

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Algeria Monthly Briefing September 2023

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#### Algeria Summary 12 September 2023

*Foreign minister Ahmed Attaf concludes a diplomatic tour in West Africa to discuss solutions to the coup d'état in neighbouring Niger. Attaf subsequently announces on 28 August that Algeria proposes a six-month transition period for the country. The presidency confirms on 9 September that Algeria will open its airspace to aid and medical flights in the aftermath of the devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake in Moroccan tourist hotspot Marrakech. The announcement comes after a major border incident between the two countries in which the Algerian coastguard on 1 September shot and killed two Moroccans on jet skis who had strayed across the maritime border between the two countries. It is confirmed on 24 August that the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) bloc rejected Algeria's application to join.*

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#### Algeria proposes six-month transition period to solve Niger crisis...

Foreign minister **Ahmed Attaf** completed a diplomacy tour to three members of the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**, **Benin**, **Ghana** and **Nigeria** before announcing on 28 August that Algeria proposes a six-month transition period led by a civilian as a solution to the crisis in neighbouring **Niger**.<sup>1</sup> Attaf said that Algeria's six-point plan is a "summary of consultations and contacts" that had taken place since the coup d'état on 26 July.<sup>2</sup>

Niger was plunged into crisis when a segment of the Nigerien military calling, the **Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie (CNSP)** (national council for safeguarding the country), detained democratically elected president, **Mohamed Bazoum** (2021-2023), due to "deteriorating security situation and bad governance".<sup>3</sup> Bazoum was elected as president of Niger in 2021 following the country's first democratic power transition since gaining independence from **French** colonial rule in 1960.<sup>4</sup> ECOWAS leaders threatened military intervention if the CNSP did not return Niger to civilian rule by 6 August. ECOWAS on 10 August ordered the activation of its standby force to restore constitutional order in Niger but thus far no military intervention in Niger has taken place. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) declared on 5 August that his country "categorically reject any military intervention" and the ultimatum issued by the ECOWAS against the new military junta in its southern neighbour Niger, with which it shares a 1,000-kilometre border, along with human and historical ties (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Aug 2023*).<sup>5</sup> Tebboune stressed that while his government is critical of the coup, it opposes military intervention as it could exacerbate security challenges facing Algeria.<sup>6</sup>

While Attaf did not provide any further details about the content of Algeria's plan, he did emphasise that most of the countries Algeria has spoken to oppose the military intervention in Niger as a solution to the crisis.<sup>7</sup> He also revealed that the Algerian ambassador to Niger, **Ali Drouiche**, had held three meetings with CNSP leader **Abdourahmane Tiani** about the need to restore the constitutional and democratic system in the country.<sup>8</sup> Attaf also stressed that Algeria categorically refuses to open

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East Monitor, 24 Aug 2023

<sup>2</sup> Anadolu Agency, 30 Aug 2023

<sup>3</sup> Aljazeera, 26 July 2023

<sup>4</sup> Anadolu Agency, 30 Aug 2023

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 6 Aug 2023; DW, 8 Jul 2023

<sup>6</sup> DW, 8 Jul 2023

<sup>7</sup> Middle East Monitor, 24 Aug 2023

<sup>8</sup> Anadolu Agency, 30 Aug 2023

its airspace to any military aircraft to intervene in Niger as his government strongly opposes this move.<sup>9</sup>

Algeria is strongly against military intervention in Niger because it could result in a security crisis in the region - Tebboune revealed as much on 5 August when he stressed that any intervention in Niger would be “*a direct threat to Algeria*” because “*the entire Sahel will go up in flames*”.<sup>10</sup> Tebboune stressed that any military action would result in Algeria being the “*main ones affected*” because of the large border it shares with Niger.<sup>11</sup> Algerian authorities are concerned that military intervention in Niger could result in major insecurity and instability in Niger, as already seen in Mali and **Libya**.<sup>12</sup> Algeria is particularly worried that military intervention in Niger could lead to a power vacuum in the event that the military regime is overthrown, as was the case in **Libya** following the 2011 **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** intervention. Such a power vacuum could lead to continuous civil war, a rise in militias, a rise in displaced persons and refugees and greater instability in the region. This could then spill over into Algeria via the border region and impact its internal security.

Algeria also argues that its military and security services are facing immense pressure from jihadi groups, illegal immigration networks and smugglers.<sup>13</sup> Tebboune said that while Algeria would not use military force against its neighbours, there could be “*no solution*” without Algeria either.<sup>14</sup> Thus far, beyond initial reporting on Algeria’s plan for the Niger, it does not appear that it has had much impact on ECOWAS leaders or the trajectory of the crisis.

### Algeria reopens airspace to Morocco

The presidency confirmed on 9 September that Algeria will open its airspace to aid and medical flights in the aftermath of the devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake in **Moroccan** tourist hotspot **Marrakech** that has left at least 2,400 people dead.<sup>15</sup> The major decision to reopen its airspace comes two years after Algeria took the unilateral decision in September 2021 to suspend ties with Morocco.<sup>16</sup> The statement from the presidency said that the country is also prepared to provide humanitarian aid and mobilise material and human resources if Morocco requests such help.<sup>17</sup> In a statement published earlier that day, the foreign ministry also offered the country’s “*sincere condolences to the brotherly Moroccan people for the victims of the earthquake*”.<sup>18</sup>

The dramatic change in position comes after a major border incident between the two countries. The Algerian coastguard on 1 September shot and killed two Moroccans on jet skis who had strayed across the maritime border between the two countries.<sup>19</sup> Algerian authorities said on 3 September that its security authorities had opened fire on a group on a group of jet skiers who ignored warning thoughts and refused to comply with orders to stop.<sup>20</sup> Dozens of Moroccans demonstrated outside the parliament in Rabat to denounce “*the crime committed by the Algerian state*” and a member of the **Moroccan League for Citizenship and Human Rights, Hicham Mellioui**, at the rally in **Rabat** on 4 September called for Morocco’s government to “*take a very firm stance in the face of these crimes*”.<sup>21</sup> Another member of the group **Thami Belmaalam** said that Moroccan and international associations will be filing applications with the international courts on 6 September.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Anadolu Agency, 30 Aug 2023

<sup>10</sup> Le Monde, 9 Aug 2023

<sup>11</sup> Le Monde, 9 Aug 2023

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, 6 Aug 2023; DW, 8 Jul 2023

<sup>13</sup> Anadolu Agency, 9 Aug 2023; DW, 8 Jul 2023

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, 6 Aug 2023

<sup>15</sup> Le Monde, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>16</sup> Simply Flying, 10 Sep 2023

<sup>17</sup> Algerian Presidency, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>18</sup> Le Monde, 9 Sep 2023

<sup>19</sup> World Politics Review, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>20</sup> Africa News, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>21</sup> Africa News, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>22</sup> Africa News, 5 Sep 2023

The incident came weeks after Moroccan leader King **Mohammed VI** called for renewed efforts in reaching a diplomatic settlement to restore relations and reopen borders between the two countries.<sup>23</sup> The reopening of borders for humanitarian reasons could be a step toward a warming of relations but it is yet to be seen whether it will be a permanent move.

### BRICS bloc rejects Algeria's membership for now...

Algeria's application to join the **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)** bloc was rejected after the BRICS leader on 24 August invited **Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** to join the bloc.<sup>24</sup> Algeria's foreign ministry officially submitted its membership application on 7 November joining a growing list of developing countries that sought to join BRICS (*see ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2022*).<sup>25</sup> BRICS, founded in 2009, accounts for 25% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and is home to 40% of the world's population. The bloc is increasingly seen by many developing countries as a rival to the **G7** and other **Western**-led blocs, as well as an ideological and economic counterweight to the **United States (US)** and its allies.<sup>26</sup>

Algerian officials will undoubtedly feel disappointed that they were not invited to join BRICS, especially since they campaigned hard for admittance. During his 15 June meeting with **Russian** President **Vladimir Putin** (2012-present), Tebboune called for an acceleration of Algeria's ascension into BRICS, stating that if approved as a member, Algeria would facilitate the process of switching to payments to be in currency other than dollars or euros (*see ARC Briefing Algeria Jul 2023*). During a five-day visit to China that began on 17 July, Tebboune also pushed Chinese president **Xi Jinping** (2013-present) to support Algeria's ascension into BRICS and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** (*ARC Briefing Algeria Aug 2023*).<sup>27</sup> To underline his commitment to joining the BRICS group, Tebboune announced that his country had submitted a request to be a shareholder in the **BRICS Bank** and pledged to provide \$1.5 billion to the institution.<sup>28</sup> However, Tebboune's absence from the BRICS summit which took place in **South Africa** from 22 to 24 August, raised doubts in whether Algeria would be admitted to the group.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the jubilations of its opponents, Algeria's ascension into BRICS is only a matter of time. This was confirmed by South Africa's finance minister **Enoch Godongwana** who said on 26 August that Algeria is likely to be among the next batch of countries to join BRICS:

*"There were debates [and] difficult decisions where they needed to have consensus on countries – they could only find consensus within the specified period of 6 countries. There is a second batch of countries that are going to be added [to] BRICS. It is my hope and wish that Algeria must be one of them."*<sup>30</sup>

Russian foreign minister **Sergey Lavrov** also said earlier this year that Algeria "*possesses features and advantages that put it above the others looking to join BRICS group*".<sup>31</sup> Algeria is also very strategically important to China and forms a part of China's global agenda. The highlight of Tebboune's trip to **Beijing** in July was a landmark \$36 billion agreement by China to invest in Algeria across multiple sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, transport, new technology and the knowledge economy.<sup>32</sup> The two countries also signed 19 memoranda of understanding (MoU) geared towards

<sup>23</sup> World Politics Review, 5 Sep 2023

<sup>24</sup> Morocco World News, 24 Aug 2023

<sup>25</sup> China Global South Project, 9 Nov 2022

<sup>26</sup> Morocco World News, 1 Aug 2022

<sup>27</sup> China Global South Project, 19 Jul 2023

<sup>28</sup> China Global South Project, 29 Jul 2023

<sup>29</sup> Morocco World News, 24 Aug 2023

<sup>30</sup> EWN, 26 Aug 2023

<sup>31</sup> Morocco World News, 24 Aug 2023

<sup>32</sup> Reuters, 20 Jul 2023

nuclear energy development, renewable power, petrochemicals, ICT and aerospace.<sup>33</sup> While Algeria is not a major supplier of oil to China, it is interested in its huge natural gas reserves.<sup>34</sup>

Going forward, Algeria will likely continue pursuing entrance into Chinese-led institutions. Algeria can raise its global profile by joining Chinese-led multilateral institutions and become less dependent on gas by engaging in several economic opportunities with China. Therefore, Tebboune's visit to China laid the groundwork for Algeria to meet key economic and diplomatic priorities.

## Planner

4 Oct 2023 **(Virtual)** The OPEC+ JMMC convene;  
 2023 **Paris (France)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Paris;  
 Dec 2024 **(Algeria)** Presidential elections;

## Chronology

10 Sep 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Foreign minister **Ahmed Attaf** says relations with **Turkey** are developing both politically and economically, adding that the two countries plan to increase their trade exchange to \$10 billion;

8 Sep 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Foreign minister **Ahmed Attaf** arrives in **Budapest (Hungary)** for a working visit;

6 Sep 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Arab News*. Chief of staff **Said Chengriha** and **United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)** director **William Burn** agree to strengthen cooperation and coordination in security. The two are already partners in the fight against terror in the **Sahel** region;

5 Sep 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *African Business*. Foreign affairs and national communities abroad minister **Ahmed Attaf** will travel to **Turkey** to co-chair the second meeting of the **Joint Planning Group** established to follow up on outcomes of the **Turkey-Algeria High-Level Cooperation Council**;

3 Sep 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Foreign affairs ministry says that it received the **United States (US)** deputy assistant secretary of state **Joshua Harris** who is on a working visit;

30 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. **Nabil Ammar**, the envoy of **Tunisian** President **Kais Saied** to Algerian President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** confirms that his country has no intention to normalise relations with **Israel**;

29 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. **Swiss** attorney general office charges former Algerian defence minister **Khaled Nezzar** with alleged crimes against humanity committed during Algeria's civil war between 1992 and 1994;

27 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** calls for the protection of civilians in **Niger**, where a military intervention ousted president **Mohamed Bazoum** last month;

<sup>33</sup> Sada Elbalad, 18 Jul 2023

<sup>34</sup> National News, 18 Jul 2023

23 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *TV BRICS*. National carrier **Air Algerie** launches the longest **African** air route from **Johannesburg (South Africa)** to **Algiers** at 4,619 miles (7,433 kilometres). The new route will take place twice weekly from 21 September;

23 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. The **French** military denies allegations that it had asked Algeria for permission to fly over its airspace;

22 Aug 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. **Qatar** will through partnership with Algeria's state-owned **Sonatrach** build a chemical plant in Algeria.

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