

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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Indonesia Keeps Close Tabs on Jemaa Islamiyah and Jihadists in Sulawesi

Jacob Zenn

Indonesia stands out as one of the few countries in the world that can claim it has largely won its domestic War on Terror. Jemaa Islamiyah (JI), for example, has not carried out a major attack in Indonesia since targeting two international hotels in Jakarta in 2009 (kompas.com, July 18, 2009). At least five of its key leaders have also been arrested since 2015 and its chief ideologue, 83-year old Abubakar Baasyir, was released from prison but remains under house arrest and is too frail to play an active role in jihadism anymore (channelsnewsasia.com, December 12, 2020; jakartapost.com, March 2, 2018).

Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT), which began in the early 2010s and was an offshoot of JI, operated primarily in Sulawesi. Its leader, Santoso, pledged loyalty to Islamic State in 2015 (jakartapost.com, December 1, 2015). However, the group became defunct by the late 2010s after Santoso's death and a number of Indonesian counter-terrorism raids against its mountain hideouts, which also led to the death of Santoso's successor, Ali Kalora (benarnews.org, September 20, 2021).

The case of Ali Kalora's wife nevertheless demonstrates how even after JI and MIT have been mostly defeated, the country is still tracking the group members' relatives to make sure they do not follow in the footsteps of jihadists in their families. Kalora's wife, Tini Susantika, was arrested in July 2020 by the elite Indonesian counter-terrorism force, Densus 88, while

she was attempting to bring food to MIT members hiding out in the central Sulawesi mountains (benarnews.org, August 19, 2020). She was subsequently sentenced to three years in prison for aiding and abetting a terrorist organization, namely MIT.

Most recently, however, the Central Sulawesi Police Chief renovated Tini Susantika's home in her village as a way of supporting her rehabilitation into society and to re-establish a "bond of friendship" between her and the community (mercusuar.web.id, March 9). Beyond this, she will be provided a monthly stipend and employment assistance and attend de-radicalization classes to facilitate her "social reintegration." She, in turn, has expressed thanks to the government and her community for the support.

The Indonesian approach to former militants, and especially women, most closely resembles that of Kazakhstan, which repatriated hundreds of women and children, and dozens of male fighters, from Syria in the last several years. The women, who primarily supported their husbands in Syria, but did not fight on the battlefield, were also provided employment support once in Kazakhstan and specialized education for their children, while their husbands were sentenced to prison terms usually of around ten years. Thus far, Kazakhstan has not witnessed any recidivism from these women, and rarely has Indonesia as well (centralasianews.com, September 13, 2021). This is a testament of the potential success of rehabilitation programs for at least former jihadist women when the state can provide sufficient resources to them to help their reintegration into society.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Where is Boko Haram One Year After Abubakar Shekau's Death?

Jacob Zenn

Just under one year ago, in May 2021, Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau self-detonated an explosive to kill himself before the rival group, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), would have captured him ([Vanguard](http://vanguard.com), May 22, 2021). In the immediate aftermath of Shekau's death, ISWAP released videos showing former Shekau loyalists defecting from Boko Haram to ISWAP, while Shekau's loyalists around Lake Chad led by Bakura promised to fight in the late Shekau's honor ([Telegram](http://telegram.com), June 25, 2021; [Telegram](http://telegram.com), June 14, 2021). Bakura's fighters, like Shekau in the final audio he released before his death, also continued to assert that Islamic State (IS) was misled by ISWAP to support their theological interpretations over Shekau's ([Telegram](http://telegram.com), May 23, 2021). IS was so convinced of Shekau's disobedience of its directives that ISWAP's then-leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, claimed in an audio that IS itself had ordered him to launch the offensive to kill Shekau ([Telegram](http://telegram.com), June 25, 2021).

Shekau's group, which is commonly known as Boko Haram but whose formal name is *Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad*, has continued to exist nominally under Bakura's leadership. However, the group no longer produces propaganda videos or audios, which significantly differs from regular releases from Shekau when he was alive. Thus, it is unclear whether Boko Haram really even exists anymore or whether the group is simply a collection of Bakura led jihadists around Lake Chad who conduct sporadic attacks on the Nigerian and neighboring countries' armies, ISWAP, and civilians, but not necessary in the name of any group (crisisgroup.org, April 6, 2020). If the formal group no longer exists, then it means ISWAP and the al-Qaeda-affiliated and northwestern Nigeria-based Ansaru, which recently renewed its

loyalty to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), are the two remaining jihadists groups in Nigeria ([Telegram](#), December 31, 2021).

Another question that arises is what happened to the Shekau loyalists in northwestern Nigeria. They had been appearing in videos showing loyalty to Shekau before his death ([Terrorism Monitor](#), July 28, 2020). They are geographically too far from Lake Chad to link up with Bakura and too extreme to ally with Ansaru, given Ansaru's history of opposition to Shekau's ideology and Shekau's record of ordering assassinations of Ansaru leaders. Their lack of any videos or audios or other communications since Shekau's death, therefore, leaves open the possibility they have joined with bandits, who had established communications with Shekau before his death ([Dailypost.ng](#), December 12, 2021). Alternatively, they may have simply returned to their villages and continued to maintain the ideology of Shekau but do so now without any of the training or other ideological materials that Shekau's loyalists had provided.

Had Shekau not been killed by ISWAP, his group likely still would have continued to be marginalized by the militarily and ideologically more effective ISWAP. Nevertheless, Shekau would have continued to release his bombastic videos on a roughly monthly basis commenting on everything from Islamic, or specifically jihadist, theology to international affairs. His prior name-dropping of Vladimir Putin, including in the video claiming the "enslavement" of the Chibok girls in 2014, among other world leaders, suggests he may have felt the need to interject on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and other major current events ([Youtube](#), May 5, 2014). Without Shekau, Nigerian jihadism will gain less attention, but ISWAP will remain among the most active IS provincial groups in the world.

Jacob Zenn is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Is there an Iranian Connection to the Militancy in Pakistan's Balochistan?

Syed Fazl-e-Haider

On February 14, Iran's interior minister Dr. Ahmad Vahidi paid a visit to Pakistan against the backdrop of a recent spike in terrorist attacks by Baluch separatists on Pakistani security forces in Baluchistan, which shares long borders with Iran and Afghanistan. Vahidi held meetings with Pakistan's top political and military brass, including Prime Minister Imran Khan and Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, to discuss security mechanisms at the Pakistan-Iran border. Both sides agreed to form a joint working group to oversee border management and security issues between the two countries ([Express Tribune](#), February 15; [Al Jazeera](#), February 15).

Most rebel groups, including the Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), have a presence in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, which borders Baluchistan. The Bulaida area of Baluchistan's Kech district, which has been the site of skirmishes between armed forces and Baluch separatists, is just 14 kilometers from the Iranian border. A connection linking Iranian-based Baluch separatist groups to recent terror attacks in Baluchistan, therefore, warrants scrutiny.

Indeed, immediately after the Vahidi's visit, Pakistani security forces conducted a clearance operation in Baluchistan's Kech district, and killed six separatists involved in an attack ([Dawn](#), February 16). Less than two weeks earlier, on the night of January 25, ten Pakistani soldiers were also killed in an attack by Baluch separatists at a security forces' check post in the same district ([Dawn](#), January 27). Subsequently, in early February, the BLA attacked security forces' camps in the Panjgur and Naushki areas near Iran's border. Twenty militants and four soldiers were killed

during a heavy exchange of fire ([Dawn](#), February 5).

Is Iran a Safe Haven for Baluch Separatist Insurgents?

In May 2020, Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa requested Tehran to thwart terrorist attacks on Pakistani security forces by Baluch separatists allegedly operating from Iran. Bajwa revealed these concerns about border security following an attack on Pakistan's armed forces in Kech district that killed six Pakistani soldiers. The attack was claimed by the BLA ([Arab News](#), May 13, 2020).

The Baluch are scattered in several provinces of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. However, it was Afghanistan-based Baluch separatists who moved to Iran's province of Sistan-Baluchistan following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August last year ([Gandhara](#), February 4). The recent attacks on security forces in Kech, Noshki and Panjgur areas of Baluchistan were orchestrated by these Baluch rebel groups from Iran. Dr. Allah Nazar, a BLF separatist leader, is also believed to have been operating from Iran against Pakistan.

Similarly, in 2019, Baluch Raaji Ajoji Sangar (BRAS), an umbrella group of Baluch insurgent groups including BLA and BLF, claimed the killings of 14 bus passengers along the border with Iran. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi at that time called on Tehran to take action against BRAS militants based in Iran. Qureshi stated that "The training camps and logistical camps of this new alliance [BRAS] ... are inside the Iranian border region" ([Arab News](#), June 5, 2020). The question, therefore, arises as to whether at least tacit support from Iranian border forces is necessary for these Baluch insurgent groups to operate along the Iranian border and from Iranian territory ([GVS](#), February 7).

The Cross-Border Terrorism Blame Game

Pakistan has repeatedly raised the issue of the growing presence of Baluch separatist groups with Iran, which are using Iranian soil for launching attacks on Pakistani security forces. Besides Qureshi, for example, in 2020, Islamabad urged Tehran to take effective actions against the separatists operating from Iranian territory during a visit to Pakistan by Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif ([Arab News PK](#), November 11, 2020).

While Baluch nationalism in Pakistan is secular in nature, it is religious in nature on sectarian lines in Iran. The BLA and BLF are beneficiaries of Iran's lenient attitude towards them because Iranian security forces have given protection and refuge to them and other Baluch rebel groups. They use this protection to attack Jaishul Adl (JA), or the Army of Justice. This militant group is fighting for the rights of both the Baluch and Sunnis in Iran and have many of their bases in Pakistan.

Iran has itself been the victim of terror attacks orchestrated by Baluch religious-nationalist militants in JA because it is an anti-Iran Sunni Muslim militant group that allegedly operates with the support from local tribes in Baluchistan. In 2018, the group claimed responsibility for the abduction of 12 Iranian security personnel in Sistan-Baluchistan province. There have also been clashes between JA and Pakistani Baluch separatist groups along Pakistan-Iran border areas ([Dawn](#), July 14, 2019).

Conclusion

Without a foolproof security arrangement at the Pakistan-Iran border, Pakistan will not be able to meet the security challenges they suspect are emerging from Iran and affecting Baluchistan. The infiltration of the Baluch militants from either side of the border ultimately poses a significant security challenge for both Iran and Pakistan. The fencing work on the 900 kilometer border has been underway since

the two nations agreed to fence the border in 2019 for better security management ([The News](#), July 19, 2019).

Nevertheless, the two countries have been accusing each other of sponsoring rival Baluch militants. In the future China could play a key role because it has heavily invested in Baluchistan and plans to invest up to \$400 billion in Iran under a strategic partnership deal it signed last year with the Islamic Republic ([Global Times](#), March 29, 2021). Beijing can use its leverage on both countries to press them to cooperate on cross-border terrorism.

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Al-Shabaab's Expanding Anti-Turkish Campaign in Somalia

Lucas Webber

On January 18, al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab conducted a suicide bombing outside of a Turkish military base in Somalia's capital city of Mogadishu, killing at least four people and injuring around 14 others ([Garowe Online](#), January 19). The group claimed responsibility for the attack through the official Shahada News Agency and touted the success of the operation against "Somali Special Forces who were trained by Turkish Forces." Al-Shabaab's target selection, and the three separate mentions of Turkey in the statement, runs consistent with the group's ongoing guerilla campaign against Turkish soldiers, nationals, and commercial interests in Somalia. The group views Turkey as an

influential supporter of the Somalian government and looks to drive the Turks out of Somalia with force. Al-Shabaab has accordingly excoriated Turkish troops stationed in Somalia as foreign "invaders" and "occupiers" ([Ahval News](#), December 31, 2019).

Al-Shabaab Leadership Declares War on Turkey

Over the past decade, Turkey has markedly expanded its political influence and security footprint in Somalia, as indicated by the 2017 establishment of its largest overseas military installation in Mogadishu ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 15, 2020). Camp TURKSOM is a base and an academy intended to improve the Somali military's operational capacities and counter-insurgency capabilities. This, in turn, has also made it a priority target for al-Shabaab plots and attacks.

Al-Shabaab's anti-Turkey campaign began around July 2013 with a vehicle-borne improvised explosives device (VBIED) attack against the Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, which killed three people and injured several others ([Hiiraan Online](#), July 27, 2013). Days after the bombing, Ahmed Abdi Godane, the group's emir at the time, reportedly criticized Turkey for "trying to divide [al-Shabaab's] leadership and its fighters." It further alleged that "countries like Qatar and Turkey as well former members of the defunct Union of the Islamic Courts (a movement that ruled most of Somalia's southern and central regions in 2006) are key players in these divisive deeds" ([Salaan Media](#), July 31, 2013).

The anti-Turkish hostility continued to accelerate as Godane's successor, Ahmed Diriye, took direct aim at Turkey in his first audio statement after stepping into al-Shabaab's top leadership role. In 2016, Diriye declared the Turkish government to be "the enemy of the nation" and accused Turkey of "looting Somali resources." He asserted that "today Somalia's economy is in total collapse because of their

intervention. ... Turkey has invaded this country economically. ... They have taken control of the Somali economy and all they want is to keep the nation in poverty” ([Daily Sabah](#), July 13, 2016). More recently, in a March 2021 video published by al-Shabaab’s official Al-Kataib Foundation for Media Productions, Diriye chastised the “apostate troops” of Turkey for supporting the “coalition of disbelievers who came from various countries” to wage “a war against the Muslims of Somalia” ([Jihadology](#), March 27, 2021).

Al-Shabaab Targets Turkish Nationals

For the past decade, al-Shabaab has been pursuing a campaign of violence aimed at Turkish politicians, diplomats, soldiers, and workers in Somalia. Notably, in 2015, the group conducted a suicide car bombing outside of the SYL Hotel in Mogadishu. At the time, Turkish delegates were meeting in preparation for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s visit, which was scheduled for the next day ([Som Tribune](#), January 22, 2015).

Al-Shabaab’s militant operations against Turkish nationals and interests had been conducted entirely on land until February 2, 2016, when the group dispatched a suicide bomber and attempted to take down a passenger plane. The original target was a Turkish Airlines flight, but its departure was canceled due to poor weather conditions. The suicide bomber, along with the other stranded passengers, then boarded a Somali-operated Daallo Airlines flight. Once in the air, the al-Shabaab operative detonated the explosive device (believed to be concealed in a laptop) and blew a hole in the fuselage. Of the 81 occupants onboard, only the bomber was killed while two other passengers were injured. Fortunately for the passengers, the aircraft remained functional and was able to successfully return to Aden Adde International Airport to perform an emergency landing. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the bombing, telling al-Jazeera that the intended targets were

Turkish NATO forces and Western officials ([Al Jazeera](#), February 13, 2016).

Over the next few years, al-Shabaab continued its anti-Turkey campaign through propaganda messaging and militant operations. In December 2019, the group struck a convoy with a car bomb, killing two Turkish nationals. In the aftermath of the attack, al-Shabaab’s spokesman, Ali Dhere, stated the group “will continue attacking Turks who invaded our country” and accused Turkey of conspiring to take control of Somalia’s resources ([Ahval News](#), December 31, 2019).

In terms of security assets, the Turkish military base in Mogadishu was targeted with rockets in May 2018 and with suicide bombings in June 2020 and January 2022 ([Mareeg](#), May 12, 2018; [Garowe Online](#), May 21, 2020; [Garowe Online](#), January 19). The group has also targeted Turkish commercial interests, as seen with the January 2, 2021, suicide attack on employees of a Turkish company working on the road from Mogadishu to Afgoye. The blast ultimately killed two Turkish nationals ([Daily Sabah](#), January 2, 2021). More recently, al-Shabaab took responsibility for a roadside bomb attack that injured four Turkish businessmen in Mogadishu on March 17, 2022, stating they intentionally singled out the foreign nationals ([allAfrica](#), March 17, 2022).

In addition to the attempted bombing of an airliner heading to Djibouti, there are further indications that Turkey potentially faces a transnational threat from al-Shabaab. In February 2021, for instance, Turkish police, in coordination with Somalia’s National Intelligence Organization (MIT), arrested an alleged al-Shabaab militant in Turkey’s capital city of Ankara. The suspect was a German-Italian national accused of having connections to al-Shabaab operatives in Kenya ([Garowe Online](#), February 24, 2021).

Conclusion

Al-Shabaab has become notably more hostile towards Turkey in its propaganda content and has ramped up attacks against Turkish nationals and interests in Somalia. Ankara looks set to continue exerting politico-economic and military influence in the country and to maintain support for the Somali government's fight against al-Shabaab. The persisting commitment on both sides of this conflict makes it likely that al-Shabaab's attacks against Turkish interests will continue, and perhaps intensify, and may even take place outside of Somalia's borders.

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A Weak AQIM and a Paralyzed Hirak: Algeria's moment of stability

Dario Cristiani

The third anniversary of the birth of the Hirak Movement in Algeria occurred on February 22, 2022. Three years earlier, in early February 2019, the then Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika officially announced his decision to run for a fifth term, despite his obvious poor health (Bouteflika subsequently passed away on September 17, 2021) ([Algérie Press Service](#), February 10, 2019, [Jeune Afrique](#), September 18, 2021). His decision triggered nationwide protests and showed how the Algerian government might have been formally stable but had grown increasingly unsustainable under the surface, particularly among the country's younger population.

After weeks of demonstrations, Bouteflika reversed course and announced that he would not seek a fifth term, postponed the

election, and called for a caretaker government to hold the country's new elections. These decisions were aimed at buying time against growing public discontent ([The Jamestown Foundation Hot Issue](#), March 17, 2019). Yet, these measures were not enough and from the end of February 2019, a widespread, and above all inter-generational and inter-classist, protest movement emerged. This wave of protests led to the end of Bouteflika's regime through his resignation in April 2019.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that Algerian civil society was silent before the emergence of the Hirak Movement. Algerian cities witnessed protests almost on a daily basis before the Hirak Movement. Yet, the nature and scope of protests used to be limited to specific, often material, and localized grievances. Aware that elections and normal political channels were not effective in conducting this discontent and achieving what various interest groups and social and economic actors wanted, protests became the way for the people to present their requests to the incumbent power and push authorities to take action ([Jamestown Hot Issue](#), January 24, 2017).

With the Hirak Movement, however, there was a shift. These new protests became systemic and aimed at achieving a change of the system (what the Algerians usually call the *pouvoir*) and did not target specific goals or sectarian aims, but expressed discontent at the entire post-independence political and economic elites and the groups and clans who have controlled the country since achieving independence from France in 1962. This ambition was well summarized in one of the slogans that came to characterize the Hirak Movement: *yetnahaou ga3!* ("They all should go!"). The movement was nurtured by the first generation born after the end of the civil war and the Black Decade of the 1990s, which entered the job market with no direct memory of the pain and destruction of the 1990s ([Terrorism Monitor](#), January 25, 2019).

By now, it is clear that the Hirak Movement failed in achieving the systemic change it wanted. Yet, the experience it gained cannot be deemed as a total failure because it became an actor that forced the Algerian *pouvoir* to redefine its relationship with Algerian society. In a way, the Hirak Movement redrew the borders of the political game in Algeria and forced the military authorities and political players to evolve. However, also thanks to the global COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Algerian authorities managed to exploit the health emergency to put the movement in a corner and destroy its potential for change ([Liberté Algérie](#), February 23).

The fact that the Hirak Movement did not manage to achieve its initial goals and demands, and the fact that its intensity gradually waned away, does not mean that the grievances that triggered, and fueled, that discontent are now gone or less significant than before. From this point of view, while the Algerian authorities managed to adapt to this wave of the protests, the factors that pushed many Algerians from many different walks of life to take to the streets and protest have not been addressed and can easily reignite. This will represent a sort of permanent sword of Damocles on Algeria's government.

AQIM and its Algerian Marginality

As the third anniversary of the establishment of the Hirak Movement was approaching, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released a new video after an unusually long media hiatus. On February 12, AQIM's media branch *al-Andalus* released the video titled "An appeal and call for mobilization (*Niad wa-Istinfar*)" in which a young militant, whose name is allegedly Abd al-Muhsin Abu Julaybib, spoke alongside scenes from a number of videos and references to historical jihadist and al-Qaeda figures ([Twitter.com/@SimNasr](#), February 12). Julaybib, who joined the group in 2019 according to what he stated in the video, is from the town of Zemmouri in the northern

province of Boumerdes and he referred specifically to Algerians who protested. He criticized them, claiming that real change can only be achieved with force and not through peaceful means, which is extremely relevant when looking at AQIM's previous positions regarding the Hirak Movement.

In May 2019, Abou Obeida Youssef Al-Annabi, who was later appointed as emir of AQIM in November 2020, became the head of the AQIM Shura Council and ideological leader of the organization ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), October 2018). At that time, he had approved the pacifist actions of the demonstrators. He asserted that jihad was not limited to armed struggle ([France24](#), May 30, 2019). This was his attempt to capitalize on the mounting discontent in Algeria and become an interlocutor for the protest movement and use it as a recruitment pool. This attempt, however, obviously failed. AQIM had no capacity to exploit the discontent mounting in Algeria, which was unlike its predecessors in the early 1990s because it had managed to make inroads among the disfranchised youth of major urban centers in Algeria.

AQIM's inability to represent a pole of attraction and its consequent incapacity to recruit protesters by exploiting their discontent is likely the reason why Julaybib also recalled an old controversy inside the Algerian jihadist circles regarding the evolution of the Armed Islamic Group's (*Groupe Islamique Armee*, GIA) strategy in the 1990s, which involved the targeting of civilians. He defined the GIA as *kharijite* (outside the fold of Islam) and stressed how AQIM's jihadists are different from the GIA and have a good reputation in the areas where they operate. The shifting strategy of the GIA in the mid-1990s to move beyond targeting only police and security forces to civilians who were considered "apostates" pushed a number of its members to leave the group. They then created a splinter group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat*,

GSPC), that later became AQIM in 2007 and avoided the GIA's indiscriminate killings ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 5, 2017).

Julaybib's video is thus interesting for several reasons. As already mentioned, it showed a shift in AQIM from being open to peaceful protests in Algeria to abandoning the ambition to win the sympathies of those who protested under the Hirak Movement's banner. However, this shift is likely linked to the inability of AQIM to win any of the protesters' sympathies and is more a reaction to AQIM's failure and lack of attractiveness to the Algerian people. In addition, the poor quality of the video of Julaybib, which was unusual for *al-Andalus*, also suggests that at least AQIM's militants operating in Algeria are hampered by logistical and organization problems. From this point of view, the video was a sort of admission of weakness by the group in Algeria and proves once more that while AQIM remains an Algerian player, its main strategic focus, and success, is consistently elsewhere, such as in Mali and more broadly the Sahel. It is in this area where the activities of the Group of Support for Islam and Muslims (*Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin*, JNIM) is much more effective and relevant than AQIM in Algeria ([Terrorism Monitor](#), April 5, 2017).

The Russian Military Invasion of Ukraine and the Algerian Paradox

The third anniversary of the Hirak Movement came as Russia was launching its military invasion of Ukraine ([Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), February 24). Although Algeria is not immediately involved in this conflict, the implications for the country are extremely significant on many levels. Against this backdrop, the most important element to consider is the mixed impact that this conflict can have on Algerian domestic dynamics. On the one hand, the build-up to the crisis and the actual outbreak of war following Russia's large-scale invasion pushed hydrocarbon prices up to levels unseen since the early 2010s. Algeria is benefiting significantly from this development as higher revenues are

providing some relief to the ailing Algerian public finances. Years of declining oil prices, coupled with domestic problems, reduced the Algerian capacity to use public money to cool down social tensions. But with prices rising again, current President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has decided to establish a "dignity subsidy" worth 13,000 Algerian dinars (around 91 USD), which appears to have come straight from the post-Arab Spring Bouteflika playbook ([Algérie Press Service](#), February 15).

However, while growing prices are boosting revenues on what the country is able to sell in the short-term, Algeria has limited spare energy capacity to actually capitalize more from these specific dynamics. The country is indeed pushing its oil production to around one-million barrels per day in April in line with the decision of OPEC+ ([Jeune Afrique](#), March 5). However, years of mismanagement, governance issues, legal problems, and tight contractual conditions have prevented the country from stably boosting its output. Moreover, even if Sonatrach (Algeria's national oil company) manages to resolve all of its problems, it would take years for the country to tap most of its potential. Rising domestic consumption is reducing the quota for exports, which means in the short-term, Algeria will not be able to increase its production significantly and make the most out of the current global situation ([Jeune Afrique](#), March 2).

As the Russian military invasion in Ukraine persists, Algeria is facing a diplomatic paradox. Algiers abstained from the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Moscow's aggression toward Kiev. More generally, Algeria has remained neutral regarding the conflict, a position in line both with the country's historical approach to global politics and reflecting the close political, economic, and military ties existing between Algeria and Russia. That said, European countries have so far avoided putting too much pressure on Algeria for this lack of condemnation and are unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, in the wake of the

war, the Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, went to Algiers for a number of meetings together with Claudio De Scalzi, the CEO of Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), which is Italy's oil and gas giant and a major actor in the global energy market. On behalf of the European Union, they sought to negotiate an increase in Algerian oil and gas supply to Europe to partially offset the impact of declining imports from Russia. This was a clear display of the increasing European attention toward Algeria ([Algérie Focus](#), March 6; [Le Figaro](#), February 28).

From this point of view, Algeria can exploit this specific diplomatic situation similarly to what it did in other situations. For instance, in the early 2000s after 9/11, Algeria went from being an international pariah to a trusted counter-terrorism ally for the Americans and Europeans. In this current case, Algeria can sell its (potential) energy capacity to partially reduce Europe's dependence on Russia in return for greater political and diplomatic freedom. On top of avoiding being targeted for its position close to Russia, Algeria can also reduce the pressure from European countries on how it handles protests and domestic social discontent.

However, there is a third element, which is significantly concerning for Algeria, linked to the current crisis in Ukraine, and specifically its food security and especially food prices. This is a common problem for many African and Middle Eastern countries, although Algeria is not in as difficult condition a situation as other countries ([Le Monde](#), March 2; [Algérie Press Service](#), December 28, 2021). Algeria is the second largest consumer of wheat in Africa and the fifth largest importer of cereals in the world. Their current stock level is sufficient for six months ([L'Opinion Maroc](#), March 7). Historically, France represents Algeria's major partner in this market, but Algerians were discussing a diversification of its sources and looking at Russia as a potential alternative ([Jeune Afrique](#), January 15, 2021). While a problem with internal shortages might not be an immediate

concern, the actual problem comes from the generalized increase in food prices. Algerian history is full of examples of social and political crises sparked by rising prices for bread, the most notable being the October 1988 riots which were at the very root of the civil war of the 1990s. This development, therefore, has the potential to offset the positive impact that rising revenues has on strengthening social peace and will force authorities to devote even more resources to promote social stability at home.

Conclusions

Three years on, the Hirak Movement contributed to changing the parameters of the political game in Algeria but failed to promote structural, systemic change within an Algerian polyarchy dominated by a military that has merely reorganized itself. It accordingly purged a significant part of the political and business elites closely linked to Bouteflika, but still reproduces old schemes. While accommodating some of the Hirak Movement's requests, particularly in the early months of the mobilization, the Algerian elites still managed to contain the movement through the measures they took to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current return of a commodity super-cycle is likely to help the Algerian *pouvoir* further strengthen its immediate control. Paradoxically, despite its close ties with Russia, Algeria is likely to avoid diplomatic and political isolation, particularly from European countries, as they desperately need alternative sources of energy to Russian supplies. Against this backdrop, the recent AQIM-released video shows that the group is now totally marginal in the domestic scene, and has completely failed in its bid to attract even just a small part of protesters.

While AQIM, through JNIM, is now a crucial actor in the Sahel, in Algeria and the broader Maghreb it continues to struggle for relevance. For Algeria, this proves once more that the actual, major structural

threat it has faced in the past – radical Jihadism - is now totally marginalized. However, because the Hirak Movement did not achieve the systemic change it hoped for, the grievances that nurtured its mobilization have not been addressed, and this poses a serious systemic challenge to Algeria in the long-run that the current elites seem to be both unwilling and unable to solve.

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