

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Türkiye signs a deal to extend its liquefied natural gas (LNG) agreement for three more years during a visit to Algiers by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (2014-present). President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present) appoints his chief of staff and ally, Nadir Larbaoui, as Algeria's new prime minister on 12 November after sacking Aymen Benabderrahmane, who served as prime minister for around two and a half years. No official reason is given for Benabderrahmane's dismissal. The foreign ministry announces on 16 November that it has appointed a new ambassador to Spain and re-established diplomatic ties 19 months after removing its ambassador over Madrid's support for Morocco's autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara. The Conseil de la Nation (council of the nation) passes a media law on 28 November that abolishes Algeria's "press offence" law and enshrines new protections for journalists to guarantee that they will not face arrest for doing their work.

Algeria and Türkiye sign 12 agreements

Türkiye has signed a deal with **Algeria** to extend its liquefied natural gas (LNG) agreement for three more years during a visit to **Algiers** by President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** (2014-present).¹ Turkish state-owned energy firm **Botas** signed the deal to extend its gas contract with Algeria's state-owned oil company, **Sonatrach**, on 21 November. The first gas contract signed between Sonatrach and Botas in 1988 was set to expire in October 2024 and is now extended until 2027.² As part of the deal, Türkiye will continue importing 4.4 billion cubic metres (bcm) of LNG from Algeria annually. Erdogan said Türkiye has very little oil and gas and is therefore "*highly dependent*" on imports from **Iran**, **Russia** and **Azerbaijan**, as well as LNG from Algeria, **Nigeria**, **Qatar** and the **United States (US)**.³ Erdogan said Türkiye seeks to diversify and enhance its relations in the area of energy through its new partnerships with Algeria.⁴

President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) and Erdogan co-chaired the second meeting of the **Türkiye-Algeria High-Level Cooperation Council** in Algiers. The two leaders signed a joint statement and attended the signing ceremony of 12 agreements in several fields.⁵ Tebboune said despite the "*special and exceptional*" conditions taking place in the region and international arenas, Erdogan's visit to Algeria was a significant success for relations.⁶ He described Algeria-Türkiye relations as strong, with open horizons for further collaboration, noting that Algeria is now Türkiye's second-largest trading partner in **Africa** after **China**.

Erdogan said trade between Türkiye and Algeria reached a record \$5.3 billion in 2022 and is expected to hit \$6 billion by the end of 2023.⁷ With increased efforts by the two leaders, Erdogan said he expects bilateral trade to reach the \$10 billion target in "*a short time*".⁸ Erdogan said his government will monitor the efforts of about 1,400 Turkish companies operating in Algeria that are supporting

¹ Reuters, 21 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 22 Nov 2023

² Middle East Monitor, 22 Nov 2023

³ Reuters, 21 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 22 Nov 2023

⁴ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023

⁵ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023

⁶ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023

⁷ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 22 Nov 2023

⁸ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 22 Nov 2023

this process and that Türkiye takes pride in its firms being the largest job providers and investors in Algeria's non-hydrocarbon sectors.⁹ Erdogan pledged to increase those investments even further.

While Türkiye has strengthened relations with Algeria in recent years, mainly to meet its energy needs, it also seeks to expand its broader influence in Africa. In recent years, Türkiye has dramatically increased its diplomatic footprint, trade volume and cultural influence across Africa as it seeks to become a major economic player, diplomatic heavyweight and a cultural bridge between continents.

Tebboune appoints new prime minister...

President Tebboune appointed his chief of staff and ally, **Nadir Larbaoui**, as Algeria's new prime minister on 12 November, after sacking **Aymen Benabderrahmane**.¹⁰ No official reason was given for dismissing Benabderrahmane, who served as Algeria's prime minister for around two and a half years, leading a government of representatives and technocrats from parties supporting Tebboune.¹¹ His replacement, Larbaoui, served as Tebboune's chief of staff from March, heading the cabinet, and previously held roles as Algeria's permanent representative to the **United Nations (UN)** and representative to the **Arab League**.¹²

Benabderrahmane's dismissal comes amid great economic anxiety in Algeria and as next year's December presidential elections approach. It also continues Tebboune's trend of dismissing officials, often without official explanation.¹³ In October, Tebboune fired state-owned oil company Sonatrach CEO **Toufik Hakkar** for unknown reasons.¹⁴ Eight of Hakkar's vice presidents were dismissed weeks later. A local source told **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)** in October that:

*"The firing of appointees is unfortunately very common in Algeria, especially since Tebboune came into office. This can lead to instability in Algerian institutions."*¹⁵

... and Algeria appoints new ambassador to Spain

Algeria's foreign ministry announced in a statement on 16 November that it had appointed a new ambassador to **Spain** and re-established diplomatic ties 19 months after removing its ambassador over **Madrid's** support for **Morocco's** autonomy proposal for the **Western Sahara**.¹⁶ The ministry said the Spanish government had approved the appointment of **Abdelfetah Daghmoum** as Algeria's new envoy to Madrid.¹⁷

Spanish prime minister **Pedro Sanchez** (2018-present) in March 2022 abandoned Spain's historic position of neutrality and officially endorsed Morocco's autonomy plan for the Western Sahara as "*as the most serious, realistic and credible basis for settling the dispute*" (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Apr 2022*).¹⁸ Morocco considers the Western Saharan territory as its own; however, the Algeria-backed **Polisario Front** movement demands a sovereign state.¹⁹ The Western Sahara is a vast disputed territory bordering Morocco, **Mauritania** and Algeria.²⁰ The UN considers the Western Sahara a "*non-self-governing territory*"; however, 80% of it is controlled by Morocco, which envisions the region as autonomous.²¹ After Spain ended its colonial rule over Western Sahara in 1976, Morocco and Mauritania partitioned the territory between themselves; however, in August 1979, under pressure from the Polisario Front guerrillas, Mauritania withdrew all claims of its portion of the Western Sahara. Morocco then moved to occupy the territory and has since asserted administrative control

⁹ Anadolu Agency, 21 Nov 2023

¹⁰ AP News, 12 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 12 Nov 2023

¹¹ AP News, 12 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 12 Nov 2023

¹² AP News, 12 Nov 2023; Middle East Monitor, 12 Nov 2023

¹³ New Arab, 3 Oct 2023

¹⁴ Algeria Press Service, 2 Oct 2023

¹⁵ ARC Source, local resident

¹⁶ Africa News, 17 Nov 2023

¹⁷ Africa News, 17 Nov 2023

¹⁸ Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

¹⁹ Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

²⁰ Middle East Monitor, 27 Sep 2023

²¹ Africa News, 27 Sep 2023

over the whole Western Sahara.²² This resulted in the outbreak of war between Morocco and the Polisario Front. The UN brokered a ceasefire in 1991 but a planned referendum on independence was never held and the final status of the territory remained unresolved.²³ More recent tensions between Algeria and Morocco stem from former US president **Donald Trump's** (2017-2021) administration's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco's normalisation of relations with **Israel**.²⁴ The US became the first country to recognise Morocco's claim over Western Sahara in December 2020 and reaffirmed Morocco's proposal to grant limited autonomy to Sahrawis under overarching Moroccan control.

Spain's support for Morocco's autonomy plan provoked a swift move in Algiers to suspend its friendship treaty with Madrid, signed in 2002 and to limit commercial transactions with Spain by freezing banking operations with this country.²⁵ Following Spain's announcement in March 2022 of its decision to support Morocco in the Western Sahara dispute, Algeria's government recalled its ambassador to Madrid for "*consultations*".²⁶ Algeria also decided to increase the prices of energy that it sold to Spain. While Algerian officials did not provide reasons for Sonatrach's review of prices of oil exported to Spain, the Spanish government reportedly claimed that the Algerian decision to increase gas prices for Spain was retaliation for its endorsement of Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara.²⁷ Algeria is Spain's main supplier of natural gas through the **Med-Gas** pipeline, which replaced the **Maghreb-Europe** pipeline through Morocco effectively terminated by Algiers in October 2021.²⁸ The decision had major repercussions for Spain. Spanish companies, particularly in agri-food, ceramics, construction and public works sectors, saw some of their projects in Algeria frozen and exports plummet.²⁹

While diplomatic relations between Algeria and Spain have been re-established, the issue of the Western Sahara remains a sensitive issue in Algiers. It is not unreasonable to expect Algeria to use Spain's support for Morocco's autonomy plan against it should bilateral relations decline in the future.

Parliament passes law to protect media freedom

The **Conseil de la Nation** (council of the nation, upper house of parliament) passed a new media law on 28 November. Algerian authorities have hailed the legislation as a major victory for Algeria's journalists, as major concerns have plagued President Tebboune's first term in office.³⁰ The new law abolishes Algeria's "*press offence*" law and enshrines new protections for journalists to guarantee that they will not face arrest for doing their jobs.³¹ The new law's author, communications minister **Mohamed Laagab**, said on 28 November that the legislation was a directive from Tebboune and that it is "*the best law in the history of independent Algeria regarding the journalism industry*".³²

While many Algerian journalists have hailed the new media law's passage as major progress, some remain cautious. Some prominent journalists remain in prison, and legislation that officials have used to prosecute journalists, such as banning foreign funding for media outlets, remains in effect.³³ US-headquartered rights group **Amnesty International** and journalists' rights groups including the US-based **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** and France-headquartered **Reporters Without Borders** in April vehemently condemned the bill and the arrest of journalists in the country.³⁴ Algeria currently ranks 134th out of 180 countries on Reporters Without Borders' 2022 World Press

²² Xinhua, 30 Oct 2023

²³ Al Jazeera, 11 Dec 2020

²⁴ Al Jazeera, 11 Dec 2020

²⁵ Africa News, 17 Nov 2023

²⁶ Middle East Eye, 19 Mar 2022

²⁷ Morocco World News, 8 Apr 2022

²⁸ Middle East Monitor, 30 Mar 2022

²⁹ Africa News, 17 Nov 2023

³⁰ AP News, 29 Nov 2023

³¹ AP News, 29 Nov 2023

³² AP News, 29 Nov 2023

³³ AP News, 29 Nov 2023

³⁴ Al Jazeera, 2 Apr 2023

Freedom Index.³⁵ While there have been no major repercussions for Algeria for its laws targeting journalists, there has been intense political pressure on the government, including repeated criticism for its human rights record from organisations such as the UN, US and EU lawmakers, and domestic and international human rights NGOs. In recent months, many Western lawmakers have called for sanctions on Algeria for its human rights record, but given its significance to the EU's energy needs, Algeria has avoided any strong sanctions.

Key things to watch in 2024

Algeria faces opportunities and challenges in 2024. Tensions with Morocco over the Western Sahara are highly likely to intensify next year. As Morocco enjoys increasing recognition of its claim over Western Sahara, the developments are expected to exacerbate tensions with Algeria, which has vowed to continue challenging **Rabat** over the issue.

A potential green hydrogen deal with **Germany** offers economic benefits, and the expected entry of US energy giants such as **Exxon Mobil** and **Chevron** into Algeria could further boost its energy sector, which is critical to the economy, with the government dependent on its profits for about 60% of its budget and 95% of export revenues. The **Russia-Ukraine** conflict has resulted in increased European demand for Algeria's energy, which has bolstered its foreign reserves.

Despite suspending its mediation efforts in neighbouring **Niger**, regional security remains a priority for Algeria. Algeria is invested in finding a political solution to the crisis in Niger, as it is worried that continued instability could lead to a power vacuum, a rise in militias, displaced persons and refugees, and overall greater instability in the region. While Algeria's parliament voted to enter the **Israel-Gaza** conflict, Algiers is not expected to provide military weapons to **Palestine**. However, it can use its recent election to the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** for the 2024/2025 term as a platform to advocate such key priorities. Given the historic drought impacting **North Africa** and Algeria's high rate of inflation, lawmakers will also focus on implementing measures to provide relief to citizens.

[The Algerian 2024 election is scheduled for December 2024, and President Tebboune is set to run for a second term. Algeria has a history of political unrest and there is some potential for instability in the run-up and aftermath of the polls. There are a number of factors that could lead to instability, including economic discontent, political repression, and regional or international factors. High unemployment and surging inflation, in particular, will provide a major challenge for the government, and it has already implemented several measures to lessen their economic impact and reduce social unrest. In the leadup to the election, the government will most likely seek to push through expensive social projects or programs to win popularity with voters, however, it could result in increased government spending and a widening of the budget deficit. The lack of transparency and accountability in Algeria, as well as political repression, could contribute to political inertia in next year's polls.]

³⁵ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

Planner

Dec 2024 **(Algeria)** Presidential elections;

Chronology

5 Dec 2023 **Moscow (Russia)** *Algeria Press Service*. President **Vladimir Putin** says his country appreciates Algeria's balanced foreign policy process, stressing that bilateral cooperation between the two countries is developing at a good pace and that Moscow intends to strengthen coordination with Algeria on current international and regional issues. Putin made the statements during the ceremony of handing over letters of credence by new ambassadors, including the Algerian ambassador to Moscow.;

3 Dec 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Fikile Mbalula X Profile*. Foreign affairs minister **Ahmed Attaf** receives the secretary general of **South Africa's** ruling **African National Congress (ANC)**, **Fikile Mbalula**;

2 Dec 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. **Palestine's** ambassador to Algeria, **Fayez Abu Aita**, hails the role of Algerian press in the "face of Zionist and Western propaganda";

30 Nov 2023 **Tindouf (Western Sahara)** *BNN Breaking*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** visits the **Western Sahara** province of **Tindouf**, on a working and inspection visit;

30 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Reuters*. Algeria voluntarily offers to cut oil production by 51,000 barrels per day for quarter one of 2024;

29 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Prime Minister's Office*. Prime minister **Nadir Larbaoui** receives **Qatar's** ambassador to Algeria, **Abdelaziz Ahmed Naama**;

27 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Foreign affairs minister **Ahmed Attaf** receives **United Nations Secretary-General for Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)** special representative **Abdoulaye Bathily** as part of the coordination and consultation process on developments in **Libya**;

26 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. **United Nations** special rapporteur for human rights defenders **Mary Lawlor** begins a 10-day visit to urge local authorities and government to respect freedom of speech and avoid human rights violations;

24 Nov 2023 **Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)** *Arab News*. Trade, investment and tourism ties between **Algeria** and Saudi Arabia are set to deepen after eight agreements were signed by the two nations at a business forum in **Riyadh**;

24 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** says the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** is suffering from "almost complete paralysis" over the siege of **Palestine** and Palestinians' suffering at **Israel's** hands;

21 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu Agency*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** says he and **Turkey's** President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** emphasised the importance of prosecuting those responsible for "genocide" in the **Gaza Strip** before the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**;

13 Nov 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Zawya*. **Western Mediterranean Zinc (WMZ)**, a joint venture between **Australian** company **Terramin** and state-owned **Entreprise Nationale des Produits Miniers Non-Ferreux et des Substances Utiles (ENOF)**, breaks ground for the **Tala Hamza** zinc and lead mine.

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