Summary

- Between 17 and 23 May 2018, there were 60 critical incidents in Algeria, including 34 deaths, 31 of which were caused by road traffic accidents. 196 arrests were also recorded, including those of eight Islamic insurgents, 18 drug traffickers and 128 immigrants. This week, criminal incidents accounted for 33.33% of the total incident pool, followed by human and social crises with 31.67% and security and defense-related incidents with 21.67%.

- Eight al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) insurgents surrendered in Tamanrasset, Adrar and Jijel this week, benefitting from the general amnesty program began by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the late nineties. Many others are expected to follow suit during the holy month of Ramadan, considering their lack of support and resources in Algeria, as well as the tense military situation in the Sahel.

- On 16 May, a pro-Islamic State recruitment cell was dismantled in Mostaganem, and 12 members were apprehended. This report created concerns by security agencies as it was believed that IS operatives had fled Algeria to neighbouring countries. The cell that was apprehended was responsible for radicalizing and recruiting young insurgents, who would then move on to Libya, Tunisia or the Sahel. An investigation is underway to determine possible ties to foreign or local groups.

- In Bordj Badji Mokhtar, a weapons cache containing war-grade weapons was discovered. Rocket heads, propelling charges and detonators were seized. In Tizi Ouzou, Jijel, Bejaia and Khenchela, 16 homemade explosives were found during ongoing large-scale counter-terrorism operations.

- On 21 May, two dead bodies were found in a Sidi Bel-Abbes mosque with their throats cut. The gendarmerie has launched an investigation into the incident, which locals reported was reminiscent of civil war executions.

- In Tizi Ouzou, street merchants clashed with the police on the first day of Ramadan, though no casualties were reported. Further activity is however expected as merchants have been barred from occupying the street located in front of the downtown marketplace.

- In just four days, 1,136 road traffic accidents claimed 31 lives nationwide. During Ramadan, road accidents account for higher numbers of casualties, largely due to tiredness and speeding. This has led the authorities to take a stricter approach in regulating traffic.
Significant Events: 17 - 23 May 2018
Algeria Weekly Summary

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Mostaganem: 16 May 2018: Distribution of Ramadan food aid turns into a protest in Mostaganem.

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Moroccan Foreign Affairs Minister speaks against Algeria

Moroccan Foreign Affairs Minister, Nasser Bourita, took to Twitter to denounce the alleged role of Algeria in the Western Sahara crisis. In a series of tweets, he denounced, "A military escalation that is unfolding with the blessing and complicity of Algeria, which is violating the charter African Union by closing its borders and sheltering an armed movement that is threatening another member of the AU." Bourita added that Algeria and the Polisario remain accountable to the international community. Algeria has yet to respond to the tweets, though tensions between the two countries are heightened.

President Bouteflika denounces political and ideological activism in universities

On the occasion of the 68th anniversary of Student Day in Algeria, President Bouteflika released a statement read by the Minister of Higher Education, Azzedine Mihoubi. In his message, the President deplored growing political and ideological activism in Algerian universities. “Universities help create the future of Algeria and its people. It is not a place for political and ideological struggles” the statement read. The President also rebuked all criticism of Algerian universities, pointing out that a number of Algerian graduates have achieved great successes.

UN criticizes Algeria for mass deportations of migrants

The United Nations called on Algeria to put an end to its crackdown on undocumented immigrants and deportations. Hassen Kacimi, a senior official at Algeria’s Interior Ministry, responded by claiming that Algeria called for assistance from the international community, while the United Nations had done little to protect the migrants. UN spokesman Ravina Shamdasani told a UN briefing in Geneva that deportations and expulsions have increased markedly since the second half of 2017, and that a UN human rights team was this month sent to Niger to investigate.

Parliamentarians take a stand against absenteeism sanctions and demand increased pay

During a debate on the new draft rules of procedure, MPs from opposition and presidential majority parties stood against any sanctions for absenteeism in parliament. This came in reaction to the government’s threat of enforcing article 69, which stipulates that MPs should attend all plenary sessions or face sanctions. Not only did all MPs condemn this article, but most demanded a pay increase and diplomatic passports.

Sidi Bel Abbes Governor causes controversy by using social media to give mayor ultimatum

The Governor of Sidi Bel-Abbes, Tahar Hachani, gave an ultimatum...
to the mayor of central Sidi Bel-Abbes, Tewfik Adda Boudjellal, via social media. This caused a backlash due to the informal nature of the directive. The Governor condemned the mayor's "laxity", and gave him 48 hours to comply with instructions to launch infrastructure projects in several areas of the city.

Islamist MP accuses PM Ouyahia of favoritism in Hajj quota distribution
Lakhdar Benkhellaf, an MP with the Islamist party el-Adala, accused Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia of favoritism toward members of his party regarding the distribution of quotas for the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. "Ouyahia distributes the quotas as if they were his property," stated MP Benkhellaf, who claimed that five parliamentary groups were excluded from the protest. The latter urged the President of the parliament, Said Bouhadja, to intervene and investigate the distribution process.

Human & Social

Street merchants and police clash in Tizi Ouzou
On 17 May, street merchants selling vegetables and fruit in downtown Tizi Ouzou skirmished with the police after the authorities ordered them to vacate the area located in front of the local market. The merchants threw rocks at police officers, who retaliated using tear gas. Security was reinforced in the city after the incident. No casualties were however reported.

Illegal immigration: 128 Sub-Saharan Africans and Algerians arrested
This week, 58 would-be immigrants were arrested in Ain Temouchent and Oran after the coast guard and the gendarmerie foiled four attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea. In Ouargla, Tlemcen, Biskra and Illizi, 70 undocumented immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa were apprehended by the security forces, according to the Ministry of Defense.

Road traffic accidents: 31 dead in just four days
The authorities have warned commuters about road safety during Ramadan. Between 17 and 21 May, the first four days of the holy month, 31 people were killed and 1,304 others wounded in 1,136 road traffic accidents nationwide. The deadliest province was Ain Defla, where four people died and 43 were wounded in 32 accidents. Tiredness and speeding were the main causes of accidents according to the police.

Local NGOs criticize deportation of 1,500 migrants
Several Algerian NGOs, human rights activists, university students and the civil society criticized the government after the deportation or 1,500 undocumented immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries, such as Guinea, Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Nigeria, among others, 1,500 of which have been deported in
the last few days.” Critics also claimed that these operations were marred by abuse and violations of international human rights laws.

**Authorities to sanction corrupt social housing beneficiaries**

The provincial authorities in Algiers announced a crackdown on social housing beneficiaries who resorted to bribery and document forgery to obtain apartments. According to local sources, investigations and legal action have been launched, and at least 984 individuals have been identified; 280 of which have been given prison sentences ranging between 18 and 24 months. 224 others were given suspended prison sentences ranging between two and six months. Fines reaching 500,000 dinars have also been imposed on 180 other suspects.

**Cevital support coordination holds sit-in protest outside Bejaia court**

On 20 May, the Cevital Support Coordination held a sit-in protest outside the court of Bejaia to denounce a lawsuit introduced by the Director of the port of Bejaia against its spokesman, Mourad Bouzidi, who was given a suspended prison sentence of three months. This comes after thousands of protesters staged a march in Bejaia to pressure the local port authorities into releasing over 30 shipping containers belonging to the private industrial company Cevital.

**Social housing seekers begin protests in Oran and Constantine**

On 21 May, social housing seekers staged protests in Oran and Constantine. In Oran, the protesters, who were higher education workers, attempted to block traffic to denounce the suspension of a project to build 160 housing units. Police prevented the protest without incident. In Constantine, housing seekers left off the most recent list of beneficiaries gathered in front of the central city hall and filed an appeal after blocking the entrance.

**One dead, many go missing as storm ravages Setif**

On 17-18 May, one person was killed and at least two others were reported missing following heavy rainfall in Setif. The authorities subsequently launched search and rescue operations. Several roads were closed in the east, and traffic was completely paralyzed as flooding was reported in various municipalities, after the Oued Ain el-Kebira river overflowed.

**Flooding hits Tebessa and Oum el-Bouaghi**

In the northeastern provinces of Tebessa and Oum el-Bouaghi, hundreds of houses and businesses were flooded amid heavy rainfall between 20 and 22 May. The most affected areas were La Remonte, el-Merdja, el-Djorf, Skanska and Meskiana. No casualties have so far been reported.

**Online petition puts Red Crescent & NGOs at odds**

The online petition "We are all migrants" caused animosity between the Algerian Red Crescent (CRA) and several Algerian NGOs, including the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH). The petition, which was begun by NGOs, human rights activists, journalists and the civil society, accused the government and the Red Crescent of violating human rights and mistreating immigrants during "arbitrary deportation operations". The President of the CRA, Saida Benhabiles, condemned a "slander campaign" targeting Algeria. The LADDH reacted by accusing the CRA, "a supposedly independent organization," of covering up the aforementioned violations.

**Blogger to appear before court after one year of detention, faces life in prison**

Blogger Merzoug Touati will appear before the court of Bejaia, 17 months after his arrest in January 2017 for "exchanging intelligence with an Israeli operative". Touati faces life in prison, according to Amnesty International, which claimed that the allegations against him were fabricated. The NGO added that this case further harms Algeria’s image with regard to its human rights record.

**Despite government efforts, exam papers leaked online**

Despite efforts made by the
Ministry of Education, exam papers have continued to be leaked. On 23 May, secondary school entrance exam papers were leaked on Facebook only eight minutes after the examination began. Education Minister Nouria Benghabrit denied that students were responsible, and instead accused exam center workers and test proctors.

**Distribution of Ramadan food aid turns into a protest in Mostaganem**

In Hassi Mameche, Mostaganem province, a food aid distribution operation turned into a protest on 16 May, a day before the beginning of Ramadan. According to local sources, some 400 beneficiaries were taken off the food aid register for unknown reasons, provoking unrest amongst local communities. Those affected by the decision protested in front of the city hall to demand access to the "much-needed aid".

**Security**

**Eight Islamist insurgents surrender in Tamanrasset, Adrar and Skikda**

Algerian AQIM fighters have continued to surrender this week. In Tamanrasset, on 21 May, a high-ranking member of AQIM in the Sahel, known as Abu Aissa, who joined AQIM in 2015, turned himself in to the army. On 22 and 23 May, in the same province, four other militants surrendered. These were identified as El Bekkai, Ahmed Gharbi, Abdenasser Ghendir and Hocine Boukhalfa, who joined al-Qaeda between 2015 and 2016. A PKT heavy machine gun and four Kalashnikov machine guns were also seized.

In Adrar, on 22 May, another insurgent, known as “Assid” and active since 2012, also surrendered. The army seized his machine gun and four rounds of ammunition. Two more Islamic insurgents affiliated with al-Qaeda surrendered in Skikda on 23 May during a counter-terrorism operation. The militants were identified as Rabah Merabet, otherwise known as "Chuaib" and Hocine Boukhalfa, known as "Chorahbil". Both of them joined AQIM in 2002. Three Kalashnikov machine guns and six rounds of ammunition were seized.

**Two bodies with cut throats found in Sidi Bel Abbes mosque**

Two dead bodies with their throats cut were found in a mosque located in Ras el-Ma, Sidi Bel Abbes province. The gendarmerie has opened an investigation into the killings, which locals claimed were reminiscent of terrorist executions during the civil war.

**IS support network dismantled, 12 arrested in Mostaganem**

In the province of Mostaganem, a terrorist network was dismantled by the police and the gendarmerie on 22 May, after an investigation which resulted in the arrest of 12 individuals, including one minor. One of the cell’s members was in the possession of an automatic rifle and documents glorifying the Islamic State. On 16 May, another terrorism supporter was arrested in the same province.

**Cache containing war-grade weapons found near Mali border**

In Bordj Badji Mokhtar, near the Malian border, a cache containing seven BM-21 artillery rocket heads, seven propelling charges and 49 detonators was discovered by the army on 16 May.

**Bombs, hideouts and weapons found during security operations**

Counter-terrorism operations were conducted in the provinces of Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia, Jijel and Khenchela this week. In Tizi Ouzou, on 22 May, nine homemade explosives were discovered. Previously, on 16 May, 12 insurgent hideouts, seven homemade explosives and a quantity of ammunition were found and cleared in Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou. Furthermore, in Khenchela, three unlicensed hunting rifles and 1,000 rounds of ammunition were seized by the gendarmerie on 20 May.

**Three armed men arrested near Libyan border**

On 19 May, the Algerian army apprehended three armed individuals in Djanet, Illizi province, near the Libyan border. A kalashnikov machine gun, ammunition and 900 liters of fuel were seized.
Over 7,000 policemen mobilized to secure the capital during Ramadan

In Algiers, over 7,000 police officers will be mobilized to make the city safe during Ramadan, amid a heightened risk of terrorism, criminality and road traffic accidents. Most of the policemen will be based in the central area, according to the DGSN.

Criminality

Drug trafficking: 18 suspects arrested, over one ton of drugs seized

18 drug traffickers were apprehended this week, including three Moroccan nationals in Tlemcen, Algiers, Blida, Batna, Mascara and Bechar. A total quantity of 1.4 tons of treated kif and 1,917 psychotropic pills were seized.

Contraband smuggling: Sizable quantity of goods seized

In Tamanrasset, 5.8 tons of contraband foodstuffs, gold mining equipment and 850 liters of fuel were seized between 16 and 19 May. In El Tarf, Tebessa and el-Tarf, 10,343 liters of fuel were seized on 17 May. In Mascara, one ton of fruit and vegetables was intercepted by the gendarmerie on 21 May.

Anti-corruption association accuses social security fund of corruption

The Algerian Association Against Corruption (AACC) denounced "irregularities" in the acquisition of a 13-story building located in Bir Mourad Rais, in central Algiers, by the National Social Security Fund (CNAS) in 2016. AACC President, Djilali Hadjadj, accused the social security fund of corruption, claiming that CNAS did not comply with public contract awarding procedures and used illegal methods, such as overbilling, to acquire the building, which cost USD 60 million.

Two Sub-Saharan Africans arrested for money counterfeiting

Two men from Sub-Saharan Africa were apprehended on 16 May in Blida for money trafficking. A significant amount of 100 dinar bills were seized.

Car trafficking network dismantled, 19 arrested

In Blida, 19 members of a criminal network specializing in car trafficking were apprehended by the police on 18 May. The network was active in Bouira, Setif, Ain Defla and Chlef.

Eight unauthorized divers and coral traffickers arrested in El Kala

In El Kala, El Tarf province, eight unauthorized divers were apprehended by the coast guard on 19 and 20 May, and a large quantity of coral seized. The divers are believed to be part of a criminal network which facilitates the smuggling of coral toward Tunisia.

Economy

Bejaia port director reacts to Cevital protests, refuses to yield

Djelloul Achour, the General Director of the port of Bejaia, reacted to recent protests calling for the release of Cevital shipping containers he had decided to block. "Cevital does not own the land on which the oilseed trituration plant is supposed to be built," he told the media. As such, he claimed that the law forbids him from releasing the materials and equipment imported by the private company, despite pressure from associations and the civil society, until Cevital acquires the necessary authorizations.

Prices of passports and driving licenses to increase

Rather than imposing taxes on widely consumed products, the government has decided to increase the price of passports, driving licenses and national ID stamps. A stamp for a 24-page passport will reach 10,000 dinars later this year, as opposed to 6,000 dinars currently. For a 48-page passport, citizens will have to pay...
50,000 dinars, against 12,000 dinars currently, which represents an increase of over 300%. The price for fast track 48-page passports will reach 150,000 dinars. As for national ID cards, stamps will cost 2,500 dinars instead of 1,000. Likewise, stamps for driver’s licenses will cost 15,000 dinars for sedans and 30,000 dinars for trucks, representing a 500% increase.
Tensions over the Polisario issue have continued to flare between Morocco and Algeria this week. Morocco has persisted in accusing Algeria and Iran, via its proxy Hezbollah, of destabilizing security in north Africa. While tensions are expected to remain heightened in the short-term, physical confrontations are unlikely. There nevertheless remains a heightened threat of civil unrest in Tindouf. Protests outside the Moroccan Embassy in Algiers are also possible should rhetoric continue to escalate.

Since April 2018, 27 Islamic insurgents affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) surrendered to the army in the northeast and deep south, and three others were captured. While al-Qaeda militants will continue to surrender in exchange for amnesty, security forces have mobilized over 7,000 troops to conduct counter-terrorism operations on the border regions and in Kabylie, due to an increased threat of terrorist attacks during Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr.

The dismantling of a pro-Islamic State cell in Mostaganem indicates that the insurgent group remains operative in Algeria, despite reports claiming that the remaining members of IS offshoots had fled to Tunisia and Libya.

The civil society expressed its frustration with increased prices of vegetables and fruit in various regions of the country, only a week after the Ministry of Trade vowed to keep prices down during Ramadan. Prices however remained high in the provinces of Oran, Algiers, Constantine, Bejaia and Mostaganem. Further increases may provoke social unrest, as the civil society warned that consumers are considering a boycott of certain products, as well as strikes in the public sector.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 May - 15 June 2018*</td>
<td>Ramadan</td>
<td>Month-long religious holiday - reduced hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Jun 2018</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)</td>
<td>Religious and national holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Jul 2018</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
<td>National holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Aug 2018</td>
<td>Eid ul-Ad’ha—Sacrifice Feast</td>
<td>Religious and national holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Sep 2018</td>
<td>Muharram –Islamic New Year</td>
<td>Religious holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Sep 2018</td>
<td>Ashura— 10th day of Muharram</td>
<td>Religious holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nov 2018</td>
<td>Anniversary of the start of Algerian independence war</td>
<td>National holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Nov 2018</td>
<td>Mawlid Nabawi—Birth of Prophet</td>
<td>Religious holiday - widespread business closures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* Muslim holidays are often determined by local sightings of lunar phases; dates given are approximate.
Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, protective security, crisis management and enabling support services to governments, international organizations and major corporations across the globe. We specialize in serving the energy, construction, extractives, critical infrastructure, development and national security sectors—assisting our clients in understanding risk and in conducting their operations safely and securely, no matter their location. Constellis takes pride in our strict adherence to an exacting code of ethics and rigorous focus on standards and compliance—reinforcing the pioneering role we play in fostering stability, efficiency and sustainable economic development.

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For more information on how Constellis can support your company in Algeria, please contact:

**Beatriz Sanchez-Garrido**

Senior Information Analyst

**Beatriz.Sanchez-Garrido@constellis.com**

For all enquiries on Constellis’ advisory & consulting services please contact:

**Mark Allison**

Vice President
Crisis and Risk Services

**Mark.Allison@constellis.com**

[www.constellis.com](http://www.constellis.com)