



MaghrebiWeek

A snap shot PDF magazine of the news from North Africa in text only form

Edition 003

21st April 2025

US approves \$825 million missile deal to strategic ally Morocco



Jack Dennison-Thompson

DESPITE MOROCCO appearing to edge forward in influencing countries around the world to back its territorial claims to Western Sahara and Algeria looking more each day like its losing the case, the former is soldiering

ahead with military procurement at an alarming rate - mainly from the US.

A statement released by the Defence Security Cooperation Agency on the 16th of April stated that the department had approved a potential sale of military weapons

to Morocco, with the deal being valued at around 825 million dollars.

According to government financed Morocco World News, the requested purchase includes 600 FIM-92K Stinger Block I missiles alongside contractor engineering, logistics, and technical support services.

The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency has stated: "There will be no adverse impact on U.S. defence readiness as a result of this proposed sale."

They further explained that the aim of the sale is to support the foreign policy and national security of an important non-NATO

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News in Brief

Algeria furious with France over diplomatic arrest

Algeria has protested the decision from France to indict a diplomat arrested over the kidnapping of an influencer in April 2024, according to The New Arab on April 13th.

The indictment follows a period of normalisation between the two countries after months of diplomatic conflict.

However, the indictment of three men – including one Algerian consular official – has put relations at risk again.

Rebel group attacks famine-hit camps in Sudan

Displaced people were forced to seek refuge in the town of Tawila after the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rebel group attacked two famine-hit camps in Sudan, as reported by Africa News on April 13th.

The RSF attacked two camps, the Zamzam and Abu Shorouk camps as well as the nearby city of el-Fasher, all of which are in the North Darfur region.

The attack has left more than 100 people dead, including aid workers and children.

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Tunisia crackdowns on political opposition using arrests

Eddie Monkman

A new report published by Human Rights Watch has found that Tunisia has dramatically expanded arrests on opposition figures.

As reported by AP on April 17th, the report claims that the authorities in Tunisia have made the arrests of lawyers, journalists, judges and opposition politicians.

The deputy Middle East and North Africa director for Human Rights Watch, Bassam Khawaja said that "not since the 2011 revolution have Tunisian authorities unleashed such repression. Saïed's government has returned the country to an era of political prisoners, robbing Tunisians of hard-won civil liberties."

As of January 2025, more than

50 individuals are detained on political grounds, with 22 being held arbitrarily and 14 facing the death penalty.

The Ennahda Movement, an opposition rights group in Tunisia, recently described the remote trial of 40 individuals as a "sham".

The trial session was held for more than 40 individuals, including six who've been in prison for over two years.

The defendants have all gone on hunger strike, and Ennahda has affirmed their "absolute solidarity with the prisoners on hunger strike and with all political detainees."

A number of the most high-profile opposition figures have joined the hunger strike in prison in order to protest against their incarceration.

This includes opposition leaders Abir Moussi, who is the leader of

the Free Constitution Party and Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of the Ennahda Party.

The Tunisian government have not responded to the allegations although Saïed has recently described the country as a "democracy" despite storming to a landslide victory in October 2024, winning 91% of the vote and arresting leading opposition figures in the build up.

Saïed wrestled greater powers for himself during the COVID-19 pandemic, suspending parliament, rewriting the constitution and exercising more control over the legal system.

The report went on to say that: "The authorities' stranglehold on the judiciary, following repeated attacks on its independence, raises serious concerns over fair trial guarantees for those detained."

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Rebel group must be sanctioned by UN security council say Sudan

Sudan has urged the United Nations Security Council to follow up their condemnation of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rebel group with formal sanctions.

As reported by Saudi news agency Ahsarq Al-Awsat on April 20th, the Foreign Minister for Sudan welcomed a statement condemning the crimes committed against the civilian population in North Darfur however has now urged the council to go a step further and issue sanctions against the rebel group.

The minister went on to ask for an end to "foreign meddling" in the war and to ensure that the actions of the security council are able to be implemented against the RSF.

The UN released a statement on April 18th saying that: "The members of the Security Council strongly condemned the repeated

attacks on El Fasher as well as on the Zamzam and Abu Shouk camps for internally displaced persons in recent days by the RSF."

In response to the statement, the RSF has escalated their attacks on refugee camps and has done their best to prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid to al-Fasher as part of its "genocide campaign" according to the Foreign Ministry.

The attacks come in the wake of

"On this anniversary, we proudly declare the establishment of the Government of Peace and Unity, a broad coalition that reflects the true face of Sudan."

the RSF formerly declaring a rival, paramilitary government in Sudan, something which they have been planning for months.

The groups leader Mohammed Dagalo claimed that the RSF would form a rival government presiding over all regions in their control: "On this anniversary, we proudly declare the establishment of the Government of Peace and Unity, a broad coalition that reflects the true face of Sudan."

The announcement came just days after the civil war progressed into its third year of activity and the formation shows that the war is no closer to coming to an end.

The conflict has been described as the "world's worst humanitarian crisis" by the UN and the recent cuts to USAID by the Trump administration has only exacerbated the dire situation.



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US approves \$825 million missile deal to strategic ally Morocco

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ally. The US has been increasing its ties with Morocco recently, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio giving recognition to Morocco's sovereignty in the Western Sahara at a meeting in Washington on April 5th.

Now with this new arms deal increasing bilateral relations, it is clear that the US and Morocco are developing a strong international relationship, with the US seeing Morocco as the best outlet for influence in North Africa.

This was backed in the agency's statement when they described Morocco as an "important force for political stability and economic progress in North Africa."

Morocco has been increasing its military prowess for decades, with the majority of its development coming from the US.

The US has supplied 91% of Morocco's arm supply, with Morocco receiving equipment worth 4,478 million dollars since 2013, on top of this, US Foreign Military Financing worth \$135 million to Morocco since 2012.

Though it is not just the US that is backing Moroccan control in North Africa, as countries such as Italy, France, and the UK have all extended their bilateral relations with the North African country in recent months.

Italy's ambassador to Morocco called the country a "genuine hub" between Europe and Africa.

Morocco appears to be increasing its power in the region, and with the current situation in the Western Sahara developing into a diplomatic row between Algeria and France, Morocco is forging a clear path to international recognition in the region.

NEWS IN BRIEF - continued from page 1

US prepares military option amid Iran nuclear talks

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth stated on April 13th that Washington remains committed to a diplomatic solution with Iran to prevent nuclear weapons, but warned that military options are ready if talks fail.

According to The National, indirect discussions between US and Iranian diplomats in Oman have been described as "productive."

President Trump confirmed that, although military action is a last resort, Israel would be involved if necessary to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Algeria and Tunisia sign educational partnership deal

Algeria and Tunisia signed a partnership agreement on the 13th of April, to revitalise bilateral cooperation in higher education and scientific research.

According to the Algerian government-friendly AL24, Minister Kamel Baddari stated it will foster institutional collaboration and innovative solutions.

The Tunisian counterpart, Mondher Belaid, emphasised the importance of enhanced coordination to facilitate knowledge exchange and improve educational quality.

The agreement includes a development plan for academic relations designed to strengthen connections between universities and their socio-economic environments.

Hamas delegation will travel to Qatar for ceasefire talks

Hamas will send a delegation to Qatar to continue indirect ceasefire talks with Israel, a Hamas official said on April 14th.

Reported by AP News on April 14th, the Hamas official said the Palestinian militant group have been discussing terms for a renewed ceasefire in Cairo after the



Algerian university students making the news for networking with Tunisia counterparts

previous ceasefire collapsed at the end of March.

Talks are meant to take place in the coming weeks as the death toll in the Gaza Strip continues to rise.

Algeria-France tensions escalate over kidnapping indictments

Algeria has ordered 12 French embassy staff to leave the country within 48 hours, with France willing to take immediate reprisals should this be carried out.

According to The European Conservative, the action has been taken in retaliation for France's indictment of three suspected Algerian agents who kidnapped Amir DZ, an Algerian dissident, on French soil in April 2024.

Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France



has encouraged the Algerian government to end the deportations as the 12 embassy staff have no relation to the kidnapping case.

Report exposes Hezbollah's training in Western Sahara separatists

A report by the Washington Post has exposed Hezbollah's training of Western Sahara separatists, pointing towards Algeria's continuing effort to destabilise the region.

According to Arab Weekly on 13 April, the article quoted sources that said the Iranian proxy had aided the pro-independence Polisario Front, likely facilitated by the Algiers.

Iranian support for the Western Saharan group, which has fought Morocco over the territory since the Spanish left in 1975, caused Rabat to sever ties with Tehran in 2018.

HTS-appointed Syrian officials to attend key World Bank talks

Syrian officials appointed by Hayat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) will attend World Bank and IMF talks in Washington next week to seek international loans, as reported on April 15th by The National.



This marks Syria's first participation in a decade, as the country aims to rebuild its shattered infrastructure.

Saudi Arabia is expected to pay Syria's \$15 million arrears to the World Bank, bolstering its re-entry into global finance.

Sudan civil war talks held in London

Twenty foreign ministers from various countries have met in London in order to discuss the civil war in Sudan which is now entering its third year, as reported by The National on April 15th.

A former Sudanese cabinet minister, Khalid Omer Yousif, has warned of a "de facto partition" being created in the country." The 13th of April marked the second anniversary of the conflict which has claimed the lives of an estimated 150,000 people and left 30 million people on the brink of starvation.

Oman supports Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara

Oman has formerly reaffirmed their support for Moroccan claims to sovereignty over the Western Sahara region along with around 100 other countries who back Rabat's autonomy plan, as reported by Middle East Monitor on April 15th.

The support was reaffirmed at the seventh Morocco-Omani Joint Commission held in Rabat. Oman has praised Morocco's leadership in promoting regional peace and reiterated its commitment to opening a consulate in Dakhla or Laayoune.

Thousands of Moroccans protest Israel's war in Gaza

Rabat saw thousands of Moroccans protest Israel's war in Gaza on 13 April, displaying one of most united fronts of rights organisations in years.

Demonstrators occupied the Capital's historic Bab El-had square, in what organisers deemed "a cry from the nation against the extermination of Palestinians," according to The New Arab.

The protest is indicative of the enduring backlash against Morocco's normalisation of relations with Israel in 2020, receiving support by Tel Aviv and the US for its annexation of Western Sahara in return.

African Union's peace and security council win for Algeria

Algeria has secured a seat on a three-year term on the African Union's Peace and Security Council.

According to the Algerian government-friendly AL24, Algeria was victorious in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, during the 24th extraordinary session of the continental body's Executive Council.

Algeria won the vote over Libya after securing the support of 34 African countries in the third round, while Libya garnered 15 votes.

Eastern Libya holds talks with civil war enemy Turkey

The son of the pro-Russian leader of Eastern Libya has visited Turkey, in a symbolic U-turn in relations

Demonstrators occupied the Capital's historic Bab El-had square, in what organisers deemed "a cry from the nation against the extermination of Palestinians"

since Libya's second civil war in 2018.

According to Defense News, Saddam Haftar, commander of Eastern Libya's ground forces met with Turkish officials in Ankara on 4 April.

The discussions mark a major turning point in ties as each side fought one another in the war.

Secret meeting between UK and Israel Foreign Ministers

Tensions rise as David Lammy meets in secret with Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar on April 15th amid the ongoing Gaza conflict, with the meeting being condemned by MPs such as independent pro-Palestine supporter Ayoub Khan per Middle East Eye.

The controversial nature of the meeting stems from Sa'ar's opposition to the two-state solution and his March 4th claim that "Aid that goes to Hamas is not humanitarian," positions that contradict Lammy's statement that blocking aid to Palestine "is a breach of international law." The secretive nature of the discus-

sions highlights growing pressure within the UK Parliament and the Labour Party to reconsider their stance on Israel, as figures like Emily Thornberry have already begun openly criticising Netanyahu's government.

Israeli settlers storm Al-Aqsa mosque

Hundreds of Israeli settlers have stormed the Al-Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem on the third day of the Jewish holiday of Passover, as reported by Middle East Monitor on April 15th.

In the first quarter of 2025 it is estimated that 13,064 settlers have entered the mosque.

Eye witness reports claim that the settlers were entering the mosque via the Al-Mugharbah Gate.

Sudan's paramilitary forces declare a rival government

Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have declared the establishment of a rival government, two years after the country descended into civil war. Marked as the world's "worst humanitarian crisis" by the United Nations, the RSF established the "Government of Peace and Unity" on April 15th, reported by Al Jazeera the same day.

The move directly challenges the army-led administration run by General al-Burhan and signals a renewed effort by paramilitary forces to undermine their rival government.

Khamenei urges caution as hopes rise over nuclear talks with US

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei tempered hopes of a nuclear deal with the US on April 15th, urging caution and warning against tying the country's fate to the talks, reports the Arab Weekly. Despite positive signs from recent Oman negotiations, Iranian offi-





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cials remain skeptical of Trump's intentions.

Meanwhile, public optimism has surged alongside a strengthening rial, fueled by hopes of economic relief through sanctions removal.

Morocco: France back sovereignty over Western Sahara

France have once again declared their support for Morocco and their claims to sovereignty over the Western Sahara, as reported by Saudi News Agency Asharq Al-Awsat on April 16th.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot released a statement reaffirming support following a meeting with his Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita.

In a letter sent to Moroccan King Mohammed VI in 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron formerly declared his support for Morocco.

Rainfall boosts Morocco's dam fill rate to 49.44%

Recent rainfall has boosted Morocco's national dam fill rate to 49.44%, with water storage now at 6.11 billion cubic metres, the Moroccan government friendly Hespess reports on April 16th.

Despite improved conditions, rainfall remains 25% below the long-term average, and southern provinces continue to face water stress. Authorities are expanding desalination capacity and planning new water transfer projects to secure future supply.

Report claims Tunisia expands use of politically motivated arrests

A report published by Human Rights Watch has found that Tunisia has greatly expanded its use of the legal system to make arrests of political opposition, as reported by AP on April 17th.

The report describes the arrests of lawyers judges, journalists and activists initiated by President Kais Saied.

As of January 2025, more than 50 individuals were being held on political grounds in Tunisia.

Israel insists they will continue to block aid to Gaza

The Defence Minister of Israel, Israel Katz, has insisted that aid into Gaza will continue to be blocked and that soldiers shall remain there "indefinitely", as reported by Middle East Eye on April 16th. Katz said that: "Israel's policy is

clear: no humanitarian aid will enter Gaza, and blocking this aid is one of the main pressure levers preventing Hamas from using it as a tool with the population."

"No one is currently planning to allow any humanitarian aid into Gaza, and there are no preparations to enable such aid."

Trump tariffs threaten to destabilize Ivory coasts cocoa industry

Great concern has been raised among cocoa farmers in the Ivory Coast over fears that Trump's tariffs could destabilize the country's cocoa industry.

According to the Associated Press, the Trump administration has threatened to impose a 21% tariff on all goods and products from the Ivory Coast.

The country is the world's largest producer of cocoa, accounting for nearly half of the global supply.

USDA exempts Morocco as new sugar tariffs take effect

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has implemented new tariffs on high-sugar imports but granted exemptions to Morocco



and several other nations.

According to Moroccan government-friendly Hespess, the duties range from 11.3 to 23.5 cents per kilogram.

They are applied to products containing over 65% sugar by dry weight and target candies, sweetened beverages, and cocoa-based products.

While most countries face these new trade barriers, Morocco joins Canada, Mexico, Jordan, Singapore, Chile, Australia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua in securing exemptions from the safeguard measures triggered under WTO agreements.

UN Report: Moroccan women still face job market hurdles

A new UN Women and ESCWA report shows Moroccan women continue to face high unemployment and limited access to stable jobs despite progress in financial inclusion, as reported by the Moroccan government friendly Hespess on April 17th.

In 2023, 44.4% of young Moroccan women were unemployed, and over half were not in school, training, or work.

Most employed women work informally, without job security or social protections.

Ex-HTS leader Al-Sharaa named in Time's 100 influential list

Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's interim president and former Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader, was named one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people of 2025, the only Middle Eastern leader on the list.

Reported by The New Arab on April 17th, Sharaa rose to power after ousting Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 and has since sought regional support and funding to rebuild Syria amid ongoing unrest.

His nomination, by former US Ambassador Robert Ford, highlights global uncertainty over whether Sharaa is a pragmatic reformer or a calculated opportunist.





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The move directly challenges the army-led administration run by General al-Burhan and signals a renewed effort by paramilitary forces to undermine their rival.

President of Chad accuses local media of corruption

Chadian President Déby has accused his country's media of being "paid and supported by foreign powers", after three journalists were arrested and accused of spying in early March, says Le Monde.

On a March 15th interview broadcasted on a channel created by the government's director of communication, the President has called for the media to "respect the laws of the republic and [to work according to] journalistic ethics", warning that accreditation cards permitting presidential access would be only delivered to "serious medias".

Until now, government press access was almost exclusively granted to government-backed media.

Sudan civil war talks held in London

Twenty foreign ministers from various countries have met in London in order to discuss the civil war in Sudan which is now entering its third year, as reported by The National on April 15th. A former Sudanese cabinet minister, Khalid Omer Yousif, has warned of a "de facto partition" being created in the country.

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Mali: Political parties fear ban

In a press conference on April 15th, more than a hundred political parties have expressed their fear that the Malian junta will put a strain on their activity, as the transition government seeks to change rules on creation of parties says RFI.

"Voices known by all are hinting that the current process seeks to dissolve, or at least to suspend political parties activities," said former Prime Minister Ibrahim Touré, reading the common declaration of 101 Malian political parties during the IPAC conference, as he reminded the audience that the article 39 of the new constitution adopted by the junta itself in 2023 guarantees the existence and the activity of political parties.

Fearing for their existence, parties have indicated they requested an "urgent meeting" with current Prime minister General Abdulaye Maiga, ensuring their desire to reinforce "the stability and the progress of transition, within the framework of the law and republican principles."

United Nations condemn RSF rebel attacks in Sudan

The United Nations Security Council have expressed concern as recent attacks by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have left at least 400 civilians dead in Sudan, as reported by Middle East Monitor on April 18th.

The fatalities included children and aid workers, with Jerome Bonnafont, Permanent Representative of France to the UN and President of the Security Council, releasing a statement saying that the RSF must be held to account.

He continued that: "The members of the Security Council strongly condemned the repeated attacks on El Fasher as well as on the Zamzam and Abu Shouk camp



Israel insists they will continue to blockade Gaza

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The controversial nature of the meeting stems from Sa’ar’s opposition to the two-state solution and his March 4th claim that “Aid that

goes to Hamas is not humanitarian,” positions that contradict Lammy’s statement that blocking aid to Palestine “is a breach of international law.”

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Wave of outrage sweeps Iraq over Al-Sharaa’s Summit invite

A mounting wave of outrage has swept through Iraqi political circles and social media since the announcement of the Syrian interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s invite to the Arab League Summit, scheduled for May 17th.

At the Sulaymaniyah Forum on April 16th, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani defended the decision, insisting that the summit would serve as a platform to resolve regional crises through dialogue, including Iran’s own growing tensions with the US.

“Yes, a formal invitation has been delivered to him, and he is welcome to attend and participate in the Arab Summit,” Prime Minister Al-Sudani told The National’s

Editor-in-Chief Mina Al-Oraibi.

Houthi say US attack on Yemen fuel port has killed 38

Houthi rebels have said that 38 people have been killed and over 100 have suffered wounds after the US launched strikes on a major fuel port in Yemen, France 24 via Reuters reported on April 18th.

Disturbing footage was aired on the Houthis’ al-Masirah satellite news channel, which showed corpses scattered on the site. The news channel reported that both the paramedic and civilian staff of the port had died due to the attack.

The attack led to a huge explosion as well as fires. As of March 15th, the US has launched air strikes on the Houthis, almost on a daily basis.

US troops pull out of Syria

The US is currently withdrawing its troops from the northeast of Syria at a time of increasing scrutiny over US military presence in the Middle Eastern country, Middle East Eye via the New York Times reported on April 17th.

The New York Times said the US is shutting down three of its military bases in the region. The country is also reportedly lowering its troop count from around 2,000 to roughly 1,400.

This information has come from two senior US officials who know of the circumstances surrounding the pullout. The US has said for a number of years that 900 troops were operating in Syria to assist in the battle against the Islamic State group.





Alastair Tibbs

Oil, guns and gold, the recent reports of an incident on the Mali-Algeria border read like a Hollywood movie. Even Vladimir Putin has a role in this latest Golden Eye epic

When a Malian drone exploded in the Saharan night on 31 March, the Sahel once again became the epicentre of a military crisis. Diplomatic smoke screens erupted over the desert, smearing the dispute in a complex web of disinformation. In the barren wastelands of northern Mali, dawning different clothes and talking in foreign tongues, the world's superpowers were clashing again. Like a timeless Bond flick, a story of forgotten rebels, untold desert treasure and – of course – fickle Russians, was unravelling.

The Turkish-manufactured Akinci surveillance drone was claimed by its alleged annihilators, Algiers, to have penetrated 1.6km beyond the Malian border into Algerian airspace, disregarding evidence that the UAV wreckage was found at least 9.5km inside Mali. Whether or not the incident was staged, both sides embraced the fallout. After Algiers and Bamako closed their airspace to one another, the spat escalated further, with diplomats recalled on both sides, as well as those of Mali's allies, Niger and Burkina Faso. While Mali accused Algeria of "sponsoring international terrorism", referencing the jihadi and Tuareg separatist groups littered across its northern frontiers, the T word in typical fashion obscured material realities. What exactly happened is not clear, but interests are always telling.

Africa is a continent awash in natural resources and desperate for wealth. Producing 680.3 metric tons of gold annually, its accounts for nearly a quarter of global production. However, its abundance comes at a terrible price – a post-colonial network of foreign actors locked in a deadly game of geo-economic control.

Mali was the continent's 2nd highest

What are the Algerian-Mali tensions really about?

producer of gold after Ghana in 2023, mining over 105 metric tons. While nearly all its production originates in the government controlled south, the north of Mali holds promising deposits of the rare mineral, as well as unexplored oil fields and potential uranium sites. But the sand swept north is also a wild west, ruled by a confederation of militias who declare the region the Islamic State of Azawad. With the area contested, only small artisanal gold mining remains active, leaving the region's potential largely untapped.

As Shirley Bassey sings in 'Goldfinger', "the man with the Midas touch" is Vladimir Putin. As the West, particularly the French, have been sent packing by the newly sprung regimes of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, Moscow has stepped into the void. The Gold-hungry Russians need the rare mineral to finance Ukraine and fortify their economy. Violent and unstable, the territory, pot-marked with jihadi groups and tribal paramilitaries, has been fertile ground for the Kremlin's security driven foreign policy. The notorious Wagner PMC and Russia's Africa Corps have taken up the Francafrrique gauntlet, boosting the local regimes' appetite for aggressive, kinetic action.

The Malian Army and its Wagner partners retook swathes of land from Azawad in 2023, capturing the key rebel stronghold of Kidal in November. The 2015 Algiers Accord, a peace agreement key to Mali's stability, was torn up and government forces pressed forward. While Mali and Wagner suffered a disastrous defeat in the wastelands around Tinzaouaten, near the Algerian border, revenge drone strikes in December 2024 reportedly killed eight Tuareg rebel leaders in the same area.

The Mali offensive is right out of Moscow's

play book. Providing security via Wagner to the Central African Republic (CAR) after the French departure in 2017, Russia has demonstrated its model for success. The PMC transformed the country's inert artisanal gold mining into a thriving industrial behemoth. Valued between \$1bn to \$2.8bn, the Ndassima mine in CAR has been placed under the Russian shell company Midas Resources and has undergone significant expansion. In Mali, Russia signed an agreement with the government in November 2023 to finance and build a gold refinery in the capital Bamako, with ambitions to produce 200 tonnes per year – over three times the country's total output in 2022. The exchange of military support for resource access – guns for gold – seems a winning formula for the Kremlin, but where it leads can be very dark indeed.

In Sudan, where a civil war has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis, Russia has been accused of supporting both sides. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is allegedly receiving arms from the UAE through Wagner's ground forces, while Moscow offers the recognised government weapons of their own. Gold appears again, as Samuel Ramadi, author of the book *Russia in Africa*, told Al Jazeera. Support for the RSF is "primarily aimed at creating a smuggling route for the gold from Sudan to Dubai and then to Russia so that they can fund Wagner Group operations inside Ukraine." Here, where the need for security is most dire, is also where greed glints in the Kremlin's eyes. Their strategy feeds on instability, and with more Russian firepower comes more Russian control. Concessions are made and deals are struck, and with a hop in their step, Putin's gunmen and industry goblins move in to extract the lifeblood of African economies. Just as in



divided Libya where Khalifa Haftar, the east's commander-in-chief sold Moscow his soul for his preservation, the Sahel has become blackly wedded to Putin's military-industrial complex.

So why doesn't Algiers just join the party, especially given its oft cited alignment with Moscow? A joint Algeria-Mali-Wagner operation would overwhelm the rebels and send them running to the dunes. High security mining compounds could then guarantee safe mineral extraction and facilitate a thriving industry. The insurgency hangover could be contained by multilateral operations – a small price to pay for shares in a gold rush. Algiers should also want to remain cordial with the Sahel states more broadly if it is to continue to develop plans for a trans-Saharan pipeline to Nigeria. Why is it then, that Algeria is so unwilling to work with Moscow on this one?

At a geopolitical flashpoint between Russia and the West, it seems Algiers favours the West more than it lets on. In January, Algeria signed "a first of its kind" agreement to expand military cooperation with the US. Remarkable given the noxious support of Washington for Moroccan rule in Western Sahara, some predict the new U.S.-Algeria Defense Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding was about curbing Russia's influence in northern Africa. The war in Ukraine has shaken up the international order and looks to have tilted Algerian foreign policy. In April 2023, Algiers made a critical juncture, voting in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution recognizing "the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine." With the blowing up of the

The Gold-hungry Russians need the rare mineral to finance Ukraine and fortify their economy. Violent and unstable, the territory, pot-marked with jihadi groups and tribal para-militaries, has been fertile ground for the Kremlin's security driven foreign policy.

Nord Stream pipeline, Algeria has become even more critical to European oil and gas supplies. As independent as it purports to be, the EU makes up over two thirds of Algiers export trade, anchoring it willingly or unwillingly to Europe. The West has aligned Tebboune to their cause and his new role – harrying Russian dominance in the Sahel.

But there may be more to the story from an Algerian perspective. As mentioned, Mali has a massive potential for oil in the far north, along the Taoudeni Basin. Its high potential for oil has been a source of speculation for decades. In 2007, the Algerian company Sonatrach was granted exploration rights but according to Sene News, the results were never shared with the public. The instability following the 2012

rebellion, led the company to suspend its operations but many suspect this was a strategic move to maintain Algerian control over the resource-rich area. To this day it is unknown what they found in the desolate plains of the Taoudeni Basin but the silence is perhaps telling.

While Tuareg rebels and jihadists have presided over northern Mali for over a decade, it seems new forces have entered northern Africa. The tensions with Algeria are indicative of a new geopolitical fault line, where again East meets West in a struggle for control over resources and influence. Each player will not leave it to chance. If indeed the drone was destroyed by Azawad forces as they themselves claimed, the surface-to-air missiles required for such a task would illustrate an escalation in the group's abilities. It is not far-fetched to imagine further overhaul of the rebel's tactics and weaponry in the coming months. The flammable concoction of foreign interests is everywhere and all it takes is a big enough spark to set loose a conflagration.

The views expressed in this article belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Maghrebi.org. Alastair Tibbs is the former news editor of Maghrebi.org. You can follow him on X: @AlastairTibbs

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