

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Algeria Summary 17 January 2020

Newly elected President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present) forms a new 17-person constitutional committee with a three-month deadline to submit proposals for discussion about amending the Algerian constitution, as Tebboune adopts a conciliatory approach in his first few weeks at the helm. Tebboune calls Libya "a red line no one should cross" in a meeting with Libyan national unity government head Fayez al-Sarraj following al-Sarraj's visit to Algiers to discuss heightened tensions in Libya, as Algeria steps-up its long-dormant role as a regional actor. The United States (US) embassy in Algeria issues a security alert over "heightened tensions in the Middle East that may result in security risks to US citizens abroad" in the wake of the assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

New face, same outfit?

Newly elected **Algerian** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) on 8 January formed a new 17-person constitutional committee with a three-month deadline to submit proposals for discussion about amending the constitution.¹ Tebboune says the committee is a key priority for his government. Tebboune has shown early signs of being a conciliatory leader who may push his troubled country down a more democratic pathway – but this will make him unpopular with the very people who got him to power, the army.

Tebboune needs popular support if he is to survive without the army's backing, and his initial moves as president may help with this. Tebboune adopted a conciliatory tone at his first press conference, 'holding out his hand' to anti-government protest movement **Hirak**. On 28 December, Tebboune, named a university professor and former diplomat, **Abdelaziz Djerad**, as prime minister – a sign that Tebboune favours meritocracy over nepotism. On 8 January, he released more than 180 prominent Hirak figures from detention, including well-known independence war veteran **Lakhdar Bouregaa**, and invited them to support him to form a genuine democracy.

After months of protests and with the glimpse of a pathway to democracy, the constitutional committee is responsible for suggesting amendments to the constitution that will be put to a public referendum, subject to approval by parliament. This may pull Hirak towards working with the government. With Hirak onboard, the newly established constitutional committee could push to turn the presidential system into a parliamentary one and devolve power to the regions, particularly the **Berber-dominated Kabyle** region.

If Tebboune's early actions show how he means to lead, his biggest hurdle may be the army, which has disdained moves towards democracy since the **Algerian Revolution** (1954-1962). The army's senior management are close allies of late military chief and de-facto leader **Ahmed Gaid Salah**, who died of a heart attack on 23 December and was replaced by **Said Chengriha**. The army under Salah accused Hirak of threatening national unity. If Tebboune is seen as getting into bed with Hirak, the army may quickly turn against the new leader.

That said, Tebboune is still far from being an ally of Hirak. Tebboune is still seen as part of the old guard. The hundreds of thousands of protesters that gathered when the army removed former President **Abdelaziz Bouteflika** (1999-2019) in April have continued to march every Friday against those who ousted him, including Tebboune. Protesters see the 12 December presidential election –

¹ Arab News, 8 Jan 2020

which was overseen by the army – as a façade to replace the same outfit with a new face. Voter turnout was the lowest ever, at 40%, and all five candidates had close ties to the ‘old guard’ (see *ARC Briefing Algeria November 2019*). Consequently, protesters contest the legitimacy of the outcome.

Additionally, steps by the army to appease protesters have shown little success. In recent months the army has tried to appease protesters by imprisoning two former prime ministers, several security chiefs and some top businessmen with links to the ‘old guard’, but Hirak denounces the army’s actions as show-trials.

Growing role in Libya crisis ...

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on 7 January called **Tripoli (Libya)** “*a red line no one should cross*” in a meeting with Libyan national unity government head **Fayez al-Sarraj** following al-Sarraj’s visit to **Algiers** to discuss heightened tensions in Libya.² The Libya crisis has revitalised Algeria’s role at the regional and international level as well as illustrating Tebboune’s determination to play an active role as a peacemaker, after years of the country sitting on the sidelines under former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Tebboune has made it a foreign affairs priority – which is sensible given the economic and security damages his country experiences as a result of the collapse of the Libyan state. Economically, Algeria reportedly spends around \$500m per year securing its 1,000-kilometre border with Libya.³ In terms of security, Libya’s civil war creates an ideal situation for terrorist organisations to flourish and proliferate in the region.

Tebboune met with al-Sarraj and **Turkey’s** foreign minister, **Mevlut Cavusoglu**, in Algiers in an attempt to mediate the conflict in Libya following the deployment of troops by Turkey to support Tripoli. Tebboune also met on 6 January with **German** Chancellor **Angela Merkel** (2005-present), who invited him to participate in the next **Berlin** (Germany) conference on the Libya crisis. **Italy’s** foreign minister, **Luigi Di Maio**, **Egyptian** foreign minister **Sameh Shoukry**, Cavusoglu and al-Sarraj have all visited Algeria in recent weeks to discuss the Libyan crisis.

The crisis has fractured relations with some of Algeria’s key allies, particularly with **France**, Egypt and Turkey. The Algerian and French stances regarding the Libyan crisis are undoubtedly different, with France being one of the main supporters of the militia, **Libyan National Army (LNA)**, led by the former prisoner of war, **Khalifa Haftar** – and so is considered to be one of the countries involved in the Libyan crisis. France is yet to send an envoy to Algeria to discuss the crisis. Algeria’s stance also differs widely from that of Egypt, which is trying to impose a military solution on the ground by its direct support of the militias of Haftar.

... amid heightened tensions in the Middle East

The **United States (US)** embassy in Algeria issued a security alert on 7 January warning of “*heightened tensions in the Middle East that may result in security risks to US citizens abroad*” in the wake of the assassination of top **Iranian** general **Qassem Soleimani** on 3 January by a US airstrike.⁴ The airstrike has heightened concerns about terrorist attacks in **Africa**, particularly against **Western** interests. Businesses and individuals in Algeria should tighten security procedures and monitor security events closely. ARC reviewed Algeria’s present security concerns.

The US embassy said heightened tension in the Middle East may result in security risks to US citizens abroad. The alert advised US citizens to keep a low profile, be aware of their surroundings, make contingency plans to leave, stay alert in locations frequented by tourists, review personal security plans and have travel documents up to date and easily accessible. Algeria is ranked as ‘Level 2: Exercise with caution’ in the US embassy’s travel advisory ratings, in which ‘Level 1’ is the least

² The New Arab, 7 Jan 2020

³ Jeune Afrique, 7 Jan 2020

⁴ ‘Security Alert’ US Embassy in Algeria, 7 Jan 2020. See: dz.usembassy.gov

concern and 'Level 4' advises against all travel. The US embassy warns citizens to “*exercise increased caution when travelling in Algeria due to terrorism.*”

Algeria's terrorism risk is at its eastern and southern borders and the **Sahara Desert**, including **Tindouf** province. The remoteness and small-scale nature of terrorist activity means it will not affect the vast majority of businesses, citizens and tourists in the country. Military efforts over the past fifteen years, and the intensive control of borders since 2013, have made it possible to repress the majority of criminal and terrorist networks in the **Salvador Pass**, a strategic point of traffic for terrorist organisations on the borders of **Niger**, Libya and Algeria. We do not anticipate that Algeria's political turbulence and protest movement will compromise the government's capacity to manage national security threats, including terrorism.

Algeria ranked 57th globally (1st place has the highest impact of terrorism and 138th has the lowest impact) in the **Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index 2019**, a three-place improvement from last year.⁵ Algeria ranked 13th out of 20 in the MENA region.⁶

Businesses and individuals should also be aware of anti-government protests every Friday in Algiers, and in other major cities, that began in February 2019. When disruptive, the protests have been violent. Other rallies, demonstrations, and strikes may occur with little notice. Previously, police have used physical barricades, water and sound cannons, and tear gas to control crowds. Individuals should avoid all areas affected by demonstrations and not participate.

Planner

Mar 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** Constitutional committee deadline for proposals;

Jun 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** Algeria Oil & Gas Summit & Exhibition;

Chronology

15 Jan 2020 **Milan (Italy)** *Upstream Online*. A **Milan** appeals court acquits **Italy**-based oil services company **Saipem** of graft charges related to business practices in **Algeria** after a lower court had found it guilty and levied fines;

13 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Daily Sabah*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** asks prime minister **Abdelaziz Djerad** to draft a bill “*criminalising all forms of racism and hate speech in the country*”;

13 Jan 2020 **Rabat (Morocco)** *The North Africa Post*. **United Kingdom**-based upstream **Sound Energy** says it has received approval from the ministry of energy, mines and environment to build and operate a 120-km gas pipeline from **Tendrara** to **Gazoduc Maghreb**, connecting **Algeria** to **Europe** via **Morocco**;

9 Jan 2020 **Hassi Messaoud (Algeria)** *Daily Sabah*. State oil firm **Sonatrach** signs a \$3.7 billion deal with **South Korea**-based **Samsung Engineering**-led consortium to build an oil refinery in **Hassi Messaoud**;

8 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** forms 17-person new constitutional committee that has three months to submit proposals for discussion to amend the constitution;

7 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *The New Arab*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** calls Tripoli “*a red line no one should cross*” in a meeting with **Libyan** head **Fayez al-Sarraj** following al-Sarraj's visit to **Algiers** to discuss heightened tensions in Libya;

6 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *S&P Global*. A new hydrocarbons law to restore attractiveness of the sector came into force against the background of low oil and gas prices and increased

⁵ Global Terrorism Index 2019, Institute for Economics and Peace, visionofhumanity.org

⁶ Global Terrorism Index 2019, Institute for Economics and Peace, visionofhumanity.org

competition;

2 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *France24*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** appoints a new government made up of 39 members, including seven deputy ministers and four secretaries of state;

2 Jan 2020 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. Government releases more than 180 prominent anti-government protest figures from detention, including well-known independence war veteran **Lakhdar Bouregaa**;

28 Dec 2019 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Aljazeera*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** appoints academic and retired diplomat **Abdelaziz Djerad** as the new prime minister;

23 Dec 2019 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Military chief and de-facto leader **Ahmed Gaid Salah** dies of a heart attack aged 79 and is replaced as acting army head by **Said Chengriha**;

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Please contact us by email info@africariskconsulting.com or call + 44 (0) 20 7078 4080

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