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Strategic U.S. Engagement with Algeria

A Pathway amid Shifting Global Dynamics

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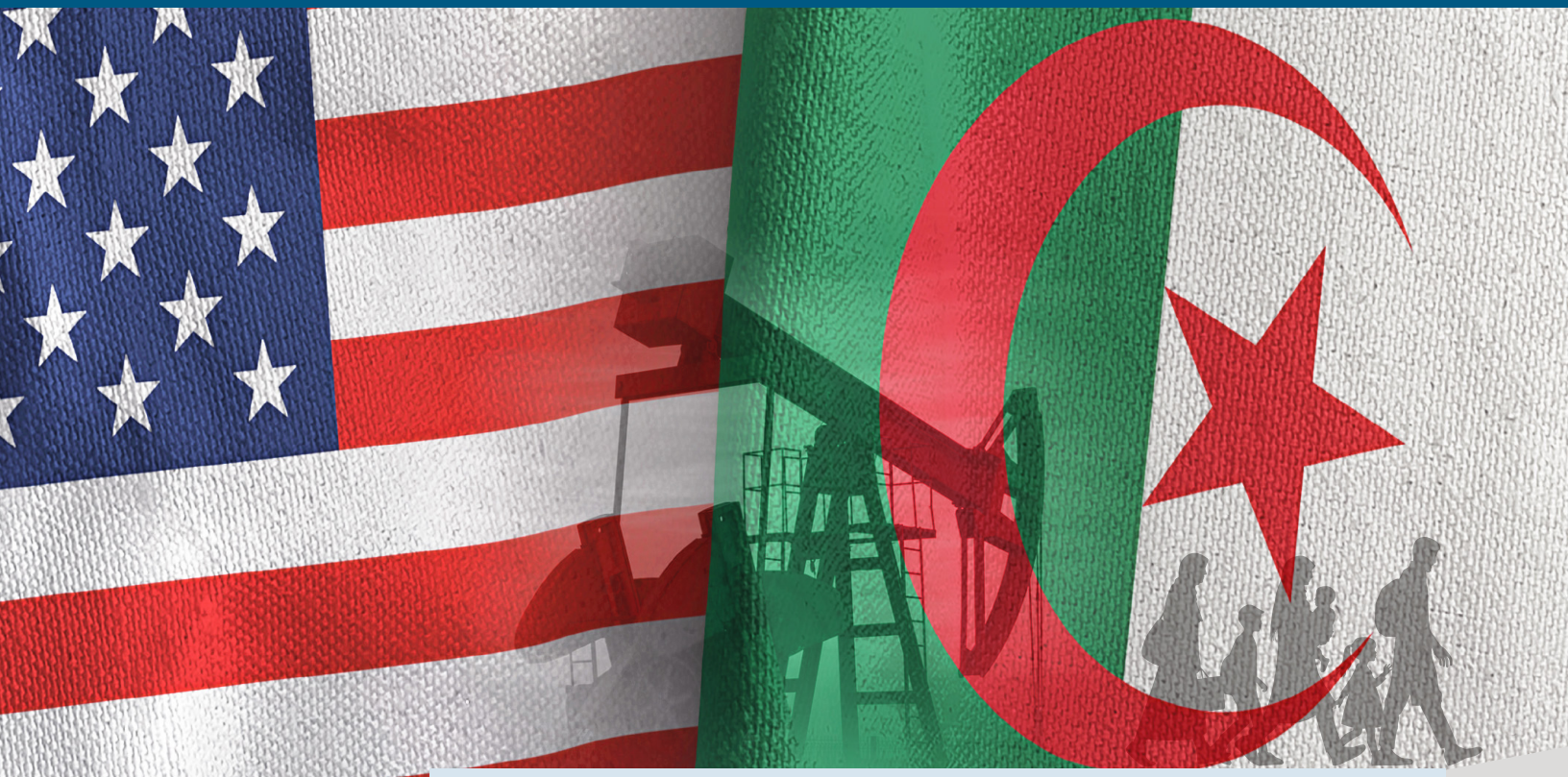


Executive Summary

Algeria has a well-earned reputation for resistance to change. While some view the government's current efforts to engage globally and address domestic challenges as ultimately insignificant, others see external challenges like the Western Sahara conflict and roiling domestic dissatisfaction as movers that could open up the system and facilitate changes in Algeria's international partnerships.

For the United States, Algeria's future direction matters for several reasons: (1) Washington has already begun to invest in deepening this bilateral

relationship, while Algiers too has shown signs of wanting to improve relations. (2) Algeria, like other countries, has sought to reap the benefits of China's expanding global economic engagement. (3) Perhaps most important, Algeria can serve as a key U.S. security partner in an increasingly volatile region.

Washington therefore has a clear incentive to encourage Algeria to open up its system—and society. In the longer term at least, this could help reinforce the economic and social stability of European states, while helping prevent Algeria from significantly deepening its partnerships with America's strategic competitors. It would also allow for deepened U.S.-Algeria security and counterterrorism cooperation, which will almost surely remain an American priority. Finally, it would facilitate expanded U.S. corporate opportunities in this large, relatively wealthy country.

To successfully guide its counterpart onto the path of reform, the United States must first make Algeria feel heard. Washington's recent increased engagement of Algiers—exemplified in a January 2025 defense MOU and its associated Joint Military Commission—reflects this approach. Yet to bring engagement to a new level, Washington must demonstrate consistent respect for Algiers and make clear that it is not simply acting out of self-interest. Regular dialogues should therefore be held with the goal of absorbing Algeria's key concerns and desires regarding the bilateral partnership, and vice versa, especially around the key areas of security and energy.

In light of growing instability in the Sahel, Washington should seize on Algiers's eagerness to be a regional security leader and help promote the country's excellence in counterterrorism. Such efforts should explicitly recognize and build on Algeria's existing capabilities rather than focusing on U.S. endeavors to strengthen Algerian capabilities. The greater the mutual confidence and respect, the more likely Algeria is to offer additional intelligence sharing and other forms of cooperation—perhaps eventually to even include contributing to multilateral peacekeeping initiatives elsewhere on the continent. In addition:

- Algeria's approach to migration is largely driven by security concerns, especially in border areas. Possibly in exchange for increased support with its border operations, Washington should encourage Algeria's continued efforts to adhere to international standards in human trafficking, which remains a problem in the country.

- The United States can leverage Algeria's interest in partnering with U.S. firms to exploit its shale reserves without depleting the water supply in Algerian communities. The U.S. government should coordinate with the Algerian private energy sector to encourage complementary water-saving measures such as subsidy reductions. U.S. technical experts, to the extent that they are still in place, can also work with Algeria on improving its agricultural efficiency.

- In other sectors such as healthcare, where Algiers is likewise aiming to develop its domestic capabilities, the U.S. government should identify Algerian entrepreneurs who can benefit from partnerships with experienced American companies.

- Mining and agro-industry are two additional nonhydrocarbon sectors that the Algerian government hopes to develop, offering opportunities for collaboration.

Wooing Algeria will require patience and persistence so that commercial cooperation can grow. American businesses often express frustration when their requests for cooperation with Algiers are met with an extraordinarily slow—and sometimes no—response. Yet on occasion, patience has paid off, such as when the Algerian government recently issued a veterinary license for Texas cattle farmers to export their dairy cows to Algeria, a potentially major export market. In business exchanges, just as with energy and security, Algeria can be a useful partner as long as U.S. actors are prepared to operate on Algeria's terms.

Diplomatically, Washington will need to keep up its heightened engagement if it wants the relationship to thrive. Boosting Algeria's self-perception as a valued

partner will be critical given the unprecedented Western alignment behind Morocco's plan to negotiate a resolution to the Western Sahara conflict at the UN Security Council, and what appears to be an irreversible U.S. position of recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. If convinced to do so, Algiers might even conceivably play a role in persuading the Polisario to accept a negotiated model of self-governance, with the Moroccan autonomy plan as the starting framework. But this unlikely development would have to be premised on U.S. respect for Algeria.

In addition to energy and security cooperation, Algeria is eager for U.S. cultural engagement, particularly around English-language study opportunities. This has become even truer with the expansion of English as a second language in Algerian schools and the country's need for qualified instructors. To take advantage of this opportunity, the United States should expand funding not only for educational programs but also for training in areas like agricultural water management. Such programming could help improve Algerians' perceptions of the United States, given that a majority currently view China more favorably.

The recommendations outlined here might seem to go against the grain of current U.S. diplomacy and trade. Yet to an extent, Algeria's traditional efforts to ensure self-reliance, as well as its natural resource endowments, may have buffered it against tariffs and cuts to funding aid. As a result, taking the recommended steps may be more feasible for Algeria than other partners for which U.S. development assistance and trade have traditionally been more important, including Morocco. Algeria is indeed a country of great opportunity, and it has many strengths, including a commitment to diplomatic mediation and dialogue, significant natural resources, and a vibrant youth culture. But it also occupies an increasingly unstable region, for which a domestic or migration crisis could reverberate regionally and even globally. The United States should therefore devote energy to shaping the bilateral relationship in a way that ensures stability and guards against an Algerian drift away from U.S. interests.

Algeria is well known for its resistance to change and opaque decisionmaking, rendering its future hard to predict. For some, apparent efforts by the Algerian leadership to enhance the country's role on the world stage while also responding to the need for domestic reform are merely a repeat of similar moments in the country's post-independence history. Yet for others, shifting external dynamics—particularly around the Western Sahara conflict and regional instability—combined with clear indications of popular dissatisfaction and mounting economic pressures suggest real potential for Algeria to move toward a more open system and attendant changes in its international partnerships.

In the coming years, the fundamental question is whether Algeria will default to stasis amid daunting challenges at home and abroad, or take the path of implementing gradual but lasting change. For the United States, the effects of such pressures and Algeria's direction matter for several reasons. First, the United States has already begun to invest in deepening this bilateral relationship, and Algiers—whether in response or of its own accord—has also shown signs of wanting to improve relations with Washington. Meanwhile, Algeria—like other countries in the Middle East and North Africa and elsewhere—has sought to reap the benefits of China's expanding global economic engagement. Perhaps most important, Algeria can be a key security partner in an increasingly volatile region. Strengthening the bilateral relationship is in both countries' interests for that reason alone. Finally, an improved bilateral relationship would help develop a solid foundation of trust—something the Algerian leadership does not dole out lightly. Such a foundation would in turn allow the United States to pursue other business and commercial opportunities in the country.

This paper examines possible directions for the U.S.-Algeria relationship against the backdrop of changes inside and outside the North African country since the Arab uprisings of 2011, along with Algeria's responses to these changes.[1] Although the paper considers scenarios for the near to medium term, the United States would do well to treat them as an urgent priority. Not only do both countries have a

president beginning his second term,[2] but both face potentially dramatic changes in their foreign policy landscapes. For the United States, the reference is to major disruptions to its traditional alliances with Europe, with which Algeria interacts closely. For Algeria, this primarily involves the Western Sahara issue along with shifting dynamics in the Sahel, as well as with Russia and potentially in Europe and elsewhere in North Africa. Given the relative distance between Washington and Algiers—particularly as compared to other countries in the region, including Algeria's rival Morocco[3]—this moment of global upheaval holds the potential for transforming this bilateral relationship as well.

The paper argues that Algeria is headed in one of two directions. In the first, the leadership could—as it has done historically—cling to its statist economic model and relatively closed political system, cycling through periods of instability and unrest, only to be rescued by a rise in global energy prices that allows it to ultimately escape major reforms. The second scenario envisions an "emerging Algeria" status, in which it increasingly embraces international partnerships and domestic reforms that in turn perpetuate a more dynamic and productive economy, flourishing society, and influential role in the region and the world. The paper then gives recommendations for Washington to support favorable bilateral relations given this uncertain outlook.

Methodology and Organization

This paper draws conclusions about future directions Algeria could take based on recent trends documented in public sources and the author's conversations with Algerian and American officials. Such conclusions are inherently limited by the uncertainty of the external environment. How will Algeria and the other actors involved in the Western Sahara conflict attempt to move the issue forward—or alternatively, bog it down?[4] What direction will U.S.-Russia or U.S.-Europe relations take in the coming years that could also affect Algeria's strategic environment? Will Algeria or one of its neighbors experience a sudden leadership change that forces unexpected actions? A multitude of factors could affect Algerian decisionmaking. As a result, this paper approaches questions of the future by simply outlining what is realistically possible and then speculating about what is likely based on the examination of events—and Algerian responses to them—in the recent past.

The paper begins by providing a background of bilateral relations since Algeria's independence from France, followed by an overview of Algeria's key relationships with other countries and regions. It then reviews recent political, economic, diplomatic/security, and societal trends in order to illustrate how Algerian authorities have simultaneously signaled an openness to change and an unwillingness to part with the past. Finally, it describes possible scenarios for Algeria's future and provides recommendations for how Washington can shape a productive future relationship with Algiers.

Background on U.S.-Algeria Relations

Since gaining independence from France in 1962, Algeria has been a relatively closed country. Its policies have been driven by fierce adherence to principles of self-sufficiency, noninterference, and nonalignment. Yet Algeria has also long sought to demonstrate its relevance on the world stage, such as during the early 2000s when oil prices were high and the United States was seeking regional partners for its war on terror. Partly as a result of these characteristics, U.S.-Algeria relations have remained more or less stable but never grown particularly close.

In recent decades, U.S. engagement with Algeria has rested on three pillars: economic cooperation, counterterrorism and security cooperation, and

cultural exchange. Economic activity is considerable: the United States was Algeria's number-one source of foreign direct investment in 2023, primarily driven by hydrocarbons.[5] But Algerian exports to the United States are small, primarily concentrated in minerals and refined petroleum products.[6] Algeria has never been a major aid recipient, which—along with its hydrocarbon-based economy—has limited U.S. points of leverage in the relationship.

Examples of cultural programs include English-language learning and teaching, government exchanges, and cultural heritage preservation.[7] Officials from both countries insist that appetite for English language among Algerians is huge, as is demand for opportunity to visit, study, and work in the United States. The U.S. government has also been investing in establishing direct flights between the two countries as a means of enhancing bilateral exchanges, including commercial exchanges.[8]

Practically speaking, security cooperation dominates the bilateral agenda. The countries have a shared interest in containing extremist movements across the Sahel and otherwise preventing regional instability that could produce massive influxes of migrants into Europe. To date, the two countries have held six strategic dialogues and a joint military dialogue, and the U.S. Department of State has funded programs for the Algerian government in counterterrorism and law enforcement. Other Algerian ministries such as those of health and justice have also received American trainings in issues such as anti-corruption.[9]

Algerian military capabilities are significant. The country is one of the top spenders globally on defense, with its $22 billion in 2024 representing approximately 8 percent of GDP and at least 21 percent of all expenditures, and the fifth-largest arms importer in the world.[10] Its army alone is approximately 130,000 members strong, of a total national population of about 46 million.[11] (Interestingly, the Moroccan army numbers nearly 200,000, out of a population of some 37 million, but this is likely because of the heavy military presence in Western Sahara.) The reported purchase and expected initial delivery in 2025 of fifth-generation Su-57e fighter jets from Russia would make Algeria's air capabilities the best in Africa.[12] Its steadily increasing defense budget since 2023 reflects its growing concerns about stability in the neighboring Sahel and its arms race with Morocco, as will be discussed below.[13]

Algeria also aspires to be a regional leader in counterterrorism cooperation. Often touting its domestic experience in combating extremism during the 1990s,[14] Algeria has assumed a relatively prominent role since 2001—for example, by helping establish a joint military command in 2009–10 of Sahelian countries called the Comité d'État-Major Operationnel Conjoint (CEMOC). The grouping has aimed to engage in intelligence sharing and conduct joint military patrols, and Algeria has provided significant equipment and training for other Sahelian members. Outside intelligence sharing, however, the initiative has experienced numerous pitfalls, including lack of necessary equipment for quick deployments and disagreement over key issues.[15] Algeria has played a key role in African Union security and counterterrorism programs, and continues to host the Union's African Center for the Study and Research on [*sic*] Terrorism.[16]

Over the past half-decade, Algeria has enjoyed expanded engagement from Washington. Although some attribute this to friction with Russia caused by the Ukraine invasion, an increase in high-level official U.S. visits began even before the war (see figure 1). The activity likely reflects Washington's recognition of Algeria's potential as a key regional security partner. Algeria has likewise shown an interest in deepening its relationship with the United States. Key indicators include the January 2025 signing of a "first of its kind" defense memorandum of understanding and earlier reports, in late 2024, of Algeria's hiring of a new lobbying firm in Washington.[17] Also in 2024, the two countries signed an MOU for cooperation on the reduction of methane emissions.[18]

Figure 1.

U.S. Official Visits to Algeria Since 2011

Algeria's role as a U.S. security partner along with apparent challenges in its relationship with Russia have fostered increased American engagement in recent years.

Gen. Carter F. Ham, commander, AFRICOM (Jun)

Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken (Jul)

Adm. Michelle J. Howard, commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, and U.S. Naval Forces Africa (May)

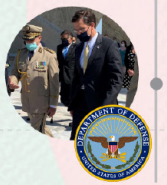
Congressional delegation, House Committee on Appropriations, led by Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) (Jul)

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Chidi Blyden and Gen. Kais Djenidi (Mar)

Secretary of State Antony Blinken (Mar & Apr)

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman (Mar)

Brett McGurk, National Security Council; Yael Lempert, Department of State; and Jeremy Berndt, National Security Council (Dec)



Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander, AFRICOM (Sep)

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper (Oct)

Assistant Secretary of State Michele Sison (Jun)

Delegation from State, Treasury, and Defense Departments (Jun)

Assistant Secretary of State Todd D. Robinson (Nov)

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Joshua Harris (Dec)

Gen. Michael Langley, commander, U.S. Africa Command (Jul)

General Langley (Jul)

5
4
3
2
1
0

2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Feb & Oct)

Secretary of State John Kerry (Apr)

Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz (Jun)

Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, commander, AFRICOM (Apr)

USTDA

Carl B. Kress, U.S. Trade and Development Agency (Jul)

Congressional delegation led by Rep. Stephen F. Lynch (D-MA) (Oct)

Barbara Barrett, Secretary of the Air Force; David Schenker, Assistant Secretary of State; and Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, commander, U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa (Jan)

Acting Assistant Secretary of State Joey Hood (Jul)

USNS *Trenton* visits Port of Oran (Nov)

USS *Forrest Sherman* visits Port of Algiers (May)

Sources for this data include the U.S. Army, Department of Defense, Department of State, and U.S. embassy to Algeria.

Algeria's Other Key Relationships

Outside North Africa, Algeria's size, natural resources, and massive weapons purchases command attention from middle, or regional, powers like Turkey and Iran as well as major powers like Russia and China.[19] While global power competition plays out all across North Africa, Algeria is particularly susceptible given its history of professed nonalignment—in contrast to neighboring Morocco and Tunisia, which have traditionally been more Western-oriented, although less so lately for Tunisia. This is evident, for example, in how members of the Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian publics view various great powers, with the latter two reporting more favorable views of the United States and less favorable views of Russia and China compared to Algeria.[20] The country's position as one of Africa's largest energy producers, strategically located along the Mediterranean maritime trade route, also makes it a potential flashpoint for acute competition.[21]

Algeria has historically been a fierce defender of the Palestinian cause and has tried on various occasions to mediate among Palestinian factions.[22] With its foreign policy firmly rooted in principles of peaceful dispute resolution, Algiers has also tried to assert itself as a mediator in African conflicts, including in Libya, Mali, Eritrea/Ethiopia, and Sudan. Although the United States has never prioritized resolving conflicts in Africa, Washington could potentially seek to capitalize on Algeria's eagerness to restore its global image as a capable peace broker on the continent.

Algeria's diplomatic and military relations with Moscow have always been deeper and stronger than those with the United States, constituting an area of concern for Washington. In recent years, however, Russia's global maneuvering and particularly its invasion of Ukraine have challenged ties with Moscow.[23] This is both because the war constrained Russia's weapons supply to Algeria and because the invasion constituted for Algeria a violation of Ukraine's national sovereignty.[24]

Moreover, although Russia is still its top arms supplier, Algeria has been considering other sources to maintain its heavy arms spending. These include China, Germany, Italy, and the United States, as well as some areas of its own emerging domestic arms industry.[25] While such shifts in Algeria's weapons supply could contribute to a gradual realignment of its diplomatic relations, simultaneous divisions among Western allies over issues like Ukraine (since early 2025) and the Gaza war—as well as within Washington[26]—could extend the period in which Algeria tries to maintain relations with Russia while also seeking deeper engagement with the United States (see figure 2).

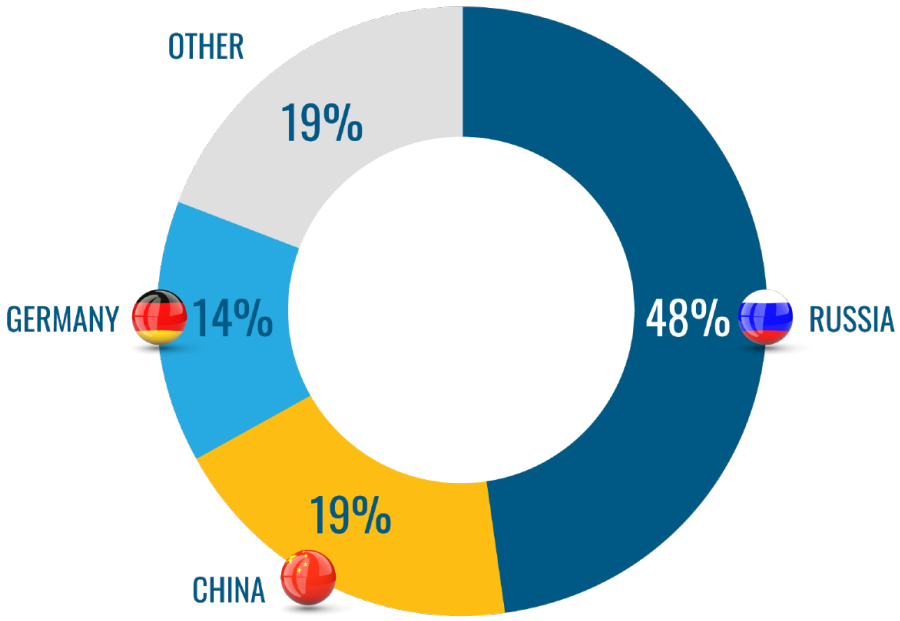
Indicators of Stasis and Change

Since 2011, Algeria has shown a remarkable ability to endure using its traditional statist model despite profound structural challenges. Yet diplomatically, the country has struggled to realize its self-perceived image as a major regional and international player. Its traditional adherence to nonalignment and noninterference also appears to be coming under strain amid an ever more unstable region, along with waning international support for self-determination in Western Sahara—the position Algeria supports. Societally, Algeria's youth bloc remains vibrant and could challenge the status quo given the dearth of employment opportunities, but it has yet to find form in a coherent movement. The Algerian government has taken small steps to address these and other challenges, but it remains to be seen whether this will be enough to once again muddle through to uphold the status quo.

Algeria's Weapons Suppliers

During the 2020–24 reporting period, Russia accounted for 48% of Algeria's arms imports. But compared to the earlier reporting period (2015–19), this represented a decline of 81%. The gap has been increasingly filled by China (19% in 2020–24, 13% in 2015–19) and Germany (14% in 2020–24, 11% in 2015–19). Other suppliers during the 2020–24 delivery period include France, Italy, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

Figure 2. Algerian Arms Imports by Country of Origin, 2020–24



Source: "Trends in International Arms Transfers," SIPRI fact sheet, March 2020, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/fs_2003_at_2019.pdf. The SIPRI arms database is available here: https://armstransfers.sipri.org/ArmsTransfer/TransferData.

Political Indicators

Despite significant challenges in recent years, Algeria's domestic political structure—dominated by aging military and civilian elites and lacking genuine political participation—has endured even amid persistent structural weaknesses. Since the 2011 Arab uprisings, Algeria has twice adopted a new constitution. In 2016, as part of a prolonged attempt to appease popular demands, authorities introduced constitutional reforms such as officially recognizing Tamazight, the Berber language, and reinstating presidential term limits. These moves were meaningful but indicated little more than tactical attempts to stave off unrest rather than facilitate genuine change.

Perhaps more significant, in 2020 the president

introduced constitutional reforms that explicitly authorized the army's role in politics by declaring it the guarantor of the "vital and strategic interests of the country." This process represented a response to the 2019 uprising known as the Hirak, the first major upheaval in Algeria since the 1990s. The 2020 constitutional reform process and its contents were widely criticized for lacking transparency, expanding presidential powers, and ignoring the Hirak's demands for a civilian rather than military state.[27]

The Hirak protests also appeared to profoundly challenge Algeria's leadership structure, even as they were unable to dismantle it. The uprising was remarkable for its peaceful nature, broad-based support, and persistence—leading to the resignation of then-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had been in office for twenty years. Yet those who had taken to the streets demanding that "they all go"—in reference to the entire system of civilian and military ruling elites—ultimately faced challenges in continuing to press their demands.[28] The December 2019 elections that brought former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune to the presidency were largely leadership-managed and marked by low voter turnout.[29]

Tebboune's declaration of a "new Algeria" included some recognition of the need to diversify economically, but his tenure has also been marked by intensified repression of journalists, dissidents, and minorities. Premised largely on safeguarding national security, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government adopted numerous amendments to the penal code meant to punish activities such as spreading "false news" and accepting foreign funding for associations—laws typically viewed as contradicting international human rights statutes.[30] During Tebboune's first term, parliament passed other measures such as a repressive information law used to pursue/arrest/harass numerous journalists, activists, and dissidents, even when they were abroad.[31] The United States has become particularly concerned about religious freedom in Algeria, placing the country in 2023 on the Commission for International Religious Freedom's Special Watch List.[32] As a result, five years on, the great disconnect between Algeria's people and its rulers remains, as evidenced by the low turnout in the 2024 presidential vote, which launched Tebboune's second mandate.[33]

Another trend under Tebboune has been the consolidation of military dominance over civilian leadership. Specifically, a June 2024 decree authorized military personnel to be seconded into the civilian administration, including in "strategic and sensitive sectors." This came in the context of highly increased visibility for the military under Tebboune, with army chief Said Chanegriha appearing frequently beside the civilian leader in public and steeply increasing already-high budget allocations for military expenditure.[34] Such developments have caused observers to wonder whether the country could be creeping toward an Egypt-like model with a military deeply entrenched in the country's economy and politics.[35] Perhaps also quite worryingly, in June 2025 parliament approved a "general mobilization law" defining the terms and procedures by which the country should transition from a state of peace to a state of war.[36]

Despite Tebboune's apparent maintenance of internal stability, the ruling elites have occupied a precarious position dating back to 2019.[37] Tebboune's predecessor, Bouteflika, sought to make both the military and intelligence subservient to him, but his apparatus could not prevent the army from forcing his resignation in April 2019 and controlling the determination of his successor amid the protests. Similarly, the network of business elites cultivated by the former president was targeted by the army to deflect protests against its own role in the system, spotlighting the instability created by elite infighting.[38] Finally, although official Algerian rhetoric often amplifies the external threats the country faces in order to legitimize military strength, rising insecurity in Algeria's immediate neighborhood poses a real threat, as will be discussed later. To sustainably protect the country from these threats without sparking populist challenges, the military leadership will need a legitimate civilian partner—not a puppet, as many perceive Tebboune to be. Yet no clear plan for such a transition has emerged, foreboding instability unless something changes.[39]

Diplomatic and Security Indicators

On the international stage, the country has not abandoned its traditional insistence on nonalignment but has indicated an openness to small but potentially significant changes to its foreign policy. Algeria has sought under Tebboune to project its strength and stability—even as its success in doing so, mirroring past efforts, has been unclear. Key indicators include its 2023 bid for membership in the BRICS group—named for initial members Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—and its January 2024 election to serve a two-year nonpermanent term on the UN Security Council. Both efforts helped boost the perception of Algeria as a country reemerging on the diplomatic stage after a period of retreat that succeeded its more engaged approach during the war on terror.[40] But the BRICS bid failed,[41] and Algeria has struggled to make an impact during its term on the Security Council—particularly in evidence on the issue of Western Sahara, where Algerian objections to the resolution regarding mandate renewal for the UN mission in the territory were overlooked and Algeria ultimately did not participate in the vote.[42]

Alongside these efforts, Algeria appears to be feeling pressure to rethink its traditional engagement abroad given deteriorating security conditions. The 2011 fall of Muammar Qadhafi in Libya led to a massive flow of weapons throughout the region, which contributed to the al-Qaeda–linked 2013 attack on the In Amenas gas field in which militants captured hundreds of foreign and Algerian workers, dozens of whom were killed.[43] Qadhafi's fall also sparked a Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali in 2012, leading to a long-running conflict there. Both the Libya and Mali conflicts as well as the related rise of the Islamic State in the mid-2010s have prompted Algeria to deploy increasing forces to its borders and even engage in some cross-border activity.[44] It has simultaneously deployed its traditional mediation tool—notably, in the 2015 Algiers agreement for Mali and attempts at conflict resolution in Libya. Algeria has also kept a wary eye on Tunisia, which has been spared widespread violent conflict but seen political and economic instability—and the attendant migration and extremism concerns—predominate over the past fifteen years.

These developments have reinforced Algeria's commitment to counterterrorism and contributed to its increased willingness to deploy its military abroad despite its long-held doctrine of nonalignment.[45] The final draft of Algeria's 2020 constitution permitted the president, with two-thirds approval from parliament, to deploy the army abroad "within the framework of respect for the principles of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Arab League."[46] This language represents a notable departure from Algeria's traditional insistence on exclusive mediation and diplomacy, a stance arising from its own violent independence struggle, which helped shape an identity based on sovereignty, self-determination, and noninterference. Analyses of the constitutional drafting process suggest that the change reflects a recognition that reliance on diplomacy alone would not suffice to ensure future regional or even domestic stability.[47]

Not only has Algeria become increasingly constrained in the implementation of its noninterference doctrine, but the cross-border nature of various conflicts has complicated its diplomacy.[48] Tensions at the Algeria-Mali border have led to growing mutual accusations of ill intent, threatening security and political relations between the two countries.[49] Growing Russian involvement in Sahelian conflicts, particularly since 2023—when France and the United States withdrew their military involvement—also appears to have upset Algiers. The Algerian president has even signaled publicly that the country is uncomfortable with Russian mercenaries at its southern borders.[50] And Algiers has quietly opposed Russian involvement in the Libyan conflict.[51]

Perhaps the most significant developments for Algerian diplomacy in recent years have regarded Western Sahara. Algeria—guided by its own anti-colonial struggle—has supported the movement represented by the armed Polisario Front demanding self-determination for the people of the so-named

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, an approximately 100,000-square-mile coastal territory to Algeria's southwest.[52] This support conflicts with Morocco's position claiming sovereignty over the territory and U.S. recognition of this claim in late 2020. Algeria-Morocco relations have generally been tense since the end of French and Spanish occupations, but they headed toward a nadir following the first Trump administration's move on Western Sahara.[53]

American recognition, which came in exchange for Morocco normalizing relations with Israel, coincided with the Polisario's declaring an end to its thirty-year ceasefire; it also lent significant diplomatic momentum to the Moroccan cause, with several prominent European powers and Israel following suit and even some African countries stepping away from their earlier neutrality (see figure 3 for stances on the Western Sahara conflict by country). Algeria has subsequently experienced significant diplomatic rifts with the concerned European powers, notably Spain and France.[54]

In February 2025, President Tebboune, in an interview with the French daily *L'Opinion*, hinted that Algeria would consider normalization with Israel "the day there is a Palestinian state."[55] For some, this reinforced the claim that Algeria feared possible isolation within the region as heavyweights such as Saudi Arabia continued to entertain normalizing ties with Israel.[56] Other regional developments such as the fall of Syria's Bashar al-Assad in December 2024—with whom Algeria had maintained relations—and the weakening of Iran, thought to be a backer of the Polisario,[57] may be further contributing to this fear. At the same time, Algeria has ramped up its public efforts to revive intra-Maghrebi cooperation, with the glaring absence of Morocco.[58]

At the time of writing (June 2025), Algeria's positions regarding Western Sahara—encompassing support for a negotiated solution under UN auspices and claims to be a non-party to the conflict—appear increasingly tenuous. In April 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated to Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita American support for a plan in which Western Sahara would remain a part of Morocco, casting this as the "only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute."[59] The United States is thus urging parties to reengage in negotiations, which have not occurred since 2019, with the autonomy plan as the starting framework. If Algeria refuses to participate based on its claims of non-party status, it risks becoming isolated and perceived as a roadblock to a resolution. Yet by going forward with negotiations, Algeria will effectively be conceding defeat, given that self-determination for the Sahrawis will be off the table—a potentially huge blow for the Algerian diplomacy that sought to create a link between the question of Palestine, which has strong resonance within Algeria, and that of Western Sahara.

Economic Indicators

Algeria has made marginal progress in diversifying away from its heavy reliance on hydrocarbons, but issues such as unemployment, an unwelcoming business environment, and water scarcity continue to present risks to its overall stability. The discovery of oil and gas in 1956 has allowed Algerian leaders to pursue an objective of economic independence, primarily by spending excessively in heavy industry and food imports. The government simultaneously relies on hydrocarbon revenues—estimated in 2024 to account for 90 percent of Algeria's export revenues and nearly 40 percent of state revenues[60]—to maintain high levels of infrastructure and social spending. Yet this approach has subjected the economy to swings between debt accumulation when energy prices decline and fiscal recovery during periods of high prices, ultimately allowing the government to preserve its statist model (see figure 4). Moreover, government investments in industry and agriculture have failed to spur job creation, with employment heavily weighted toward government and state-owned enterprises.[61]

The Algerian government's pattern of responding to external economic pressures over the past decade or so scarcely differs from previous eras. According

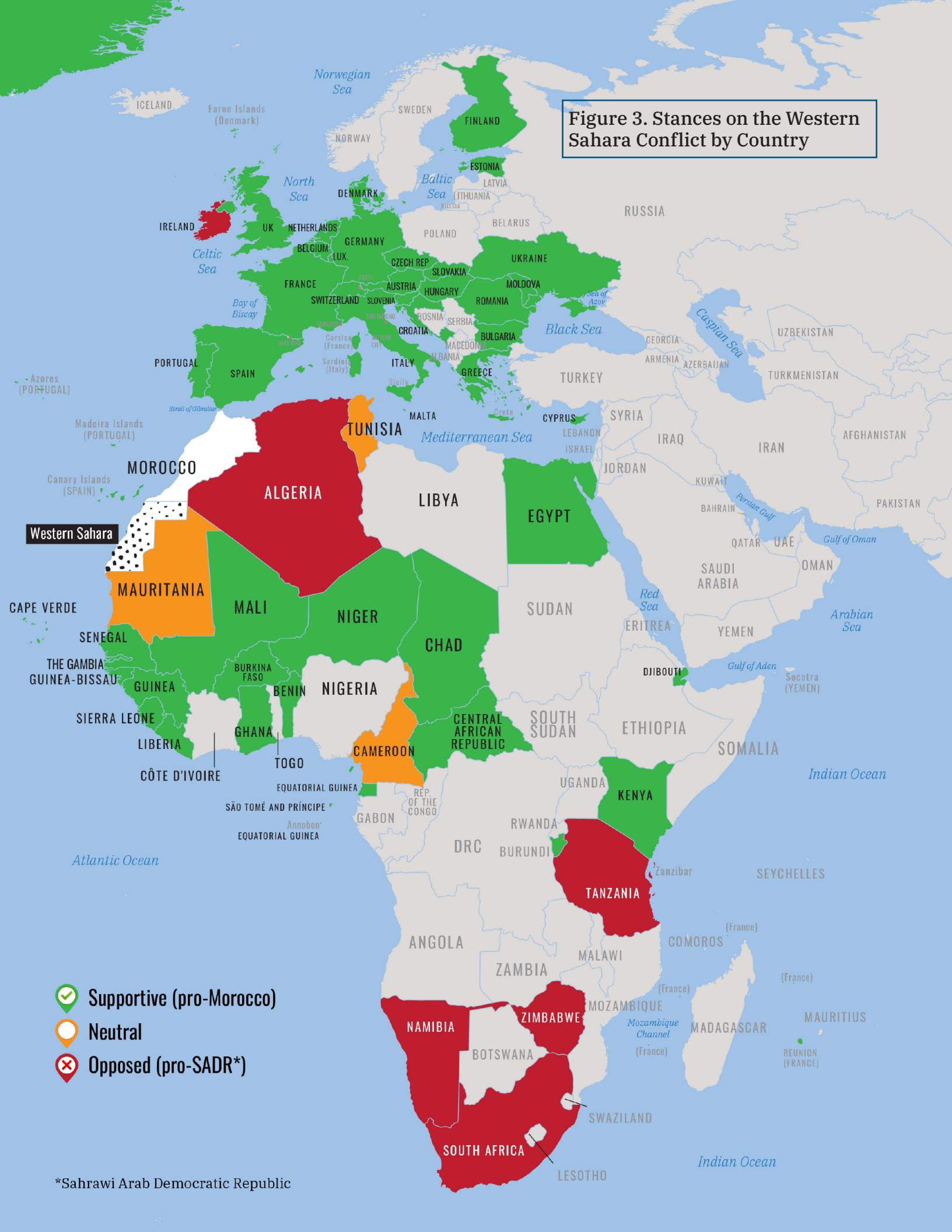
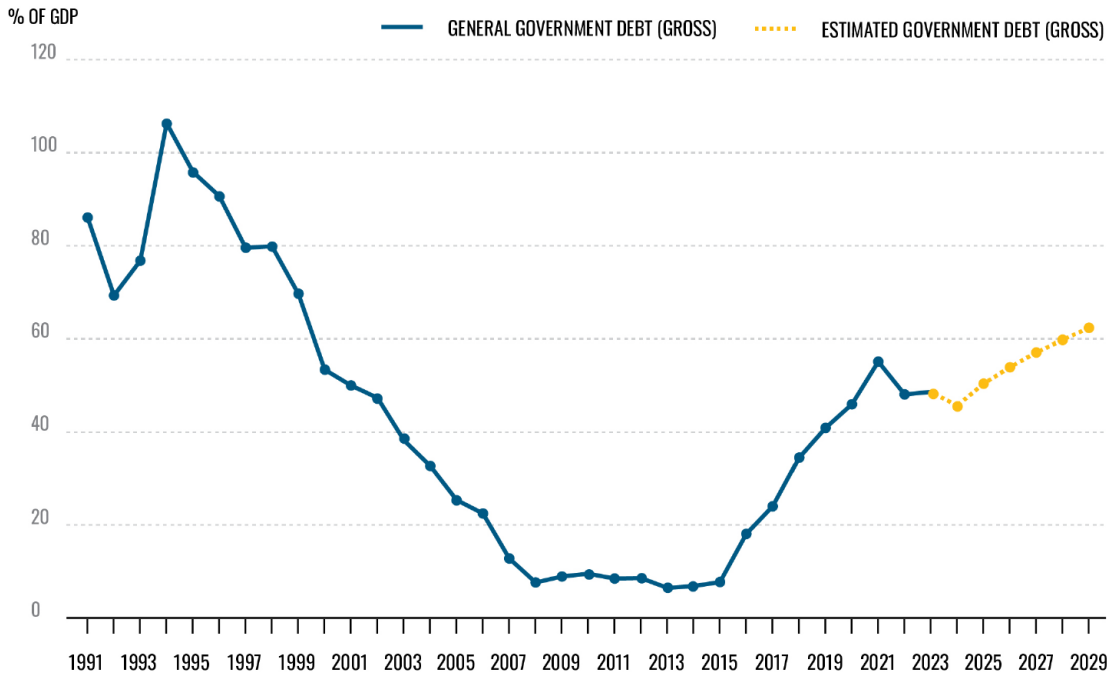


Figure 3. Stances on the Western Sahara Conflict by Country
Supportive (pro-Morocco)
Neutral
Opposed (pro-SADR*)
*Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
Western Sahara
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
LIBYA
EGYPT
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
CHAD
SUDAN
NIGERIA
CAMEROON
ETHIOPIA
SOMALIA
KENYA
TANZANIA
NAMIBIA
ZIMBABWE
BOTSWANA
SOUTH AFRICA
ANGOLA
ZAMBIA
MOZAMBIQUE
MADAGASCAR
DRC
SOUTH SUDAN
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
Norwegian Sea
Baltic Sea
North Sea
Celtic Sea
Bay of Biscay
Mediterranean Sea
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Red Sea
Arabian Sea
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Oman
Gulf of Aden
Atlantic Ocean
Indian Ocean
Mozambique Channel
RUSSIA
TURKEY
IRAN
IRAQ
SYRIA
SAUDI ARABIA
YEMEN
ERITREA
DJIBOUTI
SWEDEN
NORWAY
FINLAND
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
BELARUS
POLAND
DENMARK
IRELAND
UK
NETHERLANDS
BELGIUM
GERMANY
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
AUSTRIA
CZECH REP
SLOVAKIA
HUNGARY
UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
ROMANIA
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
BOSNIA
SERBIA
BULGARIA
ITALY
GREECE
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
MALTA
CYPRUS
LEBANON
ISRAEL
JORDAN
KUWAIT
BAHRAIN
QATAR
UAE
OMAN
PAKISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
UZBEKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
Azores (PORTUGAL)
Madeira Islands (PORTUGAL)
Canary Islands (SPAIN)
Faroe Islands (Denmark)
ICELAND
Strait of Gibraltar
Corsica (France)
Sardinia (Italy)
Sicily
Crete
Annobon
EQUATORIAL GUINEA
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE
GABON
REP. OF THE CONGO
CAPE VERDE
SENEGAL
THE GAMBIA
GUINEA-BISSAU
GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE
LIBERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
TOGO
BENIN
BURKINA FASO
RWANDA
BURUNDI
UGANDA
Zanzibar
SEYCHELLES
COMOROS
(France)
MALAWI
SWAZILAND
LESOTHO
REUNION (FRANCE)
MAURITIUS
Socotra (YEMEN)

Figure 4. Algeria's Debt-to-GDP Ratio



Source: "Algeria," Arab Development Portal, https://data.unescwa.org/Content?fromMain=true&country=dza#CoreStatistics.

to precedent, moves and declarations to diversify away from hydrocarbons are followed by limited action. For example, in 2020, in response to the Covid pandemic, Algerian authorities announced an economic recovery plan (and the next year an updated government action plan) that "ambition(ed) to foster the economy's transition towards a sustainable, private-led growth model."[62] Among numerous other areas, the plan's intended reforms included the politically sensitive issue of reducing energy subsidies. Yet by and large, these subsidies continue to allow Algerians to purchase oil, gas, and electricity at extremely cheap rates, thanks in part to revenue windfalls from oil and gas sales.

The government has since also expanded other social programs like unemployment benefits, housing, and increased public-sector wages and pensions.[63] Meanwhile, the hydrocarbon-dependent economic model faces pressures from other directions: specifically, domestic demand for power is steadily increasing,[64] and the European Union's measures to decarbonize, as expressed in measures like its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism—which imposes penalties on imported goods produced with fossil fuels—will affect Algerian exports to Europe if Algiers does not increase development of its nonhydrocarbon industries.[65]

Similarly, although recent reforms have also included modest steps to improve Algeria's investment climate—long cited as a chief obstacle to attracting foreign investment in nonhydrocarbon sectors—their effects remain limited. Most famously, in late 2020 the government eliminated its 51/49 rule requiring that Algerians remain a majority shareholder in any joint venture with a foreign investor. It did, however, retain the rule for "strategic sectors," including energy. Although some assert that this, along with a reformed hydrocarbons law adopted in 2019,[66] may have helped lead to additional deals such as in the recent 2024–25 energy bidding round—which saw the awarding of five of six onshore oil and gas blocks to European and Asian majors[67]—others argue that customs and other bureaucratic hurdles are the main problem, according to foreign businesses, rather than that outdated law.[68] More generally, although the government has recently taken additional steps like reforming the laws for investment in 2022,[69] the legal framework governing investment remains by and large problematic.[70]

Additionally, Algeria's climate management efforts—including development of renewable energy[71]—have a long way to go. In addition to summer wildfires driven by extreme heat,[72] the country is facing a pressing water scarcity problem, with the average resident enjoying less than 300 cubic meters of water per year, clearly below the threshold set by the World Bank and other multilateral development institutions.[73] Moreover, although investing in desalination and renewable energy sources can help combat climate change, many such processes are energy and water intensive, creating a "destructive feedback loop."[74]

Algeria's ability to work with international partners to mitigate and adapt to climate change appears to have improved somewhat in recent years, but it is limited by the country's eternal suspicion of foreign interference and insistence on self-sufficiency. The EU has worked with Algeria to guide energy reform, including through collaboration over green hydrogen development and transport.[75] Yet Algerian officials have shown skepticism toward such projects, maintaining the position that developed countries should bear the brunt of costs for mitigating climate change and sometimes invoking a notion of "green colonialism," or an idea that developed countries intend simply to extract developing countries' natural resources without allowing them to reap the benefits.[76]

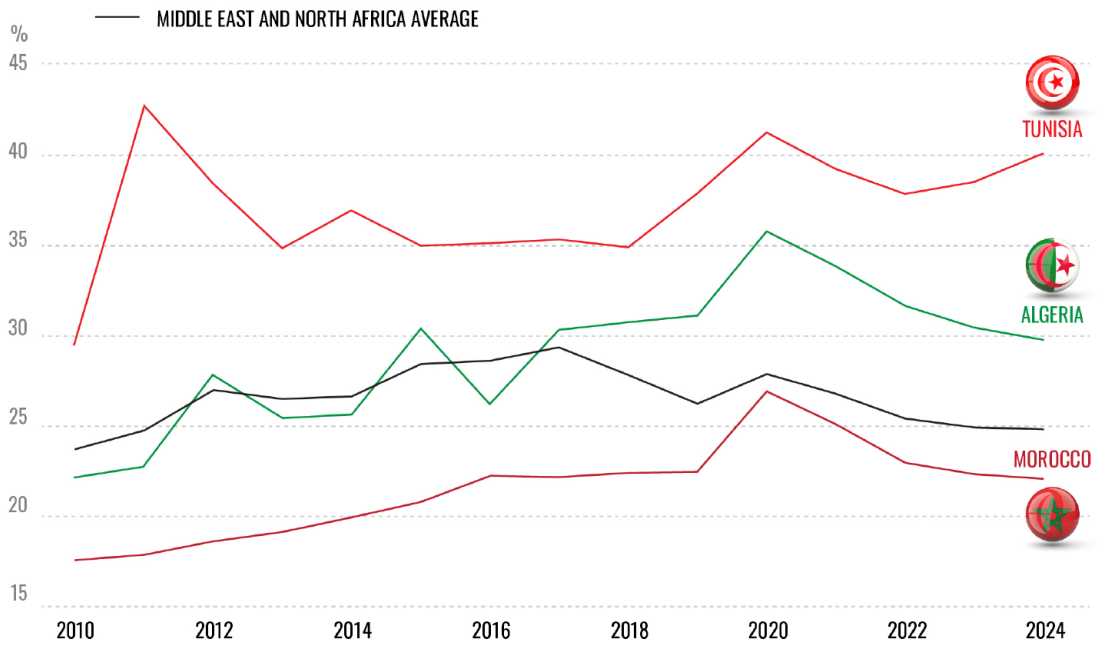
Similarly, ensuring water security requires regional cooperation, given that water sources frequently cross natural boundaries. But intra-Maghrebi cooperation is notoriously weak.[77] In this respect, Algeria, like its rival Morocco, insists it is not a barrier to such cooperation. In November 2024, Tebboune ratified a tripartite groundwater management agreement with Tunisia and Libya.[78] However laudable such steps may be, they suffer from inadequate information,[79] and appear to crudely seek advancement at the expense of Morocco.

Societal Indicators

The direction of societal change in Algeria is highly mixed: while on the one hand the government has taken steps to respond to migration- and unemployment-related challenges, its ability to appease the restless youth population, address racial tensions involving migrants, and meet educational and other demands remains limited. Algeria's substantial youth population has important effects on Algerian economics and society as well as its foreign relations.[80] Estimates place recent unemployment among youth ages fifteen to twenty-four at higher than 30 percent,[81] perpetuating—at least in the eyes of the Algerian and European governments—the risks of smuggling, illegal migration, and extremism (see figure 5).[82] As for migration, regardless of how it is perceived, these trends and the huge Algerian diaspora in France and elsewhere on the continent have fueled calls from the European right to toughen their relationship with the country.[83]

These high unemployment rates, which plague the economy, would not be significantly aided by growing the hydrocarbons sector, although an expansion of

Figure 5. Youth Unemployment in Algeria, 2010–24



Source: "Unemployment—Youth Total, Algeria," World Bank Group, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=DZ.

renewable energy sources would help create jobs.[84] Similarly, even though the government has taken steps to alleviate youth unemployment through the creation of new programs, ministries, and funds to encourage entrepreneurship, evidence suggests that the stifling business climate has prevented start-ups and private sector-led growth from taking off.[85] This lack of economic opportunities alongside a growing population naturally risks pushing Algerians to options such as emigration and illegal activity. Such concerns should in theory make economic diversification all the more urgent for Algerian authorities.

Opinion surveys and other studies of young Algerians today also suggest profound shifts in mindset compared to earlier generations. Some observers note that youth are frustrated with the country's approach to international engagement and the ways it is "stuck in the past," such as in its never-ending feud with France.[86] Although many still express skepticism about engagement with the country's formal political institutions, they also tend to project optimism about a better future and indicate a belief in individual control over one's destiny and faith in democracy. Moreover, survey data shows that high proportions of young Algerians believe collective activism could lead to democratic change—a marked difference from past surveys.[87] Such attitudes were on display during

their remarkable mobilization in the 2019 and 2021 Hirak protests, which were characterized by their broad-based and peaceful nature—suggesting that fears had abated about violent conflict dividing the country as it had in the past.[88] Overall, Algerian youth remain willing to be active and engaged if they think such action will yield results. And even as they remain preoccupied by a lack of job opportunities, they are committed to political and societal change inside their country.[89] Yet to date—notwithstanding the unity displayed during the initial months of the Hirak protests—they have lacked a cohesive force to orient them or moderate their absolutist tendencies.[90]

As in other societies, an influx of migrants—in this case from sub-Saharan Africa—has increased societal tensions, especially since the regional instability triggered by 2011 upheavals in places like Libya and Mali.[91] Official actions such as mass expulsions have inflamed this situation,[92] as have a lack of clear policy or pathways to normalization along with anti-migrant discourse.[93] Tensions manifest themselves in fears expressed on social media of migrants taking jobs from Algerians and causing harm in other forms.[94] Its practice of expelling migrants, particularly to Niger, has drawn criticism from international human rights defenders.[95]

The government has taken some extremely modest steps to respond to such pressures. In April 2025, President Tebboune sparked some discussion by suggesting that sub-Saharan migrants could be recruited to work in sectors with labor shortages, particularly agriculture, and the government suspended a TV channel for broadcasting "racist" remarks.[96] Algerians themselves have also pushed back against mistreatment of migrants, such as a high-profile 2017 measure banning their use of public transit, which was later withdrawn.[97]

In the related area of human trafficking, the U.S. State Department has acknowledged "significant efforts" by the Algerian government to meet international standards to eliminate the practice but noted that they have fallen short.[98] Steps include the enactment of a law criminalizing sex and labor trafficking and prescribing penalties commensurate with those for crimes such as rape,[99] as well as the opening of specialized anti-trafficking units within the internal security forces and upping investigations and prosecutions of alleged traffickers.[100] Such moves reflect a genuine effort by the Algerian government to cooperate with the United States on human rights issues but also its limits in doing so. For instance, the State Department has noted that the Algerian government's restrictions on NGOs impede adequate protection for trafficking victims.

Two additional societal shifts may be occurring—as always, extremely gradually. One is a recognition of the tourism industry as a potential new source of foreign currency. Although the National Recovery Plan of 2020 cited tourism as a nonhydrocarbon target industry for growth[101]—and despite some easing of visa restrictions for visitors to Algeria's southern desert region—officials privately recognize that any such campaign targeting Western tourists would require an upgrade in infrastructure, also likely balancing environmental needs. Nonetheless, recent coverage of the country's tourism potential in English-language news outlets may give the government a head start.[102] Beyond the economic benefits, dramatic change in the frequency and forms in which Algerians and foreigners interact could lead to a new—ideally, more trusting and appreciative—perspective among Algerians regarding the outside world, and vice versa.[103]

The second shift is in the education system. In June 2022, President Tebboune announced the expansion of English-language instruction at the primary level alongside French. This was followed by announcements of various steps to introduce English instruction into secondary schools and higher education settings.[104] Algerian elites had already spent decades divided over the extent to which Arabic should replace French in schools and government as a means of distancing the country from its former colonizer. Efforts to introduce English were also long resisted by supporters of French instruction—mostly Francophone elites—who feared losing their social and political influence.[105]

Since Tebboune's announcement, public officials

have largely avoided suggesting that they are phasing out French, insisting instead that English instruction will prepare Algerians for better jobs and a better future. However—particularly given the deep diplomatic crisis with France opened up by Paris's July 2024 recognition of Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara—the relative success of the English plan compared with earlier attempts suggests the turn away from French is moving decidedly forward. The process has been criticized as too hasty, and some fear much will be lost given the human capital invested by previous generations in learning French.[106] Yet a genuine, well-executed expansion of opportunities to learn English could foster new generations with a broadened outlook, and could possibly be another tool to dislodge Algeria from its well-earned reputation for being stuck in its past (see figure 6).

Two Scenarios for the Future

For Algeria, pressing, even existential challenges like the international approach to Western Sahara and climate change could force near-term adjustments to both internal and external policies. At the same time, given Algeria's history of resistance to change—a tendency enabled largely by energy price fluctuations—one can imagine an Algeria in 2040 that largely resembles the country today, characterized by frustrated youth and a powerful military that perpetuates a narrative rooted in self-defense and protection of sovereignty at all costs.[107] Algeria's international partners might thus consider two divergent scenarios for the near to medium term.

Figure 6. Whither Algeria? Stasis and Stressors

Indicators of Status Quo	Pressure Factors for Change
No genuine efforts at subsidy removal	Rising insecurity in the region
Only modest efforts to grow nonhydrocarbon industries	Changing energy demands externally
Continued repression of opposition and activists	Rising energy demands internally
Forced renewal in 2024 of mandate for President Tebboune	Climate change
Mixture of youth apathy and engagement without cohesive leadership or moderation	Shifting regional relations (e.g., Western Sahara, Washington's focus on the Gulf)

Scenario #1: Status Quo Algeria

A first scenario envisions Algiers continuing to pursue balanced diplomacy in an increasingly multipolar world, but without embracing the necessary internal reforms that would make it a major actor regionally or internationally. In this scenario, the Algerian leadership has once again managed to muddle through in the face of externally imposed and self-inflicted challenges alike. The cabal of military and civilian elites has clung to power despite one or two presidential election rounds that replace Tebboune with another consensus figure. Relations with the United States and key European countries, perhaps with the exception of Italy, drop off somewhat as Morocco's claim to control Western Sahara still enjoys widespread support.

Meanwhile, the Algerian economy remains highly vulnerable to external shocks such as volatility in commodity prices and economic slowdowns, especially in Europe, as well as climate-related factors.[108] As export markets continue to transition away from fossil fuels, both income and employment in Algeria stagnate due to a refusal to embrace the need for economic diversification.

Beijing's exchanges with Algiers deepen such that China profits from more investment opportunities in the North African country. Meanwhile, economic and cultural exchanges are enhanced through the opening of Confucius Institutes and study abroad programs, as well as possibly greater provision of Chinese weapons to Algeria. Separately, Algeria overcomes strains facing its relationship with Russia dating to the early 2020s thanks to favorable developments in conflict areas like Ukraine and Mali, permitting Algeria to resume confidence and relax concerns about Russia's activities. Russia re-ups its weapons provision to Algeria, even as Algeria tries to develop its domestic industry. The two countries also advance security cooperation in areas like nuclear technology, space exploration, and commercial exchanges in sectors including agriculture and mining.[109]

Societally, Algerians have all but lost hope for change, and persistent difficulties with European neighbors like France force increasing numbers of Algerians to seek opportunities illegally. A crisis situation builds—potentially involving political turmoil or external armed conflict followed by mass migration—to which Algerian authorities, still reluctant to embrace international partnerships, find themselves highly unprepared to respond.

Scenario #2: Toward a More Open Algeria

In a second scenario, Algerian decisionmakers respond to the various sociopolitical, economic, and security pressures described here by increasingly supporting the United States and its actions. Bilateral engagement deepens despite lost ground for Algeria regarding the Moroccan sovereignty claim over Western Sahara. Algeria's political, economic, and strategic dialogues with the United States become routine rather than ad hoc, and economic exchanges—mostly through weapons purchases—expand. Increased counterterrorism and security cooperation helps restore stability in the Sahel, creating a virtuous cycle of sustained cooperation. Visa restrictions are eased, and direct flights connect travelers between New York and Algiers, leading to more American tourists in Algeria and more Algerian students and visitors in the United States.

Meanwhile, tensions between Algeria and France cool significantly thanks to a more confident Algerian outlook. The North African country has made strides in shifting its energy mix, largely meeting its 2030 targets regarding renewables and proving itself a reliable supplier of solar and hydrogen for Europe. These developments in turn help relieve domestic unemployment levels. Cooperation with the United States on fracking technology grants the Algerian economy significant additional breathing room, permitting it to boost gas output and production without alienating local communities.

On a societal level, Algerians show themselves to be a vastly more relaxed and optimistic people relative to the impression created by the 1990s conflict. Their

leadership has permitted more space for criticism, including from younger and female voices, who push for genuine liberalization of the investment climate and increased opportunities.[110] Although the changes occur mostly at the margins, they permit Algeria to relax its obsession with securing its borders, thus improving its overall standing—and diplomatic and trade relations—across Africa. In its relations with other Arab states, Algeria strikes a more neutral position, taking gradual steps toward warming with countries like the United Arab Emirates—whose normalization with Israel chilled relations between the two—without necessarily abandoning its traditional defense of the Palestinian cause.[111]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since the start of the Arab Spring, Algeria has maintained its gradualist approach to reform despite a perceived urgent need for change. Yet today, forces swirling from inside and outside the country suggest that failure to accelerate structural changes poses a risk to Algerian stability. At least publicly, the Algerian leadership has shown small signs of recognizing this reality.

Washington has a clear incentive to encourage Algeria to adopt an orientation of greater openness, as described earlier in scenario two. In the longer term at least, this could help reinforce the economic and social stability of European states, while helping prevent Algeria from significantly deepening its partnerships with America's strategic competitors. It would also allow for deepened U.S.-Algeria security and counterterrorism cooperation, which will almost surely remain an American priority. Finally, it would facilitate expanded U.S. corporate opportunities to do business in this large, relatively wealthy country.

Even if Algeria continues to muddle along, the United States can still pursue its chief interests—energy deals and security cooperation—through continued engagement with the Algerian government. Despite the second Trump administration's reiterated support for Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, Algiers is unlikely to jeopardize bilateral relations with Washington the way it has with Paris.[112]

Yet Washington, with an eye to advancing U.S. interests, can also take advantage of Algeria's apparent willingness to entertain some changes and eagerness to elevate its diplomatic stature. The first step is to make Algeria feel heard. Washington's recent increased engagement of Algiers, most clearly exemplified by the defense MOU signed in January 2025, comports with this approach. Yet to bring this engagement to a new level and overcome a suspicious Algerian mindset, Washington must assiduously reassure Algiers that it respects its interests and is not imposing its way only for America's benefit. Regular dialogues should therefore be held with the goal of understanding Algeria's key concerns and desires regarding the bilateral partnership—and vice versa. U.S. officials must not get distracted here: sustained interest will be necessary to ensure success.

This step should lead to a deepening of dialogue around two key issues of shared interest—security and energy. In light of growing instability in the Sahel, where the United States and France have largely withdrawn their military presence, Washington should seize on Algiers's eagerness to be a regional security leader and help promote the country as a leader in regional counterterrorism efforts.[113] Such promotion should explicitly recognize and build on Algeria's existing capabilities rather than—as with other U.S. partnerships in the region—centering on American endeavors to strengthen the capabilities of Algerian counterparts. Ensuring the proper U.S. political leadership is in place to implement the Joint Military Commission created by the January 2025 defense MOU will also be key.[114] The greater the mutual confidence and respect between the two partners, the more likely Algeria is to offer additional intelligence sharing and other forms of cooperation—perhaps eventually to even include contributing to multilateral peacekeeping initiatives elsewhere on the continent.

Similarly, Algeria's approach to migration is largely driven by security concerns, especially in border areas.[115] Therefore, possibly in exchange for increased support with its border operations, Washington should encourage Algeria's continued efforts to adhere to international standards in human trafficking.

The United States can additionally leverage Algeria's keen interest in partnering with U.S. firms to help exploit its shale reserves without depleting the water supply of Algerian communities.[116] The U.S. government should coordinate with the private energy sector to encourage complementary water-saving measures such as subsidy reductions. U.S. technical experts in the Foreign Agricultural Service, to the extent that they are still in place, can also work with Algeria on improving its agricultural efficiency. In other sectors such as healthcare—where, like in agriculture, Algiers is aiming to develop its domestic capabilities—the U.S. government should identify Algerian entrepreneurs who can benefit from partnerships with experienced American companies. Beyond agriculture, mining and agro-industry are key nonhydrocarbon sectors that the Algerian government hopes to develop.[117]

Wooing Algeria will require patience and persistence so that commercial cooperation can grow. American businesses often express frustration when their requests for cooperation with Algiers are met with an extraordinarily slow—and sometimes no—response. Yet on occasion, patience has paid off, such as when the Algerian government recently issued a veterinary license for Texas cattle farmers to export their dairy cows to Algeria[118]—a potentially major export market that could expand to include beef cattle if the farmers have their way. In business exchanges, just as with energy and security, Algeria can be a useful partner for the United States, but U.S. actors must be prepared to operate on Algeria's terms.

Diplomatically, this approach will require Washington to keep up its heightened engagement of Algeria. As a rule, such engagement should show that the United States is looking to Algiers to become a leader in Sahelian and wider African politics and security, particularly as Washington turns its focus elsewhere. Boosting Algeria's self-perception as a valued partner will be critical here given the unprecedented Western alignment behind Morocco's plan to negotiate a resolution to the Western Sahara conflict at the UN Security Council, and what appears to be an irreversible American position of recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the territory.[119] If convinced to do so, Algiers could play a key role in persuading the Polisario to accept a negotiated model of self-governance with the Moroccan autonomy plan as the starting framework.[120] While the likelihood of this remains low, it will be entirely eliminated unless Algeria truly feels it is being treated as an equal.

In addition to energy and security cooperation, Algeria is eager for U.S. cultural engagement, particularly around English-language study opportunities. This has become even truer with the expansion of English as a second language in Algerian schools and the country's need for qualified instructors. To take advantage of this opportunity, the United States should expand funding not only for educational programs but also for training in areas like agricultural water management. Such programming could help improve Algerians' perceptions of the United States, given that a majority currently view China more favorably.[121]

The recommendations made in this paper might seem to go against the grain of current U.S. diplomacy and trade. Yet to an extent, Algeria's traditional efforts to ensure self-reliance, as well as its natural resource endowments, may have buffered it against tariffs and cuts to funding aid. As a result, taking the steps outlined here may be more feasible for Algeria than other partners for which U.S. development assistance and trade have traditionally been more important, including Morocco. Algeria is indeed a country of great opportunity, and it has many strengths, including a commitment to diplomatic mediation and dialogue, natural resources and beauty, and a vibrant youth culture. The United States should devote resources to shaping the bilateral relationship in a way that promotes stability, guards against future crises, and ensures Algeria does not drift in a direction counter to U.S. interests. ❖

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NOTES

1 This review of changes and trends is not exhaustive.

2 A nonconsecutive term in the case of President Donald Trump.

3 For example, annual bilateral trade between Morocco and the United States stands at roughly $7 billion, compared to about $3.5 billion for Algeria. "Trade Data," UN Comtrade Database, https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow. Among Maghreb residents, Moroccans have also traditionally been the top Fulbright scholarship recipients, and the country has hosted more than five thousand Peace Corps volunteers since the program began operating there in 1963. Algeria, by contrast, has never hosted Peace Corps volunteers. In fiscal year 2025, the Biden administration requested $1.5 million in assistance for Algeria—compared to $21 million for Morocco—including programs to promote economic diversity and openness, support natural resource management, and enhance women's safety and political participation. See "Supplementary Tables," Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Supplementary-Tables-Foreign-Assistance.pdf; and Appendix 2, Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/State-and-USAID-Appendix-2.pdf.

4 Algeria officially claims it is not a party to this conflict, but any resolution requires its involvement, whether directly or indirectly.

5 U.S. Department of State, "2023 Investment Climate Statements: Algeria," https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/algeria.

6 Office of Technology Evaluation, U.S. Department of Commerce, "Analysis of U.S. Trade with Algeria," 2022, https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/country-papers/3417-2022-statistical-analysis-of-us-trade-with-algeria/file.

7 "U.S. Relations with Algeria," previously available at U.S. Department of State, https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-algeria/.

8 Mokrane Aït Ourabi, "Exclusif—Elizabeth Moore Aubin, Ambassadeur des États-Unis en Algérie, à *El Moudjahid*: 'Nos Liens Sont Plus Forts que Jamais,'" *El Moudjahid*, March 1, 2025; Ambassador Aubin (@USAmbtoAlgeria), "Minister of Transportation Said Sayoud and I discussed opportunities for U.S.-Algeria collaboration to strengthen economic and people-to-people ties," post on X, February 20, 2025, 10:57 a.m., https://x.com/USAmbtoAlgeria/status/1892604560218177919.

9 For more background on bilateral relations since Algeria's "Dark Decade," see Michael J. Willis, *Algeria: Politics and Society from the Dark Decade to the Hirak* (Hurst, 2022), 375–78.

10 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, https://milex.sipri.org/sipri.

11 "Military Size by Country 2025," World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/military-size-by-country.

12 Reports indicate, however, that rival Morocco may be preparing to counter this acquisition with the purchase of thirty-two F-35 fighter jets. See "Algeria Becomes First Foreign Buyer of Russia's Su-56 Fighter Jet: What to

Know," Al-Monitor, February 12, 2025, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/02/algeria-becomes-first-foreign-buyer-russias-su-57-fighter-jet-what-know; Pierre Boussel, "Algerian Military Buildup Diverts Eyes from Economic Frustrations," GIS, March 3, 2025, https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/algerian-military-buildup/.

13 "Algeria Defense Industry Report 2024: Market Size and Trends, Budget Allocation, Regulations, Key Acquisitions, Competitive Landscape and Forecasts, 2020–2029," GlobeNewswire, October 17, 2024, https://www.globenewswire.com/fr/news-release/2024/07/17/2914640/28124/en/Algeria-Defense-Industry-Report-2024-Market-Size-and-Trends-Budget-Allocation-Regulations-Key-Acquisitions-Competitive-Landscape-and-Forecasts-2020-2029.html; Boussel, "Algerian Military Buildup," https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/algerian-military-buildup/.

14 Algeria's brutal internal conflict, known as the Black Decade, ran from roughly 1992 to the mid-2000s, and pitted state security forces against armed insurgents with an Islamic identity. The experience underlies the government's firm commitment to counterterrorism, an inclination reinforced by the 2013 terrorist attack on the In Amenas gas facility at Tiguentourine.

15 See Alexis Arieff, *U.S.-Algerian Security Cooperation and Regional Counterterrorism* (Institut Français de Relations Internationales, 2011), https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/us-algerian-security-cooperation-and-regional-counterterrorism; and Andrew Lebovich, *Deciphering Algeria: The Stirrings of Reform* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), https://ecfr.eu/publication/deciphering_algeria_the_stirrings_of_reform5047/.

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97 "Mass Racial Profiling," https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/10/algeria-mass-racial-profiling-used-to-deport-more-than-2000-sub-saharan-migrants/.

98 U.S. Department of State, "2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Algeria," https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/algeria/.

99 For the legislation (in Arabic), see https://legisdz.com/ar/node/345.

100 According to the U.S. State Department, Algerian authorities have also increased their identified trafficking victims in recent years, but they still lack clear criteria for doing so. See "2024 Trafficking Algeria," https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/algeria/.

101 "Plan de Relance Économique 2024," https://www.energymagazinedz.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Plan-de-relance-economique-2020-2024-fr.pdf.

102 See Henry Wismayer: "The Mystical Mountains at the Heart of the Sahara," *Financial Times*, April 4, 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/f9b52e3f-5371-4763-8664-b35224dcc2c9; and "Is Algeria the Next Great Travel Destination in Africa?" *National Geographic Traveller*, October 10, 2022, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/is-algeria-next-great-travel-destination-in-africa.

103 Currently, other than those who go abroad, Algerians' face-to-face interactions with foreigners are limited. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, approximately three million tourists visit the country each year; see the ministry's website, https://www.mta.gov.dz/?lang=fr. For an interesting discussion of how Algerians interact with the outside world—i.e., still largely through the internet—see Farrand, *The Algerian Dream*, 133–38.

104 Associated Press, "Algeria Expands English Lessons to Primary School Students," September 21, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/africa-france-language-north-a226d1792089d6be063137a1026a13ec; Karim Kebir, "Enseignement en Anglais en Algérie: Le Forcing du Gouvernement," Tout sur l'Algérie (TSA), July 18, 2023, https://www.tsa-algerie.com/enseignement-en-anglais-en-algerie-le-forcing-du-gouvernement/; "Remplacement du Français par l'Anglais: Tebboune Évoque le Dossier," Algeria 360, July 30, 2022, https://www.algerie360.com/remplacement-du-francais-par-langlais-tebboune-evoque-le-dossier/; and Rafik Tadjer, "Enseignement de la Médecine: L'Algérie Remplace le Français par l'Anglais," TSA, April 5, 2025 https://www.tsa-algerie.com/enseignement-de-la-medecine-lalgerie-remplace-le-francais-par-langlais/.

105 Abu Bakr Khaled Saad Allah, "The Politics of Language in Algerian Education," *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 20, 2023, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/07/the-politics-of-language-in-algerian-education?lang=en.

106 "Algérie: L'Anglais Commencera dès l'École Primaire," *Le Figaro*, October 7, 2022, https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/francophonie/algerie-l-anglais-commencera-des-l-ecole-primaire-20221007. An attempt in the 1980s and 1990s to introduce English in primary education was ultimately abandoned, providing a notable comparison with its current survival.

107 Boussel, "Algerian Military Buildup," https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/algerian-military-buildup/.

108 IMF, "2023 Article IV Consultation," 40–41, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2024/04/12/Algeria-2023-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-547687.

109 For more detail, see Yahia H. Zoubir, "Algeria's Balancing Act Between Partnership with Russia and Independence," Italian Institute for International Political Studies, September 4, 2024, https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/algerias-balancing-act-between-historical-partnership-with-russia-and-independence-182969; and Zoubir, *Beyond Military Cooperation?* https://mecouncil.org/publication/algerian-russian-relations-military-cooperation/.

110 After Algeria introduced a gender quota system in 2012, the number of women in parliament increased to a relatively high level for the region (32%), but after the 2021 legislative election it dropped to 9%. The most prominent female politician is Louisa Hanoune, leader of the Workers' Party, but she does not represent the younger generation. Willis, *From the Dark Decade to the Hirak*, 256–61, argues that attitudinal changes around women in public life "may have a more socially liberalizing effect on Algerian society"—although such an outcome is far from guaranteed.

111 See, e.g., Ali Idir, "Entre l'Algérie et les Émirats Arabes Unis, Rien Ne Va Plus," Tout sur l'Algérie, July 27, 2023, https://www.tsa-algerie.com/entre-lalgerie-et-les-emirats-arabes-unis-rien-ne-va-plus/.

112 President Macron articulated France's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in July 2024. Later that year, triggered by the arrest in Algiers of French-Algerian writer and critic Boualem Sansal, diplomatic tensions between the two countries escalated further.

113 Algeria has long viewed itself as having successful counterterrorism experience to offer. While this claim can be challenged on human rights grounds, Algiers could still provide useful services in such a role—e.g., by helping establish channels of communication between Washington and Moscow. See Hannah Rae Armstrong, "Counter-Terror Turned the Sahel into a Coup-Belt. U.S. Policy in the Region Should Move On," Center for International Policy, April 2, 2024, https://internationalpolicy.org/publications/counter-terror-turned-the-sahel-into-a-coup-belt-u-s-policy-in-the-region-should-move-on/.

114 On the need to fill appointments, U.S. officials, private conversations with author, May 2025.

115 Tasnim Abderrahim, *Maghreb Migrations: How North Africa and Europe Can Work Together on Sub-Saharan Migration* (European Council on Foreign Relations 2022), https://ecfr.eu/publication/maghreb-migrations-how-north-africa-and-europe-can-work-together-on-sub-saharan-migration/; Farrah, *Algeria's Migration Dilemma*, Algerias-migration-dilemma-Migratiomn-and-human-smuggling-in-southern-Algeria.pdf.

116 See, e.g., Charles Kennedy, "Exxon and Chevron Close to Signing Gas Exploration Deals in Algeria," Oilprice.com, June 2, 2023, https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Exxon-And-Chevron-Close-To-Signing-Gas-Exploration-Deals-In-Algeria.html.

117 Of these, mining has become the most high-profile given the increasing global interest in critical minerals. See "Algeria Plans to Allow Foreign Firms to Mine for Critical Metals," Mining.com, June 4, 2025, https://www.mining.com/web/algeria-plans-to-allow-foreign-firms-to-mine-for-critical-metals/.

118 Algeria Tenders (@algeriatenders), "@usda and the Algerian Ministry of Agriculture have signed an agreement to permit the import of U.S. dairy cows," post on X, November 13, 2024, https://x.com/hashtag/USAgDZ.

119 As of this writing, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States—all permanent members of the UN Security Council—have openly supported the autonomy plan, as has Spain, the former colonizer of Western Sahara. Notably, the Biden administration, while reluctant to implement its predecessor's commitments under the December 2020 tripartite agreement with Israel and Morocco, did not reverse this position.

120 See Hugh Lovatt, "Can Trump Make a Deal on Western Sahara?" Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Opinion 821, January 2025, https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/can-trump-make-deal-western-sahara.

121 "Algeria," Arab Barometer Wave VII: 2022, 12–13, https://www.arabbarometer.org/countries/algeria/.

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