

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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The state-owned media outlet Algeria Press Service (APS) announces on 16 March that President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present) shuffled his cabinet, changing 11 out of 32 positions. Key changes are made in the finance and foreign affairs ministries. The upper chamber of parliament, Conseil de la Nation (council of the nation), begins debating a new law on 10 April aimed at further restricting press freedom in Algeria by tightening media ownership regulations and preventing journalists from protecting sources. Tebboune and France's president Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) discuss relations via phone on 24 March. Following the conversation, they announce to end their diplomatic rift and "reinforce mutual cooperation". Tebboune holds a rare interview with Qatar-headquartered news outlet Al Jazeera on 21 March and discusses Algeria's relations with Morocco, Spain and the Ukraine conflict.

President conducts cabinet reshuffle, appoints third finance minister in a year...

The state-owned media outlet **Algeria Press Service (APS)** announced on 16 March that President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) had shuffled his cabinet, changing 11 out of 32 positions, and making key changes to the finance and foreign affairs ministries.¹ No official explanations were given for the reshuffle. Tebboune named his third finance minister in less than a year, with **Laaziz Fayed** replacing **Ibrahim Jamal Kassali** who was appointed in July when **Abderrahmane Raouya** was fired just three months after being appointed (See *ARC Briefing Algeria Jul 2022*).²

Ahmed Attaf also replaced **Ramtane Lamamra** as foreign minister, recovering a position he held during the 1990s, at the height of a civil war.³ **Mohamed Arkab** maintains his job as energy minister and **Aymen Benabderrahmane** remains as prime minister. APS noted that the full list of changes is below:

Ministry	Ministerial Appointment
Foreign affairs and national community abroad	Ahmed Attaf
Finance	Laaziz Fayed
Youth and sports	Abderrahmane Hammad
Digitization and statistics	Meriem Benmiloud
Trade and export promotion	Tayeb Zitouni
Water resources	Taha Derbal
Transport	Youcef Chorfa (moved from labour)
Tourism and craft industry	Mokhtar Didouche
Labour, employment and social Security	Fayçal Bentaleb
Environment and renewable energies	Fazia Dahleb

¹ Algeria Press Service, 16 Mar 2023

² Bloomberg, 16 Mar 2023

³ Bloomberg, 16 Mar 2023

Fisheries and fishery products	Ahmed Bidani
State and advisor to the president	Abdelaziz Khellaf

Tebboune also appointed **Mohamed Nadir Larbaoui** as the new chief of staff to the presidency.⁴ APS mentioned that the former digitisation and statistics minister, **Hocine Cherhabil** and trade minister, **Kamel Rezig**, were called to other duties.⁵

Lamamra's removal from the foreign affairs ministry is also notable as he was reappointed to the position, during another cabinet reshuffle, in July 2021 to replace **Sabri Boukadoum** amid Algiers' diminishing diplomatic clout within the region.⁶ His assertive nature and hands-on approach were key to his reappointment, but it remains unknown if Attaf will match Lamamra's aggressive foreign policy.

The termination of tasks and appointees has become a common practice in Algeria since Tebboune assumed power leading to instability in Algerian institutions, particularly in the finance ministry which has become accustomed to ministerial change. While no major issues were reported in the past year due to ministerial changes in the finance ministry, the appointments have been ineffective in reducing poverty in the country or slowing down annual inflation recorded at 9.3% in January.⁷

Algeria moves to further curb press freedom with new law...

The upper chamber of parliament, **Conseil de la Nation** (council of the nation), began debating a new law aimed at further restricting press freedom by tightening media ownership regulations and preventing journalists from protecting sources on 10 April with a vote expected on 13 April.⁸ The lower chamber, **Assemblée Populaire Nationale (APN)** (people's national assembly), which is controlled by parties within the ruling presidential coalition, on 28 March approved the bill on its first hearing allowing it to be passed to the upper chamber.

While the precise voting details in the lower house have not been provided in official records, a majority of the APN's 462 members approved the bill.⁹ The **Movement of Society for Peace (MSP)**, the country's largest Islamic parliamentary bloc, announced that it was opposing the draft and its 65 members subsequently voted against it.¹⁰ The MSP noted that it was opposed to the bill since there was an element of *"control and unilateralism in the preparation of the draft bill"* and no consultation with journalists or academics.¹¹ Communications minister **Mohamed Bouslimani** countered that by saying that if passed, the law will *"ensure free and responsible media practice"* and promote professionalism in the country's media.¹²

If the bill is passed into law, it would ban local media publications from receiving funding or *"direct and indirect material aid"* from abroad or face criminal prosecution that includes fines of approximately \$15,000.¹³ Even though the bill states that *"professional secrecy is a right"*, it would require journalists to divulge their sources if ordered by a judge.¹⁴ The law will also ban

⁴ Algeria Press Service, 16 Mar 2023

⁵ Algeria Press Service, 16 Mar 2023

⁶ Morocco World News, 10 Jul 2021

⁷ Middle East Monitor, 17 Feb 2022

⁸ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

⁹ Middle East Monitor, 29 Mar 2023

¹⁰ Middle East Monitor, 29 Mar 2023

¹¹ Middle East Monitor, 29 Mar 2023

¹² Middle East Monitor, 29 Mar 2023

¹³ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁴ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

dual nationals from owning all or part of media outlets.¹⁵ Journalists working for any foreign media outlets without accreditation could also be fined almost \$7,600.¹⁶

During discussions in the upper chamber, some senators said that despite being prohibited from investing in local media outlets, dual nationals are allowed to vote or invest in other sectors of the economy.¹⁷ However, upper chamber speaker **Salah Goudjil** said that the “*devil is in the details*”, highlighting that certain aspects of the bill are still unclear as accompanying legal documents to the legislation are yet to be published.¹⁸

US-headquartered rights group **Amnesty International** and journalists’ rights groups including the US-based **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** and French-headquartered **Reporters Without Borders** have vehemently condemned the new bill and the arrest of journalists in the country.¹⁹ Algeria currently ranks 134th out of 180 countries on Reporters Without Borders’ 2022 World Press Freedom Index.²⁰

The groups also denounced the decision by a court in **Algiers** on 2 April to sentence prominent journalist **Ihsane El Kadi** to three years in prison for “*foreign financing of his business*”.²¹ El Kadi, who is the director of the **Maghreb Emergent** news website and **Radio M**, is one of the last remaining independent media owners in the country.²² At least 16 international media personalities, including **Russian** journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Dmitri Muratov**, have publicly called for his immediate release and for the government to remove the “*unacceptable*” restrictions on his media outlets.²³

If the law passes, there does not appear to be any immediate repercussions for Algeria, but it does raise intense political pressure on a government that is facing repeated criticism for its human rights record from organisations such as the **United Nations**, US and **European Union (EU)** lawmakers, and domestic and international human rights NGOs. In recent months, many Western lawmakers have also called for sanctions on Algeria for its human rights record, but given its significance to the EU’s energy needs, Algeria may survive any strong sanctions.

Algeria, France end diplomatic crisis, agree to increase cooperation...

Algeria and **France** announced via APS on 24 March that their governments had agreed to end their diplomatic rift and “*reinforce mutual cooperation*”, following a phone conversation between Tebboune and French president **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) where they discussed a “*number of issues of common interest*”.²⁴ The French presidency also announced that the two presidents agreed to reinforce communication as a strategy to “*avoid facing misunderstandings*”.²⁵ Tebboune also informed Macron that Algiers’ ambassador to Paris would soon return to the French capital.

The latest diplomatic crisis began when Algeria recalled **Said Moussi**, the country’s ambassador to **France**, on 8 February for consultations with immediate effect after accusing France of orchestrating the escape of **Amira Bouraoui**, a rights activist Algeria wanted to arrest (*ARC Briefing Algeria Feb 2023*).²⁶ Algeria recalled Moussi after Bouraoui allegedly crossed into

¹⁵ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁶ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁷ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁸ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁹ Al Jazeera, 2 Apr 2023

²⁰ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

²¹ Al Jazeera, 2 Apr 2023

²² Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

²³ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

²⁴ Algeria Press Service, 25 Mar 2023

²⁵ Middle East Monitor, 25 Mar, 2023

²⁶ Bloomberg, 11 Jun 2022

Tunisia illegally after evading Algerian judicial surveillance, where she was arrested upon her arrival on 7 February and faced an extradition hearing, however, a Tunisian court ordered her to be freed and she was subsequently permitted to leave the country on 8 February.²⁷

Bourauoui's release and flight to Paris were reportedly due to French diplomatic pressure on Tunisia.²⁸ APS confirmed that Bourauoui's escape from Tunisia was one of the issues discussed by Tebboune and Macron on 24 March.

Macron also visited Algiers last year on a trip that was meant to resolve years of difficult relations over visa issues. French interior minister **Gerald Darmanin** stated via a **Twitter** post on 18 December that **Paris** had resolved visa issues with Algeria stemming from a decision to reduce visa quotes, and announced a return "to a normal consular relationship" with Algeria and an "extremely strong relationship" between them (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Jan 2023*).²⁹ However, tensions started to simmer again when Tebboune said on 31 December that France must set itself free from its "coloniser complex" for diplomatic relations to be reshaped between the two countries.³⁰ Macron responded on 11 January that he does not intend to "ask for forgiveness" over France's colonisation of Algeria and its role in the war of independence.³¹

It is hoped that this latest reconciliatory move between Tebboune and Macron would improve bilateral relations, however, caution is required given the historical tensions between the two countries. This point was emphasised by Tebboune in an interview with **Qatar-based news station Al Jazeera** on 21 March where he said that "our relationship with France is fluctuating".³² Tebboune is scheduled to travel to France in May, to return Macron's trip to Algeria last year, in what is now shaping up to be part of reconciliation efforts between the two countries.³³

Tebboune was correct when he said that Algeria-French relations fluctuate, as a new contentious issue appears as soon as one is resolved. The bitter colonial history of France in the region and Macron's insistence to not apologise for it also remains a major contention point. Tebboune in particular takes issue with Macron's lack of apology.

Tebboune gives interview on Algeria's international relations

Tebboune gave a rare interview to Al Jazeera on 21 March, where he spoke of Algeria's relations with several countries, including **Morocco** and **Spain**, while also addressing the **Ukrainian** conflict. Tebboune noted his regrets that relations with long-time rival and neighbour Morocco have reached a point of "no return".³⁴ Algeria terminated diplomatic relations with Morocco in August 2021, accusing Morocco of having "hostile tendencies", which Morocco has vehemently denied.³⁵

On Algeria's diplomatic crisis with Spain, Tebboune said that the Spanish government's stance on **Western Sahara** is "individual and biased from the Sanchez government".³⁶ Tebboune recalled his ambassador to Spain in March in retaliation for Spain's support for Morocco's proposal for Western Sahara.³⁷ Algeria supports the independence of Western Sahara and its position on the issue has caused decades of deep tensions between Algiers and Morocco.³⁸

²⁷ News24, 9 Feb 2023

²⁸ News24, 9 Feb 2023

²⁹ Africa News, 19 Dec 2022

³⁰ Almayadeen, 31 Dec 2022

³¹ Politico, 11 Jan 2022

³² Middle East Monitor, 25 Mar, 2023

³³ Bloomberg, 8 Feb 2023

³⁴ Al Jazeera, 21 Mar 2023

³⁵ Anadolu News Agency, 23 Mar 2023

³⁶ Al Jazeera, 21 Mar 2023; Anadolu News Agency, 23 Mar 2023

³⁷ Anadolu News Agency, 23 Mar 2023

³⁸ Anadolu News Agency, 23 Mar 2023

Tebboune also stated that Algeria is “qualified to play the role of mediator” in the Ukrainian conflict because Algeria “is one of the countries that has sufficient credibility for it”.³⁹ Western authorities would take offence to that given that they have criticised Algeria’s close relations with **Russia**. Algerian-Russian relations have raised major concerns over the last several months, however, Tebboune does not appear deterred and told Al Jazeera that his visit to Russia will take place in May at the invitation of Russia’s president **Vladimir Putin** (2012-present).⁴⁰

While the majority of what Tebboune said in his interview with Aljazeera will not surprise observers, his statement that relations with Morocco have reached a point of no return has dented hopes that some compromise would be reached, thereby continuing diplomatic instability in the region. A local source told **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that tensions with Morocco are “historic” and those will not be resolved anytime soon:

“Anyone expecting a quick resolution to such a historic rivalry needs to check their expectations. The best we can hope for is that they do not go to war”.⁴¹

Planner

May 2023 **Moscow (Russia)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Moscow;

May 2023 **Paris (France)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Paris;

Chronology

11 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Reuters*. State-owned energy giant, **Sonatrach**, announces that it made six oil and gas discoveries in the first quarter of this year;

11 Apr 2023 **Tunis (Tunisia)** *The North Africa Post*. Tunisian political group, the **Tunisian Salvation Front**, asks **Algeria** to abstain from meddling in Tunisia’s domestic politics following remarks by President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** in an interview with international news station **Al Jazeera** where he spoke about an Algerian role in “*averting Tunisian collapse*” or mediating between Tunisian political players;

11 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Atalayar*. Algeria and **Iran** agree to deepen relations and organise official meetings;

10 Apr 2023 **Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)** *Zawya*. The political consultation committee between Algeria and **Saudi Arabia** holds its first meeting at the level of senior officials of the two countries foreign ministries, discussing ways to enhance bilateral relations in various fields, in addition to exchanging views on several regional and international issues of common concern;

9 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. **Iran’s** president **Ebrahim Raisi** phones president **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to extend his best wishes to him and the Algerian people on the holy month of Ramadan;

8 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. An Algerian court orders the detention of the former minister delegate for small enterprises **Nasim Diafat** pending an investigation into corruption charges;

³⁹ Al Jazeera, 21 Mar 2023

⁴⁰ Anadolu News Agency, 23 Mar 2023

⁴¹ ARC Source, Local Source

7 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Tehran Times*. The new **Iranian** ambassador to Algeria, **Mohammad Reza Babai Siahkel**, meets with President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** and presents his credentials;

7 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** accuses **Morocco** of supporting terrorist organisations and being behind the abduction of the country's diplomats in **Mali**;

6 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. **Libya** and Algeria discuss the problems and obstacles facing the reopening of the border crossing between the two countries, which has been closed for nearly nine years;

3 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu News Agency*. Opposition activist **Rachid Nekkaz** announces that he is leaving Algeria just three months after a presidential pardon saw him released from prison in January;

3 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Amnesty International*. International human rights group **Amnesty International** calls for Algerian authorities to release all wrongfully detained journalists, drop all politically motivated charges against them and quash the conviction of journalist **Ihsane El Kadi**;

2 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Aljazeera*. **Sidi M'Hamed** court sentences prominent journalist **Ihsane El Kadi** to three years in prison for "*foreign financing of his business*";

27 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Opinion Today*. Algeria sends its ambassador to **France**, **Said Moussi**, back to **Paris** after a short crisis with France;

24 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** holds phone talks with **French** president **Emmanuel Macron** on issues of common interest;

19 Mar 2023 **Moscow (Russia)** *Algeria Press Service*. Parliamentary delegation is taking part in an international parliamentary conference themed 'Russia-Africa in a Multipolar World'.

About Africa Risk Consulting:

Africa Risk Consulting (ARC) is a pan-African consulting company that provides timely, relevant information and advice that enables its clients to take informed investment decisions and to safeguard their reputations.

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