



>>> Menas Associates

Algeria Politics & Security

Map

>>> Executive Summary

- > The week has been dominated by the developing foreign relations and potential security crises stemming from the fighting in Mali's northern Kidal region. Despite this, Algeria has been silent on the developing refugee problem and how it might exacerbate an already sensitive security situation in its own southern regions.
- > An extraordinary and wholly unanticipated series of events in northern Mali — triggered by a rare speech by jihadist leader **Iyad ag Ghali** — has elevated Algeria's already bad relations with the UAE to a dangerous level. Realising that it has perhaps overstepped the mark, Algiers has discretely approached Kuwait in the hope that it might act as a willing intermediary to help patch up relations with the UAE.
- > Meanwhile, Algiers has shown no softening in its hostility to Morocco and Algeria was the only Arab country not to attend the Conference of Arab Police and Security Leaders in Tangier.
- > Algiers is also angered by Nigeria's apparent favouring of the offshore Nigeria Morocco Gas Pipeline (NMGP) project over the Algerian favoured and financed onshore Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) and has asked South Africa to intervene on its behalf in Abuja.
- > It is not all bad news because relations with Spain are on the mend. After appointing an ambassador to Madrid, Air Algérie is recommencing flights to Spain with an expanded service to Barcelona. The influential Conseil du Renouveau Economique Algérien (CREA) has also extended a warm reception to Spain's Ambassador **Fernando Moran Calvo-Sotelo** and given assurances to help Spanish businesses re-establish themselves in Algeria.
- > Looking ahead to the 2024 presidential election and domestic politics, the main opposition to a second term for President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** is likely to come from the 'old DRS' of General **Mohamed 'Toufik' Mediène**. He is still determined to avenge his ousting by the late Army Chief of Staff, General **Ahmed Gaïd Salah** after the latter discovered his role in the terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas processing plant at In Amenas in 2013. He is therefore targeting the family, friends, and associates — including President Tebboune — of Gaïd Salah and former president **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**.
- > The refugee crisis developing on Algeria's border with Mali threatens to trigger a security threat in Algeria's extreme south if not handled humanely by the Algerian security forces.
- > The IMF's latest report on Algeria's economy is generally favourable, highlighting almost as many strengths as weaknesses.

» Foreign Relations

Foreign relations and the security crisis on southern border

As is so often the case, the main news of the week — which could become a serious crisis for Algeria on both the Foreign Relations and Security fronts — has been met with a stony silence by the regime. This is the situation in northern Mali and Algeria's southern Tamanrasset region, over which **Algeria Politics & Security** has been raising red flags almost weekly for the last couple of months.

What is surprising about this developing crisis is that Algiers has made no reference to it at all, other than using it to fire a few more warning shots at the UAE. The probable reason is because it reflects Algeria's rapidly declining influence in the Sahel, and Africa more generally, which is not something it wants to advertise domestically. It is also a security crisis — partly of its own making and reflecting very badly on the army — which is also why it has not been reported. The situation could become extremely serious, threatening Algeria's own political stability and security interests in its southern regions, so it does not want domestic or international attention.

The crisis has been brewing since fighting broke out between former Tuareg rebel groups and the Malian army in early August. From a security perspective, they escalated with the 14 November recapture of Kidal by the Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMA) and its Wagner Group mercenary allies. These are explained separately below (see **Security**).

Mali situation dangerously escalates Algerian-UAE enmity

The resultant security problems have been quite predictable (see **Security**) but few in the regime could have foreseen how it could have dangerously exacerbated the already poor relations between Algeria and the UAE.

The unwitting catalyst in this unforeseen crisis was none other than Algeria's very old friend Iyad ag Ghali who is a member of the noble Tuareg Iforas (Ifoghas) tribe of northern Mali, and the leader of the main Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) armed jihadist group in northern Mali.

'A threat to the stability of Algeria'

Following Kidal's recapture by the combined FAMA-Wagner forces, he gave a rare video address a day or two before 13 December which was the date that SITE — an

American NGO specialising in monitoring radical groups — authenticated the video.

Iyad exhorted members of local tribes to support his fighters against 'the treacherous governments' of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and against the Russian mercenaries in Mali. He also asked them not to join the ranks of the enemy, by which he meant: FAMA which he described as an 'army of apostasy'; the Wagner Group; and also the Burkina Faso's Volontaires de défense pour la patrie (VDP) self-defence militia. He was therefore appealing to the region's tribes and clans not to send their children to enlist in or collaborate with the security forces or their auxiliaries. He went on to promise victory over the army and the Russians whom he accused of committing abuses against the local population.

The significance of Iyad's speech was not so much its content, but that it came after Kidal's recapture. By then the relationship between Iyad and the Tuareg within the Cadre stratégique permanent pour la paix, la sécurité et le développement (CSP-PSD) had sharply deteriorated with the Tuareg blaming the JNIM for not having helped them in the face of the FAMA-Wagner advance on Kidal. Some Azawadis — as the former Tuareg rebels of the 2012 rebellion refer to themselves — went so far as to blame Iyad for Kidal's fall

by not actively engaging his fighters against the advancing column.

The CSP-PSD responded to Iyad's video by publishing its own message by accusing Iyad of having: always been working for Algeria's Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS) since the late 1980s; having had an office in Tamanrasset in 1992; and was still working for the DRS. It claimed that his mission for Algeria had always been to divide the Tuareg tribes, which he was still doing. This is aimed at destroying the Azawadian independence movement because it is an anathema to the Algerian regime which see it as a threat to the stability of southern Algeria in that it would encourage irredentist forces within the country. Iyad had successfully accomplished this in 2012 when, with the help of the DRS, he destroyed the political and military credibility and reputation of the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) which is the main Tuareg rebel movement. Now, eleven years later, his failure to intervene in Kidal's defence is seen by the CSP-PSD as proof that Iyad was still carrying out Algeria's instructions.

The consequences of the CSP-PSD's statement were possibly not what they intended. Their message was sent either directly or indirectly to the UAE which has its own designs on the Sahel — along with its new ally Morocco

— but is also in an increasingly dangerous conflict with Algeria. Abu Dhabi suspects that, amongst other things, Algeria is working with Türkiye and Qatar. In turn, Algiers sees Abu Dhabi as the ally of its two main enemies, Morocco and Israel, and expects it to withdraw its ambassador at any minute.

A further, lesser-known reason for the anger is the belief that around US\$300 million has been hidden in Emirati banks and financial institutions by members of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's family, and associated ministers and oligarchs. The restitution of these funds is a principal demand by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's regime which claims to have evidence that the US\$300 million was actually bribes paid by Emirati investors over 15 years in return for economic or political advantages from the former Bouteflika regime. Algiers has repeatedly sent requests for Emirati assistance in identifying where the funds are being held. The Emirati authorities have reportedly never responded favourably to these requests and Algiers suspects that the Bouteflika family and associates were discreetly offered a comfortable safe haven in the UAE in 2019. Abu Dhabi's response to the CSP-PSD's statement, which sent Tebboune apoplectic, was that Lyad's JNIM should therefore be attacking Algeria.

Tebboune immediately called in **Louisa Hanoune** — the Trotskyist long-time leader of the Parti Travailleiste and also a loyal nationalist — for a three hour meeting on 11 December. He authorised her to hold a press conference at which she was to accuse the UAE of attempting to destabilise Algeria and that Tebboune was fully aware of the situation. Never one to mince her words, she duly accused Abu Dhabi of destabilising Algeria for the benefit of the Zionist entity. She went even further, clearly with Tebboune's backing, by accusing the UAE of 'pushing for war in the region' and having a plan to 'infiltrate Algeria's state institutions. With Tebboune's clear backing she went on to accuse the UAE of 'collecting money to arm Morocco' and of using their investments in Algeria — such as in the Société Nationale des Tabacs et Allumettes (SNTA) — as a cover for their objective of infiltrating Algeria's state institutions.' She repeated that the UAE was 'dangerous', ... 'a threat to the stability of Algeria' and that companies such as the SNTA should 'be nationalised in order to reduce the UAE's presence in the Algerian economy.'

One of the problems for Tebboune is that the UAE's intelligence services know that:

the CSP-PSD's statement about Lyad ag Ghali is correct; and that the DRS has used Lyad extensively for decades to destabilise much of the Sahel and especially Mali. The UAE is very well-informed on the old DRS' activities and, should the Malian situation deteriorate further, this information could be put to good use by Abu Dhabi against Algiers.

The intelligence services have irrefutable evidence of the Emiratis authorities' hostile manoeuvres but, so far, the regime's anti-UAE discourse, which has been maintained since 2021, has not been aired in public. Now, largely thanks to the CSP-PSD's riposte to Lyad ag Ghali, its accusations against the Emiratis are now being made known. This is dangerous because the UAE have far more international influence than Algeria. Moreover, when it comes to the Sahel, it is very well informed about the role that Lyad ag Ghali and the DRS have played in the destabilisation of the region.

It is now evident that Abu Dhabi is no longer prepared to tolerate Algiers aggressive disinformation against the UAE. It was suspected for some time but was confirmed publicly this week that it has compiled a blacklist of Algerian individuals — journalists, politicians, civil servants, and former ministers — who have lobbied against the UAE and are now banned from entering

» Risks & Outlook

Unless reigned in, the hatred and prejudice of France's extreme right wing threaten to poison bilateral relations with Algeria and Algerians which could have political ramifications on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Investigations into **Toufik Hakkar**'s three-year management of Sonatrach are now under way. If these inquiries are not closed down by the country's leaders for fear of their own incrimination, they threaten to eclipse the Bouteflika-era scandals of the **Chakib Khelil** and could do Algeria considerable damage.

The security situation in northern Mali and southern Algeria remains precarious and could destabilise the Sahel as a whole. Algeria's longstanding regional influence appears to be collapsing and being replaced — at least for the moment — by Russia. The situation within Algeria is being exacerbated by the influx of refugees from Kidal which, if not handled humanely by the security forces, could develop into a security crisis of its own making.

the country. Much to Algiers' anger, this has prevented several prominent individuals from participating in international activities hosted in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The Tebboune regime is aware that bilateral relations have reached a dangerous impasse and has reportedly taken unofficial and discreet steps to ask Kuwait to play the role of mediator and intermediary in trying to deescalate the situation.

Tebboune probably wants to improve relations and especially before the 2024 presidential election campaign, if only to gain support from the West. On the other hand — as evidenced by the UAE's response to the CSP-PSD's statement about Iyad Ag Ghali and Tebboune's explosive reaction — neither side seems to want to make concessions. We anticipate that Algiers will continue to lambast the Emiratis for their conspiratorial manoeuvres in financially and politically supporting Morocco's alliance with Israel and by encouraging anti-Algerian movements in North Africa and the Sahel.

Algiers adopts empty chair policy at Tangier conference

Even before Louisa Hanoune accused the UAE of 'pushing for war in the Maghreb and the Sahel', Algiers was making it very clear that it wanted little to do with most

other members of the Arab World. Rather than be seen attending a meeting hosted by Morocco, it adopted an empty chair policy at the 47th Conference of Arab Police and Security Leaders which opened in Tangier on 6 December. It was the only Arab country not to have been represented at the major security conclave.

Anger over progress on Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline

On 27 November, Nigeria's Minister of State for Energy, **Ekperikpe Ekpo** said that infrastructure work on the offshore Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline (NMGP) project would begin in 2024, following agreements being reached with the numerous transit countries. Ekpo announced this on the sidelines of a meeting he had with a Moroccan delegation headed by its Ambassador **Moha Ou Ali Tagma** in Abuja.

Emirati financial support that swayed Abuja

Abuja appears to favour the offshore Moroccan route around the West African coast to transport gas to Europe rather than the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) via Niger, Algeria, and across the Mediterranean. This has triggered a strong reaction from Algiers — which thought that

it had thwarted the NMGP by offering to finance the entire TSGP — and has been taken by surprise at Abuja's apparent volte face, which is probably because of this year's election of President **Bola Tinubu**.

Nigeria claims that the Moroccan route is more reliable because it does not cross unstable and supposedly terrorist-prone countries but in Algeria's eyes, it was actually the offer of Emirati financial support that swayed Abuja.

According to well-informed sources in Algiers, the Presidency has asked South Africa to intervene to dissuade Abuja from continuing with the NMGP. Envoys are expected in Abuja in the coming days to try and persuade Nigeria's leaders back towards the Algerian-funded TSGP.

Relations with Spain improve

There is better news, however, about its relationship with Spain. After 18 months of crisis, Algiers and Madrid have agreed to return to normal relations with the 16 November appointment of an Algerian ambassador to Madrid for the first time in 18 months. Air Algérie also received the Transport Ministry's approval on 11 December to resume its services to Spain, with the Algiers-Barcelona one being increased from four to seven weekly flights.

On the same day, the Conseil du Renouveau Economique Algérien (CREA), the powerful pro-Tebboune employers' organisation, received the Spanish Ambassador, Fernando Moran Calvo-Sotelo, with strong reassurances of support from Spanish businesses.

According to our sources the suspension of the bilateral friendship treaty will be lifted very soon and there will be a resumption of normal trade. Morocco fears that this will come at the cost of Madrid's previous historic neutrality on the Western Sahara issue.

»» Politics

Tebboune's main struggle for re-election is with the old DRS

For much of the last few months, we have stressed that Tebboune's re-election in 2024 depends on him gaining the support of the army and especially its Chief of Staff, General **Saïd Chengriha**, who is known to be on the lookout for a legitimate replacement. While this is true, the real battle for him is with the old DRS or Deep State of Mohamed 'Toufik' Mediène, **Khaled Nezzar** and their clans.

Discussions with sources who have an intimate knowledge of the old DRS sug-

gest that as they approach the end of their lives, they are becoming increasingly angry at the 'accident' that befell them and what would be happening were it not for it. The 'accident' was the DRS' planned false-flag terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas facility near In Amenas in January 2013 which began to go wrong from the moment the terrorists arrived at Tiguentourine's outer gendarmerie-controlled checkpoint just before dawn. Three of the terrorists — who had been armed and instructed by the DRS' Special Intervention Force, General **Abdelkader Aït Ouarabi** (a.k.a. **General Hassan**) — managed to escape the massacre unraveling within the facility. However they were captured by the army and then revealed all to General Ahmed Gaïd Salah's inquisitors on how the whole operation had been planned by Mediène.

If Tiguentourine's outer checkpoint had only behaved as expected, the subsequent decade of Algeria's contemporary history would have been entirely different. By 2013, Mediène had been in charge of the DRS for 25 years and there was nothing to suggest that he would not have remained as the 'God of Algeria' to this present day.

According to our sources, Mediène realises there is not much time left for him to seek revenge against Gaïd Salah and correct the

'bouleversement' (violent disturbance) that he brought to Algeria. Why then, should revenge against Gaïd Salah be directed at Tebboune's presidency? It is because Mediène suspects that Tebboune was linked to Gaïd Salah because it was the latter who reversed the 2019 presidential election at the last minute to put Tebboune in power. Mediène's angst is therefore directed at all of Tebboune's connections:

- Gaïd Salah's family, such as his sons, two of whom were arrested this week;
- **Saïd Bouteflika** and what remains of the Bouteflika clan; and, further afield
- all of Tebboune's foreign connections such as those close to President **Emmanuel Macron**, the Qataris and Türkiye.

Within the intelligence services, Mediène still commands great loyalty. Although the head of the Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure (DDSE), General **M'henna Djebbar**, reports directly to Chengriha, his loyalty — as Mediène's long-serving head of the Direction Centrale de la Sécurité de l'Armée (DCSA) — is still with Mediène. Similarly, the loyalties of those at the top of the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI) are almost certainly more towards Mediène than Chengriha.

As for Chengriha, as one of the 1990s generals with blood on their hands, he would also be close to Mediène. He knows, however, how Mediène has always used blackmail to control the country's generals, politicians, and businesspersons. He is very fearful because **Guermi Bounouira's** January 2022 exposé of his criminal activities — especially drugs and arms trafficking through Morocco — will be well-known to Mediène. The latter could further expose his criminality at any time.

Chengriha's well-known conflict with Tebboune is therefore probably more on Mediène's account than his own. If, in the coming year, we see the army supporting an alternative presidential candidate, such as the former foreign minister **Ramtane Lamamra**, who was dismissed by Tebboune, it will almost certainly be Mediène rather than Chengriha who will have made that decision.

Algeria Politics & Security - 12.12.23 suggested that **Smaïl Afadjene**, the recent head of the Direction Générale du Renseignement Technique (DGRT), who has just been arrested and imprisoned, could have been spying on the military establishment on behalf of **Boualem Boualem** and the Presidency. That may be correct but our sources now believe that it is more likely that he was working on behalf of Mediène.

»» Security

Potential security crisis threatens Tamanrasset and Mali border region

Menas Associates has been warning for some weeks of a potentially serious security crisis in the extreme south caused by the situation in northern Mali (**Algeria Politics & Security - 12.12.23**). So far, Algiers has remained completely silent on the matter, while information from Mali's military junta is sheer disinformation.

The actual account of the 14 November recapture of Kidal by the Malian army and its Russian allies, and the aftermath, is very different to that being broadcast by the Mali junta. We have subsequently conducted interviews with several witnesses from local people in Kidal town, its hinterland, and on the Algerian side of the border which has enabled us to ascertain what really happened.

Much of the population of Kidal town, almost certainly a large majority, along with fighters of the CSP-PSD fled before the advance of the FAMa/Wagner column. **Boubacar Ba**, director of the Sevaré-based Centre for Analysis on Governance and Security in the Sahel, said that the majority of Kidal's population had left the town by the time the FAMa-Wagner forces arrived. While

the CSP-PSD fighters saw this as a 'tactical retreat', the flight of the civilian population was primarily motivated by fear of Wagner atrocities, notably decapitations and the destruction of homes. Wagner has already established its reputation as being a 'terrorist' force in Mali, having been responsible for more than 500 executions in the town of Moura in March 2022 and numerous decapitations at other locations around central and northern Mali.

Heads being impaled on wooden stakes

Wagner's march north to Kidal was no exception. In the first half of December we received several photographs, accompanied by witness statements from Azawadis in the Kidal region, of badly mutilated corpses and beheadings of civilians that had been undertaken by Wagner mercenaries, with the heads then being impaled on wooden stakes in public view. The circulation of these photos by Azawadis clearly had much to do with encouraging the civil population of Kidal to flee. Evidence indicates that 17 civilians were beheaded in the village of Ersane near Anéfis on or around 7 October.

At the end of November, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) confirmed that at least 50,000 inhabitants had fled

Kidal and the surrounding localities of Anéfis, Aguelhok and Tessalit. Some, notably Fulanis, have found refuge in Mauritania, where the authorities are now contemplating turning the original Mbara refugee camp into a proper town.

Some of Kidal's civilian population have returned to their desert camps about 30-50 kms from the town. These are some of the region's traditional nomads who, although having built homes in Kidal, maintain their semi-nomadic camps and their livestock in the surrounding hills. Some have even fled as far as Libya.

Significantly some have retreated into the almost impenetrable, boulder-strewn, Tigharghar Mountains — the traditional redoubt of local Tuareg fighters — on the north side of the Adrar-n-Iforas and the adjoining Timetrine Mountains a little closer to the Algerian border. Others have gone south to the Tiderméné area between the Kidal and Ménaka regions, from where they could easily flee into Niger.

However, most of the refugees have fled into Algeria. The precise number is not clear but there are certainly thousands and possibly more than 10,000. The UNHCR has already asked Algeria to assist these populations, many of whom actually hold Algerian citizenship.

Many have already gone to Tamanrasset, which is over 400 kms from the border, while others are still in and around the border towns of Tin Zaouatene and Timiaouine. The Algerian army has given strict warnings against any display of the Azawad flag or any statements or communications suggesting support for Azawad. Our interviews suggest that the refugees in Algeria have been treated aggressively and threateningly by the security forces. This is in keeping with multiple reports from human rights organisations over the last few years regarding the treatment of migrants who have entered Algeria from the Sahel. With the UNHCR now trying to keep an eye on the situation in Algeria, their treatment by the security forces might be better than usual.

In the case of the recent Moroccan earthquake and Libyan flood disasters, the Algerian authorities cynically tried to milk both tragedies for their propaganda value. So far, there appears to have been absolutely no mention in the print or broadcast media of the refugee crisis. Neither has there been reference to the potential security crisis that could follow, especially if local Tuareg, sympathetic to their Malian brethren, should turn their anger on Algeria's security forces as they have recently been prone to do in the face of its abusive and at times brutal behaviour towards them.

Tuareg leaders summoned to Algiers

With Algiers clearly uncertain about the wider escalating crisis, it is difficult to get information on how they are planning to handle developments in the Tamanrasset area. Tuareg informants have told us that members of the CSP-PSD from northern Mali were summoned to Algiers to explain their position and presumably have the riot act read to them. The details are unclear because our conversations with the CSP-PSD suggest that there may have been two planned meetings. At the first, members of the second tier of the CSP-PSD leadership, who travelled to Algiers on or around 13 December, were told that the army would crack down on any display of pro-Azawad symbols or other irredentist actions.

The CSP-PSD has told us that at the second, on or around Friday 15 December, three senior CSP-PSD leaders were summoned to go to Algiers to meet with the Army Chief of the Army Staff Army General Saïd Chengriha. They were:

- **Alghabass ag Intallah:** son of the former supreme chief of the Iforas (Ifoghas) Tuareg and one of the presidents of the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) which is a main component of the CSP-PSD;

- **Hanoun Ould Al:** leader of the Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (MAA) which is another component of the CSP-PSD; and
- **Fahad ag Almahmoud:** formerly of the pro-government Groupe d'Auto-défense Tuareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA) which is now aligned with the CSP-PSD,

We have not heard the outcome of this meeting with Chengriha or even whether it took place. This is because, when the three men arrived in Algiers on 15 December, they

were told that Chengriha was very busy and could not see them until 17 December. They, in turn, replied that they could not wait that long as they, too, were very busy and had other parties, implying Morocco, to see.

» Economy

IMF highlights strengths and risks of Algeria's economy

The IMF's latest report on Algeria — ensuing from its Article IV consultations held in

Algiers by the IMF's mission between 3-14 December — is generally favourable in the short term. On the positive side, the IMF expects: growth of 4.2% in 2023; a surplus on the current account balance of payments for the second consecutive year; and a comfortable level of foreign exchange reserves, equivalent to 14 months of imports. On the negative side, the Fund notes four dangers: excessively high inflation; increased and incessant dependence on hydrocarbons; global warming and uncontrollable public spending.

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>>> Menas Associates

Algeria Politics & Security is published weekly

Sold by subscription only

Produced by Menas Associates staff

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