

# Abstract: Is Algeria immune to the Arabic upheaval?

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In the numerous recent publications concerning the „Arabian Revolt“ Algeria is hardly mentioned, and if it is, usually only marginally as a comparatively stable state. Nevertheless, the country is too important to brush it aside with a couple of sentences. With 2.38 million km<sup>2</sup>, Algeria is not only the biggest state in Africa, but also in the MENA Area (Near/Middle East, North Africa). As far as the population number is concerned, Algeria holds the second place with 37 millions behind Egypt with 83 millions of inhabitants. Due to its rich deposits of oil and gas Algeria has considerable geo-strategic importance - it is the tenth largest gas producer of the world and is responsible for 25% of the EU's gas imports. For this reason, the EU is able to reduce its dependence on Russian supplies. As the biggest Sahara-state, Algeria additionally has considerable potential with renewable forms of energy, and it plays an important part in the DESERTEC-project, which is supported by the EU. Algeria is also a bridging country between Europe and Sub-Sahara-Africa, thus having considerable influence in the instable Sahel region. After the collapse of the Syrian army Algeria has the second strongest forces in the MENA-Area. The army of conscripts, which has been well-trying in fighting against terrorism, consists of 130.400 soldiers (army 110.000, air force 14.000, navy 6.000) and 150.000 reservists. On top of these, there are 187.200 paramilitary personnel (police 20.000, national security forces 16.000, Republican Guard 1.200, local militia 150.000). Although Algeria acts as a strong player in public, there nevertheless are interior problems similar to those of other Arabian states: a high youth unemployment, disastrous living conditions for many citizens, unsatisfactory governmental services, discrimination of segments of the population, and governmental legitimacy deficits. In 2014 not only a successor for the 77 years old president Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika will be elected; the generation of the war of liberation 1954 - 1962 urgently will have to be replaced, which still holds the controls of politics, military and economy. This will involve risks. Why have the disturbances in the Arabian world not become more apparent in Algeria? The Islam is a generally respected and undenied power, but both Islamic parties and leaders have lost their reputations because of the violent incidents in the course of the civil war. The legal Islamic parties are co-opted and involved in clientele networks, which reduces their reliability. The fact that the Algerian society is deeply traumatised is decisive: by the fierce war of liberation against France (1954-62), by the permanent power struggle within the FLN and the constant campaign against deviationists and minorities, and by the terror and anti-terror of the civil war (1991-2002). The frustration of many Algerians will increase and will finally erupt explosively if no reforms are started. The year 2014 will be both chance and risk for Algeria. If a steady transition with more pluralism and less influence of the security forces turns out well, Algeria will be able to concentrate on solving its socio-economic problems.

