ALGERIA
Weekly Report
25 - 31 May 2017
Summary

For the period between 25 and 31 May 2017, there were 52 critical incidents in Algeria, resulting in two deaths, and 140 arrests. This week, criminality and human and social incidents both accounted for nearly one third of all events each, followed by security-related incidents with 15.38%.

Counter-terrorism operations continued throughout the country. In the northeast, the decomposing body of an insurgent was found in Skikda’s Oued Zhor mountains, and hideouts and explosives were found in Tebessa and Batna, where the authorities are trying to prevent Islamic State and al-Qaeda militants from crossing the border from Tunisia. In Bejaia, an AQIM militant was killed and another one was captured in Ghardaia. Both joined the Islamic insurgency in the 1990s.

The Algerian authorities have stepped up military operations in the eastern and southern borders, especially at the border with Libya, in an effort to prevent insurgent incursions. According to a security source, the Egyptian air strikes on the northeastern Libyan city of Derna have led dozens of pro-al Qaeda and Islamic State groups to head towards the southwestern Libyan desert. On 29 May, a family was attacked in the city of Ghat, near the Algerian border, by what appeared to be Islamic insurgents.

The threat is also tangible at the Tunisian and Malian borders. In Tunisia’s Jebel Semmoum mountains, a local Islamic State leader was killed while he was reportedly trying to meet members of his support network. In Mali, the UN Peacekeeping Mission and the Malian Army continue to face repeated attacks in Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. In this context, the Algerian authorities have put the military on “extreme alert” during the month of Ramadan.

The expected ministerial reshuffle was conducted last week. Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal was replaced by the Minister of Housing, Abdelmajid Tebboune. New heads were appointed in key ministries, including Industry, Foreign Affairs Tourism and Communications. However, Messaoud Benagoun, the Minister of Tourism, was dismissed only 48 hours after his nomination, after several high-ranking officials at the said ministry decided to resign to protest against his “incompetence”. The now former Minister is also accused of having obtain his university diploma through bribery. This has worsened the government’s reputation, which is being accused of neglecting background checks.

An Algerian journalist covering the riots in the Rif region of Morocco was arrested by the Moroccan authorities in Nador, northeastern Morocco, and was subsequently expelled. The journalist, who works for the newspaper Elwatan, which is openly hostile to the Moroccan regime, was accused of inciting protests and working without authorization. The Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has launched a consular protection procedure to ensure his safe return home.
**Significant Events: 25 - 31 May 2017**

**Algiers: 25 May 2017:** More than 6,000 policemen mobilized to secure the capital during Ramadan.

**Bejaia: 25 May 2017:** Wanted AQIM militant killed in Akbou.

**Skikda: 27 May 2017:** Body of Islamic insurgent found in Skikda mountains.

**Batna/Tebessa: 25 May 2017:** Eleven hideouts destroyed, two mines dismantled in the Batna and Tebessa.

**Ghardaia: 25 May 2017:** Islamic insurgent captured by gendarmerie.

**Tamanrasset: 24 May 2017:** Weapons cache found in In Guezzam.

**Tamanrasset: 27 May 2017:** Three wanted Islamic militants captured in Tamanrasset.

**28 May 2017:** Military on maximum alert at the eastern, southern borders following Egyptian air campaign against Derna, Libya.

**Skikda: 27 May 2017:** Three wanted Islamic militants captured in Tamanrasset.
Several key ministers replaced in cabinet reshuffle

Only one day after Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected Prime Minister, the list of the new cabinet ministers was leaked to the press, and then confirmed by official sources. President Bouteflika has decided to maintain Ahmed Gaid-Salah as the Vice-Minister of Defense, Tayeb Louh as the Minister of Justice, Nourrednine Bedoui as the Minister of Interior and Nouria Benghabrit as the Minister of Education. The Ministers of Energy (Nourreddine Bouterfa), Communication (Hamid Grine), Water Resources (Abdelkader Ouali), Transport (Boudjemaa Talai), Industry (Abdelmalek Boudiaf), Labor (Mohamed al-Ghazi), Digital Economy (Moutassem Boudiaf) and Foreign Affairs (Ramtane Lamamra) were replaced. Abdelkader Messahel, former Minister of Maghreb, African Affairs and the Arab League has been nominated Foreign Minister.

The FLN was given eight ministerial portfolios, and the RND five. PM Tebboune said in a press conference that a "necessary" and "urgent" economic recovery is the main priority of the new government.

A new Energy Minister was appointed. Mustapha Guittouni is a France graduate and former Sonelgaz CEO. It is said he has been appointed to conduct reforms that his predecessor, failed to carry out particularly in the sustainable energy and oil sectors. He is said to be preparing the launch of a tender for the production of 4,050 MW using photovoltaic power plants., and is expected to bring stability into a sector that has seen three ministers in only four years. Guittouni has been vocal about his aspiration to "modernize and industrialize Algeria" and "face major challenges in the upstream and downstream oil sectors" while satisfying the growing energy demand in Algeria.

As Sonelgaz CEO, Guittouni was responsible for the total reorganization of the company, and the dissolution of seven branches. This points towards his experience implementing deep reforms.

Since the Sonelgaz CEO was just replaced, is it believed that Guittouni will maintain him this year to gauge his ability to restore the company’s image and improve foreign investment. However, if Kaddour fails to bring any change, it is likely Guittouni will push for his dismissal.

Tourism Minister dismissed 48hrs after being appointed

Messaoud Benagoun, member of the Popular Movement of Algeria (MPA) and Minister of Tourism and Craftsmanship, has been dismissed by the President, only two days after his nomination. It was revealed that a very high number of officials and employees at the Ministry resigned to oppose his nomination, alleging he has no experience in the industry. More importantly, Messaoud Benagoun is said to have an extensive criminal record. He was sentenced to six years in prison, and obtained a diploma through bribery. Three days after his dismissal, Messaoud Benagoun provided his police record, which was clean. The former minister claims being the victim of a conspiracy. The government has yet to comment on the development.

Many observers believe that this development has tarnished the image of the government, as it shows that no background checks were conducted before the appointment of cabinet members.

Following Benagoun’s dismissal, the majority party Algerian Popular Movement (MPA) reacted by claiming that the now former Minister is "not corrupt", and that he and the party are the victims of a "media witch hunt". The MPA has also denied that a group of
Tourism Ministry officials had resigned to push for the dismissal of the Minister. The opposition party Jil Jadid has called this development "expected". Likewise, the Culture and Democracy Rally (RCD) denounced the "lack of respect" that the government and the Presidency have shown to the country.

**Arrest and expulsion of Algerian journalist causes tension between Algiers and Rabat**

Algerian journalist Djamel Allal was arrested by the Moroccan police in Nador, eastern Morocco, on 28 May for "inciting protests" while he was covering social unrest in the Rif region without an authorization, according to the Moroccan authorities. Before his arrest, the journalist had published an article titled "Morocco opts for repression", and had met a group of members of the separatist movement "Harak" for an interview. A consular protection procedure was launched by the Algerian Foreign Affairs Ministry before the journalist was expelled from the neighboring country.

**Opposition urges setting up of committee to investigate electoral fraud**

The Islamist party Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) and the Culture and Democracy Rally (RCD) party, expressed their intention to demand the creation of a committee to investigate the "electoral fraud" that took place during the 4 May legislative elections. The two parties are seeking to have other political groups joining the action.

**Finance Minister fires Budget Director**

The newly appointed Minister of Finance has dismissed the General Director of Budget, Farid Bekka, over a number of conflicts pertaining budget management, and the distribution of funds and credits. An insider source revealed that several ministerial officials had been pushing for his departure.

**Human & Social**

**Berber activists sentenced to 18 months in prison in Ghardaia riots case**

Berber activists Kamel Eddine Fekhar and Abdellah Benabdellah have been given an 18-month prison sentence by the court of Medea for their alleged involvement in the inter-communal clashes that took place in Ghardaia in 2015. Kamel Eddine Fekhar has been in pre-trial detention for 22 months. He started a strike more than 100 days ago to demand a fair trial.

**Sonelgaz unionists start a march in Bejaia**

The conflict between Sonelgaz and the National Autonomous Union of Electricity and Gas Workers (Snateg) has not eased this week. On 30 May, hundreds of Snateg members started a march in Bejaia to urge the governor to take action regarding the union's dissolution, and called for the reintegration of dismissed unionists.

**Bouzareah residents block traffic, denounce quarry pollution**

The residents of Village Celeste, in the municipality of Bouzareah, Algiers province, have blocked the road to Bab el-Oued causing important traffic jams on 24 May to denounce quarry pollution and urge the authorities to solve the issue.

**Ex servicemen resume protest action in Bouira**

On 26 May, dozens of army retirees staged a protest in central Bouira, Guelma and Boumerdes to denounce "fake promises" made by the Ministry of Defense regarding a pension raise and better health benefits. The protesters, who came from a dozen provinces, vowed to continue protesting against their "marginalization".

**Constantine residents awaiting rehousing stage protest**

A group of owners of houses that were destroyed in the el-Mellah, Constantine central municipality, have staged a sit-in protest outside the governor's office to denounce delays in the rehousing process. According to the protesters, the local authorities had promised to deliver the new housing units in Ali Mendjeli municipality before the month of Ramadan.

**Union starts three-day strike at Bejaia university**

The national autonomous union of public administration workers (Snapap) started a three-day strike at the university of Bejaia on 29 May to denounce "repressive measures" taken by the dean. The strikers, who claim that members of the union were fired, vowed to escalate their action if their colleagues are not reinstated.

**UNHCR calls for help for refugees at the Moroccan border**

The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) has released...
a statement to call on Algeria and Morocco's "urgent action" to facilitate a safe passage for the 41 Syrian refugees who have been trapped in a buffer zone between Algeria and Morocco. The refugees are said to be suffering in dire conditions since 17 April 2017. The UNHCR called the situation a "matter of life and death."

Over 50 Algerian would-be immigrants detained in Libya
At least 56 young Algerian nationals who tried to venture through the Mediterranean Sea are currently detained in Libya, after having been captured off the coast of Zawiya, in the northwest of the neighboring country. NGOs have denounced the detention conditions in the facility where the Algerians, and many other North Africans, have been living for more than a month. The UN mission in Libya has even reported that some of the detainees were tortured.

More than 2,000 cases of human brucellosis reported in M’Sila
In 2017, more than 2,000 cases of human brucellosis were recorded in the eastern province of M’Sila. Brucellosis is a bacterial disease typically affecting cattle, which may also cause undulant fever in humans. Although no fatalities were reported, the virus continues to spread across the south of the province, causing grave concerns. It usually takes two to four months to recover from the illness.

Almost 50 tons of spoiled meat seized in Oran in less than a week
Almost 50 tons of spoiled red and white meat coming from illegal slaughterhouses were seized by the health and safety control services of Oran province since 27 May. Two dozens of butcher shops were fined. In Annaba, seven individuals are suffering food poisoning for consuming tainted meat.

Authorities on maximum alert at the eastern and southern borders
The military was put on maximum alert at the eastern and southern border regions, in the wake of the Egyptian air strikes on the Libyan city of Derna and clashes between Islamist militias and armed forces loyal to the UN-backed government. The Algerian authorities fear that the two developments may push armed groups to attempt to infiltrate Algeria from Libya.

Airborne surveillance operations were set up from Bordj Badji Mokhtar, in the Deep South, to Debdeb at the Libyan border. On 29 May, a Libyan man was killed and four others were wounded after an armed attack in the southwestern Libyan town of Ghat, close to the Algerian border. Locals have blamed Islamic insurgents.
Weapons cache found in In Guezzam, three AQIM militants arrested in Tamanrasset

On 24 May, during a sweeping operation in In Guezzam, province of Tamanrasset, the army discovered a large weapons cache containing four machine guns, a MAS-36 rifle, a hand grenade and seven ammunition rounds and more than 1,000 live bullets. Three days later, an army unit in Tamanrasset arrested three wanted al-Qaeda militants. A Kalashnikov machine gun, a Simonov semi-automatic rifle and several rounds of ammunition were seized.

Army prevents human smugglers from entering Algeria in Djanet

The Algerian army stopped human smugglers from entering the country in Illizi’s Djanet district, at the Libyan border, on 28 May. The smugglers were driving a truck carrying at least nine Sub-Saharan Africans.

Wanted AQIM insurgent killed in Akbou, another one arrested in Ghardaïa

On 25 May, an al-Qaeda insurgent known as "Abdelwahab Abu Yahia" was killed by the army in the region of Akbou, Bejaia province, during a large-scale sweeping operation. A Kalashnikov machine gun and a quantity of ammunition were seized during the operation. Meanwhile, the national gendarmerie captured another wanted militant tied to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), known as "Z.Said", on 25 May in Ghardaïa province. The suspect was said to have joined the insurgency in 1993.

Insurgent found dead, eleven hideouts destroyed and two mines dismantled in the northeast

In the Northeastern provinces of Batna and Tebessa, the army found 11 insurgent hideouts that contained two land mines on 24 and 25 May.

In Skikda, the dead body of an Islamic militant was found in the mountains of Oued Z'hor, Skikda province, on 27 May. The militant could not be identified as the body was already in an advanced state of decomposition. Oued Z'hor is known for having been a hot bed of terrorism activity in the 1990s.

Criminality

Drug trafficking: More than 1.4 ton of kif seized nationwide

In the provinces Tlemcen, Tizi Ouzou, Tebessa and Sidi Bel-Abbes, a total of 1.44 tons of treated kif and 9,173 psychotropic pills were seized between 25 and 31 May. Eleven suspects was arrested.

Contraband smuggling: 27 smugglers captured

Between 24 and 31 May, a total of 27 contraband smugglers were captured in the provinces of Biskra, Tindouf, Tamanrasset, Adrar and Relizane. In Biskra, 292,824 units of pharmaceutical products were seized on 24 May. In the northeast, almost 8,500 liters of contraband fuel were intercepted. The police of Relizane seized 6,000 cartons of contraband cigarettes, while in Tamanrasset and Adrar, 12.8 tons of foodstuffs, 14,820 liters of cooking oil, gold mining equipment, 17 power generators and 17 jackhammers were confiscated. In the provinces of Tindouf, Tamanrasset and Adrar, army units apprehended 12 contraband smugglers.

Mayor of Bir el Arch, Tizi-Ouzou-based customs official arrested for corruption

The mayor of Bir el-Arch, in the province of Setif, has been arrested by the police on bribery charges after being caught red-handed receiving a 100,000 Algerian dinar bribe from a local housing seeker who had previously reported him to the authorities.

In Tizi Ouzou, a high-ranking customs official was sentenced to seven years in prison for receiving a 150,000 dinar bribe on 17 May from an importer/exporter.

Illegal immigration: 92 caught in seven provinces

In Tlemcen, El-Tarf, Bechar, Illizi, Oran and Ghardaïa, 63 undocumented immigrants were apprehended between 25 and 31 May. Additionally, in Annaba, 29 would-be immigrants were caught after the coast guard intercepted two dinghy boats off the coast of Ras el-Hamra.
ECONOMY

Confusion surrounds $15B industrial contract with Saudi holding company
On 15 February 2017, a protocol of agreement was signed between the Algerian industrial groups Asmidal and Manal and the Saudi holding company Radyolla for an investment of 15 billion US dollars, under the auspices of the then Algerian Minister of Industry, Abdeslam Bouchouareb, and his Saudi counterpart, Madjid Ben Abdallah al-Qasabi. Three months later, the two Algerian companies are still unable to touch base with Radyolla, which they now suspect may be a shell corporation. According to an investigation conducted by the Algerian newspaper Le Soir d’Algerie, the CEO of Radyolla, Abdulaziz Al-Deghaither, is closely tied to the high-ranking Algerian State officials. The Ministry of Industry has refused to comment.

More than 1,000 businessmen put on fraudster lists in western border area
According to General Union of Algerian Businessmen and Craftsman (UGCAA), more than 1,000 businessmen were listed as fraudsters in the northwestern region border. Some 5,825 others were placed under court supervision and 3,021 are being sued. This comes as part of a campaign against contraband smuggling.

Cevital workers continue to put pressure on Bejaia port authorities
Thousands of Cevital workers have taken to the streets of Bejaia, and marched from their company’s offices toward the province headquarters on 24 May, in an effort to denounce the alleged blockage of Cevital investments in the said province by preventing two ships transporting Cevital equipment from docking at the local port. The blockage of the equipment is preventing the launch of a large scale project in the area, as well as the creation of 1,000 jobs, according to the protesters. On 28 May, another protest was observed by dozens of members of the Cevital workers’ support committee. The protesters denounce a "crackdown" on Cevital, after the port authorities of Bejaia blocked a shipment. On 28 May, an impromptu sit-in protest was staged by the committee outside the local radio station, which was hosting the CEO of the port.

Outrage at Naftal as compromising video of CEO leaks
A video allegedly showing the CEO of the state-owned petroleum distribution company Naftal, Hocine Rizou, partaking in homosexual acts has been sent to all Naftal personnel by an unknown party, causing immense outcry within the company. More than 1,500 workers and high-ranking employees have staged a protest outside the headquarter of Naftal to demand the official’s immediate dismissal. Naftal has denounced the act as "an attempt to destabilize the company". Insider sources informed that the CEO is very unpopular among the workers, as he is accused of marginalizing certain high-ranking employees, embezzling public funds and poor management.

Media outlets owned by A.Haddad face salary crisis
Media outlets owned by the president of the Algerian Business Leaders Forum (FCE), Ali Haddad, have been hit by a financial crisis. The outlets, namely newspapers Le Temps d’Algérie and Wakt el-Djazair, and TV channels Dzair News and Dzair TV have been unable to pay their employees' salaries for four months, according to an insider source. The workers have threatened to start an open-ended strike and "paralyze the media group" to demand the payment of their wages.
Political

The dismissal of Messaoud Benagoun has caused a huge backlash, as thousands of Algerians mocked the government on social media sites. Moreover, national and international observers expressed concerns about the lack of due diligence and background checks on high-ranking state officials, despite the Minister’s clear police record. The MPA party and Messaoud Benagoun both claim having been targeted in a conspiracy and media witch hunt, but government sources informed that the rumors about the mass resignation at the Ministry of Tourism are true. This story is going to generate additional concern over political instability in Algeria, as the opposition continues to ask for a clarification on the dismissal.

The absence of Chakib Khelil from the new cabinet hints at the fact that the former Minister of Energy may be preserving himself for the 2019 presidential election, in which former PM Sellal and former FM Lamamra are also considering running.

Security

In the wake of the threats Algeria is facing from Tunisia, Mali and most importantly Libya, the military will maintain its efforts in monitoring the border regions to prevent militant movements, while keeping a focus on the Kabylie provinces.

The month of Ramadan, which started on 27 May, has been a catalyst for terrorist attacks and criminal activity throughout the region in the last decade, this in addition to developments in Libya will not make things easier for the Algerian authorities.

AQIM and IS groups in the city of Derna and south of Benghazi are reported to be fleeing the country toward Chad, Niger and Mali. This is pushing Algeria to step up security at the southern border as well. In Tunisia, a large-scale crackdown on insurgent groups has been launched a week ago, and will continue with the support of the Algerian military, which has been carrying out airborne surveillance at the border to prevent Tunisia-based groups from entering the country.

Economy & Social

The decline in reported social unrest incidents this week is misleading as in fact, autonomous unions and civil society organizations in the northern provinces of the country are in the process of preparing strikes and protest actions in the coming days. For example, a strike is planned during the Baccalaureate exam. The ministry of education has already warned that although sanctions will be taken against strikers, in which case the unions are highly likely to take to the streets.

Similarly, in the wake of the upcoming publishing of social housing beneficiaries’ lists in a dozen provinces, applicants who have not been included are expected to spur unrest, especially in Tizi Ouzou, Bouira, Constantine, Algiers and Oran.

A faction of the ex military servicemen who recently tried to start a march in Algiers in vain, are also planning further action. The protesters are accusing the Ministry of Defense of deception and manipulation.
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<td>Eid al-Fitr / End of Ramadan</td>
<td>Religious and national holiday - widespread business closures</td>
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<td>5 Jul 2017</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
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<td>2-3 Sept 2017</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice)</td>
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<td>1 Dec 2017</td>
<td>Mawlid Al-Nabi** (Prophet’s Birthday) - Sunni</td>
<td>Religious and national holiday - widespread business closures</td>
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* Muslim holidays are often determined by local sightings of lunar phases; dates given are approximate.
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