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New Caledonia Situation Update

Outbreak of violence in Grand Nouméa

New Caledonia has been the scene of particularly violent rioting since 13 May, which have rocked the capital city, **Nouméa**. The violence has erupted over a **draft constitutional bill aimed at reforming the territory's electorate** passed by the National Assembly in the night of 14 to 15 May. The adoption of the bill, which would allow all citizens who have lived in the territory for at least ten years to vote in provincial elections, has sparked anger among **Kanak pro-independence supporters**, who claim that such an expansion could curb their electoral influence and push the Kanak indigenous people further into a minority. Their anger has taken the form of **violent demonstrations**, which have deteriorated into **rioting** plunging the South Pacific French territory into an unprecedented identity, political and security crisis.



Burning vehicle in Nouméa. Source: Nicolas Job/AP

While the **Field Action Coordination Cell (CCAT, pro independence movement)** called for demonstrations in **Nouméa** from 8 to 13 May prior to the vote on the bill, the first **clashes** broke out in the night of 13 to 14 May when scenes of **looting, vandalism** and **skirmishes** between demonstrators and the police were seen. The violence escalated over the two following nights and spread to other towns in the archipelago, namely **Dumbéa** and **Mont-Dore**. As of 16 May, at least **3 civilians and 2 gendarmes have been killed**, while **hundreds of people have been injured**. **Considerable material damage** has also been reported, with the head of the territory's Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimating the damage to amount to more than 200 millions euros.

Declaration of a state of emergency and security stepped up

A **curfew** was imposed in several towns 14 May from 18:00 local time (09:00 CET) to 06:00 local time the following day. The measure has since been extended at a local level. Gatherings in the Nouméa area have been banned, along with the sale of firearms and alcohol. All schools have closed until further notice.

A **state of emergency** has been in force since 05:00 local time (20:00 CET) Wednesday 15 May. An inter-ministerial crisis cell was set up at the Interior Ministry that evening.

16 May, President Emmanuel Macron has chaired a situation monitoring meeting and a second **defence council**. The president also offered to hold a video conference with Caledonian MPs, but this was unable to take place. According to the French presidency, **the different players have no wish to talk to each other for the time being**. For the time being, the president is expected to talk directly with the MPs, but separately.

In a statement, the CCAT pro-independence supporters condemned the “stubbornness” of the French state and announced their decision to step up their action, but in a “peaceful manner”. 16 May, the National Council of Kanak Chiefs, “Inaat Ne Kanaky”, condemned the violence, while also offered its support to the CCAT, stating that it is not a “terrorist group”.



Around 1,800 members of the police force were mobilised within the first hours of the crisis and security reinforcements are expected with the arrival of an additional 500 members of law enforcement. **In total, it is thought that 2,700 members of the police** should be present on the ground by Friday evening. The Interior Ministry notably announced the dispatching of 4 mobile gendarmerie units, 2 sections of the riot police, the RAID intervention police and GIGN gendarmes from 14 May.

Military personnel have been deployed in order to “**secure the ports and the airport** of New Caledonia”, according to French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal. High Commissioner of the Republic in New Caledonia Louis Le Franc has “**banned Tik Tok**” in a bid to limit contact between rioters. In fact, the social media platform is the preferred means of communication between groups responsible for the violence in New Caledonia for the last three nights.

In the evening of 15 May, the Interior Ministry signed five **orders for house arrest** concerning radical supporters of independence, who are believed to belong to the CCAT. More than twenty additional orders should be declared today.

According to the high commissioner of the republic, around 70 arrests were made in 24 hours in connection with the rioting, thereby bringing the **total number of arrests** made in New Caledonia since Monday **to more than 200**.

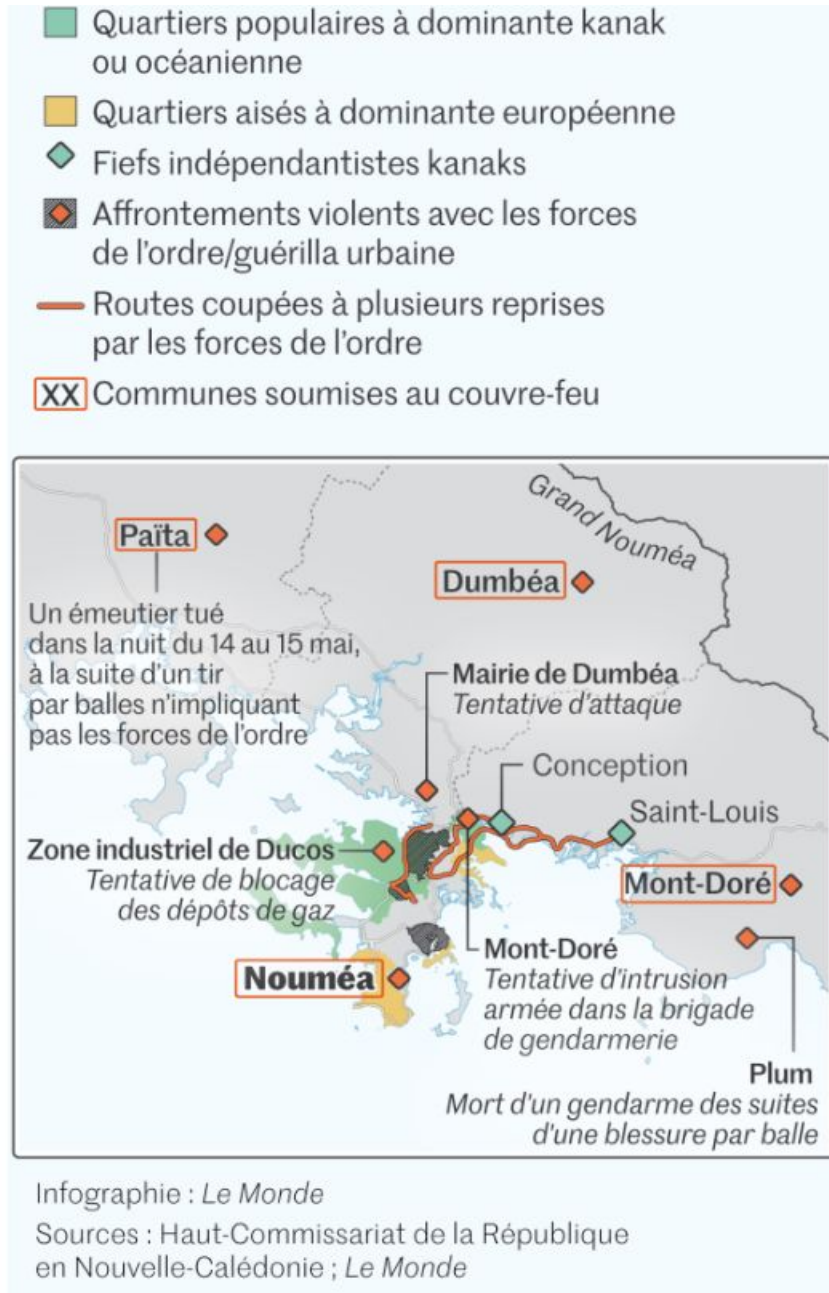
In a statement in the morning of 16 May, Mr. Le Franc praised the “commitment and professionalism” of the police when under attack.

A diplomatic row between Paris and Azerbaijan

16 May, the French interior minister **accused Azerbaijan of interfering** in New Caledonia during an interview on the France 2 television channel. On the subject of Azerbaijan he said, "this isn't a fantasy. It's a reality..." condemning “some of the Caledonian pro-independence leaders have made a deal with Azerbaijan”. **Baku quickly denied** such allegations and denounced the remarks as “insulting”.

The controversy comes after the New Caledonia Congress and the National Assembly of Azerbaijan signed a memorandum of cooperation in April. In fact, Baku had invited pro-independence supporters from Martinique, French Guiana, New Caledonia and Polynesia to set up the “Baku Initiative Group” aimed at supporting French liberation and anti-colonial movements”.

Situation in Grand Nouméa



The widespread presence of weapons in New Caledonia

According to the authorities, 64,000 weapons are declared locally and just as many are held illegally. In a parliamentary report published 29 April 2024, the state services indicated that as many as 100,000 weapons could be detained among a population of 270,000 people, meaning that one inhabitant in three could potentially be in possession of a weapon.

Situation in the archipelago



- Areas over 70% Kanak
- Rallies (demonstrations, roadblocks...)
- Violence reported (gunfire, looting, vandalism...)
- Roads regularly blocked by demonstrators

Carte: Scutum Security First (SSF) • Créé avec Datawrapper

Impact on travel

Airports: the **Nouméa Magenta** and **Nouméa La Tontouta** airports remain closed.

Roads: **many makeshift barricades** have been set up by local residents with the use of wooden crates, cans and wheelbarrows. Some of them are marked with a white flag. **Traps** have been set for the police.

Sealed off neighbourhoods: the **building of the Sénat Coutumier** has been set on fire. The poorer **Auteuil** neighbourhood has been the scene of heavy exchange of fire and many shops, restaurants and the local supermarket have been torched. In addition to Auteuil, the worst affected neighbourhoods are **Rivière salée**, **Dumbéa sur mer**, **Saint Louis**, **Conception** and **Normandie**, but also **Ducos** and **Païta**. Neighbourhoods to the south remain more calm for the time being.

Recommendations

- **Limit your movements to the bare minimum.** Do not try to travel to the airports while they are still closed.
- If possible, **keep well away from all gatherings in the areas the worst affected** by the unrest and violence.
- If you are in an area of intense violence, prepare to evacuate to a safe location once the situation stabilises. **In the event of gunfire, take shelter, lay down on the floor. Make yourself known to the police as soon as you can.**
- If you are in the immediate vicinity of a shooting or riot, move away from the area immediately and go to a safe location.
- **Monitor the development of the situation** via official sources officielles and the SSF alert service.
- Ensure your **telecommunication devices are reliable and in proper working order.** Check your emergency numbers (15 emergency ambulance).
- Stay in contact with both your company managers and your family, telling them of your condition and location.
- Comply with instructions given by the authorities.
- If possible, **stock up on food and water** when shopping. Make sure you have enough fuel, medications and cash for several days in case the violence continues indefinitely.
- **Do not attempt to force through barricades** and keep well away from potential gatherings. If you do encounter a blockade, move away immediately.
- When moving around outside, do not carry any valuables unless absolutely essential in order to minimise the risk of theft.

Outlook

- Although an **airlift** was announced 16 May, there is a **serious threat of shortages** (food, medications...) in the near future after the rioters destroyed and looted many shops across the archipelago.
- The French interior minister has expressed his belief that they are moving towards the **“restoration of peace”** since the state of emergency was declared. However, **the tension is likely to continue in the short-term and ongoing violence, or even an escalation, should not be ruled out**, especially in Nouméa. Gabriel Attal has said that the return of the peace was required in order for the dialogue to continue and guarantee the island’s supply of basic essentials.
- In view of the current tension, a **swift resolution of the conflict seems unlikely at the present time.**

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