North Africa States in Global Peace Index (GPI)

States	World classification on 148 States (2010)	World Classification on 162 States (2014)
Morocco	60	63
Algeria	118	114
Tunisia	35	79
Libya	50	133
Egypt	52	143
Sudan	145	157
South Sudan	---	160

By comparing the 2010 and 2014 data based on Global Peace Index, we notice that in countries where there were popular revolts against the regime (Tunisia, Libya and Egypt), global peace has decreased. It should be noted that 2011 forms an exceptional phase of geopolitical transition in North Africa. It's about a chain of protests against the power, initialized in Tunisia, passing by Egypt to influence by domino effect the other countries of North Africa like Libya, Morocco and Algeria. The reasons behind these popular revolts are the absence of freedom, democracy, unemployment, kleptocracy, high costs of living, and more. These fluctuations known under the name of « Arab Spring » led to the departure of some presidents. This is in fact the case of the Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. To our minds, « Arab Spring » is not an appropriate name to qualify these events. We prefer to call them « popular revolts », because the word « spring » is positive and even if these revolts have a positive influence (consolidation of the democracy and freedom), they also have a negative impact like political instability and consequently internal insecurity.

In this context, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt are the least peaceful countries in North Africa. According to the GPI, Tunisia went from rank 35 in 2010 to 79 in 2014, Egypt went from 52 in 2010 to 143 in 2014 and even worse, Libya's rank also decreased from 50 in 2010 to 133 in 2014. Based on these numbers, it could be argued that the peace regress in those countries is due to the effects of the Arab revolts started in 2011. The Kingdom of Morocco is an example of a North Africa State left with the least damage. In fact, the reforms launched in 2011 are proof of political maturity of the King Mohamed VI, and made it possible to maintain and restore the public order, peace and internal security. The main measures taken by Morocco were the adoption of a new constitution, the holding of free and transparent legislative elections congratulated by the Secretary of the United Nations, the United States, France, Spain, the United Kingdom and other democratic states.

Another example is that of Algeria which is a State often classified in the last places of global peace index. It went from rank 118 in 2010 to 114 in 2014. This state wasn't really influenced by the Arab revolts, in spite of the regime's dictatorship. That could be explained partly by the shock of the civil war which led the Algerian people to hold on to security and peace instead of democracy and freedom. It seems that what really ranks Algeria in the last places of world peace index is mainly terrorism.

2. Terrorism and its birth in Algeria.

If Algeria wasn't influenced by the Arab revolts, terrorism is the principal element for it ranking in the last positions of global peace index. In fact, terrorism persists in Algeria and poses a risk to the security of neighboring countries, despite the end of the civil war and the adoption of the law "civil concord" by the government in 1999, and the "Charter for peace and national reconciliation" in 2005 (official website of the Algerian Ministry of the interior and local Government, www.interieur.gov.dz). It's a passage of the government's armed struggle against the terrorist Islamist opposition to a material compensation and non-prosecution (Ahmed and Jean-Robert, 2001: p. 73). We should notice that the roots of terrorism in North Africa,

particularly in the Maghreb are in Algeria. In this sense, one of the most dangerous terrorist groups was founded in Algeria. It's the terrorist organization "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," or AQIM. According to some analysts, including Luis Martinez, a specialist of Algeria, it's a creation of the Algerian intelligence services. For Martinez, the purpose of its creation is to create a climate of fear and anxiety among European countries and the United States to force them to cooperate with Algeria in terms of security (Luis, 2008: p. 1).

3. Division of Sudan.

It is true that Sudan was already ranked in the last places of the global peace index, but from 2011 on, or from the division of Sudan, the results of two elements are higher: one linked to internal and interstate conflict and the other related to society and security. (www.visionofhumanity.org).The division of Sudan has created a climate of

insecurity and lack of peace not only in Sudan but also in South Sudan, ranked in 2014 at the last places of the global peace.

II. Armament requirements in North Africa and international rivalries.

In the light of risks and threats against security in North Africa, the weapons needs are increasing, due to the deterrence and states of conflict. It must be emphasized that except for South Africa, all African states have no independent arms industry. This situation makes them dependent on arms from foreign suppliers which are, in general, the major political, economic and military powers. Today, the main weapon suppliers to North Africa are the European countries (especially France), the United States, China, and Russia. The competition on the African market has been present for a long time.

Transfer of weapons to North Africa (2001 to 2013)
(www.sipri.org)

States Exporters	States Importers
United States	Egypt ; Algeria ; Morocco
France	Egypt ; Algeria Libya; Morocco
United Kingdom	Algeria
Germany	Algeria Egypt ; Morocco
Russia	Algeria ; Egypt ; Libya ; Morocco ; South Sudan ; Sudan
China	Egypt ; Sudan ; Algeria ; Morocco

The table below shows the main arms exporters to the North African States:

I   t turned out that African countries obtain weapons from various arms-producing states, but there are some specifities of each state. Morocco for example, seems inclined to buy weapons from France, while Algeria prefers Russian weapons. Indeed, according to SIPRI data in 2013, the third arms customer of Russia in the world is Algeria, with a share of 11% of Russian arms exports. With regard to France, its second customer in the world is Morocco, also with a share of 11% of French arms exports (Siemon & Pieter, 2014: p. 2). Regarding the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and China, the North African States are not part of their main customers. However, competition for the conquest of the market exists, especially between France and Russia on arms sales to Algeria and Morocco, two countries in indirect conflict.

Finally, the security challenges in North Africa have led states to the arms race. We must remember that they do not have defense industry and the purchase of weapons is involved to minimize the threats to internal security. This situation can only benefit the arms-producing States that continue to overwhelm the states of North Africa by weapons. It must be added that competition has always existed between these major powers to conquer the market in North Africa, the competition is expected to increase with the emergence of the Chinese defense industry. An open question is to ask: Will North African States react by reducing their dependence on foreign weapons and strengthen peace on their own? ∎

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