

Algeria in the changed global scenario: Political and strategic perspectives on regional security



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Abstract:

This research paper aims to explore Algeria's strategic profile in light of increasing global competition. On the one hand, its Maghreb centrality, geographical reach with its African depth, abundance of energy resources and demographic indicators allow it to stand in a position of strength within delicate diplomatic, military and economic relations. On the other hand, existing international crises and internal social tensions suggest an endemic fragility, not easy to remedy, capable of questioning the regional leadership to which it aspires. Finally, from a strategic point of view, Algeria represents not only an extended Mediterranean reality, but also a gateway to a young and growing market, which, thanks to its strategic infrastructure, is expected to extend to the heart of Africa, enabling it to play a pivotal role at the geopolitical, security and economic levels in the great Maghreb space.

Keywords: Algeria; the Magreb; regional security; regional leadership; strategy.

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Introduction:

This article focuses on analyzing the regional situation of Algeria as a country with an African-Mediterranean extension from the perspective of security studies and geopolitics with the aim of exploring the possibilities that qualify it to increase its regional weight as a pivotal country and the strategies to help this in light of the accelerating international changes.

By answering the following problem: how can Algeria play an effective security role and increase its strategic weight in the Maghreb region in its Mediterranean and African dimensions, and what is the best strategy to achieve this ambition?

To answer this question, we will put forward the following hypothesis

Adopting a strategy that combines a dynamic security doctrine with economic flexibility enables maneuvering to achieve security and strategic balance in the region .

taking advantage of the conflict of interests between major international poles enables establishing partnerships that maintaining a reasonable degree of sovereignty.

In attempting to test the hypothesis, we will adopt a complex methodological approach based primarily on the analytical approach from the perspective of security studies and geopolitics theories.

The study begins with an analytical description of the geopolitical context and the strategic circumstance in which Algeria exists, then addresses the nature of the relationship with the European Union as it is the closest international pole to the country with extremely complex relations. Then we enter into a quick presentation of the most important stations that constituted turning points in Algeria's security and economic policy and directly affected its regional role, passing through the situation of the home front and Algeria's ambition to play a pivotal role in the Maghreb region with its Mediterranean and African extensions and the requirements for that, politically, diplomatically, economically and militarily.

1- The Algerian context in the interconnection of geopolitical and strategic dynamics.

The security environment in the Maghreb region is characterized by complexity, as a result of the failure of the Maghreb Union project, the accumulation of political, social and economic events, and the exacerbation of threats of a transnational nature and their devastating impact. Regional developments, such as the Arab Spring, are linked to the re-emerging long-term strategic competition, which underscores the weakness of the global order on the

one hand and expands the scope of the threat on the other. Among these aspects, security and energy aspects play a crucial role due to the new generation of asymmetric threats and the increasing demand from countries. Therefore, such security threats and the security of energy assets are turning into strategic tools of foreign policy, ensuring three main strategic goals: maintaining and increasing influence, obtaining economic benefits and political pressure.



maghreb and sahel political map

In short, while the idea of a “global order” has been radically called into question by the “revisionist” actions taken by Russia and China, a wide range of geopolitical and geoeconomic ramifications affect all aspects of Maghreb security and Algeria in particular. Which is finally witnessing the final change in the security environment that has until now been considered relatively stable and favorable. Therefore, the rapid changes in our main reference context push towards the analytical centrality of a player like Algeria on the geopolitical arena, which, after becoming a strategic security and energy hub for Europe and NATO, presents itself as a strategic player in maintaining the security of the region extending from the coast to the Mediterranean (Khashan, 2023). Then, as a crucial opportunity within Europe’s ambition to increase its production capacity and liberate itself from Russian dominance of the energy market.

2- The fragility of the strategic partnership with the European Union.

The geopolitical and geoeconomic crises currently affecting Algeria combine with pre-existing social tensions, leading to the risk of increased fragility capable of limiting the country's role in the search for the desired regional leadership and jeopardizing its reliability in the international arena. The problem of the legitimacy of power, that is, the political system formed by the long-standing political class that has ruled the country since 1962 (Ghiles, 2014), still generates internal tensions that make the country vulnerable to external interference attempts and cross-border threats. However, the presence of a respectable military force and acceptable growth rates Stability-preserving factors. The absence of radical reforms to the political system and courageous choices on the part of the country's leaders prevents the real development of a productive economy capable of reviving Algeria from its strict dependence on fuel and the fluctuations of the global economy (Oumansour, 2022). But in light of recent opinion polls that constantly reveal increasing criticism and dissatisfaction among segments of society, it seems that the authority is able to maintain its control over the country by strengthening itself and maintaining a minimum level of security and development stability, even under these circumstances. Relations with America and Europe, as reliable and strategic partner interlocutors at the corporate and government levels.

For Europe, Algeria plays a central role in North Africa, and the long-term energy partnership is accompanied by a desire to diversify cooperation to also include small and medium-sized enterprises operating in sectors such as agro-industry, fishing and aquaculture. Pharmaceuticals and Renewable Energy (culture, 2022). This would make Europe more important to internal Algerian dynamics, as the forecasting and investment capabilities of the European productive fabric would benefit from geographical proximity, low energy costs, and the availability of a young and educated workforce, nationally. On the other hand, it can enable the Algerian economic system to have an industrial development aimed at enhancing productive activity, creating active regional dynamics around industrial technical centers, and developing infrastructure and commercial capital in order to allow the strengthening of capabilities and the diversification of products and consumption.

However, the French colonial legacy in Algeria still constitutes a heavy burden on the national memory and makes the European partner an unreliable partner, especially with the persistent attempts to interfere in internal affairs by the European Union through its non-governmental organizations, which prompted Algeria to move towards strengthening its partnership with European countries. Other individual countries such as Italy, Britain and Germany.

3- From isolation during the 'black decade' to relative success during the 'Arab Spring'.

Algeria observed in its regional location, develops its decisions within an environment that has become increasingly hostile, which internally merges the decades-long dynamics of the area with the growing levels of competition and

global comparison. This requires the government to consolidate its internal front and strengthen national unity to face not only the multiple threats that arise at its borders, but also to prevent the expansion of internal vulnerabilities from facilitating hostile maneuvers and instrumental insertions of various sign and matrix. Especially in light of what is taking place in neighboring countries, Mali and Libya first and foremost, this threat proves to be the most plausible for Algerian stability.

The historical context helps to analyze the adaptive approach that marked the attitude of the Algerian regime. Already since the end of the 1980s the country had been characterized by strong popular pressures for reform (Zoubir, 2022). In 1992, despite some openings, the regime decided to interrupt the electoral process by banning the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), considered the probable winner of the political consultations. These events, in their complex nature, led Algeria to face a 'décennie noire' (black decade) of civil war which ended, only at the beginning of the 2000s.

It cannot be overlooked that the evolution of the Algerian security environment has anticipated crucial aspects of the geopolitical dynamics and current area scenarios. On the one hand, the failed attempt to open up politics and liberalize the economic system should have made it clear that the process of democratic transformation of MENA (Middle-East and North Africa) would be arduous and long. On the other hand, the factions involved, the actors considered responsible for their financing and the violent methods of the actions suggest how the black decade anticipated the global war on international terrorism, which only became marked following the attacks of 11 September 2001. This last observation is confirmed by the change in attitude that the USA had towards Algiers. In fact, during the 1990s the country remained isolated also due to a diplomacy incapable of convincing the world of the violence exercised by Islamist armed groups, marking almost embargo against the regime.

However, as the war on terror intensified, the United States and France immediately proved willing to sell armaments to Algiers and to request the participation of the National People's Army in peacekeeping missions as for joint exercises with French, Americans and NATO (Zoubir, 2017).

In this context, between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, the country was not immune to the protests generally known as the 'Arab Spring'. However, the movements that inflamed the streets of the Maghreb and Mashreq were managed by Algiers with a different political and military maturity compared to states such as Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya. In fact, although the protests in Algeria broke out at the same time as those in other states, they never spread widely, also failing to gain the definitive momentum towards regime change. This difference was essentially due both to the government's ability to fragment the opposition and to be surrounded by a more efficient and modern security apparatus compared to that of Libya, Egypt and Syria. Precisely for this reason the

demonstrators during the 2011 protests faced a strong security apparatus that was in keeping with the context. In fact, over the previous decades, also due to the civil war, Algeria had expanded its security forces (Ghanem, 2019). making it unlikely that the latter could turn against the government. Lastly, it was the public order tactics employed that made the difference in the Algerian context as, by avoiding the use of armed violence, the security forces managed to divide the demonstrators into small groups, attenuating the effects of the mass mobilisations.

We must add to this how, twenty years after the civil war, these events represented, in the eyes of the regime and a large part of the population, nothing more than a pretext to prolong the Islamist struggle for control of Algeria. In fact, during the decade between the civil war and the Arab Spring, the clash with Salafist factions, which over time joined forces with the extremist face of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, was not completely over. Precisely for this reason, during the protests, Islamist groups were able to find a new life to continue operating underground, whether through their integration into the state's political game or violent overthrow of the government (Menes, 2011). Moreover, the memory of the civil war was crucial because it was still capable of disturbing Algerian society. This must be included among the reasons for the failure of the protests and a different path for Algerian politics. Therefore, it is finally worth noting that during the first decade of the twentieth century, Algerian society did not forget the violence of the Black Decade, and the regime was not willing to share power, but it succeeded in some intelligent way in adopting the demands of the protest and maintaining stability by containing the protests and managing the balances. Accurately and effectively.

However, the uncertainty that was growing in other North African and Middle Eastern countries became the reason for strengthening and accelerating the process of modernization of the Algerian armed forces that had already begun at the beginning of the 2000s. In 2013, Algeria entered the ranking of the ten largest arms buyers in the world, becoming the most important buyer of military materials in Africa, representing 36% of total continental imports (Ghiles F. , 2015). Recently, a diplomatic and security plan was drawn up to undertake the relaunch of Algeria's role in the region. Which was considered the cradle, due to the collapse of the Libyan state apparatus. For terrorism. However, if the country is moving on the international scene towards a new regional assertion, internal political and social events will soon raise a new alarm in the Algerian ruling class about the need to adopt more effective approaches to contain the various types of threats lurking on the country's borders.

4- The Reinforcing of the internal front and the impetus for regional leadership.

According to the realist interpretation of international relations, foreign policy is dictated by national interest. However, like other human ideas, the general concept of national interest, even compared to that of national security, is a social

construct whose definition is continuously transformed by the dynamism of individual and mass cognitive processes. Similarly, the identification of threats also derives from what a particular society considers as such in relation to a specific phase of its historical evolution. Therefore, before re-discussing the impact of the recent protests on the Algerian apparatus, it is necessary to return to considering how the origins, course and nature of the fight against the French still plays a central role in the internal dynamics of the Algerian state today.

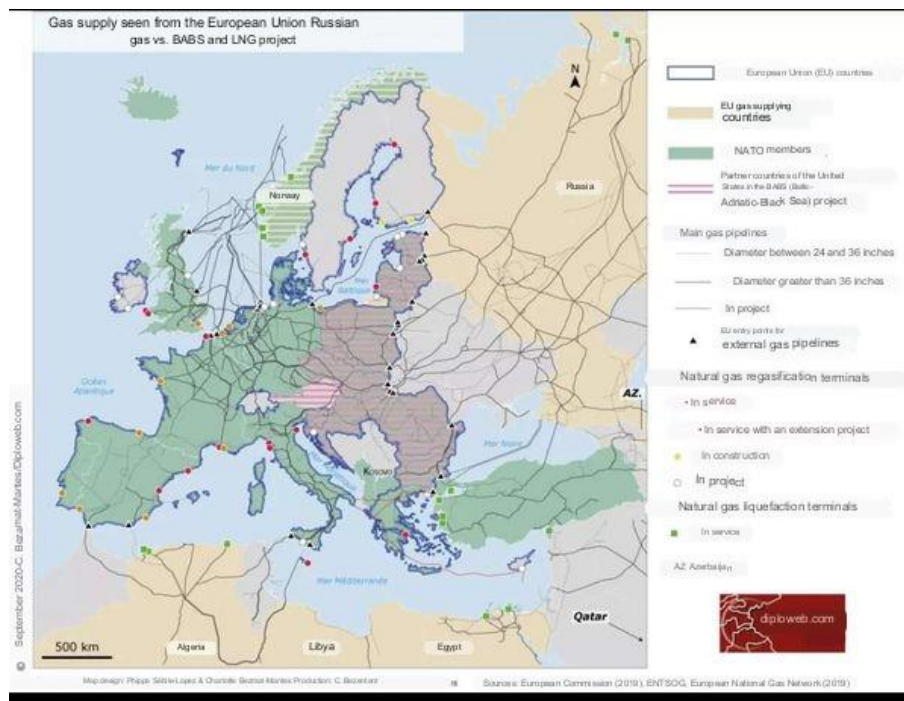
However, in February 2019, the announcement of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's candidacy for a fifth presidential term sparked unprecedented popular mobilization. This mobilization, known as the "Hirak", which affected the entire Algerian territory, led to the resignation of President Bouteflika on April 2, 2019, and the initial suspension of the electoral process. Indeed, since the fall of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria has noticeably sought to assume the role of a regional power. But the Algerian state is struggling to emerge from economic problems and its chronic crises that make it, especially in the eyes of its main competitors, a weak but highly competitive state (Oumansour, 2022). But the country succeeded in managing the crisis with great efficiency and the solution adhered to the constitutional path, in an attempt to ensure success, by reviewing the constitution that was approved by referendum, dissolving the National People's Assembly, and leading to new legislative elections. . The operation was extremely peaceful in nature, despite the imminent risks and major security challenges that accompanied it.

5- The strategic and geoeconomic profile in Algerian diplomatic relations.

In this scenario, Algiers, thanks to its geostrategic, human (47 million inhabitants with an annual growth rate of almost 2%) and economic potential, proves to be an essential regional player. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Western European states and the USA have reevaluated Algeria with a view to a fundamental partnership both in the fight against terrorism and in African stability (Oumansour, 2022). This greater political closeness to the West was able to overcome the isolation that had affected Algiers during the 1990s until it opened, in 2004, to direct participation in the security forum called 5+5 (dialogue initiative which saw the participation of Portugal, Spain, Malta, France and Italy - representatives of the northern shore of the Mediterranean- and of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya -representatives of the southern one).

The significant role of Algeria in the regional security environment has continued to grow following the geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics surrounding the war in Ukraine. This is in consideration of the fact that the European Union, the Russian Federation's main energy market, has implemented several cycles of sanctions in response to the February 2022 invasion to the point of almost completely limiting imports of Russian energy-intensive products (Parliament, 2022). Therefore, to guarantee its energy security, Brussels today counts on Algeria, the tenth country in the world by volume of estimated natural

gas reserves (over 4,504 million cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, which makes it the second African country with the largest reserves, behind only Nigeria). During 2022, the country announced its willingness to increase the volumes of gas to be supplied to European partners via the 'Medgaz' and 'Transmed' gas pipelines which respectively supply Spain and Italy (Oumansour, 2022).



Therefore, with the ambition of becoming a leading nation in energy supply, Algeria has announced that between 2022 and 2026 it will allocate almost 40 billion euros to gas exploration, production and refining, much of which will take place in new deposits in the south-west, very close to the delicate border with Mali (Security, 2022)

In fact, the Algerian economy still relies heavily on hydrocarbons, which represent about 93% of exports, 60% of tax revenues and 30% of gross domestic product. A rebound in hydrocarbon prices could discourage policymakers from pursuing economic diversification prospects to free themselves from dependence on gas and oil exports. Therefore, the fragility of this economic system, coupled with social tensions and the inability to achieve public welfare, is condensed into a repressive campaign against legitimate popular demands (Ghiles, 2014). All this keeps Algeria in an economically fragile position.

However, the country's possession of one of the strongest, most organized, and most experienced armies in the region in combat has made it a force of considerable weight regionally and given it relative immunity from cross-border threats, which qualifies it to play a role in maintaining stability in neighboring countries, as is the case in Tunisia, Libya and the African sahel and sahara.

6- The ambition of regional leadership.

The sought-after regional leadership has generated an Arms race and diplomatic fracture both with Morocco and with the contiguity of the national interests of France and Spain. However, The backdrop to the growing tensions between these countries is first of all the decades-long vicissitudes of the Western Sahara region And other disputes of interest. The importance of this portion of Africa is due to the geographical, political and economic strategicity that it has in the broader context of the transit of goods coming from the African region of the Sahel and directed both to Europe, via Morocco, and to the American continent.

Precisely because of this importance, the Western Sahara region is opening up to new turmoil in the scenario, as it has been characterized for decades by the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front. To date, this geographical reality has been included in the list of autonomous regions established by the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly Since 1978, the continuation of conflict to varying degrees between the Polisario Front and the Kingdom of Morocco has led to more than half of the population taking refuge in Algeria (Solar, 2022). This made Algeria the interlocutor of the demands of the Polisario Front.

France, now completely expelled from Mali and Niger, is watching Algeria's assertion as a strategic and diplomatic player in the Sahel with greater interest, diversifying its partners and aspiring to a place within the BRICS. As a result of a distinctly different history, relations between France and Algeria have long remained vulnerable to the general deterioration that France is experiencing throughout the African continent. The end of the military operations in Mali and the role played by the Wagner Group prompted Paris to monitor the relations established by Algeria with Russia with special interest (Novasti, 2019). This nominates Algeria to play a role in filling the vacuum created in the Sahel in cooperation with the United States, Russia and China.

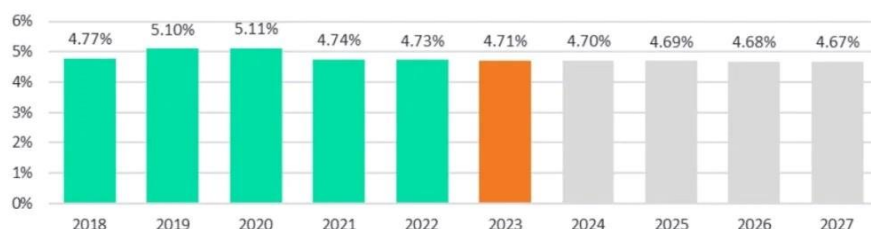
All of these factors, in addition to the country's enormous military energy potential, qualify Algeria to fill the geopolitical vacuum and play an ever-increasing security role, which opens up the prospects for security and military alliances and partnerships with powerful countries, which is an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of Algerian diplomacy in the region, the continent and the world.

7- The evolution of the Algerian armed forces: towards a more dynamic security doctrine.

The search for regional leadership and the dynamics mentioned above highlight the essential process of modernization, both doctrinal and qualitative, which has been characterizing the Algerian Armed Forces since the beginning of 2000. Military development, conducted through a pragmatic redefinition of the diplomatic attitude, sees the participation of heterogeneous actors in the defense industry sectors, from the Russian Federation to China and the United States. This, acting on the capabilities of cooperation and deterrence, has translated the military structures from the fight against the internal warfare of the 1990s to the projection into the delicate contexts that surround it, Mali and Libya first and foremost (Ghiles, 2015). It should not be overlooked that Algiers, as declared by the French general Philippe Morales, thanks to the use of naval and missile assets of Russian and Chinese manufacture, today possesses the capabilities to constitute "a real bubble of denial of access -in US doctrine defined as Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) - in the Strait of Gibraltar and up to southern Spain, in a logic of 'denial' of the western Mediterranean.

This possibility, combined with the weight that the country has in the now essential continental energy dynamics, makes Algiers equipped with a vast potential in terms of influence, pressure and coercion, something demonstrated by the increasingly determined attitude which the Algerian state has adhered to, to cause of ups and downs, its diplomatic relations with Spain and France and with which it raises tension with Morocco. In fact, since 2006 Algeria has been promoting a policy of modernization of its army, as demonstrated by the significant share of GDP that it now allocates to defense efforts, up to 6.5%, or more than 10 billion euros (Lagneau, 2022). This marks the clear detachment with the past even more if observed with the state in which the Armed Forces appeared at the beginning of the 1990s. In fact, at the onset of the first signs of the civil war, the army was called to conduct a guerrilla war for which it was ill-prepared and ill-equipped. Furthermore, the quasi-embargo imposed by the European states and the USA, combined with the country's almost bankrupt finances, forced the ANP (Armée Nationale Populaire - National People's Army) to launching military operations based on Soviet-made military assets, many of which were outside from logistics and product cycles largely between the late 1970s and early 1980s (Zoubir, 2017).

**Algeria's defense budget as a percentage of GDP,
2018–27**



Also in 2006, thanks also to new diplomatic openings, Algeria managed to renegotiate its debt of 7.5 thousand million dollars with Russia. Within this action there was the cancellation of the debt through the purchase of Russian weapons for a total of 4.7 billion dollars, an action which led Algiers to equip itself with "40 Mig-29 and 25 Soukhoi aircraft, 16 Yak-130 training aircraft, 40 tanks and 8 S-300 missile systems.

The definitive collapse of Libya's statues underlined the new course of Algerian defense. In fact, as stated in the previous paragraphs, the relative stability that characterized Algeria was observed by many analysts and military experts as useful for the stabilization of the region. In 2014, the nato, suggested that in order to intervene in Libya it should be necessary to establish a force capable of including Egyptian and Algerian ground forces. This is in order to stabilize respectively the east and the west of a country that has fallen victim to tribal fragmentation (Ghiles , 2014). However, as observed by many analysts, although this strategic declination was based on the qualitative level that characterized the Algerian Armed Forces, it never ended up enthusing or fascinating the political and military leaders of Algeria.

The country has therefore continued a policy of rearmament throughout the past decade. The greatest achievements have been achieved in the naval and air forces field.

The modernization of capabilities made it possible in particular to establish:

- offshore offensive capabilities, in particular with naval forces concentrated at Marssa El Kébir;
- deep strike capability, also in Europe, with its six Kilo submarines equipped with Kalibr-type SS-N30 missiles and its Su30MKA and Mig 25 PDA fighters;
- ballistic attack firing capability, with the Short-Range Ballistic Missile (SRBM) SS26 Iskander.
- develop A2/AD capabilities in the western Mediterranean, through an Integrated Air Defense System (IADS) from S-300 and soon S-400 and advanced radar systems (in particular of the Rezonans type), jamming and electronic warfare.

As reported by the nato information report, "Algeria's partnership with Russia is a cause for concern, especially in the context of the establishment of the Wagner Group in the Sahel (Security, 2022)". Russia is therefore by far Algeria's main supplier: supplying 67% of Algeria's military equipment needs, the concerns surrounding these relations can be seen in the attitude with which Moscow continues to ensure its penetration into Africa. Furthermore, following the invasion of Ukraine and the military difficulties that the Kremlin is experiencing, Algiers could be used to increase pressure on Europe. In fact, in the recent past, the two

States have had the opportunity to intensify operational cooperation, with a first joint training of Russian and Algerian ground forces, which took place in October 2021 (Lagneau, 2022)

Conclusion: plan for Algeria's security role in the region.

The development of forecast scenarios on the security prospects, internal and regional, relating to Algeria, should stimulate the introduction of the overall governance approaches indicated in the analysis carried out in strategic political research. This should aim not only to mitigate phenomena that directly affect our national interest, but also to develop our alliances with neighbors and globally influential poles such as Russia and China, by virtue of the weight they enjoy in the dynamics of strategic affairs.

Without neglecting the importance of the partnership with the United States of America and Western Europe, on the other hand, to enhance our role in the Mediterranean, the African Sahel, and the Sahara. The importance of the Mediterranean and its geopolitical dynamics to our national security policy is no less important than the Sahara and the Sahel. This The overlap between the coast and the continental depth, and the combination of these two dimensions, allows for a significant margin of maneuver that allows the conclusion of many security and strategic agreements and the conclusion of alliances with major global poles to ensure and enhance Algerian national security.

It is precisely for this reason, and from this perspective, that our country has been tirelessly trying, since the beginning of 2022, to rewrite its energy policy, its role in the Mediterranean, and its security strategy in the Sahara and its environs. This path should stimulate Algeria's cooperation with all Mediterranean countries. Increasing Algeria's qualitative weight in the region requires developing security and energy policies and playing on strategic balances in the Mediterranean. Once again from this perspective, this leads to the necessity of working to sustain economic growth and making structural reforms to keep pace with the dynamics of competition in the Mediterranean, the Arab world and Africa.

The study reached the following results and recommendations :

- Algeria has the potential of a pivotal country in North Africa and the Maghreb region with its energy and military capabilities and geopolitical position, it can play an effective role in the Maghreb region in its Mediterranean and African dimensions.

- Algeria, with its human and natural capabilities and energies, can play the role of regional leadership in the Maghreb region and increase its influence in neighboring countries, which puts it in a strong position before the major international blocs and poles.

- It is necessary to help economically failed neighboring countries, because they are the main source of threats to national security, and in both cases Algeria

pays the security bill, whether it helps them directly through economic and military aid, or pays the cost of not helping them by fighting terrorism, illegal immigration, and combating drugs and arms smuggling (Prevention is not treatment).

- Demarcating borders with neighboring countries through bilateral agreements, while relying on advanced military means to protect borders, such as focusing on aircraft and intensifying air sorties, because it is unreasonable for the process of monitoring and protecting the borders of a country like Algeria (the largest country in Africa) to be carried out by car patrols, especially in the desert environment. The difficult one.

- Supporting stability in Libya and a political solution through diplomacy and bringing the parties to the negotiating table while developing an economic strategy based on investment in neighboring countries, especially in Libya, and by the National Gas Company to compete with Western petroleum companies in the region, because economic relations are the basis of international cooperation in other fields.

Work to resolve the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario, find ways to avoid escalation of tension, and adopt a strategy to combat drug trafficking.

Strengthening and diversifying relations with major countries, especially with the United States of America, Russia, China, and the European Union, to achieve a margin of maneuver that allows the country to advance economically and play on the strings of international balances.

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