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Balancing Act: Algeria's Foreign Policy amidst US-China Strategic Competition

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Abstract:

Algeria's foreign policy, rooted in non-alignment and sovereignty, faces renewed challenges amid U.S.–China strategic competition. This study examines how Algeria balances relations with both powers while preserving autonomy. Using a mixed-methods approach, it analyzes trade, investment, and arms data alongside policy documents. Algeria counterterrorism cooperation. Findings show expanding economic links with China and selective security collaboration with the United States, all within Algeria's principles of sovereignty and non-interference. The study concludes that Algeria's pragmatic hedging illustrates how middle powers in the Global South navigate an evolving multipolar order.

Keywords: Algeria; Foreign Policy; USA; China; Strategic Competition.

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Introduction:

The intensifying great-power rivalry between the United States and China has become a defining feature of twenty-first-century international relations, reshaping global alignments and regional strategies. [1] Nowhere is this competition more visible than in Africa, which has emerged as a central arena for influence and investment. China remains the continent's largest trading partner, with trade volumes exceeding USD 280 billion in 2023[2] —more than four times that of the United States. Yet the balance is shifting. In 2023, the United States reclaimed its position as the leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, channeling USD 7.8 billion compared to China's USD 4 billion, marking its first lead since 2012. [3] This resurgence reflects Washington's renewed determination to counter Beijing's growing influence, particularly in sectors tied to strategic and critical mineral supply chains, which are increasingly viewed as vital to U.S. national security and economic resilience. [4] Africa's vast natural resources, expanding consumer markets, and strategic maritime corridors thus place the continent at the heart of the evolving U.S.–China competition—offering African states both new avenues for economic partnership and heightened pressure to navigate competing geopolitical demands. [5]

Within this broader continental context, Algeria emerges as a pivotal actor in the evolving U.S.–China rivalry. Strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, and the Sahel, and endowed with substantial hydrocarbon reserves, [6] Algeria serves as both a gateway between Europe and Africa and a critical energy supplier. Unlike many African states, it adheres to a

[1] Li, Xing ,"Conceptualizing China–U.S. Rivalry through the Lens of Globalization in an Era of Changing Structure–Agency Dynamics." ,(2025). https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2025.2525037

[2] Oluyemi, Oluwaseun , and Abdelsalam ,Elhudairi, "Great Power Competition (GPC) and Its Implications for Africa's Evolving Security Architecture." Journal of Xidian University 19, no. 8 (2025). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16847448.

[3] Egon Cossou,How the US overtook China as Africa's biggest foreign investor,11/11/2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2yl88wd3lo

[4] Yun Sun,US-China engagement in Africa: A crossroads,March 3, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/4r8cvddw

[5] De Freitas, Marcus Vinicius, Transatlantic Relations in Times of Transition. Policy Brief No. 56/24. 2024. https://bit.ly/4mv5hwC.

[6] Hochberg, Michael. "Algeria Charts a Path for Renewable Energy Sector Development." October 20, 2020. https://bit.ly/3W4vyXT.

deep-rooted doctrine of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, [7] inherited from its anti-colonial legacy. These principles continue to guide its cautious engagement with great powers: Algeria has expanded economic cooperation with China, [8] its largest trading partner, while maintaining selective collaboration with the United States, particularly in the fields of counterterrorism and energy. [9]

Despite Algeria's growing relevance in the broader geopolitical contest, academic inquiry into its foreign policy behavior remains limited, leaving its diplomatic strategy underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the central question: How does Algeria navigate U.S.–China competition while preserving its sovereignty and advancing its national interests?

To explore this question, the research adopts a conceptual framework combining realism, constructivism, and strategic-hedging theory. This approach captures the interplay between material power dynamics, ideational factors, and risk-management behavior that shape Algeria's foreign policy. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative document analysis of official statements and policy papers, complemented by secondary quantitative data on trade, investment, and defense cooperation.

The study argues that Algeria practices a form of strategic hedging, balancing deepening economic ties with China against selective security cooperation with the United States. This calibrated approach enables Algeria to maximize national interests while sustaining its historical commitment to non-alignment and sovereignty. In doing so, it exemplifies how middle powers in the Global South adapt to the opportunities and constraints of a multipolar international order. [10]

The structure of the article is as follows: Section 1 presents the theoretical framework; Section 2 examines Algeria's strategic positioning across economic, diplomatic, and security dimensions; Section 3 explores the implications of great-power competition; and Section 4 discusses potential directions for Algeria's

[7] Chikaoui, Arslan , "The Non-Alignment Paradigm of Algeria's Foreign Policy." July 11, 2022. https://bit.ly/4mze8j4

[8] Henneberg, Sabina, Strategic U.S. Engagement with Algeria: A Pathway Amid Shifting Global Dynamics. Policy Note No. 159. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 2025. https://bit.ly/47TxEkJ.

[9] Muhammad Qasim,US – China Rivalry in Africa, https://tinyurl.com/3rpy68ke

10 Tagliapietra, Andrea, and Guilherme Casarões. Shaping a New World? Middle Powers and Global Governance. Policy Brief No. 30/25, P.03. May 2025. https://bit.ly/46yk3Nb.

foreign policy while highlighting broader lessons for the agency of Global South states in a multipolar world.

Section one: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

A nuanced understanding of U.S.–China rivalry in the Global South requires an integrated conceptual and theoretical framework. This section develops three interconnected pillars—non-alignment, strategic competition, and hedging—framed through a triadic theoretical lens combining realism, constructivism, and dependency theory. Together, these perspectives capture both the material and ideational dimensions of state behavior, elucidating how Global South actors such as Algeria pursue strategic autonomy within asymmetric power structures.

Firstly: Conceptual Foundations

1- Non-Alignment

Originating during the Cold War, non-alignment was a strategy adopted by newly independent states to avoid entanglement in superpower rivalry. Institutionalized through the 1955 Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), it emphasized sovereignty, self-determination, and rejection of bloc politics. [11] While initially a historical practice rather than a formal analytical concept, non-alignment reflected the determination of decolonized states to safeguard autonomy amidst competing ideological forces.

Although definitions vary, non-alignment broadly entails refraining from military alliances. [12] Alam (1977) distinguishes two complementary dimensions: a negative aspect, which entails refusing to take sides in bloc conflicts, and a positive aspect, representing the active assertion of independence and national dignity. [13] As Brecher notes, non-alignment is a "political status…free from prior alliances, notably military entanglements with any bloc or great power."

[11] Aliyeva, Sabina. "The Non–Aligned Movement in Contemporary International Relations." Global Sustainable Development, *1*(1), p.26. https://doi.org/10.69471/gsd-4

[12] *Myat, Soe,* Explaining Myanmar's policy of non-alignment: An analytic eclecticism approach. Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 40(3), 2021,p.380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421992068

[13] *Alam, Muhammad, "The Concept of Non-Alignment: A Critical Analysis." World Affairs 140, no. 2 (1977),* pp. 170–176. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20671723

Following the Cold War and U.S. unipolar dominance, NAM's relevance was questioned, [14] yet its core principles of sovereignty and resistance to external interference remain significant. [15] In the current era of renewed U.S.–China rivalry, non-alignment has evolved into a form of strategic autonomy, emphasizing flexible and pragmatic engagement over rigid neutrality. [16] This conceptual continuity provides a useful lens to analyze Algeria's foreign policy, which continues to prioritize sovereignty and non-interference while engaging multiple partners.

*Second*ly: Strategic Competition

The early twenty-first century has witnessed intensified strategic competition, characterized by political, economic, and technological rivalry. [17] Scholars have debated whether the U.S.–China relationship constitutes a "Thucydides Trap," a new form of great-power relations, or a "new Cold War." Since the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy labeled China as a "strategic competitor," the concept has framed Washington's approach to Beijing. [18]

Strategic competition lies on a spectrum between cooperation and conflict. Defined as sustained, multidimensional rivalry short of direct war, it encompasses political, economic, and technological measures. Banasik and Chojnowski describe it as rivalry through multiple means,[19] while Christopher et al. (2022) view it as a "long game" combining coercion, sanctions, and alliance-building. [20] De Velde (2024) further highlights the use of espionage, cyber operations, and lawfare in maintaining pressure below the threshold of open conflict. [21]

[14] Mital, Ajay, "Non-Aligned Movement and Its Relevance Today", International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research 2, no. 7 (2016), p.23.

[15] Aliyeva, Oo.Cit, p.27.

[16] Myat, Op.Cit, p.380.

[17]Mazarr, Michael, Bryan Frederick, and Yvonne K. Crane, Understanding a New Era of Strategic Competition. RAND Corporation, 2022, . https://bit.ly/4nkJV6q

[18] Winkler, Stephanie, "Strategic Competition and U.S.–China Relations: A Conceptual Analysis." The Chinese Journal of International Politics 16, no. 3 (2023), p.333, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poad008.

[19] Banasik, Marta, and Leon ,Chojnowski. "Strategic Competition and Its Implications for International Security." Journal of Modern Science 60, no. 6 (2024), p.28. https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/196758

[20] Paul, Christopher et al, The role of information in U.S. concepts for strategic competition. RAND Corporation, 2022, p.02. https://bit.ly/4pDn4Vc

[21] Van de Velde, James. "What Is 'Strategic Competition' and Are We Still in It?" The SAIS Review of International Affairs, February 2, 2024, https://bit.ly/4mvaZyR

For Global South states, strategic competition creates both opportunities and constraints: it offers access to investment and partnerships while exposing states to dependency and external pressures. For Algeria, this environment provides structural space for maneuver, enabling it to leverage Chinese economic engagement and U.S. security cooperation while preserving strategic independence.

*Third*ly: Hedging Strategy

Hedging emerged in international relations as an alternative to the binary strategies of balancing or bandwagoning. It refers to efforts by states to adopt an intermediate position, blending selective engagement, limited resistance, and partial alignment with competing powers. The aim is to maximize benefits and minimize risks, preserving flexibility amid uncertainty. [22]

In practice, hedging combines bandwagoning-like behaviors—economic cooperation and partnership-building—with balancing-like behaviors—diversification, deterrence, and self-reliance. Kuik (2021) defines it as "a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another," [23] framing hedging as a form of insurance-seeking often adopted by middle powers. [24] Algeria exemplifies this approach: it deepens ties with China in trade and infrastructure while maintaining selective security cooperation with the United States, balancing engagement to sustain sovereignty and strategic autonomy while avoiding overdependence on any single great power.

Theoretical Approaches

This study employs a threefold theoretical framework to analyze Algeria's foreign policy amid escalating U.S.–China competition. Realism and Constructivism offer complementary insights into how material power structures and ideational factors shape state behavior, while Dependency and World-Systems theories, supplemented by scholarship on Global South agency, illuminate the

[22] *Kuik, Cheng-Chwee, "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective." China International Strategy Review 3, no. 2 (2021)* p.301. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5. *Gerstl, Alfred* , Southeast Asia's grand strategy: Hedging , (2024, August 12). https://tinyurl.com/45bb9c8x

[23] Kuik, Op.Cit, p.302.

[24] Mohamed Kara, "Strategic Hedging of Middle Powers in an Era of Great Power Competition," Diverse Asia (2023), https://diverseasia.snu.ac.kr/?p=6664.

tension between structural constraints and strategic autonomy in a multipolar world.

Firstly: Realism v.s Constructivism

Realism assumes that the international system is anarchic, lacking a central authority capable of enforcing rules or ensuring security. In this context, states prioritize survival, rely on self-help, and pursue power to protect national interests.[25] and adjust their foreign policies according to shifts in global power. [26] From a realist perspective, Algeria's emphasis on sovereignty, defense self-sufficiency, and diversified security partnerships reflects a rational response to systemic uncertainty and shifting power dynamics.

Constructivism, in contrast, highlights the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping state behavior. While material structures exist independently, their political significance is socially constructed through shared understandings and historical experience. [27] For Algeria, constructivism explains the enduring influence of its anti-colonial identity and Non-Aligned legacy, which underpin its preference for sovereignty, non-interference, and solidarity with Global South partners. Thus, while realism highlights Algeria's pursuit of power and security, constructivism clarifies the normative and ideational foundations of its foreign policy orientation. Combined, these lenses show how material constraints and identity-based values produce Algeria's pragmatic yet principled foreign policy toward both the United States and China.

Secondly: Agency and Structure: The Global South in Multipolar Competition

Dependency and World-Systems theories emphasize persistent global inequalities, showing how core states exploit peripheral economies through asymmetries in trade, finance, and technology. [28] Algeria's hydrocarbon-based economy and limited industrial diversification exemplify these structural constraints. However, contemporary Global South scholarship emphasizes that

[25] Tim, Dunne & Brian,. Schmidt, "Realism ", In : John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, The Globalization of World Politics, Uk : Oxford University Press, 6th ed, 2014, pp.100-102. Wivel, Anders, "Realism in Foreign Policy Analysis." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics (2017). https://tinyurl.com/4jt3tbt5

[26] Mark, Kauppi& Paul, Viotti, International relations theory, London: Pearson,5th ed , 2012,p.60.

[27] Erbas, İlker, "Constructivist Approach in Foreign Policy and International Relations." Journal of Positive School Psychology 6, no. 3 (2022), p.5088. https://tinyurl.com/ynhpxzb4

[28] Kuran, İbrahim. "Are Dependency Theory and Modern World-System Analysis Relevant Today?" Politik Ekonomik Kuram 8, no. 2 (May 2024): 100–120. https://doi.org/10.30586/pek.1431514

developing states are not merely passive recipients of great-power influence. As Tuttup (2024) notes, many states leverage multipolarity to diversify partnerships and assert strategic autonomy, [29] resisting full alignment with any single power bloc ; whether in the Ukraine conflict or global governance debates—demonstrates a pursuit of independence and regional solutions.[30]

For Algeria, this synthesis of structural constraint and agency is critical. While dependency theory highlights external pressures, agency-centered approaches capture how Algeria maneuvers within these limits—using economic diversification, institutional diplomacy, and strategic hedging to preserve autonomy. In doing so, Algeria exemplifies how middle powers in the Global South convert structural vulnerabilities into strategic flexibility.

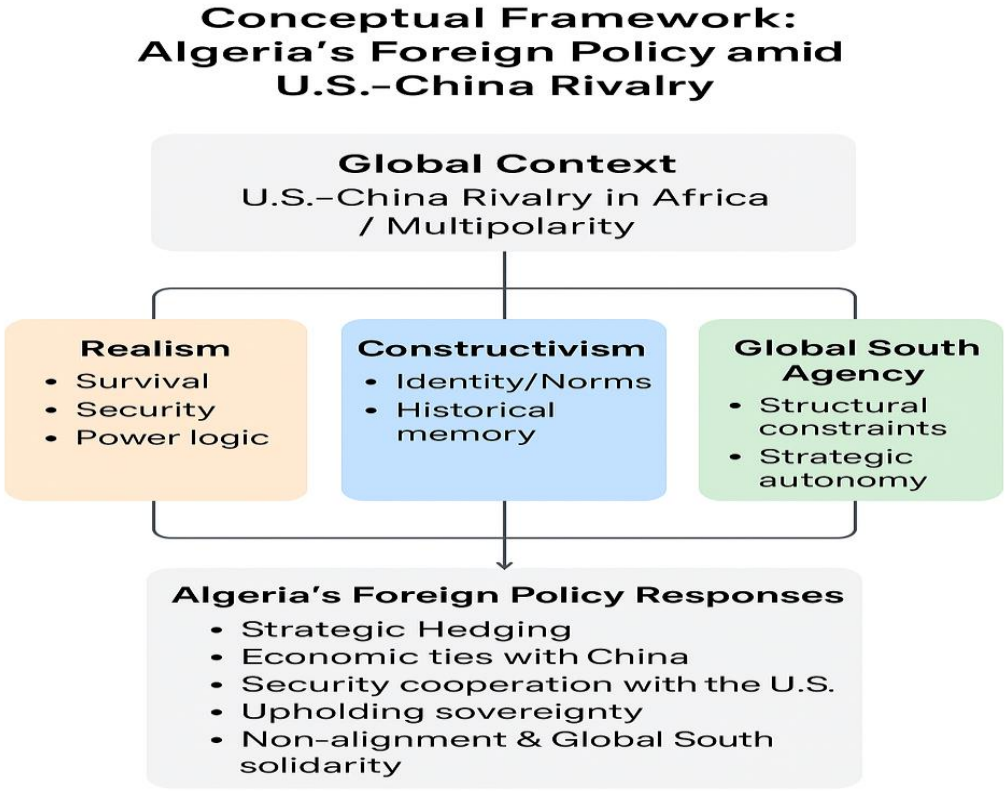
In sum, this integrated framework conceptualizes Algeria as a Global South middle power practicing strategic hedging—a synthesis of realist pragmatism, constructivist identity, and post-dependency agency—within the structural constraints of great-power rivalry. These conceptual and theoretical foundations provide the analytical tools for assessing Algeria's behavior across the economic, security, and geopolitical dimensions of the U.S.–China competition.

Building on these conceptual and theoretical foundations, the following section examines Algeria's strategic position within the evolving U.S.–China rivalry. It translates the framework's analytical insights into empirical assessment by exploring how Algeria's historical identity, material capacities, and regional environment shape its foreign policy choices. Drawing from the principles of non-alignment and strategic hedging, the analysis considers how Algeria balances between competing external powers while maintaining the core realist objective of sovereignty and the constructivist commitment to anti-colonial and Global South solidarity. Within this framework, Algeria's position at the intersection of the Maghreb, Mediterranean, and Sahel regions—and its status as a key energy supplier—becomes central to understanding how a middle-power actor exercises agency within the structural constraints of great-power competition.

[29] Tuttup, B., What is the Global South? (2024, Fall). https://tinyurl.com/3c9aphw2

[30] Men, H. "The Rise of the Global South and the New Picture of International Game: On China's Strategic Response." International Cooperation Center, August 16, 2024. https://tinyurl.com/bdcpjumz

Figure 1 : Analytical Framework of Algeria's Navigation of Strategic Competition amid U.S and China



Source: The author, based on the preceding conceptual and theoretical framework.

ALGERIA'S STRATEGIC POSITION

This section examines the primary indicators of U.S. and Chinese influence in Algeria across economic, energy, and security spheres, highlighting the country's strategy of balancing relations with Washington and Beijing to maximize external benefits while maintaining sovereignty and non-alignment.

Firstly: Economic Dimension

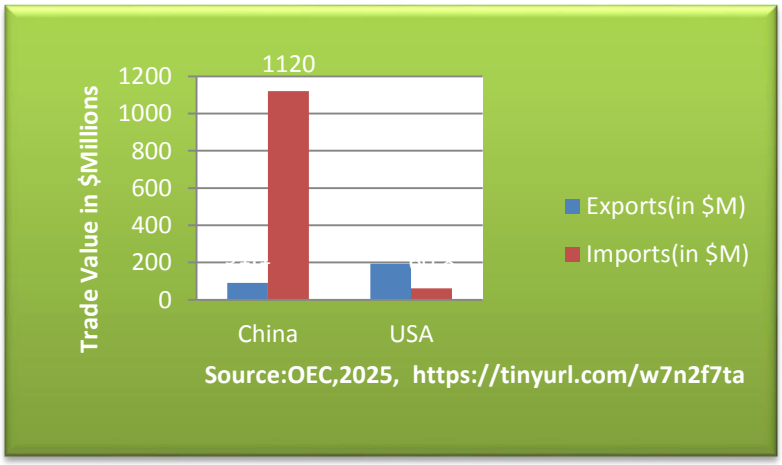
Algeria's economic engagement with China and the United States reflects two distinct approaches. China emphasizes trade and infrastructure-driven investment, whereas the U.S. focuses primarily on energy and industrial cooperation. By engaging both powers, Algeria aims to balance external dependencies while safeguarding strategic autonomy.

1- Algeria's imports/exports by partner

In September 2025, Algeria's trade patterns reflected contrasting dynamics with China and the United States. According to data, Algeria exported $73.8M and imported $1.12B from China, resulting in a negative trade balance of $1.04B. Between September 2024 and September 2025 the exports of Algeria to China increased by $10.2M (16%) from $63.6M to $73.8M, while imports increased by $281M (33.6%) from $838M to $1.12B. [31]

By contrast, Algeria's trade with the United States displayed a more favorable pattern. Exports to the U.S. totaled USD 194 million, while imports reached USD 60.8 million, producing a trade surplus of USD 133 million in Algeria's favor. Between July 2024 and July 2025, both exports and imports declined slightly—by 19.2% and 7.4%, respectively—reflecting fluctuations in hydrocarbon demand and pricing. [32]

Figure 2 : Algeria's Trade with China and the USA (July 2025)



As illustrated in **Figure 2** Algeria's trade relations with China and the United States reveal a marked asymmetry in volume and balance. China dominates as a supplier, while the United States remains a strategic export market driven largely by energy and raw material flows. This dual orientation reflects Algeria's ongoing effort to diversify its trade partnerships while maintaining economic sovereignty amid shifting global supply dependencies.

[31] OEC, Algeria/China, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/w7n2f7ta

[32] OEC, Algeria/USA ,2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/dza/partner/usa

These findings align with existing literature emphasizing that since 2013, China has become Algeria's top trade partner. However, the commercial relationship requires critical perspective: while Algeria's imports from China—primarily capital goods, machinery, and electronics—have led to a large trade imbalance, Algeria is only a marginal supplier of oil to China, which relies mostly on European destinations for its hydrocarbons.[33]

2- FDI inflows from U.S. vs. China

According to the UNCTAD, Algeria saw a notable recovery in foreign direct investment (FDI) following the pandemic. In 2023, FDI inflows reached USD 1.2 billion, approaching the pre-pandemic average of USD 1.3 billion recorded between 2018 and 2020, which brought the total inward FDI stock to approximately USD 36.8 billion by year-end. [34] The 2025 Global Investment Report indicated that this upward trend continued, with inflows reaching USD 1.43 billion in 2024—an 18% increase over 2023—despite ongoing global economic and geopolitical uncertainties. The majority of investment targeted extractive industries (USD 829 million), followed by manufacturing and construction. .[35]

According to the U.S. Department of State, the United States remains Algeria's largest investor, representing roughly 29% of total FDI stock, with Italy and France contributing 10%, Spain 7%, and the United Kingdom 6% U.S(See Figure 3).[36] investments primarily focus on hydrocarbons, construction, transport, and agriculture. In 2024, the U.S. direct investment position in Algeria stood at USD 753 million, marking a 44.8% decline from 2023. The two countries continue to engage under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which facilitates dialogue on trade and investment liberalization, with the most recent discussions held in June 2022. Washington also supports Algeria's efforts to diversify its economy, expand renewable energy, and enhance investment transparency. [37]

[33] John Calabrese,Sino-Algerian Relations: On a Path to Realizing Their Full Potential?October 31, 2017. https://tinyurl.com/3vp3kh49

[34] Lloyds Bank, *Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Algeria*. International Trade Portal, (2025, October). from https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/algeria/investment

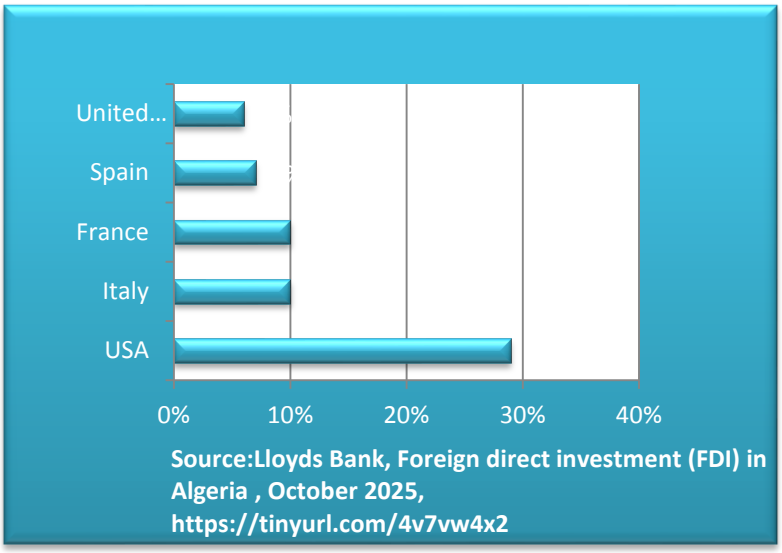
[35] UNCTAD, 2025 World investment report:International investment in the digital economy , https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2025_en.pdf

[36] Bank., Op.Cit.

[37] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. (2024, August 2). U.S. Relations With Algeria. Retrieved from https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-algeria/

E.ISSN: 2661-7404 Academic Journal of Legal and Political Researchs P.ISSN:2571-9971
Year: 2026 Vol : 10 No : 01 Page : 90 - 117

Figure 3 : The Main Investors in Algeria (2025)



As illustrated in Figure 2, the United States remains the leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Algeria, reflecting a long-standing partnership in the energy sector and the extensive presence of American firms in hydrocarbons and industrial services. European investors, including Italy, France, and Spain, hold comparatively smaller shares, signaling a gradual diversification of investment sources in line with Algeria's economic reform agenda and efforts to attract non-traditional partners.

In contrast, China's economic footprint in Algeria, though substantial, is not fully reflected in conventional FDI statistics. Much of Chinese engagement is project-oriented, implemented through state-owned enterprises, concessional loans, and turnkey infrastructure contracts under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Chinese firms are particularly active in construction and energy, having secured over USD 70 billion in public development projects, including major infrastructure such as the Great Mosque of Algiers and the East-West Highway. Importantly, these companies primarily operate as service contractors rather than long-term equity investors, since Algeria has not traditionally been a major destination for Chinese overseas investment. Moreover, Algeria's policy focus on financial sovereignty, including restrictions on foreign borrowing, has limited the inflow of Chinese official loans compared with other African nations.[38] This strategy has

[38] Calabrese, Op.Cit.

allowed China to expand its presence without it appearing as conventional FDI, complicating direct comparisons with Western investment flows.

By the end of 2018, total Chinese direct investment in Algeria reached USD 2.06 billion, with USD 59.17 million added in 2019, primarily in oil, gas, and mining. [39] Recent figures from the Algerian Investment Promotion Agency (AIPA) indicate a significant surge, with nearly USD 4.5 billion invested across 42 industrial projects, including 22 wholly-owned ventures and 20 joint projects, [40] mainly in energy, manufacturing, and construction. Since AIPA's establishment in late 2022, over 12,800 projects totaling approximately USD 43 billion have been registered, reflecting renewed foreign investor interest. While Algeria's Chinese investments, at USD 4.5 billion by 2025, are still below the levels seen in Egypt (USD 9 billion) and Morocco (USD 10 billion), [41] China's influence continues to rely more on trade and infrastructure initiatives than traditional FDI.

Overall, Algeria's FDI landscape reflects a dual pattern: the United States dominates through equity-based investments in hydrocarbons and high-value industries, whereas China operates via hybrid, project-driven models under the BRI. This contrast highlights Algeria's strategic approach of diversification and hedging, leveraging American capital and expertise alongside Chinese infrastructure financing to support economic modernization while preserving national sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

Secondly: Military/Security Cooperation

Since gaining independence, Algeria has primarily relied on the Soviet Union, and later Russia, for its military equipment. Between 2020 and 2024, Russia supplied 48% of Algeria's arms imports, although this marked an 81% decrease compared to the 2015–2019 period. Other countries have gradually filled this gap, notably China, which accounted for 19% of imports in 2020–2024 (up from 13% in 2015–2019), and Germany, contributing 14% (up from 11% previously). Additional suppliers during this period included France, Italy, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

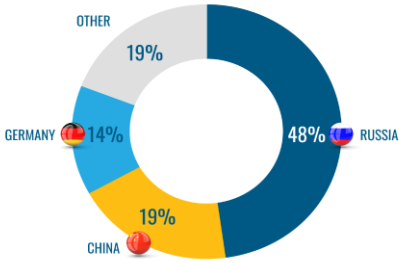
[39] Zhong Lun Law Firm,It's 'wise to be wary' with foreign investment in Algeria,2 December 2020, https://law.asia/wise-to-be-wary-foreign-investment-algeria/

[40]Algeriainvest,*D'une valeur globale de 4,5 milliards de dollars, 42 projets d'investissement chinois enregistrés à l'AAPI*. Retrieved from https://tinyurl.com/2s43v4rx

[41] Aaron Glasserman, Jessie Lin,Inroads in Algeria: The Promise and Perils of Beijing's Localization Strategy,China Brief Volume: 25 Issue: 15.August 9, 2025 . https://tinyurl.com/khy9vt6h

E.ISSN: 2661-7404 Academic Journal of Legal and Political Researchs P.ISSN:2571-9971
Year: 2026 Vol : 10 No : 01 Page : 90 - 117

Figure 4 : Algerian Arms Imports by Country of Origin, 2020–24



Source: Henneberg, Sabina. (2025, July 14). *Strategic U.S. engagement with Algeria: A pathway amid shifting global dynamics*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.p.08. https://tinyurl.com/3vrwvndj

Algeria has pursued a strategy of diversifying its military partnerships, sourcing arms from Germany, Turkey, Italy, South Africa, the United States, and China. This approach is driven by regional security challenges—such as the conflict in Libya and terrorist activity in the Sahel—and the need for advanced, adaptable military capabilities to secure its extensive territory.[42]

Security cooperation with the United States and China reflects Algeria's long-standing policy of non-alignment and strategic hedging. U.S. ties, rooted historically in the 1795 Treaty of Peace and Amity, intensified after 9/11, focusing on counterterrorism and intelligence sharing in the Maghreb and Sahel. Algeria leveraged American training, technology, [43]and diplomatic support to enhance regional influence. [44] As noted by Arieff (2011), collaboration initially focused on intelligence sharing and counterterrorism in the Maghreb and Sahel, constrained by Algeria's sensitivity to sovereignty and suspicion of Western intervention. In recent years, however, relations have expanded beyond counterterrorism.[45] The 2025 Memorandum of Understanding between AFRICOM and Algeria's Ministry of National Defence marked a historic step toward deeper military collaboration,

[42] Yahia H. Zoubir,Algeria and China: Shifts in political and military relations, Global Policy. 2023; 14(Suppl. 1),p.63. https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13115

[43] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. (2024, August 2). *U.S. Relations With Algeria*. Retrieved from https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-algeria/

[44] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. (2024, August 2). *U.S. Relations With Algeria*. Retrieved from https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-algeria/

[45] Alexis Arieff , U.S.-Algerian Security Cooperation and Regional Counterterrorism , Note de l' If r i , July 2011,p.02. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/alexisarieff.pdf

including maritime security, defense health, and joint.[46]The agreement signals Washington's intent to consolidate partnerships in North Africa amid intensifying competition with China and Russia, while for Algiers it represents an opportunity to diversify security ties and modernize its defense capabilities without compromising sovereignty.[47]

While Algeria's cooperation with Washington has deepened institutionally, its partnership with Beijing remains largely centered on arms trade, technology transfer, and strategic infrastructure. China has become one of Algeria's top military suppliers—accounting for around 15% of Algerian arms imports between 2012 and 2020—providing advanced systems such as the CX-1 cruise missile, CM-302 coastal defense missile, and C28A corvettes.[48] Beyond arms sales, China has supported Algeria's technological ambitions through satellite collaboration, exemplified by the 2017 launch of *Alcomsat-1* from China's Xichang Satellite Launch Centre, which enhanced Algeria's communications and intelligence capabilities.[49] Security cooperation also includes the annual training of Algerian officers in Chinese military academies and limited counterterrorism coordination in the Sahel, primarily to safeguard Chinese economic assets. While the U.S. relationship emphasizes strategic dialogue, institutional frameworks, and joint exercises, the Sino-Algerian partnership revolves around material and technological transfers that reinforce Algeria's autonomy and defense self-sufficiency.

In sum, Algeria's approach balances U.S. strategic cooperation—anchored in counterterrorism and institutional engagement—with China's pragmatic defense and technology partnership, reflecting Algiers' enduring commitment to hedging between great powers to preserve sovereignty and maximize strategic gains.

Thirdly: Geopolitical Calculations: Strategic Hedging

The intensifying U.S.–China rivalry has increasingly influenced Algeria's foreign policy. While Algeria is not a frontline arena of this great-power

[46] Vincent, Brandin., U.S., Algeria sign 'first-of-its-kind' agreement to expand military cooperation. Defense Scoop. (2025, January 29). https://tinyurl.com/46c4ayzr.

[47] Haboush, Joseph, Historic US-Algeria security agreement signals shift in Africa's strategic landscape. Al Arabiya English. (2025, February 7). (https://tinyurl.com/mt3xmaaw)

[48] Calabrese, Op.Cit.

[49] Zoubir, Op.Cit, pp.63-64.

competition, it faces repercussions across economic, political, security, and technological domains. [50] In response, Algiers seeks to safeguard strategic autonomy through a foreign policy grounded in sovereignty, non-intervention, and diversified partnerships. Despite global shifts, Algeria continues to prioritize core principles, including a renewed commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement, which serves as a tool for asserting independence in a multipolar world. [51]

Algeria's partnership with China is rooted in shared historical experiences and political alignment. Their ties trace back to the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), when China became the first non-Arab state to recognize the FLN's provisional government in 1958. [52] Both nations, shaped by anti-colonial struggles and revolutionary ideologies, have long championed sovereignty and self-determination. Today, Algeria's engagement with China reflects its multi-vector diplomacy and commitment to non-alignment, emphasizing diversified external relations. Politically, Algeria values Beijing's consistent non-interference and respect for sovereignty, aligning with its own diplomatic doctrines. Consequently, their partnership is driven primarily by shared political principles rather than direct security collaboration. [53]

As Duggan observes, China positions itself as an "equal partner" and advocate for developing countries, consistent with the South–South Cooperation framework. [54] In Algeria, this approach resonates strongly, as Chinese engagement is perceived as respectful, non-coercive, and free of ideological or colonial pressures. [55] Beijing's model—offering unconditional soft loans, rapid infrastructure delivery, and minimal political conditions—appeals to Algerian policymakers seeking to combine development financing with sovereignty preservation. Hence, the political dimension of the Algeria–China relationship complements expanding economic cooperation, reinforcing Algeria's strategic independence. [56]

[50] Zoubir, Y. H. Will the Maghreb states have to pick between the U.S. and China? *Middle East Council on Global Affairs*(2025, July 3).. https://tinyurl.com/yzrpt53e

[51] Arslan Chikhaoui, Algeria-U.S. Strategic Partnership,2 September 2022, https://tinyurl.com/ycy6j6f9

[52] Calabrese, Op.Cit.

[53] Yahia Zoubir, Algeria and China: Shifts in political and military relations, Op.Cit, pp.58-59.

[54] Ibidem.

[55] Abdelmadjid Tebboune, in an interview with China Media Group (CMG), Jul 22, 2023, https://youtu.be/WIi2hNhjtVI?si=4M_LR3g8Jcu8FWGC

[56] Yahia H. Zoubir, Algeria and China: Shifts in political and military relations, Op.Cit, p.60.

Algeria's relations with the United States, among the continent's oldest, date back to the 1795 Treaty of Peace and Amity and were renewed following independence in 1962. [57] Early U.S. support under President John F. Kennedy set the stage for cooperation in trade, energy, and security. Algeria's diplomatic relevance was highlighted during the 1980–81 Tehran hostage crisis, when it acted as mediator. [58] Following 9/11, counterterrorism became the cornerstone of U.S.–Algerian cooperation, positioning Algiers as a key regional partner against violent extremism. However, Algeria's insistence on sovereignty and non-alignment has occasionally strained relations—such as over U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty in 2020 and Algeria's neutral stance on the Russia–Ukraine conflict. [59] Additionally, Washington's strong alliance with Morocco and the Abraham Accords are perceived in Algiers as upsetting regional power balances. [60] Nonetheless, pragmatic cooperation continues in energy and counterterrorism, with Algeria increasingly viewed as an alternative gas supplier to Europe amid the Ukraine crisis. [61]

Algeria's current hedging approach has historical precedents. As Sam Younger (1978) noted, during the Boumedienne era, Algerian foreign policy combined radical rhetoric with economic pragmatism. Despite an anti-imperialist image, Algeria's 1970s trade remained largely Western-oriented due to technological and market dependencies on Europe and the U.S. Younger argued that Algeria's external behavior was fundamentally nationalist, not ideologically socialist, seeking sovereignty consolidation through economic independence—as exemplified by the 1971 nationalization of French oil interests. [62] This combination of ideological autonomy and pragmatic engagement continues to shape contemporary diplomacy.

Under President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algeria has undertaken a "strategic shift" toward deeper engagement with Russia and China while maintaining

[57] U.S. Department of State(*Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs*).*2024. U.S. Relations With Algeria*, https://tinyurl.com/h3pmhc9s

[58] Arslan Chikhaoui, Op.Cit.

[59] Aftandilian, Gregory,. *US-Algeria relations remain troubled, but neither side wants a break*. Arab Center Washington DC. 2023, January 25). https://tinyurl.com/58vtpjws

[60] Yahia Zoubir, Will the Maghreb states have to pick between the U.S. and China? *Middle East Council on Global Affairs.* (2025, July 3). https://tinyurl.com/yzrpt53e

[61] Aftandilian, G.Op.Cit.

[62] Sam Younger, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Algerian Foreign Policy, *The World Today* (Vol. 34, No. 3, March 1978), p.107.

practical relations with the West. The declaration of a "deep partnership" with Russia, encompassing energy, defense, and cybersecurity, alongside the strengthening of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China, underscores this recalibration. Algeria views Moscow and Beijing as reliable, respectful partners offering "win–win" cooperation, particularly through frameworks such as BRICS, aligning with Algeria's goals of economic diversification and multipolar engagement. This pivot also reflects disillusionment with Western stances on Western Sahara and perceived interference in domestic affairs.

Nonetheless, Algeria does not abandon Western ties. As Khechib (2022) notes, the country seeks to balance its growing engagement with Russia and China with sustained relations with the U.S. and the EU—a delicate equilibrium historically maintained between 1999 and 2010. Despite the challenges posed by global polarization, Algeria's geographical distance from direct confrontation allows it to pursue this hedging strategy effectively. [63]

Ultimately, Algeria's geopolitical approach exemplifies strategic hedging: engaging multiple major powers to maximize autonomy and national benefit. Concerns over Russia's military performance and its Sahel activities have prompted cautious diversification, including renewed EU outreach and the signing of a U.S.–Algeria defense Memorandum of Understanding in January 2025. Meanwhile, China's infrastructure investment and political alignment continue to support Algeria's development objectives. Ultimately, Algiers navigates great-power competition without formal alignment, leveraging rivalries to advance economic modernization, regional influence, and sovereign independence.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Growing tensions between the United States and China are exerting a growing influence on Algeria's strategic environment. Although it is not a frontline theater of confrontation, Algeria finds itself increasingly affected by the dynamics of great power competition across economic, political, security, and technological domains. In response, Algiers has sought to manage these tensions—and, where possible, to convert them into opportunities—by pursuing a pragmatic strategy of diversification and strategic hedging. The U.S.–China rivalry thus presents Algeria with both opportunities and challenges.

[63] Djallel Khechib, Why Algeria's foreign policy should be more restrained, Aug 2, 2023, https://tinyurl.com/346ksx95

Firstly: Opportunities

Algeria has adeptly leveraged intensifying U.S.–China competition to expand its diplomatic and economic maneuverability, diversify partnerships, and enhance its strategic autonomy.[64]

China has emerged as a critical partner, focusing primarily on large-scale infrastructure and resource development projects. Chinese companies have secured major contracts for projects such as the Cherchell deep-water port, the exploitation of Tébessa phosphate and Gara Djebilet iron deposits, the Alcomsat-1 satellite launch, and the Great Mosque of Algiers.[65] More recently, an April 2024 agreement with Huawei established Algeria's first national-level data center, marking a milestone in digital cooperation.[66]

The United States, in turn, remains an important—if selective—partner in security and energy. Washington provides advanced military equipment, counterterrorism training, and intelligence-sharing that support Algeria's efforts to secure its extensive borders across the Maghreb and Sahel regions.[67] While U.S. economic ties are less extensive than those with Europe or China, cooperation in the energy sector offers Algeria additional leverage in diversifying export markets—particularly amid Western demand for non-Russian energy.[68]

In sum, China stands as Algeria's largest trading partner, while the United States remains a significant investment and security partner.[69] By maintaining balanced engagement with both powers, Algeria strengthens its autonomy and extracts tangible economic, diplomatic, and security benefits. This approach

[64] *Boon, Huat, and Shaun, Teo,* Caught in the middle? Middle powers amid U.S.–China competition. *Asia Policy, 17*(4),2022, p.69. https://tinyurl.com/5a7wzn84

[65] Ben Alal, Anass Gouyez (2025). The bilateral relations of China with North African countries: Beyond the framework of soft power policy. *Peace & Security Internationales, 13*, pp.11–12.https://doi.org/10.25267/paix_secur_int.2025.i13.xxxxx

[66] Glasserman, Aaron, and Jessie, Inroads in Algeria: The promise and perils of Beijing's localization strategy. *China Brief, 25*(15) , (2025). https://tinyurl.com/khy9vt6h

[67] Henneberg, Op.Cit, pp.4-5.

[68] Carlone, Nicholas T*he United States and Algeria: An exploration of historical ties, diplomacy, and shared challenges*, (2023, December 5). https://tinyurl.com/ydsxss26

[69] Sachdeva, Mohit, and Pavel Sidorov, *The Global South: A strategic approach to the world's fourth bloc.* Deutsche Bank Research Institute , . (2025, May). p.16, https://tinyurl.com/3fnx26t2

exemplifies how mid-sized Global South states can transform systemic rivalry into a tool for advancing national interests rather than a source of vulnerability.

Secondly: Challenges

Despite these advantages, Algeria's position within the U.S.–China rivalry is not without risks.

In relations with China, persistent structural asymmetries remain. The partnership is marked by a chronic Chinese trade surplus and the dominance of Chinese contractors, both of which constrain Algeria's domestic industrialization.[70] Reliance on Chinese financing, driven by fiscal pressures, increases exposure to potential debt dependency. While Chinese investment creates local employment and capacity-building opportunities, dependence on digital infrastructure developed under the Digital Silk Road raises concerns about technological sovereignty and data security.Moreover, deepening Chinese involvement may eventually test Beijing's non-interference principle, potentially drawing it into Algeria's internal political or security affairs.[71]

China's expanding military footprint in Africa and its growing arms exports to the continent further suggest a gradual shift toward a more assertive regional posture.[72] Should Algeria seek Chinese support amid regional rivalries—particularly vis-à-vis Morocco—this could erode its long-standing policy of non-alignment and compromise its strategic autonomy.

Relations with the United States are likewise constrained by structural and political factors. Algiers remains cautious toward closer U.S. security cooperation, resisting perceived conditionalities and maintaining a diversified defense procurement strategy that includes Russia, China, France, Turkey, and others. Bilateral mistrust is compounded by Washington's close alliance with Morocco, Algeria's regional rival.[73]

On the economic front, American investment remains limited by Algeria's bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and regulatory opacity, leaving

[70] Calabrese, Op.Cit.

[71] Glasserman, & Lin,, Op.Cit.

[72] Ben Alal, Gouyez,Op.Cit, pp.14-16.

[73] Zoubir, Yihai, The United States and Algeria: A new strategic partnership? *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), 5*(4), (2011),pp.1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2011.12023188

hydrocarbons as the dominant area of cooperation.[74] Furthermore, geopolitical divergences—such as U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and support for the Abraham Accords—clash with Algeria's positions on sovereignty and the Palestinian cause, straining political trust.[75]

The broader strategic challenge for Algeria lies in maintaining equilibrium between the two powers without alienating either. Its success depends not only on diplomatic skill but also on structural conditions beyond its control. As U.S.–China rivalry intensifies, Algeria may face growing pressure to take clearer sides, thereby testing the durability of its long-standing non-aligned and sovereignty-centered foreign policy.[76]

In this context, Algeria's experience encapsulates both the promise and the peril of strategic hedging in a multipolar order: it gains leverage through diversification but remains vulnerable to systemic shifts and external dependencies.

FUTURE SCENARIOS

The evolution of Algeria's foreign policy amid the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry remains open-ended rather than predetermined. Although major powers like the United States and China exert considerable influence over the strategic environment of smaller states, Algeria's foreign policy is not merely a reaction to external pressures. 77 Instead, it reflects a dynamic interaction between historical legacies, domestic imperatives, and global structural forces. Algeria's long-standing commitment to non-alignment and the defense of sovereignty provides a robust basis for avoiding entanglement with any single great power. Simultaneously, broader structural developments—such as China's expanding economic presence, the deepening U.S.–China strategic rivalry, and Europe's increasing demand for Algerian energy—generate both constraints and new opportunities. Considering these interrelated domestic and international factors, three potential future trajectories for Algeria's foreign policy can be outlined.

Firstly: Continuation of Strategic Hedging (Status Quo)

[74] Hennebergn, Op.Cit, pp.4-5.

[75] Aftandilian, Op.Cit.

[76] Zoubir, , Will the Maghreb states have to pick between the U.S. and China? , *Op.Cit*

[77] Boon, & Teo, Op.Cit, p.63.

Aligned with realist balance-of-power logic, strategic hedging remains a pragmatic approach for middle powers navigating between the United States and China. As Gilley and O'Neil's Middle Powers and the Rise of China suggest, many such states hedge because they depend on Washington for security and on Beijing for economic growth.[78] Given Algeria's historical resistance to abrupt policy shifts,[79] the most likely trajectory is the continuation of this hedging strategy.

In this scenario, Algeria would deepen its economic ties with China—particularly through Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure and technology projects—while maintaining selective but strategic cooperation with the United States in areas such as counterterrorism and hydrocarbons. The approach reflects Algeria's doctrine of non-alignment and sovereignty, allowing it to extract economic and security benefits without full entanglement.[80] Hedging, therefore, preserves flexibility and autonomy, enabling Algeria to maneuver among competing offers of investment, technology, and defense assistance.

Secondly: China-Leaning Trajectory

A second possible trajectory involves Algeria moving closer to China. Like many Global South states, Algeria seeks to benefit from China's global economic engagement.[81] Such a shift could occur if Chinese infrastructure financing and technology investments expand to the point of dependence, or if U.S. engagement remains limited to hydrocarbons and counterterrorism.

However, this pathway entails risks of dependency—particularly in the digital and technological domains. Algeria's cooperation with Chinese companies, notably Huawei, includes projects to modernize telecommunications, establish national data centers, expand cloud computing, and develop e-government platforms. While these initiatives support modernization, they also risk exposing Algeria to technological dependence and external influence over critical infrastructure.[82]

[78] Ibid, Op.Cit, p.69.

[79] Henneberg, Op.Cit, p.17.

[80] Kuik, Op.Cit, p.302.

[81] Henneberg, , Op.Cit, p.02.

[82] The Arab Weekly, *China's growing digital footprint in Algeria raises opportunities and risks. (2025, September 1). https://tinyurl.com/4tbpctdp*

Thus, while China offers Algeria valuable opportunities for development, an overt tilt toward Beijing could narrow Algeria's strategic autonomy and constrain its future policy flexibility.

Thirdly: Rebalancing toward the West

A third, though less probable, scenario involves Algeria gradually rebalancing toward the United States and Europe. This shift could be driven by rising Western demand for Algerian hydrocarbons in the wake of reduced Russian supply or by U.S. efforts to curb Chinese technological penetration.Expanding intelligence and security cooperation with Washington might draw Algeria closer to Western partners, though this trajectory risks undermining its doctrine of non-alignment and straining its ties with Beijing—potentially weakening its advocacy for multipolarity.[83]

Recent developments suggest tentative movement in this direction. These include ongoing negotiations with the European Union to revise the Partnership Agreement and the signing of a first-ever military cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United States.[84] Such moves reflect Algeria's frustration with Russia's destabilizing behavior and its intent to diversify strategic partnerships. Nevertheless, Algeria continues to resist deeper alignment with any bloc, maintaining concurrent defense and economic relations with Russia and.[85]

Conclusion:

Algeria's foreign policy amid the intensifying U.S.–China strategic competition exemplifies how a medium-sized Global South state can exercise agency in an increasingly multipolar world. Anchored in its long-standing doctrine of non-alignment, Algeria continues to prioritize sovereignty, autonomy, and resistance to external interference. This historical legacy underpins its ability to balance relations with both Washington and Beijing, securing economic, security, and diplomatic benefits without formal alignment to either camp.

[83] U.S. Department of State, Op.Cit.

[84] *Gower, Op.Cit.*

[85] African Security Analysis, Algeria resists deeper U.S. security alignment, (2025, September 21). https://tinyurl.com/5xrvx73s

The analysis demonstrates that Algeria's external posture is best interpreted through the lens of strategic hedging. By engaging China as its primary trading partner and major infrastructure investor while cooperating with the United States on counterterrorism and energy, Algeria maximizes opportunities from both powers while minimizing dependency risks. It consistently resists pressures that could compromise its autonomy—whether through U.S. efforts to limit Chinese technological engagement or China's expansive infrastructure financing that may entail hidden dependencies.

Algeria's dual engagement underscores both the opportunities and vulnerabilities faced by middle powers navigating great power rivalry. Chinese investment promises accelerated development but carries risks of indebtedness and technological reliance. U.S. cooperation offers military and energy advantages but may perpetuate Algeria's dependency on hydrocarbons and constrain its policy space. The sustainability of Algeria's approach thus rests on its capacity to preserve a sovereignty-driven hedging strategy while converting external competition into domestic development gains.

Looking ahead, three broad scenarios appear plausible: (1) continuation of hedging, (2) a gradual tilt toward China, or (3) a partial rebalancing toward the West. Among these, the continuation of hedging remains the most probable, reflecting Algeria's historical attachment to non-alignment and its pragmatic pursuit of autonomy. In this regard, Algeria does not merely adapt to U.S.–China rivalry but actively shapes the emerging multipolar order. Its conduct challenges portrayals of Global South states as passive arenas of contestation and instead positions them as co-producers of international order.

Ultimately, Algeria's experience offers valuable insights into how Global South states can safeguard sovereignty, manage dependency risks, and harness multipolarity to advance national interests. As such, Algeria may serve as a model for mid-sized powers seeking to navigate a fragmented and competitive international landscape without sacrificing strategic independence.

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