



ALGERIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS: REALITY AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine the topic of Algerian-Chinese relations, exploring their roots and highlighting key political, economic, and investment milestones. Additionally, the study analyzes and explains the contents of implemented plans and proposed programs, the available opportunities, and delves into several challenges that may hinder the continued development of relations between the two countries.*

Keywords: *Algerian-Chinese Relations Reality Opportunities Challenges.*

Introduction

Algerian-Chinese relations have witnessed significant activity since the end of the Cold War, with increased momentum in the early years of the new millennium, coinciding with the launch of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. In this forum, China attributed special importance to the African continent. Algeria, being one of the prominent countries in North Africa both geographically and economically, presents investment opportunities that China seeks to leverage, especially amid the fierce competition for the continent's resources among major poles in the international system.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the reality of Algerian-Chinese relations and their areas of cooperation, as well as the challenges that impede the development of these relations. To dissect the elements of the researched topic, the study adopts the theory of mutual dependence based on the concept of globalization and its flows. This theory justifies countries' pursuit of increasing their opportunities in economic and trade relations and seeking new investments in different regions of the world.

The topic will be addressed through three main axes. The first axis will delve into the history of Algerian-Chinese relations, while the second axis will examine the current state of bilateral relations. The third axis will address the challenges facing the development of relations between the two countries.

The First Axis: History of Algerian-Chinese Relations

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Algeria and its African counterparts found themselves under colonial rule, continuing to endure the Western humiliation that China had experienced for a century. As African nations began gaining independence through armed revolutionary struggles, China remained constrained in international politics. The Bandung Conference in 1955 served as the Asian-African platform where China recognized the importance of its relations with third-world



countries and the African continent. Through the conference, China attempted to break free from the containment imposed by the United States and the West. Despite its focus on domestic policies and its alliance with the Soviet Union regarding the conflict with the Western world, Beijing began formulating its fundamental principles in international politics. These principles centered around peaceful coexistence, mutual respect among nations, a commitment to non-aggression against other countries (non-interference), respect for each state's internal affairs in the international system, as well as equality and mutual benefits (Nama, 2005, p. 319) .

It is worth noting that the diplomatic recognition battle between Beijing and Taipei (the capital of Taiwan) has been central to China's foreign policy since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. China sought diplomatic penetration in Africa to distance African countries from Taiwan (Alden, 2009, p. 35) .

Returning to the historical milestones and connections between China and Algeria, China was the first non-Arab country to recognize the provisional government of the Algerian Republic directly after its establishment in 1958, even before Algeria gained independence. On December 20 of the same year, diplomatic relations were officially announced between the two countries.

Following Algeria's independence on July 5, 1962, Beijing sent its first Chinese medical team to Algeria on April 16, 1963, to support the Algerian healthcare system after the significant gap and challenging conditions left by 132 years of colonial rule (Khalil, 2023).

Furthermore, the Chinese and Algerian sides exchanged visits from the early days of Algeria's independence. The Chinese government's prime minister visited Algeria in 1962 and 1964, and the late President Ahmed Ben Bella reciprocated the visit in 1965. Between 1963 and 1975, the two parties signed around twenty agreements, with the most prominent being a friendship agreement covering various areas of economic, technological, health, cultural cooperation, as well as collaboration in communication, scientific research, military, and naval cooperation (Izdern, 2023) .

Algeria played a prominent and effective role in restoring the People's Republic of China to its seat in the United Nations, on October 25, 1971, during the 26th session of the General Assembly with the overwhelming adoption of Resolution 2758 (Khalil, 2023).

In addition to both experiencing European colonization, both Algeria and China reject domination, as evidenced by Algeria's role in the Non-Aligned Movement, which repeatedly called for a new international system based on justice and the rejection of dominance a stance that China has consistently advocated in various international forums (Zoubir, 2022).

During the 1980s, the Chinese and Algerian economies took different paths. Deng Xiaoping's reforms starting in 1978 accelerated China's opening to global markets. Within a decade or a little more, China transformed into an economic power. In contrast, the economic situation in Algeria noticeably deteriorated, exacerbated by the collapse of oil prices and the depreciation of the dollar. Despite Algeria's engagement in the crises of the 1990s, bilateral relations were not significantly affected. Instead, they evolved to the



extent of military cooperation through arms deals made by Algeria, including reports indicating the purchase of weapons from China amounting to around 100 million dollars (Calabrese, Sino-Algerian Relations: On a Path to Realizing Their Full Potential?, 2017).

It can be said that Chinese relations with Algeria and Africa, in general, were characterized during the Cold War by a focus on common interests, distancing from ideological slogans used by the polarizing powers of the global system at that time (the United States and the Soviet Union). This approach was akin to Japan, which exported itself as a state without global geostrategic considerations in its creed. China, during that period, did not pursue areas of influence to enhance its competitive positions with the United States and the Soviet Union. Such an endeavor would entail political, economic, and military commitments that China, at the time, was not ready to bear. Therefore, China built its relationships with African countries based on its declared fundamental principles and maintained a limited and cautious relationship with the international community. This remained until radical changes occurred in the Chinese landscape on the one hand and in the structure and components of international politics on the other hand after the end of the Cold War (Nama, 2005, pp. 322-24) .

The second axis: The reality of Algerian-Chinese relations after 2000

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) serves as the key institutional framework governing China's diplomatic and relationship with African countries. The first ministerial conference of the forum was held in Beijing in 2000, followed by a follow-up conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2003. Some Chinese diplomats argue that the forum was established in response to an African call, while others see it as related to events in Africa, including the National Summit on Africa and the US-Africa Ministerial Conference held outside the United States in 1999. The diplomatic momentum led China to announce at the Addis Ababa Summit in 2003 the cancellation of outstanding debts of around \$1.27 billion for thirty-one African countries, in exchange for African commitments to increase total trade volume to \$28 billion by 2006. China also reduced customs duties on ninety-nine export goods from twenty-eight impoverished African countries.

The Chinese leadership stated in the first two meetings of the forum that its relations with Africa were "free of political conditions, serving the interests of both parties" (Alden, 2009, pp. 47,48).

1- Political and diplomatic relations between Algeria and China:

In addition to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, an important framework in Algerian-Chinese relations is the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), founded in 2004. This forum serves as a second framework for expanding Chinese relations with its Arab counterparts in African countries. Both forums contributed to political and diplomatic dynamics between China and Arab Africans, notably Algeria. The geographical and strategic importance of Algeria, along with its North African and Mediterranean dimensions, motivated the Chinese side to explore its interests, secure imports, access markets, and make investments, especially after China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. (Kad, 2023)



The Algerian-Chinese partnership has evolved significantly, marked by key agreements and collaborations in various sectors. In 2006, the two parties signed the Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation, which was elevated in 2014 to what is known as the "Five-Year Plan for Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation between China and Algeria," spanning from 2014 to 2018. This was the first central cooperation agreement between Beijing and a Middle Eastern and North African country.

This declaration led to numerous major projects launched by Algeria in the fields of economy, trade, investment, energy, minerals, infrastructure, agriculture, science, technology, space, and human exchange (Chinese foreign ministry, 2014).

The visit of Algerian President TEBBOUNE Abdelmadjid to China in July 17, 2023, at the invitation of Chinese President XI JUMPING, is indicative of the high level of relations between the two countries.

During the five-day visit, the two sides discussed the historical development of their relations, the level of bilateral cooperation and coordination, as well as exchanged views on issues of mutual bilateral, regional, and international interest. The timing of the visit, coinciding with the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two friendly countries, emphasized its significance.

Both sides emphasized the importance of enhancing political and security cooperation, expressing their determination to intensify communication and collaboration at various governmental and legislative levels to achieve the common interests of both countries.


Additionally, they welcomed the development of their economic relations and the volume of bilateral trade. Both sides stressed their commitment to deepening economic partnership, working on increasing the volume of non-oil Algerian exports to China, and boosting the volume of quality Chinese investments in Algeria through the benefits provided by Algerian investment law.

The two parties agreed to continue expanding communications in various cultural, sports, tourist, and media fields (Algeria press Service, 2023).

It's worth noting that in December 2022, the two countries signed the "Executive Plan for Joint Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative," in which Algeria participated in 2018, aiming to deepen and maximize cooperation. They also signed the "Tripartite Cooperation Plan in Key Areas 2022-2024," another practical mechanism among bilateral mechanisms to further advance cooperation in key economic areas prioritized in the development policies of both countries (Algerian Press Service, 2023).

The Algerian side reiterated its "respect for the One China principle, considering Taiwan as an integral part of China's territory," expressing its opposition to Taiwan's independence in any form. Algeria thanked China for "supporting its nomination for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2024-2025 term." Both sides look forward to enhancing cooperation and consultation on the Security Council's agenda items

They expressed their appreciation for the first China-Arab States Summit held in Riyadh on December 9, 2022, welcoming its results. In this context, they confirmed their support for the initiative to "work with all efforts to build the Sino-Arab community for a common future towards a new era" and praised the crucial role of the China-Arab States



Cooperation Forum in enhancing Sino-Arab cooperation. They expressed readiness to contribute to supporting and developing this forum) .Algeria press Service(2023 ,

The Algerian-Chinese visit concluded with the signing of nineteen cooperation and understanding agreements and twelve agreements between businessmen from both countries during a special forum dedicated to them (Mimouni, 2023).

2- Economic and Trade Relations between Algeria and China:

Referring to the strategic agreements between Algeria and China since 2006 and the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Plan announced in 2014, China has benefited from significant investments in Algeria, particularly in infrastructure projects. These include the East-West Highway, the new Algiers capital airport, and the Grand Mosque in Algiers, implemented between 2009 and 2019, making Algeria one of the most profitable markets in Africa with contracts executed by Chinese companies valued at around \$70 billion (Kad, 2023).

China appears to view Algeria based on four main drivers for this relationship. Firstly, Algeria is considered a reliable partner due to its strategic geographical location near Europe, providing easy access to the coastal and sub-Saharan regions via the trans-Saharan highway, making it a significant hub for the Belt and Road Initiative. Secondly, China seeks to benefit from Algeria's political position in the Mediterranean region and within the African Union. Thirdly, Algeria is regarded as a key arena for government contracts and business opportunities for Chinese companies. Fourthly, Algeria presents new opportunities for China's ongoing quest to secure raw materials (Hamaizia, 2020).

China has become Algeria's main trading partner over the past decade, ranking first in supplying the Algerian market with a value exceeding \$9 billion in 2023, according to Algerian Customs data (Algerian Press Service, 2023).


In August 2023, Algeria exported energy-related products such as refined and crude oil and oil gas to China (\$61 million), refined copper (\$1.52 million), raw cork (\$400 thousand), raw aluminum (\$369 thousand), and tanned horse and cattle hides (\$354 thousand). In the same month, China exported fabrics woven from synthetic fibers, rubber shoes (\$17 million), flat-coated iron (\$15.8 million), phones (\$15.6 million), polyacetal plastic (\$15.4 million), as well as car tires and communication equipment, totaling \$845 million.

The trade balance favored China with a positive balance of \$804 million. (OEC, 2023).

as Chinese exports increased by 66.1%, reaching \$845 million from August 2022 to August 2023. Imports from Algeria decreased by 80.5%, dropping from \$213 million to \$41.5 million during the same period, highlighting a clear imbalance in trade between the two countries. Despite the annual growth rate of Algerian exports to China being 14.8%, rising from \$26.8 million in 1995 to \$961 million in 2021, Algeria needs to exert more efforts to restructure and rebalance the trade partnership for the benefit of both sides (OEC, 2023) .

The Belt and Road Initiative and Opportunities for the Development of Sino-Algerian Relations:

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced in 2013, has garnered significant attention as a strategic vision to enhance trade and investment flows, injecting new dynamics into development pathways across Asia, Europe, and Africa. The initiative anticipates potential benefits by intensifying regional supply chains to maintain



competitiveness, reducing trade barriers (both tariff and non-tariff), thus lowering import costs. Given that emerging markets and developing countries alike require new policies and institutions to transition towards higher value-added activities, promote entrepreneurial development, and encourage innovation to sustain productivity growth, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is seen as a welcomed, albeit somewhat transformative, policy in economic terms (Wolff, 2016).

Following its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative in 2018, Algeria signed the executive plan for joint construction in 2022, along with the tripartite plan for cooperation in crucial areas for 2022-2024. These agreements led to several projects executed by China, constituting a clear addition to Algeria's infrastructure in various sectors. Notable among them are:

- An agreement to establish a company for agricultural fertilizer production, involving two Algerian and two Chinese groups, utilizing phosphate mines in eastern Algeria with a value of \$6 billion. The project was revived after facing challenges since the initial agreement in 2018. According to a statement from Sonatrach, one of the project partners, the two Algerian groups, Asmidal (a subsidiary of Sonatrach) and Mines of Algeria, collectively own 56% of the "Algerian-Chinese Fertilizer Company," while the two Chinese groups, Huayuan Industrial Engineering and Tian An, specializing in fertilizer production, own 44%. This project, unique in Algeria in terms of mining exploitation and fertilizer production, is expected to create around 12,000 jobs during the construction phase, followed by 6,000 direct jobs upon production commencement, in addition to 24,000 indirect jobs. The project aims to produce 5.4 million tons of fertilizer by exploiting phosphate mines in the Blad El Hadba region, located east of the city of Béjaïa, 630 km east of the Algerian capital (Elaph, 2023).

- Completion of the Olympic Stadium in Oran, built by the Chinese Construction Engineering Group, serving as the largest multi-functional sports complex in western Algeria. The stadium hosted the nineteenth Mediterranean Games in 2022 and various other international and regional events, earning praise for its quality and functionality.

- Signing an investment agreement in the field of hydrocarbons, investing \$490 million jointly to develop the Zarzaitine Oil field in In Amenas, southeast Algeria, in May 2022.

Active participation of Chinese institutions in collaborative projects in the Algerian solar industry and broader renewable energy sectors. Algeria possesses abundant resources in solar, wind, and hydroelectric energy, aligning with current needs for economic and social development in the country.

- Opening the "Sidi Aïch" tunnel, a municipality served by the project completed on July 13, 2023. The tunnel connects between Béjaïa and the East-West highway, extending from the port of Béjaïa in the north to the highway in the south. The project aims to address traffic congestion issues for around 900,000 people in the region. Since its launch, the project has provided approximately 18,000 job opportunities for local residents, becoming another model of Sino-Algerian cooperation (Sike, 2023).



- Against the backdrop of the Algerian president's visit to China in July 2023, which resulted in numerous agreements supporting the trajectory of bilateral relations, in August 2023, the president announced China's approval of a promising railway project in Algeria, spanning 6,000 km. The project aims to connect several Algerian cities, and the president emphasized that strengthening the railway sector is the best guarantee for development, providing facilities for mining exploitation, encouraging trade, and revitalizing economic activity in the country (Africanews, 2023).

The cooperation between China and Algeria also extends to advanced technology fields such as aerospace. Since 2017, the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation designed and produced the satellite "Alcomsat-1," marking the first collaboration in space between China and Algeria. It serves as Algeria's first communications satellite, primarily used for radio, television, communications, emergencies, distance learning, e-government, institutional communications, and navigation promotion services (Sike, 2023).

The Hamdania Port project, situated in the ChercHELL region of the Tipaza province, is one of the key stations for the Belt and Road Initiative. According to Algerian President TEBBOUNE Abdelmadjid, it represents a "strategic goal to break the isolation of African countries that lack maritime outlets." Western African and Sahel countries import their goods through Cameroon, so Algeria aims to connect this project with the Trans-Saharan Highway, linking Algeria to Lagos, Nigeria, passing through several African countries. Algeria sees the Hamdania Port project as vital for exporting goods to the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and the countries in the depth of Africa, serving as a primary distribution center for the Mediterranean.

estimated cost of \$6 billion. The construction is anticipated to be completed before 2030.

The National Public Ports Authority of Algeria signed a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese state-owned construction company CSCEC and the Chinese company for port engineering in January 2016, stating an estimated cost of \$3.3 billion at that time. However, the cost increased as large projects require additional funds to meet modern logistical standards (Amran, 2023).

According to an initial study in 2018, the Hamdania Port will include 23 docks, handle around 6.5 million containers, and process about 26 million tons of goods annually. It will occupy an area of 310 hectares, with approximately 1,916 hectares allocated for logistical zones, consisting of dry ports and temporary land transit areas for containers (Amran, 2023).

Algeria should leverage these major projects not only as a transit zone for Chinese goods to various regions but also as an economic investor seeking areas of influence and economic projects that contribute to the development of African countries, especially in the Sahel region. The initiative also provides an opportunity for Algeria, a major energy player, especially in the gas sector, to open new outlets for export, especially given the complications imposed by traditional European markets due to intense competition (Ahmed Azzi, 2021).

Axis Three: Challenges to the Development of Sino-Algerian Relations

Despite the noticeable and continuous development in the trajectory of Sino-Algerian relations, there are several challenges that may hinder or impede this progress, as outlined in the following points:

- **First:** Reliance on Algerian Financing for Joint Projects with China Based on Energy Revenues:

This carries inherent risks, as major projects undertaken by Chinese companies in Algeria during President BOUTEFLIKA'S first and second terms (such as the East-West Highway, the Grand Mosque, and others) coincided with a significant rise in global oil prices.

While the Algerian economy was not significantly affected by the substantial amounts spent on these projects during the period of high oil prices, the sharp and rapid decline in oil prices in 2014 had a negative impact on the major projects executed by Chinese companies in Algeria.

- **Second:** Trade Imbalance Clearly Evident in Previous Figures:

Algeria records a significant deficit in trade balances, with crude oil and petroleum products dominating China's imports from Algeria.

Conversely, China's exports to Algeria consist mostly of manufactured goods, offering little support for the development and growth of the Algerian economy. China, on the other hand, demonstrates flexibility and diversity in its investment sector, achieving added value and additional resources through various projects, ranging from investments in mining and cement production to railway projects, equipment manufacturing, and petroleum industries (Calabrese, Sino-Algerian Relations: On a Path to Realizing Their Full Potential?, 2017).

- **Third:** Performance of Chinese Companies in Algeria as a Challenge:

This poses another challenge hindering the development of relations between the two countries. Some Chinese companies were prohibited from entering the telecommunications sector in Algeria following corruption charges against their executives involving bribery and manipulation.

Other Chinese companies operating in Algeria were accused of failing to meet project deadlines, as well as delays in paying wages to Algerian subcontractors and workers, damaging the reputation of certain Chinese companies. The Algerian government faced pressure from labor unions and associations, claiming that the growing Chinese presence in the country has affected local unemployment rates (Calabrese, Sino-Algerian Relations: On a Path to Realizing Their Full Potential?, 2017).

- **Fourth:** International Competition in Africa in General and Algeria in Particular:



Africa is a targeted continent by major international and regional players. Algeria, as an integral part of this continent with abundant resources and diverse capabilities in North Africa, attracts the interests of Europeans, Americans, Russians, and Turks.

This competition puts pressure on the Algerian decision-maker while providing opportunities for negotiation and finding the best offers to achieve the desired goals and necessary development in the face of Chinese dominance over most major projects in the country.

- **Fifth:** Algeria's Non-Membership in the BRICS Association:

A prevailing analytical trend suggests that Algeria's non-membership in the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) will impact the nature of Sino-Algerian relations.

Algeria officially submitted its application for BRICS membership on November 7, 2022. President Tebboune expressed the country's desire to join during his visits to Russia on July 14, 2023, and China on the 17th of the same month. He urged both nations to support the application.

During his visit to China, President Tebboune also requested Algeria's membership in the New Development Bank (NDP) of the BRICS with a contribution of \$1.5 billion. Tebboune stated that Algeria's aspiration to join BRICS aims to open new economic opportunities, diversify the country's economy, and enhance partnerships with various member states.

It is obvious that Algeria, through BRICS, seeks to alleviate the pressure from international economic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the general dominance of the U.S. dollar in trade transactions. (kharief, 2023) .

Despite Algeria's efforts, the BRICS decision in South Africa in August 2023 rejected Algeria's membership due to opposition from India and Brazil. The decision included the admission of Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia into the organization.

Some sources suggest that French efforts, coordinated with India, played a role in opposing Algeria's membership. Algeria, emphasizing diplomatic solutions, rejected French military intervention in West African economic community against Niger due to a coup against a president supported by France in July 2023. Algeria also refused French military aircraft to fly over its airspace (The Cradle, 2023).

Apart from reasons for rejecting Algeria's membership, Algeria's economic indicators may not qualify it for joining, especially considering the weak economic indicators compared to other BRICS nations like Egypt. The per capita GDP for Algerians does not exceed \$3,700, far from the \$7,000 in South Africa or Brazil.

Another factor for Algerian leadership to consider is the alignment of BRICS nations and their relationship with Western countries. India and South Africa have strategic relations with the United States, and Brazil also has strained relations with the U.S. and Russia. Joining BRICS could pose a risk for Algeria if member countries face economic instability. Therefore, the rejection of Algeria's BRICS membership provides an opportunity for a

comprehensive reassessment of the feasibility of joining, especially considering the robust Sino-Algerian relations without BRICS membership (kharief, 2023).

Conclusion: In summary, Sino-Algerian relations are deeply rooted, strategic, and vital, as evidenced by clear economic and investment statistics. Challenges may impede further mutual cooperation, but China's strategic approach to its partners, marked by pragmatism and a focus on maintaining its investments and interests, positions it favorably in Algeria and other global nations. However, it is crucial for Algeria to prioritize its development needs and not merely act as a recipient of projects but rather engage in mutually beneficial and fruitful relationships.

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