THE CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE NORTH AFRICAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are members of one or more regional or sub-regional arrangements that seek to promote economic coordination, cooperation or integration among member countries. The various African regional economic blocs, and indeed the individual countries that comprise their membership, are at different stages of development and implementation of their regional arrangement. This paper examines the socio-economic integration and collective security in the North African region. Qualitatively driven with reliance on secondary sources of data, it argues that efforts at economic integration in the region is at its lowest ebb as a result of serious security threats arising from the Arab Spring which swept through the region in late 2010 and 2011. The paper also discovers that regional economic integration efforts is further jeopardized by the domestic problems and attempts at reforms of hitherto authoritarian regimes by countries of the region and concludes that until there is relative peace and security in that region, it will remain the least integrated within the African continent.

KEYWORDS: Economic, Integration, Collective Security, North Africa, Arab Spring

INTRODUCTION

The majority of sub-Saharan African countries are members of one or more regional or sub-regional arrangements that seek to promote economic coordination, cooperation or integration among the member countries concerned. The various African regional economic blocs, and indeed the individual countries that comprise their membership, are at varying stages of development and implementation of their regional arrangements. The blocs' scope covers various socio-economic, developmental and political considerations, including the promotion of intra-regional trade, socio-economic policy coordination, and management or development of shared physical infrastructure and the environment. Some of the African regional arrangements also cover issues of common interest in the areas of public governance, defense and security, among other socio-economic and political dimensions (Maruping, 2005).

Most of the many African sub-regional arrangements have a long history of existence, dating back to the pre-independence era, which has been punctuated by occasional stagnations or reversals in a few cases, and only modest achievements at best in others. Some African countries have only recently rekindled their interest in economic integration, but for different reasons from the initial decolonization agenda and the desire to overcome the colonially imposed "artificial" boundaries. They have been inspired by the success of integration efforts in Europe and the Americas. They also

need post-independence economic integration to gain bargaining power and survive economically against the threat of marginalization in the globalization process (Maruping, 2005, p.129). But more importantly, Africa needs economic integration to survive the current wave of insecurity that is ravaging almost every part of the continent.

Collective security on the other hand, entails the cooperation of several countries in an alliance to strengthen the security of each. It is a security arrangement, political, regional, or global in which each state in the system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and therefore commits to a collective response to threats to, and breaches of peace. Under a collective security arrangement, an aggressor against any one state is considered an aggressor against all other states, which act together to repel the aggressor. It is doubtful if a region like North Africa can achieve any form of collective security under the present condition of security threats and conflicts in the region. Additionally, the bulk of the countries in the region are either undergoing one form of internal reforms or the other, hosting terrorists groups that are destabilizing the region or struggling for leadership of the region.

However, this paper focuses basically on the challenges of economic integration and collective security in the North African region. The countries in the region have been facing ever-increasing security challenges, especially after the popular uprisings since late 2010. We begin with an overview of the region, its geo-politics, security threats in the region before analyzing the efforts and challenges of economic integration and collective security in the region among others.

North African Region: An Overview

The geographic entity North Africa has no single accepted definition. It has been regarded by some as stretching from the Atlantic shores of Morocco in the west to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea in the east, though this designation is more commonly referred to as northern Africa. Others have limited it to the countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, a region known by the French during colonial times as Afrique du Nord and by the Arabs as the Maghrib ("West"). The most commonly accepted definition includes Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Libya and Egypt. "North Africa", particularly when used in North Africa and the Middle East, often refers only to the countries of the Maghreb and Libya. Egypt, due to its greater Middle Eastern associations, is often considered separately. However, this paper adopts the African Union's definition of the region as consisting of Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia while Western Sahara and Mauritania (but not Sudan) are included (Bret, Warmington & Abun-Nasr, 2009). There is an existing distinction between North Africa and the other parts of Africa. This is embedded both in the ecology and history of the region and is significant because of the effective barrier created by the Sahara desert which is the dominant feature of the North African landscape, and stretches across the southern part of the region (www.wikipedia.org).

The Sahara serves as a geographical boundary between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa and marks a transition zone from the largely Arab population of North Africa to black Africa of the

south. From 3500 BC, following the abrupt desertification of the Sahara due to gradual changes in the Earth's orbit, this barrier has culturally separated the North from the rest of the continent. The overwhelming majority of the North African population is concentrated along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines and the Nile River, while the Sahara desert is one of the most sparsely populated places on Earth. Though sparsely populated, the desert has played an important role in the history of the region and it has been argued that as the seafaring civilizations of the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and others facilitated communication and migration across the Mediterranean Sea, the cultures of North Africa has become much more linked to Southwestern Asia and Europe than the other parts of Africa. The region is a major part of the Muslim world with significant Islamic influence (www.wikipedia.org).

It is pertinent to emphasize that Northern Africa should not be confused with North Africa whose definition is highly disputed but from the political standpoint is often limited to the four modern countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Within Northern Africa lies the smaller region known as Maghreb, consisting of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. However, for the purpose of this lecture, both terms will be used interchangeably to capture the countries as defined by the African Union (AU).

The Theory of Collective Security: A Framework for Analysis

This is one theory that explains the use of international forces through the ambit of the United Nations and other International Governmental Organizations (IGOs). It is a security regime created by the great powers that set rules for keeping peace. The theory is guided by the principles that an act of aggression by any state or group of states will be met by a collective response from the other states. It stipulates that effective collective measures would be taken to assist any state under aggression by another member or group of states. Collective security is based on some basic tenets. The first is that all states would avoid the use of force except in self defense. The second rest on the general agreement that peace is indivisible, while, the third is the pledge by all states (or members of the IGO) to unite against aggression and restore the peace. Indeed, members must keep their alliance and commitments to the group and agree on what constitutes aggression. Lastly, they also must pledge to contribute resources (material and personnel) to form a collective security force to fight the aggressor(s) and restore the peace (Kegely and Wittkopf, 2001, p.559).

As postulated by Weiss (1993, p.3), the roots of the concept can be traced back several centuries through a long series of proposals for maintaining international peace. The central theme remains virtually the same, this is that "the governments of all states would join together to prevent any of their members from using coercion to gain advantage, especially conquering another. Indeed, the League of Nations embodied this belief, although, it later proved unable to muster collective resistance, to deter German, Italian and Japanese aggressions in the late 1930's.

Collective security appears to exist as goal in that its application at the international level is limited by problems. Most glaring is the unwillingness of countries to subordinate their sovereign interests. It is not often that when a powerful state commits aggression against a weaker one that that other powerful states go to war over the issue as it can be quite costly to suppress a determined aggressor. This is to say that the collective security system does not work against aggression by great powers. In fact, only the UN's intervention in korea (1950-1953) and the Persian Gulf (1990-1991) appear close to fulfilling the idea of collective security (Kegely and Wittkopf, 2001, p.560).

In recent years, the concept of collective security has been broadened and by the end of the cold war, the liberal premises of international community and mutual state interests provided the foundation for a new idea called common security or 'mutual security'. This is the notion that the security of all states is mutually interdependent; therefore, the insecurity of one state makes all other states insecure. This new notion was aimed at solving the security dilemma because if a state threatened another state, its own security interest would be diminished (Palme, 1992, p.28).

The theory therefore is an attempt to highlight the various opportunities and challenges that abound in the course of the search for unity that could be galvanized through efforts at economic integration by countries in North Africa. Basically, economic integration and collective security could serve as a useful tool in managing the level of mistrust, hegemonic struggles and barefaced insecurity in the region.

Geo-politics of the North African Region

The geopolitical landscape of North African region is dotted by conflicts and insecurity which makes the region quite unstable. From Algeria to Egypt and through the Sahara, insecurity reigns both in the era of pre and post Arab Spring, a revolution which swept through the region sacking despotic and authoritarian regimes which held sway in the countries of North Africa for centuries. Except for Tunisia, the bulk of the North African states are yet to embrace true democracy even after the fall of these authoritarian regimes.

Similarly, the proximity of the countries of the North African countries to that of the Middle East in what is known as the Middle East and North African (MENA) region has also intensified violence, insecurity and instability in the region. In fact, the last century has seen the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) and the countries that form it repeatedly fall into disarray and instability. Authoritarian regimes led by dictators and monarchs had oppressed millions of people and killed thousands others, a development which has resulted in perpetual conflict within the region. As a matter of fact, the borders separating the MENA countries were drawn by British and French imperialists in the early 20th century with no regard for the ethnic, religious and ideological divides of the people inhabiting the region. The unnatural borders largely explain why MENA as a region has been so unstable. The state borders are unnatural for the people living there, and, almost a century after they were drawn, are beginning to break down (Peabody, 2015).

In the past centuries, the geopolitics of the North African region has been defined by ideological conflict between religious sects, in addition to smaller wars over the rich resources and land. During the height of the Ottoman Empire's power in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, the vast spread of the Empire's lands created a common market under which the region could unite. Eventually, the Ottomans also opened the area to European imperial and colonial powers that were interested in securing ownership of the region's resources, as well as controlling land access to Asian markets. At the fall of the Ottoman Empire, European powers such as France, Britain and Italy took control of the region and divided it amongst themselves based on their interests (Peabody, 2015). These colonial powers expanded their empires and imposed their own (usually oppressive) forms of governance and law, thereby creating the basis for deeply held anti-Western sentiments within the region's civil populations which manifests in resentment and resistance of such western influence. This also adds up as drivers of conflicts in North Africa which has remained unstable after the regime change fuelled by the Arab Spring.

The North African region is also blessed with rich oil deposits which has brought the region into international focus and seal her fate as a strategic foreign policy interest for the rest of the world. Oil is the global economy's lifeblood, and thus it penetrates the crucial interests of all states. Such reliance on one resource forces states to engage in the global economy, especially when dealing with the politics of global oil sales. In one sense, the global reliance on oil allows the North African countries with oil deposits especially those located in the Persian Gulf that possess a great proportion of the oil fields to affect the global economy with their manipulation of oil prices, and, in turn, reap enormous economic benefits (Peabody, 2015). However, the economic benefits from oil seems to generate a negative effect and tends to translate to "resource curse" as the enormous oil resources does not create better life for the citizens but generates poverty as a result of resource mismanagement, corruption and impunity.

The above situation is rooted in developments in states where the bulk of its income is derived from its own natural resources, with non reliance on taxes and other sources from the populace. It will therefore be less likely to acknowledge the political preferences of the population, and more likely to form an authoritarian and/or monarchical state than a democratic one; this type of state is called a rentier state. As a result, the vast monetary benefits of the oil economy on the North African region points to the main consequence of this resource monopoly, that the oil-rich states have also historically been politically oppressive of their citizens. The nature of the relationship between the populace and the government leads to repeated instances of unrest, instability and human rights violations in every oil-rich North African country and even those of the Middle East without exception. This social and political flux is one side effect of the "resource curse," a concept that describes the comparatively slow political, economic and social development of countries with an abundance of natural resources in relation to countries without such extensive assets.

The external effects of global oil market have reinforced these negative political tendencies. Powerful Western governments, in particular the United States (US), prioritize oil and the stability of

the oil markets as a vital national interest. In order to control access to the oil, a position for which the world powers heavily cherished during and after the Cold War, the US and its Western allies facilitated the overthrow of any Arab leader not sympathetic to Western interests.

At the same time, the US also placed and supported certain leaders who would most likely ensure political stability and protect US oil interests. In most, if not all, of these cases, these new leaders overly oppressed the populace in order to prevent political opposition and rebellion. This constant oppression throughout North Africa explains why the region is the most militarized in the world; authoritarian Arab states' militaries are funded by the US and other Western governments so that stability, both within and between the states in the region, and regardless of the consequences to the populace is ensured (Peabody, 2015). This regional standard of oppression and Western control was to end abruptly with the intraregional popular uprisings that began in 2011. The Arab Spring was supposed to represent a symbol of pan-Arabism, the unity of all Arabs prioritized over nationalistic or even ethnic or religious boundaries, and a sign of solidarity against the constant oppression of the people, regardless of ideology or background. In fact, it has been argued that the failure of the Gulf States to join the spring movement and the retention of power by some of the offending regimes has contributed to the level of instability in North Africa fuelled by ethnic and ideological boundaries.

The North African region is a strategic crossroads between the Middle East, Africa, and Europe; what happens in the Maghreb affects other countries' interests in all of those adjoining regions. Again, the Maghreb is home to U.S. allies whose stability serves U.S. interests while it has been at the forefront of both al Qaeda and ISG recruitment. In fact, North Africa has become a "more fertile environment for terrorist development, plotting, and activity than most parts of the world" (CSIS, 2017). The region is also a migrant route with a large network of cartels involved in human and drug trafficking. Its proximity to countries of Europe has placed the region as a stopover destination for migrants particularly those from other regions of Africa. Libya in particular has played host to an influx of migrants from West Africa particularly Nigeria of recent and is reputed to have derived illicit revenue from the new face of slave trade in Africa while there are tales of woe from victims who manage to escape from the horrors of maltreatment by the Libyan immigration agency. Reports reveal that Libya has been known for horrific abuses in its migrant detention centres where black Africans stopped from sea crossing and contained in Libyan detention centres are sold like livestock for paltry sums of money.

Egypt has also been a paradox of some sort courtesy of its geographical position. Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Middle East, and the Nile Basin are all geographic entities in which Egypt is either part of or is on the periphery of. This geographic position makes Egypt a crossroads between two continents and several geopolitical regions. This multitude of areas, positions, and positioning is an advantage and an opportunity for Egypt just as much as it is a handicap and difficulty. The advantage is that the country can take advantage of this multiple belonging in order to diversify its relations and establish itself as a meeting point. The handicap is that Egypt's neighborhood has so many contradictions and differences of interest that an alliance with one can be

interpreted as hostility towards another. The challenge for Egypt is to balance its policy between the various partners and geopolitical areas that surround it (Bassou, 2016). The geo-political landscape of the region is dotted with porous borders even with its linkages to the Middle East and other littoral states which lack effective policing particularly in Algeria which is the largest country in Africa. These porous borders provide safe haven for terrorists and other Jihadists groups throughout the region and as well intensify the level of insecurity.

From all of the above, largely driven by not only the global dominance of the oil market, but also the geopolitical history of the region long before oil was discovered, it is possible to see why the North African region has continuously remained unstable and insecure. Regional geopolitics also explain why the Arab Spring of 2011 was so surprising to scholars of the region, why authoritarian regimes and bureaucratic monarchies continue to rule the region despite the democratization of much of the rest of the world, and why US interests have focused so singularly on a region without prioritizing the well-being of the people there (Peabody, 2015).

On the whole, the geopolitical trajectory of North Africa in the context of the Arab Spring presents two basic view points. On the one hand, there are those scholars and practitioners who have practically declared the revolts in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt as technically dead. The election in Tunisia in late October 2014 brought former members of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali administration back into power; for Libya, scholars close to the armed conflicts literature would hardly disagree with defining the situation in the country as that of a civil war; and for Egypt, the ruling military elite continues to maintain its all-encompassing grip on power at the expense of democratic rule (Eriksson, 2015).

On the other hand, there are those who view the past years' development in North Africa in a diametrically opposed way, by looking at developments in a very positive way. Albeit recognizing that there have been instances of violence, abuses and atrocities against civilians in most of the North African states, political change has undeniably taken place. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have taken major steps to reform previous system malfunctions. For example, all states in the region have made amendments to their constitutions to conform better to democratic practices and representations. Adding to this, most states have held elections without much international critique (although the disposal of former President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt will remain a thorn for the military). From this perspective, formal institutional democratization measures have been taken and the liberalization process appears to be on the right path (Eriksson, 2015).

North Africa and the Arab Spring
The Arab Spring is a wave of pro-democracy protests and uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) beginning in 2010 and 2011, challenging some of the region's entrenched authoritarian regimes. Demonstrators expressing political and economic grievances faced violent crackdowns by their countries' security forces but their resilience and persistence yielded far

reaching and positive changes in most of the former authoritarian regimes (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

In January and February 2011, protests in Tunisia and Egypt succeeded in a matter of weeks in toppling two regimes thought to be among the region's most stable. The first demonstrations took place in central Tunisia in December 2010, catalyzed by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi a 26-year-old street vendor protesting his treatment by local officials set himself on fire. This galvanized a protest movement, dubbed the "Jasmine Revolution" in the media, which quickly spread through the country. The Tunisian government attempted to end the unrest by using violence against street demonstrations and by offering political and economic concessions. However, protests soon overwhelmed the country's security forces, compelling President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down and flee the country in January 2011. In October 2011, Tunisians participated in a free election to choose members of a council tasked with drafting a new constitution. A democratically chosen President and Prime Minister took office in December 2011 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

This was followed by massive protests broke out in Egypt in late January 2011, only days after Ben Ali's ouster in Tunisia. The Egyptian government also tried and failed to control protests by offering concessions while cracking down violently against protesters. After several days of massive demonstrations and clashes between protesters and security forces in Cairo and around the country, a turning point came at the end of the month when the Egyptian army announced that it would refuse to use force against protesters calling for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak. Having lost the support of the military, Mubārak left office on February 11 after nearly 30 years, ceding power to a council of senior military officers (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

In the period of the euphoria that followed, the new military administration enjoyed high public approval, since the military had played a decisive role in ending the Mubārak regime. However, optimism was dampened when the new administration appeared hesitant to begin a full transfer of power to an elected government and when military and security forces resumed the use of violence against protesters. Confrontations between protesters and security forces became frequent occurrences. In spite of a multiday outbreak of violence in late November 2011, parliamentary elections proceeded as scheduled and the newly elected People's Assembly held its inaugural session in late January 2012.

Encouraged by protesters' rapid successes in Tunisia and Egypt, protest movements took hold in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria in late January, February, and March 2011. In these countries, however, outpourings of popular discontent led to protracted bloody struggles between opposition groups and ruling regimes. In Libya protests against the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi in mid-February 2011 quickly escalated into an armed revolt. When the rebel forces appeared to be on the verge of defeat in March, an international coalition led by NATO launched a campaign of air strikes targeting Qaddafi's forces. Although NATO intervention ultimately shifted the military balance in

favour of the rebel forces, Qaddafi was able to cling to power in the capital, Tripoli, for several more months. He was forced from power in August 2011 after rebel forces took control of Tripoli. After evading capture for several weeks, Qaddafi was killed in Surt in October 2011 as rebel forces took control of the city (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

The challenges of governing Libya in the post-Qaddafi era became apparent soon after the internationally recognized provisional government, known the Transitional National Council (TNC), took power. The TNC struggled to restart the Libyan economy, establish functional institutions of government, and exert control over the many autonomous regional and tribal militias that had participated in the rebellion against Qaddafi. The effects of the Arab Spring movement were felt elsewhere throughout the Middle East and North Africa as many of the countries in the region experienced at least minor pro-democracy protests. In Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, and Oman, rulers offered a variety of concessions, ranging from the dismissal of unpopular officials to constitutional changes, in order to head off the spread of protest movements in their countries (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013).

It must be noted here that the Arab Spring was a result of a change in the narrative of a young generation peacefully rising up against oppressive authoritarianism to secure a more democratic political system and a brighter economic future. It is believed to have been instigated by dissatisfaction, particularly of youth and unions, with the rule of local governments, though some have speculated that wide gaps in income levels and pressures caused by the Great Recession may have contributed to the uprising.

Security Threats in the North African Region

The security situation in the northern and western regions of Africa, stretching from Morocco to Libya and from Mauritania to Chad across the sub-Saharan region, has been increasingly challenged by two major dilemmas: threats from proliferating jihadist groups, and human trafficking resulting from migration toward European shores. Recent studies show that Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mali are the worst hit. The International Crisis Group in 2017 considered the region to be among the most alarming conflict zones (Cherkaoui, 2017).

While Jihadi-salafi violence in North Africa has evolved over decades, a combination of internal and external factors is reshaping the security landscape. First, North Africa faces the risk of returning fighters who joined the ranks of the ISG and al Qaeda in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Accurate assessments of North African foreign fighters are difficult to confirm. Figures based on Maghreb government sources estimate that approximately 7,500 Tunisian, Moroccan, Libyan, Egyptian, and Algerian nationals have joined Jihadi-salafi groups abroad. North Africans therefore comprise a significant part of the approximately 40,000 foreign fighters estimated by the U.S. government to have joined armed groups in Syria and Iraq since 2011. These returning fighters pose a security threat, and effectively monitoring them requires significant resources for surveillance and

incarceration. Many jihadists have been imprisoned, and most are serving sentences of three to eight years (CSIS, 2017).

Second, some North African fighters who had joined groups in Syria and Iraq are now entering Libya or Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, where an Islamic State Group (ISG) branch is fighting the Egyptian government rather than returning to their home countries. According to Dr. R. Kim Cragin, Senior Research Fellow for Counterterrorism, National Defense University, about 900 jihadists who fought in Syria have relocated to Libya. Half are originally from Maghreb countries and half from elsewhere including Saudi Arabia. Jihadi-salafists operating in the mountainous border area between Algeria and Tunisia also remain active. The flow of a significant pool of combat veterans into under-governed or ungoverned areas of the Maghreb will result in heightened risk (CSIS, 2017).

A third and related threat lies in the lack of a political horizon in Libya. The difficulty of finding a solution to Libya's crisis suggests that the country will continue to be a destabilizing factor in the region in the years ahead. While the ISG was driven out of its stronghold in the Libyan city of Sirte, it is regenerating in central Libya and on the western borders with Algeria and Tunisia, where it remains a threat to both neighboring countries. Groups linked to al Qaeda also operate in Libya. A growing nexus between Jihadi-salafi groups and criminal networks, including human traffickers, creates additional sources of funding for extremist groups. Loosely governed spaces in the Sahel region bordering the Maghreb to the south also create safe havens in which terrorist groups can operate (CSIS, 2017).

Fourthly, there is the issue of radicalization which is increasing in intensity in the region. This is what Brandeis University scholar, Mohammed Masbah described as "fast food jihadists" who begin with little religious education or knowledge of Jihadi-salafi doctrine and are radicalized in as little as two months. With a high population of unemployed youths even with graduates from tertiary institutions, it has become easier to indoctrinate them with the Jihadi-Salafi doctrine by exploiting their psychological vulnerabilities (CSIS, 2017). It has been established that often times these youths are promised empowerment by the government whereas in reality such empowerment will be provided by Jihadi groups in exchange for their enrolment in the sect. Some of them are also recruited through cyberspace by terrorist organizations which post radical ideology on line as platform for recruitment and networking.

Despite the increasing security measures of the governments in northern and even western Africa, the border areas remain an open field of jihad across the Sahara along ethnic, sectarian, tribal, nationalistic, and ideological lines. The past two years have been a breeding season for various extremist groups that splintered from AQIM, which maintains a wide span of field operations in southern Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya as well as in northern Niger and Mali. Similarly, al-Mourabitoun (the Sentinels) remains a powerhouse of jihadism in Algeria, Libya, Mali, and Niger. Its members are mainly veteran North African men who fought in Afghanistan in the 1990s under the leadership of the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who is notorious for orchestrating the death of 50

individuals during a suicide attack on a military camp in Gao, northern Mali, last January. Nicknamed "the Uncatchable," Belmokhtar has escaped several attempts on his life, including a US airstrike in Libya in 2015 (Cherkaoui, 2017).

The internal dynamics of these two mega groups have led to the desertion of several of their senior leaders who declared allegiance to IS. As a result, more than 20 groups now have ties with IS in the continent. In his recent Eighth Annual Report, terrorism analyst Yonah Alexander highlights that "the number of radical political and social actors is both proliferating and becoming increasingly linked, formally and informally, in a 'holy alliance' of 'like-minded' movements, as well as 'strange bedfellows,' intent on trafficking, kidnapping, and violent extremism." For instance, the Islamic State of the Sahel (ISS) has increased its activities across the Mali-Niger border. Its armed men gunned down the four US soldiers in Niger in October, and have entered in negotiations with the Nigerien authorities for the release of Jeffrey Woodke, an American aid worker, who was abducted a year ago while providing humanitarian assistance in Niger (Cherkaoui, 2017).

Other emerging Jihadist groups include the Islamic State in Greater Sahara, which surfaced in August 2013 as a consolidation of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and the Masked Men Brigade; Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), led by Malian Iyad al-Ghaly and was very active in the 2012 insurgency in northern Mali; and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. Still, the complexity of the region goes beyond a linear dimension of the common interpretation of Jihadism. Militant movements have exploited structural shortcomings, common feelings of despair, and the promise of religiosity. They also showcase flexibility in transforming their ideological identities while simply acting as common law breakers and smugglers (Cherkaoui, 2007).

Driving Forces of Radicalization and Insecurity in North African Region
There are several deep-rooted structural, demographic, and economic factors behind the emerging waves of violence in the region. The recent attacks and recurring terror plots remain indicators of growing extremism as a response to underdevelopment, poverty, and unemployment. Shrinking resources and political volatility have overlapped in several fragile states there. In the backdrop, governments in North and West Africa share a common denominator, with varying proportions, of accumulated public policy failures, poverty, climate change, widespread corruption, and high population growth. For Mohammed Cherkaoui (2017), the erudite professor of conflict resolution at George Mason University, what makes the above most problematic is the revelation by a 2013 UNESCO study that 70 percent of sub-Saharan countries are under 30 years of age.

Recent statistics from the World Bank indicate an alarming scale of unemployment in North Africa, currently at 25 percent, the highest regional rate in the world. Nearly one third of the jobless youth are university graduates, including those with advanced degrees. Two years ago, UN envoy Hiroute Guebre Sellassie cautioned against the rise of extremism and migration as two direct outcomes of the spread of hopelessness among 41 million young Africans in the region. Furthermore, North and West

African countries have ranked low or very low in the 2016 UN worldwide ranking of countries in the Human Development Index. Of 188 countries, Mauritania ranked 155, Morocco, 123, Algeria 83, Tunisia 94 and Libya 96. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates a significant shortage in food supplies in the sub-Saharan region in 2017. It projects that about "30 million people will not have enough to eat, of which almost 12 million will require emergency food assistance (Cherkaoui, 2017).

Several nongovernmental organizations working in the field have warned about the continued political disarray in the region. The International Crisis Group asserts that "the absence or slow return of government administration to 'liberated' areas and other neglected hinterlands, and the weak and slow response to the fallout from these conflicts, such as displacement and social tensions, may allow militants to regroup." US Central Africa Command Chairman Thomas Waldhauser acknowledges the correlation between poverty and extremism, stating recently: "In Africa with all the challenges of the youth bulge, poverty, the lack of governance, wide open spaces, these are areas where violent extremist organizations, like ISIS or like al Qaeda, thrive" (Cherkaoui, 2017).

With the deepening socioeconomic decline and shrinking opportunities for these northwest Africans to embrace the European dream, the region has become a fertile landscape for persistent Jihadism, rebellion, and vengeance as normative calls for resistance. The widespread social malaise and lack of opportunity have pushed sizable numbers of the youth to be inspired by religiosity as a mechanism of defense and survival. Africa analysts like Grant Harris former White House Senior Director for African Affairs (2011-2015), have pointed out that "the United States is essentially ignoring an entire continent replete with far-reaching challenges as well as economic opportunities. This neglect exposes Americans to greater risks from terrorism and other transnational threats, reduces U.S. economic competitiveness and diminishes U.S. global influence." Some local business leaders have given up hope on foreign aid programs and investments; instead, they advocate for African solutions to those African challenge, reasoning that non-Africans will not invest in the continent if its own people do not make the effort themselves (Cherkaoui, 2017).

Regional Economic Integration Efforts in North African Region
The North African region is rated as the least integrated region in the African continent. This much was admitted by King Mohammed VI, at the African Union (AU) heads of state meeting in February, 2017 when he lamented the demise of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and warned of its inevitable failure if there was no progress. He said, "Today, we regret to see that the Arab Maghreb Union is the least integrated region in the African continent, if not in the whole world. Intra-regional trade has reached 10% between Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries and 19% between Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, while it is still stagnating at less than 3% between Maghreb countries" (Abinader, 2017).

Economic and even regional integration plays an important part in expanding the potential for development and improved well-being of countries. The benefits include increased trade, greater

international presence, improved balance of power in international negotiations, political and security stability and job creation. It enables the countries involved to build a shared and integrated vision of a prosperous future, where the destinies of their peoples are interconnected in prosperity, solidarity and peace. The political and security instability, which followed the insurgencies in some countries of North Africa, leading, in some cases, to regime change, have affected the dynamics of strengthening cooperation among the countries of the sub-region. Indeed, bilateral and multilateral events designed to promote partnerships in North Africa within the past years have declined in number and in the level of participation (UNECA, 2013).

North Africa is not isolated from the continental efforts to achieve integration. The countries of the sub-region are grouped into three regional economic communities: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of the Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Various levels of progress have been achieved depending on the context and on the potential for integration. The events that took place in the sub-region in recent years have had a powerful impact on the political and institutional stability required for regional cooperation, which has led to the refocusing of public policy priorities towards activities capable of responding to the urgent needs of the people. The AMU summit, expected to have been held in the past two years, could not take place due to the political changes experienced by the member countries, thereby denying the region a more sustained resumption of the integration process (UNECA, 2013).

Of the three groupings, the AMU is the one that directly impacts on countries of the region as reflected in its membership profile. While Egypt and Libya feature in COMESA without the rest countries, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia are members of CEN-SAD which is based in Libya with a clear absence of Algeria in both. There are efforts at regional integration of the region by AMU although its efforts may not be good enough. There have been efforts at integration in the area of intra-regional trade, economic cooperation, peace and security, food security, institutional cooperation and the construction of Free Trade Zone among others.

North Africa is currently one of the continent's least integrated regions, with less than 5 per cent of its exports to member countries. Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia dominate the internal market of North Africa, with almost 7 percent of the market share. In 2012, Algeria accounted for 29 per cent of the market share, Egypt 28 percent and Tunisia 23 per cent. The other four countries shared the remaining 21 percent. The share of goods supplied by the Sudan and Mauritania was relatively marginal. The structure of exports within North Africa is dominated by trade in commodities, which account for 60 per cent of the trade (UNECA, 2013, p.14).

Just like trade within North Africa, trade within the Arab Maghreb Union economic group is not very vibrant. Only 3.35 per cent of the exports of AMU member countries are destined for the Maghreb market, which represents a very small share, in view of the performances of the other regional economic communities in Africa. However, there has been a positive development in recent years.

With the exception of the drop recorded in 2009, the share of Maghreb trade in global exports has been rising steadily.

As part of economic cooperation, the fourteenth session of the Maghreb inter-ministerial transport council took place in Nouakchott in March 2013. The goal of the meeting was to promote institutions and lay the foundations for reducing the phenomenon of isolation among them. The countries called for an accelerated pace of exchanges in transport of goods and persons, development of air transport and intensification of liner shipping. The eight meeting of experts of the Maghreb ministerial finance and monetary council was held in May 2013, in Marrakesh, Morocco. The experts considered issues such as cooperation in the tax and customs sectors and the establishment of the Maghreb Bank for Investment and Foreign Trade and the steps involved in launching it later same the year (UNECA, 2013, p.6).

The Council of Ministers of Interior of the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union, meeting in April 2013, in Rabat, drafted "a joint security strategy for the Maghreb", adopting some 20 resolutions, which fall into four main areas: combating terrorism and organized crime, combating illegal immigration and human trafficking, combating the trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances and civil protection.

Similarly, the Prime Ministers of Algeria, Libya and Tunisia met in January 2013, in Libya, to discuss the issue of border security "by combating the movement of weapons and ammunitions and other types of trafficking". The border between Tunisia and Libya is regarded as a major trafficking site in the sub-region, particularly for weapons recovered from the Libyan arsenals during the 2011 political and military events. In December 2013, Libya decided to close its borders with Algeria, Chad, the Niger, and the Sudan, decreeing the South to be a closed military zone because of deteriorating security in the region. The three countries of the Maghreb announced their decision to create common control posts and coordinate border patrols to guarantee security and combat arms trafficking and organized crime (UNECA, 2013).

There has equally been concerted effort by AMU member countries to strike cooperation in food security by considering food security issues in the countries of the Maghreb and joint programmes to promote agricultural and animal husbandry, best practices in the management of fishery resources and parasite control. Topics dealt with included implementation of agreements signed by the member countries in the agricultural, livestock and fishery sectors, implementation of joint programmes on desertification and drought control and combating climate change.

The AMU has also convened meetings at the inter-ministerial level to discuss cooperation in the provision of health services in distant and remote areas, interference between the public and private sectors and the drug policy in the Maghreb region. The meeting recommendations focused on maternal and child health, vocational training and drug policy. In September 2013, the Morocco Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research held the first conference of ministers

responsible for scientific research in the "Dialogue 5+5", countries to further boost cooperation in scientific research among the countries of the Western Mediterranean region. Ministers at the meeting signed the "Rabat Declaration", a document which should prepare the ground for increased cooperation among the parties concerned (UNECA, 2013, p.7).

Members also agreed to establish a Free Trade Zone and a the Maghreb Bank of Investment and Foreign Trade since 1991 but which came to fruition in May 2013 in Marrakesh with an initial called capital of 150 million US dollars with head office in Tunis. The Board of Directors will be chaired by a representative from Algeria, for a one three-year term and the Chief Executive Officer will be a Tunisian, who will also serve for a one four-year term on rotational basis. There were also calls for strengthened cooperation in the banking sector and the free movement of persons, services and goods among other efforts at regional integration (UNECA, 2013).

The Arab Spring that is sweeping through the MENA region has created a sense of urgency in intensifying regional economic integration efforts. There are encouraging signs that new leaders are focusing on regional integration as one of several means to restoring growth, generating employment, and building more democratic and inclusive societies. For example, Tunisia recently announced its intention to reinvigorate the Arab Maghreb Union, which aims to foster cooperation among the five member countries and which had been dormant since its inception over 20 years ago.

The political landscape in North Africa and even the Middle East is changing rapidly. Experience to date in the region suggests that like-minded political regimes tend to boost economic ties. The spread and strengthening of democratic institutions throughout the region is expected to spur broader and deeper political and economic integration among countries undergoing political reform. Blocks of countries with similar political orientations may intensify economic ties in response to growing uncertainties elsewhere. The recent move by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to expand membership to Jordan and Morocco is an example of this trend.

Challenges to Regional Economic Integration Efforts in North Africa
The first challenge involves the internal economic and political problems of countries in the region. This relates to border disputes which have been compounded of recent by years of domestic difficulties in Algeria and the fall out of the UN sanctions on Libya which members of the AMU were required to apply. The AMU countries severed air links with Libya. U.N. sanctions against the Libya were suspended in 1999 following the Government's surrender of two of its citizens suspected in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103. The issue of internal political problems as a challenge to regional integration is aptly captured by Dr. George Ayittey, distinguished professor and economist, who said: "Countries seeking greater regional economic cooperation must put their own houses in order first or at least establish a set of common rules and standards they will all abide by" (Ahmad and Liggio, 1994).

The above is followed by the low level of intra-regional trade. This is also a result of sanctions and the various disputes amongst members as the sanctions affected not only the free flow of goods but heightened uncertainties, which tend to hamper the process of integration. For instance, Algeria prohibited transit trade through its territory citing the rapid development of contraband trade across the Algerian frontiers.

Thirdly, there is the issue of the long running Western Sahara dispute between Algeria and Morocco which has hampered attempts to revive a largely dormant Maghreb regional grouping, the AMU. Efforts by the foreign ministers of the member countries to inject life into the union have been rebuffed by Morocco on account of the claim to its sovereignty arising from the non-resolution of the Western Sahara dispute. Thus, ties between Algeria and Morocco have been strained for many years now because of the dispute over the vast, sparsely populated territory claimed by the Algerian backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia El-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) independent movement and largely controlled by Morocco (Arezki 2000).

The fourth challenge revolves around the long years of resentment by AMU countries to the government of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is a dictatorship that has been ruled by Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Gaddafi since 1969. Gaddafi created a political system that rejects democracy and political parties and purports to establish a "third way" superior to capitalism and communism. His regime was aided by extra governmental organizations like the Revolutionary Committees which unleashed terror on the people by abusing their rights, suppressing the press and the independence of the judiciary. Through the Gaddafi years, much of the country's income had been lost to waste, corruption, conventional armament purchases, and attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction. The Government's mismanagement of the economy led to high inflation and increased import prices, resulting in a decline in the standard of living for most of its 5.4 million citizens in recent years (World Bank Group, 2006). Libya is still on the brink of crisis years after his death.

Next is the advent of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). This was formed in 1989 by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia as a vehicle to promote economic and political integration among these North African countries. Their good intentions quickly foundered on the domestic and regional conflicts that dominated the next two decades. Mauritania faced several coup attempts, ending with the election of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz in 2009; Tunisia was under the control of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from 1987 until the Arab Spring revolution of 2011; Libya was ruled by Muammar Gaddafi who was also ousted in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in his country, and it has not witnessed any normalcy since (Abinader, 2017).

Morocco fought off the Polisario Front from 1975-1991, which sought to establish a separate state in the Western Sahara, ending with an uneasy cessation of hostilities in 1991; Morocco and Algeria closed their common border in 1994; Algeria was plunged into a civil war from 1991 to 2002, ending with the election in 1999 of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who came into power promising to end

the civil war; and there was a transition in Moroccan leadership from King Hassan II to his son King Mohammed VI in 1999 (Abinader 2017). In short, only two of the AMU, Morocco and Algeria, have had continuity in leadership; Morocco's based on a hereditary and immensely popular King as well as successive Parliamentary elections certified as "free and fair"; and Algeria's through elections that are heavily influenced by the power elite in the country to avoid embarrassing or undesirable outcomes. The AMU could not establish deep roots in this contentious environment. Despite ongoing meetings among technocrats on economic, financial, and commercial topics, the political milieu is so supercharged with tension that political discussions are next to impossible. In fact, the last heads-of-state meetings planned in 2005 was postponed indefinitely (Abinader 2017). The region is currently witnessing complex political transitions arising from the Arab Spring, stagnant economies, porous borders and the increase of security risks. The combination of all these factors leads to negative impacts on growth, exports, investment and employment.

In fact, regional economic integration continues to represent for the countries of North Africa an opportunity to be seized as well as a challenge to be overcome; and herein lies the dilemma for the region's leaders who struggle to achieve, in a sustainable way, the objectives of the integration process in which their countries have been committed since the beginning of the nineties. The objectives of this integration are mainly: building a common market, the convergence of macroeconomic policies, the harmonized implementation of sectoral policies and the strengthening of good neighborly relations, peace and security in the region. AMU is still hindered by multiple political, geopolitical and administrative barriers such as the complexity of procedures, the double tariff barriers, the low openness to foreign investment regimes, the slow reform of taxation systems and poor infrastructure (ECA, 2010).

Though representing a market of about 90,000 million inhabitants, the AMU has a very low level of trade exchange as these indicators will reveal: intra-Maghreb trade represents only 3% of the global trade in these countries, which represents the lowest integration rate in the world. According to official figures, none of the five countries has one of its Maghreb neighbors as a major trading partner. Furthermore, since the establishment of the AMU in 1989, thirty seven agreements were signed, but those who have been implemented are rare. Since 2005, several summits have targeted the reactivation of the AMU ideal, but it is only at the 5th Conference on Maghreb economic integration, held on January 8th 2013 in Nouakchott, that the Maghreb Bank for Investment and Foreign Trade (BMICE) was to become operational (ECA, 2010).

Similarly, there cannot be any form of integration in a region which is embroiled in interstate conflicts. Algeria is pitched against Morocco over Western Sahara in long lasting struggle over the status of the Northwestern African country. Relations between both countries are stuck at the dead end and there seem to be no solution in sight. Political tensions between the two North African nations, which have long been rivals, are nothing new as the two countries have long had tense relations. Most commentators have also highlighted this complex and often combative history between the two countries. Amongst the sources of this bilateral dispute is the status of Western

Sahara. Located in north-west Africa, Western Sahara is a disputed territory that is partially controlled by the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Republic, and partially under Moroccan occupation. According to security experts, the dispute over Western Sahara is at the centre of the friction between the two countries. Over the past few decades, many of the problems between Algeria and Morocco have stemmed from Algeria's support for Western Sahara's right to self-determination, a right which Morocco continues to ignore (Hamadache, 2017).

As these dynamics continue to play out, Western Sahara is becoming a central battleground in the two countries' ongoing competition for regional hegemony. Bordering both Morocco and Algeria on the northwestern coast of Africa, the Western Sahara was formerly a Spanish colony that was then annexed by Morocco in 1975 when Spain withdrew from the territory. Fighting to reclaim the territory for the indigenous Sahrawi population, the Polisario Front, the Western Saharan independence movement founded in 1973, engaged in a protracted guerrilla war with the Moroccan government. Due to the fighting, thousands of Sahrawi refugees fled to Algeria, which became a base of operation for Polisario fighters, until 1991 when the UN brokered a truce between the Polisario and Morocco. As a result of these entangled relations, the Western Sahara set the stage for the historic dispute between Morocco and Algeria over who controls the region (Mohie-Eldin, 2017).

Despite the truce, Morocco still insists the Western Sahara is an integral part of its territory, claiming it to be the Moroccan Sahara, while Algeria supports the Sahrawi movement for independence and even hosts the exiled government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), the political body that represents the Western Sahara's indigenous population (Mohie-Eldin, 2017). Recently in April, 2018 there has been fear of an outbreak of armed violence as Morocco has informed Algeria through diplomatic channels that it will intervene militarily in Western Sahara if Sahrawi forces do not withdraw from the area east of the defensive wall which is part of the buffer zone set up by a military agreement in 1991. It must also be noted that earlier in 1994, Algeria had decided to shut down its land border with Morocco after Morocco imposed visa restrictions on Algerian citizens in the wake of a terrorist attack on the Atlas Ansi Hotel in Marrakesh. Moroccan authorities maintained that the Algerian Secret Service played a role in the attacks and the border has remained closed till date (Nizar, 2015).

In another clime, relations between Egypt and Libya have remained frosty even after the Arab Spring which swept across both countries in 2011. Both countries have been having different shades of confrontations and crisis in their bilateral relations including a full scale war in 1977. There have also been concerted efforts at normalizing the relations between both countries including third party interventions but such efforts have often lasted for a time, as diverse conflicts continue to set the two countries on the path of crisis. In fact, after decades of a controversial relationship, experts predicted that with the fall of Mubarak and Gaddafi, relations between Libya and Egypt could potentially become closer. However, as the years have gone by, this has proved otherwise.

Today, current tensions stem from the inability of Libya's central government to control events unfolding in the country, particularly in its lawless eastern area. This is in part a result of the government's lack of control of the militias that roam the country and that have been wreaking havoc since the revolution. Attempts by the General National Congress to reassert central authority have failed. While some militias currently answer to parliament, those in the east remain outside government control. Egypt has been affected by this instability in a number of ways: Egyptians living in Libya have been subjected to violence; a number of Qaddafi-era figures are operating out of Egypt, thereby evading arrest in Libya; tensions are high in regard to the power of Libya's Islamist groups; and Egypt has become a thoroughfare for arms trafficking out of Libya. Political realities and ideological differences have led to a continuous contentious relationship between the two neighbouring states (Elmenshawy, 2018).

There is equally the issue of divergent economic policies of states in the region. The different development strategies pursued by the member countries since the 1960s have created major obstacles to integration, largely explaining the current problems of structural distortions and macroeconomic instability at the regional level. Following independence, Algeria applied a central planning model, emphasizing the development of heavy industry to the detriment of agriculture and consumer-oriented industries. Close relationships were maintained with the East European bloc until about 1989, when efforts were made to reorient economic management toward a market system. Tunisia, following independence in 1956, pursued a liberal economic strategy, although it relied on government controls in the productive sector and applied numerous controls and established a wide array of public enterprises (Hanafi, 2010).

Morocco's economic development, following independence in 1956, was primarily based on agricultural development and import substituting industrialization within a protected domestic market. Mauritania, which is a low-income country with only two export items and a heavy reliance on foreign aid, maintained close ties with France through the 1960s, the first decade of its independence. Beginning in the early 1970s, it pursued economic reforms but its development has been severely impeded by the scarcity of resources and by the lack of technical and professional manpower. Since the early 1970s, Libya has sought to establish a system of self-government based on direct participation by the people in the governance of the country's economic institutions. It established a large public sector, with private sector activity effectively restricted to small owner managed businesses (Hanafi, 2010).

If regional economic integration efforts in the North African region remain at the lowest ebb, attempts at collective security by countries of the region cannot be expected to fare better given the level of suspicion, mistrust and political wrangling between countries in the region. As a matter fact, most of the suspicion is embedded in the level of insecurity bedeviling countries in North Africa particularly because of the porous nature of their borders and heightened activities of terrorist organizations within the region. It is therefore doubtful that countries in the region can imbibe with

any level of seriousness the tenets of collective security where an attack on one is deemed as that on all.

Concluding Remarks

The above scenario paints a picture of the problems associated with regional economic integration efforts in North Africa as these interstate wrangling has been a thorn in the process of regional economic integration in the region. With Tunisia being the most stable at least with a democratic government in place, others are smarting under one internal crisis or the other and without a peaceful polity no nation will strive for a fruitful and beneficial union in the region. Countries in the region have also been opened to diverse sources of alliance as Egypt looks westward including a policy of accommodation with the Israeli government to the detriment of Arab nationalism which Libya has always advocated and spearheaded.

On the whole, the region benefits from being linked to the Middle East, both for business and development rather than intra-regional cooperation. After independence, countries like Egypt and Algeria looked to the Middle East for a model of an Islamic nation, or North to Europe for economic partnerships while Saudi Arabia is in the top five trading partners both for imports and exports with Egypt. North Africa has severally been described as the most separated region on the continent of Africa. However, AMU integration remains a critical priority for the region. The benefits of greater economic cooperation, open borders, increased commercial transactions, expanded business enterprises, and shared infrastructure linkages in transportation and energy can only better enable the member countries to meet their many development challenges and create a better future for its citizenry.

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