

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Algeria Monthly Briefing July 2023

Algeria Summary 10 July 2023

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present) begins his three-day official visit to Russia on 13 June. Tebboune and Russian president Vladimir Putin (2012-present) hold talks on several topics including bilateral cooperation, major developments in the Sahel and Middle East and energy cooperation. During his meeting with Putin on 15 June, Tebboune calls for an acceleration of Algeria's ascension into the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group of countries. The United Kingdom-based think tank Menas Associates reports on 27 June that the short-lived 24 June mutiny by private Russian paramilitary group Wagner Group will have major repercussions for the Algerian regime.

President Tebboune visits Russia, pledges to deepen ties...

President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) began a three-day official visit to **Russia** on 13 June, where he held talks with Russian president **Vladimir Putin** (2012-present), who is becoming increasingly isolated internationally following his decision to invade **Ukraine** in February 2022.¹ Tebboune was originally scheduled to visit Russia in May, however, but it did not take place for unannounced reasons.² In a statement published on 13 June, the Algerian presidency said that Putin extended the official invite to Tebboune for discussions on bolstering bilateral cooperation.³

Russian state-owned broadcaster **Tass News Agency** noted that talks between the leaders would focus on a strategic partnership as well as several international issues such as major developments in the **Sahel** region and the **Middle East**.⁴ The state broadcaster also said that energy cooperation within the **Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries+ (OPEC+)** would be another area of focus.⁵ Tebboune also participated in the **International Economic Forum** held in **Saint Petersburg** from 14 to 17 June.⁶ The forum brings together members of the business community to meet and discuss key economic issues facing Russia, emerging markets and the world.⁷ The year's summit was attended by over 1,500 people, including Putin, Russian officials, and attendees from the **Commonwealth of Independent States**, some African countries, **Cuba** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.⁸ There was no representation from **European** countries or the **United States (US)**.

During the visit, the two presidents pledged to deepen relations between their countries and signed a declaration on "*deep strategic partnership*" among several other agreements.⁹ Following talks on 15 June, Putin expressed that he was "*really happy to receive our friend*" and stressed that Algeria is a key Russian partner in Africa and the **Arab** world.¹⁰ Putin repeatedly also conveyed his desire to see Tebboune attend the upcoming new **Africa Summit** in July, stressing that "*relations with Algeria are of particular importance for our country*".¹¹ Putin also added that Russia is **seeking** to ramp up

¹ Anadolu Agency, 13 Jun 2023

² Middle East Monitor, 13 Jun 2023

³ Algerian Presidency, 13 Jun 2023

⁴ Tass News Agency, 13 Jun 2023

⁵ Tass News Agency, 13 Jun 2023

⁶ Middle East Monitor, 13 Jun 2023

⁷ Middle East Monitor, 13 Jun 2023

⁸ Moscow Times, 15 Jun 2023

⁹ AFP, 19 Jun 2023

¹⁰ AFP, 19 Jun 2023

¹¹ Africa News, 19 Jun 2023; AFP, 19 Jun 2023

military and energy ties with Algeria.¹² On his part, Tebboune said that Western pressure would have no bearing on Algeria's relations with Russia, noting that, "*foreign countries may put pressure on us today, but this will never affect our ties*".¹³

Algeria has historically maintained close relations with Russia, dating back to its struggle for independence from **France** in the 1960s and is still the largest importer of Russian arms in Africa.¹⁴ However, since heavy sanctions were placed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Tebboune has been balancing Algeria's interests by maintaining relations with **Moscow** while increasing economic engagement with Western countries. Algeria has repeatedly abstained from multiple **United Nations (UN)** votes to denounce Russia for the Ukraine conflict and voted against suspending Russia's membership in the **UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** but has also moved to replace Russian gas exports to the **European Union (EU)**, which has been searching for alternatives to Russian energy supplies.¹⁵

Algeria has reaped some economic benefits by choosing to maintain ties too, including having access to increased soybean and wheat imports.¹⁶ Algeria will likely have even greater access to these agricultural resources given the new strategic partnership struck between the two countries. According to Algerian official figures, Algeria is Russia's second-largest trading partner in Africa, with annual trade of approximately \$3 billion annually.¹⁷

Algeria is reportedly also the third largest global importer of Russian arms with Moscow considered to be the main supplier of the Algerian army, providing it with more than 50% of its weaponry and military systems.¹⁸ Last year, Russian state-owned media network **RT**, reported that Algeria was in the process of signing a massive military contract to acquire between \$12 to \$17 billion of Russian weaponry, including stealth warplanes, bombers and fighters.¹⁹ While the deal has not yet been made public, several international media report that it is still in the cards.

Despite its loyalty to Moscow, Algeria has displayed its willingness to take advantage of Russia's conflict in Ukraine to advance its interests, by replacing Russian energy exports to Europe.²⁰ In recent months, many Western lawmakers have also called for sanctions on Algeria for its strong ties with Russia, but given its significance to the EU's energy needs, Algeria may survive any strong sanctions. Algeria is also a key security partner of the US in the region. However, if there is a major decrease in Algeria's reliance as a major supplier of hydrocarbons to Europe over the next 10 to 15 years, Western countries may have less tolerance for **Algiers'** unwavering ties to Russia, potentially isolating the North African country further.²¹

...and pushes for BRICS membership

During his meeting with Putin on 15 June, Tebboune called for an acceleration of Algeria's ascension into the **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)** group, stating that if approved as a member, Algeria would facilitate the process of switching to payments to be in currency other than dollars or euros. Algeria's foreign ministry officially submitted its membership application on 7 November joining a growing list of developing countries, including **Iran, Argentina and Saudi Arabia**, who all seek to join BRICS (*see ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2022*).²²

¹² Africa News, 19 Jun 2023

¹³ AFP, 19 Jun 2023

¹⁴ Bloomberg, 20 Oct 2023; The Africa Report, 7 Jun 2023

¹⁵ Bloomberg, 20 Oct 2023

¹⁶ Al-monitor, 19 Jun 2023

¹⁷ Middle East Monitor, 13 Jun 2023

¹⁸ Middle East Monitor, 13 Jun 2023; Al-monitor, 19 Jun 2023

¹⁹ Al-monitor, 19 Jun 2023

²⁰ Al-monitor, 19 Jun 2023

²¹ Al-monitor, 19 Jun 2023

²² China Global South Project, 9 Nov 2022

BRICS, founded in 2009, accounts for 25% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and is home to 40% of the world's population. The bloc is increasingly seen by many developing countries as a rival to the **G7** and other **Western**-led blocs, as well as an ideological and economic counterweight to the **United States (US)** and its allies.²³

Tebboune first suggested in July 2022 that Algeria, Africa's largest natural gas exporter and fifth largest economy, could join the BRICS economic group, stating that it is an alternative power centre and "*constitutes an economic and political force*".²⁴ Tebboune also said that joining the group would bolster Algeria's commitment to the principle of non-alignment while highlighting that Algeria meets several of the economic criteria for joining BRICS but that it should not "*get ahead of things*".²⁵ The **Qatari** news publication **Al-Araby** reported on 8 July that Tebboune will embark on a state visit to **Beijing (China)** on 15 July to strengthen bilateral relations and discuss economic cooperation, including BRICS membership.²⁶

A local source told **Africa RiskBriefing (ARC Briefing)** that joining BRICS would be a "*major political and economic coup*" for Algeria, particularly as it "*becomes increasingly isolated for its seemingly unwavering support for Russia following its invasion of Ukraine*".²⁷

Algerian rocked by mutiny in Russia...

The London-based think tank **Menas Associates** reported on 27 June that the short-lived 24 June mutiny by private Russian paramilitary group **Wagner Group** will have major repercussions for the Algerian regime.²⁸ The Wagner Group, led by oligarch and Putin's close ally, **Yevgeny Prigozhin**, launched an assault on Moscow but the attempted rebellion fizzled out almost as soon as it was launched.²⁹ The mercenary group has extensive interests in **Africa** where it has contracts to provide security and related activities for countries such as **Mali** and **Central Africa Republic (CAR)** and alleged contracts with **Libya** and **Sudan**.³⁰

Menas Associates says that following his visit to Russia, Tebboune committed Algeria's support in helping Moscow in the Sahel, particularly in Mali.³¹ This comes despite Tebboune's previous criticism of the Wagner Group's activities in **Mali**. The think tank's report indicates the strong implications of Algeria's new strategic partnership with Russia is that it will support Moscow's security and political interests in Mali, which a few days earlier had instructed the **United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)** peacekeeping forces to leave the country.³² MINUSMA has been operating in Mali since 1 July 2013. Several international media, citing statements made by Russian foreign minister **Sergei Lavrov** and Russian intelligence reports indicate that Russia will maintain Wagner mercenaries in Africa but possibly under a new command structure tied to the defence ministry.³³ Lavrov also said that Wagner forces will continue to operate in both CAR and Mali.

Menas Associates warns that if Russia's defence ministry takes direct control of the Wagner troops, in Africa and Algeria provides support to them, the implications for Algeria in terms of international law will be profound.³⁴ Wagner forces in Europe were supposed to be incorporated into the defence ministry by 1 July but there has not been any major update on the Wagner forces in Africa. The future of the group in Africa is still uncertain. However, the think tank also suggests that if Wagner mercenaries are withdrawn from Africa, it may potentially pose serious implications for Algeria's

²³ Morocco World News, 1 Aug 2022

²⁴ Morocco World News, 1 Aug 2022

²⁵ NDTV, 1 Aug 2022

²⁶ Al Araby, 8 Jul 2023

²⁷ ARC Source, Local Resident

²⁸ Menas Associates, 27 Jun 2023

²⁹ Al Jazeera, 25 Jun 2023

³⁰ Al Jazeera, 25 Jun 2023

³¹ Menas Associates, 27 Jun 2023

³² North Africa Post, 30 Jun 2023

³³ North Africa Post, 30 Jun 2023

³⁴ Menas Associates, 27 Jun 2023

security and geopolitical interests.³⁵ This is because if both MINUSMA and Wagner forces withdraw from Mali, it could create a security vacuum that could be filled by jihadist forces of the **Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)** and **État Islamique au Grand Sahara (EIGS)**.³⁶

Conflict between Algeria and JNIM and the splinter group EIGS has been ongoing since the groups were established in 2012 and 2017 respectively. The Algerian government has in the past deployed its troops to the Sahel region and carried out many airstrikes against the jihadist groups, but they maintain a significant presence in the region.³⁷ The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of people and damage to their livelihoods and raised concerns about the spread of terrorism in Algeria.

The scenario laid out by Menas Associates seems plausible and they are correct in noting that the implications of Prigozhin's rebellion in Russia will likely play out in the Sahel, particularly in Mali. If Algeria does provide support to Wagner forces in Mali and the region, it will break international law, however, what remains to be seen is if Western allies will resist the urge to sanction Algeria despite its role as a major supplier of hydrocarbons to Europe.

Planner

15 Jul 2023 **(China)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to reportedly visit China;
2023 **Paris (France)** President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to visit **Paris**;

Chronology

9 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** State oil company **Sonatrach** says that it has signed contracts to boost gas production under an existing agreement worth about \$740m with **French** giant **TotalEnergies**;

8 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Tehran Times*. **Iranian** president **Ebrahim Raisi** calls for bolstering of Iran-Algeria relations in a meeting with the Algerian foreign minister **Ahmad Attaf**;

8 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *The New Arab*. Algeria pledges \$30m towards the **Palestinian Authority** for the reconstruction of **Jenin**, following **Israel's** largest military operation on the occupied **West Bank** city since 2002;

8 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Africa News*. The **France**-based separatist movement, **Mouvement pour l'Autodétermination de la Kabylie (MAK)**, described as "terrorists" by the Algerian authorities, enlists the services of the **Morocco-based United States (US)** lawyer, **Elisabeth Myers**, to carry out lobbying operations in **Washington DC**;

6 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *The New Arab*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** slams the "barbaric criminal aggression" carried out by the **Israeli** forces against the **Palestinian** town of **Jenin** in the **West Bank**;

5 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. Algeria's key energy partner, **Italy**, says that it backs **Morocco's** "serious and credible efforts" to find a lasting solution to the regional dispute over the **Western Sahara** territory, a blow to the Algerian regime;

³⁵ Menas Associates, 27 Jun 2023

³⁶ North Africa Post, 30 Jun 2023

³⁷ ACLED, 13 Jan 2023; North Africa Post, 30 Jun 2023

3 Jul 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Algeria says it will cut oil output by an extra 20,000 barrels in August to support efforts by **Saudi Arabia** and **Russia** to balance and stabilise oil markets;

28 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. Tensions erupt in the **French** neighbourhood of **Nanterre** in the late afternoon in response to police brutality that resulted in the death of a teenager of **Algerian** and **Moroccan** descent;

25 Jun 2023 **Djelfa (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** says that Algeria “*is not a source of threats to anyone*” while overseeing live-fire military manoeuvres, called **Fadjr 2023**, carried out by the army **Djelfa** state;

22 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. Two **United Nations (UN)** bodies, the **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** and the **International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** say that Algeria has forcibly pushed more than 9,000 African migrants across the border into **Niger**, resulting in a “*critical humanitarian situation*”;

21 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Aljazeera*. Court sentences former prime minister **Noureddine Bedoui** and former health minister **Abdelmalek Boudiaf** to five years in prison and a 1m dinars (\$7,383) fine. The two were involved in several irregularities in the construction of a new international airport in the state of **Constantine**;

20 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** dismisses the communications minister **Mohamed Bouslimani** following the publication of false news claiming the **Emirati** ambassador to Algiers had been deported;

18 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *France24*. Court of appeal increases the jail sentence of prominent reporter **El-Kadi**, found guilty of “*foreign financing of his business*” prompting international outrage;

15 Jun 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Space in Africa*. Algeria and **Russia** sign an agreement for peaceful space cooperation during president **Abdelmadjid Tebboune**’s state visit to Russia.

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