

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Algeria Summary 20 January 2025

French President Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) is expected to in the coming days decide how to respond to what his government considers a growing “hostile posture” from Algeria. Mali accuses Algeria of supporting terrorist groups in the Sahel, fuelling regional instability, and interfering in Mali’s internal affairs. Niger-headquartered nongovernmental organisation, NGO Alarme Phone Sahara, reports that Algeria is once again violating international conventions on migrants’ rights.

France to decide response to Algeria ‘hostility’ as tensions mount...

France’s foreign minister, **Jean-Noel Barrot** told lawmakers on 15 January that French President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) will in the next few days decide how to respond to what his government considers a growing “hostile posture” from Algeria.¹ Relations between Algeria and France have been strained for decades, given France’s colonial past, but declined further in July 2024 after Macron recognised **Morocco’s** autonomy plan for the disputed **Western Sahara**, ending its longstanding policy of neutrality (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Aug 2024*). Macron emphasised in a letter to Morocco’s King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) that autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is “the only basis for reaching an agreement” to resolve the long-running dispute.² Algeria called the decision counterproductive and subsequently withdrew its ambassador to France and downgraded its diplomatic representation to the level of chargé d’affaires in protest.

While diplomatic relations between the two countries have not been broken, French officials say Algeria is adopting a policy targeted at eliminating France’s economic presence in the country, with trade dropping by as much as 30% since June 2023.³ Barrot stressed that declining relations has major economic, security and social consequences. This is backed by the fact that 10% of France’s 68 million population have connections to Algeria. Barrot also offered to travel to Algiers to discuss and possibly resolve the diplomatic standoff.

The first sign of Algerian retaliation against France for its support for Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara came in November 2024. The **Association of Banks and Financial Institutions of Algeria (ABEF)** in early November verbally suggested that it would issue a directive to end banking transactions to and from France (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2024*).⁴ However, it was reported on 15 November that the suggested banking restrictions were not issued given the extensive nature of trade between the two countries but that French companies were no longer being considered in tenders for wheat imports to Algeria, to which France had been a key exporter.⁵

Beyond business, Macron on 6 January accused Algeria of “dishonouring itself” by arbitrarily arresting Franco-Algerian author, **Boualem Sansal**, whose health has worsened in recent weeks.⁶ Sansal, who is a major figure in modern francophone literature and a critic of the Algerian government, was arrested in mid-November at the **Algiers** airport on national security charges.⁷ President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) in late December described Sansal as an “imposter” sent by

¹ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

² MAP News, 30 Jul 2024; Middle East Monitor, 30 Jul 2024

³ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

⁴ North Africa Post, 10 Nov 2024

⁵ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

⁶ Arab Weekly, 7 Jan 2025; ENCA, 7 Jan 2025

⁷ French24, 5 Jan 2025

France.⁸ Algeria's parliament on 7 January called Macron's remarks "*irresponsible*" and accused him of "*blatant interference*" in the country's internal affairs.⁹

In early January, several Algerian social media influencers were arrested on 3 and 5 January in France and accused of inciting violence.¹⁰ One of the arrested, referred to as Doualemn, was subsequently deported to Algiers on 9 January, where Algerian authorities sent him back to Paris (France) on the same day, citing legal processes.¹¹ That infuriated some of France's right-wing parties and interior minister, Bruno Retailleau, on 10 January accused Algeria of "*seeking to humiliate France*".¹² Speaking further on the matter Retailleau said:

"This is a violation of the texts that govern our relationship, and it is a precedent that we consider serious".¹³

Retailleau added that France would have "*no option but to retaliate*" if Algeria continued to "*escalate*" the row, including restrictions on development aid or visas on holders of Algerian diplomatic passports.¹⁴ Speaking to parliamentarians, Barrot also said that Algeria's deportation of Doualemn and the arrest of Sansal had forced the government's hands to decide on how to respond.¹⁵ Algeria's foreign ministry said on 11 January that it was not seeking an escalation with France and said that far-right parties in the country were implementing a disinformation campaign against Algeria.¹⁶

Going forward, it is evident that many French politicians want to push Algeria into adopting a more flexible stance, however, has indicated that it intends to remain resolute. Regarding Algeria's stance, **Jalel Harchaoui**, an associate fellow at the **United Kingdom (UK)**-based **Royal United Services Institute**, said on 15 January:

"Algeria feels all the more emboldened by the fact that France is far less important to its economy than a few years ago".¹⁷

Mali accuses Algeria of supporting terrorists and fuelling instability

The **Malian** foreign affairs ministry on 1 January issued a strong condemnation of Algeria, accusing it of supporting terrorist groups in the **Sahel**, fuelling regional instability, and interfering in Mali's internal affairs.¹⁸ The ministry said that it had heard through the press about Algerian foreign minister, **Ahmed Attaf** "*once again commenting on Mali's strategy for combatting terrorism*".¹⁹ The ministry emphasised Mali's commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and rejected external powers like Algeria acting as "*firefighters*" while exacerbating conflicts by reportedly favouring the **Tuareg** rebels in the north of Mali.²⁰

The Tuareg people, an indigenous **Berber** group native to the Sahara, primarily live in southern Algeria and northern regions of Mali and **Niger**. In 2012, following earlier rebellions, they launched an armed uprising seeking independence for their region, known as **Azawad**.²¹ Many in Mali view the Tuareg rebellion as having inadvertently enabled radical **Islamist** groups to surpass the separatists and take control of large parts of northern Mali.²² That provoked a French military intervention in 2013, plunging the Sahel into protracted conflict.

⁸ Arab Weekly, 7 Jan 2025

⁹ Anadolu Agency, 7 Jan 2025; Middle East Monitor, 7 Jan 2025

¹⁰ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

¹¹ RFI, 12 Jan 2025

¹² Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

¹³ RFI, 12 Jan 2025

¹⁴ RFI, 12 Jan 2025

¹⁵ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

¹⁶ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

¹⁷ Reuters, 15 Jan 2025

¹⁸ North Africa Post, 1 Jan 2025

¹⁹ Algerian foreign ministry, 1 Jan 2025

²⁰ RFI, 3 Jan 2025

²¹ RFI, 3 Jan 2025

²² RFI, 3 Jan 2025

Mali's foreign affairs ministry also criticised Algeria for attempting to exploit Mali's situation to overcome its international isolation and called on Algeria to address internal issues, particularly concerning the **Kabyle** people, rather than using Mali as a tool to bolster its global position.²³ The Kabyle are an ethnic Berber group indigenous to the Kabylie region in northern Algeria. Algerian political activist, **Chawki Ben Zahra**, on 1 January on **X** (previously **Twitter**) also described Mali's statement as "*strong*" and "*historic*" accusing Algeria of harbouring terrorist groups and neglecting its internal challenges, including Kabyle independence demands.²⁴

Zahra also criticised Attaf's recent comments, labelling Algeria's diplomacy as ineffective and divisive. Zahra was echoing comments made in October by Morocco's **United Nations (UN)** permanent representative, **Omar Hilale**, who accused Algeria of harbouring separatists and extremists.²⁵ Hilale stressed that Algeria's action undermined regional stability and it is the "*root cause of all the problems in the Sahel and Sahara*".²⁶

While there is no concrete evidence that Algeria is supporting terrorist groups, the country is highly concerned about the security in the region. Algeria and Mali share a 1,400km border and there are concerns that continued instability in Mali could lead to a power vacuum, a rise in militias, displaced persons and refugees and overall greater instability in the region. The diplomatic fallout between Mali and Algeria also risks further destabilising the Sahelian region, which is already dealing with increased Islamic insurgency, in addition to a series of military coups in Mali, **Burkina Faso** and Niger.

Algeria's human rights record under spotlight again

Niger-headquartered nongovernmental organisation **NGO Alarme Phone Sahara** released a report on 13 January, accusing Algeria of violating international conventions on migrants' rights.²⁷ In its report, the NGO produced new data showing that Algerian authorities had expelled 31,404 migrants to Niger in 2024, condemning the "*fatal*" and "*violent*" approach Algerian authorities use against the migrants, including women and minors:

"Worst-case scenario [is] being fatal consequences against the migrants, who also face exclusions" under "brutal conditions".²⁸

Following raids and mass arrests targeting migrants in workplaces, such as construction sites and empty buildings, Algerian security forces have reportedly abandoned 26,000 wounded, exhausted, and sick migrants in the desert border area, leaving them in life-threatening conditions.²⁹ The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, **Doctors Without Borders**, and several NGOs have also condemned these "*unjustified and xenophobic acts*" by Algeria against abandoning **Sub-Saharan** migrants, many without food or water.³⁰ Niger's government summoned Algeria's ambassador in April 2023 to protest against the violent treatment suffered by Nigerien migrants in southern Algeria but the deportations continued.³¹

It is unclear what the repercussions Algeria could face for continued violations of rights, as **European** governments and former **United States (US)** president **Joseph Biden** (2021-2025) administration avoided sanctioning the country. Given Algeria's significance to Europe's energy needs, Algeria has avoided any strong sanctions and under the US President **Donald Trump** (2025-present) administration's, it is unlikely that these issues will be a major concern.³²

²³ North Africa Post, 2 Jan 2025

²⁴ X, 1 Jan 2025

²⁵ North Africa Post, 2 Jan 2025

²⁶ North Africa Post, 2 Jan 2025

²⁷ Morocco World News, 14 Jan 2025; North Africa Post, 15 Jan 2025

²⁸ Morocco World News, 14 Jan 2025

²⁹ North Africa Post, 15 Jan 2025

³⁰ Morocco World News, 14 Jan 2025; North Africa Post, 15 Jan 2025

³¹ North Africa Post, 15 Jan 2025

³² Source, local resident, Algiers

Planner

2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** New French sanctions against Algeria expected

2026 **(Algeria)** National assembly elections

Chronology

19 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. State-owned energy company **Sonatrach** says it is taking part in the 3rd **Energy and Economic Summit of Libya**;

15 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. **Air Algeria** CEO **Hamza Benhamouda** says the airline transported nearly eight million passengers in 2024, an increase of 10% compared to 2023;

15 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Cellworks*. The secretary of state to the energy ministry **Noureddine Yassaa**, meets with **China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corporation (CPECC)** executive vice president **He Hong San**, to discuss the Chinese company's interest in investing in Algeria, particularly in the clean energy sector, with a focus on green hydrogen;

15 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. **France** considers ending visa-free entry for Algerian diplomats and reviewing the 1968 agreements that give Algerian nationals preferential treatment when settling in France, in response to rising tensions between the two countries;

14 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *ANBA*. General **Mohamed Ameziane Lanasri** announces the **Office National Des Terres Agricoles (ONTA)** (national office of agricultural lands) is set to distribute 122,000 hectares of state-owned land for agricultural cultivation across 12 regions that are aimed to improve food security in the country;

11 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *France24*. Algeria rejects **France's** accusations that it is escalating diplomatic tensions, accusing France's extreme right of "*waging a campaign of disinformation*" against Algeria;

8 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. Legal action has been launched in **Paris (France)** by a local French association against President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** for the "*enforced disappearance*" of French-Algerian writer **Boualem Sansal**;

6 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. French authorities arrest three Algerian influencers on social media who threatened to use violence against Algerian regime's opponents in France;

3 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *RFI*. **Mali** accuses Algeria of supporting terrorist groups and showing favour to **Tuareg** rebels in northern Mali;

1 Jan 2025 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. Algeria assumes the rotating presidency of the **United Nations (UN) Security Council** for January 2025;

30 Dec 2024 **Nouakchott (Mauritania)** *North Africa Post*. In a major army leadership reshuffle, **Mauritania's** president **Mohammed Ould Ghazouani** removed generals who had recently met Algeria's chief of staff, **Saïd Chengriha**, with Mauritanian observers saying the move was reportedly a pre-emptive strike from Ghazouani, sensing a potential Algeria-orchestrated coup;

29 Dec 2024 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** criticises **France** over the lingering effects of its colonial rule in Algeria amid tensions between the two countries;

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