ALGERIA
Weekly Report
15 - 21 February 2018
Between 15 and 21 February, there were 92 critical incidents in Algeria, resulting in 18 deaths and 462 arrests. Arrests included 366 immigrants, 16 drug traffickers and 25 contraband smugglers. Human and social incidents accounted for 34.78% of the total incident pool, followed by criminality with 31.52% and security and defense with 19.57%.

On 19 February, a terrorist attack was recorded in Khenchela, where a bomb explosion disrupted an ongoing sweeping operation, leaving two soldiers dead. This was the second terrorist attack in the area in the last two weeks. A military source revealed that the bombs used in Tebessa last week and Khenchela this week date back to the nineties.

On the counter-insurgency front, two more bombs were dismantled in Boumerdes and Tebess and in Jijel, a wanted AQIM insurgent known as "Abu Dujana was killed in an army ambush. In Tamanrasset and Skikda, three other AQIM militants turned themselves in to the army.

In the context of Operation Barkhane, French forces in Northern Mali conducted air strikes only a few miles from the Algerian border, killing ten AQIM militants. Consequently, the Algerian authorities reinforced security at the border, in an effort to prevent the infiltration of insurgents into the country. It is believed that the French authorities did not brief Algerian military leaders on the operation.

Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia was condemned this week for attacking the unions behind the strikes in the health and education sectors, accusing them of causing chaos. The said unions and the opposition criticized the PM for escalating the situation. Meanwhile in Camra, the union of resident doctors staged protests in Oran, Blida and Setif to denounce sanctions taken by the Ministry of Health.

More than 19,000 striking school teachers are likely to be dismissed in the next few weeks in Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia and Blida, on grounds of job abandonment. The union that organized the strike, CNAPESTE, has reiterated its demands, and refused to end the strike. The Minister of Education has met with other five autonomous unions, but failed to reach an agreement. Consequently, a two-day nationwide strike was observed this week.

An Italian prosecutor claims having tangible proof that the former Energy Minister, Chakib Khelil, received bribes from Italian company Saipem, in exchange for contracts in Algeria. The timing of these allegations coincides with rumors that Khelil is preparing to return to politics.
Significant Events: 15 - 21 February 2018

Algeria Weekly Report


Tamanrasset: 17-18 February 2018: Two Islamic insurgents surrender.

Medea: 15 February 2018: Five Medea municipalities close amid divergence between elected officials.


Skikda: 14 February 2018: Wanted militant turns himself in.

Khenchela: 19 February 2018: Two soldiers killed in bomb explosion.

Adrar: 20 February 2018: Five rockets and 13 detonators found near Malian border.

Italian prosecutor claims possessing 'proof' of corruption involving Chakib Khelil

The General Prosecutor at the Milan Court, Isidoro Palma, claims he is in possession of documents proving that former Energy Minister Chakib Khelil received bribes from Italian company Saipem, in exchange for contracts in Algeria. Palma also asserted that he has substantial evidence that Chakib Khelil made payments to a Hong Kong-based shell company owned by his advisor, Farid Bedjaoui. These revelations come at a time when Chakib Khelil is attempting to stage a comeback into the Algerian political scene.

Opposition figure warns of unprecedented social turmoil

Ali Benflis, President of opposition party Talai al-Hurriat, has warned the population that Algeria is facing an unprecedented social crisis, which is likely to disrupt stability in the country. Benflis has blamed the crisis on a lack of consultation of opposition parties and the civil society when making important decisions.

PM condemned for reproving strikers

During a press conference in Biskra, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia reacted to the wave of strikes and social discontent, criticizing the "chaos" affecting the education and health sectors. The PM said that some of the unions’ demands cannot be met, including the suppression of compulsory military service for resident doctors, due to the need of medical staff in the southern regions.

Abderrezak Makri, the President of the Movement for Society and Peace (MSP), criticized the rhetoric of Prime Minister Ouyahia. Makri said that the PM's "provocative rhetoric" is not helping alleviate the tense social climate.

Several politicians from opposition parties also discussed the social unrest during a parliamentarian debate. During the debate, MP Noura Chitouh from the party Movement for Society and Peace (MSP) warned that the situation will keep worsening if the demands of the health and education unions are not met rapidly. Chafika Frame, from the Adala-Nahda-El Bina alliance, also criticised the Prime Minister in light of his statement denouncing the strikes, saying that threats against the unions will only exacerbate the situation. Meanwhile, Labor Party MP Ramdane Taazibt blamed the government’s austerity policies for the current social crisis.

Government considers dissolving education union behind strike

The government is reportedly considering the dissolution of the autonomous education union CNAPESTE, which is responsible for the unlimited strike in the education sector in the provinces of Tizi Ouzou, Bejaia and Blida. The ongoing strike has fueled socio-political tension, despite repeated efforts to dismantle it, both via negotiation and threats of dismissal.

Subsidy cuts announced by Finance Minister denied by the Prime Minster

During the ceremony celebrating the 21st anniversary of his party in Biskra, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia has denied that the government will be cutting fuel and food subsidies in 2019. The PM claimed that the statement made by the Finance Minister, Abderrahmane Raouia, was taken out of context and has been exploited for political ends.
Head of FLN criticizes parliament President for hosting health union

Djamel Ould Abbes, the Secretary-General of the National Liberation Front (FLN) openly criticized the President of the Parliament, Said Bouhadja, for hosting the striking resident doctors in his office and vowing to mediate between the government and the union. Ould Abbes said that Bouhadja had committed a mistake, as this "was not his prerogative". Said Bouhadja withdrew from this initiative a day later, according to insider sources, after the Ministers of Health and Labor reprimanded him.

Five Medea municipalities close amid divergence between elected officials

Five People’s Municipal Assemblies in Medea have been closed due to a lack of consensus between elected officials in the designation of commission presidents. This situation is causing tension among the local population, as the said municipalities are deeply affected by unemployment and infrastructure and healthcare issues. The Interior Ministry has given the officials an ultimatum to sort out their differences.

High Islamic Council warns on "religious anarchy"

Bouabdallah Ghlamallah, the President of the Algerian religious watchdog, the High Islamic Council (HCI), has warned against the proliferation of Fatwa sources in Algeria, especially in the media, and expressed concerns about its "devastating impact". The President of the HCI added that "religious anarchy" is reigning in Algeria, singling out those Imams preaching on television, which he says have a major influence on society. He urged the government to tighten up regulations, in an effort to curb this phenomenon.

Human & Social

Police reinforce presence in Algiers over social unrest

The police has increased its presence in La Grande Poste and the Premier Mai Boulevard in downtown Algiers following the protest action that took place in the capital in the past few weeks. The Ministry of Interior has ordered the riot police to prevent any further attempts by unions to hold protests in the city, even through the use of force. Dozens of police trucks have been seen around the city center, after hundreds of resident doctors held an impromptu rally in La Grande Poste last week.

Resident doctors threaten to resign, stage protest marches in three provinces

Members of the Collective of Resident Doctors (CAMRA) have threatened to resign in mass in the wake of the Prime Minister’s recent statement on their action. The PM stated that the union is seeking to "sow chaos" in society, and undermine the country's stability. Dr. Saidi Fouad, a member of CAMRA, denounced the "obsolete government policies" that are affecting resident doctors, who are being sent to the South to provide healthcare as part of their military service, but with few resources.

Last week, some 300 striking resident doctors stormed into the office of the General Director of Mustapha Bacha teaching hospital, in Algiers, in an effort to denounce the alleged freezing of their salaries by the Ministry of Health. The protesters reportedly caused material damage. Later, on 21 February, hundreds of CAMRA members staged protest marches in Oran, Blida and Setif, in reaction to the PM’s statement. The protesters denounced the sanctions taken against them by the Health Ministry, and informed that they will be boycotting upcoming exams. CAMRA urged the intervention of President Bouteflika.
More than 19,000 striking teachers at risk of being fired

Representatives of education autonomous unions have met Education Minister Nouria Benghabrit to discuss the crisis affecting the sector and possible ways to end the ongoing strike. During the meeting, union representatives demanded a revision of the promotion criteria, and salary raises to improve their purchasing power. However, the two parties failed to reach an agreement. As a result, the five unions SNAPEST, CELA, UNPEF, SATEF and SNTE started a two-day strike on 20 February. This prompted Minister Benghabrit to reiterate the threat to fire more than 19,000 striking teachers.

Social housing applicants continue to push for governor’s intervention in Constantine

Social housing seekers from Ali Mendjeli municipality in Constantine, staged a sit-in protest on 19 February to demand the intervention of the Governor to relaunch construction projects. The protesters claim that they have been waiting for a unit since 2006.

Students shut down Bouira University

On 19 February, three dozen science and technology students forcibly shut down all entrances to the university of Bouira. The students also blocked the East-West highway in Akroub, before being chased by the gendarmerie. The protesters demanded to be recruited as school teachers, and denounced the high unemployment rate in the sector.

Private transporters go on strike in Chlef over tax hike

Dozens of private transporters in Tenes went on strike on 18 February to denounce an increase in parking taxes. The strike caused uproar among customers, who heavily rely on the transporters to commute to Chlef.

Frontex warns that migrants coming from Algeria are a "threat to security"

The Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Fabrice Leggeri, has said during a conference on immigration in Brussels that the influx of immigrants from Algeria represent a threat to security in Southern Europe. Urging new measures to counter this phenomenon, he denounced that the European authorities are unable to identify illegal migrants.

Illegal immigration: 366 people apprehended, 15 found dead in ten days

This week, 328 undocumented immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa were arrested by the Algerian Security Forces in Tamanrasset, Adrar, Bechar, Tlaghouat, Tlemcen, Tiaret, Ouargla, Tebessa, El Oued, Oran and Naama. Additionally, 38 Algerian would-be immigrants were captured off the coasts of Oran, and Annaba.

Between 9 and 19 February, 15 dead bodies of would-be immigrants whose boat capsized off the northwestern Algerian coast were discovered in Mostaganem, Oran, Ain Temouchent and Tlemcen. Most of the dead immigrants were from Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the authorities.

NGOs denounce new wave of migrant deportations

A number of international NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have denounced a "new wave of migrant deportations" in Algeria. The NGOs claim that since 25 August 2017, at least 3,000 migrants, including pregnant women and children, from Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Liberia and Guinea have reportedly been expelled from the country and dropped off at the Niger border without any assistance. The Algerian government was blamed for the "alarming" crackdown on undocumented immigrants, and is accused of endangering their lives.

Mascara suburb residents block highway 91

More than a hundred residents of Tighennif, province of Mascara, have blocked the national road 91, which links Mascara to Tiaret, in order to demand access to gas. The protesters denounced the lack of infrastructure in the area, claiming it is undermining their safety.

Violent football fans arrested in Bouira and Sidi Bel Abbes

A violent clash erupted between fans of a Constantine-based football team and security guards of a bus station in Lakhdaria, province of Bouira, on the night of 16 February. At least a dozen people were wounded in the altercation and several vehicles were damaged, according to the gendarmerie. The conflict started when the fans allegedly refused to pay their restaurant bill.
Meanwhile, in Sidi Bel Abbes, on 18 February, 15 football fans from rival teams were apprehended by the police after a violent clash during a game. Some 1,200 police officers were deployed to the stadium to secure the game, which had been declared "high risk" by the local authorities.

**Interior Ministry denounces indoctrination cells causing illegal immigration towards Europe**

Interior Minister Noureddine Bedoui has denounced the existence of "indoctrination cells" on social media platforms, which he claims are urging Algerian citizens to cross the Mediterranean Sea illegally to immigrate to Europe. A dozen individuals suspected of being part of the said networks were apprehended, the Minister said.

**Farmers block Constantine suburban road to denounce water scarcity**

On 18 February, a group of farmers in Constantine’s Ouled Rahmoune municipality blocked local roads using burning tires and piles of rocks, to denounce water scarcity. The protesters urged the local authorities to provide the necessary infrastructure.

**Autonomous unions plan another strike on 4 April**

14 autonomous unions from the education, health, energy and administration sectors, who were involved in the strike that took place last week, have planned a second strike on 4 April. Four protests will also be held in the south, the west, east and north, to denounce the weakening purchasing power of the Algerian worker, the suppression of the early retirement and the violation of union rights by the government.

**Security**

**Two soldiers killed in Khenchela attack**

On 19 February, two soldiers were killed, and another wounded after a roadside bomb was detonated by Islamic insurgents during the passage of a military convoy in El Aich, in Khenchela's Djellal municipality. The incident took place during a large-scale counter-terrorism operation launched in the northeast of the country to dismantle criminal networks smuggling weapons from Libya to arm insurgents located at the Tunisian border. The roadside bombs that killed a total of seven soldiers in Tebessa and Khenchela in the last two weeks are said to date back to the civil war.

**Wanted AQIM militant killed in Jijel, five terrorism supporters caught in Batna**

In Jijel’s el-Milia Mountains, an AQIM insurgent known as "Abu Dujana" was killed on 16 February during a counter-terrorism operation. The insurgent is the son of another al-Qaeda member known as Abbas, who was killed on 15 April 2017. A Kalashnikov machine gun and two rounds of ammunition were seized during the operation. Meanwhile in Batna, five individuals who provided material support to Islamic militants were captured on 20 February.

**Armed forces in Mali conduct air strikes near Algerian border**

In Skikda, three terrorism supporters tied to the said militant were also captured on the same date.

In Tamanrasset, an insurgent known as Abu Hadjer, who joined al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2012, surrendered to the army in Tamanrasset, near the border with Niger, on 17 February. The authorities seized a Kalashnikov machine gun and a round of ammunition. A second Islamic militant known as Abdennabi, who joined AQIM in 2011, turned himself in on 18 February. A Kalashnikov machine gun, an automatic rifle, a M14 repeating rifle, a sniper rifle, five chargers for different calibers and a large quantity of ammunition were seized.

**Weapons, bombs and hideouts discovered in sweeping operations**

In Batna, five unlicensed firearms were seized and a suspect was captured on 14 February. In Jijel, on 20 February, the army found seven insurgent hideouts, while in Boumerdes and Tebessa, two homemade bombs dating back to the civil war era were dismantled. In Bordj Badji Mokhtar, near the Malian border, five 122 mm rockets and 13 detonators were found during a sweeping operation on 20 February.

**Army on high alert as French forces in Mali conduct air strikes near Algerian border**

The Algerian army has been put on high alert, after the French Barkhane Operation in Northern Mali conducted air strikes and large-scale sweeping operations targeting the AQIM offshoot Ansar...
Dine and its leader Iyad Ag Ghali, only ten kilometers away from the Algerian border. At least 10 insurgents were killed and 14 others were intercepted during the operation, according to French forces.

Security sources have revealed that the Algerian authorities were not informed of the operation, which has caused the ire of the Army Chief-of-Staff General Ahmed Gaid-Salah. On several occasions in the past, Algeria has denounced the “foreign intervention” in Mali.

**Weapons trafficking gang dismantled in the northeast**

In the province of Oum el-Bouaghi, four individuals were apprehended on 11 February for running a weapons manufacturing network and for the sale of weapons in the northeast. An undisclosed number of weapons and ammunition were seized.

**Morocco to reinforce security at the Algerian border**

The Moroccan army announced plans to build ten new surveillance posts on the Moroccan-Algerian border. These plans will aim at reinforcing security in the kingdom’s eastern provinces against drug trafficking gangs and people smugglers, as well as preventing the infiltration of Islamic insurgents in the region. The new centers will be equipped with sophisticated ground and air surveillance equipment that will include 33 border surveillance cameras operating around the clock, seven days a week.

**Six-member IS recruitment cell dismantled in Batna**

On 16 February, the security forces in Batna dismantled an Islamic State recruitment cell composed of six members. The suspects reportedly used social media platforms such as Facebook to share IS propaganda and approach young Algerians to join the organization.

**Student sentenced to five years in prison for terrorism**

On 19 February, the Criminal Court of Tebessa has sentenced a university student to five years in prison over his involvement in terrorism-related activities and the illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition. The suspect was apprehended in April 2017, as he was about joining al-Qaeda.

**Contraband smuggling: 25 arrested, large quantity of fuel seized**

In the Deep South, 25 contraband smugglers were apprehended. The authorities additionally seized 49,665 liters of fuel, 33,500 packs of cigarettes, 2.3 tons of tobacco, 56,340 bottles of alcoholic drinks, 15.4 tons of foodstuffs, 22,664 pyrotechnic products and 3,539 boxes of medicine.

**Kidnapped young girl freed by police**

A young girl who had been kidnapped in Ouadhias, 35 kilometers south of Tizi Ouzou, was released by the police on 17 February. The two kidnappers, who were seeking a ransom, were later captured.

**Police records 68,000 child kidnapping attempts in 2017**

The police informed that in 2017, 68,000 child kidnapping attempts were recorded nationwide, and warned that this phenomenon has sharply grown in the last few years. While security has been reinforced around schools in the most affected provinces, the police urged citizens to be more vigilant, and to collect their children from school.

**Fake police officer apprehended in Tebessa**

Tebessa police apprehended a 25-year old woman who defrauded and blackmail residents of el-Kouif, claiming to be a police officer. The traffickers were captured. In total, 246 kilograms of treated kif and 62,814 psychotropic pills were seized in Algiers, Blida, Biskra, Setif, Tlemcen, Ghardaia, Bechar and Sidi Bel Abbès.
suspect is accused of forgery, fraud and usurpation of official functions.

Money counterfeiters captured in Ghardaia and Constantine
In two separate operations conducted this week, the national gendarmerie dismantled a money counterfeiting gang in Constantine, seizing 20 million dinars in fake 1,000 and 2,000 dinar banknotes. In Ghardaia, an individual was apprehended on the same charges on 15 February. The suspect was caught in the possession of 1,274,000 dinars in fake banknotes.

Economy

Retirement Fund faces financial crisis
The President of the National Retirement Fund (CNR), Djamal Melouka, has told the press that the CNR is facing a difficult financial situation, mainly caused by the imbalance between active contributing workers and retired workers. He added that the imbalance accentuated in 2017 due to the retirement of more than 150,000 contributing workers who wanted to benefit from the early retirement system before its suppression.

Bank of Algeria urges more flexibly in checking fund sources
The Bank of Algeria has released a note on 21 February to urge public and private banks to be more flexible in their fund source checking procedures, as it claims that banks have rejected funds in the past few years "arbitrarily". The economic crisis has prompted the Bank of Algeria to be more accommodating, despite a high risk of money laundering and terrorism financing in Algeria.

Customs suspend several businessmen who imported banned products
Customs authorities in Algiers have reportedly suspended a dozen importers who tried to bypass the new law banning the import of hundreds of products. At least three of the importers used a loophole in the law to importing the said goods in the name of sovereign institutions, ministries and diplomatic missions.
The political scene in Algeria was affected this week by the ongoing social discontent in the country. Opposition parliamentarians and party leaders censured the Prime Minister’s statements on the issue, and painted a gloomy picture of the social future of the country, expressing pessimism in the face of the PM’s “provocative behavior”.

The opposition, including Ali Benflis, urged the government to take urgent action to alleviate this crisis, before the situation gets out of control. It is unlikely that the authorities will follow suit and change the course of their policies.

Meanwhile, PM Ahmed Ouyahia contradicted the Finance Minister regarding the elimination of fuel and food subsidies. This disagreement caused uneasiness among the cabinet, indicating a lack of communication among its members, and possibly antagonism. A cabinet reshuffle is therefore very likely in the near future.

Over the past week, vast military operations to dismantle bombs were launched in the provinces of Tebessa, Khencela, Skikda, Constantine, Medea, Boumerdes, Tizi Ouzou and Bejaia. Other large-scale operations were recorded off the Libyan border, targeting criminal networks suspected to be smuggling weapons for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in both Algeria and Tunisia.

In the meantime, in the Deep South, the security climate in Mali is worsening. The air strikes conducted by French Forces in northern Mali is likely to cause tension between Algiers and Paris, due to continuous miscommunication, and the consequences such operations have on Algerian security.

The possible dismissal of 19,000 school teachers could strongly hamper stability in northern Algeria, as dozens of unions have voiced their intention to generalize strike action and paralyze key sectors, including public administration and energy. The Minister of Education has tried to minimize the consequences of the ongoing strike, but she failed to reassure students’ parents, who are now threatening to also hold rallies.

Similarly, the union of resident doctors is determined to keep pressuring the authorities to suppress the mandatory military service, despite repeated refusals from the Prime Minister and other cabinet members. The salary freeze imposed by the Ministry of Health has worsened the situation, and the union is now escalating its action. If the government fails to find a permanent solution to these issues, the social instability will keep increasing, making a very tense climate for the upcoming 2019 presidential elections.
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<td>International Labor Day</td>
<td>National holiday - widespread business closures</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 May - 15 Jun 2018*</td>
<td>Ramadan</td>
<td>Month-long religious holiday - reduced hours</td>
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<td>15 Jun 2018*</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)</td>
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<td>5 Jul 2018</td>
<td>Independence Day</td>
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<td>22 Aug 2018*</td>
<td>Eid ul-Ad’ha—Sacrifice Feast</td>
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<td>11 Sep 2018*</td>
<td>Muharram –Islamic New Year</td>
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<td>20 Sep 2018*</td>
<td>Ashura— 10th day of Muharram</td>
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<td>1 Nov 2018</td>
<td>Anniversary of the start of Algerian independence war</td>
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<td>20 Nov 2018*</td>
<td>Mawlid Nabawi—Birth of Prophet Mohamed</td>
<td>Religious 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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