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More than 100,000 dead, and still the killings go on

Armed Islamist groups in Algeria have stepped up their attacks, just months after a much-publicised government offensive against the militants.

Algerian newspapers say that more than 20 people were killed and 10 kidnapped in a number of attacks on Saturday and Sunday, the highest figure for several months.

“The army's offensive...is now floundering in the face of handicaps like under-equipment, poor communication lines and the high cost of logistics in the hinterland”

El-Khadi Ihsane

The latest wave of attacks comes a year after a peace initiative launched by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika - shortly after he was elected - which included a limited amnesty for Islamic militants who surrendered.

President Bouteflika promised an all-out offensive against rebels who failed to give themselves up by 13 January, but correspondents say that this has proved ineffective.

Mayor among victims

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Algerian newspapers say that eight young people, who had come to work on a farm, were shot dead near the town of Tipaza, 70km west of Algiers, on Saturday night. Shortly beforehand, three people had been killed at a fake roadblock nearby.



President Bouteflika: His offensive is said to have failed

The same night, three people were killed and seven kidnapped in the Tissemsilt area, more than 200km south-west of Algiers.

Several papers reported the killing of the mayor of Erraguene, 300km (200 miles) east of Algiers, and three local guards in an ambush, and a policeman was reported killed on Saturday in Boudouaou, 30km (20 miles) east of Algiers.

Since the start of the January offensive against recalcitrant Islamic militants, involving the call-up of thousands of reservists, at least 200 people a month have still been reported killed in attacks attributed to the militants.

'Failures'

A recent article by the Algiers-based journalist, El-Khadi Ihsane, on the website Algeria Interface says that the offensive is far from being the ruthless clean-up that was promised.

The government initiative "is now floundering in the face of handicaps like under-equipment, poor communication lines and the high cost of logistics in the hinterland," the article says.

The journalist says the offensive was launched against traditional guerrilla strongholds on two fronts - the mountainous areas of Warsenis in the west and Babors in the east - but army engagements with the enemy on both have been "failures".

He says that only a fraction of the families displaced by the violence there have been able to return, according to official figures, while the army has suffered set-backs in areas much closer to the capital.

More than 100,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Algeria since its civil war began in 1992.

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