

# ALGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD IRAN: BALANCING COMMITMENTS TO THE ARAB WORLD WITH NATIONAL INTERESTS

Dr. Mohammed al-Amin bin Awdah

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Lecturer, Department of Political Science  
and International Relations, University of Tamanrasset, Algeria

Political systems interact with one another within a global setting, and they have varying natures and dimensions. Decision-makers in any influential political unit in the world order base their decisions on a variety of material and moral perspectives and orientations. They act as influential determinants that shape and set the contours of their countries' foreign policies with other countries, whether at the regional or global level. Scholars of international relations explore the aforesaid perspectives and orientations to interpret how global interactions occur and the nature of relationships between countries and the criteria that influences and steer decision-makers' behavior toward influential political units. This is done to determine whether the behavior of political units is based on realism or idealism or inspired by national interests, which often expresses the strength and influence of a political unit.

Algeria, one of the heavyweight countries, at least in the Arab and African regions, is an exception to the approach of understanding how relationships between countries are interconnected in international relations. Algeria achieved independence from France in 1962, which had occupied the country for more than 130 years. Since independence, through a liberation revolution and the drafting of the country's first permanent Constitution in 1963, Algeria adopted numerous essential and well-established principles governing its domestic and foreign policies. Algeria created a new nascent revolutionary policy in the Arab and African regions based on the "Declaration of 1 November 1954" —the first independentist appeal addressed by the National Liberation Front (FLN) to the Algerian people — which granted Algeria a position among other countries, particularly in terms of providing it with a future role in the region and the world.

In this context, Algeria-Iran relations have repeatedly been the subject of heated scholarly debate. This study focuses on the determinants and history of Algeria-Iran relations, shedding light on the variables that have influenced their historical trajectory. This is in addition to reviewing their common interests and disagreements when it comes to the Arab and African regions. It is worth mentioning that the Arab world is the most controversial topic when analyzing Algeria-Iran relations; given its highly significant thorny issues.

Looking at the regional developments that have occurred in the Arab world over the last decade — beginning with the political shifts that occurred in several Arab countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen and the subsequent implications and significance of these shifts, as well as the decisive developments that the Palestinian cause witnessed — scholars noticed a shift in the nature of relations between Algeria and Iran. The approximation of the two countries' governments toward these aforementioned developments was harmonious. This harmonious position coincided with Iran's growing role and expanding clout in the Arab region. These events raise several research questions: what are the parameters and well-established principles of Algerian foreign policy? Can there be any talk of well-established principles governing foreign policy in light of a rapidly changing and deeply complex world order? What is the nature of the parameters that define Algeria-Iran relations toward Arab causes? How do Algerian decision-makers assess the areas of convergence and divergence with Iran? How do Algeria's foreign policymakers strike a balance between the country's commitments toward the interests of the Arab world and the benefits it can achieve by advancing its ties with Iran's political system?

When analyzing the complexities of Algeria-Iran relations, the study adopts a general hypothesis; Algeria attempts to remain equidistant from all the influential actors in the Arab region in the face of the Iranian political

system. Meanwhile, it remains keen to preserve and not to abandon its gradual order of priorities, which is the hallmark of the vision of Algerian decision-makers, which centers on achieving Algerian national interests in the first place. Given the rising concerns and fears of Arab nations over Iran's growing role in the region, it is perhaps quite complicated and difficult for Algeria to stay adherent to Arabism with brotherly Arab nations while keeping ties with influential actors in the region in order to achieve its goals; safeguarding its national interests within the framework of a gradual order of priorities.

The study aims to answer the aforesaid questions through touching on some main analytical themes and points. In the beginning, the study sheds light on the most important principles of Algeria's foreign policy and analyzes its constants and variables. Then there will be a brief review of the historical background of Algeria-Iran relations, followed by an analysis of Algeria's foreign policy balancing act between the Arab countries and Iran.

### **Principles of Algeria's Foreign Policy and Its Constants and Variables**

Many of the writings and works that have discussed Algeria's foreign policy, particularly by Algerian researchers and academics, have placed an exaggerated focus on the country's well-established foreign policy constants that require extensive examination and scrutiny — given the nature of relations between countries in general. In politics and international relations, constants and variables are always impacted by regional and international developments; therefore, one country always needs to revise its vision and perception of its standing and role with other political units in its regional and international sphere.

The ruling system in Algeria has always reiterated the well-established constant principles governing its relations with other countries. However, this does not mean that there might not be some instances of pragmatism-driven necessities or realpolitik-based moves, with Algerian decision-makers pursuing a selective approach<sup>(1)</sup> when it comes to establishing relations with other countries — away from the restrictions of the country's well-established foreign policy principles.

Algeria's foreign policy and diplomatic establishment has gone through several experiences since independence, with "well-established foreign policy principles" being the hallmark of its positions. Despite these principles, we can cite some historical incidents reflecting Algeria's selective approach as well as its "contradicting/conflicting" positions:

■ Looking at the principle of the right to self-determination, which is one of the tenets and well-established principles of Algeria's foreign policy, the country has been largely pragmatic when it comes to this principle. At times, it turned a blind eye to the principle of self-determination. The Algerian

government refused to back the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) against the Ethiopian government in the 1980s. The Ethiopian government had achieved widespread international support at that time.

■ On the other side, Algerian diplomacy during the Cold War used a variety of mechanisms and approximations which brought it closer to the Western nations, primarily the United States, building multifaceted economic relations and bonds. However, Algeria on principle sided with the Soviet Union<sup>(2)</sup> in its capacity as a backer of liberation movements that were hostile and antagonistic toward imperial Western powers.

Moving on to attempts to determine and outline the contours or principles of Algeria's foreign policy, the country's foreign agenda is inspired by several essential sources through which it established a specific approach and model of work over the decades following the early years of national independence from the French colonizers. In the same vein, the Constitutions of 1963 and 1976, as well as the 1996 Constitution, set the contours of Algeria's foreign policy in Article 86. This article stipulates that the Algerian republic must embrace the principles enshrined in the charters of the UN, the Organization of African Unity, and the Arab League.<sup>(3)</sup> These principles establish rules for inter-state relations which are based on equality and respect for national sovereignty. This is in addition to the main parameters predetermined by the declaration on November 1, 1954 — as it is considered the main source of guidance for the Algerian revolution and building the post-independence state. All the foregoing are essential foundations that determined the well-established principles and constants governing the shaping of Algerian foreign policy.

The well-established principles of Algerian foreign policy include: the principles of fighting colonial and imperial powers (Article 92 of the 1976 Constitution), the principle of cooperation between neighboring countries, the principle of peaceful resolution of disputes between neighboring countries and not resorting to the use of force. The following two principles are discussed in detail, given their significance and relevance to the study:

■ The principle of self-determination: According to Article 87 of the 1976 Constitution, supporting liberation movements is in line with Algeria's vision of good neighborliness. Algeria's solidarity with all the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America in their struggle<sup>(4)</sup> for political and economic liberation and for achieving self-determination and independence is an essential principle of the country's foreign policy.<sup>(5)</sup>

■ The principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries: Article 93 of the 1976 Constitution stipulates that strengthening international cooperation and developing friendly relations between

countries based on equality, mutual interest and noninterference in internal affairs are essential principles of the country's national policy.

It can be said that it is quite difficult for those in charge of crafting Algeria's foreign policy to reconcile the well-established principles embraced by the country since independence in 1962 with the country's national interests and what is happening on the ground in light of constant regional and international changes. This dilemma has always put the Algerian government in an awkward position, forcing it to justify any policy that might conflict with the country's well-established foreign policy principles. This is clearly reflected in the trajectory of Algeria-Iran relations when considering Tehran's interventionist policies in Arab countries.

In light of the foregoing, Algerian diplomats and decision-makers use the inherited constitutional provisions and legal frameworks as a justification for their political orientations and decisions. This is despite the fact that these orientations and directives sometimes more or less contradict with what is happening on the ground.

### **Historical Background of Algeria-Iran Relations**

During the early 1960s, when Algeria achieved independence from France, the Algerian political leadership entered the phase of outlining the country's political vision and approximations, particularly in relation to the nature of its relationship with the four main regional spheres — the Arab, African, Islamic and Mediterranean spheres — through defining the priorities and principles that would govern the interactions within these spheres. Ultimately, the aim was to safeguard the principles and interests of Algerian foreign policy.

According to Algeria's foreign policy vision, Iran represented one of the major political units in the Islamic sphere. Algeria's national approximation and vision in this respect was based on considering Iran, along with Pakistan, one of the gateways to penetrate into the non-Arab Islamic countries. However, the relationship between the two countries over the previous decades and historical periods was marked by ups and downs. The reasons behind this fluctuation cannot be understood without considering some essential factors and indications, primarily the following:

■ The change in Algeria's model of leadership since independence. We can identify two essential models in this respect: a revolutionary/progressive model open to the world and seeking to integrate and play a regional role (in the four spheres). This model was embraced by the late Algerian presidents Houari Boumediene and Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The other model is inward-looking and less focused on regional dominance and leadership (for several reasons). The late President Chadli Bendjedid and former President Liamine Zeroual are the best representatives of this model.

■ The internal shifts and transformations in Algeria since independence. This includes the ideology ruling the country and wresting control over the political decision-making apparatuses (unilateral socialism/multilateral liberalism) or the political upheavals that impacted the very essence of the Algerian political system and radically changed its nature and structure.

■ The accelerating events in the Arab sphere: the First Gulf War, the Second Gulf War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Arab Spring, the tensions in the Maghreb (Algeria-Morocco). These events fueled intra-Arab divisions on the one hand and enhanced or weakened the bond of communication between Algeria and Tehran on the other.

Researchers who are interested in the historical evolution of Algeria-Iran relations distinguish between the different phases of bilateral relations. Each phase has a different and discernible character. Relations between the two countries shifted from being *strong/cohesive* to being characterized by *ruptures to cautious rapport*. The following discusses the aforementioned varied nature of relations between Algeria and Iran.

### **The Period of Establishing and Strengthening Relations**

It is well known that official relations between the two countries began directly after Algeria achieved independence in 1962. But the roots of their relations date back to the French colonization era as the Algerian national movement received political support for its orientations and just cause from the Iranian political leadership at that time — for the sake of combating French colonization and struggling to secure freedom and the right to self-determination for the Algerian people. Hence, the initial motives for establishing their relationship had a profound historical context.

It should be made clear that the first phase following the establishment of Algeria-Iran relations — especially if we opt to focus on the phase from 1962-1991, three full decades — saw three Algerian presidents (Ahmed Ben Bella, Houari Boumediene, Chadli Bendjedid) enter the Palace of El Mouradia (the residence of Algerian presidents). Late Algerian President Houari Boumediene was instrumental in cementing and strengthening ties with Iran. This was primarily attributed to the president's charismatic leadership at the time, as well as his revolutionary orientations in all of Algeria's regional spheres (Maghreb, Arab, African, Islamic).

Looking at the events that impacted Algeria's relations with Iran during that period, several can be identified as cementing Algeria's relationship with Tehran. Algerian diplomacy did all it could to secure all forms of national interests with Iran. Algeria was also keen to play a leadership role to keep a presence in Iran's regional sphere. Algeria did this through several moves, foremost of which were: Algerian mediation efforts in the border dispute between Iraq and Iran, the diplomatic efforts to end the Iran-Iraq War,

Algeria's contributions to ending the US hostage crisis in Iran<sup>(6)</sup> and taking care of Iranian interests in the United States. All of these Algerian moves reflect the fact that the Iranian government trusted the Algerian leadership and that political ties between the two countries were strong at the time.

### **The Period of Tensions and Rupture**

For Algeria, the second half of the 1980s until the early 1990s represented a historical period full of regional and international shifts (the expanding democratic transition in the Eastern European nations, and the collapse of the Soviet Union). In addition, the nature of the Algerian ruling system underwent radical and crucial changes. All of the aforementioned shifts and changes pushed the country into what is known as the "Black Decade," characterized by domestic unrest, political/security instability, diplomatic isolation, and the recalibration of the country's global relations. Algeria's relationship with Iran was impacted by the developments and changes that took place during this period. The relationship shifted from strength to tensions and rupture.

It was not long before the internal events in Algeria accelerated that signs and warnings of tensions emerged between the Algerian and Iranian governments. Suspending the Algerian elections in 1991 following the Islamic Salvation Front's triumph and the subsequent events (the resignation of President Chadli Bendjedid, the suspension of the Constitution, and the army's intervention) represented the final straw in Algeria-Iran relations. Iran denounced the annulment of the election results by the Algerian authorities, a move that was deemed by the Algerian political leadership as a blatant intervention in its internal affairs.

Historical incidents prove that Algeria's decision-makers were concerned about Iran's role in their country before tensions flared up between the two countries. These tensions were particularly related to the rapprochement between the Wilayat al-Faqih system and the leaders of the banned front whose President Abbasi Madani was received by high-profile officials in Iran and met with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The front received \$5 million in funding.<sup>(7)</sup> The conservative wing in Iran lauding the assassination of the late Algerian President Mohamed Boudiaf was the final straw, leading the two countries to sever their diplomatic ties in March 1993.

### **The Period of Cautious Resumption of Relations**

After nearly a decade of political rupture between Algeria and Iran, interspersed with Iranian attempts to re-establish ties during the tenure of former President Liamine Zeroual, the thaw in relations between the two parties began with the election of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999. Several researchers attribute this diplomatic breakthrough to a meeting between the two heads of state (Bouteflika and Khatami) on the sidelines of the UN General

Assembly in New York in September 2000. The meeting paved the way for the reappointment of diplomats and diplomatic exchanges in October 2001.

On the other hand, we cannot speak of this rapprochement and resumption of relations without first taking a look at the circumstances and conditions in Algeria in particular. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika came to power with a two-pronged agenda: on the one hand, calming and building internal peace through various policies and approaches (civil harmony, the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation), and on the other, resuming foreign relations with the country's neighbors in a way that would restore the standing of Algeria's diplomacy overseas and earn him international support for his internal policies and orientations. This explains the shuttle tours of Bouteflika to most of the world's countries during his first presidential term as well as the Algerian initiatives to resolve regional disputes such as the Eritrea-Ethiopia dispute and concluding the Algiers Agreement in 2000.<sup>(8)</sup>

In this context, Iran, for Algerian decision-makers, represented one of the countries with which relations should be resumed — though on a cautious and gradual basis. Iran's political determination to forge new alliances in the Arab world should not be ignored, particularly amid the shifts on the international arena following the 9/11 attacks, and the start of the US-Western restrictions on Iran's pursuit to develop its nuclear program. These developments made Iran feel the need to create new allies, particularly within the framework of OPEC. Therefore, Iran rushed to bless and support Bouteflika's Civil Concord approximation, in addition to positively responding to setting up the joint Algeria-Iran economic commission in January 2003 which aimed to bolster cooperation in the industrial and agricultural sectors. The two countries inked 18 bilateral cooperation agreements covering transportation, industry, investment and the judiciary following the visit of Bouteflika to Tehran from October 17 to October 20, 2003.<sup>(9)</sup>

Through tracking the course of Algeria-Iran relations since their inception, it becomes clear that Algerian foreign policy — while interacting with Iran — mostly conflicts with its well-established principles:

■ Interference in the internal affairs of other countries is a major redline in Algeria's foreign policy approximations: despite it being an expansionist and interventionist state in the Arab sphere, especially following the 1979 revolution, this did not weaken Tehran's relations with Algeria. But after the Algerian government sensed the danger drawing closer to its inner circle early in the 1990s, the Algerian foreign policy compass shifted toward severing ties with Iran.

■ Algeria's attempt to play a leading role in the Arab/Islamic sphere necessitated building and cementing ties with several states, including Iran.



The charismatic character of Algerian presidents played a key role in this attempt (Houari Boumediene, Abdelaziz Bouteflika).

■ Algeria's foreign policy toward Iran is not dependent on the nature of the elite ruling and controlling Tehran or the core tenets of the Iranian political system. At this point, it is important to mention that Algeria-Iran relations remained good and cohesive despite the radical shift in the Iranian political system in 1979. This shift did not impact Algeria's policy toward Tehran as long as relations remained consistent with the country's orientations (to play a leading role in the region). Furthermore, it had no bearing on Algeria pursuing its internal interests. The Iranian political system is unimportant for Algeria, in contrast to its brotherly Arab nations that are concerned about the Wilayat al-Faqih ruling system in Iran.

### **Algeria's Foreign Policy and the Balancing Act Between the Arab World and Iran**

It is critical to analyze Algeria's foreign policy toward Iran in light of the Arab context. When talking about Arab-Iran relations in general, it is important to study the pattern of Algeria-Iran relations. Each category has distinct characteristics and different policies with different determinants, backgrounds, and realities. The Arab countries and influential actors, when interacting with successive Iranian governments, especially since the 1979 revolution, can be divided into three categories:

■ Arab governments totally opposing Iranian orientations and policies in the Arab world, viewing them as a threat to their existence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. These governments include Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.

■ Arab political systems, forces and formations supportive of and aligned with the Iranian political system. They are in harmony with the tenets and agenda of Tehran in the Arab world to the extent that they receive all sorts of financial and military support from the Wilayat al-Faqih power structure. This category includes the Syrian regime, the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthi militia in Yemen and Shiite proxy groups in Iraq.

■ Arab systems in the gray zone. On many occasions, relations with Iran have been marked by ambiguity and contradiction, as well as circumstance-dictated pragmatism. In this regard, Algeria's approach to Iran stands out in comparison to the approach of other Arab countries. While it is simple to analyze and specify the parameters of Arab-Iran relations in the first and second categories, it is more difficult to explain and analyze the pattern of relations with Iran in the third category. Furthermore, predicting its future becomes extremely complicated.

Algeria is undoubtedly aware that its middle-ground position when it comes to its relations with Iran in comparison to the rest of the Arab countries

provides it with some flexibility and room for maneuver. This can be crucial for Algeria when responding to various developments directly related to Iran's policies in the Arab world. Algeria is among a few Arab countries that has maintained stable relations with Iran since its independence despite some blows down the road on a few occasions.<sup>(10)</sup> However, the policy of adopting a middle-ground position mostly conflicts with Algeria's declared principles and obligations toward the Arab world and its essential causes. Nonetheless, defenders of this Algerian approach cite several justifications, most notably:

■ That the region and the Arab political systems, at least over the past three decades, have gone through a host of transformations and changes that have impacted several aspects and frameworks of joint Arab action. As a result, the concept of Arab consensus has been rendered ineffective and ambiguous when it comes to addressing issues of common interest. This is a critical conundrum that in turn has contributed to causing a schism in the Arab house (intra-Arab relations) — not only regarding the positions of Arab states and governments toward Iran, but even toward other principal actors in the Middle East and Turkey.

■ The lack of a unified vision of Arab national security, enabling the identification of real sources of threat to security. A group of Arab countries, primarily the Arab Gulf states, view Iran under the leadership and philosophy of Wilayat al- Faqih ruling the country since 1979 as the biggest threat to the Arab world (its interests, territorial integrity, security, sovereignty, and independence). Meanwhile, this concern may be nonexistent or present to a lesser extent in some other countries, such as Algeria. And it could be completely absent in other countries. The Arab decision-makers' assessment of the importance and indicators of Arab national security has produced this state of divergence and variance in foreign policy toward Iran, as well as their divergence in assessing the enormity and extent of the threat it poses to the Arab region.

Arab governments have experienced changes and transformations in their policies over the last three decades. Furthermore, Algeria's foreign policy has been impacted by various factors (external and internal) that have shaped the country's diplomatic performance and output. Some of the factors include the following:

■ Algeria, as a nation that achieved independence in 1962, has gone through experiences that can be characterized as divergent and even contradictory at times —in terms of the nature of the system of government, and the prevalent ideological orientations (from a one-party socialist system to a pluralistic liberal system).

■ The “Black Decade” (1990-2000) led to Algeria's isolation at the regional (Maghreb, Africa, Arab world) and global levels. It caused national and

domestic orientations to become prevalent in the mindset and thinking of Algerian decision-makers. Here one can recall the symbolic policies of the Algerian government during the “Black Decade” such as the ones under the former President Liamine Zéroual who popularized the slogan “Algeria before anything.”<sup>(11)</sup>

■ All the aforementioned changes and transformations were accompanied by a steep and significant decline in the appeal of the Arabist movement — the nationalist-Arabist current — of which Algeria was one of the most important and principal pillars and actors. This contributed to reprioritizing the foreign policy agenda of all Arab countries, including Algeria.

On the other hand, it is necessary not to ignore the nature of Iranian actions in shaping relations between Algeria and Iran. It is critical to acknowledge that there is a watertight Iranian reading and approximation toward analyzing Algerian movements and predicting Algeria’s behavior and foreign policies and comprehending its parameters — through focusing on the most sensitive issues for Algerian decision-makers.

The Iranian leadership worked to implement several approximations to edge closer to the decision-making circles in Algeria. Tehran has constantly asserted that it supports the highly sensitive issues of Algeria’s foreign policy like its visions toward the Arab-Israel conflict, its mechanism to resolve the conflict in the Western Sahara and mend relations with Morocco. It is no secret for those who observe Iran, through its efforts to move closer to Algeria, that it seeks to achieve several objectives, including:

■ To win new allies in the Arab world, which will help in diminishing the number of Arab countries that oppose its policies, thus facilitating the creation of schisms and divisions in the Arab house.

■ To use Algeria as a gateway to penetrate the Maghreb and North Africa after previously making great efforts to penetrate West Africa and the Horn of Africa.

■ To take advantage of Algeria’s position in OPEC against the backdrop of mounting international pressures because of its nuclear file and Western sanctions on its energy industry. Both Iran and Algeria possess the second biggest and sixth-biggest gas reserves in the world. This prompted the two countries in 2009, along with Russia, Nigeria, and Qatar, to seek to establish an organization for gas-exporting nations.<sup>(12)</sup>

Several research and press reports are paying attention to and focusing on the improvement in Algeria-Iran relations, especially in the fields of economic cooperation and trade, especially since the end of the rupture in relations when former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika came to power. Nonetheless, one should not be limited to this approximation when attempting to assess the course and effectiveness of this relationship. The economic quantum leap that

resulted from this rapprochement (trade doubling to \$50 million in 2008 and developing a joint plan to raise trade to \$300 million)<sup>(13)</sup> and all the growing figures between the two countries are insufficient for fully understanding the essence of the dynamics of Algeria-Iran relations, especially if the political dimension is set aside.

It is patently clear that there is an undeclared and tacit focus by the two countries to provide mutual political support for respective central foreign policy issues.

As for Algeria, it does not view in principle that its rapprochement with Iran is causing harm to Arab national interests. In this context, Algeria mostly acts in a selective manner when adopting positions toward Arab countries and Iran — as is the case with its refusal to engage in or even support the Operation Storm of Resolve led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthi militia in Yemen and committing to neutrality and “absolute” noninterference in regard to the events in Iraq and Syria since 2003 and 2011 consecutively. But on the ground and over time, Algeria could develop some awareness of the blatant Iranian attempts to destabilize the region and threaten territorial integrity.

Algeria does not hesitate to use all its political weight to address any threats posed to its borders. At this point, there is a need to review the governing constitutional principles related to the role of the Algerian army beyond the country’s borders through the amendments made to Articles 29 and 95 in the 2020 Constitution. These amendments enabled the Algerian army to carry out operations overseas under the auspices of the UN. Furthermore, the resolutions of the Arab League and the efforts made by the African Union bodies must also be considered. For example, Algeria expelled the Iranian cultural attaché in 2018 over accusations of seeking to spread Shiism in Algeria.

Algeria maintains a fair distance and relationship with Iran to secure its support on several issues, including the Western Sahara issue which involves Morocco and Algeria vying to win backing for their respective positions. This is in addition to supporting Algeria’s position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the context of the aforementioned, Iran attempts to take advantage of its relationship with Algeria to score political points/leverage as follows:

- Iran’s limitless support for Algeria’s vision to resolve the Western Sahara issue: Iran realizes that Algeria is a heavyweight in the Maghreb and North Africa on the one hand and it can push Algeria against Morocco as it is deemed to be openly opposed to and antagonistic to its policies in the region.

- Playing on the heartstrings of the Algerian people through supporting the Palestinian cause: supporting the Algerian position centered on rejecting all sorts of normalization with the “Zionist regime.” The Iranian leadership avowedly declared support for Algeria’s severing of its ties with Morocco<sup>(14)</sup> due

to the escalation of its hostile campaign against Algeria, especially during the period that followed Israel-Morocco normalization. Iran has also expanded the scope of its cooperation with Algeria to include the military and defense fields.

Iranian decision-makers believe that it is timely to start rapprochement with Algeria in light of several realities (countering the Kingdom of Morocco, winning a new ally in the Maghreb and North Africa, and securing a foothold in the Arab world) and completing the project of Iranian expansion in Africa.

Iran has penetrated the Horn of Africa and West Africa by opening more than 30 Iranian embassies and seizing control of more than 80 percent of the companies in Sierra Leone that are responsible for collecting and exporting cacao, coffee, and diamonds. It has established complex business networks in West African countries, particularly among Lebanese Shiites.<sup>(15)</sup>

Therefore, Algeria's foreign policy calculus and order of priorities — which place emphasis on the Western Sahara issue and the country's relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco — which are exploited by Iran, may in the near future collide with Tehran's project and its completion. Iran's expansionist project is creeping closer to the country's southern borders after dominating the West African region. Thus, looking into this argument reveals part of the Algeria-Iran pragmatic relationship and its dimensions and visions with diverse and divergent roots and backgrounds. Iran sees Algeria as part of a larger expansionist strategy with an objective to infiltrate the African continent and divide the Arab world. Whereas Algeria views Iran as a temporary and circumstance-driven tool that assists it in gaining support and solidarity for the issues deemed central to Algeria's foreign policy. Therefore, achieving a balance between each country's national objectives makes their relations quite complex.

## **Conclusion**

The history of Algeria's diplomacy since independence is rich in events and achievements. Despite the relatively recent establishment of its foreign policy vision after gaining independence, the determinants and the general framework of Algeria's foreign policy warrant further in-depth analysis. This is due to its complicated and sometimes ambiguous details — despite its clear objectives and avowed principles. This is normal given the fact that international practices always result in complex changes, in which constants and variables become intertwined.

In this context, Algeria's foreign policy toward Iran still requires further research and analysis —especially in light of the tremendous shifts on the regional and global stage over the past three decades. These have significantly impacted the standing of several Arab governments, threatening their

existence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. This comes amid the extremely dangerous role played by Iran in instigating chaos, particularly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Hence, Algerian decision-makers must consider these shifts and review the concept of national security within its broad Arab sense and its narrow national one. Algeria continuing to pursue its approach of adopting a middle ground, especially in light of Iran's significant penetration into the Arab and African regions via its proxies will inevitably lead to collision with the Iranian project which will eventually knock on the doors of the Maghreb and North Africa — though in the medium term.

On the other side, the oscillation which Algeria's foreign policy has experienced is determined by a host of factors surrounding the Arab world. These factors are related to the intra-Arab disagreements and differences, especially with regard to the issues deemed the most sensitive for the ruling system in Algeria; the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Algeria-Morocco disagreement on the issue of Western Sahara. Iran has exploited these vulnerabilities and rifts to infiltrate deep into the cohesion of the Arab world to score the biggest possible gains and create political cleavages among the countries of the Arab order.

## Endnotes

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