



## Legitimacy, Regionalism, and Efficacy: Algeria's Role in Modern West African Security Dilemmas<sup>1</sup>

Meriem Naïli<sup>2</sup>, Sophia R. Wittemyer<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract:

This paper examines Algeria's role in shaping regional dynamics through its relationships with two key actors in West Africa: the Polisario Front in Western Sahara and Niger's junta government following the 2023 coup. It investigates how Algeria navigates its foreign policy to influence stability, with a focus on the concept of perceived legitimacy. Algeria's support for the Polisario Front and diplomatic engagement with Niger's coup leaders reflect its commitment to sovereignty, non-interference, and Pan-Africanism. By rejecting certain international recognitions, Algeria plays a significant role in shaping the regional security environment. It positions itself as a defender of self-determination and a protector of weaker states, offering diplomatic and military support to build regional alliances and counter external powers. This strategy contrasts with interventionist approaches, focusing instead on solidarity and regional cooperation. The paper argues that Algeria's policy of non-interference, combined with its emphasis on legitimacy, contributes to both internal political stability in neighbouring countries and broader security in Africa. It suggests that Algeria may be positioning itself as a regional superpower, with a long-term strategy to foster stability and strengthen its geopolitical influence. This study provides insights into how Algeria's foreign policy shapes the broader security context in West Africa.

### Keywords:

Algeria; Niger; Western Sahara; West Africa; Security; State Legitimacy; Sahel.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Law, Université Grenoble Alpes; ORCID: 0000-0002-0439-2123; Mn380@exeter.ac.uk.

<sup>3</sup> Master of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts Fletcher School; ORCID: 0009-0000-6902-3321; sophiawittemyer@gmail.com

## Introduction

Intrastate and bordering turmoil, which threatens territory's overall stability, calls into question if international actors should intervene. Should a state lose its sovereignty if it is deemed illegitimate? Contested and/or deserted conflicts, such as the ones related to the sovereignty of the 2023 coup d'état in Niger and Western Sahara, have created opportunities for a regional power to step in where previous international (colonial) powers have left or declared the territory illegitimate. Leaving a vacancy for a new moderator, Algeria has taken initiative in positioning itself as the regional superpower of West Africa. This paper seeks to understand, through the case studies of Western Sahara and Niger, what Algeria's ambitions and desired outcomes are in regional bilateralism, and how they differ or coincide between cases.

Legitimacy, or rather illegitimacy, has threatened both Western Sahara and Niger's existence as states. In the case of Western Sahara, the United States (Trump, D., 2020) and, more recently, France (Macron, E., 2024) declared the region as the territory of Morocco; the Court of Justice of the European Union however passed two decisions in October 2024 reinforcing the sovereignty of the Sahrawi people through their inalienable right to self-determination. In the case of Niger, French President Macron declared the coup d'état "completely illegitimate" and "profoundly dangerous" on July 28th (France 24, 2023), two days following the coup, and the United States followed a month later abruptly halting all military and economic activity (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). Russia and China have however maintained bilateral activity with Niger.

Lack of Western recognition has caused heightened insecurity in both cases. Sanctions, tariffs, and troop withdrawal compound governmental fragility. In the wake of being unrecognized by Western nations, Algeria has seized the opportunity to step in and back both *weak* states. If Algeria proves capable of supporting both states' sovereignty – a key Algerian foreign policy objective – and instilling a greater level of peace, it will be a victory for their own perception as a qualified regional superpower.

This research contributes to West African qualitative security studies, explores Algeria's role as a regional security protector, and follows two West African security cases which have never been compared. Analyzing and comparing Western Sahara's Polisario Front and Niger's coup government relationships with Algeria discusses relevant, current disputes in West African security. Additionally, building upon the questions posed in this research's findings, we further unpack the role of international legitimization, or renunciation, on regional stability. In discussing the idea of states deemed legitimate or illegitimate, we found that legal legitimacy differs from political legitimacy. In the case of Western Sahara for example, former United States President Donald Trump announced the contested territory as the possession of Morocco in exchange for Morocco's normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel. In the case of Niger, the United States and France rejected junta government legitimacy, given their

lack of democratic and electoral processes, and demanded the reinstatement of deposed President Bazoum. Suspending aid and withdrawing troops, Western allies abandoned Niger militarily and economically. However, states such as Russia and Algeria declare Niger's junta a credible government for bilateral negotiations (Atalayar, 2024). In the case of Western Sahara, up to 84 countries—including Algeria, Nigeria, South Africa—had officially recognized SADR statehood (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela). This necessitates the following questions: *What, or who, ultimately determines a state's legitimacy? What is the role of recognized political legitimacy in regional relationships and how does it impact regional stability?* Given international legal norms, Western Sahara may be a state and Niger's junta may be a justified, viable government; yet they are not geopolitically perceived as such. Therefore, this research requires a review of literature on how different scholars define legitimacy and how legitimacy varies in *weak* states.

## Literature Review

### Political Science

In the discipline of Political Science, scholars often leave the concept of *state legitimacy* vague, following lines of nationhood or statehood. According to European scholarship, a legitimate government should have “good governance, democratic rights, and welfare gains,” (Gilley, B., 2006, p. 47-71). Additionally, modern scholars of recognitional value and political legitimacy argue that in conceptualizing political legitimacy, the foundations of “authority, power, and coercion ... are inadequate”; rather, focusing on the dynamics *between* power and authority imbue legitimacy with value. (Greene 2019, 68). Greene also claims that “sometimes the recognition of outsiders, such as the ‘international community,’ matters for the effective functioning of a regime.” (Greene 2019, 85). Thus, some states necessitate legitimacy from external governments for their regime to function.

Recent scholarship explores a new approach to legitimacy, treating it as subjective and discussing the disadvantage of being a weaker state in the current state system. Lamb asserts that to have a legitimate government, a state must be “predictable, justifiable, equitable, accessible, and respectful,” (Lamb, R. D., 2014). In Lamb's definition of legitimacy, subjectivity can change the approach to recognition. For example, Algeria believes that Niger's junta government is legitimate in its claim to temporarily govern and that its legitimacy derives from a stated intention to eventually cede power, as well as the previous President's prioritization of Western interests over Nigerien interests. Political legitimacy can therefore function as a geopolitical tool of aligned values, rather than as an objective determinant.

## Law

In the discipline of International Law, the concept of legitimacy is typically determined through both conventional sources, such as treaties, and state practice, which can evolve into customary international law. Once a treaty is signed and ratified by the relevant parties, there is generally little debate regarding the sovereignty and legitimacy of the states involved, at least with respect to the co-contracting states. These agreements often serve as the cornerstone for formalizing relations and establishing legal frameworks for recognition. However, in the case of declarations of independence, the matter becomes more complex, as international law provides less clarity on the legality of unilateral actions aimed at secession.

In the context of Kosovo, for instance, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion on July 22, 2010, which addressed Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008. The Court concluded that there was no prohibition in international law against such declarations (ICJ, 2010). While the ICJ did not decide on the broader question of the legitimacy of Kosovo's statehood or its recognition by other states, it confirmed that Kosovo's declaration itself did not violate international law. This sets a precedent for how international law treats declarations of independence, particularly in the absence of a clear global consensus or a recognized framework for self-determination.

In contrast, the case of Western Sahara—which has long been a subject of dispute—demonstrates how self-determination can shape legal legitimacy. The ICJ's 1975 advisory opinion on the territory of Western Sahara affirmed the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination (International Court of Justice, 1975). Although the ICJ did not declare Western Sahara to be an independent state at that time, it did recognize the legitimacy of the Sahrawi people's claim to self-determination, implying that they could one day form a legitimate state. Subsequently, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which represents the interests of the Sahrawi people, has been granted full membership in the African Union (AU), further asserting its legitimacy as a political entity on the continent.

The issue of political legitimacy—whether a state or government is recognized as legitimate by other states—often becomes the central factor in discussions of statehood and sovereignty. Recognition is a highly subjective process, influenced by political interests, strategic alliances, and regional dynamics. For example, while the SADR has been recognized by numerous African nations and holds membership in the AU (SAIIA, 2022), it has not been recognized by key global powers, including countries in Europe and the United States. This discrepancy underscores how legitimacy in international relations can be fluid and contingent on the perceptions of other states. As such, a state's legitimacy often hinges not solely on legal frameworks but also on political recognition, which can vary depending on the position of the perceiving state.

Moreover, under international law, the principle of democracy is not an absolute right or a strict obligation (ICJ, 1975). The ICJ and other international bodies have clarified that while democratic governance is encouraged, there is no binding legal

requirement for all states to adhere to democratic principles. In this light, coups d'état, or military takeovers of governments, are not automatically deemed illegal under international law. While they often violate domestic legal frameworks and international norms, such events are not outright prohibited by international law, making it difficult to categorically declare them illegitimate. In fact, a coup may be recognized by other states, even if it violates democratic principles, further complicating the legal understanding of legitimacy.

Thus, international law does not unequivocally condemn coups d'état or the self-determination of peoples, such as those in Western Sahara. The ICJ's position on the right to self-determination, coupled with the absence of a legal framework against unilateral declarations of independence, reflects the fluid and often contested nature of legitimacy in both legal and political spheres. This research does not aim to define legitimacy in an overarching sense, as such a discussion would require an in-depth exploration across various disciplines. Instead, the focus here is on the contested and malleable nature of legitimacy, particularly as it pertains to the legal frameworks governing self-determination, statehood, and regime change. This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of legitimacy within both Political Science and International Law, highlighting the ways in which the term is interpreted and applied in real-world scenarios.

Given the variation of legitimacy between the Political Science and Law disciplines, as well as amongst prominent states in recognizing either case, this research does not focus on legitimacy; rather, it seeks to understand the role of both turmoil in West African regional security without diminishing their agency as states creating bilateral relationships.

### *Case Study Selection*

The contested legitimacy of both Western Sahara and the Niger coup government, the established, strong connections with Algeria, and the contentious relationship with Western nations make this case comparison pertinent and well grounded. Both cases share economic, cultural, ethnic, political, and religious similarities to Algeria, dating back decades. As their neighbor, Algeria has ongoing geopolitical interests in the wellbeing of Western Sahara and Niger. Ensuring stability and legitimization through bilateral involvement, Algeria has been the prominent moderator and protector in both cases. Western Sahara and Niger indicate the current condition of stability in West Africa as well as Algeria's expanding role as the region's security protector.

### *Western Sahara*

#### *Case Context*

The contested territory of Western Sahara dates back to the end of Spanish colonial rule, when it was known as Spanish Sahara. Although a movement for statehood began once Spain withdrew from the colony, both Morocco and Mauritania began fighting for



control over the territory from 1976 onwards. A long, violent conflict took place between Morocco and the Polisario Front, shortly after the latter proclaimed an independent SADR on February 27th, 1976. The war ultimately ended in a UN-organized ceasefire in 1991. In 2020, after nearly 30 years of peace, Morocco reignited the conflict and brought to light, once more, the questioned sovereignty of Western Sahara. The Polisario Front–SADR’s government–continues fighting Moroccan occupation, yet the skewed power of each state, coupled with increased Moroccan settlerism and “green” energy developments in Western Sahara, make the self-determination struggle difficult.

International actors disagree on the legitimacy of Western Sahara, with key players—such as the United States, France, and Spain—denouncing its sovereignty and others—Algeria, South Africa, Latin American states, and the African Union—reinforcing it. While international law declared Western Sahara a non-self-governing territory and its people entitled to self-determination, Western leaders have claimed that Morocco rightfully claims autonomy over the territory.

For the past forty years, Algeria has assumed the role of main supporter, protector, and moderator for Western Sahara.

### *Historical Algerian Relations*

Having experienced colonial oppression itself, Algeria has deep seated political similarities with Western Sahara. In 1976, Algeria brought both humanitarian aid and troops to the Amgala region of Western Sahara. Engaging in 16 years of consistent conflict, Algeria provided troops and weapons to the Polisario Front–Western Sahara’s National Liberation Movement. Algeria militarily backed Western Sahara until the UN ceasefire in 1991 (NYT Archive, 1976). Humanitarian aid and refugees were created for Sahrawis in Algeria, taking in between 100,000-160,000 refugees in Tindouf (Wilson 2016, 37) following the Moroccan “Green March” in 1975—which moved 350,000 Moroccans into Western Sahara (Paul et al. 2013, 395)—and the ongoing conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco until 1991 (United Nations, 2024).

Diplomatically, Algeria has backed the Polisario Front’s government internationally since 1976 (University of Central Arkansas). Routinely attending UN mediated negotiations from 2007-2020, Algeria acted as the Polisario Front’s heavyweight, giving legitimacy to a territory substantially weaker than Morocco.

### *Modern Algerian Relations*

As a legitimized powerful nation, Algeria continues diplomatically supporting the Polisario Front. Recently, Algeria has strongly advocated for the SADR through diplomatic and symbolic statements. In response to the 2020 United States renunciation of Western Saharan sovereignty, the Algerian Foreign Ministry denounced Trump’s decision, stating it has no legal effect as it contradicts international law and that the statement worked against all de-escalation efforts (Reuters, 2020). Additionally, Algeria

responded forcefully in response to France's recent rejection of Western Saharan sovereignty in July 2024, withdrawing the Algerian ambassador from France and calling into question France's morality and continued colonial ties (Algeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Algeria has provided humanitarian support to Western Sahara in the form of refugee camps which hold most of the Sahrawi population within Algerian borders. The refugee camps in Tindouf house about 173,600 Sahrawi refugees, demonstrating Algeria's humanitarian efforts in the Western Sahara conflict (L'observatoire des camps de réfugiés, 2019). The UN Security Council established the Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 1991, which monitors the cease-fire in Western Sahara and acts as a token of the international community's involvement in the resolution of the conflict today (United Nations Peacekeeping). The camps themselves operate as an interim state for Sahrawis, equipped with schools, hospitals, security, construction, civil society, food and agriculture, internet connection, athletics, and health monitoring by humanitarian organizations such as the UNHCR, Red Cross and Red Crescent, and UNICEF (L'observatoire des camps de réfugiés, 2019).

Algeria has not provided military backing to Western Sahara since Morocco's breach of the ceasefire in 2020, but it has actively engaged in spreading awareness of SADR state sovereignty. In 2024, Algeria endorsed Western Saharan sovereignty through both official government press releases and meetings with UN officials. Without Algerian power behind Western Sahara, the contested territory would have likely become Moroccan, so much so that Morocco has kept on insisting Algeria is recognized as a party to the conflict.

### *Algerian Intentions*

The Algerian state benefits in major ways from backing Western Saharan sovereignty. Geopolitically, Morocco and Algeria compete in a decades-old rivalry for regional influence and leadership (El-Katiri 2016, 23-24). Western Sahara provides a viable conduit for Algeria to combat Moroccan influence, given their regional competition for unipolar control. Fighting for this territory's sovereignty— a key Algerian foreign policy goal—simultaneously blocks Morocco from mainland Africa. If Western Sahara gains full independence, Morocco will be fully cut off from mainland Africa, given its closed border with Algeria and its likely confrontational relationship with a fully independent SADR. This will deteriorate Morocco's strength and capacity as a regional power. On the global stage, Morocco will have less bargaining leverage with the EU on negotiations of immigration—specifically if SADR were to adopt a closed border mirroring that of Algeria. On the regional level, Morocco will lose a major national conflict and solidify its portrayal as an oppressor to African states rather than an ally. Western Sahara's achievement of statehood would reflect its history as an occupied state against an oppressor. Ultimately, given the history and present relationship between Western

Sahara and Morocco, SADR statehood means Moroccan impairment—a tangential victory for Algeria.

Culturally, anti-Moroccan sentiment in Western Sahara creates a straightforward allyship for Algeria. France's history of oppression and colonization in Algeria incites similar cultural perspectives and empathy towards the Sahrawi nationalist movement. Backing the Polisario Front and SADR benefits Algeria on the cultural level of combatting neocolonialism. In 2023, Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf reiterated that “[African states] should not forget that our brothers and sisters in the last African colony, ...Western Sahara, are waiting for our support and backing...” (Algeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Positioning itself as a regional ally and support for Western Sahara, Algeria enforces the narrative of Pan-Africanism and brotherhood.

Economically, phosphates, the fishing industry, and agriculture thrive in Western Sahara. The previous EU-Moroccan trade agreement on fishing and agriculture—and its condemnation by the Court of Justice of the European Union in October 2024—demonstrates the potential profit and plentiful resources in Western Sahara and its significance for Morocco's trade partnership with Europe. If Western Sahara becomes a fully independent state, the special relationship between Algeria and SADR will enable Algerian access to profitable business investment and trade. Simultaneously, Morocco would lose access to major green energy outputs and phosphate mines in Western Sahara. This once again reinforces Algeria's regional power, placing Morocco at a serious geopolitical and economic disadvantage.

## *Niger*

### *Case Context*

On July 26<sup>th</sup> 2023, a military junta led by Abdourahamane Tchiani staged a coup deposing former President of Niger, Mohammed Bazoum, assuming the position of President himself (The Times and the Sunday Times, 2023). The junta retains governmental control over a year later, appointing Prime Minister Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine and Commander of the Presidential Guard Lieutenant-Colonel Habibou Assoumane on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 (Olivier, M., 2023). The junta justified its intervention referencing corruption, economic shortfalls, and lack of democracy under the previous regime—terms used recurrently since Niger's 1996 coup (Smith, D., 2010; France 24, 2010). Former president Mohammed Bazoum comprises another notable feature of the previous regime, a strong Western ally emphasizing the necessity of the United States and France in Nigerien bilateral relations (Gjevori, E., 2023).

International actors disagree on the coup's justifiability, either suggesting a needed, legitimate transition or an unconstitutional, illegitimate seizure of power. Economic sanctions and military withdrawal following the coup left Niger's economy crippled. The removal of over 2500 U.S. and French troops in Niger massively decreased the state's counterterrorism support.





Algeria took the primary role of external supporter and moderator. While not explicitly condemning the coup, it has poised itself as Niger's strategic partner to navigate a return to constitutional rule (Camara, K., & Charles, D., 2023). Algeria vehemently opposes another international intervention in the region, as French-led Operation Barkhane proved a failure after 8 years of counterterrorism and stability efforts. Additionally, French popularity has declined in Niger, giving Algeria another opportune interest (Al Jazeera, 2023).

### *Historical Algerian Relations*

Algeria's interest in supporting Niger and West Africa is not new. Given shared populations, culture, religion, and economics, Algeria presented itself as a viable security provider for West African states—notably efforts in Mali—for decades (El-Katiri 2016, 11 & 23). Before Qaddafi's fall, Libya equally involved itself in state security efforts. Interstate linkages and state moderation intentions caused Algeria to mediate dialogues during the early Tuareg Rebellions from 1990 until its end in 2000 (El-Katiri 2016, 23-24). Beyond mediation, Algeria has traded across the Nigerien borderlands since pre-colonial times, exchanging luxury items, salt, and livestock via the trans-Saharan caravan route (Alesbury 2013, 112). Algeria's shared border with Niger enables flows of migrants and refugees between the two states (Alesbury 2013, 118-120).

### *Modern Algerian Relations*

Following Niger's 2023 coup d'état, Algeria positioned itself as the conflict moderator, offering transitional plans and leadership support for the junta government. While this position may appear intuitive, given their intentions to become the regional power, their stance straddled that of Western condemnation with neighbors Mali and Burkina Faso's aggressive pro-coup stance (Milliken, E., & Cafiero, G., 2023). The Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS)—a regional organization of (then) 15 West African States—publicly denounced Niger's coup, meeting with deposed President Bazoum and requesting the “restoration of his legitimate authority,” (Al Jazeera, 2023). Additionally, the organization prepared a “standby force” to reinstate Bazoum militarily (Al Jazeera, 2023). Taking a firm anti-interventionist position—against another international peacekeeping mission mirroring Operation Barkhane—as well as a decisive posture towards transitioning back to civilian rule, Algeria currently plays the role of regional moderator skillfully (Milliken, E., & Cafiero, G., 2023).

So far, Algerian support takes the form of diplomatic moderation with the junta government and security protection for the state, rather than direct militaristic involvement. Algeria sees the conflict and withdrawal as an opportunity to emphasize state sovereignty and push for a movement away from French and U.S. involvement in West Africa. A month after the coup, Algeria proposed a plan detailing a 6-month return to civil constitutional rule for Niger (France 24, 2023; Embassy of Algeria, 2022). Additionally, it committed Algerian protection of airspace against any international involvement (France 24, 2023). The junta accepted Algeria's offer of mediation and

support, with disagreement on the plan's duration. In the year following the coup, Niger demonstrated its commitment to the bilateral Algerian relationship, sending Prime Minister Mohamed Lamine Zain and Defense Minister Lieutenant General Salifu Modela to meet with Algerian Prime Minister Mohamed Nadhir Arbawi (Arredondas, M., 2024). Algeria, noting the importance of this West African ally, repeatedly emphasized the "special importance" of their visit with "the Sister Republic of Niger," highlighting "the historic fraternal relations" and community between the two states (Arredondas, M., 2024). Nadhir Arbawi stated that it was the first meeting in a future of collaborative efforts—military, economic, and social (Arredondas, M., 2024). Algerian diplomatic vernacular enforces the themes of brotherhood and Pan-Africanism, pushing against the Western coup condemnation.

On one level, the Western withdrawal from the West African coup states has created a mutual defense pact between the junta governments of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, known as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) (Al Jazeera, 2024), ultimately strengthening regional interstate collaboration measures. On the other hand, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso all immediately withdrew from ECOWAS in January of 2024 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). This demonstrates an intense shift away from regional collaboration, with the three states turning inward towards one another to reinforce their security situation—wholly separate from ECOWAS (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). Following their withdrawal, Algeria met with the current President of ECOWAS to restate their rejection of military intervention and to discuss the situation (Mestour, C., 2023). It is worth highlighting that, despite Algeria's condemnation of international intervention, the Russian paramilitary Wagner Group has increased involvement with junta governments in the AES (Atalayar, 2024). In November of 2024, Niger invited Russian firms to invest in Uranium, given the decrease in French trade after the coup (Atalayar, 2024). Algeria has openly criticized the Wagner Group's military involvement in the region, maintaining its value on international nonintervention (Khattache, A., 2024).

### *Algerian Intentions*

Algeria's recent increase in interstate diplomacy with Niger's junta government raises the question: *Why?*

Politically, Algeria's historical stance on state sovereignty explains its encouragement of internal solution building, while moderating and protecting against any forms of occupation. Having sovereignty as an explicit, recurrent national goal, Algeria quickly intervened in the coup aftermath to prevent international involvement, or meddling, in Niger's statehood. Newly vulnerable, given French and United States troop withdrawal, Algeria aims to suspend external action until Niger has stabilized. Cynically, Algeria could be profiting off a vulnerable, weaker state to carry out its own incentives—under the guise of mutuality and respect.

Culturally, anti-French sentiment in Algeria and recent anti-French protests in Niger demonstrate similar perspectives and ideologies on development renouncing French

involvement. Given Algeria's colonial history, the recent discontent and removal of France from Niger demonstrates an alignment of personal values. Reinforcing anti-West perspectives regionally plays a role in Algerian motivation.

Economically, Algeria stands to gain from Niger's allyship. The development of the African Gas Pipeline spans from Europe into Nigeria, crossing through Niger (The World Bank in Algeria, 2024). Discussing the infrastructure project during high-level diplomatic meetings encourages reciprocity and agreement on the future project—which is set to create new market opportunities for Algeria, the largest liquid natural gas exporter at 30 mtpa (Global Energy Monitor, 2022). The Hydrocarbon sector makes up 19% of Algeria's gross domestic product and 93% of its exports (The World Bank in Algeria, 2024). Additionally, the African Development Bank Group's establishment of the Multinational Trans-Sahara Highway—road segments in Niger, Chad, and Algeria receiving \$167 million for improvement—will increase trade volume and access to landlocked fishing resources (African Development Bank Group, 2019).

## *Case Comparison*

### *Algerian Bilateral Approach*

Bilateral relations with Western-perceived “illegitimate states” bolster Algeria's role as the West African regional security provider. We argue that Algeria seeks to involve itself in both contested states because the legitimacy opportunity—a lack of recognition by regional and international organizations—presented itself. Supporting a state undergoing Western criticism progresses Algeria's regional agenda. Through heavily backing both contested states of Western Sahara and Niger, Algeria bolsters itself on the regional—and international—stage.

The largest similarities in Algeria's approach to regional bilateralism are prioritization of international noninterference, strong diplomatic backing, and emphasis on Pan-Africanism. These foreign policy similarities suggest a trend in Algeria's approach to West African bilateral relations with weaker, “illegitimate” perceived countries. We will separately discuss international noninterference, strong diplomatic backing, and emphasis on Pan-Africanism as independent factors, yet their foundations intertwine and coincide with one another.

### *International Noninterference*

Algeria's foreign policy objective of sovereignty—and vehement opposition to international intervention—holds true in both cases. Preventing Western nations from intervening has been Algeria's overarching short term goal in both cases. Practically, Algeria has protected airspace against international intervention, advocated for sovereignty and independence, housed refugee camps, and spoken diplomatically on behalf of the state. Fortifying both governments through their own state power, Algeria has effectively kept international actors from making final decisions on either regional conflict, granting instead a level of autonomy to the state itself. Algeria's approach to

leaving Niger and Western Sahara autonomous opposes typical European initiatives which include democracy or free market contingencies in aid contracts. Algeria has promised military protection and diplomatic support without attempts to interfere in the respective governments. While maintaining state autonomy has been largely successful, coups d'état have increased Russia's involvement in West Africa.

Niger's junta government rejects all Western influence, presenting itself as a favorable geopolitical conflict. Additionally, as anticolonial rhetoric defines Western Sahara, its sovereignty combats French and American investment in the region. Algerian bilateral engagement with these two states strategically combats international—mainly Western—intervention in West Africa.

### *Diplomatic Backing*

Algeria's practice of supporting each state currently follows protective and diplomatic practices rather than violent or forceful military backing. Algeria mainly aims to demonstrate its capacity and understanding of the nuance and complexity currently in both situations, and ultimately, to come away with a diplomatic, moderating victory. The Algerian Foreign Ministry consistently makes statements supporting Western Sahara and condemning any actions which decelerate SADR statehood. Similarly, the Foreign Ministry also actively condemned any international intervention in Niger, emphasizing the importance of ongoing bilateral dialogues and a peaceful transition. Proving capable of moderating each volatile transition and unresolved conflict frames Algeria as a formidable diplomat, both on a regional and an international scale.

### *Pan-Africanism*

In both cases, Algeria uses Pan-Africanism as an underlying foundation for future bilateralism. Familial terms such as “brotherhood” or “sister republic”, create a cultural relevancy and allied connection—one crucial pillar of Algerian bilateralism. Algerian official statements focus on the similarity and regionalism of West Africa. Backing *weak* states against foreign intervention demonstrates Pan-Africanism, protection, and cultural relativity. Algeria seeks to portray its understanding and support of regional conflicts as a fellow African state, rather than a foreign oppressor. In so doing, Algeria builds good neighborly relations, a sense of familial regionalism, and cohesive foundations in West Africa.

While these three approaches hold true through both cases, it is crucial to note that the stakes and relationships themselves vary. Algeria's relationship with Western Sahara could be defined as special, or even dependent; being SADR's biggest support, the contested territory's hope for statehood is bound to continuous Algerian solidarity. Without this strong, outspoken regional ally, Western Sahara would lose significant support regionally and internationally. Presently losing its sovereignty and potential for statehood, SADR differs from Niger's junta government; a different junta may overturn the current coup government, proving a failure for Algerian support, but its reversal

would not ultimately endanger the statehood of Niger. Additionally, Algerian involvement in Niger has massively increased recently following the 2023 coup d'état; prior to the coup, Algeria has shared similarities with Niger—including population, trade, language, religion—but not an ongoing bilateral relationship. It is worth noting that the connecting feature of these two studies is their perceived illegitimacy by (some) European states, not an equivalent value on the importance of each relationship.

### Outcomes

To assess the effectiveness of both cases on Algeria's perceived strength, outcomes must be viewed through a current and future perspective. We define current as the outcomes which Algeria has already gained in its bilateral relationship and future as Algeria's prospective, overall goals.

In Western Sahara, the current bilateral relationship with Algeria has proven widely effective for bolstering Algerian reliability as a regional superpower. Algeria has almost singularly backed Western Sahara, maintaining the fight for its sovereignty and publicly dissenting against oppositional states. It has maintained its foreign policy value of state sovereignty through this endeavor, solidifying its credibility in maintaining an ongoing diplomatic conversation for nearly 50 years. The future relationship with Western Sahara may provide economic opportunities, an indebted, allied neighbor, and reduced Moroccan influence in West Africa.

In Niger, the current bilateral relationship opens doors for expanded Algerian alliances in West Africa. Tying itself to Niger's transition and prosperity, Algeria's role as an effective ally—maintaining state autonomy and prioritizing sovereignty—may appeal to *weak* neighboring states. Sharing beliefs on Pan-Africanism and noninterference, post-coup states may look to Algeria for future support. So far, Algeria has succeeded in deterring Western interference in Niger—a victory in its fight against international interference. The future relationship, or rather the effectiveness of Algeria in navigating and supporting the post-coup state, could bolster its credibility as a mediator—both regionally and internationally. Additionally, success in Niger would expand Algeria's regional allies—potentially into Mali and Burkina Faso—thereby solidifying its stronghold as the North African superpower. Secure states facilitate regional stability, equally beneficial to Algeria.

The future outcomes of both Western Sahara and Niger remain to be seen; a failure in either case discredits Algeria's ability to stabilize the region. Additionally, the lack of statehood has prevented the Polisario Front from fully governing the territory. If Western Sahara gains full independence, will they be capable of autonomously self-governing? Or in Niger, where the 2023 coup seems like a recurrence in a cycle, will the junta succeed, or will their actions instigate another coup? Observing the outcomes of each conflict helps analyze the efficacy of Algeria's role in establishing regional stability.



### *Conclusion and the Future of Algerian Regional Collaboration*

Algerian bilateral relationships with weaker, “illegitimate” states follow three foundational principles: international noninterference, diplomatic backing, and Pan-Africanism. Using the case studies of Western Sahara and Niger’s junta government, one can see trends in Algeria’s approach to regionalism.

Algeria’s foreign policy strategically seeks regional allies and dominance. Contrasting Morocco, Algeria does not heavily pursue policy and allyship with Western countries. This difference marks a crucial understanding of the competition for regional superiority between Morocco and Algeria. It also guides and predicts Algerian bilateral approaches and future allies. Using the legitimacy opportunity allowed by post-coup states or contested territories, Algeria advances its own foreign policy priorities.

Ultimately, Algerian foreign policy in West Africa strategically and skillfully targets weaker states to build a foundation of regional support. Whether Algeria proves to be effective in stabilizing West Africa—via each of these cases—remains to be seen. Supporting *weak* states regionally creates a future regional stronghold. Algerian unipolarity in North Africa is contingent upon successful regional bilateralism.

Future research should address Algerian failure in fragile states, such as Mali, to gain a comprehensive understanding of this topic. While the case studies of Niger and Western Sahara remain inconclusive on the future outcomes of Algerian involvement, Mali’s tense relationship with Algeria could ameliorate understanding on the failures of Algerian regional bilateralism.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

### *Notes on Contributors*

Meriem Naïli, PhD is a Lecturer in the Department of Law at Université Grenoble Alpes. Her expertise in Western Sahara and International Law contribute greatly to this work.

Sophia R. Wittemyer is a current master’s student of Law and Diplomacy at the Tufts Fletcher School. Her expertise in post-coup governments and the Sahel region cause this work to intersect Law with Political Science.

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