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CRISIS IN SOUTH SUDAN PART ONE: SHAKE-UP IN MILITARY LEADERSHIP REFLECTS TRIBAL CRISIS

Andrew McGregor

As the security situation in the Sudan continues to deteriorate, Government of South Sudan (GoSS) president Salva Kiir Mayardit has overhauled the nation’s military leadership with a pair of controversial appointments. The dismissal of General James Hoth Mai, a Nuer, as chief-of-staff of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) has been interpreted as part of the president’s efforts to surround himself with Dinka veterans of the civil war as the political dispute that began in December evolves into a general Dinka vs. Nuer struggle for dominance in South Sudan. Defections from the SPLA, both individual and *en masse*, continue to cause instability in the Army (Radio Tamazuj, April 25).

GoSS Information Minister Michael Makuei Lueth said Mai’s removal was “a normal release and retirement” that had “nothing to do with the performance matters or anything linked to politics” (Sudan Tribune, April 25). It was the second major shake-up of the SPLA’s military leadership this year; in January, Kiir dismissed all six of General Mai’s deputies and replaced them with newly promoted officers (Sudan Tribune, January 22).

General Mai urged the people of South Sudan not to use his dismissal for political purposes: “I thank our people and urge them to not use my relief as a reason to prolong the war. I always say war cannot be a solution to anything. Dialogue is always the best option to resolve differences” (Sudan Tribune, April 24).

Mai joined the SPLA rebellion in its early days in 1983 and became a bodyguard to the SPLA commander, Dr. John Garang de Mabior, who later sent Mai for military

training in Cuba, Ethiopia and the United States. When the SPLA split along ethnic lines in 1991, Mai refused to join the largely Nuer faction under Riek Machar and instead remained loyal to Garang and the Dinka-led original SPLA. Given that Machar and the Nuer dissidents were eventually compelled to rejoin the movement, Mai could argue he made the right choice, but he has since been viewed with suspicion by many Nuer who see him as irrevocably pro-Dinka. Mai replaced Oyai Deng Ajak (currently under detention on coup charges) as chief-of-staff in 2009 and became a full general the following year. Mai was the most prominent Nuer in the South Sudan military and administration.

Mai was replaced by General Paul Malong Awan Anei, the Dinka former governor of Northern Bahr al-Ghazal state. The new chief-of-staff helped direct the operations in Juba in December that launched the conflict and is regarded as a Kiir loyalist with a strong pro-Dinka agenda. Malong was a senior SPLA commander during the civil war and was appointed governor of Northern Bahr al-Ghazal in March 2008. Malong's personal conduct as a SPLA commander led to friction with late SPLA leader Dr. Garang, leading to his arrest in 1991 (Sudan Tribune, November 17, 2013). Malong is widely believed to be illiterate, but claims he can read and write Dinka (Sudan Tribune, March 26).

Malong's authoritarian style made him unpopular in many parts of Northern Bahr al-Ghazal, but his personal loyalty to Kiir allowed him to evade discipline for defying Kiir's orders in 2013, with a forgiving Kiir saying: "Malong is not the first official to break the law. He is not the first official to fail to implement directives from my office" (Sudan Tribune, March 26, 2013).

In December 2013, residents of Aweil (the capital of Northern Bahr al-Ghazal) called for Malong's removal, charging him with embezzlement of public funds, theft of medical supplies and arbitrary rule: "The Governor puts himself in a position of prosecutor and/or a judge in the State. He orders the arrest and release of individuals according to his wishes" (Sudan Tribune, December 4, 2013). Malong is also accused of recruiting a tribal militia of 15,000 in the Bahr al-Ghazal region, a move that is believed to have been opposed by General Mai (Nyamile News, April 23).

The new chief-of-staff has promised to take an aggressive stance in bringing the rebellion to an end:

I will go to Upper Nile region and fight there myself.
I will need to get that so called Riek Machar and fight

him. He either has to catch me or I will catch him. I had a secure job before I accepted this new role. I don't want people to be killed mercilessly like this by the rebels. I will finish this rebellion and bring this crisis to an end. (Upper Nile Times, April 24).

At the same time, President Kiir relieved Major General Mac Paul Kuol (a Dinka) from his duties as head of military intelligence. Mac Paul appears to have brought his termination about when he failed to support the government's official description of the December events in Juba that launched the conflict as a "coup attempt" while testifying as a prosecution witness at a related treason trial, suggesting the violence began as the result of a disagreement between factions of the presidential guard, a more likely interpretation of events (Radio Tamazuj, April 24). Mac Paul had run-ins with the regime before becoming head of military intelligence – in July 2012, he was arrested along with 15 other officers on charges of planning a coup against Salva Kiir, though Kiir later dismissed the charges, describing them as the result of a fabrication created in Khartoum (Sudan Tribune, July 31, 2012; Radio Tamazuj, August 2, 2012).

Mac Paul's successor as head of military intelligence, General Marial Nuor Jok, a Dinka and former Director of Public Security and Criminal Investigations, is a surprising choice based on his record. While supposedly in charge of public security, Nuor was accused of torture, extortion, extra-judicial killings, the creation of illegal detention centers and the arming of a personal tribal militia (Upper Nile Times, December 14, 2011). Nuor was arrested in August 2013 in connection with the disappearance of Engineer John Luis Silvio following a land dispute. Nuor was given leave to seek medical treatment in Nairobi during his trial. He did not return as scheduled and the proceedings appear to have been abandoned.

In 2012, General Mai noted that Mac Paul and Marial Nuor were "controversial figures. Their names have always appeared in illegal detention and torture of their opponents" (Radio Tamazuj, August 2, 2012). The shake-up in the SPLA leadership was not welcomed by the rebel camp; a spokesman for Riek Machar's faction of the SPLA said the changes marked the beginning of "an imminent bloodbath, escalation and regionalization of the conflict" (Sudan Tribune, April 25).

CRISIS IN SOUTH SUDAN PART TWO: CIVILIAN MASSACRES MARK STRUGGLE TO CONTROL OIL INDUSTRY

Andrew McGregor

Government of South Sudan (GoSS) forces are battling rebels under the command of former South Sudan vice-president Riek Machar for control of Paloch in Upper Nile State, home of the nation's largest oil installation. The rebels have said they intend to take control of all of South Sudan's oilfields to prevent President Salva Kiir Mayardit from "using the oil revenues to finance his war and hire foreign mercenaries" (Sudan Tribune, April 23; Reuters, April 24). However, according to Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) spokesman Colonel Philip Aguer, it is "the dream of Riek Machar and his forces to either destroy the oil industry or control it or divert it. To whom, we don't know" (VOA, April 24).

The civilian population of the oil-rich Greater Upper Nile region (which includes Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states) has been targeted by both rebel and government forces battling for control of the oil fields. Bentiu, the capital of Unity State, was taken over by rebel forces (including the notorious Nuer "White Army") on April 15. The occupiers then launched attacks on civilians who had gathered in hopes of safety at the local hospital, the Catholic church, the vacated World Food Program compound and the Bentiu mosque. According to UNMISS, more than 200 civilians were killed and over 400 wounded at the mosque alone. The mission also condemned the use of Radio Bentiu FM to "broadcast hate speech" and calls for mass rape during the opposition's investment of the city (Sudan Tribune, April 21). During the attacks, gunmen demanded that their captives identify their ethnicity and origin and then killed all Dinkas and Darfuris. Many of the latter were traders operating from nearby Darfur.

A spokesman for the rebels' so-called "SPLM-In-Opposition" claimed government forces had massacred the Dinka and Darfuri population of Bentiu before evacuating it. The bodies were then collected and piled in "sensitive" places to "make it look like organized executions by the incoming opposition forces." The spokesman further claimed the dead Darfuri civilians were actually Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) fighters from Darfur who had changed into civilian clothes during the fighting for Bentiu. [1] Elsewhere, however, the commander of the SPLA's 4th Division (a largely Nuer unit now fighting on the rebel side), Major General James Koang Chol, said the alleged JEM fighters "were in military uniform and participated

in active combat against our forces... We would not have killed innocent Darfur civilians. We don't see them as our enemies" (Sudan Tribune, April 24).

JEM denies any involvement in the South Sudan conflict, but Koang claims the movement is concerned for its supply lines running from their current bases in north Kordofan to South Sudan (Radio Tamazuj, January 2). Opposition forces claimed to have killed a JEM major-general and a brigadier while inflicting a recent defeat on JEM forces in Unity State (Sudan Tribune, April 25). [2] JEM and the GoSS have long-standing ties, but the degree of their military cooperation has always been a matter of some contention.

The Bentiu massacre was followed two days later by an attack by gunmen armed with RPGs on Nuer refugees in the UN compound in Bor, the capital of Jonglei State. Peacekeepers from India, Nepal and South Korea were unable to prevent the slaughter of at least 46 Nuer, with hundreds more wounded (South Sudan News Agency, April 22; BBC, May 1). Bor was the scene of a massacre of some 2,000 Dinka civilians by Nuer forces under Riek Machar's command in November 1991.

Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta has warned that Kenya will not stand by and allow the situation in neighboring South Sudan to descend into genocide. [3] Uganda is providing military support to the GoSS and the evacuation of these forces is one of the primary demands of the opposition. Uganda appears eager to accommodate this demand as soon as forces from the eight-nation Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are ready to deploy in South Sudan to protect oilfields and strategic towns. Three battalions totaling 2,500 troops from Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda are expected to have a UN-authorized mandate to use greater force to protect civilians. The deployment has been delayed due to the opposition of Riek Machar's forces.

In the face of atrocities by both sides, the UN Security Council is re-examining the mandate of UNMISS on the assumption that the GoSS is no longer a reliable partner (Reuters, April 24). China, the largest investor in the South Sudan's oil industry, is naturally concerned about supply interruptions and has even taken the unusual measure of offering its services as a mediator (BBC Chinese, January 8). With government troops poised to retake Bentiu, there are fears of new killings targeting the thousands of Nuer civilians who have taken refuge in the town's UN compound.

Notes

1. James Gatdet Dak, Spokesperson of the chairman of SPLM-In Opposition: "Response to allegations of massacres in Bentiu," April 25, 2014, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50778>.
2. Brigadier General Lul Ruai Koang, Directorate of Information and Moral Orientation, Office of Military Spokesperson for SPLA in Opposition, Press Release no. 53, April 24, 2014.
3. Kenya Presidency (Nairobi), Statement on South Sudan by President Uhuru Kenyatta, Chairman of the East African Community and Rapporteur of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), April 25, 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201404251580.html>.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Prepares for Confrontation with North Yemen's Houthi Movement

Ludovico Carlino

The high profile operations that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has carried out in the last five months in Yemen have demonstrated that the group's battle against Yemen's central government and security forces is far from over. Attacks such as the coordinated suicide assault on a Ministry of Defense compound in Sana'a on December 5, 2013 that killed 52 people or the suicide attacks against the local Security Department headquarters in Aden in December and the Aden headquarters of the Army's 4th Division in April are the most evident displays of the group's strength in the midst of an insurrection. These major operations are backed by dozens of smaller operations targeting security personnel across Yemen's southern and central provinces (National Yemen, December 5, 2013; *al-Tagheer* [Aden] January 1; April 2). This surge in AQAP operations comes in a critical juncture for the Yemeni state, which is already facing the steady advance of the Zaydi Shi'a Houthi movement towards Sana'a. The Houthis are an amorphous group based in the northern province of Sa'ada, acting along the dual lines of a religious movement trying to revitalize Zaydism and an insurgent group fighting for more ambiguous goals. The group cites economic, religious and political marginalization as their main grievances against the central government, whereas the latter accuses the Houthis of attempting to re-establish the Yemeni Imamate with support from Iran.

Jihadist activities in the south and the rapid expansion of Houthist influence beyond Sa'ada Governorate represent the most complex security challenges for the central government since 2011, when both actors began to exploit the new space opened by the uncertain Yemeni transition to consolidate and extend their positions. While the government reacted to AQAP's activities with a series of military ground offensives and a steady campaign of airstrikes that inflicted serious blows to the group but failed to erode its capabilities, Sana'a has dealt with the Houthist expansion with an ineffective strategy of containment. On the one hand, this different approach is partially related to the different nature of both groups. Although the Houthis have not abandoned their rebellion, they did embark on a process of political engagement after the removal of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012, whereas AQAP clearly has no accepted political role or voice in the country.

The government seems inclined to avoid a new armed confrontation with the Houthis after having engaged in six indecisive wars with the movement in northern Sa'ada from 2004 to 2010.

The government inaction has allowed the Houthis to consolidate their grip over Sa'ada and expand their presence across Hajjah, al-Jawf, Dhamar and Amran governorates. Since 2011 an intermittent conflict has occurred in those provinces between the Houthis, various tribal clans and Sunni Salafists over local issues and territorial control. From October 2013 to February, the fighting has been centered mainly in Sa'ada and Amran (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, February 21).

The conflict has since moved close to Sana'a and has seen Houthi militants battling security forces. At the end of February, the Houthis attempted to seize control of government installations in Hazm, the capital of al-Jawf, attacking an army patrol guarding a building, killing two soldiers and injuring three (Almasdaronline, February 28). In March, Houthi militants ambushed an army post in the Hamdan district of Sana'a, killing two other soldiers and injuring four (Kamranpress.net, March 14). This incident has not been the only one in the Sana'a area, as Houthis and Sunni tribesmen had already fought in the Arhab district, only 35 kilometers north of Sana'a International Airport (*al-Ahram* [Cairo] February 6; Akhbaralyom.net, February 7). In April, the Houthis took over an army base in Amran after fighting left ten dead on both sides (Almashad-alyemeni.com, April 9).

The fact that the Houthis brought their militants close to Sana'a, coupled with the government's hesitation in moving against the group even when government forces were attacked, has boosted the impression of a weak state facing an increasingly defiant opponent. This feeling was further reinforced when President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi asked the Bani Matar tribe to help defend Sana'a from a potential Houthi attack (Almasdaronline, March 17). Although a Houthi offensive on the capital seems highly improbable given that such a move could trigger a broader conflict, the group's mobilization in the capital is nevertheless underway. This was confirmed when security forces recently blew up a weapons depot belonging to the Houthis containing about 300 RPGs in al-Jeraf (northeast of Sana'a), only one of the places where the group is believed to store its weapons in the capital (Aden Post, April 14; Albaldnews.com, April 16).

It is against this backdrop that AQAP recently joined the growing chorus of voices that have criticized the government for failing to halt the Houthist expansion.

On March 30, AQAP released a statement accusing the Yemeni government of being involved in a "conspiracy" to empower the Shi'a Houthis against the Salafists and urged Sunnis to "wake up and realize the extent of the conspiracy" (Hournews.net, March 30). The group also announced the formation of a new brigade, Ansar al-Shari'a in the Central Region, tasked with fighting the Houthis and halting their expansion (Hournews.net, April 1; Almashad-alyemeni.com, April 2).

AQAP has voiced its hostility towards the Zaydi movement on several occasions in the past.

In 2011, the late deputy AQAP leader Saeed al-Shihri called for jihad against the Houthis and last November the group vowed retaliation after Houthi militants besieged the Salafist Dar al-Hadith religious school in Dammaj (Sa'ada governorate) (Yemen Post, January 20, 2011; *Yemen Times*, November 14, 2013). AQAP has also managed to sporadically target the Houthis in the north, most notably in May 2012, when a suicide bomber targeted a Houthi mosque in al-Jawf, killing 14 people (Yemen Post, May 25, 2012).

However, the group's reputation was highly damaged after the December 5, 2013 attack on the Ministry of Defense complex. That attack also targeted a hospital located within the compound and killed unarmed medics and patients, causing outrage even amongst the group's sympathizers and ultimately pushing AQAP to officially apologize (*Yemen Times*, December 24, 2013).

Reports of an alleged jihadist camp discovered in al-Jawf, where around 300 fighters are receiving militant training in anticipation of an imminent offensive against Houthis and security forces, leave open the prospect of an open confrontation between the two groups in the near future (Yemensaeed.com, April 8; Barakish.net, April 9). In the same vein, the recent arrests by Yemeni authorities of Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guard operatives accused of helping the Houthis to set up militant training camps indicate that the Zaydi movement has no intention of laying down its weapons. There is little doubt the Houthis would fight any AQAP attempt to weaken its new position of power (Hournews.net, April 22; Almashad-alyemeni.com, April 24). In this scenario, the arc of instability crossing the country would be further extended, reducing the ability of the central government to contain further political-sectarian violence.

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Kurdish Enclaves in Syria Battle Islamist Militant Groups

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

The main Kurdish militia in Syria, the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG – Kurdish People’s Protection Units), has survived a siege of the town of Kobani (Arabic: Ayn al-Arab) by Islamist extremists belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The siege of the Kurdish-controlled town near the Turkish border began on March 10.

ISIS was not able to manage to force the Kurds into submission and the Kurds now say ISIS has ended its attempt to capture Kobani, moving most of their forces to the town of Tel Hamis (close to Qamishli), which will lead to more suicide attacks in the Hasakah governorate (Firat News, April 18). Lacking any Syrian Kurdish support, ISIS was unable to overcome the YPG and their efforts only increased support for the YPG among Syrian Kurds despite shortages of food, weapons and other supplies.

The main problem for the Syrian Kurds is that the areas where they attempt to build administrations border ISIS strongholds. The ISIS siege of Kobani from three sides was an attempt to weaken the Kurdish threat to their areas of control.

ISIS is trying to use Arab tribes settled in the Kurdish areas and fear a Kurdish takeover of areas currently under their control, such as al-Qahtaniya, Qamishli and Ras al-Ayn. ISIS has carried out several suicide attacks in Hasaka governorate that led to campaigns by Kurdish security forces to arrest ISIS sleeper cells in Arab neighbourhoods and villages. The Syrian government is also trying to use the same tribes to create ethnic tensions, says YPG spokesperson Redur Xelil. [1]

Turkey is opposed to the newly established Kurdish administrations in Syria since they are dominated by parties close to the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK – Kurdistan Workers’ Party). Syrian Kurds, therefore, often accuse Turkey of supporting Islamist rebels against them (Firat News Agency, April 18, 2014).

The YPG captured the formerly ISIS-controlled Syrian-Iraqi border crossing in Yarubiyah in late October 2013, cutting one of their main access points to Iraq (VOA, October 26, 2013). The YPG plans to control the town of Tel Abyad, close to the Turkish border, to connect the Kurdish enclaves in Kobani and Hasakah, which threaten ISIS access to the

Turkish border. Since the Kurdish areas are divided into three enclaves and are not geographically contiguous, the YPG tries to enter and capture ISIS-controlled areas such as in Tel Ebyad, Jarabulus and Manbij.

ISIS felt further threatened by a new alliance between the YPG and anti-ISIS rebel groups. Although, most anti-Assad rebels fought against the Kurds in the summer of 2013 and expelled Kurdish forces from some areas in the countryside of Raqqah and Aleppo, these operations broke down in January. Since then, the YPG has fought only ISIS.

As a result of these changing alliances, new opportunities opened up for the Kurds to cooperate with other groups against the ISIS. Jabhat al-Akrad (Kurdish Front), a militia supported by the YPG, cooperated with groups such as Liwa al-Tawhid and Liwa Asifat al-Shamal (Northern Storm Brigade) in taking the border town of Azaz after ISIS withdrew on February 28 (*Guardian*, March 4). A group of some 200 Jabhat al-Nusra fighters were also reported to have taken part in the operation, though both al-Nusra and the Kurdish groups routinely deny any cooperation (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 1).

Moreover, there is cooperation between some armed opposition groups and Kurdish militias against ISIS in the countryside of Raqqah and Aleppo governorates, while the YPG engages in clashes with ISIS in Hasakah governorate. This led to accusations by ISIS that the al-Qaeda-allied al-Nusra works with the PKK, but so far it seems this is unlikely and only part of the ideological fight between the two groups.

While the YPG has accused the Turkish state of supporting armed rebel groups against them in the past, the movement has increasingly blamed Iran and Bashar al-Assad for not accepting a Kurdish administration in Syria. Like other Syrian opposition groups, they suggest the regime and ISIS deliberately do not attack each other and that the regime allows Islamist groups to flourish in order to prevent Western support for the opposition. [2] Sipan Hemo, the Afrin-based commander of the YPG made similar allegations, saying the YPG had information “that there was secret coordination between ISIS, the Syrian regime and Iran. The attacks against Kobani were attacks carried out by these three [entities] using ISIS” (Firat News Agency, April 18).

Tensions between regime security forces and the YPG have increased in the run-up to the country’s June presidential elections. The regime has beefed up its security presence in Hasakah governorate after the failure of the Geneva II

talks and has clashed with Kurdish forces several times in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli. Recently, there was a small fire-fight between the Kurdish security police and the regime's security forces in Qamishli on April 26 (Welati.net, April 27).

On March 11, one day before the anniversary of the 2004 Kurdish uprising, Syrian security forces killed an unarmed YPG fighter in a bakery, leading to brief clashes. "It was a message from them that we are ready to attack you. The Kurds now have the YPG. We are not like the Kurds of 2004, we are ready to answer them," said Heval Abu Faruq, a YPG fighter in Qamishli. [3]

The fact that Kurds are planning their own elections in the three Kurdish enclaves under their control might also lead to new clashes between Syrian security forces and Kurdish militias.

PKK-affiliated Kurdish fighters have managed to withstand armed attacks by Syrian rebel groups against their positions in three Kurdish enclaves in northern Syria. The recent infighting between rebel groups and ISIS has resulted in new cooperation between the opposition rebels and the YPG against ISIS. This new cooperation resulted in an end of the siege on the YPG-controlled area of Afrin in the province of Aleppo and the relief of Kobani. Nevertheless, ISIS will continue to attempt to carry out suicide bombings in Kurdish areas, especially in Hasakah governorate. Furthermore, we will see an increase of clashes between Kurds and Syrian security forces in the run-up to Syria's presidential election in June.

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Notes

1. Author's interview with YPG spokesperson Redur Xelil, March 26, 2014.
2. Author's interview with YPG fighters in Qamishli, March 30, 2014.
3. Ibid.

Algeria's Political Transition Begins in the Midst of Major Security Challenges

Dario Cristiani

Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika won his fourth term in office on April 17, when he took over 81 percent of the vote in presidential elections. Former prime minister Ali Benflis failed in his second attempt to unseat Bouteflika, taking only 12 percent of the vote (Algeria Press Service, April 23, 2014). The turnout was 51.7 percent, down from the 75 percent turnout in 2009 (*El Watan* [Algiers], April 18). In Algiers, turnout was at 37 percent, while in some areas historically resistant to central control – for instance Tizi Ouzou in Kabylia – four out of five citizens did not vote. [1] This is significant, as it shows the increasing apathy of many Algerians toward the system. Nevertheless, despite accusations by Benflis concerning electoral frauds and irregularities, dismissing these elections as irrelevant simply because the result was largely predictable would be misleading (al-Arabiya, April 18).

Bouteflika still enjoys a significant degree of support and legitimacy in the eyes of many Algerians, as he is considered the person who took Algeria out of the abyss of civil war. Moreover, his patronage networks and paternalistic policies buy him a significant, inter-class and geographically widespread support. Despite his poor health, he has remained the only name on which most of the different actors of the country could agree. This fourth term will likely be a term of transition to a new configuration of power, however, since a number of generational, social and political developments will put pressure on the system.

The Pluralization of the Algerian Political System and the Role of Bouteflika

Historically, the military has played a fundamental role in Algerian politics. The dominance of the military over the system increased during the "Black decade" of the 1990s. The election of Bouteflika in 1999 signaled the beginning of a new era. Four years earlier, Bouteflika declined an offer to run in the presidential elections. He later changed his mind and was considered the "candidat du consensus," which he remains despite a series of significant changes (*Jeune Afrique*, April 18).

At that time, Algeria needed someone with significant internal legitimacy and who was well-known and respected abroad since Algeria was facing major international

isolation because of the civil war. That was the profile of Bouteflika. Since then, he has worked to reduce, on one hand, the dominance of the military over the system and, on the other, to increase room for the presidency to maneuver.

Since then, he has worked to reduce the overall dominance of the military over the system through the selective and tactical support of some security groups against others. In the early years of his presidency, Bouteflika sought the support of the Département du renseignement et de la sécurité (DRS – Algeria’s senior intelligence and security service) to reduce the power of the army. The DRS was similarly interested in increasing its relative power over other sectors of the military. From 2010 onward, however, Bouteflika returned to supporting some elements of the army against the DRS to increase room for the presidency to maneuver. In a way, Bouteflika “presidentialized” what was presidential only on paper, but only to a limited degree.

This did not mean the end of military influence over the system, but rather the emergence of a duopoly that has dominated the Algerian political system over the past fifteen years. The military and the DRS remain significant and fundamental pillars of the system but no longer enjoy the power they had until the late 1990s. The army agreed to end its (direct) interference in politics and the constitutional changes that occurred in 2008 introduced an increase in presidential powers. In this period, the importance of the DRS increased but the tactical alliance with Bouteflika had begun to fade. The decision of Bouteflika to run again, despite his poor health, actually confirms this situation. If the DRS dominates the system –and it has tried to weaken Bouteflika and his clan over the past years in the battle for control of Sonatrach (the government-owned energy company) and by issuing allegations of corruption – why did the DRS accept Bouteflika’s return? It is because the DRS now recognizes the existence of this duality of power and the limits to its activity. Some of the higher military rankings support Bouteflika, including the Algerian army’s chief-of-staff and deputy defense minister, Lieutenant General Ahmad Kaid Saleh. Moreover, the DRS and the Algerian army are undergoing a series of major internal and generational challenges.

DRS chief General Muhammad Mediene (a.k.a. Toufik) and his supporters remain key players in the Algerian political balance, but there is now a new generation of generals in their forties and fifties running military regions and operational units who are craving for change. Moreover, there is an ongoing – though slow – process of elite pluralization in Algeria. This will have a significant role

in the future configuration of power in Algeria and on the system that will be crafted over the next years.

Looking Ahead: Security Challenges for Algeria in Bouteflika’s Fourth Term

During Bouteflika’s next term, the Algerian state can be expected to face four major challenges, although these do not exclude the possible of other unexpected problems. As of now, these are the most important challenges that the Algerian power will face:

- *Jihadism and a complex regional order*

Historically, radical Islamist militancy has represented the most important security challenge for the Algerian government. Shortly after the election, there was a major attack in the commune of Iboudraren (50 kilometers southeast of Tizi-Ouzou), in which 14 Algerian soldiers were killed (Algeria Press Service, April 20). At the time of writing, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had not claimed responsibility for this attack (al-Jazeera, April 20). However, while radical Islamist militancy remains a serious concern, it is no longer the existential challenge that Algeria faced during the 1990s.

While Algeria remains the major rhetorical target of AQIM, a series of changing circumstances – successful counter-terrorist operations by the Algerian state, the declining popular appeal of radical Islamism, the opening of “windows of strategic opportunities” in the Sahara and the Sahel and the “internationalization” of the brand after joining al-Qaeda following years of mutual distrust between al-Qaeda and Algerian jihadists – has led AQIM to partially change its focus.

The Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC – AQIM’s predecessor in Algeria), initiated the geographical shift that led Algerian terrorism to become increasingly involved in the Sahelian strip, while the re-branding as AQIM led first to the adoption of al-Qaeda style attacks in Algeria between 2007-2008, and then to a greater focus by the organization on illicit activities rather than pure jihad, especially in the Sahelian strip. This culminated in the jihadist takeover of northern Mali in 2012 that pushed external actors – namely, France and members of the African Union – to intervene. While jihadism is no longer an existential threat within Algerian borders, it nevertheless remains a major security concern, as it has the potential to destabilize the Algerian neighborhood, especially Mali and Libya.

- *A revival of independence-autonomist tendencies in Kabylia*

In the wider North Africa region, the Arab Spring meant a revival of the Berber (Amazigh) presence in the public space, especially in Libya (Slate Afrique, August 11, 2011; *Jeune Afrique*, October 18, 2011). In Algeria, however, it would be misleading to talk generally about a “Berber question.” Berber people are well integrated in the social, political and economic structure of the country. Ali Benflis is Berber himself (he is a Shawi [a.k.a. Chaoui], from the Shawiya of the Aurès Mountains). The real question regards the persistence of independent and anti-central sentiments in Kabylia, a mountainous area in north-east Algeria with specific cultural and identity features. These sentiments distinguish this group from the other Berber groups present in Algeria (the already mentioned Shawiya, the Mozabites and the Tuareg). People in Kabylia have already been protagonists in two major revolts against the Algerian state: the so-called Berber Spring of the 1980s, and the “black spring” of early 2000, which led to a major government crackdown on protests in the region. Tension in the region is far from being dissipated. AQIM has a significant presence left in the area – Abd al-Malik Droukdel has his headquarters there – while the feeling of alienation from the Algerian state and its Arab-centered identity remains significant. As such, the emergence of a more active and significant opposition to the central state in Kabylia remains a major issue, although the divisions with the wider Berber population of Algeria and the significant presence of Berber personalities within the national system should prevent this from becoming an issue of systemic impact.

- *Problems in the hydrocarbon sector*

As of 2011, the Algerian oil and gas sector generated roughly 97 percent of overall exports, 70 percent of budget receipts and about 37 percent of GDP (down from 43.7 percent in 2007). [2] This drop was, however, not due to a greater diversification of the Algerian economy, but to the downward trend of its hydrocarbon production. As shown during the 1980s, a major drop in oil and gas revenues – in that period due to a sharp decline in global energy prices – raised the potential for destabilization in the country. Algeria’s oil and gas sector is caught in a web of different problems; scarce investment, ageing equipment and mismanagement have reduced production capacities. Moreover, a weak legal and regulatory environment is de-incentivizing investment. The attack on the In Aménas gas facilities in 2013 still represents a psychological burden for companies otherwise willing to invest in Algeria. However, its overall impact should not be overestimated.

The problems burdening the oil and gas sector in Algeria are not only limited to the security of companies operating in the region. Moreover, since authorities adopted a rather expansionary fiscal stance to cope with the regional wave of protests in 2011, they postponed the reduction of energy subsidies (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 17, 2011). This led to an increase in domestic consumption, reducing export capacity. Finally, dependence on oil and gas makes Algeria prone to external shocks (for instance, a sudden decline in global energy prices). All these elements make the stability of the oil and gas sector a major security issue, as its economy – and the capacity to use economic instruments to cool down social and political tension – depends entirely on these dynamics.

- *Social tension and an “Arab Spring” style revolt*

As noted, Algeria was able to avoid the wave of “Arab Spring” protests. However, the re-election of Bouteflika led to the emergence of protests from a number of social and political movements. Notably, in the weeks before the election, there was the emergence of a new opposition platform, the Barakat (Enough) movement. [3] In its manifesto, the movement describes itself as a “peaceful, national citizen movement that is autonomous and non-partisan, and that campaigns for the establishment of democracy, and of a state subject to the rule of law and justice in Algeria.” [4] The movement also calls for an end to *hogra*, the feeling of injustice and humiliation that ordinary citizens experience in dealing with the authorities, a typical element of social narratives in the Maghreb. *Hogra* was central in triggering the revolution in Tunisia, for instance.

However, while the potential impact of this movement should not be underestimated, at the moment its capacity to trigger a major revolt against authorities is somewhat limited for a series of reasons. First of all, Algerians value stability and security greatly, above all bearing in mind what happened in the 1990s during the “Black decade” of the civil war. Although unemployment – especially among youngsters – remains particularly high, corruption rampant and housing in short supply, the memory of the civil war still presents a major psychological burden. Recent events in Egypt, Libya and Syria are powerful reminders of the chaos that countries going through revolutionary processes may face.

Finally, the “international momentum” in support of these changes is diminishing. The Arab Spring revolts were supported by external actors and, above all in the case of Libya, success was seized only thanks to significant

external military support. However, the stalemate in Syria and the post-revolutionary chaos in Egypt and Libya have reduced the commitment of external actors to support revolutionary destabilization in the Mediterranean. In the specific case of Algeria, there are two other elements to take in consideration. The ongoing escalation in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, its potential impact on world gas and oil supplies and prices and the fragile situation in the Sahel and Libya suggest a more cautious approach towards a possible destabilization of Algeria. That is why European countries, as well as the United States, have a strong interest in a stable and functioning Algeria. Among the four major risks assessed, this is – at the moment – the least significant.

Conclusion

Describing the Algerian system as dominated only by the army and the DRS would be misleading. The Algerian system is now centered on a duopoly: the army and the DRS on one side, with significant internal and generational cleavages, and the president and his clan on the other side. In the wake of this duopoly, there is also a rising pluralization of the Algerian elites, which will likely emerge more visibly over the next years. The fourth term in power for Bouteflika will be likely a transitional period leading towards a new configuration of the governing system. The elections showed that Bouteflika still enjoys a significant legitimacy, although elections in Algeria can hardly be considered completely free and fair. Yet, the significant numbers who abstained from voting is a sign of widespread apathy and discontent with the system. In this context, Algeria will face four major security challenges. Jihadism and regional destabilization and the problems of its oil and gas sector are the most urgent, while the revival of independence aspirations in Kabylia and a violent internal revolution remain possible, but not as urgent as the other two challenges.

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Notes

1. http://www.interieur.gov.dz/PublishingFiles/VAC_Clature_Fr_17-04-14.pdf.
2. Algeria – African Economic Outlook, <http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/2013/PDF/Algeria%20-%20African%20Economic%20Outlook.pdf>.

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3. <https://www.facebook.com/50snabarakat>.
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