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Conflict analysis of Algeria

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About this report

This report provides a short synthesis of some of the most recent, high quality literature on the topic of conflict in Algeria. It aims to orient policymakers to the key debates and emerging issues. It was prepared (in November 2013) for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2014. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID.

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1. Overview

Local and regional protests about a diverse range of socio-economic issues have been taking place in Algeria since 2011. However, much of the literature suggests that Algeria was not greatly affected by the protests emerging from the 'Arab Spring'. The Algerian government has succeeded in preventing protests from escalating to the levels witnessed in neighbouring countries through a number of short-term economic measures. Algeria's historical legacy and conflict in neighbouring countries have also led to a reluctance to engage in violent protest.

There is a moderate amount of literature dealing with drivers of conflict in Algeria since the onset of the Arab Spring. The majority of this literature is qualitative, and there is a heavy emphasis on terrorism and on trans-national criminal activities in the Sahara-Sahel region. The literature largely consists of policy papers produced by US-based and European think tanks. The literature dealing with terrorism and criminal networks is relatively consistent, although there is some divergence with regard to the extent of the involvement of Islamist groups in criminal activities.

Algeria faces a diverse range of interrelated security threats. Key drivers of conflict and potential drivers of conflict are Islamist terrorist groups, trafficking and kidnapping, protests, tensions in the Sahrawi camps in Tindouf, and a range of economic and political factors.

- **Islamist groups**: Both (AQIM) Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and MUJAO (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa) are active in Algeria. AQIM has split into northern cells and southern cells, with the former sticking more closely to its jihadi origins and the latter increasingly turning to criminal activity.
- **Trafficking and kidnapping:** Algeria and the wider region are affected by organised crime. Drug and arms trafficking, as well as cigarette and fuel smuggling, are a significant problem. Kidnapping for ransom, which is a major source of funding for Islamist groups, has also been on the increase in the region.
- **Protests:** Protests continue on a daily basis and are generally motivated by a lack of basic services and unemployment. The regime has taken steps to appease protestors, which has prevented the protests from escalating in the same way that they did in other countries in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.
- **Weak economy and high unemployment:** Algeria is heavily reliant on hydrocarbon exports, which poses a long-term threat to stability. Unemployment remains a problem, and underemployment is on the rise.
- **Political system:** The ruling party, the FLN, has been in power since Algeria's independence. President Bouteflika has been in power since 1999. He is in poor health and this has caused concern over succession. Presidential elections will be held in 2014 and there is uncertainty about who the candidates will be. The military and the intelligence services are extremely powerful and retain control over decisions in key areas such as defence and security and public expenditure.
- **Polisario camps in Tindouf[1]:** There has been some criminalisation among young Sahrawis in the camps due to a lack of opportunities. However, while there have been some concerns regarding the potential radicalisation of the Sahrawi youth, these appear to be largely unfounded. A continuing lack of opportunities for young people could however be a cause of long-term instability.
- **Tuaregs:** The Tuaregs are becoming increasingly religious, but at present there appears to be a minimal risk of radicalisation.

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[1] The Polisario Front is a Sahrawi national liberation movement, whose main aim is Western Sahara's independence from Morocco. The movement's headquarters are in the Algerian province of Tindouf.

- ▪ **Berbers:** The government has made a number of concessions to Berber communities following discontent over its arabisation policies. Berber protests tend to be related to broader social issues rather than focusing on Berber rights and identity alone, thus the threat of Berber separatism becoming a problem is currently minimal.
- ▪ **Migration from sub-Saharan Africa:** Although non-violent manifestations of racism are prevalent, more anger is directed towards the growing Chinese population in Algeria.

International and local responses to conflict in Algeria include:

- ▪ **Counterterrorism activities**: Algeria's counterterrorism strategy to date has been a hard-line military approach. Other countries such as the US and Algeria's neighbours have launched joint initiatives but some analysts and academics argue that cooperation between states in the region is still far below desirable levels.
- ▪ **Anti-corruption initiatives:** There have been limited efforts by the Algerian government to tackle corruption, such as ratifying the United Nations Convention against Corruption. However, accusations of corruption have been on the rise and are being used as a means of eliminating political opponents.
- ▪ **Economic diversification and inclusion:** The government increased public spending on infrastructure and public services in the aftermath of the initial Arab Spring protests. There has also been an increase in the number of infrastructure projects being undertaken. Cooperation with the EU appears to be increasing in this field. However, the government currently lacks a coherent economic strategy.
- ▪ **Tackling transnational crime:** Efforts to tackle transnational crime often overlap with counterterrorism efforts. Some regional cooperation initiatives have been launched in this area, but to date they have had limited success.

There are a number of **practical recommendations** from the literature:

- ▪ There should be less focus on counterterrorism activities and more focus on dealing with the root causes of radicalisation.
- ▪ Countries should take a common position on ransom payments, ideally leading to a complete ban.
- ▪ There needs to be support for the diversification of the Algerian economy.
- ▪ There needs to be support for regional cooperation initiatives on security issues, but also on the economy.

2. Conflict dynamics

2.1 Historic conflict dynamics

Algeria's violent history is frequently cited as the reason behind the absence of large-scale protests in the country since 2011 (Sèbe, 2013). Algeria gained independence from France in 1962, following a violent war of independence (1954-1962). Ammour (2012) states that the 1965 coup marked the beginning of the one-party era, the rise of the military, and the creation of a security state. The FLN derives its legitimacy from the role that its members played in the fight for independence.

During the 1980s gaps between the country's young population and the political elite resulted in violent strikes and riots.[2] The unrest resulted in the introduction of a multiparty system in 1990.[3] The Islamic opposition party, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) looked likely to win the 1991 elections on a religious-populist platform (Sèbe, 2013). In response, the army cancelled a second round of elections and the FIS was outlawed in 1992 (Ibid).[4] This resulted in a proliferation of armed groups (Ibid). Between 100,000 and 150,000 people were killed during the ensuing conflict, which began in 1992 and ended in 1999. A state of emergency was declared in 1992 and remained in place until 2011 (Ammour, 2012).

In the 1990s Islamist groups in Algeria obtained their weapons from Morocco, Libya and Mali, profiting from the lack of cooperation between states in the region and from a lack of border controls. In the south west of the country, the terrorists received weapons from Tuareg groups and in the south east weapons arrived from Chad via Libya (Jesus, 2011). Ammour (2012: 5) states that the war economy created during the civil war in the 1990s led to a continued lack of transparency in Algerian governance, and also led to the growth of corruption networks, which resulted in the creation of a "mafia-like bazaar economy."

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[2] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[3] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[4] See also Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#

Figure 1. Map of Algeria[5]

2.2 Current conflict dynamics

Most current conflict activity takes place in the north of the country, which is more densely populated than the south, however, increasing incidences of conflict are being recorded in the south (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013). There has also been growing insecurity along the borders with Tunisia and Libya. The majority of the violence occurring in Algeria targets the security forces and takes the form of battles (Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and ambushes) (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013).

The conflict in Libya had a significant impact on conflict in Algeria. The amount, and the accessibility of weapons in the region, increased significantly during the Libyan conflict. This increase in the number of weapons, combined with the unstable political situation, led to a better armed AQIM in Algeria (Ammour, 2012).[6] The collapse of the Libyan regime left the borders between Libya and Algeria largely unmanned. Conflict-related fatalities have increased in Algeria since the onset of the Arab Spring, due to the fact that AQIM is now significantly better equipped, and due to the lifting of the state of emergency[7]. According to the (UCDP) Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, this is in sharp

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[5] http://geology.com/world/algeria-map.gif
[6] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[7] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#

contrast to the situation in 2010, when the number of violent incidents was reducing. The UCDP states that many analysts predicted the end of the Islamic uprising in Algeria in 2010 – around the time of the Algerian military's large scale offensives against AQIM.[8] The campaign appeared to have been successful, and AQIM was reduced to around 100 fighters.[9] However, the subsequent instability in the region created an ideal environment for AQIM to rebuild its capacity and to carry out attacks.[10]

3.   Drivers of conflict

3.1   Radicalisation and terrorism

Jihadism in Algeria dates back to the 1980s. Between 2001 and 2012, 938 terrorist attacks took place within its borders (Ammour 2012). While the Algerian government has traditionally taken a hard-line approach against terrorism, this strategy appears to have had limited success in recent years, due to a lack of cooperation with neighbouring countries and due to the changing nature of the threat. According to Ammour (2012: 2), one of the main reasons for the fragmented regional response to AQIM and other Islamist groups, is the inability of regional governments to define the enemy. MUJAO has also carried out a number of attacks in Algeria. Their activities will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2, which focuses on trafficking and kidnapping

AQIM

Much of the literature emphasises the fact that AQIM is increasingly being viewed as a criminal organisation rather than just being viewed through the Islamist terrorist lens (see for example: Jesus, 2011; Ammour, 2012). Lacher (2011) states that it is necessary to differentiate between AQIM in northern Algeria and AQIM in the Sahel. AQIM is currently divided into separate cells, with a northern cell based in Kabylia and the Algiers hinterland, and two southern cells operating in the Sahel. (Ammour, 2012). According to the UCDP, this split became more obvious in 2011.[11] The northern factions of the group have remained more focused on the struggle against the Algerian government and their aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate, while the southern cells have increasingly turned to criminal activity.[12] According to the UCDP, Algeria's geographical features, and the region in which AQIM operates, might be the factors behind the split, as the Sahara desert separating the different cells makes it difficult for them to coordinate and cooperate.[13] Ammour (2012) notes that the groups sometimes appear to be acting in competition with one another. The changing nature of AQIM has already had an impact on the regional dynamics of the conflict. Countries in the Sahel are keen to prevent increasing cooperation between AQIM and other terrorist organisations.[14] Spencer (2012) argues that the northern branch of AQIM has become less important, as the importance of the southern branch has increased.

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[8] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#

Some authors argue that the AQIM 'phenomenon' is manipulated by the Algerian regime in order to serve its strategic aims both domestically and in the Sahel (see for example Spencer, 2012: 8). Ammour (2012: 2) states that the Algerian authorities deny the fact that there is a connection between AQIM and domestic terrorist groups. She argues that they see AQIM as a new type of terrorist organisation, which is driven by its extremist ideology, while other governments in the Sahel emphasise the criminal nature of AQIM. AQIM is well-funded because it imposes tolls on trans-border drug smuggling and because it regularly kidnaps people for ransom (Boukhars, 2013).[15] AQIM in Algeria also receives funds from supporters living abroad, especially in Western Europe (Jesus, 2011). A number of sources cite the possibility of links between AQIM and the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram (see for example Ammour, 2012). One expert argues that the majority of terrorists are not terrorists as a result of their convictions, but due to the money earned. He does however add that Salafism[16] remains a significant threat (Expert comment).

Terrorist links in the region

Algeria relies heavily on military force to combat terrorism, however countries in the wider Sahara-Sahel region see this approach as counterproductive. Boukhars (2013) argues that the hard-line Algerian government approach to extremism has resulted in the internationalisation of the conflict.[17] He states that Algeria has been poor at fighting extremism outside its borders despite having the capacity to do so. Algerians constitute the majority of the leadership of Islamist Jihadist groups in Northern Mali (Sèbe, 2013). The Algerian government has focused on negotiating political settlements in Mali rather than opting for military intervention. Sèbe (2013) argues that Algerian Islamists moved to Mali, having been forced out of Algeria by the ANP (Algerian National Army). Boukhars (2013) supports this argument stating "the transformation of Algerian violent Islamist groups into a regional franchise for terror began over a decade ago when Algerian forces chased Islamist combatants into the southern part of the country."[18] He adds that by 2003, the Islamists had moved into Mali and other countries in the region. Sèbe (2013) states that it has been suggested that the Algerian secret services might have been happy to support this relocation, which allowed them both to eradicate the problem of armed Islamists at home, and to remind Western governments of the dangers facing the region. Sèbe (2013) argues that this ensured foreign support for the Algerian government, in spite of its "limited democratic credentials."

3.2 Trafficking (arms, drugs, cigarettes) and kidnapping

Organised crime is closely linked with terrorist activity in Algeria and the broader Sahara-Sahel region. In 2011 an estimated 90 per cent of AQIM's funding came from kidnapping for ransom (Jesus, 2011). In recent years there have been two cases of hostages being killed. The first was due to a refusal to negotiate on the part of the UK, and the second was due to an unsuccessful French rescue attempt (Lacher, 2011: 1). Ransom payments have been increasing and now stand at several million Euros per hostage (Ibid: 2). While Algeria and the African Union (AU) have led calls for a ban on the payment of ransoms, in which they have been supported by the UK Government, it seems

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[15] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4slJ

[16] Salafist groups are strongly influenced by Wahhabism, an ultra-conservative branch within Sunni thinking that is predominately found in Saudi Arabia, and can be broadly divided into two camps: 'Scientific (or Scripturalist) Salafists' who are reject the use of violence and preach a 'pure version of Islam' (Wolf, 2013, p. 569) and Jihadi Salafists who are noted to advocate the use of violence in the pursuit of their ultra-conservative goals (Ibid.).

[17] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl

[18] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl

unlikely that France will stop paying ransoms (Expert comment). This problematises efforts to deal effectively with the problem of kidnapping (Expert comment). MUJAO also began to be involved in kidnapping in late 2011. Spencer (2012: 9) states that AQIM built an opportunistic alliance with the Mali-based Islamist group Ansar al-Din, which is based on the sharing of ransoms paid for foreign kidnapping victims. Spencer (2012: 9) notes that the two groups do not share ideological views.

State complicity exacerbates the problem of criminal networks, however, complicity in illegal activities is **at the provincial level in Algeria, rather than at the national level** (Lacher, 2012: 11). He cites the case of illegal sales of subsidised Algerian fuel in Mali, noting that officials in the Algerian administration and security apparatus managed the sales. Cigarette smuggling, is also a lucrative source of funds, and accounts for 18 per cent of the Algerian cigarette market (Ibid: 5). Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the leader of Those Who Signed in Blood, has a long history in the cigarette trade (Jesus, 2011). Lacher (2012: 5) also notes that Sahrawis trade Algerian goods and humanitarian aid southwards.

Lacher (2012: 8) argues that there is little evidence to support the theory that AQIM is directly involved in drug smuggling, however he states that the group does sometimes charge drug smugglers a transit fee. Lacher (2013) argues that the idea of "**narco-terrorism**" is a myth and that, while there is evidence to suggest that members of MUJAO are directly involved in drug smuggling, they have multiple motivations. Moreover, Lacher (2013) argues that there are many other actors involved in the drug trade, who are more important and more active.

3.3 Protests

The demonstrations in Algeria, which took place in 2011, were mainly the result of **rising food prices and increasing fuel costs**.[19] Taxes were cut in order to reduce food prices in response to protests in January 2011. The CNCD (National Coordination for Democratic Change), which consisted of trade unions, human rights organisations, opposition parties and youth associations, held demonstrations in Algeria in February and March 2011. However, there were **divisions** between the human rights organisations and the trade unions on one side, and the political parties on the other, with regard to whether demonstrations should continue following the government's **ban on demonstrations in Algiers** (Achy, 2013: 11). This ban remains in place (Arieff, 2013).

A number of other reasons as to why the protests in Algeria did not escalate to the levels witnessed in other countries in the MENA region have been suggested. Primary among these is Algeria's **violent history** and a resulting desire amongst Algerians to avoid instability (Sèbe, 2013). The **violence and turmoil being experienced by other countries in the region** is also frequently cited in this context. Experts also state that President Bouteflika is not as unpopular as the leaders that were toppled in those countries, which have experienced regime change as a result of popular unrest in the last two years (Expert comments). Moreover, protests did not escalate because the Algerian police force had **sophisticated crowd control training**, and did not fire on protestors (Achy, 2013: 12). This sets them apart from their counterparts in other countries in the MENA region. Moreover, the Algerian police force, which consisted of 200,000 **well-paid officers** in 2012 (Ibid), remained loyal to the regime, unlike in neighbouring countries.

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[19] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#

While much of the literature suggests that Algeria largely avoided the Arab Spring, Ammour (2013: 2) states that according to the Ministry of the Interior 10,000 protests took place in 2011 (see also Gall, 2013). Moreover, **local and regional protests** about issues such inadequate social services, inflation, housing and youth unemployment, as well as strikes over pay and working conditions continued into 2013. The National Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Unemployed, a protest movement based in the city of Ouargla has also been leading a campaign of protest in 2013 (Benoit-Lavelle, 2013). The movement has received considerable media attention. Moreover, Achy (2013: 9) states that there have been at least 12 cases of **self-immolation** since 2011. Others cite figures as high as 100 for the number of self-immolations or attempted self-immolations that have taken place in Algeria since the onset of the Arab Spring. The regime's response to these protests and strikes has generally been to provide **pay-outs** to the disaffected. However, there have also been reports of protest leaders being arrested (Expert comment).

3.4   The economy and weak state institutions

According to Werenfels (2010: 3), many of the power struggles in Algeria are about **economic distribution**. Achy (2013, p.3) states that the government in Algiers "staves off unrest by relying on its large hydrocarbon revenues to finance a redistribution system that buys the regime quiescence and loyalty from key constituencies while leaving the bulk of the population in misery." He adds that this system cannot continue indefinitely. Emphasising the importance of the hydrocarbons industry in Algeria, Werenfels (2010: 2) argues that **exercising control over the hydrocarbon sector is the key to exercising power in Algeria**.

The World Bank lists the challenges that face the Algerian economy as being:
- Reducing subsidies.
- Improving the business environment.
- Creating private sector jobs – unemployment stands at 10 per cent but youth unemployment stands at 21.5 per cent and unemployment amongst women stands at 17.2 per cent.
- Diversifying the economy.[20]

It is worth noting that unemployment has decreased in recent years but that this decrease has resulted in **the problem of unemployment being replaced with the problem of underemployment,** and many people working in temporary jobs or the informal sector (Achy, 2013: 7). While official figures state that unemployment lies at around 10 per cent of the population, the real figure is likely to lie at closer to 30 per cent (Gall, 2013).

An issue addressed in much of the literature is the future of Algeria's hydrocarbon industry. Achy (2013: 4) argues that if domestic hydrocarbon consumption continues to increase at its current rate, **Algeria will only be exporting gas by 2023 and it will be importing oil**. He adds that Algeria could become a **net hydrocarbon importer by 2026**, which would expose the country to a range of economic and political challenges. Achy (2013: 18) also notes that a fall in international oil prices in the mid-1980s led to the 1988 popular protests and the subsequent breakdown of state-society relations.

An expert noted that **government spending** is around US$300 billion on public investments as part of the current five-year plan, highlighting this as evidence of the government's efforts to distribute its wealth more equally (Expert comments). However, of the US$286 billion budget, US$130 billion

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[20] World Bank - http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/algeria/overview

has been set aside to **complete projects started under the previous five-year plan** (Achy, 2013: 21). Achy (2013: 21) argues that public expenditure is aimed at **buying loyalty**, not at strengthening the economy, thus no economic analysis takes place and spending is often not related to strategic objectives.

Demographics are closely linked to the economic issues discussed in this section. Achy (2013: 6-7) discusses Algeria's **rapid average population growth rate,** which stands at 1.5 per cent per year and exceeds the population growth rate of neighbouring countries. He notes that Algeria's population is expected to surpass 40 million by 2020, with those aged 34 and under constituting 68 per cent of the total population. He adds that Algeria's population has grown more educated, with an average of seven years of schooling, and that it has become more urbanised, with 72 percent of Algerians living in cities compared to 44 per cent at the beginning of the 1980s (Achy, 2013: 7). It is also important to note that **Algeria's youth did not experience Algeria's war for independence and the civil war** and therefore the government does not have the same legitimacy for them as it did for older generations (Ibid).

Corruption is a significant problem in Algeria, and the **Algerian judiciary is the lowest ranking in the MENA region, except for Lebanon, with regard to judicial independence** (Achy, 2013: 6). Moreover, Algeria ranks 105/176 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.[21]

3.5   Weak political system

Algeria's political system is **highly centralised**, with major decisions being taken by *le pouvoir,* the name used to refer to senior military and intelligence officials (Spencer, 2012: 3). Algeria has a **presidential system** with a subsidiary national assembly and a multiparty system, which only came into being in the 1990s (Ibid). Since he came to power, Bouteflika has attempted to seize some powers from the military and the intelligence services (Ibid). All decisions regarding Algeria's external revenues, public expenditure, and defence and security policy are taken by the military and the security establishment (Ibid). The FLN, which has close ties with the military and the intelligence services, has been in power since 1962. Ammour (2012: 5) states "by ruling but not governing, the military has maintained its prerogative to formulate and execute foreign and domestic foreign policy." **Secrecy and conspiracy theories** in Algeria are rife, and are a legacy of the FLN (Expert comment). Spencer (2012: 3) notes that "the military-security establishment is aging, and several key generals have died in recent years."

Following protests in 2011, the government **repealed the State of Emergency**, which had been in place for 19 years. While this was considered a positive development, the government also passed new laws restricting freedom of expression. It is also worth noting that former FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) members are banned from political activities. **Voter participation is low** and in the parliamentary election in 2012, 18.3 per cent of the 9.4 million voters who went to the polls left their ballots blank to make a statement about Algeria's de facto one party rule (Achy, 2013: 3). As a result effective participation stood at less than 35 per cent (Achy, 2013: 3). Moreover, liberalisation policies and divide and rule have resulted in a fragmented political scene (Werenfels, 2010: 5). In addition, Islamist parties are riven by internal power struggles. Rifts along ethnic lines, as well as the question of the *famille revolutionnaire[22]* have also prevented opposition groups from forming broad coalitions (Werenfels, 2010: 6).

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[21] Transparency International - http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/
[22] Membership is dependent upon having any kind of link to the war of liberation (Werenfels, 2010).

Bouteflika has built up his power base by building **networks of patronage** in politics, civil administration, and economy, which are largely based on regional affiliations (Werenfels, 2010: 1). His family comes from the west of the country (Ibid). It is worth noting Werenfels' (2010: 2) view that reducing power structures in Algeria to the President and the generals does not do justice to the complexity of the regime. In September 2013, Bouteflika oversaw a significant cabinet reshuffle, which has fuelled speculation that Bouteflika intends to remain in power beyond the 2014 presidential election (Benoit-Lavelle, 2013).

The forthcoming **presidential election** is a key issue. Fabiani (2013) has suggested three possible scenarios for the succession in Algeria. These are, in order of likelihood:

- Bouteflika completes his current term as president while Algeria's rival political groupings vie to secure the presidential nomination prior to the 2014 election (Fabiani, 2013).
- Bouteflika either steps down because of ill health or dies and the rival clans successfully bring about a managed transition (Fabiani, 2013).
- A military takeover of the country as a result of rival clans failing to agree peacefully on a replacement (Fabiani, 2013).

Bouteflika remaining in power is widely viewed as the best chance of stability for Algeria. It seems likely that Bouteflika will run in the forthcoming presidential elections (Expert comment). It must however be noted that **Bouteflika has not addressed the nation in over a year**, and the general population are not even sure if he can speak following his stroke early in April 2013 (Gall, 2013). The current Prime Minister Sellal is well-placed in terms of candidacy for the presidency, but he is unwilling to run for office. Other possible candidates include Benflis or any of the other former Prime Ministers (Expert comment). One expert notes that the candidates that have expressed their intention to run for election, such as the former Prime Ministers Benbitour and Benflis, or the writer Yasmin Khadra, will not be able to defeat him (Expert comment). There is concern about what would happen if Bouteflika dies either before the elections, or during his fourth term. At present, there is **no "strong man" within the FLN** that can do the job (Expert comment). Each time that there is a possible successor (for example Minister of State Abdelaziz Belkhadem or former Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia), they are weakened by their opponents inside the FLN and marginalised or excluded from the political game (Expert comment). The risk therefore, is that a leader who can do the job if Bouteflika dies, will not be found. However, there are also believed to be a number of potential candidates who do not want to declare their intentions as long as Bouteflika is around (Expert comment). In the event that he doesn't run for president, then the military will probably choose a leader (Expert comment).

There is a general consensus that **a military takeover is unlikely**, as the military would not want a repeat of the 1992 scenario. The military and intelligence services are powerful, and have their say on who is going to run the country but as a result of their historical experiences, they prefer to remain behind the scenes, especially as the elections can easily be rigged as long as all the factions agree on the choice of leader (Expert comments). *Le Pouvoir* is widely believed to be suffering from internal divisions (Arieff, 2013: 2-3).

Boubekeur (2013: 469) states that private sector actors are often viewed as potential agents of political change and that they have been expected to contribute to democratisation. However, she states that **Algerian entrepreneurs benefit from the current political system** and it is therefore difficult for them to become agents of reform. Bouteflika sought to distance himself from traditional networks and chose to rely on entrepreneurs instead. His re-election campaigns have been supported by economic leaders who have also provided logistical support. Boubekeur (2013: 475-

476) argues that rival clans use high profile corruption cases to weaken their competitors and that politicians also attack the business networks of their rivals.

3.6 Socio-political tensions

Berbers

The size of the Berber population is estimated to be somewhere between 6.6 million and 9.9 million.[23] **About half of Algeria's Berber population lives in the Kabylia region**, with another group, the Shawiya people living in the mountains in the east of the country. Smaller Berber communities live in the south and include the Tuareg people, who will be discussed in more detail below.[24]

According to Arieff (2013: 11), "many Algerians' heritage reflects both Berber and Arab influences, but the state has pursued **Arabisation policies** in national education and politics, that are seen by some Berbers as disadvantageous." Berber groups in the Kabylia region have been particularly focused on demanding language and cultural rights (Arieff, 2013: 11). Periodic unrest in Kabylia has been caused by perceived official discrimination and neglect (Ibid). The region has also become increasingly isolated economically, as a result of AQIM activity and connected security measures, which have made it hard for businesses to operate in the area (Arieff, 2013: 11). According to the Minority Rights Group, despite government fears, there appears to be **little support for separatism**.[25] They do however state that there is support for greater recognition of Berber identity and rights for Berber-speakers within a more "democratic and pluralist" Algerian state. They state that "the most enduring form of Berber opposition has come from broader based cultural movements."[26] Berber became a national, but not an official language in Algeria in 2001. There are two Berber political parties, the FFS (Front des Forces Socialistes) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD).

Tuareg

The Tuareg are a nomadic Berber tribe. Historically, they have been less committed to religious practice than the Arabs and women have had a lot more freedom in Tuareg society (Expert comment). However, the Tuareg community have increasingly felt let down by independence, and have begun to view the Arabs as a replacement of French colonisers (Expert comment). This dissatisfaction led to the Tuareg rebellions in Mali and Niger. In Algeria it has led to an **increase in religiosity amongst the Tuareg**. Modernity is perceived by many as having destroyed the social fabric in Algeria (Expert comment). One example cited, is that some young Tuareg women have turned to prostitution via the internet (Expert comment). This has led to increased conservatism. The Tuareg in Algeria have also become increasingly arabised. While there is a potential for radicalisation, this is lower in southern Algeria than it is Mali and Niger, as the Tuaregs in Algeria are wealthier than those in the other two countries (Expert comment). Ammour (2012: 7) supports this view arguing that although AQIM has a strong presence in the same area as the Tuareg, the **Tuareg have shown no signs of becoming radicalised** or any amenability to AQIM.

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[23] Minority Rights Group - http://www.minorityrights.org/4083/algeria/berbers.html
[24] Minority Rights Group - http://www.minorityrights.org/4083/algeria/berbers.html
[25] Minority Rights Group - http://www.minorityrights.org/4083/algeria/berbers.html
[26] Minority Rights Group - http://www.minorityrights.org/4083/algeria/berbers.html

Iyad ag Ghali is a key leadership figure for the Malian Tuareg, and he has strong connections to Algeria (Boukhars, 2012b: 11). According to Ammour (2013: 3) he works closely with Algeria's intelligence service - the Département de la Sécurité et du Renseignement (DRS); and it is claimed he is involved in liberating hostages, and takes large percentages of the ransoms paid. Ammour (2013: 2) states that earlier efforts by Algeria to mediate in conflicts in the Sahel, have been motivated by its **fear of contagion among Algerian Tuaregs** and by a desire to contain Libya's influence in the region. Algeria also successfully persuaded former Malian Tuareg rebels to join a specialised unit to maintain security in northern Mali under the 2006 Tamanrasset Accords, which were an attempt to maintain security in northern Mali (Ibid).

Several **nomadic groups** in the south of Libya and Algeria (principally Tuareg and Tebu) facilitate cross-border movement through their longstanding transit routes and ethnic connections in other countries. These groups have clan structures, which stretch over much of the Maghreb. They **often bypass the official border points** to convey goods to other communities, but border officials appear to be informed of their movements, therefore unofficially sanctioning them (Cole, 2012). This movement of nomads and goods through **longstanding commercial and social networks** blurs the boundaries of licit and illicit trade (Lacher, 2012: 4).[27]

Sahrawi refugees

The Algeria Government is the main backer of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and its armed wing the **Polisario Front.** The group has been based in Algeria's Tindouf province since the mid-1970s. According to Boukhars (2012a: 3), the Polisario administered camps in Tindouf, are becoming "major hubs for drug trafficking, the smuggling of contraband, and the circulation of weapons." Boukhars (2012a: 3) argues that there is increasing evidence to suggest dangerous links between the Sahrawi refugees in Tindouf, and both AQIM and criminal organisations.

According to Boukhars (2012a: 5), "AQIM and its offshoots in the Sahel work relentlessly to expand their partnership with smugglers from the camps and enlist recruits among disenchanted Sahrawis." He also argues that Sahrawi youths in the camps in Tindouf are increasingly turning to drug trafficking. Boukhars (2012a: 6) states "the partnerships between AQIM and elements of the Polisario may not be based on ideological affinity and are not as widespread as is feared, but they do exist and constitute a major security threat to the Maghreb and the Sahel." Some members of the Polisario have been involved in kidnapping incidents (Ibid). Discussing the potential for radicalization in Tindouf, one expert argues that the vast majority of the Sahrawi living in both the occupied Western Sahara territory as well as in the camps of Tindouf are aware that such a move would not serve their cause internationally. He argues that the Polisario would do everything it can to prevent such a scenario for the same reason (Expert comment). The expert does however add that it is inevitable that some individuals may be vulnerable to radicalisation.

Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa

Algeria faces economic and social challenges due to the **influx of irregular migrants**. There is a problem with **racism** towards migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, especially among the Tuareg. However, this racism has not resulted in any violent clashes to date (Expert comment). Moreover, Algeria is becoming less of a popular route to Europe, with Morocco and Libya becoming increasingly

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[27] See Browne, E. (2013). *Border Insecurity in North Africa* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 945). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

popular transit points (Expert comment). There is more tension with Chinese migrants, working on large infrastructure projects, who are seen as competing with Algerians for jobs (Expert comment). According to Spencer (2012: 7) **around 50,000 Chinese workers have taken up temporary residence in Algeria**, resulting in some friction with the local community.

4. International and local responses to conflict

4.1 Counter-terrorism drive

Ammour (2012: 3) describes Algeria as seeking to centralise the war on terror. The country has long favoured a **hard-line approach** to combatting radical Islam and terrorist groups (Ammour, 2012: 5). In this context, several authors cite the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's data on defence expenditures, according to which Algeria's defence expenditures rose by 44 per cent in 2011. As a result Algeria was the world's seventh largest importer of conventional weapons for the period 2007-2011 (Spencer, 2012: 8). States in the Sahel oppose Algeria's military focus, as they believe that stability can only be brought about through a focus on economic, social, and political factors (Ammour, 2012: 2). Algerian counterterrorism efforts have largely focused on the Kabylia region and Algiers (Ammour, 2012: 5). As part of its counterterrorism activities, Algeria has also launched a "**deradicalisation programme**", and it tries to exercise control over the content of religious sermons (Arieff, 2013: 9).

In terms of regional cooperation, Algeria is behind the Tamanrasset Plan, which is a **regional cooperation initiative to counter terrorism and regional crime**. This resulted in the establishment of CEMOC (Joint Operational Chiefs of Staff Committee) (Arieff, 2013: 10). The initiative involves the military chiefs of Algeria, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Libya. One expert notes that CEMOC has only been in place for three years and that it is therefore too early to judge its effectiveness (Expert comment). A Central Intelligence Cell aimed at coordinating counterterrorism efforts between countries in the Sahara and the Sahel was also established in Algiers in 2010 (Ammour, 2012: 4). Algeria is also behind CAERT (African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism), which is based in Algiers, and it had committed 25,000 soldiers to take part in joint counterterrorist activities across the Sahel region by the end of 2011 (Spencer, 2012: 5). According to Ammour (2012: 4) Special Forces from Algeria, Mali, and Niger also undertook their first joint exercises in 2011. Ammour (2012: 3) argues that regional counterterrorism initiatives are often undermined by the fact that Algeria is fearful of its neighbours acting independently, and possibly to the detriment of its interests.

Algeria is keen to prevent foreign (non-African) counterterrorism intervention in the region but welcomes indirect outside support (Arieff, 2013: 9-10). Spencer (2012: 5) argues that Algeria remains **very suspicious of French and US intentions in the Sahel**. Despite this, Algeria allowed France to use its airspace and cooperated with French military operations in Mali in 2013 (Arieff, 2013: 10). Moreover, Algeria was the US' "partner of choice" in its Pan-Sahel Initiative from 2004 onwards and also for the Africa Command (Africom) mission, which was established in 2007 to monitor terrorism, organised crime, and trafficking networks across the region (Spencer, 2012: 5). Another such initiative is the US Trans Sahara Counter Terrorist Initiative (TSCTI). Algeria and the US also signed a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in the field of counterterrorism in 2010 (Ibid). In addition, the FBI has opened a field office in Algiers, Algerian officers have been trained in the US, and there have been a number of joint intelligence missions between high-ranking DRS officers and their counterparts from the US (Ammour, 2013: 5). The EU also launched its Strategy for Security and Development in the

Sahel in March, 2011 (Jesus, 2011: 52). Algeria is also a member of the NATO Mediterranean dialogue, which aims at promoting regional security and stability.

4.2 Anti-corruption drive

In 2004, Algeria ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and it also promulgated a **law for the prevention of corruption in the public sector**. The country also established the National Commission for the Prevention and Fight against Corruption in 2004. However, the seven members of the body were not appointed until 2010 and there do not appear to have been any tangible results to date (Achy, 2013: 5).

Recent years have seen an increase in high profile corruption cases. In 2010 judicial proceedings began against almost all the top cadres at the Algerian state energy company Sonatrach as a result of allegations of corruption (Werenfels, 2010: 3) While corruption at Sonatrach is not new, the way in which the matter was dealt was very different. Details of the alleged corruption were initially leaked by a newspaper, which is known for being critical of Bouteflika (Ibid). Moreover, much of the media attention focused on the Minister of Energy and Mines, who was a close ally of the President. Werenfels (2010: 3) cites oil business insiders who state that there has been a lot of resentment over the President's attempts to place members of his regional network in top positions at Sonatrach. This does not appear to be the only case of corruption cases being used to settle political scores. Charges of corruption have also been made against the President's brother and advisor Said Bouteflika (Expert comment). Moreover, rather than corruption cases taking place at the national level, there have been a growing number of cases which are being investigated at the international level (Expert comment). One expert argues that the message that Bouteflika is corrupt has therefore been intensifying (Expert comment).

4.3 Economic diversification and inclusion

The Algerian regime has shown **little inclination towards economic diversification**. While interest free loans have been granted to young entrepreneurs, the scheme is not viewed as having had an impact on the economic challenges facing the country (Expert comment).

The EU is involved in a number of initiatives to assist countries in North Africa in terms of their economies and their political systems. The EU's activities in the region are outlined in the **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, and include initiatives in the areas of: democracy; human rights; rule of law; good governance; market economy principles and sustainable development. Other EU activities are outlined in the Europe-Mediterranean Partnership (MEDA) – The Union for the Mediterranean promotes economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbours to the EU's south in North Africa and the Middle East. Algeria is also a member of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Ammour, 2012: 2).

4.4 Tackling transnational crime

Boukhars (2013) argues that since the 2011 Libyan conflict Algeria has become "slightly more responsive to problems on its periphery."[28] It **increased its troop presence in the east and in the south of the country**, and it also increased the number of checkpoints and surveillance flights to track the movement of drug dealers, arms traders, and terrorists that could carry conflicts to other territories (Boukhars, 2013).[29] According to Spencer (2012: 9) the Algerian government deployed 7,000 border guards on its border with Libya in response to the flow of arms and fighters crossing into Mali. In January 2013, the prime ministers of Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia met in Ghadames in Libya, where they agreed to establish joint teams to better coordinate security along their borders and to stop the flow of drugs, arms, and fuel (Boukhars, 2013).[30]

5. Practical recommendations

5.1 Western governments should stop paying ransoms

There is a strong consensus in the literature and amongst experts that western governments should stop paying ransoms (see for example Jesus, 2011). Both the UK and the AU have supported a ban on the payment of ransoms, but it seems unlikely that France and Spain would agree to such a move (Expert comment). Jesus (2011: 54) argues that there should also be a ban on the exchange of imprisoned terrorists for the release of hostages.

5.2 Increase regional cooperation and military capacity building

Increased regional cooperation is considered to be vital in combatting Islamist groups and criminal gangs operating in Algeria and in the wider region. Ammour (2012: 7) advocates the creation of intra-regional battalions to undertake operations in border areas. She adds that the Tuaregs should be involved in any such initiative due to their knowledge of the terrain and the population in target areas.

With regard to combatting criminal activity in the region, cooperation should be extended to include Burkina Faso, Senegal, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria, as they are all transit points for cocaine (Ammour, 2012: 7).

Foreign governments should also provide law enforcement and military capacity building to regional governments (Jesus, 2011: 53).

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[28]http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl
[29] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl
[30] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl

5.3 Support the diversification of the Algerian economy and employment creation initiatives.

According to Achy (2013), a coherent economic strategy is required if Algeria is to avoid the dangers of continued protests and the long-term threat posed by running out of hydrocarbons for export. Achy (2013: 22) argues that complex administrative procedures need to be simplified and the system of universal food and fuel subsidies abolished, in order to target the poor rather than the entire Algerian population.

5.4 Avoid short-term focus on counterterrorism.

Achy (2013: 23) argues that rather than focusing solely on counterterrorism strategies, the international community needs to help the Algerian leadership understand that "the only way to retain power, is to share it." Algeria's international partners should also support efforts to bring about political and economic reform (Achy, 2013: 23). In this regard Ammour (2012: 7) emphasises the importance of reducing the role of the military in Algerian politics.

5.5 Deepen economic integration in the Sahel-Sahara region and invest in neglected areas.

Ammour (2012: 6-7) argues that deepening economic integration in the region through joint infrastructure projects would improve the accessibility of marginalised regions. Ammour (2012: 6) also advocates high levels of investment in local development initiatives in neglected areas, as this would reduce the attraction of criminal activity and radicalisation.

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Key websites

European External Action Service (EEAS) - http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/
Minority Rights Group - http://www.minorityrights.org
Transparency International - http://cpi.transparency.org/
UN Sanctions Committee - http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE13412E.shtml
Uppsala Conflict Data Program - http://ucdp.uu.se
World Bank - http://www.worldbank.org

Appendix: Key actors

Political parties

National Liberation Front (FLN)

The FLN is a socialist party which is widely credited with the achievement of Algerian independence. During the Algerian war for independence, the FLN was responsible for major human rights abuses.

Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)

The FIS is an Islamist party, which has been banned since 1992, when it was deemed likely to win the parliamentary elections. In the run up to the 2012 parliamentary elections they called for a boycott.

Other Islamist parties

According to Achy (2012), those Islamist parties that did participate in the presidential elections, were those that were considered to be moderate by the regime. The Green Alliance, is the largest of these parties and won 10 per cent of the seats. Achy (2012), notes that most Algerians associate Islamists with violence and radicalism.[31]

Berber parties

The two main Berber parties are the FFS (Front des Forces Socialistes) and the RCD (Rally for Culture and Democracy).

Security forces

Algerian National Army (Armée Nationale Populaire, ANP)

The ANP numbers 140,000 with an additional 100,000 reservists (Achy, 2013: 12). It is the best equipped and most battle-tested military in the region (Ammour, 2012: 2). The ANP has always taken a hard-line approach to eradicating violent Islamism (Boukhars, 2013).[32] The military has significant decision-making powers.

Département de la Sécurité et du Renseignement (DRS)

Along with the military, the DRS is responsible for decision-making on key issues such as public expenditure and defence and security policy.

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[31] http://carnegie-mec.org/2012/05/31/algeria-avoids-arab-spring/b0ys
[32] http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/23/what-s-next-for-mali-and-algeria/f4sl

Islamist groups

Those Who Signed in Blood (Al-Mouwakoune Bi-Dima)/ The Masked Men Brigade (Al Mulathameen)/ Khaled Abu Al Abbas Brigade

This is a splinter group of AQIM led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, which separated in 2012. The group claimed responsibility for the attack on the In Amenas gas facility in January 2013 (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013). In August 2013 it was reported that the group has merged with **MUJAO** to form **Al Murabitoun**. This has not been confirmed by the experts commenting on the groups.

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb/ Al-Qaeda in the lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM/AQLIM)

This group was known as GSPC (Groupe Salafite pour la prédication et le combat/ Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) and it was a splinter group of the GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé/ Armed Islamic Group), which had been fighting the Government since 1993.[33] AQIM in Algeria was founded by Hassan Hattab, a former member of the GIA. The group stated that only the state is a legitimate target, disassociating itself from the GIA's policy of considering civilians to be legitimate targets. However AQIM has also used one-sided violence.[34] Its affiliation with al-Qaeda was viewed as negative by some members, as jihadism in Algeria dates back to the 1980s and therefore Bin Laden, was seen to be copying the Algerians. Affiliation was therefore deemed to be unnecessary (Expert comment). The group's aim is to replace Algeria's secular state with an Islamic one.[35] The group has split into northern and southern cells, with the northern cell retaining its ideological goals, while the southern cells have been increasingly involved in criminal activity. AQIM's northern cell is led by Abdelmalek Droukdel. The organisation is active across the Sahara-Sahel region.

Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, MUJAO)

MUJAO is a splinter group of AQIM.[36] The group emerged in 2011, and its first attack was the kidnapping of three humanitarian workers in Tindouf. They have also claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of seven Algerian diplomats in Gao, Mali, and for attacks on the Gendarmeries in Tamanrasset and Ouargla. The group is allied with AQIM and Ansar Eddine (a Malian group).[37] In August 2013 Mokhtar Belmokhtar announced a merger between the Masked Men Brigade and MUJAO.

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[33] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[34] Ibid.
[35] Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -
http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#
[36] Heidelberger Institut fur Internationale Konfliktforschung -
http://www.hiik.de/de/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2012.pdf
[37] UN Sanctions Committee - http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE13412E.shtml