

SPOTLIGHT ON AFRICA:

Mapping geopolitical trends:

Quarter Two and Three 2020



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Introduction

The IGD Trends reports are aimed at supporting policy and decision-makers as they try to keep abreast of trends and challenges that may impact Africa in the medium-term to long-term. In addition to providing a concise overview of strategic trends, this report also seeks to promote pro-active discussions among stakeholders and regular assessments of strategic policy choices in view of nuances, dynamics and context.

In West Africa and the Sahel, noteworthy developments include the protests and the military coup in Mali in August; upcoming October elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea which bear on the contentious issue of term limits in Africa; and the intensification and expansion of the multi-dimensional crisis in the Sahel. In North Africa, the Hirak protest movement in Algeria finds itself at a crossroads in light of efforts by the newly elected government to silence the protesters rather than engage in serious dialogues with protest leaders. In the Horn of Africa, Sudan's precarious political transition is facing economic challenges and the reform agenda is caught up in policy dilemmas around the issue of subsidy reforms.

Furthermore, fractures in the civilian-military transitional government, as well as the slow pace of reforms have frustrated protesters who are wary of a military underhand that could compromise the transition process. In Ethiopia, the flare-up of protests in the Oromia region in the aftermath of the killing of a popular Oromo musician in June reawakened long-standing tensions and inter-communal violence, which prompted a heavy handed approach by federal government security forces. The confrontation between the federal government and authorities of the Tigray region have also reached boiling point in the wake of the decision by the Tigray State Council to hold elections in defiance of a federal ruling that had postponed all elections due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In southern Africa, the arrests and torture of journalists and anti-corruption activists in Zimbabwe have drawn

widespread condemnation while the Zimbabwe African National Union -Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government vehemently denies that the country is going through economic and political crises. Further afield in New York, Kenya was elected to the UN Security Council for the period 2021 to 2022, taking over from South Africa whose term comes to an end in December 2020. After contested rounds of nominations for the African group seat challenged by Djibouti, Kenya won in a second round of voting to take up the two-year term African seat on the UN Security Council alongside Niger and Tunisia.

Mali: protests and coup redux

The essentials

Mali experienced its fourth [military coup](#) on 18th August 2020, when a group of soldiers from a military camp in Kati marched on to Bamako and arrested President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (also known IBK) and a number of senior military officers and civilian cabinet officials. The military coup followed months of protests since June, led by the Movement of 5 June - Rally of Patriotic Forces known as M5-RFP. The military coup was orchestrated by a military junta that has presented itself as the National Committee for the Salvation of the People and has declared its intent to restore stability and to oversee a transition to a civilian authority within a reasonable timeframe. The modalities of the transition are yet to be determined as the CNSP navigates tense negotiations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in which the military junta is proposing a two year transition period vis-à-vis ECOWAS' push for a to 12-month window or less.

The context

Mali held contested legislative elections in April 2020, which led to mass demonstrations with protesters rejecting by IBK's party victory, subsequently upheld by a decision of the Constitutional Court. In addition to suppression of the opposition, [the protest movement](#) also

denounced widespread corruption in government, economic decline and the government's poor handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. The protests also have to be viewed against the backdrop of growing insecurity in North and Central Mali, where jihadi insurgents have been stoking inter-communal violence that has resulted in the death of thousands of civilians and displacement of hundreds of thousands. The failure of Keita's government to contain extremist groups, lack of commitment to the [2015 peace accord](#) and deterioration of the security situation in Central Mali, coupled with public discontent over the governance crisis all contributed to a weakening of IBK's standing.

The 2020 military coup is hot on the heels of Mali's last coup in 2012, which led to the ouster of President Amadou Toumani Touré and a three-week transition of power to the National Assembly president. However, the dynamics of the 2020 coup are complicated by the international community's [soft acceptance](#) of the CNSP's terms such as IBK's exit and the willingness of the military to work with the M5-RFP coalition of opposition and civil society groups in negotiating the mechanisms and structure of the transition process. The popular Muslim cleric and former leader of Mali's High Islamic Council, [Mahmoud Dicko](#), has also played a crucial role in tapping into the grievances of protesters, emerging as an important figurehead in the discussions around the democratic transition.

From the perspective of the [international community](#), specifically France and ECOWAS, engagement with the CNSP leaders has been mostly informed by the ongoing stabilization and counterterrorism agenda in the Sahel being carried out by the French-led Operation Barkhane and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Furthermore, IBK's failure to follow through on the implementation of the 2015 Algiers peace accord, coupled with the weakened security apparatus under his watch, dented his credibility among Western powers, who managed to dissuade ECOWAS

regional leaders about IBK's potential return to power. The Malian army has also had its grievances with Keita's government, including disputes over salaries and government's inaction following soldiers' deaths in central Mali as a result of extremist violence. Overall, protests in Mali cannot be extricated from the [broader context of weak state capacity](#) and marginalization in parts of central and northern Mali, which have served as fertile ground for extremist and Islamist militant groups that present a direct challenge to the Malian state. The major armed jihadist groupings, the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (JNIM) which is a coalition of groups affiliated to al Qaeda, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have [gained ground](#) across the Sahel, expanding violence into Niger and Burkina Faso which could become a launchpad of extremist violence into West African coastal states. A protracted political crisis in Mali could add onto the intensification of violence as jihadi groups fight over territory and control, and weaken the state as a legitimate security actor in the eyes of affected populations.

Mali's long term stability and democratic transition has implications for regional security given the destabilizing effect of a potential security vacuum that will foster entrenchment and expansion of armed jihadist groups across the Sahelian-Saharan borderlands. [A coordinated regional and international response](#) is also crucial to supporting the democratic transition as well as strengthening the normative frameworks aimed at addressing coups and unconstitutional changes of government. The UN, EU and France condemned the military coup and called for a speedy transition to civilian authority, while ECOWAS suspended Mali from the regional body and imposed sanctions. However, divergent views among ECOWAS Heads of State on the Malian transition also points to a complex mix of issues, national interests and interpersonal relationships in the negotiations with the CNSP. The upheavals in Mali are part and parcel of the heavily securitized counterterrorism approach in the Sahel and any roadmap to democratic transition will have to factor in larger security and

development issues with interlinked local and international dimensions.

The wicked problems of the Sahel: limitations of a militarized approach and expanding jihadi-on-jihadi violence

The essentials

While the al-Qaeda affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have peacefully coexisted and demarcated territorial boundaries across the Sahara territory over the past five years, heightened tensions and violent confrontation between the militant groups have been on the increase throughout the first half of 2020. The fighting between JNIM and ISGS could lead to increased multi-directional violence across the Sahara and expansion of militant groups into coastal West Africa. Furthermore, the ideological clashes in power struggles could feed splinter groups with fluid and evolving dynamics that would further undermine the counterterrorism strategies of regional and international security actors.

The context

The wicked problems of terrorism and Islamist militancy across the Sahel have laid bare the weak points of [predominantly militarized approaches](#) as terrorist groups evolve their strategies, feed into local grievances and inter-communal tensions, and broaden their scope of operations into coastal West Africa. After initial setbacks as a result of intensive counterterrorism operations by French-led Operation Barkhane in 2017 and 2018, ISGS regrouped and adjusted tactics and recruitment modes, and has worked to bolster capabilities and capture more territory in the inland Niger Delta area and Gourma area on both sides of the Mali-Burkina Faso border. [The rise of ISGS](#) since 2015, has changed the balance of power, leading to increased tensions and confrontations with rival al-Qaeda affiliated jihadi group, the JNIM. The uneasy alliance

between JNIM and ISGS has been informed by practical considerations and joint coordination to control territories, making up what some commentators have labeled as a '[Sahelian exceptionalism](#)' in reference to the relationship between the two rival jihadi franchises.

In addition to interpersonal ties and personnel crossovers from both jihadi groups, the cordial relationship has also extended to [joint raids](#) against international and regional counterterrorism forces, such as the 2017 assault on a joint MINUSMA-Malian government operation in Delimane in northern Mali and the 2019 ISGS ambush on Nigerien troops in Tongo. However, rather than being seen as a formal alliance, the occasional cooperation between the JNIM and ISGS should be viewed as [a fluid and practical arrangement](#) that has emerged out of necessity and common ground in fighting shared enemies. However, increased clashes and violent confrontations between the two jihadi groupings since July 2019 seem to point to growing competition and a souring of relations.

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#) (ACLED) there have been 34 incidents of jihadi-on-jihadi confrontations during the first half of 2020 across Mali, Burkina Faso and the Burkina Faso-Niger border. Although there have been several attempts to bring the two rival groups to talks, such as a crisis meeting in September 2019 meant to [demarcate territorial boundaries](#), dialogue has failed to mitigate tensions as confrontations have intensified for most of 2020. The [main drivers of conflict](#) between the JNIM and ISGS have included ideological differences; the growing ambition and confrontational approach of ISGS given its incorporation as a sub-unit of the Islamic State West Africa province and pressure from Islamic State Central; differences in *modus operandi* with regard to exploiting inter-communal conflict among local populations; and tensions arising from inter-group defections of fighters. The jihadi-on-jihadi fighting has implications for regional security and broader counterterrorism operations, which have been battling to adapt to the agility and capability of

jihadi groups to embed themselves within local populations. There is an imperative for regional and international security actors to move beyond the [outdated jihadist paradigms](#) and pre-occupation with kinetic dimensions of counterterrorism strategies and begin to address the hybridized nature of security threats and multi-faceted radicalization strategies of militant groups.

Although the jihadist groups are the main perpetrators of violence across the Sahel, violence against civilians from community-based militias and state forces has also been on the rise. According to [ACLED](#), reports of abuses by state forces in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have recorded over 350 fatalities between January and April 2020. The surge in state violence targeting civilians can be attributed to several factors, including increased demand for counter-insurgency results by international partners in operation such as Barkhane and the G5 Sahel; acts of vengeance by security forces who view local communities as accomplices of jihadists; and poorly trained and equipped state forces who perpetrate human rights abuses with impunity.

Democracy under siege: circumvention of constitutional term limits, repression and curtailment of civil and political liberties

The context

As Côte d'Ivoire looks to head to the polls on 31 October 2020, incumbent President Alassane Ouattara has [reneged on his earlier promise](#) not to vie for a third term. In spite of protests and outcry from the opposition regarding term limits outlined in the new constitution approved in 2016, Ouattara's party, the *Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix* (RHDP) has maintained that the two-term constitutional limit does not apply retrospectively to the past terms prior to the promulgation of the new constitution. Similarly,

in Guinea, incumbent 82-year old Alpha Condé is also set to run for a third term in upcoming elections on 18 October, having being nominated by his party, the ruling Rally of the Guinean People (RPF). [Condé's third term](#) bid also sparked protests by opposition supporters who have accused the government of tampering with the voters' register and registering minors in ruling party strongholds. [Tanzania](#) is also set to hold presidential and legislative elections on 28 October amid growing concerns repression of opposition parties, NGOs and the media since 2015 when incumbent president John Magufuli came into office. The repressive tactics of the Tanzanian government have cast a shadow over the prospects of free and fair elections, along with the grim possibility of a return to one-party rule by the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party which has been in power since independence in 1961. The abrogation of term limits as well as authoritarian tendencies taking hold in a number of African countries point to a pervasive anti-democratic trend that is cause for concern for observers as well as citizens, who bear the brunt of oppression and tyranny.

Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara's volte-face on a third term

The sudden demise of RHDP presidential candidate Gon Coulibaly on 8 July threw the party into disarray as they searched for a replacement candidate in light of incumbent president Ouattara's earlier promise not to run for a third term. Seeking to protect his [legacy](#) and to embody progressive statesmanship, Ouattara had promised to step down at the end of his second term in office. However, pressure from key figures within RHDP who asserted the lack of a candidate with the equivalence of Ouattara's public appeal, international profile and popular support pushed for the declaration of his candidacy. Ouattara's third term bid triggered angry reactions and protests from the opposition who have pointed to the [constitutional term limits](#) provided for in Article 183 of the 2016 constitution. The chances of Ouattara's victory are high given the lack of credible opponents as a result of a disqualification of former

parliamentary speaker Guillaume Soro, who is exiled in France following a conviction over corruption, and [former president Laurent Gbagbo](#) who has been unable to travel from Brussels, where he has remained after his acquittal from the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity linked to the disputed presidential elections in 2010. Furthermore, Gbagbo has also been charged in absentia for embezzlement from the Central Bank of the West African States.

A third term risks undermining Ouattara's accomplishment during his two terms - he has been credited with restoring some stability since the post-election conflict in 2010 and for championing the [end of the French-controlled West African CFA franc](#) and a stop to the centralization of foreign exchange reserves of West African states with the Bank of France. The challenge by the opposition who view the third-term bid as constitutional manipulation and flare-up of protests may also inflame entrenched regional divisions and lingering security risks that could tip into electoral violence and prolonged instability.

Guinea: Alpha Condé's third term bid

In Guinea, 82 year-old President Alpha Condé's third term bid triggered violent protests and public outcry against a move many perceive as a blatant disregard for constitutional provisions. In March, Condé pushed through [a controversial constitutional referendum](#) that sought an amendment to extend presidential terms from five to six years. The opposition boycotted the referendum seen as illegal having been authorized by the speaker of National Assembly rather than by the parliament as required by the Constitution. Moreover, the referendum has been seen as a pretext for Condé's efforts to remain in office through constitutional manipulation, setting the stage for a violent electoral season and political instability. After 50 years of authoritarian rule, Guinea's political transition began in 2010, with high hopes of progressive consolidation of democratic governance and the rule of law. However, since

Condé's re-election in a disputed poll in 2015, he has increasingly displayed [an authoritarian streak](#) through repression of the opposition, repeated attempts to remove the head of the Constitutional Court and banning of protests that began in March 2018 against constitutional change.

In spite of boycotts and resistance to the Constitution on the referendum on 22 March, the government denied allegations of irregularities and claimed victory, pushing through the [amendments to the Constitution](#). In addition to extending length of presidential terms to six years and resetting the term limit clock, amendments also expanded executive power, granting the president power to appoint over half of judges on the Constitutional Court and veto power over legislation. The constitutional engineering to allow a third term bid, repression of the opposition, censure of the media and increasing presidential power are foreboding signs of democratic backsliding and a direct challenge to the African charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Governance. A coalition of [opposition political parties and civil society organizations](#) have been actively resisting Condé's authoritarian plans through protest action and filing of a petition with the ECOWAS Court of Justice on grounds of human rights violations by Guinea's government, indiscriminate use of force to quell protests illegality of constitutional changes.

ECOWAS has a crucial role to play in upholding democratic norms and practices in support of governance, rule of law and accountability. [ECOWAS has had a strong record](#) of resisting attempts of leaders to cling to power as seen in regional intervention in Côte d' Ivoire after the 2010 elections and in the Gambia in 2017. Overall, if the trend of evading term limits and shrinking of democratic space continues unabated, the region is likely to see a violent electoral season, civil unrest and extensive political instability fuelled by deep-rooted tensions and sectarian divides.

Tanzania: rapid decline into authoritarianism

Tanzania has witnessed a [rapid diminution of democratic space](#) ever since President John Magufuli came into office in 2015. In addition to the banning of public rallies, the curtailing of press freedoms, arrests of opposition party members and dissidents of the government have also been on the rise. In July 2019, Parliament passed [a raft of new legislation](#) that affected the media in civic freedoms granting government discretionary powers over civil society organizations and non-governmental organisations including the power to suspend them and investigate their internal operations. Members of opposition political parties such as the Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT) Wazalendo Party and the Chama Cha Demokrasia Na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) party have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, and various media outlets have had their [licenses revoked](#) for disseminating content critical or government or deemed to promote homosexuality. For instance, one regulation prohibits Tanzanian broadcasters from liaising with foreign broadcasters in the absence of representatives from the Tanzanian Communications and Regulating Authority.

The authorities have also [placed restrictions on the number of NGOs](#) permitted to monitor the upcoming election on 28 October, excluding major human rights organizations such as the Legal and Human Rights Centre and the Tanzania Human rights Defenders Coalition. Stringent regulations of online content have also been introduced, prohibiting publication of any content critical in the government or perceived as promoting sedition, hate speech or homosexuality, incurring serious penalties for non-compliance.

The shift towards democratic decline in Tanzania has to be viewed against waning popularity of the CCM Party, which been in power since independence in 1961. Magufuli's election at the helm of CCM in 2015 came at a time when the party was facing heavy public backlash for failure to address widespread corruption and malfeasance, compounded by internal divisions

and factionalism. Magufuli's [campaign platform of anti-corruption](#) and a broad reform agenda appealed to the voters and received acclaim, especially during his first six months in office, but has since taken a turn towards the suppression of dissidents and curtailing of press and civic freedoms. On top of the repressive laws targeting opposition parties, the media and civil society groups, the Judiciary and Parliament have been [systematically weakened](#) by an encroaching executive and the erosion of democratic checks and balances.

Democracy activists and civil society have been putting up a fight against the authoritarian onslaught through a number of platforms including filing petitions with the African Court on Human and People's Rights and the East African Court of Justice. [Prominent public figures](#) such as constitutional expert, Issa Shivji, and chair of the Constitutional Review Commission, Justice Joseph Sinde Warioba have been vocal in condemning the government's repressive tactics, the systematic suppression and the climate of fear in the lead up to the election. The momentum for democratic reform will need to draw external support from internal and external stakeholders who can push for accountability and the upholding of democratic norms in Tanzania. So far, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) have been [reluctant to enforce their declared commitments](#) to democratic norms, promotion of human rights and accountability, an ominous sign for democratic progress and the legitimacy of elections in Tanzania.

Zimbabwe: multiple crises and an increasingly authoritarian regime under President Emmerson Mnangagwa

President Emmerson Mnangagwa came into power in 2017 with lofty promises of a new dispensation and policy reforms to address the deepening economic and political crises that have plagued Zimbabwe for nearly two decades. However, Zimbabweans have found themselves in the doldrums as the government steps up the

oppression of critics and dissidents, arbitrary arrests of journalists and anti-corruption activists, and carries out human rights abuses against citizens with impunity. The situation on the ground is aggravated by [a food shortage crisis, rising poverty levels and economic collapse](#) characterized by a hyperinflation of 780%, a currency crisis and shortage of basic goods and commodities.

In July 2020, journalist [Hopewell Chin'ono](#) and leader of activist group Transform Zimbabwe Jacob Ngarivhume were arrested on charges of incitement ahead of mounting costs for protests against corruption, state failure and government's inadequate response to the Covid-19. Chin'ono had exposed links between Mnangagwa's son and a UAE-based company that had received a multi-million contract to supply Covid-19 material. The exposé sparked public outrage and [calls for nationwide protests](#) by opposition parties, trade unions and civil society groups to demonstrate against corruption and the worsening economic and political crises under Mnangagwa's government.

The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the dire state of public health facilities in the country in the [deplorable working conditions](#) of doctors and nurses who have held several protests for better wages since 2019. Zimbabwean government has used emergency measures and lockdown regulations in response to the pandemic as a pretext to pass through constitutional amendments to expand the executive power without following due process. Furthermore, to [prevent the planned 31 July protests](#) from taking place, the government increased security presence and carried out widespread arrests, abductions and torture of dozens of opposition politicians, activists and journalists. The targeting of journalists and activists who were staging non-violent demonstration, such as Booker Prize-nominated novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga and opposition party Movement for Democratic Change spokesperson Fadzayi Mahere sparked local and [international outcry](#) from celebrities and prominent figures across the globe, expressing solidarity with Zimbabweans

involved in protests against human rights violations and government repression. The pressure for decisive action from regional and continental stakeholders specifically SADC and the AU, ultimately led to South Africa (which holds the AU chair in 2020) sending special envoys to engage with the Zimbabwean government on resolutions to the economic and political crises that have gripped the country. [The dispatch of South African special envoys](#) to Zimbabwe has been criticized as nothing more than a shallow public diplomacy exercise and a play to the gallery, as the envoys held meetings with only President Mnangagwa and failed to engage with any opposition political groups or civil society representatives. Save for a [statement from AU Commission Chair](#) Moussa Faki Mahamat calling on the Zimbabwean government to uphold the rule of law, civic and press freedoms and respect for human rights, regional and continental involvement in attempts to resolve the crisis in Zimbabwe have been lackluster. On its part, the Zimbabwean government has been on the defensive, vehemently resisting external criticism and [deflecting arguments about crisis](#) within its borders.

A wavering reform agenda: protests and political tensions in Ethiopia, an embattled transitional government in Sudan

The essentials

[The killing of a popular Oromo Singer Hachalu Hundessa](#) in June triggered a wave of protests in the Oromia region and in Addis Ababa that resulted in 300 fatalities and arrests of over 7000 people, including journalists, opposition figures and activists. The heavy handed response of the Ethiopian federal states to quell the protests, ranging from an internet shut down to the imposition of curfews and mass arrests, has aggravated deep-rooted tensions and unearthed faultlines between the federal government and

regions in a politically charged ethno-nationalist bargain. The tension has also extended to the Tigray region, which proceeded with regional elections in defiance of the federal government's postponement of elections as a result for Covid-19 pandemic. The confrontation between the federal government and the Tigray region has reignited age-old power struggles rooted in factionalist splits and divisions from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) era, which has now been replaced by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's new Prosperity Party. [The dispute between Addis and Mekelle](#), Tigray's capital, is also underpinned by a secessionist current, which could stoke further inter-ethnic violence in other regions such as the Wolayta Zone, the North Gondar zone and Oromia, which has been centre of anti-federal protests since 2015. An escalation of tensions could also have regional implications and possibly undermine the 2018 rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea after decades-long stalemate stemming from the 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrea war.

The context: Ethiopia

The initial euphoria around the reformist agenda initiated under PM Abiy Ahmed has waned significantly in recent months with many decrying what they see as [a return to a law and order state](#) and recourse to violent repression of protests by federal security forces. Furthermore, the indefinite postponement of general elections as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has been cast as a missed opportunity for PM Abiy to bolster his legitimacy and consolidate popular support for the new pan-Ethiopian Prosperity Party, launched in 2019. Detractors of Abiy have also used the postponement of elections to question the constitutional process behind the House of Federation's deferral to a Council of Constitutional Inquiry (CCI) which approved the [indefinite extension of the legislative term limits](#) of the federal government and regional states. By failing to consult opposition parties and regional stakeholders over the deferment of elections, Abiy's recourse to Parliament has been perceived as a unilateral decision, a misstep that could

potentially alienate the prime minister and inflame lingering tensions between the [regions and the centre](#). The assassination of popular Oromo musician, Hachalu Hundessa also triggered protests in the restive Oromia region, which also happens to be the political constituency of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Hundessa's murder brought to the fore combustible issues of Oromo ethnonationalism underpinned by accumulated grievances of political marginalization and exploitation. The inter-ethnic violence and uprisings that have been centered in the Oromia region and spread to other regions have drawn from the convergence of two potent political trends – [an Oromo nationalist imperative and the manifestation of the 'vernacularized' politics](#), fueled by a range of factors such as group identities, geography and inter-generational divergences.

The contestations around ethnonationalism and politicized narratives of marginalization have been key drivers of inter-ethnic violence that has resulted in a growing humanitarian and security crisis aggravated by proliferation of internally displaced people reported to be over 3 million in 2019. The gravest of inter-ethnic conflicts broke out in [regional state borders](#) including the Oromia-Somali Regional State (SRS) borders, Oromia-Afar regional state borders, the Guji Oromo-Gedeo community border areas, the Amhara-Gumuz regional state borders, the Oromo-Benishangul Gumuz regional state borders, and the Oromo special zones in Amhara region.

In addition to historic grievances, a major contributing factor to protests and violent uprisings has been state-sanctioned violence that has included crackdowns, mass arrests, and lethal force to quell protests. The effect has been counter-violence and a pervasive climate of fear and outcry against what has been seen as [a gradual undoing of Abiy's reformist agenda](#) and a return to the old state. A polarizing issue that has aggravated inter-communal hostilities is the campaign around centralization and [the dismantling of the ethnic federalism model](#) that

has been enshrined in the country's constitution since 1995. PM Ahmed's push for a pan Ethiopian identity has provoked fears among old elites who view a centralized state as a threat to regional autonomy and a pretext for further marginalization. The regional challenge presented by Tigray in defiance of the federal authorities on elections, the resumption of protests in Oromia region and widespread inter-ethnic violence pose a high risk to PM Abiy's reform and a derailment of the democratic transition. Regional stability is also at risk given the potential spillover of the conflict in Oromia into northern Kenya, alongside the tensions between Addis and Tigray that could militate against the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace deal. There's an urgent need for a national dialogue to not only de-escalate tensions with regions, but to also foster cohesion and map a future around the contentious issues of ethnic federalism, including [possible modification of the federalism arrangement](#) along territorial units as opposed to ethnicities.

Sudan: the transitional government comes up against political and economic headwinds

With Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok at the helm, Sudan's one-year old transitional government has been grappling with a range of challenges that threaten the gains of the transition and aggravate tensions between an expectant public and the government under heavy pressure to deliver. Buckling under the weight of a debt-laden economy, rising food and commodity prices and rocketing inflation, the hybrid military-civilian government also has to navigate [underhand dealings from the military component](#) with strong linkages to the former regime under Omar al-Bashir and patronage to regional actors such as Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia. A large part of the economic dilemma confronting the transitional government is the thorny issue of [commodity subsidy reforms](#) which could exacerbate impoverishment of the vulnerable segments of the population and ignite protests and civil unrest. Following years under economic sanctions, the transitional government desperately needs to mobilize international

financial support to stabilize the economy but Sudan's large account deficits and crippling arrears has made donor assistance contingent on wide-ranging macroeconomic reforms such as [removal of fuel subsidies](#), the recovery of stolen funds and enhanced oversight management over public funds. On 25th June, a virtual conference of the Partners Forum for Sudan, sponsored by the EU and Germany, realized [a pledge of \\$1.8 billion](#) and \$400 million in World Bank grants, a much needed show of solidarity with Sudan in meeting its transitional priorities centered on political and economic reform agenda.

A second major impediment to the democratic transition process is the [power struggle within the military establishment](#), specifically between the armed forces led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces led by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo (popularly known as Hemedti). The fractures within the military are a formidable destabilizing force that could not only undermine the transition process, but has also been seen as [a threat to the civilian oversight](#) and balance of power between the military and civilian components of the transitional government in view of the historical ties of generals to interests of powerful actors in the Gulf. The patronage networks and established stakes in gold mining by the military are illustrative of the extensive power and influence that the reform agenda will have to contend with in ensuring a successful transition. The RSF have also been blamed for the [death of more than 100 civilians](#) and the rape of at least 60 women during the protest in June 2019. Although an independent investigation into the killings was announced, many fear that the military's influence over the transitional government will mean that perpetrators may go unpunished.

In addition to economic stability and strengthening of democracy, sustainable peace will also be a priority for Sudan's transitional government with reference to the decades-long conflict with armed groups in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile. A welcome development was the [breakthrough of a peace deal in August 2020](#) between the Sudan

Revolutionary Front (SRF), an alliance of five rebel groups and four political movements, and senior officials from Sudan's transitional government. The final agreement covers key issues around security, land ownership, transitional justice, power-sharing and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. The peace accord has been seen as a positive step towards sustainable peace and relief for millions of refugees and will be able to return to their own homes. However, implementation of the deal and peacebuilding will be a long process given [the complexity of issues](#) such as competition between signatory movements, the potential sabotage by elements of the former regime and inter-tribal violence. Overall, the path to democracy in Sudan is a long and treacherous one and PM Hamdok's transitional government will need all the local and international support it can amass to deliver the goals of the revolution.

North Africa: policy shift towards sub-Saharan Africa and a tumultuous post-Arab Spring transitional decade

The essentials

The recent turn of North African countries towards sub-Saharan Africa is indicative of policy shifts and recalibration of foreign policies to the south. The rationales for enhanced engagement with sub-Saharan Africa are underpinned by a broad range of considerations, including economic, security and political factors. The Arab Spring in 2011 ushered an era of transition and popular demand for improved governance and human development enmeshed with the struggle against authoritarian rule and push for restructuring of state-society relations. The post-Arab spring period has also highlighted the transregional dynamics across the Sahel, the Maghreb, West Africa and the Horn, characterised by commercial, political and ideological networks that cut across regional divides increasingly connecting labour, goods, capital, security and people. Whether viewed

through security lenses or through the prism of migration or economic opportunism, the interconnectedness of North Africa and Africa south of the Sahara will necessitate a re-think of policies and engagement strategies in both the short term and medium term.

The context: the North African turn to the south

The African strategies of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt are underpinned by a wide array of factors and evolving priorities. For instance, for Morocco, its policy shift towards sub-Saharan Africa has entailed a combination of expanding investment in key sectors, diplomatic initiatives to expand its influence and clout and leveraging its position on the Western Saharan issue.

[Morocco's return to the AU](#) in 2017 after a 33-year absence marked the turning point of its Africa policy, especially with regards to its claim over the territory of Western Sahara which has been recognized as a member of the AU since 1984. The question of Western Sahara's autonomy has been a polarizing dispute that has split Algeria and Morocco, eventually leading to a breakdown of relations and the deterioration of the Arab Maghreb Union. Apart from the Western Sahara issue, Morocco has premised its African strategy on expanding investments and business operations in [key sectors such as infrastructure, banking, and telecommunications](#). According to the [African Development Bank](#), as of 2016, 85% of Morocco's FDI was directed towards Africa and increased to \$4.75 billion in 2017, up from \$3.4 billion in 2016.

Morocco's infrastructure development has also set it on the path towards becoming a major transshipment hub on the southern Mediterranean via its world-class port facilities at Casablanca and Tangier-Med, in addition to boosting regional integration and connectivity through projects such as the 5700 kilometer [gas pipeline linking Nigeria to Morocco](#). In 2017, Morocco applied for accession to ECOWAS, a move that has been received with skepticism in some quarters who are wary of opening up the region's manufacturing sector to increased

competition. Morocco's African policy also employs [a soft power strategy](#) through development cooperation, education and religious training. The Tidjanniya *sufi* order has formed the basis of strong religious links between Morocco and West Africa, alongside the establishment of the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema which engages in training of African imams. Morocco has also been an attractive destination for students from sub-Saharan Africa who have access to scholarships and exchange programs via the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation.

On the security front, Morocco has positioned itself as a supporter of strategic transregional security initiatives such as G5 Sahel Force, providing military and religious training in an approach centred on countering Islamic radicalization in the Sahel. Most recently, Morocco's enhanced profile as [a constructive regional security actor](#) has seen it host talks between the conflicting parties in Libya with a view to finding a lasting solution to the Libyan crisis, an outcome that would be positive for regional broader regional stability. With regard to migration, a 2018 agreement between the AU and Morocco led to the establishment of the [Africa Observatory on Migration and Development](#) in Rabat, welcomed as an initial step in coordinating African migration policies and promoting constructive dialogues migration policy reform. In sum, Morocco has embraced a multi-faceted African policy that aims to realize economic and political goals, promote national interest and enhance its profile as a gateway between Europe and Africa.

[Algeria's historical role](#) in African peace and security initiatives and its leadership on the counterterrorism agenda in Africa have been key pillars of its engagement strategy with sub-Saharan Africa. In a bid to expand the relations between security affairs, Algeria has also moved to boost commercial ties with sub-Saharan African countries and to promote regional integration through infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Sahara route and Nigeria-Algeria pipeline project. In April 2020, Algerian President

Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced the creation of the [Algerian Agency for International cooperation of Solidarity and Development](#) aimed at re-orienting the country's foreign policy in Africa with an emphasis on cooperation in economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and scientific sectors. Some commentators have interpreted Algeria's move to reshape its continental profile as a countermove to rival Morocco's growing footprint on the continent. Signalling its commitment to deepen economic cooperation with sub-Saharan African countries, in December 2016 Algeria hosted the African Business and Investment Forum, laying the basis for Algeria's expanding investment in the continent and its [support for African integration initiatives](#) like the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The jihadist and Islamist militancy threats in the Sahel and the Saharan strip along Algeria's border with Mali have also re-oriented Algiers' security policy, cementing its multifaceted contribution towards enhancement of peace and security in Africa through mechanisms such as the Joint Operational Staff Committee ([CEMOC](#)), which brings together Mauritania, Algeria, Mali and Niger in joint counterterrorism operations and intelligence sharing; the Fusion and Liaison Unit and the African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism (CAERT). Additionally, proposed constitutional amendments published in May 2020, will also amount to [a reversal of Algeria's decades-long non-interference policy](#), enabling Algeria to deploy troops to regional counterterrorism operations and to multilateral peacekeeping missions. The Constitutional changes are a clear indication of Algeria's strategic policy shift in response to security and geopolitical imperatives that have a direct bearing on its national interests and regional stability, while strengthening its role as a pivotal security actor in the Maghreb and the Sahelian-Saharan region.

Tunisia's turn southwards has been largely informed by [economic considerations](#), including access to new markets and promoting regional integration and economic cooperation. In 2017.

Tunisia joined the Common market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and has observer status with ECOWAS. Complementing its economic diplomacy outreach, the number of Tunisia's diplomatic missions in sub-Saharan Africa has increased to 12 embassies to serve 49 African countries. The lack of transport links and weak institutional links of the country's banks with the rest of the continent is a significant hurdle that the Tunisia-Africa Business Council will have to overcome in expanding its inter-African market base. Education is also another potential catalyst to strengthen Tunisia's relations with sub-Saharan Africa given the attractiveness of its scientific research sector and budding networks of cooperation in higher education. Overall, Tunisia's foreign policy in Africa has been a function of a pragmatic economic calculus combined with a gradual re-orientation away from sole alignment towards Europe.

Egypt's relations with African countries have been characterized by [patterns of prosperity and decline since the 1950s and 1960s](#). While Egypt actively supported the independence movements of many sub-Saharan African countries during the decolonization struggle, the 1970s saw a reorientation of Egyptian foreign policy towards the Arab world, wrought by developments such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the attempted assassination of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1995. The ouster of Mubarak during the 2011 Arab Spring, followed closely by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's overthrow of Morsi in 2013 marked a new phase of Egypt's policy towards sub-Saharan Africa.

The spillover security risks in the aftermath of the Arab Spring coupled with Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile have been the [foremost determinants of Cairo's revitalized foreign policy](#) in Africa. Egypt served as chair of the AU in 2019, utilizing the platform to enhance the country's diplomatic and political clout across the continent, and bolstering support for strategic regional security and economic regional and priorities. Egypt's increasingly pro-active stance

in African peace and security affairs informed its campaign to host the AU Centre for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. Furthermore, Egypt has been a key supporter of Khalifa Haftar who leads the Libyan National Army (LNA) faction fighting against the UN-recognised and Turkish-backed Government of National Accord in the Libyan conflict. For Sisi, support for the LNA has been presented as key element of his campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood and as a [containment strategy](#) against Islamic jihadist militias along its western flank with Libya.

The Nile remains Egypt's most important regional priority, driven in part by Ethiopia's construction of the GERD which Egypt views as a threat to its water supply and a violation of its water usage rights pegged on historical treaties. In spite of several rounds of [talks between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan](#) over the Nile dispute, outstanding issues around drought mitigation measures, the technicalities of filling the dam and dispute resolution mechanisms have stalled finalization of an agreement.

Seeking to promote trade ties with sub-Saharan African countries, Egypt has been a member of COMESA since 1998 and has convened a number of economic conferences in Sharm El-Sheikh to promote inter-African economic cooperation. The [Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development](#) has also been at the forefront in implementing Egyptian engagement in South-South cooperation with African countries through a range of capacity-building programs in health, agriculture, irrigation, electricity and infrastructure sectors as well as provision of scholarships to African students. Thus, Egypt's Africa policy is premised on a mix of economic, security and geopolitical imperatives, although critics have pointed to the [lack of an integrated strategy](#) and have urged Cairo to embrace more of a bridge-building and facilitator role in continental affairs, as opposed to a focus on competition with other power brokers in Africa such as Nigeria, South Africa in Nigeria.

The post-Arab Spring era: a decade of transition in North Africa?

The 2011 Arab uprising that saw toppling of authoritarian leaders in Tunisia and Egypt has been highlighted as a redefining moment for state-society relations and the beginning of a transitional era of politics and governance in the North African region. The impact of 2011 upheavals have given way to markedly different trajectories across the Maghreb countries and influenced the emergence of new dynamics and challenges across political, economic and security dimensions.

In Tunisia, [the post-revolutionary power-sharing](#) between the secular Nidaa Tounes party and the Islamist-oriented Ennada party has been hailed as a rarity in the Arab world. But the coalition has not been exempt from the typical internal divisions and power struggles that pose a constant threat to the consensus between political forces. Furthermore, rampant corruption, delayed processes of transitional justice and weak state capacity has put a damper on the expectations of citizens, many of whom are wary of the potential drift toward 'authoritarianism lite' characterised by a strengthened presidentialism and a weakened parliament.

As [King Mohammed VI celebrates 21 years on the throne](#), Morocco has witnessed a range of political and economic reforms including an upgrade of infrastructure, partial political opening to fairer elections, decreased media Center and free and fair parliamentary elections. On the foreign policy front, Morocco has re-oriented its focus towards sub-Saharan Africa, boosting commercial and investment links with the continent and enhancing the country's profile as a gateway between Europe and Africa. However, domestic challenges prevail in the form of high poverty levels particularly in rural areas, youth unemployment, poor service delivery and high levels of public debt. The resurgence of protests in the Rif region between 2016 and 2018 point to long-standing grievances and persistent demand for deeper reforms. Although the Moroccan regime has gotten by through depression and violent crackdowns, the socio-economic hardships and widespread frustration

contain seeds of imminent uprisings against authoritarianism. In Algeria, [the Hirak protest movement](#) which set off the weekly 2019 protests that led to the removal of long-ruling leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika is at a critical juncture. The election of Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune in rushed elections during December 2019 has led to a legitimacy crisis, amidst low levels of popular support and continued protests by Algerians who see the new president as a product of the former regime. The Hirak has also been confronted with systemic challenges that have weakened its prospects to evolve into an alternative political force in the Algerian political landscape. [Ideological and spatial differences](#) over the roadmap of the transition have also continued to work against a clear pathway towards change, signaling uncertainty about Algeria's political trajectory in the short-term to medium term and dimming prospects for a successful democratic transition.

Libya's descent into civil war since the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 has reverberated across the region, increasingly becoming [a focal point for geostrategic competition](#) and aggravating insecurity across the Maghreb and the Sahel. In addition to playing out as a site for geopolitical competition between a complex web of regional and international actors, Libya's oil wealth has also fueled the intermeddling by foreign actors who have compounded fragmentation of the political landscape and widening security vacuum.

The [internationalization of the conflict](#) has acted as a driver for intensification and prolonging of the conflict, as multiple attempts at summitry and wheel-dealing between international powerbrokers and their local proxies complicate the quest for viable political solutions. As the brunt of nearly ten years of conflict continues to weigh heavily on Libyans amidst worsening social and economic conditions, [anti-government protests](#) have once again flared up in eastern Libya, a surefire sign of the structural drivers and deep-rooted grievances that feed into a seemingly endless and rapidly evolving civil war. In Egypt, since Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took over

power following Morsi's ouster in 2013, the country has seen gradual reversal of the revolutionary gains of the Arab uprising and [institutionalized slide into authoritarianism](#). In addition to extending the presidential term and consolidating military powers over the state, Sisi's regime has also placed the country in a permanent state of emergency, a pretext to crush dissent, repress civil and political liberties and engage in [human rights abuses](#), torture and extrajudicial killings. The silence from Egypt's

regional and international allies, such as the US, which has continued to provide security assistance to Cairo has only acted as an enabler to Sisi's entrenchment of authoritarian rule and strengthening of his grip on power. The climate of fear and intolerance of dissent is reminiscent of Mubarak's authoritarian rule, with some arguing that the current situation is even [worse than before](#) and has set Egypt on the decline into instability.

