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“Legitimizing an authoritative power through the foreign policy discourse, the example of Algeria during the Arab uprisings”

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In spite of many predictions, the wind of the “Arab spring” did not blow on Algeria. To be more accurate and to use La Fontaine’s words in his poem *The Oak and the Reed*: facing the wind of the Arab unrest in 2011, the Algerian government *did bend but did not break*.

This could seem surprising because Algeria actually shares many characteristics with its Arab neighbours such as Tunisia and Egypt where the revolution led to the fall of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. Indeed, Abdelaziz Bouteflika has been leading the country for 12 years at the moment of the Arab uprisings; Algeria is traditionally dominated by the army; the state of emergency was imposed during 20 years until 2011 and there is a growing discontent about the political institutions and leaders and a high rate of youth unemployment (23,6%)¹.

The Algerian society has not been impervious to the Arab unrest. On the contrary, mobilizations in the country have historically been quite strong. According to the Algerian army, more than 10 000 social movements broke out in the country in 2010². However, as Layla Baamara explains, these protests were sectorial protests and all attempts for a united action did not succeed³.

Protests that occurred in 2011 in Algeria took more or less the same pattern as protests in other Arab countries: young men aged 16-24, for many unemployed, formed several small groups in different neighbourhoods before emerging onto roads and setting up barricades⁴. Moreover, even though every Arab society has its own specificities, the reasons for the protests were about the same in Algeria: lack of jobs, lack of housing, very high cost of food, fight against corruption, claim for more rights etc.⁵

The repression by the security forces has been severe but is far from being the only reason why the uprising failed to materialise. Many researchers have tried to explain why the country has not been concerned by the “domino effect”⁶ that ousted dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen or Libya.

For Dris Chérif, the governmental successful strategy has been to make people believe that the democratic changes in Algeria had already taken place after the events of October 1988 with, among other reforms, the adoption of a new Constitution and the end of the one-party regime⁷. According to

¹ CHENA Salim, « L’Algérie dans le “Printemps arabe » entre espoirs, initiatives et blocages”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, N° 77, p. 105-118, 2011

² DRIS-AÏT HAMADOUCHE Louisa, “L’Algérie face au printemps arabe: pressions diffuses et résilience entretenue”, *Politiques méditerranéennes*, p.178-183, 2012

³ BAAMARA Layla, “Alger ou la contestation en rang dispersés: des mobilisations qui “ne prennent pas” in CAMAU Michel et VAIREL Frédéric, *Soulèvements et recompositions politiques dans le monde arabe*, PUM, 2014

⁴ Dr. Abdel Nasser Jabi, “Protest Movements in Algeria”, Case Analysis, Arab Center for Research & Policy studies, Mai 2011 (on line, 6th November 2014)

⁵ BAAMARA Layla, *Ibid*

⁶ “The domino effect of Arab unrest”, CNN, on line (6th of November 2014)

⁷ DRIS Cherif, “Élections, *dumping* politique et populisme : Quand l’Algérie triomphe du “printemps arabe”” *L’Année du Maghreb*, IX, p. 279-297, 2013

Kamel Boudjemil, “*this discourse has been internalized by the great majority of Algerian people who are now convinced that the status quo is preferable*”⁸.

Moreover, for Louisa Dris Hamadouche, the great resilience capacity of the Algerian state is another explanation to the failure of the protests. The author highlights the reforms adopted by the Algerian state in 2011 and 2012: suspension of the state of emergency, house building projects, adoption of measures to support the purchasing power and a massive redistribution of the oil revenues. In other words, the Algerian regime bought social peace⁹.

For other scholars, the power and sophistication of the “police state” embodied in the *Department of Intelligence and Security* (DRS) and the weakness and the “atomisation” of the internal opposition are two other elements that explain the absence of a shift in power following the 2011 unrests¹⁰.

All these works show a very accurate knowledge, by scholars, of internal issues of the Algerian society. However, very few of these works address the question of Algeria’s foreign policy during the “Arab spring”, nor do they focus on official discourses held by the Algerian authorities during this period. We assume that the foreign policy discourse and, more generally, the official discourse, held by the Algerian authorities in 2011 and 2012 can be another source of comprehension of the stability of the Algerian regime when facing the Arab uprisings. In fact, analysing the foreign policy discourse allows us to see in which myths this political *imaginaire* is grounded¹¹. It reveals what interpretation of international events has been made by the political figures and what message they have tried to broadcast.

Our hypothesis is that the Algerian government uses foreign policy as a tool to legitimate the autocratic regime. On the one hand, it serves for the institutionalization of fear within the population and for the designation of a common enemy: terrorism, in order to limit the social unrests and to maintain social peace. For that purpose, the Algerian leaders use of a *memorial discursive strategy*. On the other hand, it legitimates, in the eyes of the international society, the “police state” and the use of coercive measures aimed, officially, at fighting terrorism. Even though these elements are not specific to the period of the “Arab spring”, they are striking at that moment because the survival of the regime is at stake.

Such a study can only be conducted by replacing Algerian foreign policy in a historical perspective in order to observe the evolutions that have taken place within the last fifty years. This will be done in the first section where we will be showing how Bouteflika has made foreign policy a key element of his presidency since 1999. In section two, we will be analysing the foreign policy discourse held by the Algerian authorities in 2011 and 2012 and show how it is used as a tool for the legitimation of the autocratic regime. In the last section, we will question Algeria’s foreign policy making process and observe the blurring between national and international issues in that country.

Section 1: Algeria’s foreign policy in a historical perspective

As Guillaume Devin explains in his book *Sociologie des relations internationales*, “*international relations sociology retains a strong attachment to the historical depth of the different phenomena studied in order to account for their evolution and, more generally, to take up the issue of change in international relations*”¹². Thus, it is necessary to place our object of study in a historical perspective.

⁸ Interview with Kamel BOUDJEMIL, Paris, November 20, 2014

⁹ DRIS-AÏT HAMADOUCHE Louisa et DRIS Cherif, “De la résilience des régimes autoritaires : la complexité algérienne”, *L’Année du Maghreb*, VIII, p. 279-301, 2012

¹⁰ KEENAN Jeremy H., “Foreign Policy and the Global War on Terror in the Reproduction of Algerian State Power”, *State Crime Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 196-216, Autumn 2012

¹¹ COLIN Guillaume, “Russian Foreign Policy Discourse during the Kosovo Crisis: Internal Struggles and the Political *Imaginaire*”, *Research in question*, n° 12, December 2004

¹² DEVIN Guillaume, *Sociologie des relations internationales*, La Découverte, Paris, 3ed., 2013

1. From the “golden age” of Algerian diplomacy to the isolation on the international stage

The history of Algerian diplomacy, interestingly but not surprisingly, coincides with the evolutions of the internal situation of the country. In 1962, the Evian agreements put an end to 8 years of war in Algeria. Algeria obtains its independence from France after 132 years of colonization. The country is promising on the economic and political level and Algerian leaders are willing to give the country a central role in the region but also at the international level.

The first Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella choses a twenty-five-year-old former combatant of the National Liberation Army named Abdelaziz Bouteflika as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1963. Bouteflika will be holding this position until the death of President Boumediene in 1978.

Algerian diplomacy has been very active in the 1970s and was, according to journalist Akram Belkaïd, the “branding” of the newly independent Algeria. Revolution was, at that time, “*the basis of Algerian diplomacy's existence and of its international action*”¹³. Algeria, through its diplomacy, imposed itself as the spokesman of the “third world” and has constantly defended the principle of sovereignty and the right to decolonization.

During 15 years, Bouteflika and its administration will ardently defend the decolonization process especially at the United Nations. In 1974, Bouteflika is elected president of the 29th United Nations (UN) General Assembly¹⁴ and on the 10th of April 1974 President Boumediene does, at the UN, his famous speech on the new economic order pleading for the refoundation of international relations and for an equitable share of wealth among nations.

Most of the Algerian diplomats were, at that time, former revolutionaries and members of the National Liberation Front¹⁵. Therefore, Paul Balta and Claudine Rulleau speak about “*maquisard diplomacy*”¹⁶. Moreover, there is a strong connexion between diplomacy and politics and the circulation between the two worlds is very intense. According to Nicolas Grimaud, in spite of Boumediene’s strong personality and omnipresence on the international stage, “*Bouteflika shared with him the conduct of Algerian foreign policy*”¹⁷. This ambitious foreign policy and the anticolonial discourse have created, within the population, a strong approval and a great respect for Algerian diplomats.

Amine Ait-Chaalal considers that Algerian foreign policy has been characterised, from 1965 to 1978, by coherence, continuity and efficiency since Bouteflika was Minister of Foreign affairs during all that time¹⁸.

However, the pro-Sahraouian activism of Algeria has hampered the international ambitions of Algerian diplomacy after 1976. In fact, the conflict that opposed Morocco and Algeria and the support of Polisario rebels by Boumediene discredited the “new world order” discourses held by the Algerian president and his minister, Bouteflika. With the death of Boumediene in 1978 and Bouteflika’s eviction, the capacity of

¹³ BELKAÏD Akram, “La diplomatie algérienne à la recherche de son âge d’or”, *Politique étrangère*, Été, p. 337-344, 2009

¹⁴ “Abdelaziz Bouteflika élu président de la vingt-neuvième session de l’Assemblée générale”, <http://www.un.org/french/ga/president/bios/bio29f.shtml>

¹⁵ AIT-CHAALAL Amine, “La politique étrangère de l’Algérie entre héritage et originalité” in Claude, ROSOUX Valerie, DE WILDE D’ESTMAEL Tanguy, *La politique étrangère, le modèle classique à l’épreuve*, Géopolitique et résolution des conflits, Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2004

¹⁶ BALTA Paul and RULLEAU Claudine, *L’Algérie des Algériens vingt ans après*, Paris, Editions ouvrières, 1981, p. 191

¹⁷ GRIMAUD Nicoles, *La politique extérieur de l’Algérie (1962-1978)*, Karthala, 1984, p. 16

¹⁸ AIT-CHAALAL Amine, “La politique étrangère de l’Algérie entre héritage et originalité” in Claude, ROSOUX Valerie, DE WILDE D’ESTMAEL Tanguy, *La politique étrangère, le modèle classique à l’épreuve*, Géopolitique et résolution des conflits, Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2004

the Algerian diplomacy to speak out loud in the name of the “third world” has been considerably reduced.

In the 1980s the diplomatic withdrawal of Algeria from all issues related to the Middle East has been progressive but significant. In the 1990s, according to Akram Belkaïd, the interruption of the electoral process (December 1991) and the refusal of national authorities to accept the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front has obliged the Algerian diplomacy to do everything possible in order to avoid the total isolation of the country¹⁹. The message held by the Algerian officials to “western” countries was clear: either the regime survives or it is chaos in the whole region.

The 1990s civil war, also called the “bloody decade” or the “dark decade” has reinforced the “mutism” of Algeria on international affairs.

2. The resurgence of Algeria’s Foreign Policy with Bouteflika’s election

Only by exposing the previous elements about the “golden age” of Algerian diplomacy in the 1960s and 1970s and its significant withdrawal from the international stage in the 1980s and 1990s can we understand Bouteflika’s diplomatic action after his election as President in 1999.

When Bouteflika got elected, Algeria was facing two major problems. First, the state was considered a *rogue state* by the international society because of the 1992 *coup d’Etat* and because of the prominence of the army in the 1990’s “dirty war”. More precisely, the perception of the country had been tarnished following the suspicions of military involvement in some killings attributed to Islamist groups. Secondly, as a result of the international embargoes, the army was under-equipped and lacked modern weaponry²⁰.

For Yahia H. Zoubir, “*although there have existed periods of cordiality and good economic ties, Algeria’s relations with the United States have historically been marked by misunderstandings, suspicion and at times great antagonism as the two countries collided over the Arab-Israeli conflict, Vietnam, Western Sahara, Nicaragua, Cuba and Grenada.*”²¹

Newly elected Abdelaziz Bouteflika has invested a lot of energy in forging a special relationship between his country and the US. This new relationship was coherent with the American new Maghreb policy aiming at reinforcing stability in the region through the improvement of economy. However, in spite of the intense diplomatic and economic exchanges between the two countries their relationship did not attain the level that Bouteflika hoped. For example, the United States refused to provide sophisticated military weapons in order to help Algerian security forces fight Islamist insurgents.

The 11-september events have been a windfall for the country. In fact, the bombing on the Wall Trade Center and the Pentagon has been an unexpected opportunity for Algeria to tighten its links with the “western” countries and especially the USA. Bouteflika’s two-day visit to Washington in July 2001 was the first of an Algerian Head of State in the United States since 1985. Bouteflika’s “civil concord” policy, harshly criticized in Algeria, was strongly supported by the new American President Georges W. Bush.

The Algerian President launched his country into the “global war on terror” and, in April 2003, the US State Department openly recognized Algeria as one of the countries that “*actively supported the global campaign against terrorism*”²². Progressively, Algeria has become a masterpiece of the “western” antiterrorist policy in the region and its image of a *rogue state* has changed.

¹⁹ BELKAÏD Akram, op. cit

²⁰ KEENAN Jeremy H., *Ibid*,

²¹ ZOUBIR YAHIA H, “Algeria and U.S. Interests: Containing Radical Islamism and Promoting Democracy.” *Middle East Policy* 9(1): 64–81, 2002

²² ZOUBIR YAHIA H. “The resurgence of Algeria’s Foreign Policy in the Twenty First Century”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 9, n°2, pp. 169-183, 2004

At the national level, this international image of a country cooperating side by side with the “international community” has helped entrenching Bouteflika’s power. The return of peace in the country and the good economic results facilitated this task. As a result, Bouteflika enjoys the image of the peacemaker and of a bulwark against terrorism.

Section 2: Algeria’s foreign policy during the “Arab spring”

During the “Arab spring”, Algeria’s foreign policy has been used as a tool to create consent among the population and to legitimate the military control of the society in the eyes of the “international community”.

1. The “institutionalization of fear”²³ through a memorial discursive strategy

Very soon after the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, the Algerian authorities have tried to differentiate the situation of Algeria from the situation of Tunisia and Egypt. “*Algeria is not Tunisia and is not Egypt*” the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mourad Medelci, said in February 2011²⁴. Moreover, as he explained: “*the causes of the Arab spring were not met in Algeria, fortunately. Tunisia and Egypt had a centralized system of government, no freedom of the press and had not taken seriously the issue of regional balance and ethnic balance (...) Political pluralism in Algeria dates back to 1988, we are very far from a centralized system*”²⁵.

When analysing the Algerian foreign policy discourse in the context of the Arab revolutions, we observe that it somehow betrays a fear of Bouteflika’s regime to fall. Anouar Boukhars considers that “*Algerian leaders were concerned about the potential disintegrative effects of the breakdown phase of authoritarian structures in neighbouring countries on Algeria’s internal stability*”²⁶.

Therefore, Algerian diplomacy has insisted, in its discourses, on the risk of instability caused by the political changes in Arab states. In an interview for a French magazine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mourad Medelci has evoked the “*negative repercussions of these movements*”. For the diplomat, “*the first challenge is instability. This will take a long time and be hard to manage because these countries face economic and social difficulties. Therefore, the transition will be difficult*”²⁷.

This *memorial discursive strategy* used by Algerian leaders can be observed in the repeated insistence on sovereignty and non-interference. As an example, in Bouteflika’s speech to the Algerian Nation of April 2011, the President explained that, in the context of the Arab uprising, “*it is obvious that (Algeria) takes position in favour of political forces impregnated with nationalist ideas that ban any interference within other countries internal affairs and who reject, in turn, any foreign interference in theirs. This is the position of the overwhelming majority of our citizens (...) who are entitled to express themselves when the country’s stability is threatened*”²⁸.

In march 2012, Mourad Meldici explained: “*Not wanting interference in our internal affairs, we abstain to do so in sovereign countries national affairs, no matter how geographically close they are. This is one of*

²³ The expression “institutionalization of fear” is used by Mohammed Hachemaoui in “La corruption politique en Algérie: l’envers de l’autoritarisme”, HACHEMAOUI Mohamed, *La Corruption politique en Algérie. Structures, acteurs et dynamiques d’un système de gouvernement*, Karthala, 2012

²⁴ Interview of Mourad MEDELICI by Jean-Pierre ELKABACH for *France 24*, February 15, 2011

²⁵ Hearing of Mourad MEDELICI by the French National Assembly, December 7, 2011

²⁶ BOUKHARS Anouar “Algerian Foreign Policy in the Context of the Arab Spring”, *Carnegie endowment for international peace*, Published online on January 14, 2013

²⁷ Interview with *Paris Match*, October 26, 2011, Press release issued by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26/10/2011, online (consulted on the 17th of November 2014)

²⁸ BOUTEFLIKA Abdelaziz, speech to the Nation on March 15, 2011, online (consulted on the 17th of November 2014)

the fundamental constants of the Algerian diplomacy"²⁹. By inscribing Algeria's position in a historical perspective, we can see that Algerian leaders are trying to recall that they are the ones who have pacified the country after the 1990s bloody decade.

The same sovereignty logic explains, on July 23rd 2012, the assertions by Algerian officials at the meeting of the Arab League that Bashar Al Assad shall not be forced by the League to leave the power in Syria. According to the report, "*Algeria expressed "reservations" about the League's position, saying it was "not the prerogative of this council but remains a sovereign decision of the brotherly Syrian people"*".³⁰. In addition, in March 2013, Algeria refused to sign the agreement of the Arab League, strongly pushed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, authorizing Arab states to provide a military support to the Syrian opposition³¹. It must be noted that the two presidents are so close that, in May 2013, after Bouteflika's hospitalization, Bashar Al Assad wished him "*a quick recovery and a long life*", praying God so that the Algerian president could "*return to his homeland with good health and continue the construction and the wise leadership of the brotherly country of Algeria*"³².

According to Driss Chérif, "*the Algerian regime saw in the fall of two neighbouring secular dictatorships (Tunisia and Egypt) a grave prelude to the Islamization of both societies, undermining their own national security as well as that of their surroundings*"³³. Indeed, the references to terrorism have been used many times by the Algerian authorities especially at the moment of the Libyan crisis where the country was firmly opposed to an international military intervention. "*What is happening in Libya could be an encouragement to the development of terrorism and that encouragement can give wings to terrorism everywhere, including on our territory*" the Algerian Minister Medelci explained. "*It took Algeria several years to get rid of terrorism and stabilize its domestic front*" the Minister recalled³⁴. "*We're almost certain that what is happening in Libya may have consequences for the sub-region, not only in Algeria but also in other neighbouring countries*" President Bouteflika said in his speech to the Nation on the 15th of March 2011³⁵.

The concept of "terrorism", as used by the Algerian official discourse, can be qualified a *myth* in the sense that Roland Barthes gave to this term³⁶. For Barthes, "*through the [mythical] concept, it is a whole new history which is implanted in the myth*". In other words, what matter is not the actual threat but the *imaginaire* to which it refers. Hence, the *myth* "*is an efficient instrument for political figures to solicit (...) adhesion to their discourse*"³⁷.

In the Algerian case, the threat of terrorism is used as "*an instrument for the mobilization of the civil*

²⁹ Press release issued by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15/03/2012, online (consulted on the 17th of November 2014)

³⁰ AFP, "Algeria rejects Arab League call for Assad to go", July 23rd 2012, online (Daily Star website, consulted on the 5th of December 2014)

³¹ *Le Matin*, "Ligue Arabe : l'Algérie refuse de signer le communiqué final sur la Syrie", March 7 2013, online, consulted on the 5th of December 2014

³² *Le Parisien*, "Bachar al-Assad pense à la santé de Bouteflika", May 26 2013, online, consulted on the 5th of December 2014

³³ CHERIF Driss, "La politique étrangère algérienne à l'épreuve des révoltes arabes: entre considérations internes et impératifs stratégiques", Conférence internationale à l'EGE Rabat, Maroc, 10th of May 2012.

³⁴ Interview with *Paris Match*, October 26, 2011, Press release issued by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26/10/2011

³⁵ Interview of Mourad Medelci for the Algeria National Radio (channel III). Press release issued by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24/04/2011, on line

³⁵ BOUTEFLIKA Abdelaziz, speech to the Nation on March 15, 2011, online (consulted on the 17th of November 2014)

³⁵ Press release issued by the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15/03/2012, online (consulted on the 17th of November 2014)

³⁶ BARTHES Roland, *Mythologies*, London: Paladin, 1973

³⁷ COLIN Guillaume, *op. cit*

*society against a common enemy*³⁸. This mobilization comes from the fact that large sections of the Algerian society have paid a heavy price in the war against terrorism in the 1990s and would be inclined to support the State in this struggle against terrorism rather than demanding ambitious reforms.

Therefore, references to a potential terrorist threat are part of what we can call a *memorial discursive strategy* that is to say a discourse that has a historical resonance to the “dark decade”. The “*deterrent effect of fear*”³⁹ produced by these historical references to the civil war in order is a mean to reinforce consent to the autocratic government within the society.

2. The use of the foreign policy discourse to justify the autocratic power

Moreover, this threat of terrorism has been used since the end of the 1990s as a justification of the autocratic regime and of the military control of the Algerian society in the eyes of the “international community”. For Narrimane Benakcha, “*residual struggles from the civil war have justified further the militarization of the regime*”⁴⁰.

According to Kamel Boudjemil, “*Algeria is very sensitive to international criticism. Therefore, its leaders use the antiterrorist discourse to express the idea that autocracy is the counterpart to an efficient antiterrorist strategy*”⁴¹. In February 2011, Mourad Medelci explained, in an interview: “*We must be vigilant. The Algerian government has brought peace back but never lowered the guard against terrorism*”⁴².

In January 2012, during the official visit of Mourad Medelci in Washington, Hillary Clinton insisted on the support of Algeria in the war against terrorism. “*Our two nations have worked closely on security and economic issues, particularly on counterterrorism for more than a decade*”⁴³ she recalled.

With more than 200 000 policeman (1 for 180 inhabitants⁴⁴) and a very powerful intelligence service that constitutes the link between the military and the political world, military control is very strong in the Algerian society and is a central tool for the regime. The repression of opponents and the lack of freedom are therefore hidden behind the need for security resulting from the 1990s decade.

Hence, the Algerian government has used this image of a spearhead of counterterrorism as a justification for the military control over social movements and, among other things, the massive presence of the police during the popular demonstrations in 2011. As an example, on the 12th of February 2011, on the National Coordination for Change and Democracy initiative, about 3000 protestors gathered in the center of Alger but 30 000 policemen were deployed that day in the streets and hundreds of participants were arrested⁴⁵. In its *2013 Annual report*, Amnesty international revealed that in Algeria, “*despite lifting the state of emergency in 2011, the authorities continued to prohibit demonstrations in Algiers under a 2001 decree. There and elsewhere, security forces either prevented*

³⁸ BAGHZOUZ Aomar, “L’Algérie et les révoltes arabes : ni exception ni domino”, *Outre-Terre*, n°29, p.159-174, 2001

³⁹ DRIS-AÏT HAMADOUCHE Louisa, “L’Algérie face au printemps arabe : pressions diffuses et résilience entretenue”, *Politiques méditerranéennes*, p.178-183, 2012

⁴⁰ BENAKCHA Narrimane, “The Algerian Regime: An Arab Spring Survivor”, *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, 7th of march 2012, on line <http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/online-articles/algerian-regime-arab-spring-survivor/> (consulted on the 18th of November 2014)

⁴¹ Interview with Kamel BOUDJEMIL, Paris, November 20, 2014

⁴² Interview of Mourad MEDELICI by Jean-Pierre ELKABACH for *France 24*, February 15, 2011

⁴³ Press conference of Mourad Medelci and Hillary Clinton, Washington, January 12, 2012

⁴⁴ DRIS-AÏT HAMADOUCHE Louisa, “L’Algérie face au printemps arabe : pressions diffuses et résilience entretenue”, *Politiques méditerranéennes*, p.178-183, 2012

⁴⁵ “Une manifestation d’opposants dispersée à Alger”, *Le Monde*, February 12, 2012

demonstrations by blocking access and making arrests or dispersed them through actual or threatened force"⁴⁶.

For researcher Francesco Cavatorta *"the struggle against terrorism triggered by the United States allowed the Arab authoritarian regimes to squelch with even more strength the political opposition at a time when the repression was beginning to be costly at the international level"*⁴⁷. The fact that a residual but mastered terrorism still continues to exist in Algeria is a way, for the Algerian authorities, to reactivate it whenever their security strategy requires.

Eventually, it is interesting to note that the recent strengthening of ties between Algeria and Egypt occurs on the basis of the fight against terrorism. Between 2009 and 2011, the relationships between the two countries had deteriorated because of personal disputes against leaders. However, the election of Al Sissi in June 2014 has brought an important change and the two countries have recently signed several cooperation agreements, particularly on terrorism issues. For Egyptian researcher Chérif Amir, *"diplomatically, the two countries already form a strong front"*⁴⁸. In November 2014, the visit of Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal to President Al Sissi in Cairo, gave the two men, the opportunity to show the common positions of both countries. *"There can be no sustainable development or economic recovery without peace and stability, hence we need to eradicate terrorism to achieve these objectives"* Abdelmalek Sellal argued, using words very similar to those of Algerian official discourse⁴⁹.

Section 3. The difficulty analysing the foreign policy making process in Algeria

Analyzing the Algerian foreign policy discourse cannot be done without questioning the process through which it is produced. However, this question is very complicated because of the scattering of the different decision-making centers and because of the competition between various actors. Moreover, the blurring between national and international issues makes the analysis even more difficult.

1. Power in Algeria: a "black box"

There is a lack of knowledge about the way decisions are taken in Algeria. As Akram Belkaid explains, *"the power, in Algeria, is a black box", "no one knows how it actually works"*⁵⁰. During the uprisings, as Salim Chena notes, *"the scattering of the different decision-making centers between the Presidency, the Security Services and the army "blurred the target" where to direct claims"*⁵¹ for Algerian protestors. Michel Camau notes that *"the demands (of protestors) were not directed at the head of state or at the Government, considered as decoys, but were directed against a more abstract "system" or "power"*⁵². The imprecision of the Algerian slogan "the system must leave" used in 2011 reveals the incapacity of protestor to grasp the consistency of power.

When Bouteflika was Minister of Foreign Affairs, *"he was directing "his" Ministry in a very energetic manner, far from any interference, his only interlocutor being President Boumediene"*⁵³. Today, the puzzle

⁴⁶ Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2014*, "The state of the world's human rights", Algeria

⁴⁷ CAVATORTA Francesco, "La reconfiguration des structures de pouvoir en Algérie" *Entre le national et l'International, Revue Tiers Monde*, n°210, p. 13-29, 2012

⁴⁸ Interview of Chérif Amir for the Algerian newspaper *Le temps*, November 17 2014, online, (consulted on December 5th 2014)

⁴⁹ *Algerie Press Service*, "L'Algérie et l'Egypte soulignent leur convergence de vues sur l'impérative préservation de l'unité territoriale de la Libye", November 13th 2014, online (consulted on December 5th 2014)

⁵⁰ BALKAID Akram, Interview for *Mediapart*, July 8, 2013

⁵¹ CHENA Salim, *op. cit*

⁵² CAMAU Michel, "La disgrâce du chef. Mobilisations populaires arabes et crise du leadership", *Mouvements*, 66, été, p. 22-29, 2011

⁵³ AIT-CHAALAL Amine, *op. cit*

is much more complex: many actors participate in the decision-making process and lots of interests are at stake.

For many observers, the real leaders of the country are the Army and of the Secret services (*Department of Intelligence and Security*)⁵⁴. Since 1992 and the *coup d'Etat*, the two bodies have remained united. According to José Garçon, “each clan, the military high command and the secret services, has the characteristics of a secret society whose members are trying to empower, compete, balance, monitor, cooperate and neutralize each other in respecting an absolute red line: sticking together facing a population that does not take advantage of the wealth of the country and part of which is almost in a state of insurrection”⁵⁵. The president is nothing more than the expression of the weak consensus between the chief of the Army and the chief of the DRS. Moreover, the Ministry of Energy and Mining also plays an important role in the management of Algeria’s rentier economy, which constitutes an element of Algeria’s foreign policy.

Even though he has skillfully been able to deal with the two main bodies for more than a decade, in particular through the suppression of the Minister of Defense at his arrival at the Presidency in 1999⁵⁶, it is now clear that Bouteflika is not leading the country anymore. Indeed, the frail health of the 77-year-old President, who now moves in a wheelchair, and the fact that he has hardly been seen in public since his re-election in April⁵⁷ make observer say that he is not able to govern the country anymore and that the « after-Bouteflika » is being prepared.

There are multiple poles of power: Général Mohamed ‘Toufik’ Mediene (DRS), some Generals of the Army in their seventies like General Gaïd Salah and the presidential clan, with the growing power of Bouteflika’s brother: Saïd Bouteflika. “Gossips say that it won’t be Bouteflika’s fourth mandate but Saïd’s first” journalist Kamel Daoud explains⁵⁸. The competition within this “tribal and military consortium”⁵⁹ seems to have increased in the last months. The conflicts opposing Bouteflika’s clan to General Mediene, chief of the DRS, is a proof that the balance of power might be evolving soon but no necessarily toward more democracy.

2. The blurring of internal and international issues

Algeria’s foreign policy is a good example of the blurring between internal and international issues. For a long time, scholars have made a distinction between *high politics* and *low politics*. For example, in 1984, Marcel Merle defined foreign policy as “the portion of government activity that is oriented toward the ‘outside’, that is to say, as opposed to internal politics, problems arising beyond the national borders”⁶⁰. However, with the rise of modern diplomacy, the border has faded and Algeria’s foreign policy reveals this significant blurring.

According to Nicoles Grimaud, “in the history of Algeria, inside and outside maintain subtle dialectic relations and by a kind of sway, one or the other dominates”⁶¹. This is true for several reasons.

⁵⁴ The country had the largest defence budget on the African continent with \$10.3 billion in 2012

⁵⁵ GARÇON José, “Alger: tout changer pour que rien ne bouge”, *L’observateur du Maroc*, November 13, 2013, on line (consulted on the 14th of November 2014)

⁵⁶ In 1999, Bouteflika explicitly suppressed the post of Minister of Defence from the members of the Government and attributed it to himself. He replaced it by a vice-Minister of Defence that would assist him.

⁵⁷ One of Bouteflika’s rare public appearance was on November 1st 2014 for Algeria’s independence celebrations – *Le Point*, “Rare apparition de Bouteflika en public”, November 1st 2014 (online, consulted on the 4th of December)

⁵⁸ DAOUD Kamel, “Comment l’Algérie a-t-elle pu devenir une monarchie ?”, *Algérie-Focus*, October 19th, 2013

⁵⁹ Interview with Kamel BOUDJEMIL, Paris, November 20, 2014

⁶⁰ MERLE Marcel, *La politique étrangère*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1984, p.7

⁶¹ GRIMAUD Nicoles, *op. cit.*, p.21

First of all, the important actors at the national level (DRS, Army, the President and some Ministers) also play an important role at the international level and participate in the decision-making process. The two types of politics emanate from the same institutions and are part of the same political project. Thus, they are complementary.

Secondly, some tools used by the national authorities to ensure the stability of the regime are also used at the international level. One of these elements is, as we have seen, the “war on terrorism” which is used, at the national level as a mean to create unity behind a common enemy and, at the international level, as a mean to justify the autocratic regime and to enhance the image of the country.

Moreover, oil is another tool that serves, at the national level as a lever to neutralize contestation and to restore national cohesion through redistribution and, at the international level, as a mean to ensure Algeria’s independence and its good economic relations with the USA and the European Union. As Luis Martinez explains, “*one of the benefits of oil revenues has been to immunize its holders against any form of pressure or threat from the international community. Oil wealth produced interested friendships in democratic countries, which has protected regimes from fear of economic or diplomatic retaliation in case of human rights violations*”⁶².

Finally, the claim of the Algerian diplomacy that the sovereignty principle must be respected, especially at the moment of the “western” intervention in Libya and the criticisms that Algeria has issued against the members of the coalition, are actually a message to the international community saying that the country will not tolerate any foreign interference in its internal affairs. As a result, the foreign policy discourse can be seen as synthesis between national and international issues.

Conclusion

Analyzing Algeria’s foreign policy discourse during the Arab uprisings is interesting in many ways. First, it shows that, in spite of the new strategic alliance of Algeria with the “western” countries since 1999, the principle of non-interference within the internal affairs defended by the Algerian diplomacy for half a century remains a key element in the regime’s official discourse. In the context of the “Arab spring”, its reactivation reflects the fear of the Algerian authorities about the creation of a potentially dangerous precedent for regime change “fomented” by “western” countries in the Arab world.

Moreover, this discourse, aimed at legitimating the autocratic regime and at reinforcing consent within the society, reveals the blurring of internal and international issues. Risks on instability, terrorist threat, refusal of interference within the internal affairs and nationalism are the main discursive elements used by the Algerian diplomacy during the Arab uprisings.

It is difficult to assess the role of this discourse in the failure of the mobilizations to materialize in Algeria but, as part of a global resilience strategy engaged by the regime, it seems to be a significant element to take into account.

For some observers, the regime is struggling to position itself in the new architecture of international relations because it has not yet realized that the world is changing. For the former Algerian diplomat Abdelaziz Rahab, “*this problem of adaptation does not apply to foreign policy alone, but it affects the way the whole country is governed as well*”⁶³. The non-renewal of elites can be an explanation to these adjustment difficulties. In 2004, Isabelle Werenfels has described very precisely the structure of elites in Algeria from the 1992 *coup d’Etat* and has shown that dynamics and changes did not provoke any

⁶² MARTINEZ Luis, *Violence de la rente pétrolière. Algérie Irak Libye*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2010, p. 199

⁶³ Sonie Leyes, Interview with Abdelaziz Rahabi, ‘On fait un mauvais à la diplomatie algérienne,’ *Tout Sur l’Algérie*, July 26, 2012; Abdelaziz Rahabi, “Quelle diplomatie pour l’Algérie?” *El Watan*, April 9, 2009.

system change. On the contrary, changes have guaranteed continuity⁶⁴. Therefore, even with the generational change that might occur in the next years, it is doubtful whether a significant evolution might happen in the upcoming years.

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Press articles and interviews

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