



(NASA, 2002)

## Weekly Insights from North Africa

01/03/2019-07/03/2019

*Elections are the ongoing theme in the North Africa region. As Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj announces a new date for Presidential elections, the international community has begun to take sides considering the current popular protests in Algeria against the nomination of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika for a 5<sup>th</sup> Presidential term. Candidates for Mauritania have begun to announce themselves, while Tunisia has officially fixed its own date for Presidential elections to 10 November of this year. Egypt hosted a high-level meeting to address the ongoing challenges in Libya, whilst Morocco, in a rare instance of regional calm, has utilized the week to push for greater bilateral cooperation in economics and security.*

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## Algeria

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News has focussed on the upcoming Algerian Presidential elections. The US has officially come out in support of the popular protests against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's run for a 5<sup>th</sup> Presidential term (*France 24*)<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, former colonial power France has instead maintained an ambivalent tone, promoting stability and adherence to the electoral process above other concerns (*France 24*)<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, in the ongoing protests across Algeria, there are reports of arrests of protestors in Algiers for alleged vandalism and attacks on law enforcement (*Akhbar Dzair*)<sup>3</sup>. The Algerian government has signed an agreement with the Arab League of States to monitor the upcoming elections (*Aljazair 24*)<sup>4</sup>.

And Bouteflika, who has been the favourite to win the next election for his 5<sup>th</sup> term in office, has reportedly been released from hospital in Geneva, Switzerland, following a medical issue to return to Algeria at the soonest opportunity (*Maghreb Emergent*)<sup>5</sup>.

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## Egypt

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Representatives from Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt met in Cairo this week to discuss the ongoing crisis in Libya and committed to restabilising security and stability in Libya whilst rejecting malicious foreign interference in the process (*Cairo Now; People Daily*)<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding domestic affairs, reportedly seven terrorists with links to the Muslim Brotherhood were killed in Jeezah by local police (*Ahl Masr News*)<sup>7</sup>.

There has been arrests following a serious rail accident in Cairo, itself following other significant accidents in recent months across Egypt (*News 24*)<sup>8</sup>.

There has also been differing reports of arrests against outspoken anti-government activists for attacking government institutions, though the nature of these cases is disputed (*Egyptian Streets*)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190306-algerie-bouteflika-contestation-soutien-etats-unis>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190306-algerie-jean-yves-le-drian-processus-electoral-bouteflika>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bit.ly/2tSXTDz> (Link Shortened)

<sup>4</sup> <http://aljazair24.com/national/61401.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bit.ly/2XLWNr9> (Link Shortened)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cairo-now.com/show-2,N-1105280.html>; <http://french.peopledaily.com.cn/Afrique/n3/2019/0306/c96852-9553066.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ahlmassnews.com/808003>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/egypt-more-arrested-over-cairo-train-crash-that-killed-25-20190306>

<sup>9</sup> <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/03/06/46027/>; <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/03/07/egyptian-trans-woman-arrested-for-protesting-fears-being-placed-in-a-male-prison/>

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## Libya

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Prime Minister Fayeze al-Serraj, of the Government of National Accord, announced his intention to hold anticipated Presidential elections in Libya by the end of 2019, a statement welcomed by international partners such as the US, UK, France and Italy (*The Libyan Express*)<sup>10</sup>. The Minister of Justice for the Government of National Accord also met with a delegation from the EU in Tripoli to address the current situation in the country (*The Libyan Observer*)<sup>11</sup>.

Meanwhile, General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army has reportedly gained significant control of Libya's south, an area that has seen significant fighting around the city of Sabha in recent months (*The Libyan Express*)<sup>12</sup>. The role of Russian mercenaries in support of Haftar's campaign has been both reported and denied by differing sources (*The Libyan Express*; *The Libyan Observer*)<sup>13</sup>.

In the west of Libya, the Arab Organization for Human Rights has condemned the use of weapons to disperse peaceful demonstrations in Tripoli against the presence of armed militias in the Libyan capital (*Libyan Cloud News Agency*)<sup>14</sup>. Regarding the humanitarian crisis, the UNHCR has again criticised the treatment of illegal migrants in Libyan detention centres (*The Libyan Express*)<sup>15</sup>.

Neighbouring Chad also reportedly shut its border with Libya citing concerns regarding security (*The Libyan Observer*)<sup>16</sup>.

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## Mauritania

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In the build to Mauritania's next Presidential election, current Minister of Defence Ould El Ghazouani has officially announced his candidacy, and a move largely seen as the current government's choice for the future (*Asharq Al-Awsat*; *Jannah News*)<sup>17</sup>. The governments of Mauritania and The Gambia have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding in a move designed to bolster bilateral cooperation (*All Africa*).

Regarding the political opposition, businessman Mohamed Bouamatou has publicised his political platform for candidacy (*L'Authentique*)<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior has officially dissolved more than seventy opposition parties, citing insufficient electoral support in previous elections in 2013 and 2018 (*Jannah News*)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.libyanexpress.com/al-sirraj-libyas-elections-by-end-of-2019/>; <https://www.libyanexpress.com/france-uk-us-italy-welcome-libya-agreement-to-end-transitional-phase/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/minister-justice-reviews-aspects-cooperation-eu-mission>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.libyanexpress.com/haftars-forces-claim-full-control-of-south-libya/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.libyanexpress.com/russian-mercenaries-supporting-haftars-forces-the-telegraph-says/>;  
<https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/russia-denies-presence-benghazi>

<sup>14</sup> <https://en.libyan-cna.net/political-affairs/the-arab-organization-for-human-rights-condemns-use-of-weapons-to-disperse-peaceful-demonstration-in-tripoli/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.libyanexpress.com/unhcr-concerned-over-treatment-of-illegal-immigrants-in-libya-detention-centers/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/chad-shuts-border-libya>

<sup>17</sup> <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1616281/mauritania-defense-minister-run-upcoming-presidential-elections>;  
<https://www.saharamedias.net/fr/gazouani-officiellement-candidat-aux-prochaines-elections-presidentielles/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.lauthentic.info/Politique/article/Le-projet-presidentiel-de-Mohamed-Bouamatou-pour-la-Mauritanie>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.saharamedias.net/fr/mauritanie-dissolution-de-plus-de-70-partis-politiques/>

In other news, feminist activists have publicly called on the government to enact tougher penalties for cases of sexual violence (*The Times of India*)<sup>20</sup>.

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## Morocco

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Morocco has advanced a series of international agreements this week. With Serbia, Morocco signed three separate agreements on trade, tourism and culture (2M)<sup>21</sup>. With Spain, Morocco discussed an important deal to utilise Spanish military technology (*Le360*)<sup>22</sup>. And with Mali, Morocco signed an agreement to harmonize their migration policies (*Morocco Gazette*)<sup>23</sup>. There have also been reports that the Sustainable Fisheries Agreement with the EU will soon enter into force (*MarocWeb*)<sup>24</sup>.

On the other hand, Morocco has publicly warned against the destabilizing influence of Iran in Arab countries across the wider Middle East/North Africa region (*Morocco World News*)<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding domestic policy, Amina Bouayach, President of the National Human Rights Council, indicated that she will follow a similar strategy as her predecessor Driss El Yazimi (*Le360*)<sup>26</sup>.

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## Tunisia

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Many domestic political developments took place this week. The dates of the upcoming legislative and Presidential elections in Tunisia have been fixed, 6 October for the former and 10 November for the latter (*Mosaïque FM*)<sup>27</sup>. The current head of government, Youssed Chahed, announced the creation of a new political party (*Jeune Afrique*)<sup>28</sup>.

However, the Tunisian parliament failed to reach a consensus regarding the election of the three currently vacant places in the constitutional court (*Kapitalis*)<sup>29</sup>. In addition, forty-three parliamentarians filed a lawsuit regarding alleged secret apparatus of Ennahdha, supposedly linked to the political assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi (*Tunisie Numérique*)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/in-conservative-mauritania-confronting-sexual-violence-laws/articleshow/68297827.cms>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.2m.ma/fr/news/maroc-serbie-3-accords-de-cooperation-signes-20190306/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://fr.le360.ma/politique/les-termes-dun-important-deal-avec-madrid-pour-le-transfert-au-maroc-de-la-technologie-militaire-185333>

<sup>23</sup> <http://marocgazette.com/story-z3282177>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.marocweb.com/decision-relative-conclusion-accord-peche-adoptee-maroc-union-europeenne.html>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2019/03/267223/morocco-iranian-influence-arab-countries/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://fr.le360.ma/politique/video-grand-format-le360-amina-bouayach-dit-tout-sur-les-droits-humains-au-maroc-185437>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mosaïquefm.net/fr/actualite-national-tunisie/507231/officiel-les-dates-des-legislatives-et-presidentielles-fixees>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/716563/politique/tunisie-tahya-tounes-le-nouveau-parti-dans-le-giron-de-youssef-chahed/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2019/03/06/tunisie-limpossible-election-des-membres-de-la-cour-constitutionnelle/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.tunisienumerique.com/tunisie-audio-rim-mahjoubi-devoile-les-details-relatifs-au-proces-intente-contre-lappareil-secret-dennahdha/>

Also, the draft law on the extension of the state of emergency proposed by President Beji Caid Essebsi has been denounced as unconstitutional, authoritarian and a threat to human rights (*Nawaat*)<sup>31</sup>.

## About:

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

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<sup>31</sup> <https://bit.ly/2HI5I2o> (Link Shortened)



## BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The BIC-RHR is a research organization based in the capital of Europe that works to produce valuable insights into policy debates and political actions taking place in the MENA region and its effects on individuals.

We base our activities in three spheres of work: Social Outreach, Insights and Democratic Development. Combined, they provide a global perspective with actions focused on influencing the individual.

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