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Algeria — Russia Relations: Strategic Partnership in the Age of Geopolitics

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Abstract. The relationship between Algeria and Russia is stronger than at any other time in history. While this may be true in most regards, the historical narratives help to decipher how the Algerian-Russian relationship has evolved to its current state. The problems of modern relations between Algeria and Russia are revealed. The relevance of the topic is linked to the fact that relations between the two countries have undergone a qualitative change in recent years, as military ties have expanded to include economic relations and investment cooperation, leading to a new dynamic in bilateral relations. With growing interdependence, the two countries are also paying attention to the policies of major powers, especially Western powers, and the traditional bilateral strategic cooperation is deepening to address new geostrategic challenges, which will largely determine their future direction. Under these circumstances, it is important to analyze the emerging geopolitical dynamics and determine its impact on the strategic aspects of the bilateral relations. This article aims to highlight the main developments in these relations and to emphasize their evolution in the era of geopolitical tensions. Methodologically, the study is based on political realism. The main sources of the analysis are materials of think tanks, speeches of official officials and others. The study shows what underlies the current cooperation between Algeria and Russia and how geopolitical dynamics affect it. Both countries see each other as important security partners in certain regions, such as North Africa and the Sahel, and as partners in more ambitious projects of a political and strategic nature.

Key words: Algerian-Soviet relations, bilateral relations, security, military, Middle East, North Africa


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Алжирско-российские отношения: стратегическое партнерство в эпоху геополитики

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Аннотация. Раскрывается проблематика современных отношений Алжира и России. Актуальность темы обусловлена тем, что в последние годы отношения между двумя странами претерпели качественную трансформацию, поскольку связи в военной сфере расширились до экономических отношений и инвестиционного сотрудничества, что привело к новой динамике в двусторонних отношениях. В условиях растущей взаимозависимости обе страны также обращают внимание на политику крупных держав, особенно западных, и традиционное двустороннее стратегическое сотрудничество углубляется для решения новых

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геостратегических задач, что во многом будет определять их будущее направление. В этих условиях важно проанализировать формирующуюся геополитическую динамику и определить ее влияние на стратегические аспекты двусторонних отношений. Исследование призвано выделить ключевые события в этих отношениях и сделать упор на их развитие в эпоху геополитической напряженности. Методологически исследование базируется на политическом реализме. Основными источниками для анализа служат материалы аналитических центров, выступления официальных должностных лиц и др. Выявлены факторы, лежащие в основе современного сотрудничества между Алжиром и Россией, и проанализировано влияние геополитической динамики на это сотрудничество. Обе страны рассматривают друг друга как важных партнеров в деле обеспечения безопасности в отдельных регионах, например в Северной Африке и Сахеле, а также как партнеров в более амбициозных проектах политического и стратегического характера.

Ключевые слова: алжирско-советские отношения, двусторонние отношения, безопасность, военные силы, Ближний Восток, Северная Африка

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Introduction

Algeria — Russia relations date back long before the creation of the modern Algeria and Russia states — the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria and the Russian Federation. In fact, interactions have been recorded as early as the late 18th century, when the first important treaty between the two countries was signed under the reign of Catherine the Great (Davison, 1976).

Historically, Algeria — Russia relations have been resilient for decades, enduring different transformations in the geostrategic landscape. The Algerian-Russian relations have maintained their strategic orientation and stability due to the convergence of interests and mutual trust. This relationship owes its stability and sustainability to the legacy of their Cold War postcolonial ties, as well as to the unique trajectories of the two countries.

The theoretical explanation of this paper would be realism. Thus, research on Algeria — Russia relations generally employ traditional realist frameworks to analyse the relationship between the two countries.

Russia sees Algeria as a valuable ally in responding to regional security challenges and as a partner in broader political and strategic

ventures. Meanwhile, Algeria’s geopolitical outlook is influenced by its central location amidst areas of intense competition for political and economic influence by regional and external powers. This combination of systemic and non-systemic variables justifies the relevance of the classical realist framework, since considering either level separately, as alternative explanations would suggest, would be insufficient. Consequently, the realist paradigm essentially views the relationship on the basis of expediency and geopolitical considerations. Thus, Algeria — Russia relations were based on sound geostrategic calculations.

This paper proceeds as follows: in the first section, the author describes the recent history of Algerian-Russian relations, focusing on the renaissance of these relations in recent decades. The second section analyses the interrelationship between Russia’s re-emergence as a revisionist global actor and its significance for Algerian-Russian relations in this context. The third section discusses the realities and challenges of Algerian-Russian relations, particularly in the three main areas of bilateral interaction: military, security, and political.

Algeria — Russia Relations: From the USSR to the Russian Federation

Both Algeria and Russia attach great importance to the historical context of their relations. They view contemporary relations as part of a long association in which the positive past anchors both present and future relations, reflecting this historical continuity even given the changing circumstances in both countries. In this sense, we will review the past decades of Algerian-Soviet and Algerian-Russian relations and examine how the present changes unfold within this broader context. Conversely, this historical context for relations between the Republic of Algeria and the Russian Federation goes back decades, even to the Algerian War of Independence. During this war, the Soviet Union provided Algeria with political, military and financial support (Zoubir, 1987a). The Soviet Union provided military assistance to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN, *Front de libération nationale*), the umbrella organization that coordinated the struggle against colonial France (Shrader, 1999). The Soviet Union was the first country in the world to recognize the interim government of the Algerian Republic in October 1960, and then recognized the rule of law on March 23, 1962, and established diplomatic relations with this African country (Mousli, 2019, p. 285).

Ben Bella Era (1962–1965)

Algeria occupied a crucial position for Soviet policy in the Maghreb: not only because the two countries often agreed on major political issues, but also because of Algeria's leading role in Third World affairs. Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has been able to build a reputation as a stable revolutionary socialist state whose pragmatism has allowed it to establish good relations with both blocs (Zoubir, 1987a). Algeria's independence in July 1962 was warmly greeted by the Soviets, who granted the country a 100 million USD loan in September 1963.

The major factor that brought Algeria and the USSR into a closer relation was the former's need to modernize its military. Between 1964 and 1966, Algeria received substantial military equipment from the Soviet Union, making Ahmed Ben Bella's Algeria become the second largest recipient of Soviet aid in Africa (after Egypt) (Zoubir, 1987a).

Most importantly, that the Soviet Union played a crucial role in facilitating Algeria's industrial development by supporting key industries such as energy, mining and metallurgy, mechanical engineering and the water industry. The Soviet assistance extended to the construction of various facilities, including the El Hadjar Iron and Steel Complex, the Annaba Integrated Steel Mill, the Jijel Thermal Power Plant, the gas pipeline from Alrar to Hassi Messaoud via Tinfuye and the Beni Zid and Tilsedit dams (Zherlitsina, 2015).

In late 1963, Moscow granted about 200 million USD worth of import credits for Soviet machinery and technical equipment and agreed to buy Algerian agricultural products and minerals such as mercury and lead. Following border clashes with Morocco in October–November 1963, the Kremlin also became Algeria's main supplier in an arms race between the two North African countries. The following year, the Soviets pledged to build a petrochemical training and research institute (Ottoway & Ottoway, 1970).

In the spring of 1964, Algeria's first president, Ahmed Ben Bella, visited Moscow, was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, and was declared "Hero of the Soviet Union," an honour that the USSR's strongest socialist ally in the Middle East, which the president Gamal Abdel Nasser, did not receive until the following month when Nikita Khrushchev visited Egypt. One of the main reasons for the Soviets to extend this support to Algeria was to be found in yet another objective in the region, namely, the elimination of Chinese influence (Byrne, 2009).

Houari Boumédiène Era (1965–1976)

The military coup that overthrew Ahmed Ben Bella on June 19, 1965, worried the Soviets tremendously. Moreover, H. Boumédiène's anti-communism worried Moscow, which feared that Algeria was heading down an unpredictable path.

Six months after the coup, H. Boumédiène visited Moscow. Although his reception was not as dramatic as Ben Bella's, H. Boumédiène succeeded in obtaining more economic and military aid than his predecessor (Zoubir, 1987a). The 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of bilateral cooperation. The 1970s were described as the golden age of Algerian-Soviet cooperation, during which Algerian foreign policy aimed to strengthen ties and cooperation with the anti-imperialist powers of the world, including the Soviet Union (John, 1968, p. 342).

The compatibility between the ideologies of the two sides brought closer political views and aspirations and included the struggle for similar values and ideals. Both sides were determined to fight imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism for the sake of "liberty," national independence, peace and peaceful coexistence. Moreover, the two countries had similar attitudes toward many of the American foreign policy actions, which they both condemned in a Joint Communiqué, issued December 18, 1965, following the visit of President Houari Boumédiène to Moscow.¹ American imperialism in South Vietnam and the US aggression against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were regarded by both countries as a serious threat to world peace. However, the Soviet Union's policy did not always prove to be very compatible with the Arab cause, which Algeria had always supported unconditionally,

¹ Le président Boumediene fait à Moscou son premier voyage hors d'Afrique // Le Monde. 14.12.1965. URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1965/12/14/le-president-boumediene-fait-a-moscou-son-premier-voyage-hors-d-afrique_2193276_1819218.html (accessed: 10.10.2023).

especially during the 1973 October War (Dawisha, 1981, pp. 50–51).

At the end of the 1970s, 90% of Algeria's military equipment was of Soviet origin (Grimaud, 1984). The Russian press estimates that Moscow supplied 11 billion USD in military equipment to Algeria between 1962 and 1989, equivalent to 70–80% of Algeria's inventory, and that these weapons were paid for primarily through 11 billion USD in loans that the USSR extended to Algeria (Katz, 2007, p. 152).

Moscow contributes to the development of the mining sector in Algeria and opens its training centres and universities to young Algerian graduates — among other African and Arab graduates. Many executives, engineers and officers of the young Algerian republic benefit from Soviet education, which is accompanied by matrimonial (mixed marriages) and cultural (language learning) ties.

Post-Boumédiène Era

When H. Boumédiène died on December 27, 1978, the Soviets were worried about his succession. The Soviet condolence messages emphasized that H. Boumédiène was "a great friend of the Soviet Union" (Zoubir, 1987a) and that the Algerian Constitution reaffirmed the socialist orientation of the country's development. Although there was no indication that Algeria was going to change its political orientation, what worried the Soviets was probably the decision of the new president, Chedli Benjedid, to remove from the heights of the FLN personalities whose ideological positions seemed too radical. In addition Benjedid's liberalizing reforms in the early 1980s have raised Soviet concerns about the future trajectory of bilateral relations (Mortimer, 2015).

It is generally known that C. Bendjedid was no longer a Boumedienist, but had a neutral position regarding political or ideological affiliation with socialism. During his rule, Algerian trends turned at most 180 degrees

towards the Western bloc. He was also the first Algerian president to visit Paris. In addition U.S.-Algerian relations, which had warmed considerably as a result of Algeria's role in the liberation of the US hostages in Iran in early 1981, improved (Iratni, 1986).

Algerian-Soviet relations, in turn, were not the same as in the 1970s, but they maintained their momentum. For example, during a visit to Moscow in March 1986, C. Benjedid and M.S. Gorbachev condemned American actions in the Gulf of Sidra (Kullaa, 2021, p. 222). However, by the end of the 1980s, aid from Moscow decreased dramatically and eventually dried up, although Algerian military leaders continued to benefit from Russian political support during the black decade 1992–2002 (Mokhefi, 2015).

Algerian-Russian Relations in post-Soviet Period

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, post-Soviet Russia's Middle East politics, like its foreign policy in general, have undergone substantial changes. In this context, Algeria's relations with Moscow became less cooperative. In fact, Russian-Algerian cooperation ceased in the 1990s as both governments struggled with serious internal problems (Titorenko, 2006).

While Russia's economy was in free fall, Algeria was experiencing its "black decade" of conflict between regime security forces and radical Islamist insurgents, which resulted in 200,000 deaths (Pennell, 2021). At the same time, Algeria's decision to join NATO's "Mediterranean Dialogue" in 2000² became a source of tension between Algiers and Moscow.

However, after the two countries' leaders, A. Bouteflika and V.V. Putin, came to power in 1999 and 2000, respectively, bilateral relations began to improve. In 2001, A. Bouteflika paid

² Relations Algeria — NATO // Embassy of Algeria in Brussels. URL: <https://embbussels.mfa.gov.dz/embassy/relations-algeria-nato> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

an official visit to the Russian capital shortly after the visit of Russian Foreign Minister I.S. Ivanov to Algiers. During Bouteflika's visit to Moscow, he and V.V. Putin signed Russia's first declaration of strategic partnership;³ likely in response to Algiers' decision to join the "Mediterranean Dialogue," and both leaders discussed arms sales and cooperation in Algeria's fuel and energy sectors.

Similarly, Putin's historic visit to Algeria in March 2006 marked a turning point in bilateral relations. Putin was the first top-level leader from Moscow to visit Algiers since 1969. Significantly, during Putin's stop in Algeria, the two governments resolved a contentious debt issue, with the Russians agreeing to write off the debt entirely if Algiers agreed to buy an equivalent amount of Russian industrial goods. Algeria also pledged to purchase 7.5 billion USD in military equipment from Moscow.⁴ Thanks largely to an upsurge in oil and gas prices; Algeria had enough resources to become Russia's third largest buyer of military equipment. In the 2000s, Russia's energy giants also played a crucial role in developing Algeria's hydrocarbon mining sector and building of its pipeline infrastructure (Němečková, Melnikovová & Piskunova, 2021, p. 379).

Growing Security and Military Ties: Renewed Partnership

Military relations have long been the most important and vibrant component of Algeria — Russia relations. Bilateral military cooperation

³ Barth M. The Algeria — Russia Strategic Partnership: An Assertive Geopolitical Move? // Brussels International Center for Research and Human Rights. March 22, 2019. URL: <https://www.bic-rhr.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Algeria-Russia%20strategic%20partnership%20-%20Analysis%2C%20North%20Africa%20-%20official.pdf> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

⁴ Algeria Signs Up to Russian Debt-For-Arms Deal // Energy Intelligence. March 14, 2006. URL: <https://www.energyintel.com/0000017b-a7aa-de4c-a17b-e7eafa470000> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

is “unusually strong” and ranges from naval cooperation to arms sales, to combined military and counterterrorism exercises. These examples of cooperation underscore the high level of institutional trust that has arisen between the two militaries. Of all the centres of Algerian power, the army — which remains the first of them — appears to be the one where Russian influence has been the most enduring.⁵ The current chief of staff of the Algerian People’s National Army (PNA), Saïd Chengriha, was trained at the Soviet General Staff Academy in the 1970s. His predecessor, Ahmed Gaid Salah, the strongman of Algerian power after the first months of the popular uprising (*Hirak*) and the architect of the ousting of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was also trained in the Soviet Union.

Arms sales continue to dominate bilateral relations. At the end of the Cold War finished, approximately 90% of the PNA’s arsenal came from the Soviet Union (Mokhefi, 2015). Since the early 2000s, when Algeria embarked on a military modernization effort, it has used its vast oil and natural gas exports to finance extensive arms purchases. Accordingly, as gas and oil prices were relatively high during the time of the Arab Spring, Algeria was able to invest heavily in Russian weapons. The overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, previously a key Russian arms customer, and continued instability in Libya have increased Algeria’s importance as a Russian customer.

A 7.5 billion USD military modernization and training program was unrolled with the purchase of MiG-29 and Su-30 fighters, missile systems, tanks and other equipment.⁶ Despite the fact that 15 of the MiGs were returned in

2008 for its defective components, the deal remained on track. Between 2008 and 2012, Algeria rose from the 22nd to the 6th largest recipient of global arms transfers, with Russia supplying 93% of these weapons, including fighters, 2 submarines, long-range surface-to-air missile systems, and nearly 200 T-90 tanks (Mokhefi, 2015). Between 2014 and 2018, Algeria was Russia’s third largest customer, purchasing 14% of its total arms exports. Russia provided two thirds of Algeria’s arms, serving as Moscow’s largest African market and accounting for half of all arms sales to the continent.⁷ During this period, Algeria was the world’s fifth largest arms importer, having increased them by 55% from the 2009 to 2013 period. From 2016 to 2020, Algeria accounted for 15% of Russian arms exports, according to SIPRI.⁸

In addition Algeria imports a wide range of Russian weapons in all major weapons categories, including some of the most advanced systems available, such as Iskander-E short-range ballistic missiles and Project 636 submarines.⁹ Russia appears determined to keep its market share in Algeria due to Algeria’s high demand and ability to pay for the latest Russian weapons.¹⁰

⁷ Ramani S. *Russia’s Cautious Calculus in Algeria* // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. March 22, 2019. URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78667> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

⁸ Da Silva D.L., Tian N., Béraud-Sudreau L., Marksteiner A., Liang X. *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2021* // SIPRI Fact Sheet. April 2022. URL: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs_2204_milex_2021_0.pdf (accessed: 10.10.2023).

⁹ *Algerian Navy — Modernisation* // Global Security. October 10, 2022. URL: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/algeria/navy-modernization.htm> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

¹⁰ Pritchett J. *Less Than a Full Deck: Russia’s Economic Influence in the Mediterranean* // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. July 21, 2021. URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/07/21/less-than-full-deck-russia-s-economic-influence-in-mediterranean-pub-84973> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

⁵ Mohammedi A. *Russia — Algeria: A Flexible and Pragmatic Partnership* // FMES. January 22, 2021. URL: <https://fmes-france.org/russia-algeria-a-flexible-and-pragmatic-partnership/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

⁶ *Russia in NATO’s South: Expansionist Strategy or Defensive Posture?* / ed. by C. Berger, C. Salloum // NDC Research Paper. 2021 (January). No. 16. P. 11. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29561> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

New Geopolitical Dynamics and New Drivers for Algeria — Russia Cooperation

Shared Concerns and Convergent Geopolitical Interests

The relationship between Algeria and Russia is probably influenced by three sets of factors: geopolitical, economic and shared security. Faced with the three geopolitical axes that have emerged in the Middle East (namely the counter-revolutionary axis led by Abu Dhabi, the axis led by Ankara — Doha and the resistance axis led by Tehran), Russia and Algeria share the same flexibility.

In the 21st century, Russia's foreign policy doctrine was based on the rejection of alliances and bloc logic, and thanks to such a course, Moscow was able to take advantage of its military successes in Syria after 2015. After an exacerbation of tensions with Damascus' main adversaries in the early years of the Syrian conflict (Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Qatar), who reproached him for his decisive support for Syrian power, Russia ended up appearing as an essential partner. It maintains excellent relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (one of Russia's main economic partners in the Arab world), while maintaining an almost systematic dialogue with Türkiye (on Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh) and continuing cooperation with Tehran and Damascus.¹¹ Russia intends to maintain good relations with all actors, while ensuring that no relationship is jeopardized by another: cooperation with Iran while maintaining relations with Israel; dialogue with Türkiye while maintaining relations with the Emirates.

On its own scale, Algeria is following the Russian example and trying to maintain good relations with almost everyone by a relative stability in its external relations. While Russia

¹¹ Mohammedi A. Russia — Algeria: A Flexible and Pragmatic Partnership // FMES. January 22, 2021. URL: <https://fmes-france.org/russia-algeria-a-flexible-and-pragmatic-partnership/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

sees flexibility in foreign policy (the ability to engage in dialogue with all actors) as an instrument of power and a vector of economic opportunities, Algeria sees it simply as a protection mechanism.

Despite occasional, largely exaggerated tensions, the Algerian government maintains good relations with Abu Dhabi. Ideologically, the Algerian leaders represent everything that the Emirates support in the Arab world: military power against the instability that democracy would bring and against the terrorist threat. On this particular point, Algiers, Moscow and Abu Dhabi seem to be on the same wavelength. In addition, Algeria is the second largest customer of the UAE's military industry.¹² In Libya, Algeria has opted for a balanced position between the government of national unity and the army of Khalifa Haftar.¹³ With its main sponsor, Türkiye, Algeria maintains a relationship analogous to the Russian-Turkish one: it sees in it an essential partner without necessarily supporting its foreign policy activities. Finally, Algeria has had good relations with Iran since 2000. Like Russia, Algeria supports the Tehran — Damascus axis (for example, by promoting Syria's return to the Arab League) with a certain caution. This caution stems from Algeria's commitment to maintaining strong bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia.

The situation in Western Sahara can be singled out separately. Historically, Russia's position on the Western Sahara issue is in line with that of Algeria (Zoubir, 1987b, p. 18).

¹² Mezran K., Henneberg S. Gulf Influence in the Maghreb // New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy. June 1, 2022. URL: <https://newlinesinstitute.org/north-africa/gulf-influence-in-the-maghreb/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

¹³ See: Libye: le chef de la diplomatie algérienne rencontre le maréchal Haftar à Benghazi // Le Figaro. 05.02.2020. URL: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/libye-le-chef-de-la-diplomatie-algerienne-rencontre-le-marechal-haftar-a-benghazi-20200205> (accessed: 10.10.2023); Fayez Al-Sarraj arrives in Algiers // APS. June 20, 2020. URL: <https://www.aps.dz/en/algeria/34626-fayez-al-sarraj-arrive-in-algiers> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

In addition to its longstanding relations with Algeria, Moscow maintains warm relations with the POLISARIO Front. The latter has welcomed Moscow's role in mediating between the different parties to the conflict and in holding additional leverage against Morocco if necessary. Moreover, despite its traditional support for the POLISARIO Front and its turbulent relations with Rabat, Algeria has adopted a cautious and restrained approach to the current tensions in Western Sahara.¹⁴

From Russia's perspective, besides Algeria's role in ensuring regional stability in North Africa, this country makes a significant contribution to the fight against terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel region, actively participates in international efforts to achieve a national accord in Mali and has a constructive mediating potential in the Libyan settlement. Counterterrorism remains a core interest for both Algeria and Russia. Since 2016, the governments in Algiers and Moscow have also begun sharing intelligence on the movement of terrorist organizations throughout the Maghreb.¹⁵

Ultimately, Russia and Algeria share numerous representations and common biases: an emphasis on stability (particularly, through the importance given to the fight against terrorism) and the resolution of conflicts through mediation. Furthermore, Algeria has been one of the only eight African countries that Russian presidents have visited in the last two decades. Certainly, the choice of countries visited reflects Russia's geographical priorities on the continent (Hamchi & Rebiai, 2014).

¹⁴ Sahara Occidental: l'anniversaire du cessez-le feu revient en plein guerre // APS. 06.09.2021. URL: <https://www.aps.dz/monde/127045-sahara-occidental-l-anniversaire-du-cessez-le-feu-revient-en-plein-guerre> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

¹⁵ Feuer S., Borshchevskaya A. Russia Makes Inroads in North Africa // The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. November 2, 2017. URL: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russia-makes-inroads-north-africa> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

Ukraine Crisis in Algeria — Russia Relations

Algeria maintains a balanced and impartial position on the Ukrainian crisis. This supposed neutrality is explained by multiple geopolitical reasons, but also by the military weight and the growing economic influence of Russia in the region. For example, Algeria was one of 35 states that abstained from voting and was therefore not among four others which, apart from Russia, had opposed the United Nations General Assembly resolution ES-11/1: North Korea, Belarus, Eritrea and Syria.¹⁶

Algeria's position was, on the one hand, unwillingness to take sides in a conflict that did not it, and, on the other, a commitment to peace and a negotiated solution to the conflict. In early April 2022, a delegation led by Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra thus met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Warsaw. The result of these consultations was the endorsement of 'direct negotiations' between the two belligerents.¹⁷ The visit took place within the framework of the Arab League Contact Group on the Ukrainian crisis, which also includes Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan, and the Secretary-General of the Arab League.

As the war in Ukraine rapidly escalates, Algeria's anti-imperialist legacy is juxtaposed with its historically strong ties to Russia. Algeria's ties to Ukraine, by comparison, are much less robust. This mix of factors, domestic

¹⁶ Ghebouli Z. L. The War in Ukraine: A Test for Algiers' Non-Alignment Doctrine // The Middle East Institute. July 7, 2022. URL: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/war-ukraine-test-algiers-non-alignment-doctrine> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

¹⁷ Belkaid A. Maghreb — Ukraine: L'Algérie et le Maroc refusent de choisir // Orient XXI. 19.05.2022. URL: <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/maghreb-ukraine-1-l-algerie-et-le-maroc-refusent-de-choisir,5603> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

and international, historical and contemporary, helps explain Algeria's position.¹⁸

Algeria is also trying to adopt a careful balancing act between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states which have imposed economic sanctions on Moscow. That's why Algeria did not take an official political position on the Russian-European conflict, refraining from declaring support for or condemning Russia's military operation in Ukraine.¹⁹ All the statements issued by the Algerian Foreign Ministry focused on the conditions of Algerians in Ukraine.²⁰

Deepening Algeria's Emerging Turn "Eastward": A "New Era" in Algeria — Russia Relations

The new post-*Hirak* leadership under Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in December 2019, reaffirmed the primacy of "Look to the East" policy. For him, it was less a matter of updating a policy put on hold by his predecessor, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, than of following on a diplomatic line adopted and pursued after a decade of diplomatic and foreign policy quasi paralysis of the Bouteflika regime.²¹ Actually, Algeria "Look to the East"

¹⁸ Farrand A. Russia's War in Ukraine Will Relieve the Pressure on Algeria's Leaders for Now // Democracy for the Arab World Now. March 4, 2022. URL: <https://dawnmena.org/russias-war-in-ukraine-will-relieve-the-pressure-on-algerias-leaders-for-now/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

¹⁹ Sakhri M. A Stable Balance: Understanding the Algerian Stance on the War in Ukraine // Politics-DZ. December 26, 2022. URL: <https://www.politics-dz.com/en/a-stable-balance-understanding-the-algerian-stance-on-the-war-in-ukraine/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²⁰ An Insight into Algeria's Position on Russia — Ukraine Conflict // Future for Advanced Research and Studies. March 15, 2022. URL: <https://futureuae.com/en-US/Mainpage/Item/7192/declared-neutrality-an-insight-into-algerias-position-on-russia-ukraine-conflict> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²¹ Vasilenko A., Lukyanov G. International Organizations in Algeria's Foreign Policy // Russian International Affairs Council. February 7, 2023. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and->

policy strategy aims to strengthen Algeria's strategic cooperation with Russia and China. Thus, it means that in the era of changing world order Algeria has made its choice and it is joining the Sino-Russian political and economic pole.²²

Clearly, Algeria's relationship with Russia is a legacy partnership, born out of post-independence necessity and convenience. Labelled as "a strategic partnership" the partnership between Algeria and Russia is characterized by a fundamental asymmetry in the distribution of material capabilities, international status and ambitions between the two partners (Zherlitsina, 2015). In this sense, Algeria, the largest country in Africa and the Arab world, holds significant geopolitical importance, situated as a major Mediterranean country, it also exerts influence as a heavyweight in the African Union, a member of the Arab League, and the Non-Aligned Movement, and as an anti-imperialism actor, which is considered a highly valuable geostrategic asset in Russia. Despite of the firm non-alignment doctrine and Algeria's self-perception as a non-aligned power, its foreign policy is much more complex. In this regard, in the face of the anticipated changes in the international system, Russia plays a key role within the Algeria "Look to the East" strategy.²³

More broadly, for the Algerian leaders, relations with Russia have also provided a stabilizing anchor through the more irregular ups and downs of the Algerian-European

[comments/analytics/international-organizations-in-algerias-foreign-policy/](https://www.russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/international-organizations-in-algerias-foreign-policy/) (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²² Blank S. Algeria and Russia Are Uniting to Divide West Africa // The Hill. September 21, 2023. URL: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4214238-algeria-and-russia-are-uniting-to-divide-west-africa/> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²³ Rumer E. Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None // Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. October 31, 2019. URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

relationship since the 2019–2021 Algerian protests. Similarly, while public opinion plays a limited role in shaping Algerian foreign policy, polls in Algeria confirm an overwhelmingly positive view of Russia and largely negative views of the United States and Western major powers.²⁴ The Algerian and Russian political élites also express loyalty to each other, on the basis of common goals and a shared vision on various issues. Simultaneously, however, Algeria's new approach seems to be different: by turning to Russia, Algeria is not only seeking to escape Western hegemony in a global power shifts system by looking for “all-weather partners.” Rather, it seems prone to foster the creation of the emerging anti-Western alliance. Arguably, for Algeria, “multipolarization” gives it the chance to project itself more emphatically and also to work with its Eurasian friends to defend its wide-ranging interests.

Algeria can define at least two main benefits from leaning towards the East; first, it is a political-security advantage. After all, Algeria faces destabilization across North Africa and the Sahel (Medushevskii & Malyutin, 2023). Therefore, in the security sphere, the eastward approach can be considered as a balancing act, putting Algeria in a state of equilibrium with foreign powers. Secondly, Algeria focuses on building economic relations with Russia and China, as well as the BRICS countries, in order to boost its economic growth.

In this evolving context, in June 2023, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune embarked on a significant visit to Russia, where he was warmly welcomed by President Vladimir Putin, marking a remarkable diplomatic event.²⁵

²⁴ See: Algeria Country Report // Arab Barometer VI. 2021. URL: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Algeria-Arab-Barometer-Public-Opinion-2021-ENG.pdf> (accessed: 10.10.2023); Opinion Polls in Algeria // EU Neighbors South. 2021. URL: <https://south.euneighbours.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Opinion-Polls-2022-Algeria.pdf> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²⁵ President of the Republic Arrives in Moscow for Three-Day State Visit // APS. June 13, 2023.

Tebboune's choice to hold his formal presidential visit in Moscow, amidst the Russia — Ukraine politico-military crisis, despite strong criticism from Europe and the United States,²⁶ is no accident and reflects the heightening trend of the regime in Algeria to strengthen ties with Russia; which were further strengthened by the signing of a “Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Partnership.”²⁷

During Tebboune's visit to Russia, the economic relations and technological cooperation between the two countries were the focal point of the discussions, including civil nuclear cooperation. A. Tebboune urged Russian enterprises to consider investing in Algeria during his presence at the World Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg as a guest of honor. Notably, there has been a noticeable influx of Russian investment across various sectors, encompassing energy, pharmaceuticals, transportation, logistics, and infrastructure.²⁸ While in Russia, President Putin highlighted the inauguration of a square named after the Algerian national hero Emir Abdelkader in Moscow. This gesture not only signifies the strengthening of Russo-Algerian relations but

URL: <https://www.aps.dz/en/algeria/47872-president-of-the-republic-arrives-in-moscow-for-three-day-state-visit> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²⁶ Tebboune's Visit to Moscow Likely to Fuel Western Concerns About Algeria's Foreign Policy // The Arab Weekly. June 16, 2023. URL: <https://theArabweekly.com/tebboune-visit-moscow-likely-fuel-western-concerns-about-algerias-foreign-policy> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²⁷ Algeria — Russia: Signing of In-Depth Strategic Partnership Declaration, Several Agreements and MOUs // People's Democratic Republic of Algeria Permanent Mission of Algeria to the UN — New York. 2023. URL: <https://pmnewyork.mfa.gov.dz/news-and-press-releases/algeria-russia-signing-of-in-depth-strategic-partnership-declaration-several-agreements-and-mous> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

²⁸ Notte H. Dangerous Decline: Russia's Military and Security Influence in the Global South and the Implications for the United States // CNS Occasional Paper. 2023. No. 58. URL: https://nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RSI-Short-Report_Notte_2023_OP_CNS2.pdf (accessed: 10.10.2023).

also carries a historical message directed at France; Abdelkader's resistance to the French colonial occupation of Algeria in the 19th century is of great significance.²⁹

Conclusion

This paper argues that traditional geopolitical interests still underpin the Algeria — Russia relationship, including fighting terrorism and ensuring internal stability

²⁹ The President of Russia and the President of Algeria Made Statements for the Press // The President of Russia. June 15, 2023. URL: <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/71437> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

in North Africa and the Sahel, relying on strong military-to-military relations, and pursuing of growing economic ties. These shared interests are the ballast for the mutual support that the two governments provide for one another in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and in regional relations. The predominance of security issues also helps explain the strong Algerian-Russian military-to-military relationship. Russia counts on Algeria to support Moscow's position on some of Russia's vital national objectives, and Algeria sees Russia as an important partner in assisting Algeria with its national security needs.

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