



12th May 2025

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Tunisia's democratic reckoning- Continued from page 1

-profile figures, politicians, journalists and lawyers who have been arrested and accused of "conspiring against the state."

These trials involve 40 defendants, with some defendants being under arrest for the last two years, as many critics see these trials as a direct attack on civil liberty, as Saied looks to use arbitrary detention to suppress his opposition.

This tactic of arbitrary detention has been reported by Human Rights Watch as a "cornerstone of its repressive policy" as the government of Saied looks to shut down opposition with arrests and detention, which Volker Turk, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights believes are "marred by violations of fair trial and due process rights."



This tactic may have reached its peak, on the 2nd of May, when a Tunisian court sentenced former Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh to 34 years in prison on charges of facilitating the departure of jihadists to Syria over the past decade.

The ex-prime minister has denied the allegations, with many critics seeing this arrest as a blatant political move by Saied as he continues to shut down any opposition to his rule in the country.

Regarding this issue, in an exclusive interview with Maghrebi, Sharan Grewal, Assistant Professor of Government at American University and an expert researcher on revolutions and democratic transitions in the

the Arab world, shared his assessment.

"There has certainly been an escalation in repression in 2025, with a slew of sham trials sentencing political prisoners to decades in prison on trumped-up charges."

Speaking on why Saied has chosen the route of repression, which has escalated in 2025, Grewal explained, "After Kais Saied's self-coup in 2021, repression helped him to consolidate power."

This consolidation of power is the motivation which appears to many critics to be robbing democracy, which was built post Arab Spring, with the imprisonment of one of the ex-prime ministers, appearing as the last pillar undermining Tunisian democracy.

Yet this has not stopped the Tunisian people from standing up for the democracy they earned by expelling Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

Anti-Saied demonstrations have been sparked across Tunisia in the face of the repressive Saied regime. On the 1st of May, chants by protesters were heard screaming "The people want the fall of the regime" in the street, Habib Bourguiba Avenue.

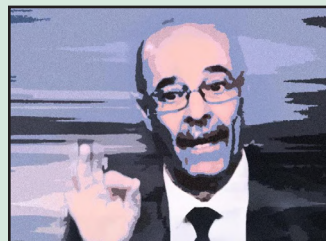
Yet Saied still has his followers across the country who, in the face of these actions as counter protesters in support of the president responded by shouting "No to foreign interference" and "The people want Saied again."

Whilst these trials and the imprisonment of ex-prime minister Ali Laarayedh may seem like the final nail in the coffin to Tunisian democracy, Professor Grewal made the point on how Tunisian democracy may just survive.

"Repression is a double-edged sword. If repression goes too far, and starts to be perceived as pure authoritarianism, it can delegitimise a regime and produce mass resistance to it."

This point entails the idea that the imprisonment of an ex-prime minister may have been Saied expanding his repression too far and "might serve as that spark that unites the opposition and helps build a stronger, pro-democracy movement."

Just like in the Arab Spring, when authoritarianism is pushed, and pushed and pushed, eventually the people will fight back. In the case of Tunisia, it is the case that the imprisonment of Ali Laarayedh may just break democracy, or it may just make it.



Algeria jails historian - continued from page 1

Developments have seen "Yennayer", which is the Amazigh new year, being added to the national holiday list in 2017 with many analysts seeing the representation as essential in a country with the ethnicity making up 20% of the 44 million Algerian population.

Though the situation has also been heavily criticised because of the tensions which have been occurring between Algeria and the UAE in recent times.

One key escalation came when Morocco and the UAE recognised Israel in 2021, which was heavily criticised by the Algerian government alongside the UAE's involvement in wars in Sudan and Libya, which Algeria saw as aiming to destabilise the neighbouring Tunisia.

Whilst Algeria has taken an increased step in supporting the Amazigh ethnicity by condemning the comments made by Belghit, many critics will see this as an attack on free speech and more than likely a way in which Algeria can further criticise the UAE.



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**Protests have taken
place across Tunisia**




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When the flights are scheduled to begin has yet to be confirmed and the White House did not respond to Reuters for further comment.

Libya health minister detained over cancer drug scandal

Libya's Public Prosecutor has ordered the detention of Health Minister Ali Al-Zanati, along with several other senior officials from the Government of National Unity (GNU) over irregularities in the import of cancer medication from Iraq, according to the Middle East Monitor on May 7th.

The officials were accused of bypassing procedures and failing to coordinate with the General Authority for Combating Cancer, the body responsible for approving imported cancer treatments.

Prosecutor Al-Seddiq Al-Sour stated that anyone posing a risk to public health or public funds would be held accountable.

Morocco seeks "China ready" status to boost tourism surge

Morocco is seeking "China Ready" certification to triple Chinese tourism arrivals by 2027, aiming to capitalise on one of the world's most lucrative outbound travel markets.

According to the Moroccan government friendly Hespres, the move follows a post-pandemic rebound, with Chinese visitor numbers rising to 106,000 in 2024, and includes plans for Mandarin services, digital payment tools, and direct flights.

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Algeria and Algeria agree to 'normalisation' relations

The issue of normalisation dates over the Western Sahara has been a long-standing point of contention between the two countries, as France supports Morocco's claims to sovereignty over the Western Sahara region. Algeria - a former French colony since 1962 - has consistently defended the rights of the native Sahrawi people against the Moroccan state's claims of the Western Sahara. The area contained data that revealed Algeria was not a neutral party in the Western Sahara and had been supporting Moroccan claims. Many were not sure whether the move was due by Algeria. The area and subsequent normalisation of relations will remain life for them.



Migrants from Sahel countries try to make their way north

A major B2B tourism summit and infrastructure audit are underway as part of Morocco's wider push to attract 2.5 million more tourists by 2025.

Tunisian court sentences former PM Ali Larayedh to 34 years

A Tunisian court has, on May 2nd, sentenced former Prime Minister Ali Larayedh to 34 years in prison on charges of facilitating the departure of jihadists to Syria over the past decade.

As reported by The New Arab plus agencies, Ali Larayedh, a senior member of the opposition Ennahda party, has denied allegations of the Tunisian court,

claiming the case is politically motivated amid President Kais Saied's ongoing crackdown on opposition figures.

The ruling, which follows recent detentions and prison sentences for other critics of Saied, has drawn condemnation from human rights groups, who warn it signals a dangerous escalation in the government's suppression of dissent.

Algeria seeking migrant agreements with Sahel countries

Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said he was in favour of the regularisation of undocumented workers, while Algeria

continues to deport thousands of them at its border, says Le Monde on May 1st.

During a visit in Bechar in Southwest Algeria - a hotspot for migrants - Tebboune said he was willing to reach an agreement with neighbouring countries to create a legal framework for migrant workers - a first for an Algerian president.

More than 31,000 migrants were expelled towards Niger in 2024, according to NGO Alarme Phone Sahara. Migrants are usually dropped in a spot called "point zero" from which they need to walk 15km to reach the next village in Niger.

Morocco plays bridging role at the 4th Europe-Africa Forum

Morocco has demonstrated its geostrategic importance, playing a key role in the recent Europe-Africa forum, claims Moroccan government friendly Atalayar on May 8th.

The 4th edition of the forum took place in Marseille and brought together leaders, investors and policy makers from across Africa and Europe to discuss relations between the two continents

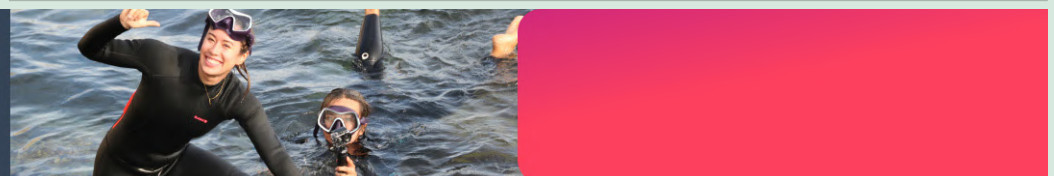
Discussions themed around cooperation through innovation by drawing on the vast resources of both continents as well

as on their strategic connection through the Mediterranean. The emphasis on the Mediterranean as a key point of connection between the regions has made Morocco a vital player at the forum.

Underlining this vital position, one of Morocco's representatives at the conference, Ali Seddiki, Director General of the Moroccan Agency for Investment and Export Development (AMDIE), made a point of highlighting Morocco's role as a strategic bridge and advocated for inclusive and sustainable shared prosperity between the two continents.

Karim Zidane, Morocco's Minister of Investment, Convergence and Public Policy Evaluation, emphasised Morocco's ambitious and leading role in many of these areas, particularly as a driver of investment and sustainable and inclusive development.

Meanwhile, Leila Benali, Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, highlighted Morocco's potential to help build durable and sustainable supply chains between Europe and Africa, as a producer of renewable energy at a third of the cost of Europe.





Children try to get food relief in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah

Yemen's Houthi group says ceasefire with U.S. excludes Israel

Yemen's Houthi group said on May 7th that its ceasefire agreement with the United States does not extend to Israel, indicating that attacks on Israel-linked shipping may continue, Middle East Eye reported.



"The agreement does not include Israel in any way, shape or form," chief Houthi negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam told Reuters. The statement follows President

Donald Trump's announcement on May 6th that U.S. strikes on Houthi targets would cease, following the group's pledge to stop disrupting key shipping lanes in the Middle East.

Mediated by Oman, the ceasefire comes amid a decline in Red Sea attacks since January. However, the Houthis' stance raises concerns over the safety of Israel-linked maritime traffic.

Israeli strikes halt Yemen flights, hundreds stranded

Yemenia Airways has halted flights from Sana'a after Israeli strikes damaged the airport's main facilities, stranding hundreds, including patients, in Amman and Yemen on May 7th, The New Arab reported. The airline is considering rerouting

travellers through Aden, the southern city under the internationally recognised government's control.

Houthi officials say six planes were destroyed, including three previously seized in a power struggle with the Yemeni government.

Algeria looks to Oman as relations with UAE sour

Algerian President Abdelmadji Tebboune and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq held extended talks on May 4th to strengthen



bilateral cooperation, reports the Arab Weekly plus agencies.

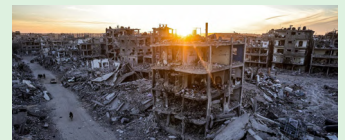
Both leaders reviewed potential avenues for collaboration and discussed furthering relations in a mutually beneficial manner.

The visit comes amid rising tensions between Algeria and the UAE, a key Gulf Cooperation Council member, suggesting a strategic alignment by Algeria with alternative Gulf partners.

Images show 80 percent of Rafah destroyed

Satellite images reveal around 80% of Rafah has been destroyed under Israeli bombardment, reports Middle East Eye on May 8th, citing Israel's Channel 12.

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza mounts, the scenes of near total devastation of the south Gazan city, once a refuge for displaced Palestinians, marks the sheer scale of Israeli bombardment, making Rafah uninhabitable.



The images come after Israel announced plans earlier this week to expand its war on Gaza, in a move which will see further territory seized and many more Palestinians displaced.

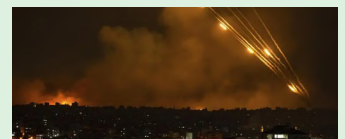
Israel warns Houthis of harsh retaliation over attacks

On May 8, Israel's Defence Minister, Israel Katz, warned Yemen's Houthis of severe consequences if it continues targeting Israel, Middle East Eye reported.

Posting on X, vowed that "The Houthis will suffer heavy blows from Israel if they continue to fire at us".

is remarks coincide with a ceasefire agreement on May 6 with the U.S to stop Houthi attacks on American vessels—an agreement that does not apply to Israel.

France condemns Israeli "conquest" of Gaza



The Foreign Minister for France, has condemned the Israeli army's latest military campaign in Gaza, as reported by Saudi news agency Asharq Al-Awsat on May, describing the plans as "in violation of humanitarian law".

Israel's latest plans amount to the "the conquest of the Gaza Strip and the holding of the territories" according to the country's security cabinet.

UN warns of child starvation in blockaded Gaza

Hanah Shokeir

At least 66,000 children in Gaza are suffering from severe malnutrition following Israel's two-month blockade on food and humanitarian assistance, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) reported on May 6th.

UNRWA spokesperson Adnan Abu Hasna spoke to Al-Ghad TV and reiterated the alarming figures, saying: "Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are eating one meal every two or three days."

Medical sources have linked at least 57 deaths to starvation since October 2023, with the toll expected to rise as Israel continues to close Gaza's border crossings.

Since March 2nd, all routes for food, medical supplies, and aid have been sealed off, exacerbating

what aid agencies describe as a spiraling humanitarian catastrophe. According to World Bank data, about 91 percent of Gaza's population (1.84 million people) across the Gaza Strip are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity.

Efforts to re-establish aid flows are complicated by Israel's recent plan to outsource deliveries to private contractors, a move condemned by the UN's humanitarian team. The team says the Israeli plan "pushes civilians into military zones" and violates fundamental humanitarian principles.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres, reported that the proposal would leave "large parts of Gaza...less mobile" and render the most vulnerable without life-saving supplies.

Meanwhile, the death toll in Gaza continues to rise. Since October

7th, at least 52,567 Palestinians—mostly women and children—have been killed, with many more feared trapped beneath rubble.

In the U.S., five Democrats and Independent Bernie Sanders—have urged an investigation into whether Israel and other governments are breaching American laws by obstructing aid.

The senators referenced the Foreign Assistance Act and the Leahy Laws, which prohibit U.S. support to countries violating human rights and blocking humanitarian relief.

As international concern mounts, Israel's cabinet on May 5th approved plans for expanded military control in Gaza, including possible full territorial control, raising fresh fears for civilians already at breaking point.

Syria-Israel indirect negotiations confirmed by Al-Sharaa

Syria's Ahmed al-Sharaa has said that his country is having indirect negotiations with Israel to improve bilateral ties, Al-Monitor via Reuters reported on May 7th.

During a press conference in Paris with President Emmanuel Macron of France, Al-Sharaa said the talks intend to "calm the situation and prevent it from spiraling out of control."



According to US Congressman Marlin Stutzman, in a meeting with the Syrian president last month, Al-Sharaa expressed willingness to normalise his country's relations with Israel, "but under certain conditions." In 2025, Israel has launched airstrikes on Syria on an ongoing basis.

Turkey and Iraq reaffirm commitment to combat Kurdish militants

Turkey and Iraq have reaffirmed their commitment to cooperating on security, including combatting Kurdish militants in Iraq.

Reported by Asharq Al-Awsat on May 9th, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani arrived in Turkey to strengthen their relationship and mend past tensions as relations were strained over Turkish military incursions into northern Iraq.



"We once again emphasized that terrorism has no place in the future of our region," says Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Israeli settlers reportedly storm Al-Aqsa Mosque once again

Israeli settlers have reportedly stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem under heavy protection from the police, according to Middle East Eye citing the Palestinian news agency Wafa on May 6th.

Local Palestinian residents described the event as a "provocative display" by the Israeli settlers.

Amongst the group was far-right rabbi Shimshon Alboim who has called for the Al-Aqsa Mosque to be destroyed.



Smoke and fire rising from a neighbourhood in Sanaa, Yemen following an air strike on March 19, 2025

Ecuador turns to Israel and the UAE to tackle drug cartels

The President of Ecuador has said that he looked for support from Israel and the United Arab Emirates to tackle the drug cartels that are bringing turmoil to his nation, Al-Monitor via AFP reported on May 8th.

In conversation with AFP in Paris, the 37-year-old president, Daniel Noboa, explained that Israel and the UAE said they would give intelligence to assist in combating traffickers of cocaine.

Israel seals shut UN schools in Palestinian refugee camps

The Police of Israel have enforced the closure of schools run by the

UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) in occupied East Jerusalem on May 8th.



The Palestinian Ministry of Education said the shutdown is "a crime against education and is part of a systematic and ongoing assault on education in Jerusalem," according to Middle East Eye.

The closure means roughly 800 children will not have access to education, just weeks before the academic year finishes.

UAE to fund natural gas pipeline project for Nigeria, Morocco

The United Arab Emirates will contribute to a project valued at \$25 billion, which will create a natural gas pipeline from Nigeria to Morocco, The Arab Weekly reported on May 8th.

The Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development for Morocco, said: "Morocco has completed all preliminary feasibility and engineering studies for the planned gas pipeline that will connect Nigeria to Morocco."

The expansion of the gas pipeline represents strengthening ties between the countries. The pipeline will span across 6,800 km.

"They just don't want to fight": Trump ends air strikes in Yemen

Malaika Remedios

The U.S. and the Houthis have struck a deal, effectively halting Trump's seven-week bombing campaign in Yemen. According to the BBC on May 7th, the ceasefire followed the Iranian-backed group's "capitulation" after it agreed to stop attacking American vessels in the Red Sea.

Trump broke the news during an unrelated Oval Office meeting with Canada's Prime Minister: "They just don't want to fight," he said. "And we will honor that, and we will stop the bombings... they will not be blowing up ships anymore."

This brings an end to the air strike campaign that began in March when Trump vowed to use "overwhelming lethal force" in response to Houthi threats to

resume attacks on Israeli ships en route to Yemen.

But despite Trump's characteristic bravado, it remains questionable whether the US has achieved its objective of quelling Houthi threats to international shipping. The Houthis themselves have refrained from declaring a full-on ceasefire, reaffirming that they will continue their fight against Israel and its genocide in Gaza.

Houthi media has also portrayed the deal as an American failure, popularizing the hashtag "Yemen defeats America."

Since the onset of the war in Gaza in October 2023, the Houthis have targeted commercial and military ships in the Red Sea. The attacks have forced many shipping companies to take much longer routes around South Africa.

In retaliation, under former President Joe Biden, the U.S. launched its air strike campaign, which intensified under Trump. In April, the Houthis claimed that at least 68 African migrants were killed in a U.S. air strike in north-western Yemen.

Oman's foreign minister, Badr Albusaidi, has since interjected, claiming Muscat had a significant role in mediating the agreement. On X, he wrote, "In the future, neither side will target the other, including American vessels, in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait."

However, it remains unclear whether the Houthis will also stop attacking other vessels sailing through the Red Sea, as they have previously targeted ships with no clear link to either the U.S. or Israel.



Pro-democracy activists protest the military regime's proposal to dissolve political parties in Mali on May 3, 2025

Port Sudan struck for fifth consecutive day

The Sudanese army forces (SAF) stronghold of Port Sudan has been struck by drone attacks for the fifth consecutive day, reports Algerian government-backed news channel AL24 on May 8th.



The city had remained one of the few areas of safety in the country until the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rebel group began attacking it at the beginning of May. The drone strike reportedly hit an air force college just outside of the

Sudan to cut diplomatic ties with UAE



The defence and security council of Sudan have announced that they will cut diplomatic ties with the UAE, who they accuse of backing the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rebel group, as reported by The Guardian on May 6th.

Sudan's defence minister, Yassin Ibrahim, announced that the country is "severing diplomatic relations with the UAE".

Sudan has also recalled the ambassador from Abu Dhabi.

ICJ dismisses Sudan's genocide case against UAE over Darfur

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has dismissed Sudan's case accusing the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of complicity in genocide in Darfur, ruling on May 5th that it lacks jurisdiction and ordering the case be struck from its docket.



By a 14-2 vote, as reported by The Arab Weekly plus agencies, the UN's top court also rejected Sudan's urgent request for emergency measures to halt alleged genocide

attacks against the Masali people in West Darfur by RSF paramilitaries, whom the UAE deny supporting.



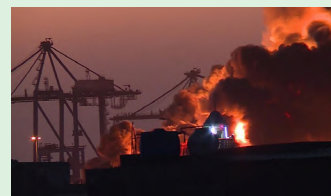
The UAE, which denies arming the RSF, hailed the ruling as a "clear and decisive" legal victory, though UN experts have previously cited credible concerns over foreign arms supplies to the group.

Drone strikes cut power in Port Sudan

On May 6th, Sudan's electricity company said it was assessing damage to a key power station after drone strikes caused a total power outage in Port Sudan, disrupting water supply, healthcare, and other vital services, according to the BBC.

Explosions were reported near the airport, army base, and a hotel, sparking fires and black smoke across the city.

The UN has briefly halted aid flights to Port Sudan, amid warnings of a deepening humanitarian crisis.



Mali's junta suspends political activities amid growing unrest

Hanah Shokeir

Mali's ruling military government has announced a nationwide suspension of all political activities "until further notice", Africanews reported on May 9th.

The order, signed on May 7th by transitional leader General Assimi Goita, referenced "reasons of public order" and affects political parties as well as other organisations.

This move comes shortly after a pro-democracy demonstration and just before an anti-junta protest scheduled for May 9th. The military has maintained control of the country since carrying out coups in both 2020 and 2021.

Despite warnings from the government, hundreds of activists

took to the streets of Bamako on the weekend of May 2nd to protest a proposed law that would disband all political parties.

"I'm not surprised, I expected this because this is their way of preventing us from carrying out our activities, but we will continue to defend democracy in Mali," said Cheick Oumar Doumbia, one of the leaders of the weekend demonstration, in an interview with AP.

The military government had initially pledged to hold elections in February 2022, but that deadline has been repeatedly delayed. The junta has previously suspended political party activities in the lead-up to major political events.

In April 2024, a comparable suspension was announced ahead

of an "inter-Malian dialogue," where extending the transition timeline from two to five years was proposed.

In the previous year, Mali joined forces with Burkina Faso and Niger to establish the Alliance of Sahel States, following the withdrawal of all three military-led governments from the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS. All three countries have severed ties with France, their former colonial ruler, and are increasingly turning to Russia for support.

Mali has also been grappling with a worsening security crisis for over ten years, as armed groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to launch attacks across the country.

The military has accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of carrying out the drone attacks that began on May 4th, though the RSF has not yet responded to the allegations.

A map that PDF magazine of the news from North Africa and the MENA region

France and Algeria agree to 'normalisation' of relations

NEWS IN BRIEF

Algeria and France have agreed to a 'normalisation' of relations, ending a period of tension that has lasted for decades. The agreement, signed by French President Emmanuel Macron and Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, marks a significant step towards resolving long-standing disputes between the two countries. The deal includes a commitment to improve bilateral relations, including in the areas of trade, security, and human rights. It also calls for a more constructive dialogue between the two nations, particularly regarding the ongoing conflict in Libya. The agreement is seen as a positive development for the region, as it opens up new opportunities for cooperation and stability.

Israel poised to finish off Hezbollah

NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel's military has announced that it is preparing for a final offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon. The move comes after a series of escalating attacks and a failed ceasefire. Israeli officials claim that Hezbollah's infrastructure is being dismantled, and that the group's leadership is being targeted. The operation is expected to result in the complete defeat of Hezbollah, which has been a major threat to Israel's security for years. The announcement has drawn international attention, with some countries expressing concern over the potential for a wider conflict in the Middle East.

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Alisa Butterwick

Belfast-born rap band, Kneecap, have certainly taken this philosophy to a whole new level, particularly after the recent investigation made by British counterterrorism into the group's latest gigs. Kneecap was accused of calling for the death of Conservative MPs, pronouncing "the only good Tory is a dead Tory".

Originating in West Belfast in Northern Ireland, Kneecap – comprising the aliases Mo Chara, Móglaí Bap and DJ Próvaí – have established their reputation as vehemently anti-establishment. Their career was ignited by Móglaí and a friend spray-painting the word 'cearta' (meaning 'freedom') on a bus stop in support of an Irish Language Act march. Whilst Móglaí fled the scene after police showed up, his friend was arrested and spent the night in a cell. After documenting these events in their song "C.E.A.R.T.A", the song was played on Irish radio, and the proverbial rest is history. Their lyrics span topics from drugs to the freeing of Northern Ireland from British rule, and their recent concert statements have been incendiary towards the genocidal treatment of Gazans by the Israeli government.

Have Kneecap gone too far with Tory death threats?

When the world is falling to pieces, the barrier between music and politics tends to follow suit. The more dire the situation, the more the creative space feels obliged to undertake a political stance.

This contempt emerges from a place of shared history of struggle. During the Irish War of Independence, several members of the Black and Tans, a controversial police force recruited by the British to suppress Irish insurgency, were sent to Palestine to carry out their policing duties. The Black and Tans were notorious for their brutality and guerilla warfare. It is no surprise, then, that Irish scorn towards the British has now seen Irish scorn towards Israel; they feel a duty to support those facing oppressive rule like they once did.

"Controversy creates change. But when controversy threatens its oppressor, that is when it weakens its cause. Threats are seldom political statements: they remain threats."

Contempt for the right-wing Conservative Party has been long standing throughout the UK, undoubtedly spiked by Brexit and its successive incompetent Conservative cabinet members and leaders. However, Kneecap have certainly taken this to the next level with their calling for the death of Tory MPs. In light of Sir David Amess' – the former Conservative MP for Southend West – murder in 2021, perhaps this was not the smartest move from the band. Although the group issued an apology to Amess' wife, a line was certainly crossed.

Music is no stranger to being a vehicle of institutional frustration. The Cranberries, Marvin

Gaye, Bob Dylan, The Isley Brothers, The Beatles: the list of artists who have crossed the perimeters that separate art and politics is infinite. Even British rapper Stormzy, with Shakespearean fervor, encourages us in his song 'Vossi Bop' to 'f* the government, and f* Boris'.

Music, the art most representative of the human race, should be the main accommodator of freedom of speech. It should, therefore, absolutely dismantle the political barrier. What better way to generate awareness for a cause than disruption through metaphor? Music has been subverting since the beginning of comprehension; jazz, rap, hip-hop, disco, Motown all originated by breaking down oppressive racial frameworks. Disruption is the essence of progression.

Kneecap is the classic example of when passion crosses the border into extremism. In teeing themselves up to publicly support terrorist groups in the name of justice, they have over swung into, ironically, promoting genocide. Their brief apology is not enough to reverse hate speech, and it is frustrating to see a vital cause be marginally tainted by compromised safety. Jeremy Corbyn should take heed of this.

The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Maghrebi.org. Alisa Butterwick is a journalist and has a BA Honours degree from the University of Exeter. She is the Opinion Editor of Maghrebi.org. You can follow her on X: @AButterwick_.





Sera Songwe & Witney Schneidman

In a recent interview, Fox News anchor Bret Baier asked Felix Tshisekedi, the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, how his government would balance continued ties with the US — including the negotiation of a critical minerals deal — with its deepening relationship with China.

Tshisekedi responded that China's influence is not so much “waxing” in Africa, as America's influence is “waning.”

Tshisekedi is right. In 2000, the US was Africa's largest trading partner; today, China's total trade with Africa is more than four times larger than that of the US. Two US-Africa Leaders Summits have been held, in 2014 and 2022, and there is no date for a third, though Congress passed legislation late last year that would compel President Donald Trump to convene a summit this year and every two years thereafter.

Meanwhile, China is preparing to convene its 10th summit with African leaders, through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, in 2027. A Gallup poll published last year showed that, for the first time, China's approval rating in Africa (58 percent) had surpassed that of the US (56 percent).

Speaking to Baier, Tshisekedi pointed out that his country would be “very happy” to see a renewed US commercial presence there. But Trump's trade policies could have the opposite outcome. And persistent reports that the Trump administration plans to reduce the number of US embassies and consulates in Africa will only add to this decline in influence.

For the last 25 years, the cornerstone of America's commercial relationship with Africa has been the African Growth and Opportunity Act, a nonreciprocal trade agreement that allows more than 6,000 African products into the US without duties or quotas. Between 2001 and 2022, African members of the agreement exported more than \$100 billion of goods to the US.

The trade was always supposed to be one-way, but that does not mean it did not benefit US companies — such as Levi's, Gap and Walmart — and consumers.

Africa's next steps with Trump

Africa and the US are both seeking to strengthen their manufacturing sectors, but this is not a zero-sum game

The African Growth and Opportunity Act was designed to help Africa transform its manufacturing base, thereby shifting the basis of its relationship with the US from aid to trade — a goal that one might expect the Trump administration, which has slashed foreign aid programs, to support. Participation was conditioned on African governments' promotion of political pluralism, good governance and economic liberalization. And studies have shown that trade with the US increases value-added production, labor productivity and labor demand in Africa.

However, early last month, Trump introduced “reciprocal” tariffs on many African countries, with some of the African Growth and Opportunity Act's strongest performers facing the highest rates: Lesotho (50 percent), Madagascar (47 percent) and Mauritius (40 percent). Meanwhile, the 17 African countries that are ineligible for the benefits of the act, mainly due to poor governance, were effectively rewarded with far lower tariffs.

“By agreeing to help strengthen Africa's industrial capabilities, the US could gain greater access to resources that its own industry needs, reverse the decline of its commercial influence on the continent and contribute to the revival of wider, mutually beneficial trade.”

Trump suspended most of these tariffs almost immediately, opening a 90-day window to strike new trade deals. And, to some extent, he is getting what he wanted, with African Growth and Opportunity Act countries scrambling to salvage their preferential access to the US market. Lesotho, for example, granted Trump ally Elon Musk's Starlink a 10-year license to operate its satellite network in the country.

Nonetheless, Trump's tariffs are unlikely to deliver quick wins for the US. Already, African trade ministers have agreed to fast-track policies that will promote trade within the continent, as well as to diversify exports to reduce their countries' dependence on particular foreign markets. Add to that the shuttering of the US Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the closure of Voice of America and the lapse of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and America's footprint in Africa is shrinking fast.

But there is a way for Africa to leverage the US administration's interests to the benefit of both sides. Trump's top priority in Africa is securing access to critical minerals. This makes countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo — which boasts the world's richest copper deposits and four of the world's five largest cobalt mines — as well as Gabon, Zambia, South Africa and even Chad, strategically important. The US is already in talks over a minerals deal with Kinshasa and others.



President Trump with leaders from Guinea, Nigeria and Ethiopia, in May 2017



Artisanal miners work at the Shabara mine near Kolwezi in southeastern DR Congo

The only problem is that China is far ahead of the US on this front. Chinese state-owned companies and banks control 80 percent of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's cobalt production and as much as 90 percent of the world's supply is refined in China, whereas the US produces less than 1 percent. This imbalance drove former US President

African leaders join Trump and G7 counterparts at 2017 Sicily summit. Joe Biden's administration to develop the Lobito Corridor initiative, aimed at expanding the 800-mile rail line that extends from the Angolan port of Lobito on Africa's Atlantic coast through the mineral-rich Democratic Republic of the Congo to Zambia.

This initiative — for which the Trump administration has signaled its support — will upgrade African infrastructure by establishing partnerships between the US, African governments, African-led financing agencies such as the Africa Finance Corporation and the EU. But African countries must do more to ensure that any critical minerals agreement provides a real boost to their economies, especially by insisting that some value-add production occurs on the continent.”

To complement access to Africa's critical minerals, the US should also commit to processing them and adding value on the continent — for example, making cobalt into battery precursors before export. Since Chinese companies have

shown no interest in doing this, such an exchange would position the US as a more valuable partner, thereby ensuring its long-term access to these vital resources. Given that Africa has all the minerals needed for production, spread across more than 10 countries in Central and Southern Africa, the development of local processing capabilities would also be consistent with the goals of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Africa and the US are both seeking to strengthen their manufacturing sectors, but this is not a zero-sum game. On the contrary, by agreeing to help strengthen Africa's industrial capabilities, the US could gain greater access to resources that its own industry needs, reverse the decline of its commercial influence on the continent and contribute to the revival of wider, mutually beneficial trade. This could lead to more balanced current accounts, just as Trump desires.


The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Maghrebi.org. Vera Songwe, a former executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and undersecretary-general at the UN, is a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Founder and Chair of the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, and Co-Chair of the Expert Review on Debt, Nature and Climate. Witney Schneidman, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, was US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs during the Clinton administration.


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