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How Algeria Faces the Libyan Conflict

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Front cover photo

Algerian Border Guard units (Unités des Gardes-Frontières) on patrol in the country's vast southern border regions.

Source: ForcesDZ.com forum, post by Archange78B, March 2012

Overview

In March 2011, Algeria opposed the Arab League's request for a Western military intervention against the Qaddafi regime in Libya. The anarchy and arms proliferation that resulted from the ensuing war were a shock to Algeria's own national security.

This Briefing Paper explores the underpinnings of Algeria's foreign policy, and how it has evolved with respect to the ongoing crises in Libya, and offers insight into future prospects. The Paper notes that Algerian foreign policy has engaged with a wide variety of Libyan actors from 2011 to the present, playing a key role in international efforts to form an effective government. At the same time, Algeria has moved beyond its strict policy of 'no boots on the ground' to a more flexible stance on direct intervention. At its core, however, Algeria remains committed to compromise and dialogue with all parties, a stance that sometimes puts it at odds with the West.

Key findings

- The ongoing Libyan crisis has affected Algeria adversely, both directly and indirectly. Partly in response, Algiers almost doubled its military expenditures, and remains committed to maintaining its defence budget at a high level.
- Algerian diplomacy contributed to the formation and the installation of the UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) in 2015–16.
- In recent years, Algiers has departed slightly from its commitment to never sending troops beyond its own borders. Small ad hoc operations in Libya are conceivable.
- The Algerians are not opposed in principle to eastern-faction leader Khalifa Haftar ruling all of Libya at some stage. But they are concerned about the uncompromising, polarizing, and inconclusive nature of his military approach, along with his frail coalition.
- Algiers' current Libya policy consists in working with, and exerting leverage on, various non-jihadi Libyan factions in order to help foster compromise. It favours a soft-landing transition into a unified Libya, preferring this to a scenario where one camp attempts to impose 'stability' by force and gives rise to the concomitant risk of unintended consequences.
- Geostrategic imperatives and ideological idiosyncrasies are a continued source of friction between France and Algeria in the Maghreb–Sahel. The situation in Libya enhances the likelihood that this divergence will persist in the near future.

Introduction

The Maghreb¹ is being recognized as a region that has enormous potential to disrupt Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States. It is also becoming a territory on which Middle East contests and global rivalries are being fought (Kadlec, 2017; Pusztai, 2017). Amid these deteriorating circumstances, Algeria stands apart as a robust state, possessing a strong military-and-police apparatus along with expansive, proficient intelligence networks (Zoubir, 2016; Riedel, 2013).

The ongoing Libyan crisis is perhaps Algeria's main external threat. But Algeria's own logic and the risk criteria that it applies to its neighbour are not always understood. This Briefing Paper seeks to provide insight into how Algiers assesses, and responds to, the evolving Libyan situation.

The first part of this Paper focuses on capturing the rationale behind Algeria's general demeanour on the international stage. The second part, after briefly reviewing the history of Libya–Algeria relations, traces Algeria's evolving position vis-à-vis the Libyan conflict. The conclusion offers prospects for the future. This Briefing Paper is based on extensive field research, incorporating interviews conducted during three separate trips to Algiers between January and July 2017. It also draws upon a September 2016 trip to Tripoli, and several interviews carried out in London, Paris, Tunis, and Washington.

Algeria's foreign policy: precepts and perceptions

Algeria is a predominantly Muslim Sunni country with a population of 41.3 million (APS, 2017a). It is variously described as an 'important counter-terrorism partner'; an 'ambiguous' participant in the fight against terrorism; and a 'problematic and paradoxical' player that could become a key ally to Western powers if only Algiers had a different attitude (USDOS, 2016; Plagnol and Loncle, 2012, p. 65; Chivvis and Kadlec, 2015). These contradictory descriptions reflect the opacity of the Algerian government. Owing to the difficulty of conducting meaningful fieldwork, numerous theories on Algeria's national security behaviour are put forth based

on no factual evidence—the proposition that the Algerian government has supported jihadi terrorism since 1992 being a case-in-point. As German expert Isabelle Werenfels points out, this particular theory remains unproven (Steinberg and Weber, 2015, p. 54). The reality, as French historian Jean-Christophe Notin notes, is that the Algerian government is no more Machiavellian than other states grappling with issues of jihadi terrorism and related instability (Notin, 2014, pp. 28–29). Another frequent assumption about Algeria is that its foreign policy is static. Some of its mechanisms in fact do evolve in response to both internal and external threats, including increasing tensions in Libya and persistent security deterioration in Mali. While making an effort to keep speculation to a minimum, this section examines the reasoning used by the Algerian government in assessing the threat environment.

Geopolitics, territory, and security

Algiers' point of view is seldom in harmony with European and Middle-Eastern capitals when it comes to Maghreb-Sahel security.² This divergence has more to do with geography and basic security facts than ideology. In the words of a former senior White House national security staffer, the Maghreb is at 'the margin, sort of' and countries such as Algeria or Libya 'aren't the heart of the Arab world; the heart is either the Levant or the Gulf'.³ From the perspective of the majority-Sunni states⁴ interfering in Libya's ongoing conflicts, the Maghreb is important but not as important as territories closer to home. Similarly, former colonial powers such as France and Italy—which are both militarily involved in Libya—sometimes see the Maghreb as 'Europe's backyard' (Santini and Varvelli, 2011). Italy's Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti even called Libya 'Europe's southern border' (Gabanelli, 2017). Needless to say, Algerians do not subscribe to this or similar representations.

Divergent perceptions: Algeria and Middle Eastern powers

In addressing the prospect of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joining 2011's NATO intervention, then-Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen re-

ferred to the two Gulf countries as the North-Atlantic alliance's 'partners in the region' (Parrish, 2011). From Algiers perspective, Qatar and the UAE are not part of the Maghreb region, and therefore should not be depicted as natural security partners for Libya or its vicinity.⁵ Situated over 2,500 miles away from Tripoli, the Gulf states are not affected by the escalation of the jihadi threat, migrant flows, or weapons proliferation in Libya. Algeria's opposition to the Arab League's request for a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011 is in part attributable to this geographic proximity (Bronner and Sanger, 2011). Gulf countries have less of an incentive to curtail the use of force on remote Libyan soil than Algeria does. In contrast, the Algerians feel they are one among a tiny number of actors genuinely concerned with actual stability and peace in the western half of Libya. 'Because they're right there,' explains a Western official, alluding to the considerable cost Algeria incurs whenever the area is destabilized.⁶

Divergent perceptions: Algeria and Morocco

Geography also explains a substantial part of the US' fateful November 1975 decision to support Morocco's incremental annexation of the Western Sahara. Algeria's large, resource-rich territory, relative to its neighbours, makes it a de facto candidate for regional hegemony. Regardless of ideology, major outside powers will therefore always be tempted to contain Algeria by helping Rabat achieve eventual control over the Western Sahara (it currently controls two-thirds). The alternative—instead backing the Sahrawi camp's bid for sovereignty—would be seen as an existential threat to Morocco's government. The kingdom's territory, in that scenario, would end up being isolated from Central Africa and too small in comparison to its neighbour to the east. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger used this kind of elementary geographic reasoning when he told President Ford: 'If [Hassan II] doesn't get [the Western Sahara], he is finished' (Zunes and Mundy, 2010, p. 64).

The structural competition between Morocco and Algeria affects the two countries' calculus on Libya. Each, invariably at the expense of the other, seeks to portray itself as a robust 'go-to' country for regional security that is capable of

making a difference as an unbiased, respected mediator in protracted conflicts such as the ongoing one in Libya. Morocco and Algeria cannot help but see the country as part of their broader geopolitical competition over the Sahara and the Sahel. For instance, Morocco benefits strategically when an unstable Libya absorbs its rival's resources and attention, since this detracts from Algeria's western flank (Cristiani, 2016). The distance separating Libya from Morocco enables the latter to be supportive of a wider range of policies in Libya.⁷ In comparison to its nemesis to the east, Morocco is indeed less exposed than Algeria to the ripple effects of potential deteriorations in Libyan security. If a set of European or Gulf powers champion a Libya policy that may indirectly isolate Algeria in its own region, then Rabat will be more likely to support it (Stitou, 2015). This dynamic was partly at play in 2011 and may again appear in the foreseeable future.⁸

The preceding discussion demonstrates that geography has considerable explanatory importance in Algeria's geopolitics. Against this backdrop of structural imperatives, Algeria has maintained a relatively distinctive profile in international affairs over the years, with the exception of the 1992–2002 lull (Mortimer, 2015).

Key Algerian principles

As it devises its foreign policy, Algeria pursues its own national interests, above all else. Although exceptions exist, this exercise often articulates three main principles, of which territorial sovereignty is the most pre-eminent.

Territorial sovereignty

To an extent that frequently arouses the consternation of Arab and Western powers alike, Algeria is profoundly attached to the sacrosanctity of post-colonial borders (Trout, 1969, p. 428). In common with other former colonies endowed with an immense territory still inhabited by the memory of bloody interaction with a foreign occupier, it opposes almost any form of foreign interference⁹ and dreads being carved up or seeing other Global South countries partitioned. By implication, Algiers is particularly sensitive to issues such as ethnic minority self-determination.

Map 1 Algeria and its neighbours



In the case of Algeria's Tuareg community, which is linked into both Libya and Mali's current crises, Algiers has not forgotten Paris' strenuous efforts in 1957–62 to insulate the Sahara from northern Algeria in the hope of retaining access to its natural resources after decolonization (Guichaoua, 2015, p. 321; Vaïsse, 2012, p. 283). President Charles de Gaulle long tried to 'internationalize' the oil-rich expanse, albeit to no avail (Home, 2006, p. 475). As a result of this history, many Algerians, to this day, believe that the French still do not regard Algeria's national territory as indivisible. They fear Paris might, if an opportune geopolitical environment arose, lend direct or indirect support to ethnic minorities' aspirations for self-determination, with the unstated purpose of diminishing the central government's control over parts of the nation's territory.¹⁰ This perceived 'return' of an activist France in the Maghreb-Sahel since 2011 must be acknowledged if one wishes to understand Algerian thinking on Libya. For instance, several Paris officials and commentators said that 2011's NATO military campaign there made it possible for France and Great Britain to 'rectify the bad memory that was the Suez Crisis' of

October 1956 (Razoux, 2013, p. 6).¹¹ Algeria's diplomats and security officials evidence considerable reticence when they hear that France may still be interested in rectifying any of the 'bad memories' it may have retained from several decades ago. For the Algerians, post-colonial borders in general and the Évian Accords of 1962 in particular are by no means unfinished business warranting fine-tuning. For the Algerians, these parameters are, on the contrary, graven in stone. This stark difference between the attitudes of Paris and Algiers towards the concept of territorial sovereignty has considerable significance for the ongoing Libyan crisis.

Because of the aforementioned opposition to interventionism, Algerian security depends on neighbouring states not collapsing. When this happened in the past few years, Algiers responded by attempting to help neighbouring countries train their own national security personnel. The hope has been that such capacity-building initiatives will diminish the chances of a foreign power (including Algeria itself) needing to intervene in these countries (Benantar, 2016).

Another manifestation of the sovereignty principle is the fact that, to this

day, Algeria has never allowed a foreign base to be openly established on its soil, unlike Egypt in 1967–73, for example (Schmidt, 2013, p. 44; Petro and Rubinstein, 1997, p. 251). In recent years, foreign bases have proliferated in the Middle East and Africa, meaning that Algeria's choice very much stands as an exception to a growing trend.¹² Foreign pressure on Algiers in this regard will only increase in coming years.¹³

Independence

Sovereignty is closely intertwined with independence, which is the second key priority of Algeria's foreign policy. In the international sphere, Algeria is committed to maintaining some degree of leeway for itself. Total alignment with an outside power is perceived by the Algerian government as an existential threat. This thinking is most likely a legacy of Algeria's war of liberation: its leadership is fiercely attached to independence for the sake of independence. The loss of latitude in the foreign policy realm would mean a return to its former status as a colony. Policy-makers believe that if they accept limited authority in the foreign-policy domain, their country's domestic

sovereignty will inevitably become compromised as a result.

Historically, unlike Tunisia, Morocco, Nigeria, and many other countries in the Global South, the emancipation of Algeria from European presence was achieved through a long, violent war of liberation (1954–62). Since 1962, the country's leadership has gone to great lengths to avoid 'becoming beholden to a single state' or a single bloc (Draper, 1981). A recent illustration of that policy was Algiers' ability to speak and coordinate with both Tehran and Riyadh, two mutual enemies, during Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) negotiations in 2016 (Sheppard, Ravel, and Hume, 2016).

A former Algerian minister observed: 'We never involve other states in our policy formation or key decision-making processes. [It has] been an expensive choice.'¹⁴ This is an allusion to Algeria's refusal to let a foreign overseer assist it in confronting its own national security challenges. Algiers takes umbrage whenever it senses outside powers might be trying to dictate terms to it. Instead of putting its assets at the service of foreign entities, Algeria wants to be consulted and insists that its policy recommendations be heard.

In the specific case of Libya, the principle of independence establishes that if a foreign state or a bloc of foreign states interferes in Libya, or attempts to enhance its influence in the western half of the country, Algeria will resist and seek out ways to challenge or subvert this development.

'A security-only approach cannot work'¹⁵

A third core belief among Algiers policy-makers—that a narrow security-driven approach always backfires—can be traced back to the country's 1992–2002 civil war.¹⁶ Hard power must be used ruthlessly against the threat of terrorism in the security sphere, but always in conjunction with an array of bold, soft-power measures in the socio-political sphere. In the early 1990s, Algiers followed an all-out security approach in which security hardliners were pre-eminent. This began to change in 1995. Algiers' own eradication campaign during the first half of the 1990s—consisting of

deployment of force along with little in the way of soft power—in fact failed to eliminate the insurgent organizations that the campaign was meant to eliminate and further hardened the political opposition (Steinberg and Weber, 2015, p. 53).

Algerians feel that they 'learned the hard way' to never leave political opponents without a way out of armed confrontation. President Zeroual's *rahma* (clemency) law in 1994 (Martinez, 2000, p. 239) was the first manifestation of this principle. President Bouteflika, upon acceding to power in 1999, used a similar concept to implement the Civil Concord Law. The latter offered a time window allowing armed Islamists, who in theory had no blood on their hands, to disarm and apply for amnesty. Those who had engaged in violent crimes were excluded from the National Reconciliation initiative but still received reduced sentences. A second round of amnesty was implemented in 2005 (Lounnas, 2013). Bouteflika's measures, despite their many flaws and injustices, were instrumental in bringing an end to a civil war that had killed 150,000 (Joffé, 2008; Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2016).

Algerian officials see a clear parallel between Libyan faction leader Khalifa Haftar's air strikes in Libya and President Zeroual's use of the same method to eradicate Islamist militants near Algiers two decades previously (Al-Warfalli and Lewis, 2017; Ashour, 2009, p. 120). Haftar, whose headquarters are based near Benghazi, has, since May 2014, conducted an intransigent military campaign with the intention of eliminating his political opponents (Toaldo, 2017). He has sought to conflate different hues of Islamists, extending from the jihadi Salafis to the Muslim Brothers, to secular actors who demonstrate any level of tolerance towards the latter (Harchaoui, 2018). In his discourse, each is considered to be a 'terrorist'. Algerian strategic thought is almost unanimous in agreeing that Haftar's method is unlikely to foster peace or avoid a partition of Libya.

In summary, Algiers' key principles are sovereignty, independence, and scepticism about security-only policies. Although a few other principles influence Algerian foreign policy, these are the three main and central ones. In attempting to enforce them, Algiers draws upon the following pillars.

Foundations of Algerian foreign policy

Algeria's foreign policy has tended to achieve results when it has managed to simultaneously tap into natural-resource wealth and promote robust national security.

Natural resources

The main sources of funding for the Algerian government are hydrocarbon-export proceeds and foreign-exchange reserves saved from previous years.¹⁷ Algeria's hybrid political system combines authoritarianism with some elements of democracy (Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2017). Domestic stability is, to a substantial extent, predicated on the country's ample redistributive socio-economic policies made possible by hydrocarbon exports.¹⁸ The latter is also a way of ensuring that Western powers are stakeholders in Algeria's internal stability (Çelenk, 2009). As a critical link in the European Union's energy-supply chain, the North African country is the third largest gas supplier to the bloc, helping to meet the energy needs of member states including Spain (55 per cent), Italy (16 per cent), and Portugal (15 per cent) (Chikhi, 2016; 2017a). In 2016, it exported a daily average of 185,000 barrels of crude oil and unfinished oils to the US (EIA, 2018). With regard to shale resources, the North African country possesses an as-yet-untapped reservoir of over 700 trillion cubic feet's worth of technically recoverable gas, which exceeds that of the US (EIA, 2013, p. 6).

National security

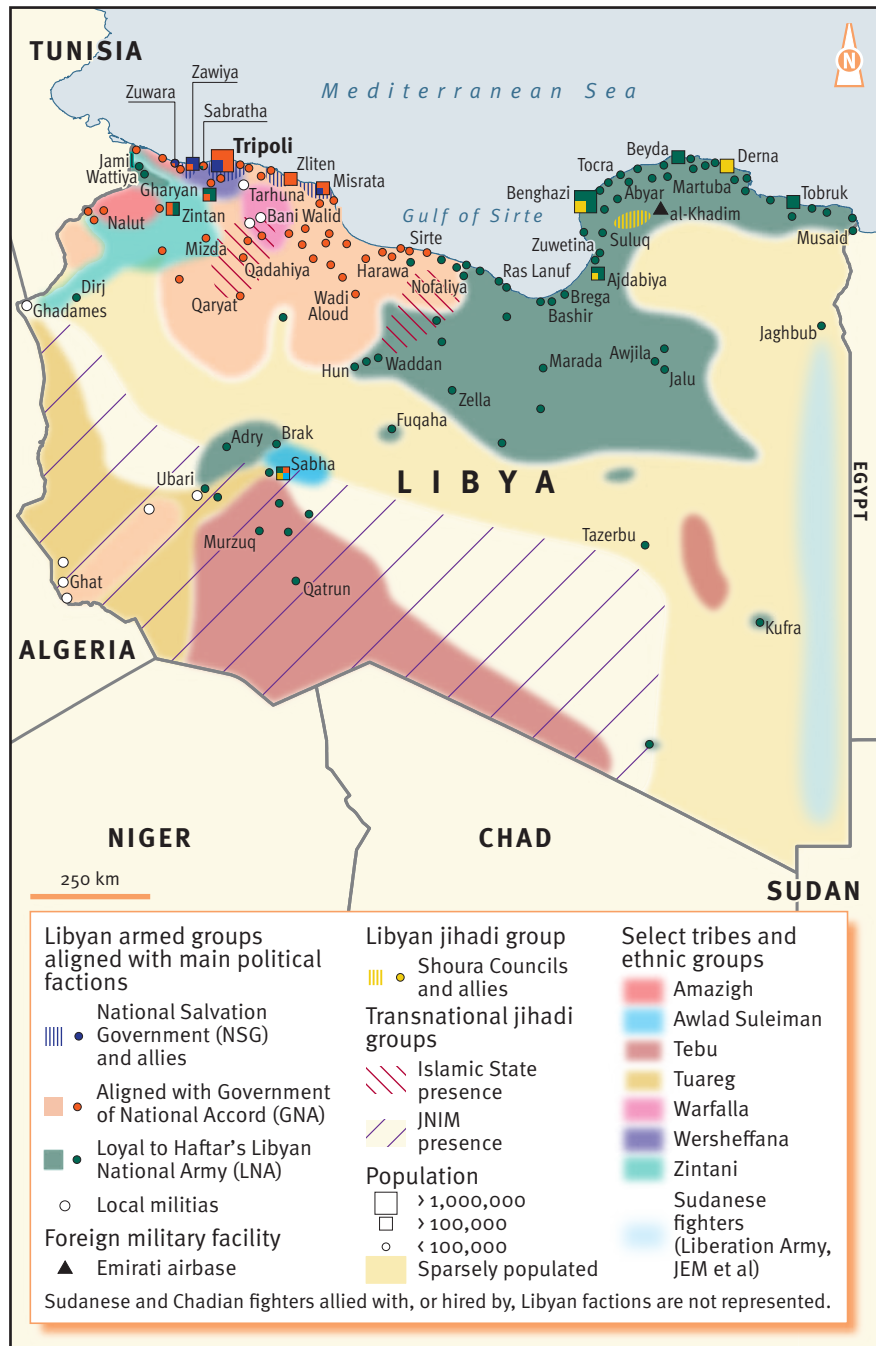
The Algerian government claims that it possesses a robust national security apparatus, and justifies this claim by referring to strong military and police forces, extensive numbers of experienced diplomats, vast intelligence networks, and, since 2001, an enhanced counter-terrorism focus and capacity.

a) **Armed forces.** After Egypt, Algeria has the largest armed forces in Africa, with around 147,000 active personnel. The overall figure reaches 460,000 when the country's military reserve forces and gendarmerie are included (Touchard, 2017, p. 17).¹⁹ Algeria possesses a large fleet of aircraft. The

country's defence budget, at USD 10.2 billion in 2016, is Africa's largest, and the sixth largest in the Greater Middle East (SIPRI, n.d.).²⁰ The majority, although not all, of the weapons that Algeria imports are purchased from Russia (Mokhefi, 2015). The fall in hydrocarbon prices since 2014 has caused Algeria's revenues to shrink from USD 60 billion in 2014 down to USD 27.5 billion in 2016 (Chikhi, 2017b). In responding to this decreasing income, Algiers reduced public spending from USD 103 billion in 2015 (Middle East Online, 2014) to USD 65 billion in 2017 (Aghiles, 2017a). Algerian imports fell from USD 58 billion in 2014 down to USD 46 billion in 2017 (Direction Générale des Douanes, 2018). But the country has maintained military spending above USD 10 billion for the last several years (Aghiles, 2017b). This shows how intent the government is on insulating its large defence budget from the austerity measures affecting all other outlays. But if oil prices exhibit softness on a prolonged basis, it may translate into greater caution and less consistency within Algeria's national security.

- b) **Police.** Over the last decade, Algeria has endowed itself with a large, well-trained, well-equipped, and well-paid police force (ICG, 2017, p. 23). Between 2009 and 2014, this force more than doubled in size, increasing from 90,000 officers to 209,000 (Matin d'Algérie, 2014).
- c) **Diplomatic corps.** The aura associated with its 1954–62 war of national liberation enables Algeria to position itself as a Global South country un-subordinated to any other state or coalition of states. In being anchored in that narrative of perennial opposition to disruptive agendas in world affairs, it has maintained a strong diplomatic tradition through a large part—but not all—of its history since 1962. Often secretive, Algerian diplomats have on several occasions shown themselves to be proactive, steadfast, and well-informed mediators (Tajine, 2013). For example, in 1975, Algeria brought Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran to the negotiating table and helped broker a settlement to the Shatt al-Arab dispute (Entelis, 2015, p. 199).

Map 2 Libyan armed groups—approximate presence and territorial control as of April 2018



Source: Jalel Harchaoui, 2018. The information in this map is derived from original research conducted by the author.²¹

- d) **Intelligence networks and counter-terrorism capacity.** Algiers has long been committed to maintaining an extensive web of intelligence assets abroad.²² Its intelligence networks are proficient and its information on the Maghreb-Sahel may well be more granular than almost any other capital. Algeria's foreign policy also relies on its own counter-terrorism performance at home as a source of credibility. In the immediate aftermath of

the 11 September 2001 attacks, the Bouteflika Presidency, which by then was already working on a rapprochement with Washington, took on a zealously pro-US posture (Tlemçani, 2008). It identified hundreds of Algerian citizens suspected of fomenting terroristic activities domestically and abroad (Bamford, 2001) and shared this information with the US authorities. Since the late 1980s, many of Algiers' most redoubtable enemies

“Most officials in Algiers believe that Haftar’s method is unlikely to foster peace or avoid a partition of Libya.”

had been trained and hardened in Afghanistan’s jihadi enclaves that the US began bombing on 7 October 2001.²³

Counter-terrorism capacity proved a credible talking point because the Bouteflika Presidency had largely succeeded in ending a ten-year insurgency at home (Ghanem-Yazbeck, 2016). From October 2001 onward, Algiers highlighted its counter-terrorism know-how and presented itself to the world as a wise, neutral, and steady security giant with a ten-year head start in the Global War on Terror. This narrative is still deployed (APS, 2017b). In March 2003, in overriding Algeria’s customary opposition to interventionism, President Bouteflika forbade domestic protests against President George W. Bush’s invasion of Iraq (Landsford, 2011, p. 112). The charm offensive worked. Intelligence and security cooperation with the US, and later France, grew tighter. The increased closeness with the West effectively ended the decade of relative diplomatic isolation that had begun when elections were cancelled in January 1992. It also initiated the current era in which the Algerian government entertains diplomatic and economic ties with not only the US, but also China, European countries, Iran, Russia, Venezuela, and others—this being consistent with the revived Non-Alignment Movement’s philosophy inherited from the cold war era. In 2013, Algiers also began more-sustained efforts to cultivate security, economic, and political relations with sub-Saharan African countries.²⁴

When one or several of the linchpins described above is weak, Algeria’s foreign policy loses momentum. When they are in place, it can be effective. For example, Algiers played a pivotal role in promoting the political compromise reached between Islamist and non-Islamist parties in Tunisia in 2013, a tense, perilous year

(Tajine, 2013). Combined with the diplomatic work, Algiers initiated a wide-ranging training programme for Tunisia’s security forces, and boosted military and intelligence cooperation with Tunis in order to combat militants along their shared border.²⁵

Washington, Paris, and African security

In 2006, for several reasons, the growing importance of Africa led Washington to create the US Africa Command in Stuttgart, Germany, thereby splitting responsibility for military operations on the continent off from US European Command, which had previously been the relevant body. This provided Africa with an increased level of attention in the US military (Kempe, 2006; White House, 2007). The US at that point in time decided to adopt a two-pronged approach to African security. The new approach—which still persists under Secretary of Defense James Mattis—relies upon a combination of covert US presence and overt presence provided by allied European militaries. Paris has embraced the framework. The French government’s 2013 white paper on defence and national security acknowledges that, in addition to its US AFRICOM initiative, the US believes that the ‘Europeans, who have a more direct stake in Africa’s stability and also the capabilities to take responsibility for it, must play a greater role in the security of the continent’ (MDA, 2013, p. 29). After 2011’s Libya war, Britain adopted a more limited role in Africa. France, in contrast, did precisely the opposite by initiating major military operations in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Mali, and Niger. Paris has taken on a much more active posture in Africa than during the 1994–2011 period.²⁶

Washington’s Africa doctrine since 2006 has left the Algerians in a quandary: they want to work closely with the US on regional security but are reluctant to see France fulfil a military leadership role in the Maghreb-Sahel region. This unease is attributable to France’s track record in Libya, its lack of progress in Mali,²⁷ and Algeria’s past as a colony along with its fierce attachment to sovereignty and predilection to keep its options open. In the Algerian view, a security partnership between two countries cannot be a dynamic where one actor executes policies determined by the other²⁸ (Lebovich, 2015, p. 6). Meanwhile, France—because it has the military capability and willingness to intervene in the Maghreb-Sahel—views itself as the main decision-maker in the area. Thus, each of the two states views itself as the more legitimate, wiser ‘brain’ behind the regional security project.

Furthermore, Paris favours a rather militarized approach (Powell, 2016; Guichaoua, Jezequel et al., 2018) that runs counter to Algeria’s principles.²⁹ Over the last decade, Algiers has introduced minority-specific benefits that are focused upon specific religious movements and ethnic groups (Lebovich, 2015, p. 7). Even in its near abroad, including northern Mali and south-west Libya, Algeria in recent years has sometimes followed a policy that consists of extending humanitarian assistance to analogous communities.³⁰ In doing so, it has noted that this practice mollifies the corresponding community in Algeria itself. As a former Algerian minister observed:

For us, those groups [in our immediate vicinity] are the continuum of some of our own communities, but the French don’t understand what we do [in the realm of soft power]. For them, it’s just small-time sociology.³¹

As a result of the mutual mistrust and doctrinal incompatibility between France and Algeria, there has been substantial and counterproductive duplication of efforts within the Sahel (ICG, 2015, p. 12).³² A similar malaise is growing in relation to Libya. The events of 26 May 2017 illustrate the divergence between Paris and Algiers. Only hours after militants from the non-state armed group ‘Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham’ (the so-called ‘Islamic State’; IS) killed 29 Christian Copts in Minya, Egypt conducted air strikes on Derna in east Libya, and Hun in the

country's central area, just 370 miles from Algeria's eastern border. Cairo likely targeted enemies of Haftar unrelated to IS there (Aboulenein and Elgood, 2017; MacDonald, 2017). Paris voiced support for the air strikes conducted by Egypt on Libyan soil in support of Haftar (Irish, 2017). In contrast, Algiers expressed concern about Egypt's military intervention in Libya (Dimitrakis, 2017).

More broadly, Paris has in recent years ramped up its support for Egyptian President Abdelfattah al-Sisi's and Chadian President Idriss Déby's governments.³³ Since at least early 2015, France has also assisted Haftar's coalition directly, by sending advisers, clandestine operatives, and special forces on the ground.³⁴ Moreover, France has refrained from criticizing the UAE for violating international law by delivering weapons and operating an airbase in east Libya (Nkala, 2016; UNSC Panel of Experts, 2017, pp. 25–34). As a result of this trend, French influence is increasingly felt around Algeria, and extends from Egypt to Morocco and onto the Sahel. The engulfing trend, if it continues, could end up running counter to Algeria's independence principle. The aforementioned dissonance between Algeria and France will assert itself with greater force if Haftar's forces or other French-backed factions grab territory by force, moving nearer to urban centres in the western half of Libya, such as Misrata, Sabha, and Tripoli. Before reviewing the impact that the Libyan crisis has had on Algeria since 2011, and the policies that the country has implemented in response, it is useful to examine the relationship between the two countries in the years prior to 2011.

Algeria's stance on Libya

A rebuke of Algiers published in the Emirati media during 2011's NATO–Arab intervention asserted that ‘the Algerian regime [was] a true friend to Qaddafi’ (Cheref, 2011). The historical record points to a more complex reality.

History of Algeria–Libya relations prior to 2011

Qaddafi's Libya was an impulsive, revisionist power that pro-status quo Algeria deplored. The Algerians disapproved of Qaddafi's incursions on Chadian soil in

1978–87 as well as his short-lived alliance with Morocco in 1984 (Maddy-Weitzmann, 1986, p. 117). From 1979 onwards, Qaddafi, in deploying an anti-imperial rhetoric, supported irredentist movements in many countries, including Algeria (Entelis, 2015, p. 195; Buijtenhuijs, 1987, p. 143; Metz, 1989, p. 268). To Algeria's great dismay, the Libyan leader promised a recast of the post-colonial Saharan space and its borders to support the Tuaregs.

Yet Chadli Bendjedid's Algeria (1979–92) made sure to stay in close touch with Qaddafi and gave him the impression that it was ready to stand, or even fight, alongside him.³⁵ During the same period, Chadli granted a base to Libyan nationalists belonging to an anti-Qaddafi group called the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) as they prepared, with support from the US, a coup against the Libyan dictator. The 1985 operation was derailed by a leak (Laham, 2007, p. 148). After Chadli's departure in 1992, Algiers continued to permit the NFSL, which US-based anti-Qaddafist Khalifa Haftar was then associated with, to meet in Algeria (Ougartchinska and Priore, 2013, p. 193; Hilsum, 2013, p. 87; Barfi, 2014, p. 4).

In the 1990s, some Algerian officials were convinced that Qaddafi supported Islamist insurgents operating in their territory.³⁶ Moreover, after the West's 2003 thaw with Qaddafi, Libya and Algeria were rivals in the energy market. Libya sought to displace Algeria as the Maghreb's main supplier of natural gas to Europe (Zoubir and Dris-Ait-Hamadouche, 2013, p. 73). The two principal funders of the African Union also championed two incompatible visions of the continent.³⁷ As a US expert of the Maghreb notes,³⁸ the Algerians were always torn by the question of whether a strong or chaotic Libya presented a stronger challenge.

This serves to demonstrate that what preoccupied Algeria in 2011 was not friendship for Qaddafi. Although the Algerians found his policies unpleasant, they feared the vacuum and disorder that would ensue in the event of his overthrow. A then-senior figure in the Libyan rebellion, in addressing Algiers' attitude in 2011,³⁹ observed that ‘our requests for a meeting with Algerian officials to present our case from the National Transitional Council's (NTC) perspective were not answered at all’.⁴⁰

Months after French President Sarkozy's government recognized the NTC on 10 March 2011, Algiers refused to follow suit, insisting that the Libyan rebels should first commit to fight al-Qaeda in North Africa.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the NTC accused Algiers of facilitating the transit of hundreds of Polisario Front fighters who joined Qaddafi's camp as mercenaries via Algerian land.⁴² It should also be noted that Algeria did not seek to prevent the Gulf states from funnelling weapons to the anti-Qaddafi rebellion in 2011. In May 2011, the UAE began sending weapons to the rebels in the north-western city of Zintan (Cole and Khan, 2015, p. 76). An eyewitness recalls:

*Arms shipments landed in Tunisia. Then trucks crossed the border strip near Algeria, in the Ghadames area. The Algerians turned a blind eye to what was happening at the border, and sometimes even stepped in to help the Zintanis. In general, Algiers does not like to deal with the Gulf states. But it had a historically strong relationship with the city of Zintan from before 2011.*⁴³

Soon after the fall of Tripoli in late August 2011, Algeria is believed to have refused a fleeing Muammar Qaddafi access to its territory (Aïd Mouhoub, 2011).⁴⁴ The dictator's wife Safiya, daughter Aisha, and sons Hannibal and Mohammed were however allowed in (Harding, Chulov, and Stephen, 2011). Some commentators maintain that Algiers should have been quicker to support the NATO–Arab intervention against the Qaddafi regime, and embrace Libya's rebels. In this reading, Algerian reluctance showed that they ‘got the new Libyan reality wrong’ in 2011 (Matarese, 2016). Others disagree with this interpretation, and instead suggest that Algiers' assessment of the NTC was more accurate than that of Paris or London. These commentators argue that Algiers immediately saw the interim government as a flimsy façade behind which factions had already begun fighting each other, thus indirectly enabling jihadi cells—and rogue armed groups in general—to strengthen. Algeria's ‘body language’ during the 2011 war in fact betrayed its visceral fear of a Libyan collapse yielding to non-state actors and internecine strife among rebels (Thieux, 2018, p. 9). From this perspective, Algeria's rigid response in 2011 was more a sign of its wish to see some state

structure subsist in its near abroad than full-blown support for Qaddafi per se.

While much of the Algerian scepticism towards the various factions of anti-Qaddafi rebels proved warranted, the refusal to talk to them for several months after the revolution began was neither pragmatic nor shrewd. During the two years that followed the toppling of Qaddafi in 2011, Algeria's diplomacy in Libya never fully stopped, but it was hesitant and somewhat scarred by the rigidity displayed during that key year (Megerisi, 2017, p. 34). It took on a new life after the civil war erupted in May 2014.

Prior to addressing Algeria's policy towards Libya since the ongoing conflict erupted in 2014, it is necessary to review the extent to which the February–October war exerted an impact on Algeria's national security.

Security

Overall, the Libya war of February–October 2011 contributed to making Algeria's security landscape more dangerous. Weapons proliferation and the frequency of militant attacks increased. The 2011–12 period also saw a crescent of weakly-governed or ungoverned spaces emerge around most of Algeria, particularly along the borders with Libya, Mali, and Tunisia.⁴⁵

Spike in jihadi activity

The uncontrolled overabundance of explosives, light weapons, small arms, and related ammunition in Libya since early 2011 has strongly influenced the perceptions that Algerian officials have of their worrisome neighbour to the east. The proliferation inside Libya,⁴⁶ which instantly caused spillover effects into countries nearby, materialized through the dispersal of Qaddafi's existing inventory during the 2011 war and the provision of additional weapons by member states of the coalition that intervened the same year.

From the outset of NATO–Arab coalition's 2011 military campaign in Libya, it became clear that fighters from Algeria's archenemy al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)⁴⁷ participated in the armed rebellion against the Qaddafi regime (Entous, Johnson, and Levinson, 2011). Within Algeria, the level of jihadi violence rose. Hundreds of kilograms of Qaddafi's Semtex explosive were report-

edly used by jihadis near Algiers during the summer of 2011 (Ouazani, 2011). Tapping into the Libya free-for-all, AQIM hit northern Algeria's security apparatus with a wave of terror attacks that began in April 2011.⁴⁸ Starting in October 2011, another wave of attacks was launched against Algeria. These attacks drew part of their logistical strength from Libya but were launched from Mali.⁴⁹ In the regional scheme of things, Algeria was not however the jihadis' top target in 2011–12. Non-state actors with access to weapons circulating in Libya perceived other territories in the wider region to be either more permissive or a higher priority than Algeria.⁵⁰ Arms outflows from Libya went to Syria—and along the way, a portion ended up in Gaza, southern Lebanon, and the Sinai (Chivers, Schmitt, and Mazzetti, 2013; Nichols, 2013). Northern Mali was the other major destination for Libyan armaments (Anders, 2015).

The large amount of weapons caches in Algeria's south is disproportionate to the suspected number of militants operating within Algeria's territory.⁵¹ One possible explanation is that Algeria's south is used mostly as a pass-through area or a warehouse area (Hanlon and Herbert, 2015, p. 27). Until 2009, AQIM still regarded Algeria proper as their main area of operation and their principal target and, at that time, used the Sahel and the Sahara as secondary areas for support purposes. A change has taken place over the last few years as the jihadi group started its 'Sahelization' strategy and extended its scope of operations by opening a southern front to Sahelian territories (Boukhars, 2016a). This logic suggests that Algeria may no longer be the centre of AQIM's attention and that Algeria's south will henceforth be used as a stepping-stone territory for an agenda focused on the Sahel.⁵²

Another possible explanation is that AQIM prepares cross-border assaults in Algeria's south. Cross-border action is more likely to succeed if the terror cells are nimble and not overloaded with ammunition or weapons. For this reason, insurgents sometimes prepare weapons caches in or near target areas located in Algeria, in preparation for future attacks there. They may also do this with the intention of preparing against possible siege scenarios on territory they wish to take and transform into a stronghold.

Counter-measures

In order to prevent the entry of weapons and terrorist groups, Algeria has, since 2011, expended vast amounts of effort and money on the monitoring of its eastern borders. After the January 2013 shock of In Amenas, the army reacted by moving the Border Guard Group from Constantine to Ain El Aouinet in Tebessa, near the Tunisian border (El Watan, 2014). Algiers also claims it is building a barrier, which consists of sand running alongside water-filled trenches (Amiar, 2016; Assemblée Nationale, 2017). In addition, the government has also deployed air assets, including: aircraft, patrol helicopters, and surveillance drones (Alilat, 2016). The supplementary troops allocated permanently include special forces and border guards. The level of mobilization increased in May 2015, when IS took the airport of Sirte. According to the Algerian government, the human personnel stationed along the country's 1,200-mile long eastern flank totals around 23,000 and includes border guards, gendarmes, and soldiers.⁵³ Given this new environment, observers of the Maghreb-Sahel increasingly question whether Algeria's strict non-interventionist stance is tenable.

Non-interventionism forever?

Some analysts argue that Algeria's adherence to non-interventionism has been to its own detriment in recent years (Boukhars, 2013). But it should be acknowledged that the Algerians' reading of the conflicts plaguing their neighbourhood have often tended to be the most accurate.⁵⁴ From there, they devise policies that, with a few exceptions, appear to have been successful in fostering peace. Yet, Algeria seldom ensures that its own preferred solutions are implemented with sufficient vigour. Partly for this reason, other capitals are often dismissive of what Algiers has to say about the Maghreb-Sahel.

There is a widespread misconception, which some Algerian officials actively perpetuate, that Algeria's constitution prohibits external intervention. Article 26 of Algeria's Constitution does not preclude sending troops abroad in all cases. It rules it out only if the purpose of the military effort is 'to undermine the legitimate sovereignty, or the freedom, of other peoples' (Algérie, 1996). Algeria's armed

Box 1 Arms proliferation from Libya

Qaddafi neglected the manpower, readiness, and training of most of his country's formal armed forces, while purchasing and storing large amounts of weaponry (Cordesman and Nerguizian, 2009, p. 61). The majority, though not all, of the dictatorship's arsenal had been acquired in the 1970s from the Soviet Union. On the eve of the uprisings, the contents of Qaddafi's arsenal included somewhere between 250,000 and 700,000 firearms, consisting mainly of assault rifles and roughly 15,000 shoulder-fired, surface-to-air missiles (Small Arms Survey, 2015, p. 175; Schroeder, 2015) that included Strela-2, SA-16, and SA-24 man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) along with corresponding accessories (grip stocks; thermal batteries; launch tubes).⁵⁵ Inventories also contained anti-tank rocket-propelled grenades, 'Grad' BM-21 rockets, and DShK heavy machine guns. In addition to the Soviet-made materiel, Qaddafi's Libya possessed large quantities of NR-442 bounding anti-personnel mines and NR-160 anti-tank missiles purchased in the 1970s and 1980s from Belgian manufacturer Poudrières Réunies de Belgique.⁵⁶ In 2007, France sold MILAN missiles to Qaddafi (La Dépêche, 2007), who also purchased anti-aircraft guns from North Korea and China (Rawnsley, 2011). Finally, the dictatorship was known to possess hundreds of tons of Semtex plastic explosive that had been sold to it by Czechoslovakia prior to 1990 (Green, 1990). While part of this arsenal was destroyed by NATO airstrikes (Mueller, 2015), the bulk was seized by rebels and other non-state actors.

In addition to these pre-existing stockpiles, Gulf states also distributed large quantities of fresh weapons during the 2011 war. Anti-Qaddafi Libyan officials observe that, between April and September 2011, Qatar shipped 20,000 tons of assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, ammunition, military uniforms, and vehicles into Libya (Dagher, Levinson, and Coker, 2011).⁵⁷ Despite the fact that no detailed breakdown of Qatar's cargos has been made publicly available, the significance of this assistance is indicated by the fact that if half of the alleged tonnage consisted of small arms, it would amount to 178,000 Kalashnikov-type rifles and 3,000 rounds of ammunition per gun.⁵⁸ Several other member states of the NATO–Arab coalition—including France and the UAE—also sent lethal aid, albeit to a lesser extent than Qatar.⁵⁹ Both Egypt's military and Sudan helped to channel arms to the opposition (Levinson and Rosenberg, 2011; ElHag, 2012). After 2011, the flow of weapons into Libya from Middle Eastern powers (such as the UAE) continued (UNSC, 2016, paras. 140–43). Turkey soon began to ship illicit weapons into Libya too, in contravention of international law (UNSC, 2016, paras. 151–59).⁶⁰

The resulting omnipresence of weapons in Libya severely impacted the new government's efforts to assert a monopoly over the use of force. This left the North African country a weakly governed space at best. Some armed groups—in particular, transnational insurgent groups—were able to exploit this dynamic to try and undermine governments and state institutions, not only within Libya but also in a set of other territories in the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, in 2012, the three major Western powers still believed that Libya would be easy to 'fix' after Qaddafi's fall. At the time, their insistence that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad had to go, showed a belief that if a regime was deemed hostile, then its removal by non-state actors was desirable. That Western attitude, prevalent in 2012, was perceived as a sort of moral encouragement by the Maghreb-Sahel region's jihadi groups, Algerian and otherwise, in their anti-state thrust. The volume of weapons and ammunition in circulation, combined with ungoverned spaces, which insurgent groups were able to utilize in post-2011 Libya, was logistical manna.

In the case of Algeria, the flow of arms originating from Qaddafi's pre-2011 arsenal into the North African country abated in 2013–14 but has not stopped. Arms from other conflict zones, such as Chad and Sudan, have also entered the country (Conflict Armament Research, 2016, p. 25). One expert on Algeria and Mali remarked that weapons have circulated in significant quantities for two decades in the Sahel.⁶¹ Libya's post-2011 environment has made it easier for these weapons to enter Algeria, too.

Overall, weapons scattered across Algeria's south have been discovered with greater frequency over the last four to five years, with the figure peaking around 2016.⁶² Arms found to date have tended to originate from the Sahel and Libya. In 2016 alone, according to the Algerian Chief of Staff's official publication *El-Djeich*,⁶³ security forces seized 189,362 cartridges, 735 kilograms of explosives, 338 RPG-7 rockets, 17 S-5 57 mm rockets, 668 AK-47-type rifles, 48 FMPK machine guns, 64 Simonov rifles, 18 RPG-7 launchers, and 792 grenades (El-Djeich, 2016, p. 20). Roughly speaking, an average-size cache typically consists of a dozen rifles, half-a-dozen grenades, half-a-dozen RPG rockets, and 10 kilograms of explosive. A number of outliers have also been found. One particularly large cache, which was unearthed in el-Oued in Spring 2016, included anti-aircraft guns such as DShK 12.7 mm and KPV-14.5 (Kharief, 2016). In August 2017, a trove of 66,000 rounds of ammunition was found near Adrar (APS, 2017c).⁶⁴ The number of weapons found during 2017 was lower than the previous year.⁶⁵

forces may cross the borders if the mandate establishes that assistance will be given to an internationally recognized government. A classic precedent is provided by President Boumediene's decision to send his country's military to Egypt in 1967 and 1973, to help Cairo fight Israel (Belkaid, 2017; Rabinovitch, 2007, p. 23). The main constraint to external military intervention is not legal but is instead a doctrine. This, unlike the constitution, can be abrogated at any moment without warning or legislation. A few developments in recent years suggest a change may be occurring.

In the spring of 2012, the northern-Malian jihadi Salafi group MUJAO carried out two attacks on Algerian targets.⁶⁶ In both instances, Algiers refrained from responding, in compliance with its 'no incursion abroad' rule.

In early spring 2014, however, Algeria responded differently. After learning a jihadi group had threatened its embassy in Tripoli, Algerian special forces took action on Libyan soil (Benyoub, 2014). Several small groups of Algerian operatives, dressed in civilian clothing, then flew into Tripoli's international airport, in the south of the city. They had not pre-

arranged anything with the Zintani armed group then in charge of the airport's security, but simply arrived. An alternative plan, which called for the diplomats to move to Zintan if the flight to Algiers proved too difficult, was agreed between Algiers and Zintan-based armed groups. That alternative was ready to be implemented but was not, as the Algerian group (including the diplomats) was able to travel the eight kilometres from the country's embassy to Mitiga Airport. From there, the group flew back to Algiers. Going through Mitiga Airport, in the east of Tripoli, was possible because the

“As its immediate vicinity features more threats to its national interests, Algeria has inched closer to a more flexible attitude as far as intervening on foreign soil, particularly on a clandestine basis.”

Algerians benefited from the help of Abdelraouf Kara and Abdelhakim Belhaj there.⁶⁷ The latter exerted substantial influence over Mitiga in that period.⁶⁸ Weeks before the civil war began, the exfiltration carried out by the Algerians benefited from the help of Belhaj's and the Zintani militias, who were at that time in direct competition.

At around the same time, the London-based think tank Henry Jackson Society and other sources asserted—without producing evidence—that Algerian special forces, along with French and US troops, had conducted a 300-mile incursion into the Fezzan to confront AQIM there (Haynes, Evans, and Morajea, 2014). In May 2014, Algeria signed a cooperation accord with Tunisia that granted it ‘rights of hot pursuit’ or the ability to engage in cross-border military actions on Tunisian soil (Zine, 2014).⁶⁹

The above elements depart from Algiers' customary insistence that it is ‘not allowed’ to send armed personnel beyond its borders. As its immediate vicinity features an increasing amount of threats to its national interests, Algeria has inched closer to a more flexible attitude as far as intervening militarily on foreign soil. This is particularly true of instances in which it is possible to intervene on a low-profile, clandestine basis. The aforementioned incidents also clearly illustrate the broad-ranging character of the networks Algiers maintains inside Libya.

More important than the constitutional or doctrinal debates is the question of whether Algeria has the physical capacity to send armed forces abroad for purposes beyond small ad hoc incursions. The following considerations are particularly relevant:

a) **Interconnectedness.** A visible military action by Algeria in its near abroad will likely have domestic ramifications, given that political factions, ethnic communities, and jihadi organizations straddle borders. For instance, various religious currents on both sides of Libya's main fault line have counterpart elements within Algeria that may see a potential operation as an opportunity to escalate their narrative of grievance, while mounting an assault upon the Algerian government. Put differently, Algiers, by intervening outside, may end up increasing the chances of an insurgency or providing additional impetus to an existing pocket of instability on its own territory. ‘We can't be seen with one part of a neighbouring country's population and against another part of its population,’ is a recurring sentence in interviews with Algerians.

b) **Image of pacifism.** Algeria's image, and therefore diplomatic credibility, has over the years relied on its track record as a non-interventionist power. A senior Western official based in Algiers noted:

They are keen to project this image of a modern, reassuring pole of stability. [But] when you step outside, you run the chance of experiencing a defeat on the international stage, and at this juncture Algiers can't afford to take chances with its image.⁷⁰

The same applies at the domestic level, where the country's civilian leadership has derived political dividends from its commitment to never send troops into strange lands (Porter, 2015b, p. 46).

c) **Manpower.** Algeria's military capabilities are already absorbed by its vast national territory. If the situation in Libya worsens markedly, the Algerian army might extend beyond an already-high mobilization. As an expert on Maghreb border regions observed:

The army may surge in some additional capacity for very discrete amounts of time. But they would find it extremely difficult to do that in any sort of sustained sense without either stripping out forces dedicated to interior counter-terrorism, security around the Tunisian border, or the large forces they have on the Moroccan border.⁷¹

Despite these and a number of other constraining factors, outside observers can no longer be entirely certain that Algeria will refrain from intervening militarily in Libya, whose western half is both closer to Algeria and more heavily populated.

What makes western Libya different

The Libyan civil war has been, to date, largely conducted at a low level of intensity in the western half of the country,⁷² with only sporadic clashes between armed formations (ICG, 2016b). Direct military involvement from outside powers such as the UAE and Egypt in support of Haftar or other anti-Islamist leaders may embolden such armed actors into making forceful advances in western Libya (Saleh, 2017; Gearan, 2014). This heightened level of violence may, in turn, engender shock waves that would destabilize Tunisia or Algeria itself. Algeria is prepared to go considerable lengths to prevent a collapse in Tunisia, which borders the country's populated north-east provinces, thus providing an incentive for Algerians to support stability in their neighbour. Any significant security degradation inside Tunisia has a direct bearing on not solely Tebessa but also Annaba, Constantine, and Guelma.⁷³ The Algerians are ‘hugely wary about Tunisia's frailty,’ said a Western military officer. ‘For them, Tunisia is the weak link.’⁷⁴

This helps to explain why Algeria has articulated a ‘Libya roadmap’ grounded within three premises: 1) the conflict's solution cannot be military, only political; 2) the indivisible nature of Libya as a

Box 2 Mali, 2012—links to Libya, 2011

Algiers sees the Libyan crisis as part of an arc of instability that also includes northern Mali. This connection is therefore reviewed here, because it is essential to understanding the Algerian perception of Libya.⁷⁵

The Libyan crisis of 2011 and the Malian crisis the following year were merely the latest in a series of shocks that have, over the years, transformed the Sahel-Sahara and its environs into a groundswell of criminal networks and jihadi groups (Boukhars, 2016b, p. 126). These two layers—smuggling and trafficking on the one hand, and transnational jihad (including kidnapping for ransom) on the other—often overlap intricately in Algeria’s south, as they do in other parts of the Sahel-Sahara (Harmon, 2014, pp. 143–72). Helping to feed these illegal activities, socio-economic grievances and resentment against the central government have existed, in ebbs and flows, for decades. Algeria’s south, for instance, did not suddenly ‘awaken’ in 2011 or 2012. Instead, it only enhanced its ability to politically mobilize and project its voice (Armstrong, 2014).

According to a former senior British Army officer, the dynamic on the ground began changing in July 2011. ‘The Tuareg who were working for Qaddafi, somehow or other just all went south,’ he recalled. ‘[In Mali,] they were free and had nothing to do. They had a lot of weapons, as well as some money, they wouldn’t otherwise have had.’⁷⁶ In October 2011, Malian Tuareg fighters who had been employed by the Libyan dictator as part of his auxiliary armed group ‘Islamic Legion’ gathered in Zakak, an oasis in north-east Mali, located 11 miles from the Algerian border. They were joined by long-time rebels, Malian-army deserters, and young, Internet-savvy activists. Together they formed the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, or the MNLA (Lewis and Diarra, 2012). A number of the 2012 insurgency’s ingredients had been present to some degree or other for years in pre-2011 northern Mali. Factors falling in this category include arms smuggling, drug trafficking, government inaction, Islamic extremism, and material support from Qaddafi.⁷⁷ The Tuareg nomads in the northern part of Mali had carried out three large-scale rebellions since the country’s first in 1963–64, with the most recent occurring in 2006–08 (Solomon, 2015, p. 69). The Libya war fuelled these (and other) anti-state dynamics. But it also introduced new dimensions to the insurgency, most notably by increasing the availability of weapons in northern Mali.

Alongside the MNLA, Iyad ag-Ghali, a Malian Tuareg who grew up in Algeria’s south and was long known to Algeria’s secret services as a pivotal figure of the secular rebellion,⁷⁸ had recently returned in his native Kidal after a two-year stint as a Malian diplomat in Saudi Arabia and was seeking a new leadership role (Vogl, 2012). Ghali and other Ifoghas Tuareg soon formed Ansar al-Dine, a Salafi group allied with AQIM’s mainly Algerian jihadis that had been galvanized by the Libya war and the weapons-looting opportunities it had provided. A former British military commander remembers that AQIM’s attitude towards various Tuareg militias in late 2011 was that it would extend assistance if these militias imitated it.⁷⁹ This explains why their embrace of jihadism appears to have been guided more by pragmatism than by belief. The novel mixture of jihadi Salafism, Tuareg irredentism, and Libyan-weapons profusion became visible on 17 January 2012, when the seizure of Aguelhok resulted in the execution of more than 100 Malian soldiers by Ansar al-Dine, AQIM, and MNLA (Lewis and Diarra, 2012). Shortly afterwards, enmity emerged between the MNLA and Ansar al-Dine.

The fighting in the Kidal region disrupted anti-terrorism training and cooperation between the Malian government and key allies such

as Algeria and the US. A small team of Algerian trainers dispatched to the region with the intention of training local army units was forced to leave.

After the Aguelhok atrocity,⁸⁰ Paris pushed for negotiations with the groups responsible for it, and with MNLA in particular (Chivvis, 2015, p. 67; Notin, 2014, pp. 130–32). In Spring 2012, however, Mali’s north eventually fell under the control of militants. By July, France determined that a military intervention was necessary, although the Algerians, United Nations, and US Department of State resisted this course of action (Notin, 2014, p. 116). In late September, Washington put its weight behind French efforts to persuade Algerian President Bouteflika to abandon his non-interventionist approach to northern Mali. For geographic reasons, a Western military intervention in Mali, unlike the Libya example, was virtually unfeasible without a modicum of cooperation from Algeria. By late October 2012, Algiers had said it would not automatically reject a military intervention in Mali (Gearan, 2012).

Still, Algiers underestimated the jihadi component of Ghali’s agenda until Ansar al-Dine, as part of its lightning advance southward, which entered Konna on 10 January 2013. Up until this point, Algiers had persisted in seeing him as a potentially useful interlocutor and had sought to involve him in a political solution to the conflict, despite the fact that Paris had renounced this path months earlier.⁸¹ One expert on the Maghreb, working as part of the Obama administration at the time, suggested the Algerians to some extent ended up with ‘egg on their face’ when the move south towards Bamako occurred, as it was in many respects a clear violation of what the Algerians were trying to engineer through their network of contacts in northern Mali.⁸² When Paris launched its Operation Serval on 11 January 2013, Algeria authorized French warplanes to use its airspace to conduct bombing raids on Mali.⁸³

The Malian collapse in 2012, in addition to a weak Mauritania, un-governed Libya, porous Niger, and frail Tunisia, adversely impacted Algeria’s national security. In the years since, all of Algeria’s border areas have been turned into military zones that are closed to unauthorized non-military personnel (Boukhars, 2016b, p. 121).

In February 2012, Algerian security services announced that they had discovered two caches of weapons, including 15 SA-24 and 28 Strela-2 MANPADS missiles from Qaddafi’s arsenal, near In Amenas, 27 miles from the Libyan border (Faouzi, 2012). In June 2012, three months after a similar operation in Tamanrasset, Algeria’s top jihadi enemy AQIM assisted MUJAO in conducting a suicide attack on a paramilitary-police base in Ouargla, killing one and wounding three (Reuters, 2012).

On 16 January 2013, the In Amenas locale was struck by a terror attack on the Tigantourine gas facility (Gauthier-Villars, Barnes, and Hatoum, 2013) that killed 39 foreign hostages and one Algerian security guard. The cell responsible for the devastating terror operation, which was led by an Algerian veteran of AQIM, began in northern Mali, travelled through Niger, and stopped in Libya, north of Ghat, where it assembled and launched the cross-border attack into Algerian territory (Lacher, 2014; Porter, 2017; Armstrong, 2014).⁸⁴ Algerian officials maintained that most of the weapons used by the militants were from Qaddafi’s stockpiles (Matarese, 2013). In addition to many other items, the jihadis in In Amenas had taken Belgian-manufactured land mines from Qaddafi’s inventories (Black, 2013).

Box 3 The MANPADS situation

Less than three weeks into 2011's NATO–Arab intervention, Algiers issued a warning that Qaddafi's Strela-2 shoulder-mounted missiles were being acquired by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a mainly Algerian terror organization (Chikhi, 2011). Algerian security officials sometimes allude to the practical implications and geographic spread of MANPADS missiles, along with the dangers they present to both civil and military aviation and low-flying aircraft and helicopters. In the vast expanses of Algeria's south, aviation assets perform a particularly important security role. The successful use of MANPADS against the Algerian Air Force's planes could therefore be a drastic game changer. Within the civilian realm, Algerian officials fear a scenario similar to the 2002 Mombasa attack, when militants fired two shoulder-launched Strela-2 missiles at a crowded Israeli passenger jet (Bennet, 2002).

Even prior to 2011, Algiers had to grapple with surface-to-air systems. A border security expert familiar with Algeria observed that 'concern about MANPADS proliferating [on Algerian soil] has been pretty heavy for the last 25 years'—that is, since the end of the Soviet-era conflict in Afghanistan.⁸⁵ After the USSR invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the US, with Saudi and Pakistani backing, provided Stinger, Strela-2 pattern, and Blowpipe shoulder-fired missiles to Sunni militants seeking to oust Soviet troops (Riedel, 2014, pp. 61, 71). Starting in the early 1990s, Algerian veterans of the Afghan wars brought some of the MANPADS into their home country and, in at least one instance, fired a missile towards government aircraft (Raufer, 1996). This precedent partly explains why the Algerian government was expressing public concern about the uncontrolled spread of Qaddafi's SA-series MANPADS two weeks into the military intervention by the NATO–Arab coalition (Chikhi, 2011).

In the months following the fall of Tripoli in August 2011, Algiers ceased to be a lone voice of concern about Qaddafi's MANPADS, and other states began to express similar concerns. Commercial-flight routes were subject to precautionary detours. France's Foreign Minister Alain Juppé, in speaking before the French parliament, confirmed NATO's assessment that 10,000 Strela-2s were scattered in Libya and its vicinity.⁸⁶ Most of these estimates relate to missiles rather than complete systems. A complete system consists of a missile, a launcher, and a functioning battery. In most cases, national inventories contain many more missiles than launchers, and this makes it difficult for militants to gather a complete system.⁸⁷ In 2016, retired general and former head of British armed forces Lord David Richards said it was a NATO policy objective to try and secure ex-Gaddafi regime weapons and ammunition in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 war. But he added that he personally could not remember the UK 'doing anything to achieve it' (UKHC, 2016, p. 28).

The UK may have contributed to US-led efforts to secure conventional weapons and ammunition in Libya. In October 2011, Washington allocated USD 40 million to helping Tripoli recover, secure, or destroy arms stockpiles (Myers, 2011) and also put in place a purchase programme (Chivers, 2011).⁸⁸ In February 2012, a US government communiqué indicated that these US efforts had managed to secure, or otherwise account for, approximately 5,000 MANPADS and components (Shapiro, 2012). A separate unnamed 'well-placed source' contradicted the official communiqué by telling CBS News that 'only about 2,000 were accounted for prior to the September 11, 2012 terrorist attacks on Benghazi' (Attkisson, 2013). Anthony Blinken, a top aide to then Vice President Joe Biden, told the *New York Times* that some of the US recovery efforts stumbled on the 'total paralysis' of Libyan ministers at the time (Shane and Becker, 2016). One interviewee, who was privy to the attitude of US officials

tasked with assisting Libya combat weapons proliferation post-2011, attributed part of the US hesitancy to the spectre of the failed nation-building experiment in Iraq. 'The line was: "We are support; we'll let the Libyans lead this." They were waiting for directions from the Libyan government. But the Libyan government didn't have the wherewithal to give directions.'⁸⁹

As of April 2017, according to a senior Western military officer, the overall number of MANPADS missiles in non-state actors' hands across the entire North Africa theatre was lower than 2,000.⁹⁰ An Israeli security consultant who focuses upon North Africa maintains that the scarcity of MANPADS grip stocks acts as a limiting factor.⁹¹ These two technical challenges make it difficult to utilize the MANPADS missiles still in circulation. The consultant adds that this can be worked around. 'This can be done if you have somebody cunning enough, with high technical aptitude,' he explained. 'We saw that happen in Syria, where [jihadists] built their own rocket launcher. It won't be as good as the original but it will serve their need, which is to make [the systems] operable.'

Although most interviewees appear to hope that erosion effects and the lack of proper maintenance by militants will make still-in-circulation MANPADS less and less serviceable as months pass by, concerns revive whenever militants in North Africa successfully launch these missiles.

Two recent episodes on Libyan soil are believed to have possibly involved MANPADS. The first, on 17 July 2016, resulted in a Libyan National Army helicopter with six soldiers aboard crashing during combat against the Benghazi Defence Brigades (BDB) near al-Magrun, south of Benghazi (Bensimon, Bobin, and Zerrouky, 2016). Successful use of MANPADS is suspected by some experts because photographs of the downed helicopter seem to indicate greater damage than if it had crashed in other circumstances (ASN, n.d.). The involvement of MANPADS has never been proven. Soon after the July 2016 incident, Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) published a picture of two Strela-2s recovered from the area previously held by BDB (see Photo 1, below). Three of the six casualties were French operatives and it is therefore likely that some of the details will continue to be restricted. The activities of France's external intelligence agency in eastern Libya are clandestine. Paris therefore has an incentive to insist that it was an 'accident' (Guibert, 2016). The second possible incident occurred near Misrata. On 4 October 2017, IS carried out an attack on a court complex in the coastal city (Elumami, 2017). A few days later, a counter-terrorism unit from the city raided a nearby IS locale. Strela-2 systems were among the numerous weapons seized that day (see Photo 3, below). Incidents such as these partially explain why MANPADS have not ceased to preoccupy Algerian authorities.

In addition to MANPADS, other items taken from Libya, including MILAN missiles and Grad rockets, continue to concern Algerian officials. A Reuters article and the accounts of other observers suggest that Mali militants possess MILAN missiles that originated in Libya (Lewis and Diarra, 2012). On 18 March 2016, AQIM carried out a failed attack on the Ain Salah gas plant in Kherchba, central Algeria (Ambrose, 2016). No battle-damage assessments or photos of the projectiles are available to the public, but independent experts believe the terrorists used 107 mm or, more likely, 122 mm Grad BM-21 rockets fired using improvised launchers.⁹² A year prior, an armed group had fired a Grad rocket in the direction of the refinery in Zawiyah, north-west Libya, killing a Filipino worker (Elumami, 2015). In February 2017, a large arms cache was found in the Adrar region that contained two Grad rockets, along with three RPG-7s and seven D-30 155 mm shells (Yacoub, 2017).



Photo 1: Photo published by Haftar's army featuring two Strelas allegedly recovered from an area under BDB control in July 2016. Note that neither gripstocks nor batteries appear in the photograph. The photograph was released by the LNA after the LNA Air Force helicopter, which was carrying DGSE operatives, crashed. Source: Abraxas Spa/ Twitter, 2016

إسقاط مروحية لمليشيات حفتر فوق المقرون
HELICOPTER SHOT DOWN MILITIA HFTER OVER ALMAQRUN

أكدت قوات سربرايا الدفاع عن بنغازي أن طاقم الطائرة مكون من اثنين اثنين اثنين اثنين اثنين لم يتم التعرف على هوياتهم إلى الآن .

استهدفت قوات سربرايا الدفاع عن بنغازي بصاروخ حراري موجه نوع سام 7 طائرة مروحية تابعة لقوات حفتر في منطقة المقرون غرب بنغازي

M135
 تفاصيل إسقاط طائرة مروحية فجر اليوم بمنطقة المقرون غرب بنغازي

أدى الاستهداف إلى إسقاط الطائرة ومقتل كامل طاقمها المكون من أربع أشخاص .

نوع الطائرة التي أسقطت اليوم : هي M135 مروحية عمودية من طراز

DETAILS PRODUCTION PLANE AT DAWN TODAY ALMAQRUN, WEST OF BENGHAZI AREA

@BOSHRANEWS وكالة بشرى الإخبارية BUSHRA NEWS AGENCY @BOSHRAMAD

Photo 2: BDB propaganda claiming that the group used Strela-2S to shoot down the LNA helicopter in July 2016. Visual released online by BDB in 2016. Source: Oded Berkowitz/Twitter, 2016

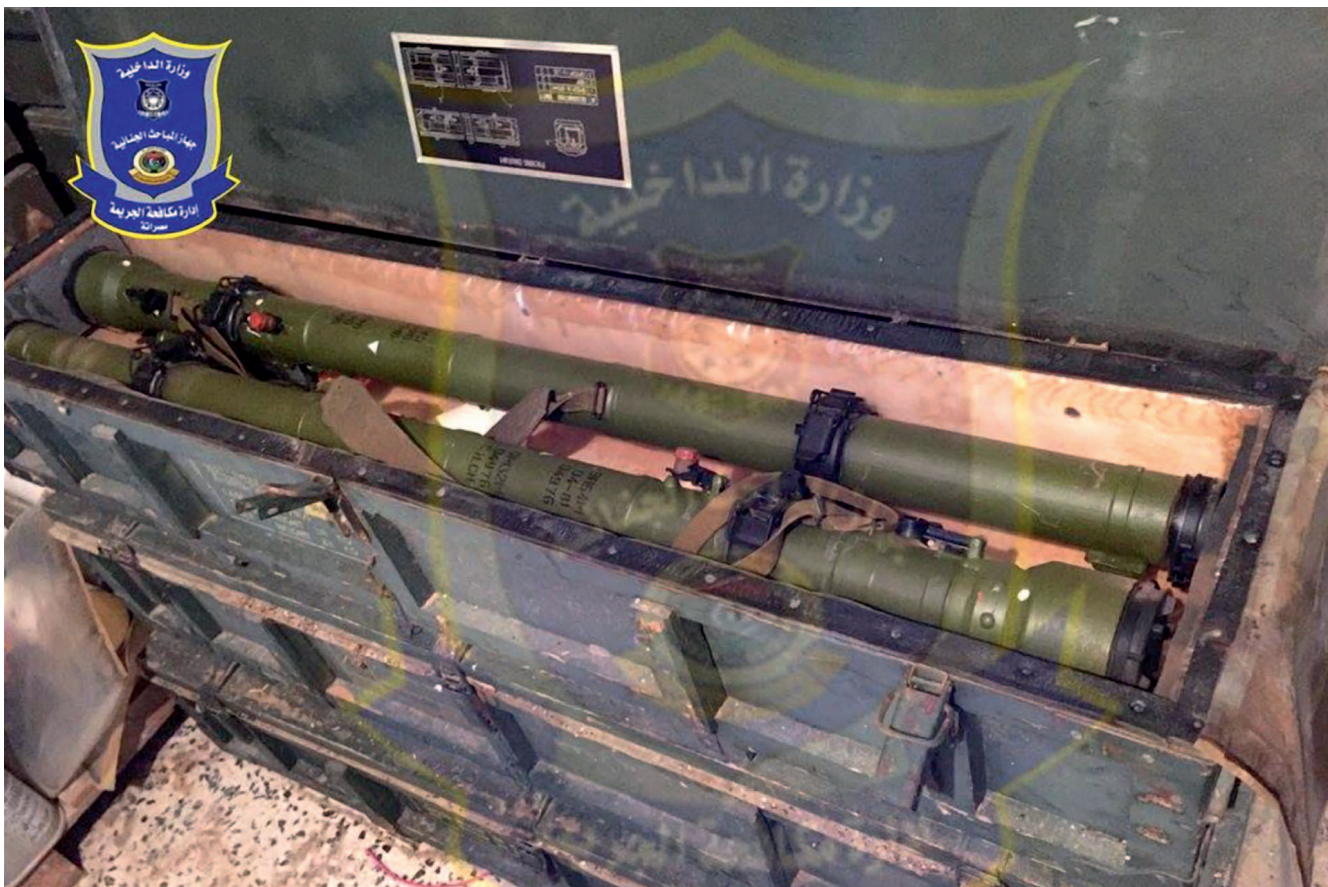


Photo 3: Photo published online by a Misrata-based Counter-terrorism Unit showing Strelas seized during a raid on an IS locale near the coastal city, October 2017. Source: Libya Herald/Misrata Anti Crime Unit Photo (Zaptia, 2017)

“As it extended a hand to Libya’s Islamists, Algiers has also courted their adversaries.”

nation-state; and 3) the need for wide, genuine political inclusion (LDA, 2017).

Diplomacy

Political inclusion

Many Algerian decision-makers perceive political inclusion as having been instrumental in helping the country exit its own civil war in the early 2000s. This perception originated an approach that Algiers continues to utilize to this day domestically. It consists in granting dissidents deemed willing to contemplate political compromise a degree of recognition that enables them to renounce violence, while withholding recognition from those who remain committed to jihadi means. This has two perceived benefits. First, it helps decrease the chances of an escalation or a hardening of armed resistance. Second, Algiers expects the truce to split the opposition into two camps: it peels the socio-politically oriented actors away from more-violent ones. The underlying intent is to placate and weaken the Islamists. Many decision-makers in Algiers believe that this type of co-option will help the state eventually prevail over its challengers.

Algiers uses a similar rationale in its foreign policy. When anarchy spread in Algeria’s near-abroad, the government applied the logic above beyond its borders, including in Libya. The inclusivity play does not always work in Algiers’ favour, as illustrated by the January 2013 offensive led by Malian Tuareg leader Iyad Ag Ghali, which went ahead despite months of engagement by Algiers (see Box 2, above).

Algerian diplomats believe that the exclusion of some non-jihadi groups from the official political process increases the probability of armed confrontation and an eventual break-up of Libya. That would in turn open the door to foreign intervention, which is a scenario that Algiers dreads.

Algiers’ diplomacy in Libya

In practical terms, the inclusive approach entails that Algiers views Libya’s Muslim Brotherhood movement as a political current like any other. In stark contrast, Haftar and his main foreign backers, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, consider the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist organization. In 2013, Algiers had carried out a rapprochement with Tunisia’s Islamists (Jeune Afrique, 2013). It was then able to use some of this momentum to establish direct lines of communication with Libya’s Islamists,⁹³ such as Ali al-Sallabi (Meslem, 2017; Ammour, 2015a). Algeria’s new Libya policy first became visible in September 2014 when Abdelhakim Belhaj visited Algiers (Mustafa, 2014). The Afghanistan-war veteran with a jihadi pedigree was deemed a politically important leader in Libyan society at the time of the rapprochement, which likely began in early 2014. Eighteen months before he was welcomed in Algiers, Belhaj was suspected by some Algerian officials of having assisted the jihadi attack on In Amenas (El Badil, 2013).

At the same time as it extended a hand to the Islamists, Algiers has courted their adversaries. Agueela Saleh Issa, the chairman of the House of Representatives based in Tobruk, visited Algiers in November 2016, although he has been closer to Rabat and Riyadh (Bensaci, 2016). Similarly, Aref Ali Nayed, a pro-Haftar, pro-UAE Libyan politician, visited Algiers in February 2017.⁹⁴

Often in secret, Algiers has forged (or revived) relationships with hundreds of Libyan actors (Dilmi, 2015). This approach is guided by a desire to exert leverage over all Libyan groups with a modicum of political legitimacy that control their respective territory and that do not seek to assist jihadi groups within that territory. In pursuing these rules with a degree of flexibility, Algiers has succeeded in establishing a wide variety of relationships it

can use to its advantage. A Misratan politician opposed to Haftar described the policy as follows:

In 2011, the Algerians’ main thrust was to try and stay as neutral as possible in Libya until they could see a clear winner they could support. That’s essentially still the Algerians’ position to this day and hour. They have contacts with so many Libyan sides—almost all of them. Yet, I believe the people in power in Algiers, for obvious reasons, don’t want to see democracy in Libya, because it’s against their interests. They want calm, but not democracy. At the same time, the Algerians are against Cairo extending its influence in Libya. They want the Egyptians to stay away from their borders.⁹⁵

Western-Libyan tribes and groups into which Algiers has a channel include the Megharha, Qadhadhfa,⁹⁶ Tubu,⁹⁷ various Tuareg factions, Warshefana, Werfalla, and the Zintanis (Ammour, 2015b). With regard to political and armed groups, Algiers maintains a dialogue with former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) leaders, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, the Special Deterrence Force (Radaa) led by Abdulraouf Kara, and a number of others.

Algiers’ current Libya diplomacy consists in working with, and exerting leverage on, contending non-jihadi Libyan factions so as to reduce the probability that they will enter into violent clashes near its borders. Algiers seeks to deploy its influence in opposition to entities that seek to impose ‘stability’ through military force and exclusionary policies in west Libya.

Support for the Skhirat Agreement

Algiers has been among the key supporters of the UN-backed Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) concluded in Skhirat, Morocco, in late 2015.⁹⁸ A senior diplomat covering Libya under the authority of Secretary of State John Kerry recalled how the mediation work undertaken by the Algerians in Libya became visible more than a year earlier, in September 2014, when the crisis was discussed at the General Assembly of the United Nations.⁹⁹ In March–April 2015, as the UN-led peace

talks in Morocco began to gather momentum, the grassroots networking and diplomatic efforts that Algiers had been engaged with since the previous summer proved useful and contributed to the process that culminated in the LPA being signed on 17 December 2015.¹⁰⁰

An Algiers-based US diplomat recalls that, since the early stages, ‘the Algerians have been involved alongside the UN’s peace process. [We] see eye to eye on what they’re trying to achieve in Libya; we agree with the inclusivity angle they take.’¹⁰¹ In evidencing an awareness of this inclusive inclination, Haftar, Cairo, and Abu Dhabi have sometimes been tempted to leave Algeria out of their own diplomatic forum (El-Gamaty, 2017). For instance, in January 2017, Haftar refused an invitation to meet GNA’s Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj in Algeria, and instead preferred to meet his rival in Abu Dhabi four months later (Cremonisi, 2017; AskaNews, 2017; Gambrell, 2017).

A tangible example of how Algeria’s strategy helped form and install the GNA was provided in March 2016, when the

Sarraj and his government peacefully arrived at the Abu Setta naval base in Tripoli. The UN-backed head of state is still partly based there. To help achieve this outcome, Algiers drew upon its relationship with Belhaj (Africa Intelligence, 2016, p. 2).¹⁰² This is not the only example.¹⁰³

In Libya, jihadi violence is only one of a number of threats. Other concerns include intensification of the civil war, a possible partition of the country, and an adverse change in the migration flows. In each of these respects, Khalifa Haftar and his armed coalition are potentially relevant political actors. This in turn raises the question of how they are regarded by Algiers.

What if Haftar gets closer?

The Algerians have henceforth supported UN-backed inclusive compromises such as the GNA as the way out of the conflict, although Haftar opposes this course of action. Algiers did not choose this policy because it wanted the Islamists in power in Libya, but rather because it deemed

Haftar and his foreign sponsors to be incapable of easily wiping them out through a direct, forceful confrontation.

Algeria was in favour of Haftar’s anti-Islamist military campaign (‘Operation Dignity’) during its first months.¹⁰⁴ But the relationship between Algiers and Haftar became more uneasy¹⁰⁵ after Emirati warplanes, with Egypt’s logistical support, bombed the international airport of Tripoli in late August 2014 to assist Operation Dignity. The Algerian government resented the foreign air strikes and revealed its boldly inclusive diplomacy the subsequent month by inviting Belhaj for a visit. Algiers’ rapport with Islamists such as Belhaj, Sallabi, and others has frustrated Haftar and led many within his camp to consider Algeria to be pro-Islamist.¹⁰⁶

The idea that Haftar, or a leader with similar attributes, may end up ruling all of Libya, did not elicit a strong controversy among the Algerians interviewed for this Briefing Paper. The Algerians are distinguished from the other states that provide military support to Libya’s counter-revolutionary factions by their scepticism about how, when—and at what costs



Photo 4: General Khalifa Haftar meets with Abdelkader Messahel, Algerian Minister of Maghreb Affairs in Benghazi, April 2017. This meeting was a follow-up to their earlier meeting in December, 2016. Source: Al Wasat Newspaper, April 2017

to regional stability—Libya’s counter-revolutionaries will arrive at this final outcome (Cristiani and Rekawek, 2014). Algeria’s lack of enthusiasm for Haftar is more methodological than ideological.

This is not to say that Algiers is indifferent to the ideological ramifications of a Haftar-ruled Libya. An assertive Haftar cannot be separated from the foreign powers that back him.¹⁰⁷ He also brings with him a mode of governance that potentially increases the influence of Madkhali Salafist ideology, as these rigorist Salafis form a vital component of Haftar’s forces (Luck, 2018). If this current of thought gains strength in Libya, it may disrupt Algeria’s own domestic landscape, which already features a growing rigorist Salafi movement. In the current environment, the number of Algerians loyal to Saudi sheikh Rabi’ al-Madkhali and his closest collaborators is a source of concern for the Algerian authorities (Makedhi, 2018). As Madkhali Salafis become more powerful in Libya, whether through the rise of Haftar or some other process, their Algerian counterparts will feel emboldened. From Algiers’ perspective, Saudi leaders issuing instructions to their Algerian followers, as they often do, amounts to geopolitical interference. Algerian disquiet extends to Madkhali activities in Libya as well; Haftar’s camp has already issued a *fatwa* against Ibadi followers in Libya (HRW, 2017). The Ibadi school of Islam has already created tensions in south-central Algeria (ICG, 2016a, pp. 8–10). If Haftar’s camp persecutes Ibadis in western Libya, as it seems intent on doing, reverberations will likely be felt inside Algeria, and may extend to the M’zab region.

One foreign diplomat observed that ‘the Algerians aren’t enamoured with Haftar. They find him a bit too bellicose’. His military coalition is also viewed as lacking cohesion and efficacy, and his narrow political base is a source of concern.¹⁰⁸ If the eastern-Libyan forces led by Haftar advance into the western half of Libya, Algeria fears he will duplicate what he did in Benghazi, Ajdabiya, and Derna—namely, a destructive war of attrition involving protracted sieges near the Tunisian or Algerian borders. Were Haftar to advance, Algeria foresees a resurgence of jihadi groups, a spike in the flow of refugees going into both Tunisia and Algeria, and the further polarization of Libya’s political spectrum. In attempting

to address security concerns in western Libya, Algiers privileges a pragmatic, network-based approach, and the leveraging of actors already based there. One former Algerian minister observed:

We [the Algerians] have a relationship with all political factions in Libya. We talk to everybody who’s not a jihadi... including someone like [Abdelhakim] Belhaj.¹⁰⁹ When Haftar came to Algiers in December 2016, it wasn’t his first visit here.¹¹⁰ Haftar came to Algeria multiple times prior to that. We’ve known him since 1984 in fact. Why did he come? Haftar knows full well that in order to rule the western half of Libya, he needs Algeria’s help.¹¹¹

Conclusion

Libya’s 2011 war and its aftermath inflicted a substantial shock upon Algeria’s physical security. Partly as a consequence, Algiers has nearly doubled its defence budget and maintained it at that elevated level despite financial difficulty.

After the January 2013 attack on the In Amenas gas facility—which the Algerians attribute to the Libyan crisis in a number of respects—a doctrinal shift began to occur. Although not always consistently, the Algerians now engage more in their near abroad, including in Libya. That diplomatic push since 2014 has had an impact, most notably by assisting the UN in its peace process and the installation of the UN-backed GNA in Tripoli. In addition to these benefits, this diplomatic effort has also provided Algiers with a wide range of relationships and dialogues that it can utilize unilaterally.

Algiers intends to exert its diplomatic clout for the purpose of promoting entente among non-jihadi Libyan factions and acting as a counterweight to entities seeking to impose ‘stability’ through military force and exclusionary policies inside Libya. The Algerians view exclusionary and securitized policies as being responsible for their neighbour’s current failed-state status. In this context, small ad hoc incursions by Algerian forces on Libyan soil, whether overt or clandestine, can no longer be ruled out.

With regard to politics, the Algerians are not, in principle, opposed to seeing Khalifa Haftar or someone with a similar

ideology succeed in imposing his rule over all of Libya. They are however sceptical that Haftar’s camp will succeed in achieving this without causing bloodshed and destabilization in west Libya. More broadly, the Algerians are concerned by the side effects a militarized approach in the western half of Libya may have on Tunisia and Algeria itself. They continue to be concerned about the possibility of a de facto partition of Libya.

Several foreign states interfering in Libya’s civil war remain attached to military force and exclusionary policies. Algiers places France in this category. Moreover, in the Algerians’ perception, France’s sphere of influence increasingly surrounds their country. Even though both states wish to see Libya become stable, the divergence of Algerian and French doctrines and methods is likely to become increasingly pronounced as time progresses.

Prospects for the future

If the support of France and other foreign states for the exclusionary and securitized methods of Libya’s counter-revolutionary factions persists, Algeria will feel more and more marginalized. Indeed, Algiers opposes the use of such methods in west Libya because it sees it as a source of yet more instability in the future.

In further compounding this concern, economic stagnation could combine with uncertainties over succession and may divert Algiers’ attention away from foreign policy. Its response to future potential shocks emanating from Libya may be different from what observers of the Maghreb-Sahel watchers were accustomed to before 2014.

One possible scenario could see Algiers bolster its existing friendship with Moscow in an effort to limit French influence.¹¹² Even though both Russia and France have thus far favoured Haftar’s military campaign in Libya, they have done so as competitors, not as coordinated partners. Algiers might try to exploit that rivalry by ramping up its security partnership with Moscow so as to undermine what it perceives as an almost-continuous swath of French influence extending from Morocco, to Mali, to Egypt, and beyond. ●

Abbreviations

AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
BDB	Benghazi Defence Brigades
DGSE	France's General Directorate for External Security
GIA	Armed Islamic Group of Algeria
GNA	Government of National Accord
GSJC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
IS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
LNA	Libyan National Army
MANPADS	Man-portable air defence systems
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MLNA	Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MUJAO	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFSL	National Front for the Salvation of Libya
NTC	National Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Notes

- 1 The Maghreb consists of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Western Sahara.
- 2 For instance, many Western commentators maintain Algeria was 'unhelpful' in sitting out 2011's NATO–Arab intervention in Libya (Heisbourg, 2016). According to one scholar of Algerian politics, a senior US diplomat acknowledged privately in September 2011 that: '[t]he Algerians were right. All the predictions they made, proved correct...' (author correspondence, January 2018). For Algiers' early warnings about the propensity of the military intervention to foster jihadism in Libya and its vicinity, see the press interview conducted by then Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci in March 2011 (Mebarki and Fattani, 2011).
- 3 Author interview, Washington, DC, April 2014.
- 4 The internationally recognized government of Libya is based in Tripoli and has been in place since January 2016. Foreign states committed to a counter-revolutionary agenda (such as Russia and the UAE) tend to support the armed coalition of General Khalifa Haftar, which is based in eastern Libya. States with revisionist ambitions (such as Turkey and Qatar) tend to support Haftar's enemies. The conflict in Libya is not a simple proxy war, however. Several countries, including the US, support both Haftar's army and the armed groups affiliated with the GNA in Tripoli.
- 5 In the late 1960s, Saudi Arabia began increasing its efforts to project leadership in all other Arab lands (Thurston, 2016, p. 69). This trend became more pronounced after the Iraq war of 2003. In the years since, the Gulf states have increasingly become the source of new initiatives and thinking in other Arab countries (Abdulla, 2010; Ottaway, 2010). This trend runs counter to Algeria's principle of sovereignty, which dictates that Algerian policies must not be influenced by any foreign entity. Moreover, Algeria is largely opposed to interventionism. See 'Territorial sovereignty', p. 4.
- 6 Author interview, Algiers, April 2017.
- 7 In the simplest of terms, Algiers is opposed to foreign states intervening militarily in Libya whereas Morocco is not. An illustration of this was on display in November 2017, when Paris called for an intervention in Libya, by suggesting 'a concrete initiative that is military and police-like in nature, on the ground' (Wemaëre, 2017). Rabat, along with Berlin, N'Djamena, Niamey, and other actors, manifested a degree of sympathy for Paris' calls—but Algiers remained largely silent (Ouest-France, 2017). When Paris' idea of an intervention by foreign states in Libya to rescue migrants failed to elicit sufficient support, President Macron stopped mentioning it.
- 8 Morocco supported the NATO–Arab intervention in Libya (Le Matin, 2011).
- 9 Here the emphasis should be on *almost*: Algiers does not oppose all foreign interventions. It officially saw January 2013's military intervention by foreign forces in Mali as a sovereign decision by Bamako that occurred in response to a request from the recognized government (El Watan, 2013). Using a similar rationale, it has been favourable to Russia's intervention in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and saluted the latter's taking of Aleppo by force (PressTV, 2016). Lastly, Algeria never has criticized the Saudi-Emirati war on the Houthis in Yemen (AF, 2015), since it was requested by the internationally recognized government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.
- 10 The Algerians are aware that Paris has provided weapons directly to Iraq's Kurdish community, without going through Baghdad (AFP, 2014). In 2017, at a ceremony in Damascus celebrating the Algerian uprising of 1954, Syria's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the presence of the Algerian ambassador, said: 'Syria and Iraq will never be dismembered. [...] Kurdish citizens will never allow colonialism to prevail'—this was an allusion to the military support that Paris and Washington had provided to the Kurds (PressTV, 2017).
- 11 Besides historian Pierre Razoux, other French personalities also maintained that Libya 2011 was in part seen in Paris as an opportunity to repair the humiliation of Suez 1956. Author interviews with an analyst at the Office for Strategic Affairs (*Délégation aux Affaires Stratégiques*) in the French Ministry of Defense, Paris, November 2013, and with a political adviser at the European External Action Service, Brussels, May 2014.
- 12 The UAE has an airbase in al-Khadim, east Libya (Maslin, 2017), has a base in Assab, Eritrea (Economist, 2017), and is building a new base in Somalia (Manek, 2017). In addition to several other facilities, France has maintained a base in the UAE since 2009 (Saltmarsh, 2009), and another base in northern Niger since 2014 (Martin, 2015). Turkey has a military base in Qatar (Vagneur-Jones and Kasapoglu, 2017) and Russia has two bases in Syria, including one since 2015 (DW, 2017). The Sisi government has authorized Russia's military planes to deploy from bases in Egypt (RFE RL, 2017). The US has maintained a surveillance drone base in Tunisia since 2016 (Entous and Ryan, 2016) and two bases in Niger, since 2014 and 2018, respectively (Schmitt, 2018).
- 13 US warplanes can refuel on Algerian soil (Babouche, 2018).
- 14 Author interview, Algiers, January 2017.
- 15 Author interview with a former Algerian minister, Algiers, January 2017. The phrase is commonly used by Algerian diplomats in conversations about security issues.
- 16 This is by no means a uniform consensus among Algerian policy-makers. There is a continual debate in Algiers between the hardliners and the conciliators, and the balance of power between the two camps has varied over time.
- 17 The Algerian economy is dominated by its oil and gas resources, which account for 98 per cent of the country's exports. The hydrocarbon sector represents about 45 per cent of total GDP and about two-thirds of budget revenues (IMF, 2011).
- 18 For the role of redistribution in Algerian politics, see Lowi (2009, pp. 83–85); and Achy (2013, pp. 13–19). It should be noted that part of Bouteflika's success in helping the country emerge from civil war can be attributed to the overlap between his arrival and the beginning of the commodity super cycle of 2000–14, which lifted oil prices.
- 19 Algeria also manufactures some of its small arms and ammunition. Examples include Type-56 assault rifles made by the Khenchela Company (ECMK; Anzar, 2012); and 7.62 x 39 mm cartridges made by the Seriana Company (ERIS; Anders, 2015, p. 177).
- 20 According to Military Balance 2017 report, Algeria's defence spending in 2016 amounted to 7 per cent of gross domestic product. The defence budget, which was USD 6 billion in 2010, stands at USD 10.6 billion (IISS, 2017, pp. 358, 359).
- 21 A version of this map was also published in Harchaoui, 2018.
- 22 See also Riedel (2013), Bourrat (2012), and Boukhars (2012). Author Clément Tibère writes that the Algerian intelligence community employs a total of 100,000

- individuals, domestically and abroad, and enjoys an annual budget of EUR 2 billion (USD 2.4 billion; Tibère, 2018). But no evidence was forthcoming in support of this assertion.
- 23 Two years prior to that, Algeria had condemned NATO's March 1999 intervention in Kosovo (Buckley and Cummings, 2002, p. 210). In the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001, it supported the US-led war in Afghanistan. Regarding the Algerian returnees from the Afghan war, see Martinez (2006).
- 24 See also Thieux (2016, p. 133) and Bozonnet (2015). Ramtane Lamamra, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs from September 2013 through May 2017, is often credited as having revitalized Algeria's foreign policy for sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to 2013, Algerians had chaired the African Union's Security Council for Peace for 11 years, during which Algiers ramped up its security role and networks in Africa (Nickels, 2014).
- 25 See also Ben Khalid (2015, p. 19). In continuing the pattern of training elite counter-terrorism and protection units in neighbouring countries, Algeria also provides training to the Presidential Guard of Libya's internationally recognized government in Tripoli (Alharaty, 2017).
- 26 See also Pannier (2017, p. 484). For France's growing influence across the northern half of Africa, see Harchaoui (2017) and Powell (2017). Washington also welcomes displays of 'leadership' from Rome, too, as Italy has military presence in Niger and in Libya itself (DPA, 2017; Thrush, 2017; Fatto Quotidiano, 2018). A former senior US diplomat said African crises such as the one in Libya were 'also a useful opportunity in terms of prompting France and Britain, the Europeans in general, to play a more decisive security role within that time zone'—a reference to the fact that most of the African continent is geographically situated within the same longitudes as Europe (author interview, Washington, DC, April 2014).
- 27 For the security deterioration in Mali, despite France's Operation Barkhane, see testimonies before a French Senate commission (Sénat, 2018).
- 28 Author interviews with French officials, Paris, April 2018.
- 29 On Paris' bias towards a militarized approach to geopolitical crises, see Powell (2016) and Guichaoua, Jezequel et al. (2018). For instance, since September 2014, both France's Minister of Defence and military leaders have recommended several times that their country intervene in Libya (Le Figaro, 2014; Merchet, 2015a; 2015b). Algerian opposition was one among several reasons no overt French intervention materialized during that period.
- 30 See also HuffPost Algérie (2014). Beyond humanitarian aid, there exists a tacit rule among Algeria's security decision-makers that low-level smuggling should be tolerated in order to maintain the quality of life of cross-border tribes (Megerisi, 2017, p. 35).
- 31 Author interview, Algiers, January 2017.
- 32 In 2010, the Algerians set up the Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC), a regional counter-terrorism cooperation mechanism headquartered in Tamanrasset. They also pushed for the creation of a Fusion and Liaison Unit the same year (OECD/SWAC, 2014, pp. 207–08). Four years later, when Paris promoted the creation of the G5-Sahel Force, it largely disregarded Algeria's existing initiatives. This political rivalry is sub-optimal from a security and effectiveness perspective.
- 33 See Soliman (2017), Bredoux (2017), and Abba (2016).
- 34 See Guibert (2016), Landauro and Morajea (2016), and Harchaoui (2017).
- 35 Author interview with a retired officer of the Algerian armed forces, Oran, July 2017.
- 36 This particular concern of the Algerian leadership contributed to the meeting in In Amenas between Algerian president Zeroual and Libyan leader Qaddafi, on 19 April 1995. The joint communiqué offered a formal condemnation of radical Islamism (Défense Nationale, 1996, p. 100).
- 37 From the African Union's 1999 inception, Qaddafi projected his own country as the providential benefactor and principal leader of the organization (Otman and Karlberg, 2007, p. 58). Algeria felt it could not share his Libyan-centric vision of the AU.
- 38 Author interview, Tunis, March 2017.
- 39 Author interview, Washington, DC, May 2017.
- 40 Author interview, Washington, DC, May 2017.
- 41 Algeria's concern had to do with al-Qaeda activities in general, not one particular militant leader. Algeria felt that intra-Libyan division and lawlessness in Libya was bound to bolster al-Qaeda affiliates in North Africa, as proved to be the case.
- 42 On Polisario militants fighting alongside Qaddafi's forces during the 2011 war, see also Gabriel (2011), Fitzpatrick (2011), and Coughlin (2011). Separately from the Polisario Front, some observers claim that Algeria funnelled supplies and arms directly to the loyalists during the first months of the 2011 war (Chorin, 2012, p. 226). Documents found in regime offices after Tripoli's fall showed that Qaddafi planned to import Chinese arms via Algeria by as late as July 2011 (McElroy, 2011). Although entirely plausible, Algeria's indirect or direct support for the Qaddafi regime during 2011 has been neither proven nor disproven.
- 43 Author interview with an eyewitness from Zintan, Tunis, March 2018.
- 44 A few days after the fall of Tripoli, on 29 August 2011, Algeria's Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci sat down with NTC Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril in Cairo (Bouazza and Gouëset, 2011). Algeria granted its recognition to the NTC three weeks later, in September—the same month as China (RFI, 2011).
- 45 In the aftermath of President Ben Ali's overthrow in January 2011, Tunisia experienced a period of six months in which there was virtually no functioning border security apparatus (ICG, 2013, p. 16). While this was not related to the Libyan crisis, it exacerbated the shock experienced by Algeria during the period 2011–13.
- 46 See Box 1, 'Arms proliferation from Libya', p. 11.
- 47 AQIM, an al-Qaeda affiliate, emerged in 2007 from an extremist group that survived Algeria's civil war.
- 48 The killing of 14 Algerian soldiers on 15 April 2011 during an attack on the Azazga army barracks was the first of several bold attacks that the AQIM's northern branch launched near Algiers (Hammoum, 2011). The 2011 attacks have been interpreted by scholars and Algerian officials as a direct reverberation of Libyan instability (Lebovich, 2011). In October 2011, the newly formed al-Qaeda splinter group Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), which was led by fighters from an Arab tribe based in Gao, Mali, attacked a refugee camp near Tindouf, in western Algeria, 30 miles from the Mauritanian border. The attackers abducted an Italian and two Spanish aid workers (The Telegraph, 2011; AFP, 2012b).
- 49 In this Briefing Paper, 'Algeria's south' is defined as the country's national territory south of the city of Laghouat, which is located approximately on the 34th parallel.
- 50 For example, an arms depot located near Qasr Abu Hadi, located south of Sirte, was seized by rebels during the 2011 war. Large quantities of weapons and ammunition were also taken from arms depots across the greater Tripoli area.
- 51 The number of AQIM militants active in Algeria is estimated to be less than 500. A few dozen IS militants must also be added to this figure. Figures provided by an independent Algerian security analyst. Orders of magnitude corroborated informally by other interviewees. Author interview, Algiers, April 2017. See also Bachir and Khariief (2017) and Zerrouky (2018).
- 52 For instance, relative neglect on the part of the central government in Bamako helps to make northern Mali more conducive to the spread of AQIM-linked groups. Moreover, MINUSMA and France's Operation Barkhane have been unsuccessful in their fight against jihadi groups there.
- 53 See Fauzi (2015). Here 'eastern flank' refers to the 1,200 miles of border that separates Algeria from Tunisia and Libya.

- A centralized security apparatus exists in Tunisia but not in Libya, and Algiers distributes its military forces accordingly. The number of 23,000 personnel stationed along the border may be somewhat exaggerated since it emanates from the Algerian government itself. But an independent Algerian expert accepted it as a rough estimate (author interview, Algiers, April 2017). In 2014, Algeria announced that it would create a seventh command centre (*région militaire*). If the initiative is implemented, the existing Fourth Military Region—headquartered in Ouargla and covering Algeria's border with Libya and parts of the conjoining areas with Niger and Tunisia—would be split in two (Ben Khalid, 2015).
- 54 In the assessment of a political-science professor at an Algiers university, Algeria's diplomacy is 'lacking in the way of action on the ground. Perhaps their capacity to physically implement it is too limited, or perhaps their desire is too limited—or both.' The scholar added that Algeria does not invest enough money and does not provide security beyond its borders. Author interview, Algiers, January 2017.
- 55 See Box 3 'The MANPADS situation', p. 14.
- 56 See also Cordesman and Nerguizian (2009, p. 62), Spleeters (2011), Black (2013), and Chivers (2013).
- 57 Although the *Wall Street Journal's* October 2011 article is the only public document that cites this figure, none of the Western military figures interviewed for this Paper demurred from its accuracy. A retired British Army general stated: '20,000 tons? I don't know the [exact] figure, but they [the Gulf states] poured a lot of equipment and money' (emphasis in the original; author interview, London, February 2014). A retired US Navy admiral said: 'On-the-ground assistance [contributed by the Gulf states] to the resistance was very important' (author correspondence, April 2014). Qatar's violations of the UNSC's arms embargo were acknowledged by the UNSC's Panel of Experts on Libya (UNSC, 2013, p. 15–16). Anti-Qaddafi officials told the Panel that about 20 flights' worth of arms and ammunition had been delivered by the state of Qatar by July 2011. (This figure does not include weapons transported by sea, via Sudan, or via other land routes; UNSC, 2012, p. 24.)
- 58 This calculation assumes the following gross weights: 65 kg per box of 10 AK-47 rifles and 49.5 kg per 3,000 rounds of ammunition.
- 59 See also Risen, Mazzetti, and Schmidt (2012) and Gélie (2011).
- 60 For a discussion of the presence of Turkish weapons in Libya during the UN arms embargo, see Schanzer (2015).
- 61 Author interview, Algiers, April 2017.
- 62 In contrast, weapons caches in the northern part of the country, which are mostly a remnant of the 1990s, are fewer in number (Kasmi, 2017).
- 63 Although the Algerian army may have a slight incentive to exaggerate the sensational nature of its arms seizures, its official statistics still provide a useful means of monitoring trends and orders of magnitude.
- 64 Bullets are important to militants because they tend to be scarcer than rifles.
- 65 See also El-Djeich (2018, pp. 22–23).
- 66 In March 2012, the al-Qaeda splinter group attacked a military post in the Algerian town of Tamanrasset (AFP, 2012a). Algerian armed forces did not venture into MUJAO's northern-Mali strongholds to conduct reprisals (Porter, 2015b, p. 49). A month later, seven Algerian diplomats were kidnapped by MUJAO in Gao, Mali (France24, 2014). Five were held hostage for 28 months while two of them, including the vice-consul, lost their lives. Still, the Algerians did not cross their borders.
- 67 Abdelraouf Kara's armed group, the Special Deterrence Force, is increasingly powerful in Tripoli. It has a rigorist Salafi orientation and claims it is committed to combating crime, the Muslim Brotherhood, and IS (Trew, 2017). Some members of Kara's armed group confirm that the Algerian state has established lines of communication with the group. Author interview, Tripoli, September 2016. Abdelhakim Belhaj is an influential Libyan businessman, former jihadi, and Islamist leader.
- 68 Details about the 2014 incident were related by a Zintani individual familiar with the city's various militias and their leaders (author interview, Tunis, March 2018). An independent security expert in Algiers gave an account consistent with the Zintani's description (author interview, Algiers, April 2017). Separately, a senior civilian member of Zintan's leadership said that his city enjoyed an excellent friendship with Algeria. Author interview, Tunis, November, 2017.
- 69 Although Algeria conducted operations on Tunisian soil prior to 2014 on a clandestine basis, the formal accord with Tunis is a meaningful landmark.
- 70 Author interview, Algiers, April 2017.
- 71 Author interview, Tunis, March 2017.
- 72 Algerian officials seem acutely cognizant of the Libyan theatre's asymmetrical nature: In contrast with west-Egypt, which is almost empty, Tunisia and north-east Algeria are densely populated. More important, less than a third of Libya's population lives in Cyrenaica. The other two-thirds are concentrated in the country's western half, the vast majority of which is located in the north-west quadrant, Tripolitania. If a particular war tactic proves disruptive in Cyrenaica, then it will be much more so in western Libya.
- 73 In western Tunisia, in the Jendouba, Kasserine, Kef, and Sidi Bouzid Mountains, approximately 100 jihadi militants continue to evade capture (Al-Jarida, 2017).
- Many are Algerians who take refuge there in order to evade Algerian authorities' frequent 'raking operations' (from the French *ratissage*; sweeping up) next door. These jihadi cells, and others, wait for the security circumstances to degrade, in the expectation that this will enable them to set up a corridor into Algeria and transfer weapons before carrying out attacks there (Ayari, 2015).
- 74 Author interview, Algiers, April 2017.
- 75 For detailed scholarship on why it is no longer possible to maintain a distinction between the Maghreb's and the Sahel's security dynamics, see Martinez and Boserup (2017).
- 76 Author interview, London, February 2014.
- 77 See also Boukhars (2012). Algeria de facto strengthened jihadism in northern Mali in the mid-2000s by pursuing part of AQIM predecessor Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) from Algeria's north into the Sahara.
- 78 In the two decades preceding 2011, Algiers had experienced several successes in helping to broker peace in northern Mali. During its engagement with various crises, it witnessed Ghali behave as a secular leader of armed rebellions, who wielded political influence over the powerful Ifoghas tribe (Ould M. Salem, 2014, p. 143).
- 79 Author interview, London, February 2014.
- 80 The military base of Aguelhok was attacked by Ansar al-Dine, AQIM, and the MNLA in mid-January 2012, resulting in a massacre of an estimated 128 individuals (although some sources maintain the figure was actually closer to 153). In addition to the death toll, the exact details of the attack are still clouded in considerable uncertainty (Touchard, 2013).
- 81 See Notin (2014, p. 137). For more analysis on Algiers' diplomatic failure in Mali 2012, see Lounnas (2014, p. 49).
- 82 Author interview, Washington, DC, May 2017.
- 83 In 2013, Algeria significantly improved its intelligence sharing with Paris and Washington (author interview with US official focusing on security in the Maghreb, Washington, DC, March 2017). Algeria even provided logistical support to the French during the Mali intervention (Notin, 2014, p. 258).
- 84 Before becoming a high-profile member of AQIM, Algerian jihadi Mokhtar Belmokhtar was a veteran of GIA and GSPC (Harmon, 2014, p. 57). The team that he ordered to attack In Amenas in January 2013 was not exclusively composed of fellow Algerian citizens but also included Tunisians, Libyans, and other nationalities (Lebovich, 2013). The transnational nature of the organization should be underlined.
- 85 Author interview, Tunis, March 2017.
- 86 See also Le Monde (2011) and Malbrunot (2011).

- 87 Author interview with an expert, Washington, DC, May 2017.
- 88 Washington would not specify if the USD 40 million figure encompasses the funds budgeted for the purchase programme.
- 89 Author interview, Washington, DC, May 2016.
- 90 Author interview, Algiers, April 2017.
- 91 Author interview by telephone, Tel Aviv, April 2017.
- 92 Author interview by telephone, Tel Aviv, March 2017.
- 93 Algiers made its overture towards Libya's various Islamists in 2014 only after it was sure that the influence of political Islam was consistently weakening across the region, a trend that began in early 2013 (Lynch, 2016, p. 166; Pargeter, 2016, p. 4).
- 94 Nayed mentioned his Algiers visit as part of his remarks at a Heritage Foundation conference in Washington, DC, on 7 March 2017.
- 95 Author telephone interview, July 2018, Misrata.
- 96 During the war in 2011, the Qadhadhfa of the southern city of Sabha found refuge in Algeria. As one Sabha native recalled:
- The Qadhadhfa were treated well [in Algeria]. The dynamic in Sabha was very tribal, and things were very difficult for anyone who was in the army, had a government position [under Qaddafi], or would not bow down to [local Arab tribe] the Awlad Suleiman. The Qadhadhfa came back gradually from Algeria when their money ran out. Most of them returned in late 2014, when the Awlad Suleiman were busy fighting the [Tubu].*
- Author interview, Tripoli, September 2016.
- 97 Before Qatar launched a similar peace initiative, Algeria acted as a key mediator between Tubu and Tuareg in the city of Ubari (Libya Herald, 2015; Murray, 2017, p. 14). Ali Kanna is a Tuareg figure close to both Algiers and Haftar (Murray, 2017, p. 14; Freeman, 2016).
- 98 The Skhirat Agreement, which gave rise to the GNA in January 2016, rules out a military solution and emphasizes civilian control of the armed forces. It also calls for the inclusion of as many Libyan political rivals as possible (UNSMIL, 2016; El Yaakoubi, 2015). The Algerians have been among the most adamant champions of political inclusion (Porter, 2015a). Other genuine supporters have included Great Britain, Italy, and the US.
- 98 Author interview, Washington, DC, October 2017.
- 100 Although all the credit for helping shepherd the signing of the Skhirat Agreement went to Morocco in 2015, Algeria refrained from sabotaging the process. Algerian security concerns relating to Libya and an abhorrence of militarized solutions prevailed over their enmity towards Rabat. In the recollection of an expert on the Maghreb who worked as part of the Obama administration at the time:
- After the first drafts of the LPA were completed in spring of 2015, there was sniping by pundits. Moroccans criticized Algeria and Algerians criticized Morocco. But that had no effect on the actual consensus between them regarding the LPA. Amazingly, during those months, there was little diversion from the basic agreement that existed between Algeria and Morocco on what was best for Libya: a political solution, not a military one.*
- Author interview, Washington, DC, May 2017.
- 101 Author interview, Algiers, January 2017.
- 102 At the time, Belhaj was based in the Znata and Suq al-Jumaa neighbourhoods, located approximately three miles south-east of Abu Sitta (author interview, Tripoli, September 2016).
- 103 In June 2017, the chairman of Tripoli's National Oil Company Mustafa Sanalla went to Algiers, where he met with Algeria's Foreign Minister before issuing a joint statement calling for Libya's oil assets to 'be protected'. The mere occurrence of the meeting further indicates the possibility of Algeria assuming an increasingly flexible security role beyond its eastern borders (Saada, 2017). On potentially closer partnership between Libya's and Algeria's respective national oil companies, see also Libya Herald (2017).
- 104 See Ougartchinska (2014). In November 2014, Haftar even told the Western media that Algiers provided him with weapons (Battistini, 2014).
- 105 In a December 2017 interview with the press, Haftar quipped he was not aware of Algeria's mediation efforts in Libya. Yet he also made an overture by adding that the Algerians could be neutral mediators, saying: 'It's an Arab state. And the Libyans' staying united matters to Algiers just as much as their divisions harm it' (de Saint Périer, 2018).
- 106 In December 2014, a pro-Haftar figure accused Algeria of trying to install jihadists in power in Libya (Al-Wasat, 2014). In June 2017, the spokesperson of Haftar's armed coalition accused Algeria of conspiring to help Islamists dominate west Libya. Others accuse it of promoting political inclusion in Libya for the sole purpose of keeping dangerous Islamists in Libya, who would otherwise infiltrate Algeria instead (RT Arabic, 2017). Other anti-Islamist voices in Libya speak of a sinister complicity between Algeria and Qatar (Libya Times, 2017).
- 107 See also Harchaoui (2018) and Wehrey (2018, pp. 183, 263). On the issue of Haftar being a conduit for foreign influence into the Maghreb region, Algerian functionaries tend to voice two main opinions. Career diplomats usually evidence a higher level of concern whereas military and security officials are more sanguine. They view Libya from a more parochial perspective and are therefore predisposed to view Haftar as part of the solution.
- 108 The Algerian military believe that, above all, Libya needs a strong army that can guarantee a security that extends to its borders (Bachir, 2017, quoting an Algerian military officer). This 'lack of strength' aspect is of paramount importance. The Haftar camp often presents itself as possessing sufficient land power necessary to seize Tripoli and western Libya (Ghanmi, 2017). This view is not widely shared by the Algerians, who are concerned that Haftar's armed coalition is not a regular army and therefore lacks the force necessary to control Libya in its entirety. Haftar's lack of land power has caused him to rely on his own and foreign aircraft (from Egypt, France, and the UAE) along with foreign mercenaries on the ground (Hammond, 2018; Tsvetkova, 2017; Avril, 2016; Delalande, 2018). This helps explain why the resulting military campaign has proven to be more internationalized, messier, and more uncertain (Oberlé, 2014). Moreover, Haftar's forces exert insufficient control over the territories that they have taken (Harchaoui, 2018). This weakness partially explains Algiers' continued misgivings about Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army.
- 109 Abdelhakim Belhaj was blacklisted as 'terrorist' by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (The National, 2017).
- 110 See Africa News (2016) for a description of Haftar's visit.
- 111 Author interview, Algiers, January 2017.
- 112 Algeria enjoys close relations with Russia, which have strengthened since 2006 (Mokhefi, 2015, p. 11).

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