



Navigating in a complex neighbourhood

Algeria's responses to security challenges in Libya and the Sahel

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FOI-R--4960--SE

APRIL 2020



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Titel	Svårnavigerad region – Algeriets hantering av säkerhetsutmaningar i Libyen och Sahel
Title	Navigating in a complex neighbourhood– Algeria's responses to security challenges in Libya and the Sahel
Rapportnr/Report no	FOI-R--4960--SE
Månad/Month	April
Utgivningsår/Year	2020
Antal sidor/Pages	59
ISSN	1650-1942
Kund/Customer	Försvarsdepartementet
Forskningsområde	Säkerhetspolitik
FoT-område	Inget FoT-område
Projektnr/Project no	A112004
Godkänd av/Approved by	Lars Höstbeck
Ansvarig avdelning	Försvarsanalys

Bild/Cover: Algerian soldiers stand guard at the Tiguentourine Gas Plant in In Amenas, close to the Libyan border. Photo taken on 31 January 2013. Reuters/Louafi Larbi.

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Sammanfattning

Algeriet har traditionellt haft en stabiliserande roll i en konflikttrabbad och instabil region. Idag står landet inför omfattande politiska och ekonomiska utmaningar, samtidigt som utvecklingen i framförallt Libyen och Sahel utgör komplexa och gränsöverskridande hot för landets säkerhet. Denna rapport har ett tvådelat syfte. Förutom att ge en överblick över centrala aspekter i Algeriets historia, politik, ekonomi, militär och den aktuella politiska händelseutvecklingen, syftar rapporten till att analysera hur Algeriet agerar i relation till instabiliteten i Libyen och Sahel. I rapporten diskuteras även om Algeriets egen inrikespolitiska och ekonomiska situation kan komma att påverka landets agerande gentemot dessa närområden.

I rapporten dras slutsatsen att Algeriet hanterar ett försämrat säkerhetsläge i Libyen och Sahel med såväl diplomatiska som militära och ekonomiska medel. Trots stora regionala utmaningar och inrikespolitiska förändringar har Algeriet i hög grad hållit fast vid principer som formades efter landets självständighetskrig 1954–1962, såsom icke-inblandning och alliansfrihet. Kontrollen av landets gränser och kontraterrorism är två prioriterade områden. I nuläget tyder ingenting på att denna hållning kommer att ändras på kort sikt. Inrikespolitisk turbulens och ekonomiska svårigheter leder dock till att Algeriets förhållningssätt till konflikterna i närområdet är mer oförutsägbara i ett längre perspektiv.

Nyckelord: Algeriet, Libyen, Sahel, Maghreb, externa aktörer, säkerhetspolitik.

Summary

Algeria has traditionally had a stabilising role in a conflict-torn and unstable region. At a time when Algeria faces considerable political and economic challenges at home, developments, in particular in Libya and the Sahel, have resulted in increasingly complex and transnational security threats. The purposes of this report are twofold. The first is to provide an overview of key aspects of Algeria's history, politics, economy, military, and recent political developments. Second, the report aims to increase the understanding of how Algeria responds to the instability in Libya and the Sahel. It also discusses whether and how Algeria's domestic political and economic turmoil may affect the country's posture in its immediate vicinity in future.

The report finds that Algeria uses combined military, diplomatic, and economic means to deal with the deteriorated security situation in Libya and the Sahel. Despite challenging regional developments and domestic changes, Algeria has largely upheld the foreign policy principles that were formed after its war of independence in 1954–1962, such as non-interventionism and non-alignment. Border control and counterterrorism are two prioritised areas. There are currently no indications that this will change in the short term. Yet, continued political turbulence and economic difficulties at home make Algeria's responses to the regional security challenges somewhat more unpredictable in a long-term perspective.

Keywords: Algeria, Libya, Sahel, Maghreb, external actors, security policy.

Acknowledgments

A number of individuals have contributed to this report in different ways.

Firstly, we would like to express our deep gratitude to the Swedish embassy in Algiers, in particular for the generous help of Ambassador Marie-Claire Swärd Capra and Second Secretary Amanda Sporre. We are also thankful for the logistical assistance of the embassy's local staff. Moreover, we are highly grateful to all interlocutors – in Algiers and elsewhere – who have taken their time to share valuable insights with us.

For their advice and a meticulous review of an earlier version of the report, we are also grateful to a number of internal and external participants in a review seminar.

Lastly, special thanks are extended to Per Wikström, who designed the map, to Richard Langlais, for language-editing the text, and to Lena Engelmark, for formatting the report.

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Abbreviations

AFRIPOL	the African Union's Mechanism for Police Cooperation
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
ANC	African National Congress
AQIM	al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (French abbreviation: AQMI)
AU	African Union
CEMOC	Joint Operational Army Staffs Committee
FIS	The Islamic Salvation Front (French: Front Islamique du Salut)
FLN	National Liberation Front (French: Front de Libération Nationale)
GCTF	Global Counterterrorism Forum
GIA	Armed Islamic Group (French: Groupe Islamique Armé)
GNA	Government of National Accord, Libya
LADDH	Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (French: Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme)
LNA	Libyan National Army
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NARC	North Africa Regional Capability
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
REC	Regional Economic Community
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WITS	World Integrated Trade Solution

1 Introduction

Algeria is by surface area the largest country in Africa – it shares nearly 6400 km of borders with other African countries – at the same time as it has a more than 1,600 km Mediterranean coastline. Algeria’s promotion of diplomacy and its continuous national and regional efforts against violent extremism, combined with its geographic location, have contributed to its role as a stabiliser in a conflict-torn and unstable region.¹ However, at a time when Algeria faces considerable political and economic challenges at home, developments, in particular in Libya and the Sahel, have resulted in increasingly complex and transnational security threats.

The announcement that Abdelaziz Bouteflika – Algeria’s president since 1999 – would run for a fifth term triggered nationwide protests in Algeria. Throughout 2019 and in the beginning of 2020, massive gatherings of demonstrators have called for an end to the authoritarian state and the demise of the ruling elite. These demonstrations continued in spite of Bouteflika’s decision to step down in April 2019. The popular movement rejects the new government formed by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who was elected, after a historically low voter turnout, in December 2019. In addition, the country’s economy, heavily dependent on revenues from oil and gas exports, is stagnating. With an increasing trade deficit and shrinking foreign reserves, Algeria is approaching a financial crisis and is in dire need of substantial economic reforms and diversification.

Regional challenges are not declining either. On the contrary, these persist and seem to be deepening, with extensive political, security, humanitarian, and economic consequences. The Libyan civil war has intensified since the Libyan National Army’s attack on Tripoli in April 2019. The 2015 peace agreement in Mali has not stopped the fighting between various militant groups, and violent extremists groups are expanding their influence and activities in the Sahel. Climate change, population growth, migration, weak governance, and organised crime represent other regional challenges.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

Algeria has the potential to continue to be a significant contributor to a more secure and stable region and an important partner for external countries and actors in the Maghreb and the Sahel. The domestic developments in Algeria, as well as its regional politics, are thus of vital importance for its neighbourhood in Africa and Europe as well as in the international arena.

The violent character of the ongoing conflicts in Libya and the Sahel contributes to complex and multiple threats along Algeria’s vast eastern and southern borders.

¹ See, for example, International Crisis Group (2015).

By studying Algeria's approach to and handling of instability in Libya and the Sahel, this report aims to contribute a better understanding of how Algeria responds to security challenges in its immediate vicinity. While Algeria has a long-standing rivalry with Morocco, mainly due to the frozen conflict in Western Sahara, and while violent extremist organisations in Tunisia are of great concern, the security challenges emanating from Libya and the Sahel are at present more critical and pressing for Algeria as well as the region.²

The purposes of this report are twofold. The first is to provide an overview of key aspects of Algeria's history, politics, economy, military, and recent political developments. The second is to analyse Algeria's responses to the Libyan and Sahelian security challenges. The following questions structure the second part of the analysis:

- Which are the major security challenges to Algeria emanating from Libya and the Sahel?
- What are Algeria's responses, including cooperation with external actors, to these security challenges?

Addressing the first question builds on interviews with government officials, international security experts, scholars, journalists, and civil society representatives in Algeria. The second question focuses on Algeria's responses to the identified security challenges. More specifically, this approach is an analysis of which methods, such as diplomacy and border control, are being used and of Algeria's cooperation (or lack of it) with major external actors, particularly the European Union (EU), France, Russia, and the United States.

An additional purpose is to discuss whether and if so how Algeria's domestic political turmoil and economic difficulties may affect its foreign policy responses in relation to Libya and the Sahel in a short-term perspective (1–3 years).

1.2 Methods and sources

This study builds on primary as well as secondary sources. Interviews have mainly been conducted with representatives from various Western embassies in Algiers. In addition, some interviews were made with Algerian government officials, representatives of multilateral organisations, and mainly North African scholars and civil society representatives. A majority of the interviews were conducted during a field trip to Algeria in May 2019.³ Additional interviews, with Algerian think-tankers and North Africa experts, were held in other places or over the phone

² Our interviewees in Algiers in May 2019 (e.g. no. 1, 7, 10, 11, 14) indisputably considered that the security challenges emanating from Libya and the Sahel were the most pressing and of greatest concern for Algeria.

³ Due to travel restrictions, all of these interviews were conducted in the *wilayat* (province) of Algiers.

in the spring, summer, and autumn of 2019. In addition to the interviews, the report builds on information gathered in a range of written sources, including academic articles, books, reports, and news outlets. Publicly available databases, such as the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database, were also used during the research.

The material is somewhat biased, as a majority of the interviewees in Algiers were representatives of Western countries. Due to the Algerian state's lack of transparency, as well as the uncertainty of the current political situation, we were only able to conduct a couple of interviews with Algerian officials. No interviews were conducted with representatives from the Algerian military and defence sector.

Comments from interviewees were often coloured by the respondent's experiences, position, and interests. A tendency among the respondents was to perceive the security challenges emanating from the Sahel in a somewhat more comprehensive way than they did regarding those from Libya, for example by focusing on short-term and long-term challenges, including climate change and socio-economic development. In comparison, discussions on Libya tended to focus on more acute security threats, such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons.

The interviews have been coded and numbered randomly. A list of the interviews is provided in Chapter 5.1.

1.3 Delimitations of the study

While the Sahel region, geographically, stretches across the African continent, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, this report focuses on Western Sahel, particularly Mali and Niger, because of their vast borders with Algeria.

The study focuses on Algeria's bilateral relations and politics and largely excludes Algeria's role and actions in multilateral organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Regional Economic Community (REC), the North Africa Regional Capability (NARC), and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The analysis of external actors primarily focuses on Algeria's cooperation with key actors, namely France, the European Union, Russia, and the United States. The selection of external actors is far from complete. In future research, it would be of interest to include also Italy, Spain, Morocco, and Egypt, among other states, in the analysis.

The report stretches back to Algerian independence (1962), with a particular focus on the last ten years.

1.4 Outline

Chapter 2 supplies a brief overview of Algeria's history since independence, as well as of its current foreign policy, military, economy, and socioeconomic situation. The chapter also outlines recent political developments. Chapter 3 describes the security challenges originating from Libya and the Sahel and conducts an analysis of Algeria's responses to these challenges. Chapter 3 also provides an overview of how Algeria cooperates with external actors on security challenges and an analysis of how Algeria's domestic political and economic developments may influence its approach towards Libya and the Sahel. Finally, Chapter 4 summarises the main findings of the report.

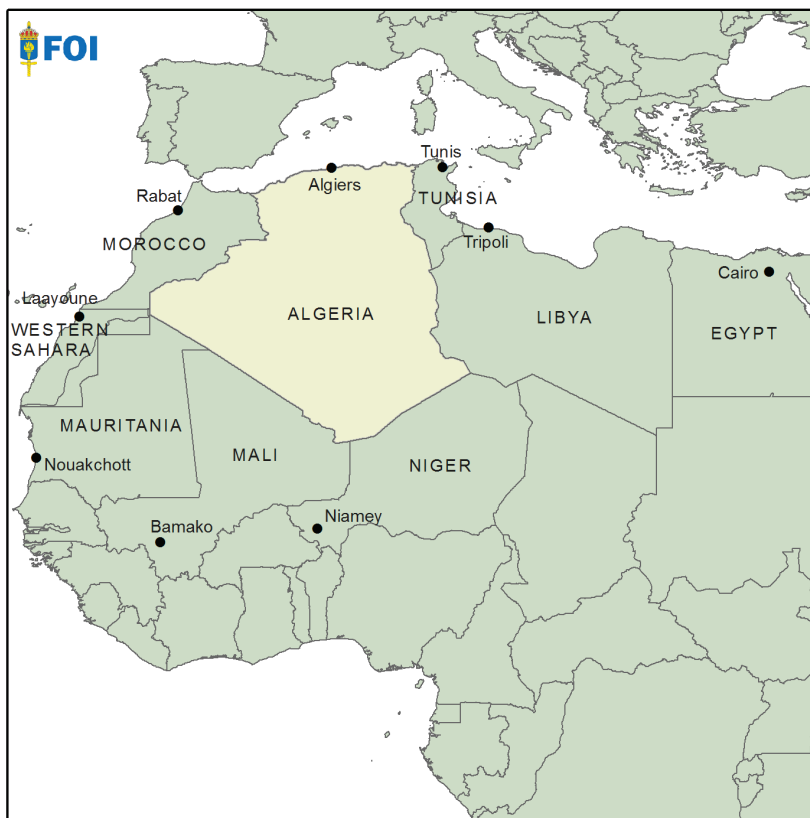


Figure 1. Map of Algeria and its neighbouring countries

Table 1. Quick facts of Algeria⁴

<i>Official name</i>	Al-Jumhūriyyah al-Jazā'iriyyah al-Dīmuqrāṭiyyah al-Sha'biyyah (Arabic) (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria)
<i>Form of government</i>	Multiparty republic with two legislative houses
<i>President</i>	Abdelmadjid Tebboune
<i>Prime Minister</i>	Abdelaziz Djerad
<i>Capital</i>	Algiers
<i>Official languages</i>	Arabic, Amazigh
<i>Official religion</i>	Islam
<i>GDP</i>	164.9 billion USD (current prices, 2018)
<i>GDP per capita</i>	3926 USD (current prices, 2018)
<i>Population</i>	43,583,000 (2019)
<i>Urban and rural population</i>	Urban 71%, rural 29% (2015)
<i>Literacy rate (15 years and above)</i>	Male 87%, female 73% (2015)

⁴ Sources: Chanderli, Sutton, Brown and Zaimche (2019); World Bank (2019b).

2 An introduction to Algeria

This chapter gives a short overview of Algeria's key historical events since its independence in 1962, its foreign policy, and military. A brief summary of Algeria's economy, socioeconomic challenges, and the recent political protests and other developments is also provided.

2.1 A turbulent history

An independent and authoritarian state is formed

On 1 November 1954, Algerian insurgents under the name of Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) launched armed revolts throughout the country in a call for a sovereign state and an end to France's colonial rule. This marked the start of the war of national liberation, which lasted eight years. After 132 years under French colonialism, Algeria gained independence on 5 July 1962. The protracted war, which reportedly cost more than one million lives,⁵ gave the FLN's military leaders an upper hand in the complex process of building an independent state. An authoritarian regime with a one-party system under the FLN was set up, placing the army at the center, with an opaque system and an initial discourse of third-worldism and socialism.⁶ Algeria's first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, was installed in a political landscape where there was no other candidate. Dissident voices, who had been calling for political pluralism, were silenced and often forced into exile – among those some veteran leaders from the FLN.⁷

The new regime was inspired by the Soviet Union and introduced a planned economy and a strong military, whose officers mostly received their training in the Soviet Union. This system evolved against the backdrop of the technical and administrative void, which originated from the exodus of approximately one million European colonisers who fled Algeria after independence. Nonetheless, Algeria did not want to be incorporated into the Soviet bloc during the Cold War and sought a third way between the superpowers (see more in Chapter 2.2).

In 1965, Ben Bella was ousted from power in a bloodless coup, led by the Minister of Defence, Colonel Houari Boumedienne.⁸ Under Boumedienne's authority, lasting until his death, in 1978, Algeria's military elite and security services consolidated their power, forming the backbone of an increasingly and widely detested *pouvoir* – a French word commonly used by Algerians when referring to the regime.

⁵ Fisk (2005), p. 639.

⁶ Khalfoune and Meynier (2014), pp. 665–683.

⁷ Among them Hocine Aït-Ahmed and Mohamed Boudiaf. See, for instance, Bouchène, Peyroulou, Tengour and Thénault (eds.) (2012).

⁸ Khalfoune and Meynier (2014), pp. 665–683.

After independence, the single-party state needed to fill the void left by the French teachers and administrators who had fled the country. Algeria's new leaders also wished to impose a national identity, which was based on Arabism and a one language policy.⁹ As a result, Boumedienne initiated a gradual Arabisation process. This was not well received by the Berbers, an indigenous ethnicity in North Africa, nor by large swaths of Algerians with a French-language education who saw the Arabisation project as a means to draw a tighter link between nationalism and Islam. With the influx of teachers from mainly Egypt, the Arabisation project in reality became an element for disunity, paving the way for the rise of the Islamists in the end of the 1980s.¹⁰

Economic crisis, civil protests, and constitutional changes

After Boumedienne's passing, in 1978, the mishandling of Algeria's centralised economy resulted in an economic crisis, particularly following the sharp decline of oil prices in 1986.¹¹ Attempts to liberalise the economy favoured the already rich elite and inequalities were high.¹² At the end of the 1980s, urban youth took to the streets in protest against unemployment and the one-party rule of the FLN. Hundreds were killed or injured after a military crackdown on a protest in 1988.¹³ One year later, a new constitution, which ended the one-party-state, received massive approval in a referendum. Neither the FLN nor socialism was mentioned in the new constitution.¹⁴ Newspapers and magazines started to mushroom. A new law allowed opposition parties to run for elections. These constitutional openings, a result of a protest movement in the late 1980s, are seen by many Algerians as their local forerunner of the Arab Spring, in 2011. The new election law excluded parties based on religion, region, or language. In spite of this, the Algerian Islamist political party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), with links to the pan-Arab Muslim Brotherhood, was permitted, and the regime failed to keep control of mosques and Friday prayers.¹⁵

Islamists win elections – only to be banned

In 1990, in the first free elections since independence, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won a resounding victory in local elections, almost double that of the FLN, the previous single party.¹⁶ This came as a heavy blow to the FLN, but the FIS vision of a more pious nation also set secular-minded Algerian democrats on the

⁹ Bassiouney (2009), p. 216.

¹⁰ Daoudi (2018).

¹¹ Entelis (2011), p. 655; Joffé (2002), p. 32.

¹² Entelis (2011), p. 655; Joffé (2002), p. 32.

¹³ "When Chadli Bendjedid's troops killed up to 500 demonstrators who were demanding democracy in Algiers in 1988, the event helped to give birth to FIS": Fisk (2005), p. 647.

¹⁴ Quandt (1998), p. 47.

¹⁵ Quandt (1998), p. 50.

¹⁶ Quandt (1998), p. 52.

alert. In the first round of the parliamentary elections in December 1991, FIS won 48 per cent of the ballots,¹⁷ far ahead of its rivals. In January 1992, the army intervened, annulled the second round of the elections, banned FIS, and forced President Chadli Bendjedid to resign. Leaders of FIS were sentenced to long terms in prison,¹⁸ whereas thousands of FIS militants and officials were brought to mass detention camps in the Sahara.¹⁹ This was a coup d'état that many Western governments supported openly or tacitly, which deepened the divide between the West and the Islamists in the greater Middle East and North Africa.²⁰

Civil war in the 1990s

Algeria rushed into a calamitous meltdown that resulted in a decade-long civil war, often called the Black Decade. Forced underground, FIS split into different groups. Simultaneously, even more violent insurgents began to appear. The so-called “Algerian Afghans”, who had fought the Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan, returned to their home country with a Salafi-jihadist ideology, spreading fear and terror in the country.²¹ Operating like a forerunner of al-Qaida in the Maghreb, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) targeted journalists, intellectuals, women, and regime figures, as well as other Islamists who wished to defect or were willing to negotiate with the government. The GIA committed scores of massacres in the years 1992–1998. A shared antipathy in Algiers and Moscow against these “Afghan” warriors reinforced the ties between the two capitals.²² Until this day, the extent to which Algerian security forces were themselves infiltrating the GIA, or involved in other war crimes during the civil war, is disputed and cannot be disclosed due to amnesty laws.²³ This affected foreign relations with Western capitals for many years.

Bouteflika ends the civil war and continues an authoritarian rule

The end of the civil war – which claimed approximately 150,000 lives²⁴ – did not occur in one specific, final moment. However, an amnesty law, issued in 1999 by the newly elected President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, an FLN veteran, carried huge importance by offering insurgents the possibility to repent. Another amnesty law followed this in 2005, as a result of a national referendum on reconciliation. Since then, Algeria has shown ample examples of how to reintegrate repentant Islamist fighters into the society – in many cases by giving them the chance to set up small businesses, such as grocery shops.²⁵ Nowadays, Algerian officials estimate that

¹⁷ The voting turnout in the December 1991 election was 59 per cent. Since then, voter participation has been declining, according to Parks (2016).

¹⁸ See, for instance: Quandt (1998); McDougall (2017); and Roberts (2003).

¹⁹ Roberts (2003), p. 369.

²⁰ Frampton (2018), p. 380–381.

²¹ MacDonald (2019).

²² Kepel (2001), p. 256.

²³ See for example Hammargren (2010).

²⁴ Al Jazeera (2005).

²⁵ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 6).

the country has successfully reintegrated around 80 per cent of the former insurgents.²⁶ This can however not be independently verified and it is debatable whether it remains valid today.

The authoritarian system nevertheless continued, limiting political and civil rights, under Bouteflika.²⁷ While Algeria has ratified most international conventions on human rights, the implementation of these is often failing.²⁸ Elections have been held regularly, but electoral fraud has been widespread and there has been a lack of transparency both in relation to the election processes and the work of the government, including general decision-making processes.²⁹

During Bouteflika's regime, and today, media outlets must operate with a government authorisation. In the Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders, Algeria ranks low (141 in a list of 180 countries).³⁰ In 2008, the Algerian parliament approved amendments to the constitution from 1996, including removal of the limit of two presidential terms. This allowed Bouteflika to be re-elected, in 2009, for a third term. In 2014, Bouteflika ran – and was elected – for a fourth term in office, despite having suffered a stroke in 2013, which has resulted in very few public appearances since. The limit of two terms was later re-introduced in the amended constitution in 2016.

2.2 Foreign policy: firm principles and diversifying relations

Algeria's experiences of colonialism and the war of independence resulted in principles of sovereignty, support for decolonisation, non-interference, and people's rights to self-determination. These principles are part of Algeria's constitution and have guided the country's external affairs since independence.³¹ Those experiences also triggered an activist foreign policy, which was particularly visible during the 1970s and enabled by the country's revenues from the hydrocarbon sector.³² Boumedienne used the growing national wealth to enhance Algeria's international standing. In addition to promoting pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism, Boumedienne made Algeria a leading nation within the Non-Aligned Movement, a forum assembling states that did not wish to align with any power

²⁶ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13).

²⁷ See, for instance, Human Rights Watch (2019c).

²⁸ Interview, in May 2019 (no. 16).

²⁹ Freedom House (2019).

³⁰ Reporters without Borders (2019). Nevertheless, non-official Algerian media outlets, such as *El Watan*, *Quotidien d'Oran* and *Liberté Algérie* often show a surprising degree of debate and criticism against "le pouvoir".

³¹ See, for example, Thieux (2018), p. 428.

³² Thieux (2018), p. 428.

bloc during the Cold War.³³ Algeria's anti-colonial and leftist third-world ideology inspired several national liberation movements during the 1960s and 1970s, among them the African National Congress (ANC), in South Africa, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and, from 1975, the Polisario Front of Western Sahara. Overall, Algeria claims it has supported 18 liberation movements since independence.³⁴ The activist foreign policy was also manifested during the Arab-Israeli October War, in 1973. Algeria then stood in the forefront among the OPEC countries who called for a ban of oil shipments to Western countries that were perceived as supporters of Israel. During that war, Algeria also took part in the defence of Egypt, in particular Cairo, against Israel.³⁵

The economic crisis in the late 1980s and the civil war in the 1990s forced the Algerian government to dampen its activist foreign policy and focus more on national issues. Algiers' reappearance on the global scene from the beginning of the 2000s came as a result of its gradual return to domestic peace and political and economic stability, and global events such as in particular the terror attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001.

Under Bouteflika, Algeria favoured a foreign policy strategy that increasingly centred on serving national interests. In line with this, Algiers sought to broaden its foreign relations and partnerships. Apart from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) *Mediterranean Dialogue*, in 2000, Algeria signed an Association Agreement with the EU two years later, and is part of the Western Mediterranean dialogue (the so-called 5+5 dialogue). The United States' Global War on Terror, initiated after the al-Qaida attacks on 11 September 2001, gave Bouteflika's presidency a chance to regain a strategic position globally and not least in its relations with the West.³⁶ Algeria collaborates with a number of countries on counterterrorism issues, including in the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), since 2011 (see more in Chapter 3.2.2).

Rising oil prices gave Bouteflika the possibility to reactivate Algeria's African policy and reclaim some diplomatic ground on the continent.³⁷ The country has for example been involved in several mediation processes, such as the one between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in 2000.³⁸ Apart from strengthened ties with the West and a more active role on the African continent, Algeria has growing relations with China. Since 2015, China has replaced France as the biggest investor in Algeria.³⁹

³³ The Non-Aligned Movement was officially established in 1961, in the context of the Cold War, and now has 120 members and 27 observer countries and organisations.

³⁴ Thieux (2017), p. 123.

³⁵ Belkaid (2017).

³⁶ Berkouk (2009); Thieux (2017), p. 127.

³⁷ Thieux (2017), p. 127.

³⁸ Chikhaoui (2017), pp. 236-237.

³⁹ See France Diplomatie, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2019); Société Générale Import Export Solutions (2019); Calabrese (2017).

Moreover, Algeria has developed relations with individual European countries, including Germany, Spain, Italy, and Portugal.

In addition to new relations, Algeria has maintained ties with traditional partners, not least Russia. Relations with Russia date back to the war of independence, when the Soviet Union provided financial, political, and military support to the Algerian revolutionaries, and to the following decades, when the Soviets continued to provide Algiers with military equipment through loans.⁴⁰ Following a dormant and somewhat tense relation in the 1990s, Algerian-Russian cooperation was resurrected in the 2000s. During a visit to Moscow in 2001, President Bouteflika signed an agreement between the two Ministries of Defence and a declaration of strategic partnership with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, making Algeria the first Arab and African country to sign such a treaty with Russia.⁴¹ In 2006, a Russian presidential visit to the Middle East and North Africa, including Algeria, resulted in Russia's writing off Algeria's debt of 4.7 billion USD, in return for new major arms deals.⁴² Since then, Algeria has been one of the largest export markets for Russia's weapons (see Chapter 2.3).⁴³

As for France, French-Algerian relations have remained tense and complex since the French colonisation and the war of independence. For decades after Algeria's liberation, consecutive French presidents refrained from mentioning the widespread use of torture and war crimes in colonial Algeria. However, Emmanuel Macron, the first French president born after 1962, has described the colonisation of Algeria as "a crime against humanity" and acknowledged France's use of torture in the Algerian war.⁴⁴ While Macron reportedly aims to improve relations with Algeria, French actions in Libya and the Sahel contribute to sustained tensions between the countries, as explained further in Chapter 3.3.

Regional – multilateral as well as bilateral – cooperation remains a core pillar of Algeria's foreign policy. For instance, Algiers was a founding member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), in 1963, and supported the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), in 1989.⁴⁵ However, continuous disagreements between Algeria and Morocco, largely caused by their different stands on the Western Sahara conflict, constitute an impediment for economic as well as political cooperation between Algeria and Morocco and in the AMU, including on Libyan and Sahelian security challenges.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Katz (2007).

⁴¹ Barth (2019), p. 3; Mokhefi (2015), p. 62.

⁴² Lund (2019), pp. 13-14. Syria's, Iraq's, and Libya's debts to Russia were also written off.

⁴³ Algeria is Russia's third-biggest arms client, behind India and China. See Wezeman et al. (2019), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Serhan (2018).

⁴⁵ For an overview of Algeria's relation with the OAU and AU, see, for example, Zoubir (2015).

⁴⁶ In 1975, after Spain's withdrawal from its African colony, Morocco annexed large parts of Western Sahara. Algeria supports the liberation movement Polisario Front of Western Sahara and the Sahrawi people's right of self-determination. The land border between Algeria and Morocco has remained closed

2.3 A strong military and substantial arms imports

The military, carrying a legacy from the war of independence, the civil war, and the continued war on domestic and regional terrorism, remains the backbone of the republic. The Algerian military is strong and plays a considerable role in politics. Since independence, the chief of staff of the army has been pre-empting political decision-making.⁴⁷ According to the *Military Balance*, the Algerian armed forces are “among the most capable and best equipped in North Africa” and primarily focus on “territorial integrity, internal security and regional stability”.⁴⁸ The armed forces, which recruits its personnel through conscription, trains regularly and has extensive experience of counter-insurgency operations.⁴⁹ Diplomats and security experts in Algeria describe the military, similarly to the Algerian state in general, as an opaque institution into which it is difficult to obtain any insight.⁵⁰

Algiers spends a significant amount of its budget on its armed forces. With military spending in 2018 of 9.6 billion USD, which accounted for 5.3 per cent of its GDP, Algeria is one of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with the highest military expenditure. It is also the country in North Africa and on the African continent that spends most on its military, both in absolute numbers and as a share of GDP.⁵¹ Algeria’s military expenditure increased by 85 per cent between 2009 and 2018. However, that figure has stagnated, or even decreased in real terms, in the past few years.⁵²

While Algeria maintains its military equipment domestically and is developing a national defence industry (resulting in projects with foreign companies, including a German and Italian), the country depends on arms imports.⁵³ Algeria is the fifth largest arms importer globally and accounted for 4.4 per cent of global arms imports between 2014 and 2018.⁵⁴ As mentioned, Russia is by far the country from which Algeria purchases most arms: Russian military equipment accounted for 66 per cent of all Algerian arms procurement in the 2014–2018 period, followed by 13 per cent from China and 10 per cent from Germany.⁵⁵ Algeria has substantial

since 1994. For more information on the history and current state of Western Sahara, see, for example, Roxvall and Persson (2018).

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Hachemaoui (2011).

⁴⁸ International Institute for Strategic Studies (2020), p. 340.

⁴⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (2018), p. 325.

⁵⁰ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 2, 3, 11, 12 and 14).

⁵¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (2020), p. 3335; Tian et al. (2019), p. 2.

⁵² Tian et al. (2019), p. 2 and 4.

⁵³ International Institute for Strategic Studies (2020), p. 340.

⁵⁴ Wezeman et al. (2019), p. 6.

⁵⁵ Wezeman et al. (2019), p. 6.

contracts for acquisitions of fighter jets, air defence systems, helicopters, submarines, and other high-technology weapon systems from Russia.⁵⁶ Most recently, in September 2019, Algeria reportedly signed two contracts for acquisition of new fighter jets.⁵⁷ Furthermore, an agreement allowing Algeria to use Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System was signed in 2018, making Algeria one of few foreign countries using the Russian system.⁵⁸

As discussed further in Chapter 3.4, however, Algeria is diversifying its arms imports with increasing shares of procurement from other suppliers than Russia. In the period 2009–2013, Russian arms accounted for 91 per cent of Algerian arms imports, compared to 66 per cent 2014–2018.⁵⁹ In contrast to various other arms-importing countries that for political reasons do not buy Chinese arms, Algeria has increased its procurement from China. Between 2014 and 2018, Algeria accounted for 11 per cent – and thereby contributed to the rapid increase – of China's arms exports.⁶⁰

2.4 An economy dependent on oil and gas

Algeria's highly centralised and state-controlled economy is heavily dependent on oil and natural gas. The hydrocarbon sector contributes to around one-third of Algeria's GDP and makes up almost 95 per cent of the country's export earnings.⁶¹ As was the case in other OPEC economies, the falling oil prices in 2014 exposed Algeria's vulnerability and long-standing need for economic diversification. The necessity of economic reforms is amplified by the fact that oil and gas production have decreased, and a steadily increasing domestic energy consumption reduces the amount of oil and gas available for export.⁶² To develop its energy production, foreign expertise and technology is needed. However, unfavourable investment conditions have not helped to attract firms from abroad. The Algerian state-owned company Sonatrach has a mandatory 51 per cent stake in all foreign projects. Since 2009, the so-called 51/49 rule applies to foreign investment in all sectors. In the World Bank Group's report, *Doing Business 2019*, Algeria only ranks 157 out of 190 countries, indicating that the country's regulatory environment is rather unfavourable to starting and operating a local firm.⁶³

A large part of the budget (more than 20 per cent) is spent on public subsidies.⁶⁴ The Bouteflika regime used subsidies as a rather successful, yet economically

⁵⁶ Lund (2019), p. 36; Lystseva (2018).

⁵⁷ Menadefense (2019).

⁵⁸ McGregor (2018).

⁵⁹ Wezeman et al. (2014), p. 4; Wezeman et al. (2019), p. 6.

⁶⁰ Wezeman et al. (2019), p. 2 and 5.

⁶¹ Miller et al. (2018), p. 76.

⁶² CEIC (2019).

⁶³ World Bank Group (2019), p. 5.

⁶⁴ Al Jazeera (2019b).

unsustainable, tool to stifle political unrest and anti-regime protests. Several analysts and academics believe that this partly explains why Algeria only had limited protests during the so-called Arab Spring, in 2011.⁶⁵

There is awareness of the need for economic reforms, but the challenge lies in their implementation. Since Bouteflika's presidency, the Algerian economy has been divided between oligarchs closely linked to the ruling party, the FLN. Since the gas and oil earnings have largely benefitted a small minority, the political will to diversify the economy and undertake the required major reforms has been lacking. Diversifying the economy means diversifying power, which the Bouteflika regime desperately tried to limit.⁶⁶

Poor management of the income from the hydrocarbon sector, as well as of the state economy in general, has resulted in an approaching economic crisis. Algeria has tried to manage the reduction of export earnings (from 73 billion USD in 2011 to 35 billion USD in 2017)⁶⁷ in the past years with quantitative easing and protectionist measures, including import restrictions, as well as budget cuts.⁶⁸

The combination of an unsustainable budget with decreasing export earnings has resulted in a rapid decrease in the country's foreign reserves. According to figures from the Algerian Ministry of Finance, the reserves dropped from 193 billion USD in 2013 to 72.6 billion USD at the end of April 2019.⁶⁹ According to this prognosis, the country has another three years to manoeuvre the shrinking reserves, but some foreign experts are more pessimistic and believe the reserves may be empty in 2021, or as soon as the autumn of 2020.⁷⁰ Algeria has almost no external debt (1.06 per cent of GDP in June 2018), and is reluctant to take loans. Borrowing is furthermore not an option as long as the country does not have a credit rating.⁷¹

2.5 Considerable socioeconomic challenges

Statistics from the World Bank and the UN demonstrate that the level of human development has risen in Algeria during the last decades,⁷² but high unemployment rates as well as socioeconomic inequalities with regard to age, gender, marginalised groups, and geographical areas constitute significant challenges.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Achy (2011); Barkaoui (2012); Volpi (2013), p. 110.

⁶⁶ Al Jazeera (2019b).

⁶⁷ Data retrieved from World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) on 22 July 2019. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) Trade Statistics estimates that there will be an increase in Algeria's exports in 2018.

⁶⁸ Algérie Presse Service (2019a).

⁶⁹ Algérie Presse Service (2019b).

⁷⁰ Interviews, in Algiers, 2019 (no. 4 and 11).

⁷¹ International Crisis Group (2018), p. 4, and International Monetary Fund (2017), p. 13.

⁷² See, for example, United Nations Development Programme (2018), p. 27.

Whereas the unemployment rate of the total population is 11.7 per cent, it is higher among educated individuals, women, and youth.⁷³ With its 42 million people, Algeria is the fourth most populous country in the MENA region, and it is estimated that it will have around 61 million people in 2050.⁷⁴ Over half of the population is less than 30 years old. Accommodating these increasingly educated individuals on the labour market is one of Algeria's most pressing challenges.

Furthermore, although the country has almost eradicated extreme poverty, the World Bank estimates that around 10 per cent of the Algerian population live in vulnerable conditions and face a risk of falling back into poverty if their economic situation worsens.⁷⁵ The socioeconomic disparities are substantial between different regions in Algeria.⁷⁶ For instance, the poverty rate (based on the poverty line of 3.6 USD per day) is double among individuals living in the southern areas of the country and three times as high among those living on the Steppe, i.e. the area between the desert in the south and the green areas in the north.⁷⁷ Furthermore, school dropouts are higher in rural areas.⁷⁸ The World Health Organisation additionally reports that maternal mortality rates are higher in rural areas.⁷⁹

Algeria also has a long way to go when it comes to for example gender equality. The World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2018* ranks Algeria 128 out of 149 countries – below the global average.⁸⁰ Whereas gender equality is high in the areas of education and health, according to the report, high inequalities remain between men and women, particularly in regard to political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity (as in many other countries).⁸¹ In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health expressed concern about Algeria with regard to, for example, the tolerance of violence against women and children, the high rates of maternal and neo-natal mortality, and persistent barriers to women's access to health services.⁸²

The indigenous people, the Berbers (Amazigh), are marginalised. Estimated as numbering around 12 million in Algeria, the Berbers account for one-third of the country's population.⁸³ A Berber movement has long demanded increased rights, and some political parties are working for regional autonomy for the Kabyle

⁷³ World Bank (2018).

⁷⁴ Data retrieved from UN DESA World Population Prospects 2019 on 22 July 2019.

⁷⁵ World Bank (2016).

⁷⁶ World Bank (2019a).

⁷⁷ World Bank (2019a).

⁷⁸ UNICEF (2019).

⁷⁹ World Health Organisation (2016), p. 18.

⁸⁰ World Economic Forum (2018), p. 11.

⁸¹ World Economic Forum (2018), p. 3.

⁸² Pūras (2016).

⁸³ Lounes (2019), p. 395.

region, which is home to about 50 per cent of the Berber population in Algeria.⁸⁴ In 2016, the language of the Berbers (Tamazight) was recognised as an official language in Algeria, alongside Arabic. The Berber New Year (Yennayer) became a public holiday from 2018. Nonetheless, the Berber people are still marginalised and their cultural and political gatherings and activities are often banned or suppressed by the Algerian police. In the demonstrations of the popular movement, Berber flags have been raised, which has led to arrests.⁸⁵ The Tuaregs – who are part of the Berbers – particularly those living in the south, also suffer from marginalisation. The closure of the borders in the south stops Tuareg people from having social as well as economic ties with the Tuareg communities in northern Mali and southern Libya.⁸⁶

2.6 Recent political developments

The socioeconomic situation, combined with corruption, has since 2011 resulted in increased dissatisfaction and anti-government sentiment. While protests took place in Algeria in 2011, during the so-called Arab Spring, they did not result in upheaval, as was the case in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.⁸⁷ However, the announcement in February 2019 that an ailing Bouteflika wanted to run for a fifth term in office triggered giant peaceful protests: after the Islamic Friday prayer since Friday, 22 February 2019, mass gatherings, shouting slogans directed against *le pouvoir*, have been occurring in every region of Algeria.

The Algerian army has not been involved in crowd control during the demonstrations. However, the regime has tried to counter the movement (*hirak*) by arresting local journalists as well as activists, particularly those who have raised the Berber flag.⁸⁸ The issue of national identity, with possible regional reverberations, is still a case for Berber activists.

At the end of March 2019, the army's chief of staff, Gaïd Salah, called for Bouteflika to be declared unfit for office. However, Bouteflika's forced resignation a few days later did not pacify the so-called "Revolution of Smiles". Millions of people of different ages and genders, as well as from various societal sectors throughout Algeria, continued to call for the demise of the entire ruling elite.

These developments set Algeria on a new course. An interim president, Abdelkader Bensalah, was appointed in April 2019, while generals were ruling the

⁸⁴ Lounes (2019), p. 395–398. For an historical overview of the Kabyle movement and conflict, see, for example, Brandell (2005).

⁸⁵ See, for example, Benfodil (2019).

⁸⁶ Lounes (2019), p. 399–400.

⁸⁷ For details on the Algerian protests in 2011 and the Algerian government's responses to them, see, for example, Eriksson (2014a); Eriksson (2014b).

⁸⁸ See, for example, Djouadi (2019); France24 (2019); Human Rights Watch (2019a).

country behind the scenes.⁸⁹ Following Bouteflika's resignation, a number of high-profile individuals, many of whom belonged to the former president's entourage, were arrested and charged. Among those detained were Bouteflika's younger brother, Saïd Bouteflika, former heads of the military intelligence, former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, and several oligarchs. This marked the first time in Algeria's history that former heads of government faced such accusations.⁹⁰ Several of the arrested, including Saïd Bouteflika, were sentenced to 15 year jail terms for undermining the army and plotting against the state.⁹¹

Protests continued throughout the year and the postponed presidential election, originally to be held in April but re-scheduled for July, was cancelled, due to a lack of candidates. The election was eventually held on 12 December 2019, but was rejected by the popular movement and boycotted by several political parties. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a former prime minister, was declared as the new president following what was, for an Algerian pluralist presidential election, a record-breaking low voter turnout (39.9 per cent of eligible voters participated in the election, according to official figures).⁹²

The popular movement considers the new president and the newly appointed government as illegitimate. The protests continued in the beginning of 2020, voicing demands for the dismantling of the old political system, a genuine political transition, and civilian rule.⁹³ It is yet uncertain whether and how the widespread popular grievances, in combination with the unexpected death of the army's powerful chief of staff, Gaïd Salah, in December 2019, will affect Algeria's domestic as well as foreign policy. In addition, starting in March 2020, Algeria faces a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Due to the pandemic, the protests in the end of March and in April 2020 were cancelled, for the first time since the beginning of the Friday protests in February 2019. It is however yet uncertain how the coronavirus will affect the future of the protest movement.

Memories of Algeria's Black Decade are a mitigating factor against the re-emergence of internal violence.⁹⁴ In May 2019, our interlocutors saw little risk that Algeria would become an authoritarian regime as Egypt did after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's coup d'état in July 2013. However, Algeria's government may experience increased difficulty in managing the combined political turmoil and economic challenges, now with the added challenge of also handling the coronavirus outbreak.

⁸⁹ Various interviews in Algiers, May 2019.

⁹⁰ Zerrouky (2019).

⁹¹ Al Jazeera (2019a).

⁹² Le Monde (2019).

⁹³ See, for example, Zoubir (2020).

⁹⁴ Various interviews (e.g. no 20).

Many political and security experts point to the economy as the major hurdle and main determinant for the country's future.⁹⁵ As mentioned above, major economic reforms, including economic diversification, are a requirement, but will not be easy to implement. For example, aiming to increase foreign investment in the energy sector, in October 2019 the interim government passed new hydrocarbon legislation, which was met by protests.⁹⁶

2.7 Summary

With 132 years of colonialism under France, a long war of independence that ended in 1962, and a decade-long civil war in the 1990s, Algeria has a dramatic history. This historic legacy is visible in many parts of Algeria's current politics, including its foreign policy, which maintains principles of non-interference, people's rights to self-determination, and non-alliance, despite a changing regional context. Its historic experiences also triggered an activist foreign policy that lasted until the economic crisis and civil war. Following a period with domestic issues in focus, Bouteflika undertook a pragmatic foreign policy. This involved a diversification and broadening of Algeria's foreign relations, including with the West and China, while also maintaining close ties with traditional partners such as Russia. Relations with France remain tense and complex.

Partly because of its firm foreign policy principles and the increasing regional instability, Algeria has invested in its military. Substantial arms imports from mainly Russia and to an increasing extent other suppliers, such as China and Germany, have made the Algerian military one of the best equipped and most capable in North Africa. While the military primarily focuses on national and regional security and stability, it has also played a significant political role. Since the 1960s, it constitutes the backbone of the Algerian regime.

Political and civil rights remained limited under Bouteflika's presidency, while the wealth from the hydrocarbon sector benefitted a small elite. Socioeconomic and demographic challenges persist, including high levels of unemployment, vulnerable economic conditions, gender inequality, and discrimination against the Berber people and culture. These conditions and corruption among the elite have contributed to increased anti-government sentiments in the last decade. Bouteflika's decision to run for a fifth term triggered massive peaceful protests, which continued throughout 2019, after his resignation. In the postponed election in December 2019, Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected president. The popular movement continued its protests during the beginning of 2020, while many foreign observers and Algerian experts point to the economy as the biggest challenge ahead. An increasing trade deficit and shrinking foreign reserves have resulted in growing financial challenges. The economy remains heavily dependent on oil and natural gas and is in need of diversification and other reforms.

⁹⁵ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 4, 6, 11 and 12). See also for example El-Tablawy (2019).

⁹⁶ Jeune Afrique (2019).

3 Security challenges and responses

This chapter is an overview of the security challenges that are of main concern for Algeria, namely, those emanating from Libya (3.1) and the Sahel (3.2), and Algiers' responses to them. The chapter also looks at how Algeria either cooperates with external actors on those challenges, or at times refrains from doing so (3.3), and how Algeria's domestic political and economic developments may affect the future of its responses (3.4).

3.1 Libya

3.1.1 The intensifying anxiety in the east

Since the Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi was overthrown during a NATO-led intervention in 2011, Algeria's eastern neighbour has constituted a major security challenge for Algeria as well as the region.

The conflict is complex and involves various Libyan as well as external actors. Currently, the main domestic parties to the conflict are the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA), in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, and the Libyan National Army (LNA),⁹⁷ led by Khalifa Haftar.⁹⁸

The Libyan civil war in 2011 resulted in a sharp and uncontrolled increase in weapons and explosives, not only in Libya, but also in the entire region, as well as in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, largely due to the looting of the Qaddafi regime's weapons depots.⁹⁹ As an Algerian government official put it, "Libya has become the hypermarket for weaponry".¹⁰⁰ The Algerian army and security forces have on several occasions discovered large quantities of arms on Algerian territory, close to the Libyan and Saharan borders.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the arms used in some of the terrorist attacks in Algeria have reportedly come from Libya, according to media sources.¹⁰²

Apart from regional arms proliferation, Algeria has concerns about what a former Algerian minister of foreign affairs called a "safe haven for jihadist groups" in Libya.¹⁰³ Terrorist groups with links to Libya carried out attacks against oil and

⁹⁷ LNA is also known as the Haftar Armed Forces (HAF).

⁹⁸ For more information on the conflict in Libya, see, for example, Eriksson and Bohman (2018); Hallqvist and Mickelsson (2019).

⁹⁹ Lounnas (2018), p. 15; Iratni (2017), p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 8).

¹⁰¹ BBC News Afrique (2019); Alilat (2016a).

¹⁰² E.g. Algeria Today (2018).

¹⁰³ Lounnas (2018), p. 3.

natural gas facilities in Algeria in 2012 and 2013¹⁰⁴ and Algeria wants to prevent jihadists from using Libya as a base for conducting further attacks in the region, including Algeria.¹⁰⁵ The worry about Islamists' use of Libya as a regional hub is amplified due to the fear of Islamic State (IS/Daesh) fighters returning to Libya from Iraq and Syria.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the Algerian government is concerned about the rising influence in Libya of the ultraconservative Madkhali Salafists, followers of a Saudi sheikh.¹⁰⁷ Other security concerns originating from the situation in Libya regard illegal cross-border transactions, such as human trafficking.¹⁰⁸

The offensive by Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army against Tripoli, which started in April 2019, has resulted in further instability and uncertainty, as well as a growing security vacuum in parts of Libya, which only intensifies Algeria's concern about its eastern border.¹⁰⁹ In January 2020, the Algerian leader, President Tebboune, stated that, "the security of Libya is the extension of our [Algeria's] own security".¹¹⁰

Regional observers underline that the political, economic, and military involvement in Libya by foreign actors, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), France, Russia, Turkey, and Qatar, has aggravated the Libyan crisis, to the detriment of Algeria's national security.¹¹¹ Several actors have systematically violated the UN-backed arms embargo on Libya. The foreign meddling includes an influx of mercenaries. Some of these are in support of the Tripoli-based government, such as Turkish-backed, mainly of Syrian origin, mercenaries.¹¹² Others back Haftar, including reportedly Russian fighters contracted from the Wagner Group.¹¹³ The intensified civil war, arms proliferation, terrorism, illegal cross-border transactions, and foreign involvement are far from being the only challenges in Libya: during the interviews conducted in Algiers, in May 2019, they were identified as the main security concerns for Algeria.

3.1.2 Algeria's responses

Unsurprisingly, Algeria has a strong desire to stabilise the situation in Libya for its own as well as the region's interests and security. In addition to a diplomatic and military strategy, Algeria emphasises the significance of a multidimensional

¹⁰⁴ Magnan (2018); Iratni (2017), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Lounnas (2018), p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Lounnas (2018), p. 3; interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 10).

¹⁰⁷ See for example Harchaoui (2018), p. 18; International Crisis Group (2019).

¹⁰⁸ Lounnas (2018), p. 3; interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 11).

¹⁰⁹ Besides, the fact that Haftar's offensive coincided with the political protests in Algeria has created speculation on whether Haftar took advantage of the Algerian turmoil and the arguably subsequent enlarged acting space in Libya.

¹¹⁰ Algérie Presse Service (2020). Translated from French by the authors.

¹¹¹ Interviews, in August 2019.

¹¹² See, for example, McKernan and Akoush (2020).

¹¹³ See, for example, Dahlvist (2018); Michael (2020).

approach, including socioeconomic development, to handle security challenges. According to President Tebboune, Algeria provides Libya with “food and medicines”.¹¹⁴ Yet we have not found any statistics or other information about the amount or type of aid provided by Algeria to Libya.

Border control

Militarily, Algeria is trying to contain the conflict on the Libyan side of the border and prevent spillovers to Algerian territory. This is primarily achieved through major, well-organised, and costly control of the long border. The length of the borders and the difficult terrain, in combination with the lack of official interlocutors on the Libyan side of the frontier, make the task challenging and complex.¹¹⁵ While Algeria’s border security cooperation with Tunisia is well-functioning, this is not the case with Libya, since Algeria does not deal with militias, at least not formally.¹¹⁶ However, according to a senior Western security expert, Algeria has extremely strong border capabilities – and is perhaps the country on the African continent with the best border risk assessment and capability for handling difficult borders.¹¹⁷ Along the border, apart from the patrolling soldiers it has deployed there, Algeria maintains small military outposts and uses aircraft as well as satellites and surveillance drones for intelligence collection and border control.¹¹⁸ Partly due to the Libyan crisis, Algeria has almost doubled its military expenditure.¹¹⁹ 70 per cent of the Algerian army is deployed to control the territory, mostly the borders, including the one to Libya.¹²⁰ According to media sources, more than 50,000 soldiers are deployed to the Algerian-Libyan frontier.¹²¹ The military operates on the Algerian side of the border, and overall, Algiers has maintained its policy of non-intervention.¹²² Nonetheless, its military reportedly crosses the border into Libya occasionally to carry out limited ad-hoc operations.¹²³

Diplomatic actions

In line with its commitment to resolve conflicts peacefully and with its firm non-interventionist foreign policy, Algeria has consistently expressed support for a diplomatic process and political solution to the Libyan conflict. Algeria favours a unified Libya and is an ardent advocate of an inclusive national peace process.

¹¹⁴ Portes and Matarese (2020).

¹¹⁵ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 11 and 13).

¹¹⁶ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 11).

¹¹⁷ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 10).

¹¹⁸ Alilat (2016b); Lounnas (2018), p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Harchaoui (2018), p. 16.

¹²⁰ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 3).

¹²¹ Meddi (2020).

¹²² Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 12).

¹²³ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 11); Algeria Today (2018); Harchaoui (2018); Lounnas (2018), p. 16.

Algerian official representatives as well as foreign diplomats in Algeria confirm that Algiers has good contacts with all (non-jihadist) actors in the conflict, including Haftar.¹²⁴ Algiers supports the UN-led political process in Libya and has been involved in different mediation attempts between Libyan conflict actors and in regional dialogues, for instance with Tunisia and Egypt.¹²⁵

While Algeria's domestic political crisis limited its possibilities for influencing the developments in Libya throughout 2019,¹²⁶ President Tebboune has made the Libyan dossier a priority. Since his election in December 2019, Tebboune has intensified Algerian diplomatic efforts towards Libya. Within the first month of his presidency, in light of the escalation of the Libyan conflict and Turkey's decision to support the Tripoli-based government with troops, Tebboune hosted the Tripoli-based government's prime minister, Fayez al-Sarraj, as well as Turkey's foreign minister. On the occasion of these meetings, the Algerian president called for a cease-fire and a resumption of the political dialogue, denounced all acts of violence, and stated that he considers Tripoli a red line that no conflict actor should cross.¹²⁷

At the International Conference on Libya, held in Berlin in January 2020, Tebboune offered to host political dialogue between the Libyan warring parties in Algeria, making it clear that Algiers wishes to be an important part of the peace process.¹²⁸ This was confirmed in an interview the French newspaper *Le Figaro* held with Tebboune, in which the president stated that, "Algeria is capable of rapidly bringing peace to Libya, because Algeria is a sincere and credible mediator, accepted by all Libyan groups".¹²⁹ At the end of January 2020, a meeting on Libya was held with the foreign ministers of the countries neighbouring Libya, in Algiers.

Rejection of all foreign involvement

In 2011, Algeria opposed the NATO-led intervention in Libya, and has continuously rejected all foreign military interventions and other forms of involvement in Libya.¹³⁰ This holds for involvement and support for both sides in the Libyan conflict. While this is partly explained by Algeria's above-mentioned principle of non-intervention, the policy is also grounded in the fact that Algeria fears the results of such intervention (with the consequences of the 2011 intervention fresh in mind). Algiers also argues that all involved actors avoid an exclusive focus on security in Libya and emphasises the need for a more multifaceted approach that includes socioeconomic development.¹³¹ In addition, Algeria seeks to maintain the regional balance of power in North Africa by

¹²⁴ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (no 6, 8 and 13); Harchaoui (2018), p. 16; Iratni (2017), p. 23.

¹²⁵ Algérie Presse Service (2020); Taylor (2018).

¹²⁶ See, for example, Speakman Cordall (2020).

¹²⁷ Cherfaoui (2020a); Cherfaoui (2020b); Meddi (2020).

¹²⁸ Algérie Presse Service (2020).

¹²⁹ Portes and Matarese (2020). Quote translated from French by the authors.

¹³⁰ Harchaoui (2018), p. 9–10; Zoubir and Dris-Ait-Hamadouche (2013), p. 72–73; Lounnas (2018), p. 15.

¹³¹ Iratni (2017), p. 20.

avoiding the strong influence in Libya of either Egypt, in particular, or the UAE – which has a base in the eastern part of the country.¹³² Simultaneously, Turkey’s heightened military profile in Libya, including its military intervention on the Tripoli-based GNA’s side, increases the risk of a prolonged regional proxy war in Libya.

3.2 The Sahel

3.2.1 Numerous and complex challenges

Because of the numerous and complex challenges in the region, Sahel¹³³ – with which Algeria shares a 2,800 kilometre-long border – has been called Algeria’s “ring of fire”¹³⁴ and “corridor of all dangers”.¹³⁵

Just as in the case of Libya, a major – and perhaps the greatest – security threat from Algeria’s southern borders is the risk of spillover from violent extremist organisations operating in the Sahel. The overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi’s regime in Libya in 2011 and the subsequent Libyan conflict have contributed greatly to the increasing scope and reach of terrorism in Sahel, primarily through the high regional proliferation of arms.¹³⁶ The increase of arms and the return of Tuareg fighters from Libya contributed to the timing and scale of the separatist rebellion in northern Mali in 2012 and the ensuing Islamist insurgency in Mali.¹³⁷

The number of terrorist attacks in the Sahel is constantly increasing: the attacks carried out by violent extremist organisations rose from 90 in 2016 to 465 in 2018.¹³⁸ While a majority of these attacks took place in Mali, Islamist groups have increased in numbers and geographically expanded their activity in the region, including to Niger, over the past years.¹³⁹ Terrorist attacks and abductions have been carried out not only in Mali, close to the Algerian border, but also on Algerian territory. The last major attack in Algeria, however, was against the In Amenas gas plant, in 2013.¹⁴⁰

According to Algerian officials, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other terrorist groups are no longer a major threat inside Algeria, but operate in

¹³² Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 5); Bergenwall (2019), pp. 41-42; Lounnas (2018), p. 15; Taylor (2018) ‘Algeria’s Libya problem’.

¹³³ Geographically, as mentioned, the Sahel region stretches across the African continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, but this report focuses on Western Sahel, and particularly Mali and Niger, because of their vast borders with Algeria.

¹³⁴ Iratni (2017), p. 16.

¹³⁵ Zoubir (2018), p. 73.

¹³⁶ Interview, in May 2019 (no. 18).

¹³⁷ See, for example, Lewis and Diarra (2012); Lins de Albuquerque (2014); Nichols (2013).

¹³⁸ African Center for Strategic Studies (2019).

¹³⁹ See, for example, Human Rights Watch (2019b); Gunnarsson and Gasinska (2019).

¹⁴⁰ Dagenborg and Chikhi (2014).

Mali, in particular, and have links with terrorists who are still in Algeria.¹⁴¹ Transnational terrorism, and the presence of both AQIM and the Islamic State (IS/Daesh) in Libya and the Sahel constitute a major challenge for Algeria's border control, particularly if IS and AQIM eventually try to merge.¹⁴²

Besides terrorism, other threats against Algeria from the south include cross-border criminality and the activities of criminal networks, as well as the illicit trafficking of drugs, light weapons, and people.¹⁴³ Ancient trafficking routes, in rugged terrain that only locals know, combined with increased poverty, are part of these challenges, especially since the "industry" of human trafficking and kidnapping can yield huge revenues in a black economy.¹⁴⁴ This has been feeding terror groups such as AQIM and Boko Haram. Climate change is aggravating the situation further. The decreasing water resources, including in the Lake Chad region, make herdsmen and others more easily recruitable by extremist organisations and willing to carry out kidnappings for ransom.¹⁴⁵

From an Algerian perspective, the intense foreign military presence in the Sahel region – as in the case of Libya – is also worrying. An Algerian official pointed out the close connection between the increase in military operations and the expansion of terrorism in the Sahel.¹⁴⁶ As a regional security expert put it, "when the Western troops move in, local food prices augment up to three times, people can't afford to buy food", which in turn facilitates recruitment to terrorist organisations.¹⁴⁷ According to a scholar who focuses on North Africa, Algeria feels increasingly surrounded by the bases of its former enemy, France, and worries about media reports of UAE's alleged interest in establishing a base in Niger.¹⁴⁸ Added to this is the fear that the Emirati and Saudi support of the Madkhali Salafi movement in Libya will spread to the Sahel and lead to a worst-case scenario, wherein the Sahel becomes as instable and fragmented as Somalia.¹⁴⁹ On top of this, Algeria is experiencing increasing competition from its rival, Morocco, for influence in the Sahel.¹⁵⁰

The question of the Tuaregs – a Berber people – is furthermore a constant headache for Algiers. Because of the Libyan civil war, many Tuaregs left Libya for Mali and Niger and are considered a potential security threat for Algeria in the Sahel region. Algiers fears that Tuareg secessionist movements in Mali and Niger may inspire

¹⁴¹ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 1 and 2).

¹⁴² Cafarella et al. (2019).

¹⁴³ See, for example, Zoubir (2018).

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Napoleoni (2016).

¹⁴⁵ Interviews, in May 2019 (no. 18).

¹⁴⁶ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13).

¹⁴⁷ Interviews, in May 2019 (e.g. no. 18).

¹⁴⁸ Interview, in August 2019 (no. 19); Mondafrique (2019). For an overview of France's military presence on the African continent, including Sahel, see Gasinska (ed.) (2019).

¹⁴⁹ Interview, in August 2019 (no. 19).

¹⁵⁰ Interview, in August 2019 (no. 19); Economist (2017); Fakir (2019).

Tuareg people living in Algeria, which would threaten Algeria's territorial integrity.¹⁵¹

Algeria is furthermore concerned about the increasing influx of refugees and migrants from the Sahel region.¹⁵² In July 2017, Algeria's foreign minister, Abdelkader Messahel, stated that migrants constitute a threat to Algeria's national security, and Bouteflika's cabinet chief made an association between migrants, drugs, and criminality.¹⁵³ For the time being, Algeria is a destination – and to a lesser extent a transit country – for migrants and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNHCR, there are about 95,000 refugees and 8,900 asylum-seekers in Algeria. Most of the new refugees and asylum-seekers registered in Algiers in 2018 came from Syria, Guinea, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁵⁴ It is estimated that between 25,000 and 100,000 migrants, without documents and primarily from the Sahel countries, live in Algeria. A majority work in the construction or agricultural sectors.¹⁵⁵ In addition, a growing number of individuals, particularly those from West Africa and seeking to reach Europe, are entering Spain from Algeria, as migrants increasingly choose the Western Mediterranean route.¹⁵⁶

3.2.2 Algeria's responses

Because of the extensive and growing security challenges from the Sahel, Algeria has increasingly focused on this region in the past decade and works on many levels to minimise the threat and stabilise the region.

Border control

Algeria puts extensive resources into controlling its southern borders just as it does with the eastern border, to Libya. The Algerian military patrols and monitors the borders – which, at least in theory, are closed – as carefully as possible, although the territory and the length of the borders make it at least as challenging as the Libyan border.¹⁵⁷ Overall, Algeria respects its non-intervention policy, although some security experts believe that the Algerian military occasionally crosses the border into Mali in the same way as it does into Libya.¹⁵⁸

Regional security cooperation

While Algeria collaborates internationally on counterterrorism issues (see 3.3), Algiers also spends substantial resources and directs its focus on both the continental and regional levels. Considerable financial support is for example

¹⁵¹ Zoubir (2018), p. 75.

¹⁵² Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 3 and 17).

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch (2017).

¹⁵⁴ UNHCR (2019).

¹⁵⁵ Ben Yahia (2018).

¹⁵⁶ UNHCR (2019).

¹⁵⁷ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13).

¹⁵⁸ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 1).

given to the African Union’s Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa.¹⁵⁹ Algiers also hosts the headquarters of AU’s Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), coordinates AU’s work on counterterrorism on the African continent, and in 2010 co-initiated the meetings of the chiefs of staff of the member states of the Joint Operational Army Staffs Committee (CEMOC) – “the first regional security architecture in the Sahel with an operational dimension”.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Algeria co-chairs the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s (GCTF) Capacity-building in the West Africa Region Working Group, established in 2017, with Canada. The inaugural meeting of the GCTF Sahel Working Group, which preceded the current working group, was held in Algiers in 2011.¹⁶¹

While declining to be part of G5 Sahel – a framework for development and security coordination founded in 2014, with five member states: Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger (see more below) – Algiers has been developing “intense bilateral collaboration” with each of the members.¹⁶² Algeria has for example provided Malian forces with military supplies and has assisted Mali and Niger to develop their respective border control capabilities.¹⁶³ In November 2017, Algeria’s prime minister stated that the country had over the preceding seven to eight years given more than 100 million USD, meant for equipment and training of Special Forces brigades, to Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania.¹⁶⁴ According to some experts, the Algerian non-intervention policy is nonetheless a factor that to some extent hampers regional cooperation. For instance, the policy was one factor that contributed to preventing Algeria from helping Mali when the latter asked for military assistance between 2010 and 2012.¹⁶⁵

Diplomatic actions

Algeria has also been engaged diplomatically in the Sahel. Because of Algeria’s position and interests in the region, including the concern over domestic and regional Tuareg secessionism, Algeria mediated between Tuaregs in Mali and the government in Bamako in 1990 and 2006, and again since 2012.¹⁶⁶ In 2015, the Algerian-led peace talks resulted in the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In an interview with *Le Figaro*, in February 2020, President Tebboune

¹⁵⁹ Zoubir (2018), p. 83.

¹⁶⁰ Zoubir (2018), p. 84.

¹⁶¹ Embassy of Canada to Algeria (2015). The Capacity-building in the West Africa Region Working Group, “promotes regional and international cooperation and provides a venue for experts to discuss capacity-building gaps specific to the West Africa region and identifying solutions”. For more information, see Global Counterterrorism Forum (2019).

¹⁶² Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13).

¹⁶³ Zoubir (2018), p. 85.

¹⁶⁴ Zoubir (2018), p. 85.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Zoubir (2018), p. 86.

¹⁶⁶ Zoubir (2018), p. 75.

stated that, “the *Accord d’Alger*¹⁶⁷ was almost perfect” and was “the only possible way that the south of Mali could integrate northern Mali in its structures and institutions”.¹⁶⁸ In the same interview, Tebboune added that it is necessary to go back to this peace agreement, and thus pushed for a political rather than military solution to the conflict.¹⁶⁹ A regional security expert described Algeria as “a big brother” in the region.¹⁷⁰ According to our interviewees, Algeria is growing its image as a regional leader, but it does most of its work in the shadows and rarely communicates what it is doing to the public and media.¹⁷¹ This makes it difficult to find information about Algeria’s actions.

Development cooperation

Like the Sahel countries, Algeria stresses the importance and necessity of socio-economic development and the elimination of poverty to combat the expansion of terrorism, illicit trafficking, and illegal migration.¹⁷² This multidimensional policy is largely the result of Algeria’s domestic experiences, not least the battle against violent extremism during the civil war in the 1990s, and the re-integration of terrorists in the aftermath of the conflict. A senior Algerian government official states:

At the beginning, it is a question of development. In Burkina Faso, you can get 15 euros to drop off a bomb. 400 euros to sell your children [to a terrorist organisation]. These are families without resources. You have to invest money in development rather than in the military. The security and military approaches are important, but we also have to work with the economic, cultural, and social sectors [...] There is certainly an export of ideologies in the region. But the financial interest is bigger and mobilise more people.¹⁷³

In line with this approach, Algiers has reportedly annulled the debt of several African countries, amounting to at least 1 billion USD.¹⁷⁴ Algeria also provides scholarships to students across the continent for studies in Algeria.¹⁷⁵ The amount of aid that Algeria gives to other countries is uncertain, however, partly since the Algerian government rarely discloses figures publicly.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ The peace agreement signed in 2015 between the government of Mali and the Tuareg coalition, the Coordination of Azawad Movements.

¹⁶⁸ Portes and Matarese (2020). Quote translated from French by the authors.

¹⁶⁹ Portes and Matarese (2020). Quote translated from French by the authors.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 10).

¹⁷¹ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 6 and 17).

¹⁷² Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 8).

¹⁷³ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13). Translated from French by the authors.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 8 and 17).

¹⁷⁵ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 8 and 17).

¹⁷⁶ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no. 6); Zoubir (2018), p. 85.

Migration policies

In regard to migration, Algeria – unwilling to be seen as a migrant and refugee destination, or transit, country – has set up a number of policies to prevent this from becoming a reality. For instance, the UN has not received authorisation from the Algerian authorities to open an office in Tamanrasset, the city in the south that most refugees first arrive at. This forces refugees to travel all the way to Algiers to apply for refugee status.¹⁷⁷ Aiming to regulate and reduce the number of migrants and refugees, Algeria also regularly deports those migrants and asylum seekers who are without documents to the borders of Niger and Mali. Algeria and Niger have a bilateral agreement that allows Algeria to send back Nigeriens, but Algeria has also deported nationals from other countries to Niger.¹⁷⁸

Reports that Algeria has expelled thousands of migrants and refugees to the borders of Mali and Niger, treated them in inhumane ways and left them in the middle of desert to walk to a village or town in Mali or Niger, have elicited strong criticism from the UN and human rights organisations.¹⁷⁹ Algeria's policies have sparked tensions with Mali and Niger, as well as with the refugees' countries of origin.¹⁸⁰

3.3 Cooperation with external actors

How does Algeria cooperate (or not) with major external actors on the security challenges emanating from Libya and the Sahel? To address this question, some of Algeria's relations with external actors, in particular Russia, the United States, the European Union, and France, are analysed below.

Counterterrorism cooperation with the West

Algeria cooperates with non-African countries on some Sahel-related matters, particularly in regard to counterterrorism. As mentioned above, the terror attacks on 11 September 2001 brought Algeria closer to the West, including the United States, Canada, and Europe, very much because of its experience in combatting and successfully reintegrating – at least partially – violent extremists. Algerian officials claim that only “ten per cent of the terrorists” from the civil war have been hopeless cases, whereas the vast majority have been released and reintegrated into the society by the help of the reconciliation laws and economic subsidies.¹⁸¹

In 2002, the United States declared that it would provide Algeria with weapons to combat terrorism. One year later, the U.S. State Department recognised Algeria as

¹⁷⁷ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 17).

¹⁷⁸ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 14 and 17).

¹⁷⁹ An article from European Council on Refugees and Exiles reports that 25,000 migrants were expelled from Algeria to Niger in 2018, of which 14,000 were Nigeriens (compared to 6,800 expelled Nigeriens in 2017): European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2019).

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Ben Yahia (2018); Human Rights Watch (2018); UN News (2018).

¹⁸¹ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 13).

one of the countries that “actively supported the global campaign against terrorism”.¹⁸² This increased cooperation was followed by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, a U.S.-funded initiative established in 2005, which comprises military cooperation, law enforcement, and civilian actors across North and West Africa.¹⁸³ The United States and Algeria nowadays have a regular dialogue on counterterrorism issues, which has largely evolved against the backdrop that many Salafi jihadists are of North African descent. The details of the collaboration, however, are not transparent to third parties.¹⁸⁴ What is known is that Algeria sends a few personnel for training to the U.S. National Defence University.¹⁸⁵

As mentioned in Chapter 2.2, Algeria joined NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue in 2000, and Algeria and the European Union strengthened their ties in the beginning of the 2000s. Among various areas, the Association Agreement between Algeria and the EU includes a chapter on terrorism, and the opening to the West and NATO has facilitated intelligence-sharing, some military cooperation, and procurement of military equipment to combat terrorism with NATO-countries.¹⁸⁶ While Algerian-EU relations are to a large extent centred around economic and energy cooperation, both parties have an increasing cooperation in the area of security. Since 2017, Algeria and the EU have held informal high-level meetings focused on matters related to counterterrorism and regional security, including the situation in Libya and the Sahel.¹⁸⁷

Limited cooperation on migration matters

In the same way that Algeria has very limited cooperation with the United Nations on migration from Sahel, Algiers is reluctant to work with the European Union, or individual European countries, on these matters. A closer cooperation with Brussels as well as UN agencies on migration is largely hindered because of Algeria’s long-held principles of non-interference in its domestic affairs.¹⁸⁸ Algeria does not want any foreign interference in what are considered Algerian issues – a heritage from its colonial experience. In addition, an Algerian government official stated that Algeria considers the EU and many European countries as focusing too much on the military and security aspects of migration, and not enough on other aspects, including economic development.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² United States Department of State (2003), p. 52.

¹⁸³ The partner countries include Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. See: United States Department of State (2018).

¹⁸⁴ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 4).

¹⁸⁵ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 10).

¹⁸⁶ Zoubir (2004), p. 176.

¹⁸⁷ Algérie Presse Service (2017).

¹⁸⁸ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 14) and interview in May 2019 (no. 15).

¹⁸⁹ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 8).

A continued complex relation with France

French actions in Libya – including its intervention in 2011, and its close links with Haftar, despite its official support of the UN process – comprise one of several “sources of friction” between Algeria and France.¹⁹⁰ However, France’s military operation Serval, which took place in Mali from 2013 to 2014, was one of the rare Algerian-supported foreign operations. The Malian government, in Bamako, had demanded French assistance in ousting Islamists in the north of the country. Algeria supported the operation by letting France use its air space, supplying French forces with oil, and closing its border to Mali.¹⁹¹ The creation of G5 Sahel and France’s continuous military presence in the region have nevertheless become a cause of concern for Algeria. In Algiers, G5 Sahel is perceived as a French-driven initiative that almost exclusively focuses on a military solution, which double-crosses Algeria’s work in the region and results in a French military presence in Algeria’s vicinity.¹⁹² Algeria also fears that France’s presence increases the support for Islamist groups among local populations in Mali.¹⁹³ Algiers’ relations with France thus continue to be complex, as they have been since colonisation and the war of independence (see Chapter 2).

Arms imports from Russia

Although Algeria is against Russia’s support for the Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar, Russia is indirectly an important partner for Algeria’s military prevention of spillovers from Libya and the Sahel to Algeria. Algiers’ procurement of Russian arms is a critical part of and contributes to Algeria’s control of its borders, including those to Libya, Mali and Niger, and the Algerian territory more generally (for more details, see chapter 2.3).

3.4 Future outlook

Seeing the multiple and pressing challenges emanating from Libya and the Sahel, these are likely to remain a top priority for Algeria in the near future. However, domestic political and economic developments could possibly affect Algeria’s responses.

Border control

A critical question for Algeria as well as for its neighbouring African and European countries is whether the Algerian military will be able to maintain its border control, particularly if the domestic political turmoil continues and if the military is ordered to deal with crowd control. A weakened border control would increase the threat of terrorism in Algeria (and potentially the greater Maghreb-Sahel region

¹⁹⁰ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 1); Harchaoui (2018).

¹⁹¹ Zoubir (2018), p. 78.

¹⁹² Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 11) and in August 2019 (no. 9); Zoubir (2018), p. 87;

¹⁹³ Zoubir (2018), p. 81.

and Europe), as well as illicit cross-border activities. This, in turn, would contribute to further destabilisation of the domestic state of affairs. This is why upholding security, including of the country's borders, is and will remain a priority for political and military decision-makers.

So far, the political protests have been contained by the police and have not affected the activities and focus of the army.¹⁹⁴ All interlocutors interviewed in Algiers in May 2019 stated that the Algerian army protects its borders with the same capacity as before and that this is unlikely to change in the near future. The war of independence and the civil war in the 1990s have created a shared interest among Algerians to prevent and avoid violent extremism and other forms of violence. As expressed by an expert on North Africa: "Nobody wants this country to sink".¹⁹⁵ Only a major event, much more challenging for the regime than the 2019 protests, would result in a decision to move military border protection personnel somewhere else in the country.

Retrenchment of the Algerian economy could potentially affect Algeria's spending on security. Despite expected austerity measures, however, the country is likely to remain a stabilising actor in terms of border control. This will continue to obstruct the influx of migrants and refugees to Algeria, as well as spillover from cross-border criminality, trafficking, and violent extremism. A risk that cannot be excluded is of a possible increase in illicit flows, due to the stagnating economy, which would make Algeria's border control more challenging. It should also be noted, that due to the rough terrain and long distances, Algeria's frontiers are not and will likely never be fully secured.

Non-intervention abroad

As the security challenges originating from Libya and the Sahel have worsened over the last decade, the Algerian military, reportedly, has on occasion stretched the country's policy of non-intervention outside its borders. Described as small-scale and ad-hoc, its military operations on the Libyan and Malian side of the border will likely continue as long as the Libyan and Sahelian instability remains. Notwithstanding these exceptions, there are currently no signs that Algeria will abandon its non-interventionist policy with regard to either Libya or the Sahel. While domestic political changes may result in amendments to the policy, the future of Algerian non-interventionism will likely depend more on regional developments. The extent to which Algeria will be able to control its frontiers and prevent spillovers from Libya and the Sahel, solely on the basis of its military presence on its own side of the borders, will be decisive for the future. The outcome of these challenges will most likely determine whether the Algerian military is willing to modify its principles and conduct more regular and large-

¹⁹⁴ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 12).

¹⁹⁵ Interview, in Algiers, May 2019 (no. 21).

scale operations abroad. Algeria's domestic economic challenges may also limit its foreign interventions.

Diplomatic action and development assistance

While continued domestic political and economic challenges are unlikely to affect Algeria's border control capabilities, internal turbulence has the potential to affect Algiers' political policies towards Libya and the Sahel. As noted above, domestic turmoil somewhat limited Algerian diplomatic action in 2019. However, meetings with and statements by President Tebboune in the beginning of 2020 indicate that the Libyan conflict will remain a political as well as a military priority for Algeria. While Algeria, as of February 2020, is not (publicly) involved in any major political process on the Sahel crisis, there are no indications that Algeria will stop giving priority to its southern neighbours.

A continuation of Algerian development aid and scholarships to African students may be difficult to uphold the day Algeria needs to impose austerity measures to save its economy. As mentioned, that day is approaching quickly. While Algeria may not cut all bilateral or regional financial aid, it is likely that the country will gradually have to prioritise the most critical parts of its "Sahel strategy".

Relations with external actors

Because of its continued prioritisation of military border control, as well as territorial security more generally, Algeria is likely to maintain close relations with Russia on matters related to arms procurement. As mentioned, an overwhelming majority of Algeria's weaponry is imported from Russia, but Western observers note Algeria's effort to diversify its arms procurements.¹⁹⁶ With the apparent aim of avoiding an over-dependence on Russian military equipment, since 2014 Algiers has increased its arms imports from mainly China, Germany, and Italy.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Russia's longstanding aspiration to establish a naval base in Mers al-Kabir, in northwestern Algeria, has always been deflected by Algiers – and will most likely continue to be.¹⁹⁸ Moscow's political backing of Haftar, in Libya, could potentially lead to colliding interests with Algiers.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Algerian acquisitions of Russian weapons systems inevitably results in long-standing ties between the countries, not least because of the need for regular maintenance of equipment. Russia, eager to ensure continuous arms sales to Algeria and to retain a balance of power in the Maghreb and North Africa, will moreover most likely think twice before making any drastic moves in Libya or the Sahel that would overly annoy Algeria.

¹⁹⁶ Interviews, in Algiers, May 2019 (e.g. no 10).

¹⁹⁷ Data retrieved from SIPRI Arms Trade Database (Importer/exporter TIV tables), on 10 September 2019.

¹⁹⁸ McGregor (2018); Watanabe (2019), p. 71.

¹⁹⁹ Issam Laaroussi (2019).

While there are no indications that Algeria is reconsidering whether to participate in G5 Sahel, Algiers will likely continue to keep and strengthen its bilateral relationships with Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and other countries in the Sahel and West Africa. However, due to its domestic political and economic turmoil, Algeria may increasingly have to focus on only the troublesome countries in its direct vicinity, i.e. its neighbouring countries. At the same time, if Algeria continues to expulse the migrants originating from the Sahel countries, tensions between Algeria and the countries in the region may be increased.

There are no signs that Algeria's partnerships with Western countries, including the United States, on regional counterterrorism collaboration will decrease. Since Algeria is expected to hold on to its principles of non-interference in its domestic affairs, cooperation in relation to migration is likely to remain limited. The European Union will thus have to continue to rely on Algeria's policies and its functioning as a gatekeeper against migration flows from Africa to Europe. However, Algeria's economic situation and its current dependence on European countries for their continued energy consumption and imports of crude oil (particularly France and the United Kingdom) and natural gas (mainly Italy and Spain)²⁰⁰ may make Algiers more prone to discussions with Brussels on questions related to migration from the region. This possibility is amplified by Algeria's increasing export competition from recent gas discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.²⁰¹ Alternatively, Europe's concern over another wave of migration could give Algiers a good bargaining position the day Algeria needs financial assistance to manage its economic challenges. Nevertheless, given Algeria's long-held principles, it will not easily let any negotiations lead to an infringement of its sovereign rights.

²⁰⁰ U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA) (2019).

²⁰¹ See, for example, Aronson (2019).

4 Conclusions

Algeria faces numerous and to some extent increasing challenges in its neighbourhood. By studying Algeria's approach to and handling of a spiralling instability in Libya and the Sahel, this report aims to provide a better understanding of how Algeria responds to security challenges in its immediate vicinity.

Main security challenges

The major security challenges that Libya poses to Algeria include regional arms proliferation (since the fall of Muammar Qaddafi, in 2011), increased instability and uncertainty (since 2011 and more recently since the start of Haftar's offensive against Tripoli, in April 2019), and Libya's use, by violent extremists, as a regional hub. In addition, Algeria is deeply concerned about the increasing economic, political, and military meddling of foreign actors, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, France, Russia, Turkey, and Qatar, which increases the risk of a prolonged proxy war on Libyan soil and a broken state.

The challenges emanating from the Sahel include the rapid increase and geographic extension of violent extremism and cross-border criminality and trafficking. Just as in the case of Libya, from Algeria's perspective the intense foreign military presence in the Sahel is also worrying and contributes to an aggravation of the instability in the region. In addition, Algiers fears that Tuareg secessionist movements in Mali and Niger could inspire Tuaregs in Algeria, which would threaten Algeria's territorial integrity. The influx of refugees and migrants from the Sahel region is considered a security challenge, as Algerian government officials have associated these with transnational criminality.

Algeria's key responses

To prevent spillover from the Libyan conflict, Algeria invests heavily in its border control. In line with its non-interference policy, Algeria has continuously rejected foreign military involvement in Libya and is resolutely pushing for a political and inclusive national peace process to resolve the Libyan conflict. Algeria is a firm supporter of the UN-led political process in Libya; since his election, President Tebboune has intensified Algeria's diplomatic efforts in the Libyan crisis, and has proposed to mediate between the parties.

Controlling the frontiers to the south is an important part of Algeria's strategy to minimise the threats to its security from the Sahel. To contribute to a stabilisation of the region, Algeria has a multidimensional approach that also includes political, security, and development cooperation with the Sahel countries, not least Mali and Niger, and diplomatic actions. Algiers wishes to regulate and reduce the number of migrants and refugees and has made it difficult to apply for refugee status; in addition, it has expelled thousands of migrants and refugees to the borders of Mali and Niger.

The challenges originating from Libya and the Sahel are mainly managed through bilateral relations with neighbouring countries and regional multilateral cooperation, including the work in the African Union and in the GCTF's Capacity-building in the West Africa Region Working Group. Algiers has declined to be part of G5 Sahel, which it sees as a regional tool for French interests. However, since the beginning of the 2000s, Algeria has strengthened its ties with Western countries, particularly concerning regional counterterrorism. Cooperation with external actors on migration matters remains limited. Russia is an important partner for Algeria's military prevention of spillovers from Libya and the Sahel, as substantial imports of Russian arms contribute to Algerian border control.

Changing policies due to domestic political and economic turmoil?

The Algerian popular protest movement, *hirak*, has rejected Tebboune, the new president, and continues to call for a new and democratic constitution and a clean start, with an end to corruption. Memories of the civil war in the 1990s continue to stifle the risk of violent and widespread clashes. There are no strong indications that the country will collapse. However, continued widespread popular grievances, combined with a looming economic crisis, constitute substantial challenges for Algeria. These could affect its responses to security challenges originating from Libya and the Sahel.

While Algeria will not relinquish its endeavour to be a central actor in the region, and will likely aspire to continue undertaking a multidimensional approach to security challenges in its vicinity, economic forecasts indicate that austerity programmes will be necessary in the near future. This realisation may force Algeria to prioritise the most pressing internal as well as external challenges. For instance, it may limit some of Algeria's external actions, including development aid to countries in the region. Domestic political turbulence could also limit an active diplomacy, which to some extent was the case in 2019.

Nonetheless, Algiers is expected to continue prioritising military expenditure, also during financially challenging times. In particular, upholding and controlling the borders and continuing its fight against terrorism will likely remain top priorities for the Algerian government. For Europe, Algeria's continued prioritisation of its border control implies that the country is likely to remain an important "migration lock" from Sub-Saharan Africa across the Mediterranean Sea.

Despite changing and challenging regional developments, Algeria has largely maintained the foreign policy principles, such as non-interventionism and non-alignment, which it formed after its war of independence, 1954–1962. Even though Algeria's military reportedly conducts occasional small-scale ad-hoc operations on the Libyan and Malian sides of its borders, the conclusion from various interviews is that it is maintaining its non-interventionist policy. There are currently no signs that Algeria will abandon this principle. While domestic

political changes may amend the policy, the future of Algerian non-interventionism will likely depend more on regional developments.

Algeria's history has contributed to a careful cherry-picking of partners. Algeria wants room for manoeuvre, with an emphasis on diversified external relations, and a reluctance to be too dependent on any big power or neighbour. Algeria will also likely maintain this strategy in times of political and economic crisis, by for example continuing to increase arms imports from new partners such as China, while maintaining ties with old partners, including Russia.

All in all, Algiers will undoubtedly continue its focus on its immediate vicinity, not least as long as regional instability persists. Algiers will likely continue to respond to security challenges with combined military, diplomatic, and socio-economic means, and is expected to remain a central player in the Maghreb and the Sahel. Yet, continued political turbulence and, perhaps especially, economic difficulties at home make Algeria's responses to the regional security challenges somewhat more unpredictable.

5 References

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5.1 Interviews

The interviews are coded and numbered randomly. To protect the interviewee(s), the place of certain interviews has been omitted.

No.	Interviewee(s)	Organisation	Time and place
1	Security expert	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
2	Security expert	Multilateral organisation	Algiers, May 2019
3	Security expert	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
4	Diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
5	Diplomats	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
6	Diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
7	Diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
8	Algerian government official	Algerian ministry	Algiers, May 2019
9	North Africa Expert	Independent	August 2019
10	Security experts, diplomats	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
11	Security experts, diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
12	Security experts, diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
13	Algerian government official	Algerian ministry	Algiers, May 2019
14	Security experts, diplomat	Western embassy	Algiers, May 2019
15	North Africa Expert	Independent	May 2019
16	Human rights expert	NGO	May 2019
17	Diplomat	Multilateral organisation	Algiers, May 2019
18	Security experts	Multilateral organisation	May 2019
19	North Africa Expert	Think Tank	August 2019
20	Scholar, Algerian Expert	University	August 2019
21	North Africa Expert	Independent	Algiers, May 2019

5.2 Databases

SIPRI Arms Trade Database

World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS)

UN DESA World Population Prospects

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Trade Statistics



ISSN 1650-1942

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