

Algeria and Its Neighbours

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Executive Summary

Algeria is emerging as an indispensable broker of stability in North Africa and the Sahel. Where insecurity, foreign meddling and polarisation are on the rise across the region, it has at key moments promoted dialogue and state-building as the best means for lifting neighbours out of crisis, thus to safeguard its own long-term security. What some call Algeria's "return" to regional politics after a long absence since its "black-decade" civil war in the 1990s has been positive in many respects: its approach of promoting inclusion and compromise to stabilise its neighbours, driven by enlightened self-interest, presents an opportunity for an international system that has struggled to tackle the challenges engendered by the Arab uprisings. Yet, its ambitions have self-imposed limits. A moribund domestic political scene – a regime riven by factionalism and uncertainty over who might succeed an ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika – cast a fog over the political horizon. Relations with other powers with clout in the region, notably Morocco and France, have room for improvement.

After more than a decade of prioritising relations with the U.S. and European Union (EU), Algeria is recalibrating its foreign policy. Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, a widely respected career diplomat and Africanist, has reinvigorated diplomacy toward the continent and its environs, demonstrating his country's desire to be an anchor for a troubled neighbourhood, although without jettisoning close engagement with the U.S. and Europe. This has been in part a necessary response to unprecedented turmoil on its frontiers. Along much of the eastern and southern parts of its 6,500km land border, Algeria has to contend with greatly weakened states and jihadi threats. The Arab uprisings and Malian crisis and their aftermath have turned Libya, Tunisia and Mali, as well as the wider Sahel region, into cross-border security risks for the first time. The January 2013 jihadi attack on a natural gas complex in Ain Amenas was ample evidence of this.

Since the 2011 regional upheaval, Algeria has played important – at times crucial – roles in the political and security crises of three of its neighbours. In Libya, it has backed UN negotiations and conducted its own discreet diplomacy since mid-2014 to reconcile warring factions. In Mali, it has hosted and brokered talks between the government and northern rebel factions, both to stabilise the country and to prevent northern secessionism. In Tunisia, it has been a quiet but critical backer of the consensus between Islamists and secularists that has been the source of stability there since 2014. In these cases, Lamamra and other senior officials have championed political solutions to polarisation, social unrest and armed conflict. Given the scarcity of actors capable of and willing to play a constructive role in the region – especially in the Sahel, perhaps the world's largest, at least partly, ungoverned space – this is very positive.

Nonetheless, there are constraints on the aspiration for a prominent regional role. These start with domestic politics, where the regime has shown less flexibility. Fears abound that Bouteflika's eventual succession could usher in intra-elite competition and popular unrest. Calls to prepare a managed political opening have been rebuffed, prompting some in the opposition to accuse the president and his entourage of rigidity and stagnation. A constant backdrop to these concerns is that the regional context will make an already delicate transition riskier, as the attention of the military

and intelligence institutions, which have an outsize role in domestic politics and governance, is directed beyond the borders. Deteriorating regional security also affects domestic politics, since it is one of several battlegrounds in the unprecedented public divisions between the presidency and a powerful “deep state” centred on the military intelligence services.

Inversely, domestic politics and its glacial pace of change impede any attempt to adapt foreign policy doctrine (and corresponding military doctrine) to changing times. Traditionally focused on state-to-state relations, Algeria has begun, and must continue, to buttress its traditional diplomatic relationships with ties to the region’s multiplying non-state actors. Long influential in African affairs but relatively marginal in the Arab world, it should engage Gulf states that are increasingly assertive in North Africa and make its case to them through persuasion and not just express pique. Relations with France, the former colonial power, and neighbour Morocco are riven with often unnecessary tensions and rivalries, hostage to a history of which most Algerians have no living memory.

The country would be well served by resolving or at least decreasing these tensions whenever possible. A generational leadership change underway in its politics as well as its institutions offers an opportunity to do so, provided there are understanding counterparts. Particularly at a time of heightened regional insecurity and ideological polarisation, greater Algerian engagement as a pragmatic broker of stability and political compromise in the Maghreb’s and Sahel’s conflicts should be welcomed.

Algiers/Brussels, 12 October 2015

Algeria and Its Neighbours

I. Introduction

Long inward-looking as it focused on political reconciliation after a decade of civil war in the 1990s, Algeria is making a bid for regional leadership in its near-abroad, clearly stating its desire to be an anchor of stability in a troubled region. In doing so, it has often constructively facilitated conflict-resolution and consensus-building in its neighbours, notably Libya, Mali and Tunisia.

This background report assesses the reinvigorated foreign policy from three perspectives. First, is the interplay of domestic politics and a traditionally non-interventionist foreign policy, coming out of the 1990s “black decade” and in the context of increasingly-public establishment schisms and mounting anxiety over succession of the ailing president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Secondly, it tracks the changes (or lack thereof) in rivalries with France and Morocco in the Maghreb and Sahel. Finally, it examines the more deeply engaged, largely constructive approach to the political and security crises in Libya, Mali and Tunisia since 2011. The report is based on discussions with officials in Algeria and its neighbours, as well as a range of other international actors. It is complementary to Crisis Group’s prior reporting on the crises in North Africa and the Sahel.¹

¹ These include the following publications focused on Algeria’s neighbourhood: Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°41, *Tunisia’s Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, 21 October 2014; Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°37, *The Tunisian Exception: Success and Limits of Consensus*, 5 June 2014; Middle East and North Africa Report N°148, *Tunisia’s Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, 28 November 2013; Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°157, *Libya: Getting Geneva Right*, 26 February 2015; Crisis Group Africa Report N°227, *The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm*, 25 June 2015; Crisis Group Africa Report N°226, *Mali: An Imposed Peace?*, 22 May 2015; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°104, *Mali: Last Chance in Algiers*, 18 November 2014.

II. The Legacy of the “Black Decade”

When the Arab world erupted in upheaval in 2011, Algerians took the view that they had already undergone a similar experience, one for which they paid heavily during the subsequent “black decade”, the deadly conflict between Islamist insurgents and security forces (1992-1997) that was sparked by the government’s cancelling of elections that the Islamic Salvation Front (Front islamique du salut, FIS) had been poised to win.² Condemnations of the state’s conduct notwithstanding – particularly by human rights organisations and foreign governments that suspected security forces had played a role in the killing of hundreds of civilians in villages outside Algiers³ – the prevailing domestic narrative is that the state defeated the terrorists. Bitterness about the country’s isolation, including a U.S. arms embargo, at a time of great vulnerability remains strong, as does the sense that the international community failed Algeria in its hour of need.⁴

A. A Slow Return to Normalcy

President Bouteflika swept into power in 1999 on a platform of peacemaking and national reconciliation, beginning a long process of re-engagement with international partners.⁵ He was already building cooperation with the U.S. and France based on mutual interests in the energy sector when the 11 September 2001 attacks in the U.S. occurred. Claiming that Algeria had long been on the front line in a war on terror that had only just reached American soil, he succeeded in forging stronger security ties with Washington, ending his country’s isolation and restoring its international legitimacy. In 2002, the U.S. lifted its ten-year arms embargo against Algeria and began to include it in regional security forums, notably NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (initiated in 1994).⁶ For some, it seemed that this focus on regaining standing in the West came at the expense of Algeria’s historic role in Africa and its immediate

² Algeria’s experience with what its citizens perceive as their earlier version of the “Arab Spring” began in 1980 with protests then known as the “Berber Spring” and peaked with the 1988 “Black October” protests for political pluralism and democratic reforms. Despite security forces’ brutal suppression of those protests, they eventually forced the opening up of the one-party political system. In December 1991, the Front islamique du salut (FIS) party swept the first multiparty elections since independence. The military cancelled the elections after the first round, dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and declared a state of emergency. Algeria spent the following “black decade” mired in a civil war pitting various Islamist groups (some benefiting from the experience of Algerians who had fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan) against the government. Up to 200,000 persons are estimated to have died in the conflict.

³ On Algeria’s civil war and its denouement, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°24, *The Algerian Crisis: Not Over Yet*, 20 October 2000.

⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Algerian officials, former army officers, researchers, Algiers, December 2014-February 2015.

⁵ On the Civil Concord Law promoted by Bouteflika and subsequent amnesty, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°31, *The Civil Concord: A Peace Initiative Wasted*, 9 July 2001. The process culminated in a Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, approved by popular referendum in 2005. Algerians welcomed measures to end the violence, but the amnesty and treatment of the disappeared have drawn criticism that still lingers.

⁶ See Y. Zoubir, “The United States and Algeria: the Cautious Road to Partnership”, *The Maghreb Center Journal*, Issue 1, spring/summer 2010.

neighbourhood, notably through the African Union (AU) and its predecessors, where its diplomats have played leading roles.⁷

Bouteflika vowed during his first election campaign not to be “three-fourths of a president” (ie, not to be a front man for the military), signalling a willingness to challenge the army’s tight grasp on power since the time of President Houari Boumediene (1965-1978) and a succession of weak presidents during the “black decade”. Despite sporadic violence and not infrequent attacks on security forces, the remaining militant threat to the state and society has largely dissipated on Bouteflika’s watch.⁸ He was also successful in strengthening a weakened presidency, in part because, by improving the security environment and midwifing national reconciliation, he diminished the need for the military and intelligence services in national life.

Nonetheless, despite the integration of opposition parties, including Islamists, in successive national unity governments since the late 1990s,⁹ politics remains largely authoritarian and dominated by the presidency and the security services. The experience of the 1990s continues to cast a shadow over politics, with many Algerians (as well as Western officials) convinced that security and stability are closely interwoven with – and perhaps dependent upon – Bouteflika’s authoritarian style.¹⁰ The government lifted the nineteen-year state of emergency in March 2011 in response to domestic protests inspired by those in Tunisia and Egypt, even if they never gained momentum. But it also enacted new legislation conferring heavier penalties on protesting, which remains illegal.

Popular and elite anxiety that the Arab uprisings would revive the 1990s turmoil is a reason Algeria did not experience the same unrest as its neighbours; huge increases in state spending to address socio-economic demands is another. As the situation deteriorated elsewhere, the government pointed to spreading chaos across the region, as well as Algeria’s own difficult history, as a warning against revolutionary upheaval and justification for the status quo.

During the April 2014 presidential elections, in which Bouteflika won a controversial fourth term¹¹ without campaigning (due to poor health after a crippling stroke in 2013¹²), he turned the crises in Libya, Tunisia and Mali into a domestic political

⁷ Bouteflika and former Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci are perceived to have downgraded Algeria’s traditional Africa policy by never visiting the Sahel countries on its border and neglecting ties with other African states. Abdelaziz Rahabi, a former diplomat and minister of communications, said, “there was no Africa policy. Algeria cancelled \$1.3 billion in debt from all African countries, getting nothing in return. Instead it should have taken the opportunity to invest in those countries”. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, September 2014.

⁸ Crisis Group interview, security official, Algiers, October 2014.

⁹ See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°29, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, 30 July 2004.

¹⁰ For Bouteflika’s supporters, continuity amounts to stability; while there has been no substantial democratisation of political life, the end of the civil war and restoration of public security have been major achievements that any political change could undermine. The Arab Spring, in this context, serves as a cautionary tale. Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Algiers, December 2014; Western diplomat, Algiers, October 2014.

¹¹ In 2008, Bouteflika controversially pushed through a constitutional amendment removing term limits, enabling him to seek a third term a year later and a fourth in 2014.

¹² According to Western officials who met with him, Bouteflika is wheelchair-bound and must speak through a microphone due to weakened vocal cords. Although he is said to show his usual intellectual agility, it is uncertain how many hours per day he can be active. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, December 2014. Bouteflika has been hospitalised in France on several occasions since his initial

issue. Though he made no public appearances, he received heavily publicised weekly visits from the army chief of staff, Gaid Salah, in which they discussed security and stability. The not-so-subtle message was that in view of regional turmoil, Algeria could ill afford a leadership transition. Critics charge that the president's re-election strategy amounted to "*chantage sécuritaire*" ("security blackmail"), emphasising the prospect of instability and turmoil in the event the status quo was threatened and the military turned its attention from protecting against external threats to undoing the expansion of presidential powers under his rule.¹³

B. *Internal Tensions and Foreign Policy*

At the heart of these domestic tensions are the questions of who will succeed Bouteflika, how this will affect the balance of power and division of labour between civilians and the military – notably the powerful Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS) – and whether the ruling system in place for decades can and should be reformed. In this debate, foreign and security policy is one of several battlegrounds.

The president's critics claim that his infirmity is paralysing the country's institutions: since his stroke, he has been nearly completely absent from the public arena, the cabinet meets every third month instead of monthly, and parliament is widely seen as moribund. His refusal to step down despite poor health has prompted potential rivals such as Ali Benflis – prime minister during Bouteflika's first term and his chief opponent in the 2014 presidential elections – to accuse him of allowing a dangerous power vacuum to develop.¹⁴

In parallel, a debate about the role of the security forces and their political influence is being pushed by the presidency and its allies. Critics of the DRS stress the need to move away from the legacy of the 1990s and, particularly after the end of the state of emergency in 2011, return the armed forces to the limited defence responsibility they should have in a democratic political system.¹⁵ Senior officers in the DRS and military more generally are said to have a chronic suspicion of the importance and usefulness of civilian government, which they see as lacking efficiency and producing uncertain results compared with military decision-making.¹⁶ In the face of a severe internal threat in the 1990s, the military and civilian powers collaborated to

2013 stroke. Some opposition politicians have alleged that he is no longer able to govern and that the presidency has multiple (and competing) decision-making centres. See, for instance, Hacen Ouali, "Ali Benflis à l'ouverture du congrès de son parti: « Des forces extraconstitutionnelles ont pris possession du centre de décision »", *El Watan*, 14 June 2014.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, Abdelaziz Rahabi, ex-diplomat and minister, Algiers, September 2014.

¹⁴ According to Benflis, it is this vacuum, and not authoritarianism, that characterises the current moment in politics. He has pointed at recurrent rioting in the southern city of Ghardaia and an unprecedented October 2014 strike by riot police deployed there, who marched on the presidency in Algiers, as emblematic of this vacuum. "The centre of national decision-making is crumbling and dispersing, and the power of pressure, influence, and interest groups are replacing the power of the state". Communiqué by Ali Benflis, reproduced in "Ali Benflis: la situation à Ghardaïa révèle la vacance du pouvoir", *Le Matin*, 14 October 2014.

¹⁵ See, for instance, this interview with National Liberation Front (FLN) leader Amar Saadani: Achira Mammeri, "Saïd Bouteflika, Constitution, DRS: Amar Saadani nous dit tout", *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 16 April 2015.

¹⁶ See preface by Abdelhamid Mehri to "Problématique Algérie", by retired DRS Colonel Mohamed Chafik Mesbah, *Le Soir d'Algérie* (Algiers, 2009).

prevent state collapse;¹⁷ today, when security threats appear to be coming chiefly from instability in neighbouring countries, some advocate that the DRS and military focus on controlling borders rather than involve themselves in internal affairs.

To some extent, this has already happened: over the last decade the military has receded from the dominant role it played in the 1990s, even if it remains a powerful behind-the-scenes domestic player. Since 2013, Bouteflika has also taken unprecedented steps to formally curtail the DRS's power in particular. In September 2013, he stripped the DRS of three of its strategic bureaus, dissolving the judicial police and transferring control over the army's press office and Central Directorate of Army Security to the army chief of staff.¹⁸ Three senior DRS officers were forced into retirement, while a fourth was placed under judicial supervision. In October 2014, senior DRS officers detached to government ministries were recalled, and the service's wiretapping powers were placed under justice ministry control. Public and private speculation about the extent to which these measures carry real weight continues; for many observers, the DRS remains the most powerful actor in domestic politics.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the retirement of Major-General Mohammed "Tewfik" Mediène, the DRS's head for 25 years, in September 2015 signals along with the above measures that the institution's influence may be waning.²⁰

While signs of tensions occasionally surface, the presidency and DRS clearly collaborate.²¹ An overly conspiratorial view of inner-regime dynamics tends to underplay

¹⁷ "Without this institutional harmony, the state would have collapsed in the 1990s. The situation was much worse than what Libya experienced in 2011". Crisis Group interview, senior government official, Algiers, October 2014.

¹⁸ See "Décret présidentiel no. 13-309 du 8 Septembre 2013", *Journal officiel de la République algérienne démocratique et populaire*.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, former DRS officer, opposition writers, political analysts and Western diplomats, Algiers and Paris, November 2014-February 2015. The rivalry between the presidency and the DRS is a mainstay of the Algerian press and blogs, as well as the international press. See, for instance, Mélanie Matarese, "Abdelaziz Bouteflika s'attaque aux services secrets algériens", *Le Figaro*, 12 September 2013; Fayçal Hamdani, "Restructuration des services secrets: comment la DCSA a supplanté le DRS", *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 12 August 2015; "10 observations sur la crise de l'été 2013 en Algérie", Observations Confidentielles blog (<https://7our.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/10-observations-sur-la-crise-de-lete-2013-en-algerie>), 13 September 2013; "Pressing for Depth", The Moor Next Door blog (<https://themoornextdoor.wordpress.com/2015/08/04/pressing-for-depth>), 4 August 2015.

²⁰ Mediène was replaced by General Athman Tartag, a DRS veteran who had been seconded to the presidency. Several foreign observers in Algiers saw his appointment as signalling a degree of continuity, namely as part of an effort to restructure and professionalise the security apparatus more than as a reflection of a battle for power within the regime: a way of bringing about "organisational efficiencies driven by the change in the security situation", in the words of a military attaché. Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats and military attachés, Algiers, September 2015. An Algerian analyst with good links to the security establishment put it thus: "The goal is to professionalise the military and refocus the DRS on its core business, which is espionage and counter-espionage. The DRS's reputation for knowing and seeing everything is wildly exaggerated. Restructuring will refocus attention towards the Sahel and Maghreb and make counter-terrorism a greater priority". Crisis Group interview, Algiers, September 2015. A journalist said, "the president is moving DRS back to what it was in the 1970s. The regime no longer has a dual system; the clan war is over". Crisis Group interview, Algiers, September 2015. Of course, there may be a simpler reason for Mediène's retirement: he is long rumoured to have been ill, while other generals who were powerful in the 1990s have already retired or passed away.

²¹ The relationship between the presidency and DRS is opaque, complex and therefore difficult to understand, particularly as both are tightly closed institutions. A former DRS officer who remains

the evolution of Algeria's threat perception and its regional environment. Some of the personnel and policy changes of the last few years should be taken at face value as an adjustment of security strategy, not necessarily (or only) as the reflection of an internal political struggle on which much of Algeria's press and opposition have tended to focus.²² That there is an internal policy debate on how to face security challenges, and that resulting responses have an impact on domestic power balances should not be surprising.

C. *Turning Point: The Ain Amenas Hostage Crisis*

The 16 January 2013 attack on the Tinguetourine gas complex in Ain Amenas, in the south-eastern province of Illizi near the Libyan border, by Mokhtar Belmokhtar's al-Murabitoun jihadi group was a watershed event.²³ It highlighted how instability in neighbouring countries can threaten national interests, particularly in the vast expanse of hard-to-control southern desert, where illicit trade in goods, arms, drugs and people is rife.²⁴ And it drove home the challenge posed by the collapse of state security – and the absence of reliable interlocutors – in Libya, from where the assailants had come. The attack and subsequent capture of over 800 hostages by jihadi militants illustrated the profound transformation of national security challenges: used to tackling internal threats, as it did primarily in the country's north during the "black decade", Algeria must now contend with external threats from transnational radical groups operating in weak states and ungoverned territories along its southern borders.

close to the institution suggested that no matter what steps are taken formally, the agency can continue to rely on a network of personalities whose influence is felt far beyond official channels to control or influence key state institutions. Crisis Group interview, Paris, November 2014. An Algerian writer in exile critical of the regime suggested that ultimately the agency forms the deep state's backbone, so is likely to survive removal of even key leaders: "[Former President Houari] Boumediene used to say the army is the backbone of the country – well, then the intelligence services are its spinal cord". Crisis Group interview, Paris, November 2014.

²² The replacement of three senior internal security figures, including those responsible for President Bouteflika's personal security, in July 2015, after unconfirmed reports of a foiled attack (by unknown, or at least undisclosed, assailants) on his residence outside of Algiers, is a case in point. See Achira Mammeri, "Changements dans l'armée: Bouteflika verrouille à tous les étages", *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 27 July 2015.

²³ Only weeks after the French military intervention in Mali, militants from al-Murabitoun – an al-Qaeda-allied group led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, known as "Mr Marlboro" for his cigarette smuggling network across the Sahel – crossed into southern Algeria from Libya and took more than 800 hostages at the Tinguetourine gas plant. 39 foreign hostages and one Algerian guard were killed during the two-day crisis and subsequent rescue operation, as well as 29 militants. Tinguetourine then accounted for 10 per cent of Algeria's natural gas production, generating revenues of approximately \$5 million per day. The plant – a joint venture of Norway's Statoil, BP and state-owned Sonatrach – was guarded by the Algerian military. Belmokhtar, also known as Khaled Abou El Abbas, is an Algerian-born former commander of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb for the Sahel region, who has operated in the region since the 1990s. Targeted by a U.S. airstrike in the eastern Libyan town of Ajdabiya on 13 June 2015, he reportedly survived.

²⁴ When Qadhafi ruled Libya, Algerian gendarmes and border police patrolled their side of the border, while Libyan forces patrolled theirs. The Libyan side is now either not policed or controlled by militias, including Tuareg border guards drawn from former Qadhafi-era security forces. Crisis Group interview, Libyan Tuareg border guards, Tripoli, March 2015.

The Ain Amenas attack triggered recriminations over security readiness. In an exceptionally public reproach, Amar Saadani, the ruling National Liberation Front's secretary general, said that Mediène, the long-time DRS chief, should have stepped down after failing to prevent the incident.²⁵ This criticism by a senior official of the governing party seen as close to the presidency against a figure many consider a kingmaker even more powerful than the president was unprecedented.

In immediate response to the Ain Amenas events, Bouteflika imposed strict border controls. He ordered the closure of the crossings to Libya and Mali, conditioned access to border zones on military permission and deployed ground and air forces to enforce the new rules, with a particular focus on the Libyan frontier.²⁶ Some 100,000 troops are now actively deployed at the borders, at least double the previous number.²⁷ The army created a new military zone – the seventh, carved from parts of the fourth and sixth – along the highest-risk border, that with Libya, in the south east; in the wake of the seizure of Sirte by Islamic State fighters in February 2015, it vowed to destroy on sight any unidentified convoy of vehicles approaching from the Libyan side.²⁸ The new zone's commander has been given extensive resources to combat both the jihadi threat and smuggling, including control over the army, air force, border police, national guards and gendarmerie.²⁹

The border's militarisation has created new difficulties. After its closure caused food shortages in the Libyan province of Ghat, protesters gathered in the south-eastern border city of Djanet (in Algeria's Illizi province) to denounce an unfolding humanitarian crisis.³⁰ In response, Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal instructed the Algerian Red Crescent to prepare a humanitarian convoy for Ghat and nearby Libyan towns and instructed that border controls be relaxed.³¹

Conflict and the consequences of a security vacuum have spilled across the frontiers on other occasions as well. The impact of France's 2013 Operation Serval in Mali was felt along the Algeria-Mali border, changing the balance of power between competing local ethnic groups.³² In Ghat and in Tamanrasset – provinces close to

²⁵ "Amar Saadani demande la démission du général Toufik et défend Chakib Khelil", *Maghreb Emergent*, 3 February 2014. Saadani accused the DRS of "overriding its prerogatives" and standing in the way of the construction of a civil state.

²⁶ Mohamed Ben Ahmad, "Algeria closes most of its land borders", *El Khabar*, 22 May 2014. Around 40,000 soldiers were reportedly deployed to reinforce the paramilitary forces – Groupement des gardes-frontières (GGF), Police de l'air et des frontières (PAF), customs police and gendarmes – already charged with controlling the Libyan border.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Algerian diplomat, New York, March 2015.

²⁸ "Algeria raises alert level along border with Libya", *Middle East Monitor*, 4 June 2015.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, government counter-terrorism official, Algiers, May 2015.

³⁰ Food shortages in the Libyan province of Ghat may have worsened also as a result of fighting between Tebu and Tuareg militias, particularly after September 2014, when the road linking the major southern trading post of Sebha to Ghat province was closed, forcing greater dependence on Algeria. Crisis Group observations, Sebha, March 2015.

³¹ See "Algeria to send shipments of humanitarian aid to Libya", *Middle East Monitor*, 24 November 2014.

³² Arab self-defence militias sprang up overnight after Idnan Tuaregs called in French airstrikes against their rival Berabiche traffickers in Ain Khalil (Mali), who they claimed were fighters belonging to the northern Malian jihadi group Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The resulting tribal conflict spread across the border into the Algerian village of Bordj Badji Mokhtar. Crisis Group interviews, northern Malian rebels, Algiers, October 2014. See also "Dieu a maudit

the Libyan and Malian borders respectively – Algerians have protested border closures. Likewise, Algerian-led jihadi groups sought refuge in Tunisia’s Mount Chaambi nature preserve, near the Algerian frontier, after the post-2011 weakening of security there.³³ Recruiting Tunisian and other militants, they have carried out attacks in Tunisia and been involved with cross-border smuggling.

The Ain Amenas crisis confirmed for Algerian leaders that with the chief security threats to the country outside its borders, they can no longer afford the relatively passive foreign policy followed for much of the decade since the end of the civil war.

beaucoup de personnes cette semaine à Bordj Badji Mokhtar’: le douloureux réveil de Bordj Badji Mokhtar”, *Tamoudre*, 23 August 2013.

³³ Crisis Group has reported extensively on the emergence of the Algeria-Tunisia border as a refuge for jihadi militants. See Middle East and North Africa Report N°148, *Tunisia’s Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, 28 November 2013.

III. An Uneasy Triangle: Algeria, Morocco and France

Having defeated an Islamist insurrection at home – officials today describe the threat from armed groups as “residual” – Algeria perceives itself as an island of stability bordered by unstable countries.³⁴ Its regional strategy consists of preparing a “*politique de voisinage*” (“neighbourhood policy”) that promotes horizontal integration among Sahelian countries, with Algeria as both pivot and protector, as opposed to the neighbourhood looking to the West (ie, France, the U.S. and other outside powers) to solve its problems. At the same time, Algiers is resisting pressure to become a “*gendarme de la région*” (“regional cop”) subcontracted to protect the West from jihadi violence and clandestine immigration or intervene militarily in regional crises.³⁵ While keen to assert itself as a regional power, it wants to do so on its own terms, particularly as officials view recent Western policy – especially NATO’s intervention in Libya – as profoundly ill-conceived and irresponsible.³⁶ It is also concerned with maintaining the coherence of its traditional foreign policy doctrine.³⁷

Algeria’s approach to the Libya, Mali and Tunisia crises cannot be seen in isolation from its relationship with its traditional rival Morocco, or with France and the U.S., which have designated the Sahel as a priority concern and whose own policies and willingness to project force can clash with Algerian interests. In a sense, the new neighbourhood policy is geared to asserting the country’s influence in the region, whether in the context of such competition or to avoid having its interests and positions ignored at decisive moments (as in Libya in 2011).

The relationships and rivalries between Algeria, Morocco and France are particularly important. Algiers and Rabat tend to see bilateral relations in zero-sum terms:

³⁴ A former official suggested that the EU is fuelling this perception by encouraging Algeria to see itself as an extension of the EU’s Schengen Agreement border: “The Europeans want Schengen to start at Tamanrasset. They want to control human flows towards the north. But these should be monitored at the source, not after they arrive in Morocco or Algeria! So we have an international responsibility in the sense that Westerners think we have to stabilise the region”. Crisis Group interview, Abdelaziz Rahabi, Algiers, September 2014. The desire by some EU member states to secure help from North African states in handling cross-Mediterranean people flows, including hosting processing centres for migrants and refugees, may be one driver of this thinking. Crisis Group interviews, EU officials, Brussels, May 2015.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, former and current government officials, Algiers, October-December 2014. A presidential counter-terrorism adviser explicitly rejected a military approach, pointing out that the constitution prohibits the military from intervening in other states. See “Kamel Rezzag Bara: l’Algérie refuse le rôle de gendarme dans la région”, *radioalgerie.net*, 11 June 2015. Article 26 of the constitution states that Algeria “shall not resort to war to attack the legitimate sovereignty and the liberty of other peoples”.

³⁶ A senior government official railed in particular against what he termed a decision to allow pro-Qadhafi Tuareg fighters “to escape Libya to Mali with all of their weapons”, when NATO controlled Libyan airspace and could have bombed the escaping column – a deal he alleged was made to quickly bring down the Qadhafi regime at the expense of northern Mali’s stability. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, December 2014.

³⁷ Algeria’s post-independence foreign policy doctrine is defined by adherence to principles such as respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, economic nationalism, positive nonalignment and support for decolonisation and liberation movements. Algeria has sent military forces abroad on only two occasions: the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. Recent peace-building efforts recall its role in past international diplomatic successes, such as the Algiers-brokered 1975 accord between Iraq and Iran, Algerian diplomats’ role in securing the release of U.S. hostages in Iran in 1981, and mediation in the 2000 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

any gain in regional stature for one is viewed automatically by the other as a loss to itself.³⁸ Morocco perceives Algerian hegemony in the Sahel as a threat to its growing influence in West Africa (it is the largest African investor in the region) and to its claim to Western Sahara, especially at the diplomatic level, since most states that have recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) of the Polisario Movement are African. This has left Morocco outside AU in protest at the SADR's membership and, apart from its role in West Africa, marginalised in the continent's diplomacy.³⁹ Algeria perceives Morocco as a spoiler more than a rival.⁴⁰

The improvement or decline of Algiers' and Rabat's relations with Paris, in turn, are also seen as coming at the other's expense.⁴¹ Franco-Algerian relations are, for both countries, complicated by a war of independence that continues to resonate in domestic politics – especially for an Algerian political class steeped in the revolutionary credo of the National Liberation Front. Algeria considers France a genuine rival in the Sahel, even if it is also a partner. France has a strong military presence and extensive political influence in its two former colonies, Mali and Niger, and in francophone Africa more generally. While officials believe France's military action in both Libya and Mali has had a destabilising impact and harmed Algerian interests,⁴²

³⁸ Algeria and Morocco went to war briefly over a border dispute in 1963, soon after Algeria's independence from France. This "war of the sands" set a tone of distrust between the two countries (despite the border conflict being eventually settled) that turned into permanent hostility due to Algeria's backing of the Polisario Front's 1975 claim for self-determination of the Western Sahara, a Spanish colony claimed by Morocco. The Western Sahara conflict is the chief source of tension between the two countries, with Morocco seeing Algeria's position as aimed at isolating it. Algeria says its position is principled, driven by adherence to international law and international decolonisation norms. The two compete for influence in the Maghreb and West Africa and frequently present rival diplomatic initiatives in both. Crisis Group interviews, Algerian, Moroccan, Arab, sub-Saharan African and Western diplomats, and UN officials, Algiers, Rabat, Cairo, Paris, Brussels and New York, October 2014–July 2015. This rivalry has become a permanent fixture of both medias since the 1970s and a staple of nationalist discourse.

³⁹ According to a senior Moroccan diplomat, Algeria's bid for regional influence is chiefly aimed at excluding Morocco: "Their objective is to guarantee a certain influence in the region. They are always excluding us. If there is an initiative, a meeting, their first reaction is to exclude Morocco. Their first aim is not fighting terrorism; it is excluding Morocco". Crisis Group interview, New York, March 2015. An Algerian diplomat expressed similar sentiments about Morocco's diplomacy: "They are very harsh towards us; they never want to cooperate. We know each other very well: they know us, and we know them". Crisis Group interview, New York, March 2015. Media in both countries often routinely depict diplomatic successes (for instance Algiers hosting the Mali negotiations, or Morocco hosting Libya negotiations) as a defeat for the other.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Algerian security official, Algiers, October 2014.

⁴¹ "We are stuck in a triangle with Algeria and Morocco", noted a French diplomat in Rabat. "France's rapprochement with Algeria after Operation Serval in Mali was taken very badly here". Crisis Group interview, Rabat, August 2015. A French official described the domestic dimension of the triangle: "For both Algerians and Moroccans, the French left is with Algeria, and the French right is with Morocco. We are the victims of this image". Crisis Group interview, Paris, November 2014. Over the course of 2014, partly because of improvements in France's relations with Algeria under President François Hollande (but also because of the indictment by a French judge of a senior Moroccan security official for human rights abuses), a diplomatic crisis brewed with Morocco, leading to the suspension of some security and judicial collaboration. See Thierry Oberlé, "Hollande s'empêtre dans la rivalité maroco-algérienne", *Le Figaro*, 6 January 2015. Relations improved in 2015 after Hollande's intervention in the crisis.

⁴² Some Malian rebel leaders say they believe France promised to support a Tuareg war for independence in 2011 in exchange for abandoning Qadhafi and cooperation on counter-terrorism in

the two countries have common security interests and have strengthened cooperation between their military and intelligence services in recent years.⁴³ Even so, they continue to have pronounced differences in approach to Sahel security, especially the use of military power.

Following UN Security Council Resolution 2085 (20 December 2012) authorising the deployment of an African-led support mission to restore constitutional order and territorial integrity in Mali and an official request by interim Malian government officials for French assistance, Algeria cooperated with Operation Serval, the French-led military intervention. A retired Algerian intelligence officer said:

The French military operation was supported by the UN. In the face of a crumbling Malian state and spreading chaos, the French rapidly arranged for a UN resolution authorising the use of force in Mali. The Malian government accepts the presence of French forces, so Algeria cannot oppose it.⁴⁴

That said, Algeria is unhappy with the limited degree to which France has shared information on its operations in northern Mali, operations that have a direct impact on Algeria, especially through refugee flows or fleeing fighters.⁴⁵

Algeria is also competing with France over shaping the region's security infrastructure. Algiers is the lead backer of the Nouakchott Process, launched by the AU in March 2013, which brings together eleven Maghreb, Sahel and West African countries to promote regional security cooperation.⁴⁶ Algeria views it as an alternative both to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which was incapable of responding to the Malian crisis in 2012, and to UN peacekeeping forces, which lack a political framework.⁴⁷ Officials say the Nouakchott Process already has measur-

northern Mali, and that France abandoned them after jihadi groups overpowered them and the presidency passed from Sarkozy to Hollande. See, for instance, interview with former National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, MNLA) Minister of External Relations Hama ag Mahmoud: "France gave us its green light for independence of Azawad", *Courier du Sahara*, January 2014. The charge that France stirred up Tuareg separatism along the Algerian border in order to topple the Libyan regime and impose a new security order in northern Mali, if true, is seen in the Algerian media and by some officials as at best meddling and at worst a dangerous escalation in encircling Algeria, the only country in the region that remains outside of France's sphere of influence. Crisis Group interviews, Algerian officials, October-December 2014. For an example of concern in Algerian media about a perceived "encirclement" by foreign military bases, see Brahim Takheroubt, "L'Algérie encerclée par des bases militaires", *L'Expression*, 4 February 2013; and Rafik Bahri, "Avec comme conséquence l'encerclement total de l'Algérie: Essebsi offre ses bases à l'Otan", *Algérie Patriotique*, 22 May 2015.

⁴³ See, for instance, Jean-Marie Guénois, "La France et l'Algérie s'accordent pour former les imams à la laïcité", *Le Figaro*, 19 December 2014.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Algiers, November 2014.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Algiers, October 2014.

⁴⁶ The Nouakchott Process includes Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad, and operates under the auspices of the AU's Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Heads of member states' intelligence services meet every two months, foreign ministers every three.

⁴⁷ Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra said, "ECOWAS was ill-equipped to tackle a very confusing, asymmetrical, situation where tribal affiliation is much more important than ideological affiliation. The Nouakchott Process seeks to address this problem". Crisis Group interview, Algiers, 21 December 2014.

ably improved intelligence sharing, and there are plans for joint personnel training and mixed patrols.

France promotes a different approach to Sahel security, one that sometimes mirrors Algeria's own. For instance, it launched a Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU) at a meeting in Paris just after the 2014 Boko Haram kidnapping of several hundred girls from a school in Chibok, Nigeria. It bears striking similarities to the Algiers-based Unit for Fusion and Liaison, an intelligence-sharing hub created in 2010 that brings together the intelligence chiefs of Sahel states concerned about cross-border threats. One day after the Nouakchott Process launch, the France-backed "Sahel G5", a framework for promoting security coordination between Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, convened an extraordinary summit in Nouakchott. Heads of state from Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso attended the back-to-back summits.

Finally, in July 2014, France launched Operation Barkhane, the successor to Operation Serval, not just to continue French operations in Mali, but also to establish an intelligence-gathering architecture and project force across the Sahel, including through bases in Chad, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. France's principal regional partner is Chad, the only Sahel country with the capacity to deploy troops across the region. Barkhane is a more ambitious, more militarised, effort to bring stability to the Sahel. For this reason, Algeria views it as an attempt at encirclement by France and its allies that would further reduce Algeria's influence and pave the way for additional military interventions on its borders. This is of particular concern in the context of closer security relations between Tunisia and the West (including NATO) and the possibility of a new Western military intervention in Libya to stem the flow of migrants and/or combat the Islamic State (IS).

IV. Tackling the Neighbourhood's Crises

Algeria's policy toward its three troubled neighbours – Libya, Mali and Tunisia – has two key characteristics. The first is that it sees its own experience in dealing with radical groups and integrating mainstream Islamists as a model that can and should be exported. Algiers contends it was able to root out Islamist violence and its contributing factors after the “black decade” through reconciliation and de-radicalisation measures, attention to socio-economic grievances and brute force when necessary. Although there are still pockets of militancy in the country, the threat of internal violence has been contained; new recruitment and radicalisation appear to be on the decline.⁴⁸ The government has touted its de-radicalisation programs internationally, notably in tandem with U.S.-led programs on countering extremism and by backing the League of the Ulemas of the Sahel, which promotes the Maleki rite of Sunni Islam (historically dominant in the Maghreb and Sahel) as a bulwark against fundamentalism.⁴⁹

Despite the flaws in Algeria's own post-civil war reconciliation initiatives – largely predicated on the military defeat of armed groups rather than reform-oriented political measures⁵⁰ – the relative calm and marginalisation of radical groups since 1999 have given it the confidence to avoid the type of stridently anti-Islamist “*éradicateur*” discourse championed by, for example, Egypt since the July 2013 overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi. Algiers's approach was aided by what remained of organised Islamist politics after 2000. The Muslim Brotherhood-inspired *Mouvement de la société pour la paix* (MSP, known by its Arabic acronym *Hamass*) was part of a pro-Bouteflika coalition for most of the 2000s, allowing the regime to claim that as it was integrating peaceful Islamists into the government, there were opportunities to overcome the Islamist-secular divide that had framed the 1990s civil war.

The second key principle is that Algeria has an interest in strong centralised states on its borders, spurring it to combat centrifugal forces that could lead to partition, whether formal or informal, and the multiplication of actors with which it would have to deal. This fear stems from both its post-colonial experience and ideology and the reality of ungoverned, or loosely governed, territories along its borders. Like many states, Algeria prefers to have a well-constituted local counterpart and is uneasy in dealing with non-state actors. It also echoes a common regional refrain – that the Arab uprisings since 2011 have weakened the state, or injured the “prestige of the state” (*hibat al-dawla*), which, even if authoritarian, is the sole rampart against societal conflict and disintegration. Whether in the Arab or sub-Saharan African context, the failure, or

⁴⁸ The dwindling numbers of Algerians fighting abroad also support this. An official Algerian estimate places the number of those who have gone to fight in Syria at less than 70, compared to over 1,600 from Morocco and over 3,000 from Tunisia. See also R. Barrett, “Foreign Fighters in Syria”, The Soufan Group, June 2014.

⁴⁹ Algeria has committed to hold a regional summit on de-radicalisation as a follow-up to the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism of February 2015, and is participating in the U.S.-led Global Counter-Terrorism Forum launched on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2011. See “Joint Communiqué on the U.S.-Algeria Strategic Dialogue”, U.S. Department of State, 8 April 2015. The League of the Ulemas of the Sahel was launched by Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania in January 2013. It is in competition, to some extent, with pre-existing Moroccan initiatives in the region, notably the training of imams in Mali, suggesting that de-radicalisation and counter-extremism programs are another field on which Rabat and Algiers are in competition.

⁵⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria*, op. cit.

at least crisis, of the post-colonial state is a source of great anxiety throughout the region, Algeria included.

A. *Libya: Facilitation and Containment*

In Libya, Algeria seeks a political solution based on dialogue and inclusivity as a bulwark against both jihadi groups and further foreign meddling, with the aim of building up state institutions and their ability to control borders. Algeria remained officially neutral toward the anti-Qadhafi uprising (though some believe they discerned a pro-Qadhafi orientation) and opposed the 2011 NATO intervention.⁵¹ While Algiers long had cool relations with the former regime, it warned that intervention would result in tribal infighting, arms flooding the region and a steep rise in jihadi attacks – all of which came to pass.⁵² Security officials resented the international campaign, which broke the government's monopoly over security and empowered unreliable militias that have battled ever since and proved unable to restore order, particularly at the borders.⁵³ The Qadhafi regime's collapse also allowed creation of a safe haven for militants following the 2013 French military intervention in northern Mali.⁵⁴

Since Libya's transition disintegrated in July 2014, and the government split into two competing authorities, Algeria has advocated national reconciliation through an inclusive process bringing together rivals, including Islamists and Qadhafi-era officials – as an official put it, “everyone but the terrorists”, a category that in Algiers's eyes includes anyone who refuses to engage in electoral politics, such as Ansar al-

⁵¹ A visit by Sadek Bouguettaya, a National Liberation Front (FLN) central committee member and member of parliament, to a pro-Qadhafi meeting of Libyan tribes in Tripoli on 8 May 2011 as part of an official FLN delegation drew accusations of Algerian military support for the Qadhafi regime. Bouguettaya was cited in the Algerian press as arguing that “no *mujahid* [in the Algerian context, “veteran”] of the glorious 1 November 1954 revolution can accept or tolerate that NATO forces bomb and massacre a brotherly people to which we are united by close ties of tradition, language, Maleki religious practice, and common borders”. See “Sadek Bouguettaya nous écrit”, *Le Soir d'Algérie*, 17 May 2011. Algeria also gave asylum to several fleeing members of the Qadhafi family, although they were subsequently made to leave the country.

⁵² In a March 2011 interview, then Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci said, “we told the international community: be careful, if you continue like this, you will have to manage the rise not of terrorism, but of the capabilities offered to terrorists whose nuisance will be more greatly felt. Our message is to focus attention on the secondary effects of this first ‘earthquake’, as we see Libyans killing one another. There will be a second ‘earthquake’ that will be the result of the spread of weapons across the region”. See interview in *L'Expression*, 24 March 2011.

⁵³ In January 2013, the prime ministers of Algeria, Libya and Tunisia met in the Libyan town of Ghadames to discuss improving cross-border security. Cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia has progressed on security, political and economic fronts, but deepening conflict in Libya has made cooperation with that country practically impossible, to the frustration of Algiers. “Every six months they have a new head of state”, an Algerian diplomat said. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, October 2014.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, French and Algerian security officials, Paris and Algiers, October–December 2014. From the Algerian perspective, the use of Libya as a transit point by the perpetrators of the attack on the Ain Amenas gas complex underscored the need to end Libya's divisions and reestablish a state able to impose security at the country's borders – or at least a reliable interlocutor with which to coordinate border control and share intelligence.

Sharia or IS and al-Qaeda affiliates.⁵⁵ It has pushed a consensual, democratic solution, culminating in elections and a new constitution. To this end, it has worked closely with the UN Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, Bernardino León, hosting the political-parties track of the UN-led negotiations.⁵⁶ It views facilitating a political solution to the crisis and the re-emergence of state institutions not only as a priority in itself, but also as the foremost condition for fighting the spread of violent jihadism.⁵⁷

Although Algeria, along with Libya's five other neighbours (Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger and Tunisia), has favoured an approach driven by and coordinated within the region, it is at odds with Egypt's decision to back, politically and militarily, the internationally recognised parliament in Tobruk. It is particularly opposed to other, more distant states, such as the UAE or Jordan, wielding influence in Libya by supporting pro-Tobruk factions.⁵⁸ In the words of a senior Algerian diplomat, "I wonder how countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council would react if we intervened in Yemen. I understand the concerns of our neighbours, but not those of others [further afield]".⁵⁹

In February 2015, Algeria took a forceful stance at the UN Security Council against Egypt's call for a partial lifting of the arms embargo on Libya (in place since February 2011) to allow weapons to flow to the Tobruk side.⁶⁰ It sees the Egyptian approach as

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Abdelkader Messahel, minister delegate, Maghreb and African Affairs, Algiers, 22 December 2014.

⁵⁶ During the UN's initial mediation attempt between Libyan parliamentarians in September 2014, held at the Libyan town of Ghadames near the point where the country's borders intersect with Algeria and Tunisia, Algeria tried to convince boycotting members of the House of Representatives (the parliament elected in June 2014, currently sitting in Tobruk) to take up their seats. It has since worked on convincing the parties to form a national unity government and resume the transition that collapsed in July 2014. Crisis Group interview, Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, Algiers, 21 December 2014. Minister Delegate for Maghreb and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel, who handles Algeria's Libya file, has claimed to be in "almost daily" contact with León. In March 2015, Algeria hosted the first round of the political-parties track, though officials say they had previously conducted intensive, discreet diplomacy with a broad spectrum of Libyan actors. A foreign policy analyst close to the government said there were "200 secret meetings in the lead-up to the Algiers talks". Crisis Group interview, Algiers, December 2014. The talks included former Qadhafi loyalists, a point Algerian officials, more than other backers of the UN-led process, frequently insist upon. A second round of the political-parties track was conducted in Algiers in June 2015, just before the UN presented a fourth draft agreement to Libyan participants. On the UN-brokered Libyan talks, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°157, *Libya: Getting Geneva Right*, 26 February 2015.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Abdelkader Messahel, minister delegate, Maghreb and African Affairs, Algiers, 22 December 2014.

⁵⁸ On the sidelines of a May 2014 Non-Aligned Movement foreign ministers meeting in Algiers, a "neighbours plan" was agreed on for Libya, assigning to Egypt the role of political mediator and charging Algeria with improving security. The initiative came partly to quiet talk of a new foreign intervention. But neighbours' agendas began to diverge in August 2014, when Egypt's involvement in airstrikes (believed to have been carried out by UAE jets operating out of a north-western Egyptian airbase) against Libya Dawn, a militia coalition backing the Tripoli-government ruled out its neutrality as a mediator. There were concerns that such airstrikes and, more generally, military support from Gulf countries would increase the chances of civil war and, possibly, Libya's eventual partition.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, New York, March 2015. More generally, Algerian officials perceive the UAE's and Qatar's roles in the 2011 uprising against the Qadhafi regime as having been deeply disruptive.

⁶⁰ A senior Algerian diplomat said, "it would be total craziness to lift the embargo. It is militarily impossible for one party to overcome the other. Solving the issue with weapons will lead to total chaos". Crisis Group interview, New York, March 2015.

driven by hostility to political Islam, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, though it is only a small part of the coalition backing the Tripoli-based parliament.⁶¹ Algiers also has actively opposed a new (if more limited) military intervention in Libya – promoted by France and some of its African allies, who fear that southern Libya could become a hub for Sahelian militant groups. It dismisses the idea as naïve about possible consequences, just as it believes NATO’s original intervention was.⁶² “This time, we want to be listened to”, asserted a senior official:

If the idea is to neutralise [al-Murabitoun leader Mokhtar] Belmokhtar and the terrorists, good. But what worries us is that the calls for intervention are coming from the outside. They must come from the inside. Those in Tobruk say they want intervention, but there is no consensus in Libya. There is therefore no alternative to dialogue.⁶³

The biggest problem, from the Algiers standpoint, is not the various parties’ ideology but the lack of an effective state providing internal security and coordinating with neighbours. The official continued:

There is barely a state there, unlike in Tunisia or Egypt. When you [ie, NATO and Libyan rebels] broke the regime, you broke the state; it was regime collapse, not regime change. And there have been no systematic efforts to rebuild the state since Qadhafi fell.⁶⁴

The worsening situation in Libya, despite the July 2015 UN-brokered tentative agreement to create a government of national accord, and rising security challenges, could force Algeria to change tack.⁶⁵ In June 2015, in reaction to news that IS-affiliated factions in Sirte had taken control of the local airport, it raised the alert on its border with Libya to the highest level, reportedly deploying more soldiers to guard it and issuing shoot-to-kill orders against trespassers.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Minister Delegate for Maghreb and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel said, “Egypt has a problem with its Muslim Brothers, but they should not be projecting this onto Libya. Libya’s Muslim Brotherhood does not represent a very big part of the political spectrum”. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, 22 December 2014. Algeria has declined to follow the lead of Egypt and some Gulf states in cracking down on political Islamists and rejected a January 2014 call on Arab League members to declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation.

⁶² The call for Western militaries to conduct “after-sales service” in Libya, made at the France-led Dakar Peace and Security Summit in December 2014, found some echo but appeared to lose currency as UN negotiations between Libyan parties took off. By March 2015, French officials were downplaying the possibility of military action, with President Hollande said to have decided against it. Crisis Group interviews, French officials, Paris, March–April 2015.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, Abdelkader Messahel, minister delegate, Maghreb and African Affairs, Algiers, 22 December 2014.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See Crisis Group Statement, “The Libyan Political Dialogue: An Incomplete Consensus”, 16 July 2015. For now, there has been no sign of a significant shift, or of a discussion concerning a “Plan B”. Both in the Arab League and in public Algiers has forcefully held on to its no-intervention, pro-UN-deal line on Libya. If, however, it were to face a more serious threat in its immediate vicinity, it might decide to refocus on dealing with whomever is near the border at the expense of the wider picture, thereby forfeiting or at least putting aside its regional role.

⁶⁶ See “Algeria raises alert level along border with Libya”, *Middle East Monitor*, 4 June 2015.

B. *Mali: Partisan Mediation?*

Algeria champions preservation of Mali's territorial integrity via a negotiated political settlement of the conflict, while countering insecurity on its southern border stemming from the rising jihadi tide. It also seeks to establish itself as a key Sahelian power broker, sometimes in competition with Western states active in the region, such as France and the U.S., as well as with Morocco, which has maintained its own links to Malian actors. Algeria has been the chief mediator of the Inter-Malian Dialogue, hosted in Algiers since July 2014, which has centred on the disputed northern territory and the devolution of Bamako institutions.⁶⁷ Seeking to maintain Mali's territorial integrity, Algiers has sought to curtail not just the separatist ambitions among some in the north but also a substantial move toward federalism. More broadly, it aims to help rebuild the state, reconstitute its military and resolve the security problem in the north.⁶⁸

The Coalition of Movements of Azawad (CMA), representing the main northern rebel groups in Mali, has promised supporters it will accept nothing short of autonomy, while the government has vowed it will not compromise on territorial integrity. Algerian mediators favour decentralisation over autonomy, so as to leave more power with the central government. For example, they support making Bamako institutions more inclusive and representative of northern populations but oppose giving their local institutions greater autonomy.⁶⁹ The Algerian-brokered accord, signed in Bamako on 15 May 2015 – with some northern groups, including the CMA, boycotting at the time – reflects this perspective, which shows Algiers's bias toward an arrangement it sees as most capable of preserving Mali's territorial integrity and thus its own interests.⁷⁰

The intense pressure put on the rebel coalition to agree to the accord was perceived by some rebel leaders as driven by the DRS against Lamamra's judgment.⁷¹ True or not, this reflects the perennial doubt interlocutors harbour about who really calls the shots in Algiers: civilian officials or the military. Algerian mediators say they lost patience with the CMA's internecine squabbling and pushed to conclude the

⁶⁷ Following the May 2014 ceasefire, Algeria replaced the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) as the head mediator and began hosting the Inter-Malian Dialogue between two loosely organised coalitions of armed groups. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°104, *Mali: Last Chance in Algiers*, 18 November 2014.

⁶⁸ Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra said, "we see three priorities: the question of the north in its various aspects, including its use as a rear base for radical groups, as well as drug and human trafficking; security and the integration of militants into state structures and negotiations; and the question of governance, elections and the restructuring of the state". Crisis Group interview, Algiers, 21 December 2014.

⁶⁹ In the words of Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, "there are two sets of issues we need to address: the territory and the institutions in Bamako. For instance, a senate (not necessarily elected) like we have in Algeria, with a third of senators who need not be politicians named by the president. The number of northern deputies in Bamako should increase; the executive must give more space to northerners, as they're the ones who lead rebellions. Crisis Group interview, Algiers, 21 December 2014.

⁷⁰ For commentary on the proposed agreement and the breakout of violence in northern Mali, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°226, *Mali: An Imposed Peace?*, 22 May 2015. Crisis Group recommended that negotiators, including Algeria, revive a complementary phase of negotiations to strengthen the agreement with additional clauses on resolving local conflicts in northern Mali through political dialogue.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Malian rebel leader, Algiers, February 2015.

accord to avoid losing momentum.⁷² The tensions over some groups' refusal to sign encouraged violence to flare again in the Menaka region of the north in April 2015, suggesting the pressure may have been counter-productive, as Crisis Group has argued.⁷³ CMA representatives bowed to international pressure and signed the agreement at a ceremony in Bamako on 20 June, despite continued opposition by northern rebels and refugees.⁷⁴

The Inter-Malian Dialogue marks the fourth time in three decades that Algeria has been the principal mediator in crises between the Malian government and separatist Arab-Tuareg movements.⁷⁵ Algiers has consistently supported Mali's territorial integrity, opposed Tuareg separatism in neighbouring states and sought to manage the multinational character of Tuareg identity;⁷⁶ as an official put it, "[the southern Algerian city of] Tamanrasset is a Tuareg capital".⁷⁷ This stance contrasts with that of Libya's Qadhafi, who armed and trained Tuareg fighters for his "Islamic Legion", used them in his regime's security forces and supported an independent state as a solution to the Sahara's "Tuareg problem".⁷⁸ With Qadhafi gone, Algeria's only remaining neighbour with some influence on Mali is Morocco, but from the Algiers perspective it has mostly played a spoiler role, manipulating Tuareg movements to create problems for Algeria.⁷⁹

In the wake of Qadhafi's overthrow, Algeria made a bid for sub-regional hegemony in the Sahel, based on a number of factors: communities in northern Mali and Niger depend for survival on Algerian contraband, in particular subsidised primary goods and petrol;⁸⁰ several Saharan Arab and Tuareg communities span the Algeria-Mali border; and Algeria's formidable military and its intelligence services, deployed along borders with six Saharan states (as well as parts of Western Sahara not under the control of the Moroccan military), give it an unrivalled centrality and relevance.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, Algerian mediator, Algiers, May 2015.

⁷³ See Crisis Group Report, *Mali: An Imposed Peace?*, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Protests against the signing took place in Kidal, northern Mali, and in refugee camps in Mbera, eastern Mauritania. They included members of the MNLA and Tuareg civil society. See statement by the "Comité de crise et de sauvegarde des idéaux du MNLA", 20 June 2015, tamazgha.fr.

⁷⁵ Algeria played a central role in the January 1991 Tamanrasset Accords, the April 1992 National pact, and the July 2006 Algiers Accord.

⁷⁶ While this stance is consistent with AU and UN principles regarding territorial integrity and the sanctity of post-colonial borders, it is often interpreted as interest-based and linked to Algeria's fear that an independent or autonomous Tuareg state would sow unrest in its own southern region.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Algiers, December 2014.

⁷⁸ See Dida Badi, "Les relations des Touaregs aux États, Le cas de l'Algérie et de la Libye", Note de l'Ifri, Institute Français des relations internationales, 24 June 2010.

⁷⁹ For instance, King Mohammed VI of Morocco invited MNLA secretary general and ardent secessionist Bilal ag Cherif for an official visit in February 2014, on the eve of the debut of the Algiers Dialogue; seven months later, as negotiations in Algiers drew to a close, the MNLA held a press conference in Rabat calling for a "real international conference", thus questioning the Algiers talks' impartiality. See Ibrahima Coulibaly, "Bilal Ag Cherif, chef du MnlA reçu par le roi du Maroc: Le Maroc s'implique dans la résolution de la crise malienne", maliweb.net, 4 February 2014.

⁸⁰ Smuggled Algerian-subsidised food staples and petrol are cheaper and more easily accessible than goods from Bamako in northern Malian cities such as Kidal and Gao, which are oriented toward the north more than the south and are closer culturally and economically to rapidly-growing southern Algerian cities like Tamanrasset than they are to Bamako or Niamey. See Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2012).

Apart from hosting Malian mediation, Algeria also is talking up a long-term infrastructure-based plan for Sahel development intended to reduce criminality and insurgent violence. The Trans-Sahara Highway is its cornerstone, and discussions are underway for a pipeline that would bring natural gas from Niger to Europe via Algeria, supplying Sahel countries along the way with energy for pumping water.⁸¹ This ambitious plan remains largely contingent on regional capacity and international support. Although funds have been committed, insecurity is a hurdle to construction in Mali and Niger, where crucial stretches linking completed portions of the 4,500km highway, as well as 3,500km of planned offshoots stretching into Mali and Tunisia, remain unpaved.⁸²

C. Tunisia: Cooperation and Strategic Depth

Tunisia's revolution presented two sets of challenges. First, it offered an opportunity for an Islamist party, An-Nahda, to wield executive power in a country whose governing elite had long shared the Algerian establishment's anti-Islamism. In light of its suspension of Islamist electoral success in the 1990s, it was hardly a given that Algiers would welcome the Nahda-led troika that formed a government after Tunisia's October 2011 elections. Secondly, the post-revolutionary disarray of Tunisia's security state weakened what had long been a secure eastern border, exposing it to greater risk not only from Tunisia itself but also from Libya. Algeria perceives Tunisia as a strategic corridor – an extension of its own east in the direction of Libya.⁸³ Seen through this lens, a stable Tunisia provides strategic depth against a rising threat of transnational jihadism using Libya as a base to destabilise the region.⁸⁴

Whatever apprehensions it had about the opening to Islamists, Algeria has played an important behind-the-scenes role in stabilising the post-Ben Ali political transition, including critical interventions during the crisis between opposition parties and the Nahda-led government in 2013 and subsequent National Dialogue. It also gave Tunisia \$200 million in loans and deposits in May 2014 and has fostered robust cooperation on counter-terrorism and cross-border security. Attacks on Tunisian and Algerian soldiers in the Mount Chaambi area cemented the need for a coordinated approach to border security.⁸⁵ Algeria perceives Tunisia's lack of experience in fighting

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, Algiers, 21 December 2014. The idea of the Trans-Sahara Highway linking Sahelian states has been promoted by Algeria since the 1970s, as part of a "Trans-Africa Highway System". It currently links Algeria, Niger and Nigeria, with plans to extend to Mali, Tunisia and Chad.

⁸² In 2012, the African Development Bank committed \$184.49 million in grants and loans to Niger and Chad. Algeria's public investment fund financed its own \$19.2 million section.

⁸³ "Tunisia's security is our security, we have no choice but to support stability there", a senior Algerian diplomat said. Crisis Group interview, New York, March 2015.

⁸⁴ A former senior Tunisian security official commented: "The Algerians want the factions to make peace in Libya. But how long can they wait? Money and weapons are crossing the borders. There is a jihadi axis heading west [from Libya]. In the end, we depend on an eventual solution in Libya and so do the Algerians. Terrorism on the Tunisian-Algerian border lives off the connection to Libya. Tunisia is not the target, it's just a necessary waypoint to Algeria". Crisis Group interview, Tunis, March 2015.

⁸⁵ See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°148, *Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband*, 28 November 2013; and Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°41, *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and Regional Polarisation*, 21 October 2014. Some reports in the

the jihadi threat and protecting the 965km shared border as an opportunity for increasing cooperation and deepening its neighbourhood policy.⁸⁶ In February 2015, President Béji Caïd Essebsi made his first official visit abroad to Algeria in order to “strengthen cooperation” between the two countries.

Seeing Islamists come to power in Tunisia’s first free elections in October 2011 brought back painful memories for Algeria, where, in the words of a security official, “Islamists vowed to use democracy to destroy democracy”.⁸⁷ Security officials expressed nervousness about the Islamists’ political rise, viewing An-Nahda as a smoke-screen for extremist groups such as Ansar al-Sharia (a regular refrain about the party’s opponents in Tunisia, at least until a Nahda-led government banned the group),⁸⁸ remembering that An-Nahda leader Rached Ghannouchi expressed support for FIS in the 1990s and opposed the Algerian Muslim Brothers’ decision in the 1994 National Consensus initiative to work within the Algerian system.⁸⁹ Beyond issues of security, there was the matter of optics: the rapid and overwhelmingly peaceful transition from a dictatorial regime to free and fair elections in neighbouring Tunisia highlighted Algeria’s failure to implement substantive democratic reforms.⁹⁰

Yet, Algeria has defied expectations that it would seek to torpedo Islamist political influence in Tunisia, in part because Nahda did not take a hardline Islamist approach and grew tougher on radical groups like Ansar al-Sharia. Bouteflika received both Ghannouchi and Essebsi (a staunch secularist, then head of the Nida Tounes party and now also Tunisia’s president) at a critical juncture in the transition, meetings that were seen as key to the success of the National Dialogue in 2013-2014.⁹¹ Today, Ghannouchi is a “friend” of Bouteflika, contends Abdelaziz Mokri, the MSP leader. As Algeria’s own Muslim Brotherhood-oriented party, it is ideologically analogous to An-Nahda, but unlike its Tunisian counterpart, it opposed FIS’s resort to arms in the 1990s. Today, he says, An-Nahda has changed:

There is complete consistency between An-Nahda’s policy and Algeria’s, and we support this. Tunisia represents the exception of the Arab Spring. An-Nahda enjoys majority support [in Tunisia], yet it agreed to step down from government

Algerian press have suggested that Algeria’s military directly enters Tunisian territory, something officials in both countries deny. See “Les failles de la sécurité tunisienne”, *El Watan*, 20 March 2015.

⁸⁶ A bilateral agreement established military-to-military communications and a coordination committee in order to improve information-sharing related to counter-terrorism activities. See Geoff D. Porter, “Algeria Moves Toward Regional Security Cooperation, Within Limits”, *World Politics Review*, 12 September 2013.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Algiers, October 2014. This is in reference to FIS spokesman Ali Belhadj, who asked in 1992, “if we have the law of God, why should we need the law of the people?”

⁸⁸ Ibid. The An-Nahda-led government of Prime Minister Ali Larayedh declared Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organisation in August 2013, although many of its opponents continue to accuse the party of complacency about the radical fringe of the Islamist movement in 2011-2012.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sidahmed Boulil, former minister and head of external relations for the MSP, Algiers, September 2014.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interview, prominent Tunisian secular politician, Tunis, April 2015.

⁹¹ Separate, back-to-back bilateral meetings between Bouteflika and (secularist) Nida Tounes leader Beji Caïd Essebsi (since December 2014, Tunisia’s president) and (Islamist) An-Nahda leader Rached Ghannouchi took place in Algiers on 10 and 11 September 2013. They are said to have been a turning point in Tunisia’s National Dialogue. Crisis Group interviews, Tunisian politicians and Tunis-based Western diplomats, November 2013-January 2014.

on its own volition. This never happened before in the Arab world. It was an act of wisdom.⁹²

The Tunisian experience of cohabitation is also a potential boon for the MSP, as An-Nahda's willingness to share power with the secularist establishment represents an evolution of the model set by the MSP, which has taken part in governing coalitions for two decades. MSP officials contend that what has been touted as a uniquely Tunisian Arab Spring "consensus model" is actually fashioned after Algeria's experiment building a diverse coalition of parties in the 1994 National Consensus.⁹³ (Unlike the recent Tunisian experience, however, Algeria tolerates some Islamist parties only as subordinates in a political system that concentrates power in the military and presidency.) While the MSP has given full-throated support to Algeria's Tunisia policy, it is currently leading the opposition in demanding a "managed democratic transition" at home.⁹⁴

The more immediate reason Algeria has supported a consensus governing arrangement since mid-2013 (after a period during which many Tunisian political observers believed it would not tolerate An-Nahda's dominance) is that it perceives An-Nahda as working with it in reaching out to Libyan Islamists, acting as go-between.⁹⁵ It is unclear whether it does so as a result of Algerian pressure or out of a calculation that it is best served by a political solution in Libya because its south is highly exposed to escalating conflict across the border.⁹⁶ Regardless, Algiers has a significant say in the future of the still-precarious equilibrium in Tunisia. That makes some Tunisians nervous; they worry not just about their neighbour's meddling, but also about their country's over-dependence for stability at a time when Algeria may be facing its own growing instability.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Abderrazak Mokri, MSP president, Algiers, December 2014.

⁹³ Both Ghannouchi and veteran An-Nahda leader Abdelfattah Morou visited MSP offices for informal counselling on how to promote conservative values while working within ruling coalitions. Crisis Group interview, Sidahmed Boulil, former minister and head of external relations for the MSP, Algiers, September 2014.

⁹⁴ The MSP left Bouteflika's ruling coalition in the lead-up to presidential elections in April 2014, and has since regularly issued calls for a democratic transition through an opposition coalition, the Coordination nationale pour les libertés et une transition démocratique (CNLTD).

⁹⁵ "Ghannouchi has a key role to play in Algeria's regional approach. The Egyptian approach [to Libya] is not working, Haftar's Operation Dignity is not working. ... The Egyptians want to eliminate the Islamists, but it's impossible". Crisis Group interview, senior Algerian official, December 2015.

⁹⁶ Some Tunisians suggest that Nida Tounes is split on Libya, with Foreign Minister Taieb Baccouche representing a more pro-Tobruk, Emirati-backed faction, while Essebsi is closer to Algeria and favours neutrality. This split is mirrored in An-Nahda, some of whose leaders back Tripoli and others, in part because of Algeria, favour a neutral posture. Crisis Group interviews, Tunisian politicians and senior security officials, Tunis, November 2014-March 2015.

V. Conclusion

Instability in its neighbourhood and new cross-border threats are creating a need for adaptation in Algeria's foreign policy, including a militarisation of borders that it neither expected nor desired. In particular, the 2012 outbreak of conflict in Mali was unprecedented, involving for the first time not only Arabs and Tuaregs fighting against the central government, but also jihadi insurgents and traffickers.⁹⁷ Combined with the lack of border control capacity and security vacuums in southern Libya and Tunisia's Mount Chaambi region, three new fronts of jihadist insurgency have opened on Algeria's borders, creating a new strategic reality.

The risks as the country adjusts to this new strategic reality are significant. Increased spending, especially on troop deployments in border areas, is costly and could stress the national budget at a time when military capacity is being upgraded more broadly. Military spending was doubled between 2004 and 2013, making Algeria the first African country with a military budget exceeding \$10 billion, or 5 per cent of its GDP.⁹⁸ Army and air force deployments to protect its long border against a largely invisible enemy run up against the possibility of a long war of attrition.⁹⁹ The cost of maintaining these efforts is increasing, while state finances are under pressure from the fall in oil prices, and such spending must compete with social demands at a time of political uncertainty. Ample hard-currency reserves may give a few years' reprieve, but hard choices will present themselves soon, especially if oil prices continue to hover at their current level. Decisions may well have to be made once the country moves into its first leadership transition in over sixteen years.

Nevertheless, there are significant potential gains in playing a predominant, stabilising role in regional conflicts. Refocusing on its south allows Algeria to reassume a pivotal role in African diplomacy: while it is a second-tier actor in the Middle East and Mediterranean, it can have real sway in Africa, particularly with the end of the Qadhafi-era on the continent. Its influence in the Sahel – increasingly seen by the international community as an ungoverned no-man's land and refuge for jihadis – helps cement its status as an indispensable regional interlocutor for the EU and U.S. and redress its longstanding grievance that external actors do not sufficiently take into account its interests in the region. Other actors, in the region and beyond, should recognise that Algerian policy is driven by fear that prolonged regional instability will ultimately harm its interests. Western states, especially NATO members, should be particularly attentive to these concerns in light of their role in unwittingly contributing to the region's destabilisation, notably through the 2011 intervention in Libya.

In order to fulfil its self-assigned role of regional stability broker, Algeria will have to improve engagement with potential partners, including Morocco, and assuage fears that it seeks regional hegemony at others' expense.¹⁰⁰ And it will have to prioritise

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, Algiers, December 2014.

⁹⁸ "Military spending continues to fall in the West, but rises everywhere else, says SIPRI", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 14 April 2014. "Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, World Development Indicators", World Bank, 2010-2014.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Algerian counter-terrorism official, Algiers, October 2014.

¹⁰⁰ A first step toward improving Algerian-Moroccan relations would be for both countries to tone down their public criticism of one another and begin an effort at more structured and constructive bilateral relations – whatever differences will continue to exist on issues such as Western Sahara – by engaging on issues of mutual concern: border security, migration control, counter-terrorism,

long-term efforts to build a sustainable peace in conflicts where it has considerable influence, as in Mali, rather than imposing agreements for short-term gain. Ultimately, just as Algerians say they want to be listened to, so do their potential partners: the credibility of Algeria's emerging role rests not just on how it projects power and influence, but also on its ability to deliver deals that meet its neighbours' interests.

Algiers/Brussels, 12 October 2015

bilateral trade and investment, energy security, etc. Seeking to include one another in regional initiatives, even symbolically, would be an improvement. The obstacle to improving relations between Algiers and Rabat is to a large extent psychological; even a small thaw could pave the way for lasting improvements, such as the reopening of their shared border, closed since 1994.

Appendix A: Map of Algeria



Courtesy of the University of Texas at Austin.

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Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 125 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown, and Dean of Paris School of International Affairs (Sciences Po), Ghassan Salamé.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, assumed his role on 1 September 2014. Mr Guéhenno served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices or representation in 26 locations: Baghdad/Suleimaniya, Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Bishkek, Bogotá, Cairo, Dakar, Dubai, Gaza City, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Kabul, London, Mexico City, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Seoul, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis and Washington DC. Crisis Group currently covers some 70 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, North Caucasus, Serbia and Turkey; in the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Western Sahara and Yemen; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Venezuela.

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The Emperor Has No Clothes: Palestinians and the End of the Peace Process, Middle East Report N°122, 7 May 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Light at the End of their Tunnels? Hamas & the Arab Uprisings, Middle East Report N°129, 14 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Israel and Hamas: Fire and Ceasefire in a New Middle East, Middle East Report N°133, 22 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).

Extreme Makeover? (I): Israel's Politics of Land and Faith in East Jerusalem, Middle East Report N°134, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Extreme Makeover? (II): The Withering of Arab Jerusalem, Middle East Report N°135, 20 December 2012 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Buying Time? Money, Guns and Politics in the West Bank, Middle East Report N°142, 29 May 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Leap of Faith: Israel's National Religious and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Middle East Report N°147, 21 November 2013 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

The Next Round in Gaza, Middle East Report N°149, 25 March 2014 (also available in Arabic).

Gaza and Israel: New Obstacles, New Solutions, Middle East Briefing N°39, 14 July 2014.

Bringing Back the Palestinian Refugee Question, Middle East Report N°156, 9 October 2014 (also available in Arabic).

Toward a Lasting Ceasefire in Gaza, Middle East Briefing N°42, 23 October 2014 (also available in Arabic).

The Status of the Status Quo at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade, Middle East Report N°159, 30 June 2015 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

No Exit? Gaza & Israel Between Wars, Middle East Report N°162, 26 August 2015. (also available in Arabic).

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Now or Never: A Negotiated Transition for Syria, Middle East Briefing N°32, 5 March 2012 (also available in Arabic and Russian).

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Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF, Middle East/North Africa Report N°121, 24 April 2012 (also available in Arabic).

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Tentative Jihad: Syria's Fundamentalist Opposition, Middle East Report N°131, 12 October 2012 (also available in Arabic).

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Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle, Middle East Report N°136, 22 January 2013 (also available in Arabic and Kurdish).

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Marching in Circles: Egypt's Dangerous Second Transition, Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°35, 7 August 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Anything But Politics: The State of Syria's Political Opposition, Middle East Report N°146, 17 October 2013 (also available in Arabic).

Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria, Middle East Report N°151, 8 May 2014 (also available in Arabic).

Lebanon's Hizbollah Turns Eastward to Syria, Middle East Report N°153, 27 May 2014 (also available in Arabic).

Rigged Cars and Barrel Bombs: Aleppo and the State of the Syrian War, Middle East Report N°155, 9 September 2014 (also available in Arabic).

Lebanon's Self-Defeating Survival Strategies, Middle East Report N°160, 20 July 2015 (also available in Arabic).

New Approach in Southern Syria, Middle East Report N°163, 2 September 2015.

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- Yemen at War, Middle East Briefing N°45, 27 March 2015 (also available in Arabic).*
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