With the presidential election day approaching in Algeria, the sheer number of political forces aiming to secure power in this troubled state leaves geopolitical analysts bewildered and confused. Those trying hard to explain the situation that slips out of control rapidly are also trying to establish who was behind the recent anti-government protests on top of the US, that clearly played an important role in bringing the Bouteflika government down.

Most observers seem to agree that the former head of the Ministry of national defense, Ali Ghediri has the best shot at getting elected president. Back in 2015, this seasoned general had to retire after a conflict he had with Algeria's army chief of staff, Ahmed Gaid Salah.

Ali Ghediri, who's in his mid sixties, can be best described by his idealistic ideas of an anti-imperialistic patriot who aspires to catch his country in a free-fall by kick-starting democratic reforms. However, he is not going to take this fight alone, as he has recently received both financial and political support from Issad Rebrab, a billionaire who is best described as the wealthiest man in Algeria. The CEO of the Cevital industrial group provides jobs to tens of thousands of people across the country, and argues that he's going to assist his champion in making Algeria as successful and prosperous as his industrial group is. It's his conviction that to secure this goal one has to liberalize the national legislation, allowing foreign investors to play a larger role in the economic life of the country, while bringing it out of the tight grip of local military and political elites.

It's noteworthy that the former head of the Ministry of national defense refused to participate in protests against the Bouteflika government in any form of fashion. However, this fact affected his popularity in a rather negative way, as there's more than enough of those who are convinced that if a politician failed to side with the street mob he must...
have been controlled by representatives of the former government.

However, as mentioned above, the question of who is the most likely winner of the unraveling presidential campaign is hardly the only thing that geopolitical analysts are breaking their heads over. Some of them are increasingly inclined to point out that France played a role in the staging of political unrest in Algeria. This opinion is primarily based on the fact that both the Bouteflika government and his most likely successor - Ali Ghediri refused to provide French businessmen with guarantees that their interests are going to be preserved by Algiers in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, it's been pointed out that the seasoned Algerian general has made it clear to the to the Elysee Palace on multiple occasions that under his rule Algeria is going to pursue a completely independent foreign policy. Moreover, he has declined a number of unofficial invitations to visit Paris that were delivered to him via the backer of his election campaign - Issad Rebrab.

Under those conditions, it's hardly surprising that Paris is planning to promote the idea that there must be a redistribution of influence between the branches of power in Algeria, to ensure its peaceful transition from presidential to parliamentary republic. Should it succeed, it may aspire to preserve its influence inside its former colony.

However, there's forces inside Algeria that seek to establish closer ties with their former colonial masters. Among them one can find a number of high-profile representatives of Bouteflika's inner circle that are concerned by the fact that a new political force may render them powerless overnight. So one shouldn't be too surprised by their latest attempts to pursue rapprochement with the sitting French authorities. Among the first manifestations of this anxiety was the publication of a message from the Bouteflika government that announced the possible birth of a new republic. It goes without saying that among the implications that such a message carry are various amendments that are to be introduced into Algeria's constitution. This announcement that was released to the general public in early March, made it clear to France that it may carry on promoting its agenda in this North African state by relying on the old guard.

However, France and the United States are not the only international players that are interested in strengthening their positions in Algeria to influence both its regional policy and its hydrocarbon exports.

For instance, Saudi Arabia used to occupy center stage in attempts to stir Islamist opposition in Algeria before cutting down on the support it had been providing to radical forces inside this North African state for years. This change was caused by its attempts to destroy both Syria and Yemen that diverted its financial resources from assisting the Islamist opposition. Nevertheless, religious tensions inside Algeria remain high. It shouldn't be overlooked that in a desperate bid to bring peace to his country, Abdelaziz Bouteflika had to pardon those forces that tried to bring his government down during the civil war that raged all through the 1990s in Algeria. This resulted in “legal Islamists” such as Ammar Gul being allowed to occupy high-profile positions across various branches of the government. Moreover, these days yet another high-profile Islamist - Abderrazak Makri leads the third largest political party in the country – Mouvement de la Société Pour la Paix (or Harakat Moudjtamaa As-Silm in Arabic).

It's curious that the idea to postpone the presidential election that backfired on the Bouteflika government was advanced and promoted by those same “legalized Islamists”. But this wasn't their only success as they've been able to advocate "conservative values" proceeding with the radicalization of the country through peaceful means by getting relevant laws through the parliament. In short, they've been able to secure the goal they've been fighting for in the civil war without firing a single shot. However, those forces are not satisfied with that, as they crave for revenge for the military defeat they had to suffer, paying no heed to the fact that the radical ideas they promoted resulted in a death toll of 200 thousand human lives lost in the course of the hostilities. Today, the ideas of the so-called “Islamic socialism” hasn't lost its relevance, in fact they received even more support after the collapse of the traditional Arab social-nationalist forces.

It is curious that Qatar, which is competing with Riyadh for influence, prefers to stay away from supporting any opposition forces in Algeria, while focusing on its efforts to promote bilateral hydrocarbon cooperation with Algiers.

At the same time, local pro-government sources continue accusing France and Israel of supporting "Berber separatism." The forces in question are represented by the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie and its leader - Ferhat Mehenni, while his opponents argue that he's been raising funds in the above mentioned states for the Berber struggle. Such suspicions can be explained by the fact that the recent protests have been particularly widespread in the north-eastern highlands of Algeria, the regions traditionally inhabited by Berbers. But it’s hard to argue that the
grievances of the Berber people are not legitimate. With a third of the population of the country made up of the Berbers, this minority claims that the nationalist Algerian authorities deliberately suppress the indigenous population, whose ancestors inhabited this country long before Arabs. The Berbers wouldn't forgive the Bouteflika government for the bloody suppression of the so-called Black Spring – a large-scale Berber protest against Arabization.

Thus, we're observing a large number of external and internal forces in play that aim at taking advantage of the current situation in Algeria to strengthen their positions.

As for the development of the situation in the future, it is necessary to point out that it's nearly impossible for the government to deal with a fragmented opposition with no prominent figures to antagonize. But at the same time, such an opposition has slim chances to achieve any political goals through legitimate means.

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