

EXPLAINING THE ALGERIAN-FRENCH CRISIS (2019-2025): FROM COLONIAL MEMORY TO STRATEGIC DIVERGENCE

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Abstract: This article examines the persistent deterioration of Algerian-French relations between 2019 and 2025, arguing that the crisis stems from the interplay between unresolved colonial legacies and structurally divergent strategic imperatives. Rather than a sequence of isolated diplomatic disputes, the rupture is interpreted as a structural phenomenon embedded in long-standing historical grievances, asymmetrical power perceptions, and shifting regional dynamics. France's oscillating posture toward its colonial past – marked by selective symbolic overtures without comprehensive reconciliation – has perpetuated mistrust and hindered the normalization of bilateral ties. In parallel, Algeria's post-Hirak political trajectory has reinforced a doctrine of sovereignty preservation, accompanied by a deliberate diversification of external partnerships to reduce reliance on traditional interlocutors. Strategic incompatibilities have been further magnified in the Maghreb-Sahel security sphere, where France's preference for force projection contrasts sharply with Algeria's advocacy for political dialogue and regionally owned security mechanisms. Analytically, the study applies a dual theoretical lens: it uses postcolonial theory to elucidate the symbolic and identity-based undercurrents of the crisis and provides a neoclassical realism reading of the events to account for how domestic political constraints, leadership perceptions, and systemic shifts converge in shaping foreign policy choices. The findings indicate a gradual transformation of the bilateral relationship from symbolic estrangement to strategic disengagement, reflecting a broader regional reconfiguration toward multipolarity, with Algeria emerging as an increasingly autonomous regional actor and France confronting its diminishing leverage in the region.

Keywords: Algeria, post-Hirak government, colonial memory, political crisis, far-right, France, Security of the Maghreb-Sahel region

Rezumat: Acest articol examinează deteriorarea continuă a relațiilor algeriano-franceze între 2019 și 2025, argumentând că această criză provine din interacțiunea dintre

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moștenirile coloniale nerezolvate și imperativele strategice structural divergente ale celor două state. Ruptura nu este doar o secvență de dispute diplomatice izolate, ci aceasta trebuie interpretată ca un fenomen structural înrădăcinat în nemulțumiri istorice de lungă durată, percepțiile asimetrice ale puterii precum și dinamicii regionale în schimbare. Postura oscilantă a Franței față de trecutul său colonial – marcată de deschideri simbolice selective, fără o reconciliere cuprinzătoare – a perpetuat neîncrederea și a împiedicat normalizarea legăturilor bilaterale. În paralel, traectoria politică post-Hirak a Algeriei a consolidat o doctrină a conservării suveranității, însotită de o diversificare deliberată a parteneriatelor externe pentru a reduce dependența de interlocutorii tradiționali. Incompatibilitățile strategice au fost amplificate și mai mult în sfera de securitate Maghreb-Sahel, unde preferința Franței pentru proiectarea forței contrastează cu pleoaria Algeriei pentru dialog politic și mecanisme de securitate la nivel regional. Din punct de vedere analitic, studiul aplică o dublă perspectivă teoretică: utilizează teoria postcolonială pentru a înțelege dinamica subiacentă simbolică și identitară a crizei și oferă o analiză realistă neoclasică a evenimentelor pentru a explica modul în care constrângerile politice interne, percepțiile asupra conducerii și schimbările sistemice converg în modelarea deciziilor de politică externă. Rezultatele cercetării indică o transformare treptată a relației bilaterale de la înstrăinare simbolică la dezangajare strategică, reflectând o reconfigurare regională mai amplă către multipolaritate, Algeria devenind un actor regional din ce în ce mai autonom, în timp ce Franța se confruntă cu o influență diminuată în regiune.

Cuvinte cheie: Algeria, guvernarea post-Hirak, memorie colonială, criză politică, extrema dreaptă, Franța, securitatea regiunii Maghreb-Sahel

I. Introduction

Algerian -French relations have long been shaped by a complex nexus of memory, identity, and power, with postcolonial legacies sustaining structural asymmetries and symbolic tensions at the core of the bilateral relationship. In the aftermath of decolonization, unresolved colonial memories, contested sovereignty claims, and divergent national narratives entrenched a cycle of recurrent diplomatic ruptures, periodically interrupted by pragmatic cooperation in areas such as security, energy, and trade. This oscillation between engagement and confrontation persisted as a latent fault line, reactivated through episodic crises, mutual recriminations, and alternating phases of rapprochement and estrangement.

However, since 2019 the relationship has entered a qualitatively distinct phase, marked not merely by intensified disputes but by a structural reconfiguration of the bilateral landscape. What had previously been intermittent tensions has transformed into a sustained and multidimensional crisis, driven by the convergence of three novel dynamics: 1) the domestic political transitions triggered by the 2019 Hirak movement (Revolution of

Smiles), which redefined Algeria's foreign policy posture and discursive identity; 2) the erosion of diplomatic trust and sharper rhetorical confrontations between the two states; 3) the widening geopolitical divergence over strategic priorities in the Maghreb and the Sahel¹.

This combination distinguishes the 2019–2025 period from earlier phases. Symbolic disputes over colonial memory are now increasingly entwined with shifting regional alignments, leading to deeper and more persistent forms of contention. Although the literature addresses postcolonial memory politics in Algerian-French relations², scholarly engagement with this recent, highly fluid period remains limited, especially regarding how the symbolic and strategic dimensions intersect during moments of acute bilateral strain. Existing studies³ treat these domains separately, thereby overlooking the ways in which they have become mutually reinforcing since 2019.

The novelty of the current period is further characterized by broader geostrategic transformations in the Mediterranean region and Africa. Intensified competition over energy corridors, recalibrated security partnerships, and the restructuring of Euro-African relations in the wake of the Ukraine war have reshaped the strategic calculus of both Algeria and France. These shifts have amplified disputes over sovereignty, regional influence, and security cooperation, while simultaneously reactivating longstanding postcolonial grievances. As a result, the 2019–2025 crisis is embedded in a fundamentally altered strategic environment, one in which memory politics, identity narratives, and geopolitical rivalries are deeply intertwined.

Against this backdrop, the central research question guiding this study is: *How can the Algerian-French crisis (2019–2025) be explained considering the historical depth of the relationship and the intensifying divergence in their strategic trajectories, while accounting for the symbolic legacies of colonialism and evolving regional geostrategic contexts?* From this overarching inquiry emerge the following sub-questions: How do

¹ Brahim Oumansour, “Relations franco-algéries: derrière la désescalade des tensions, quels enjeux?”, *Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.iris-france.org/relations-franco-algeriennes-derriere-la-desescalade-des-tensions-quels-enjeux/>

² Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Phillip C. Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2024); Jill Jarvis, *Decolonizing Memory: Algeria and the Politics of Testimony* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Belkacem Belmekki and Ahlem Fidouh, “Algeria, France: Complex Relations and a Lasting Trauma of Colonialism”, *The Historian* 86, no. 4 (2024/25): 356.

³ Frédéric Charillon, “La relation franco-algérienne au regard de l'analyse de politique étrangère”, *Questions internationales* 81 (September-October 2016): 97-108; Laurence Thieux and Rachid Farrah, “Algeria and Western Sahara: Reactivating the Principle of Just Cause in the Post Hirak Era”, *The Journal of North African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2025): 228; Michael J. Willis, “Algeria and the Outside World: Foreign Policy and Relations in a Transformed Regional Environment,” in *Algeria: Politics and Society from the Dark Decade to the Hirak*, ed. Michael J. Willis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 335-402.

unresolved colonial memories and competing identity narratives influence the perceptions and diplomatic conduct of both states during the current crisis?; In what ways have domestic political dynamics within Algeria and France shaped their foreign policy choices between 2019 and 2025?; How have regional and international developments – including post-Ukraine shifts in Euro-African relations and evolving geopolitics in the Maghreb and Sahel – interacted with symbolic disputes to exacerbate bilateral tensions?; and finally: To what extent does the interplay between symbolic dimensions (memory, identity) and strategic considerations (security, influence, energy) account for the persistence and structural nature of the crisis?

The study advances the hypothesis that the current crisis is dual in nature: rooted simultaneously in the enduring symbolic weight of unresolved colonial memory and identity disputes, and in an increasing incompatibility of geopolitical orientations, particularly in North Africa and the Sahel. This divergence has been sharpened by Europe's evolving energy and security imperatives in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, fostering renewed competition for influence in Africa, with Algeria pursuing strategic diversification and France seeking to preserve its traditional spheres of influence.

To adequately address this multidimensional entanglement of symbolic and strategic factors, the study adopts an interpretive and multilayered analytical framework that integrates postcolonial theory insights into memory and identity with neoclassical realism's emphasis on the interaction between systemic pressures and domestic political mediation. Such an approach moves beyond the limitations of conventional foreign policy analysis, which often privileges material power while overlooking symbolic politics, and avoids the reductionism of memory-centered frameworks that underplay the strategic recalibrations shaping the Maghreb, the Sahel, and the broader Mediterranean region since 2019.

Methodologically, the study draws primarily on multiple sources, including official governmental statements, policy documents, media reports, and research center publications, ensuring that the data accurately captures each state's positions, narratives, and strategic considerations.

II. Conceptual and Theoretical framework

Understanding the Algerian-French crisis in its contemporary form requires a conceptual approach capable of capturing both its symbolic depth and strategic complexity. To this end, the article adopts a dual theoretical framework, drawing on postcolonial theory and neoclassical realism. This combination allows for a layered analysis of the crisis – one that integrates the

politics of memory and identity with the strategic behaviors shaped by domestic and systemic variables.

II.1. Postcolonial Theory: Colonial Legacies and Power in International Relations

Postcolonial theory serves as a crucial epistemological framework for interrogating how the legacies of colonialism permeate and structure contemporary international relations beyond the formal cessation of imperial systems. It challenges dominant paradigms that focus predominantly on materialist and institutional variables by foregrounding the enduring cultural, symbolic, and discursive power asymmetries that persist between former colonial metropoles and postcolonial states⁴. The postcolonial approach problematizes the notion of decolonization as a discrete historical event and instead frames it as an ongoing process through which colonial epistemologies, identity constructs, and power hierarchies continue to inform global political interactions⁵.

At the heart of postcolonial analysis is Edward Said's seminal concept of *imaginative geographies*, elaborated in *Orientalism*³. Said demonstrates how the West's construction of the "Orient" as an exotic, inferior Other was not merely a literary or academic exercise but a mechanism of imperial domination that established enduring epistemic asymmetries⁶. This binary oppositional logic-defining the West as rational, progressive, and superior vis-à-vis a backward, irrational East continues to underpin contemporary international relations through what postcolonial scholars' term "coloniality of power"⁷. These representational frameworks are deeply embedded in Western diplomatic discourse, media, and policy narratives, influencing how former colonies are surveilled, governed, and engaged on the global stage⁸. Such entrenched hierarchies manifest as civilizational essentialism and neocolonial practices, reproducing exclusion and marginalization despite the affirmation of formal sovereignty.

Colonial memory, in this context, refers to the collective and institutionalized remembrance of colonial rule, encompassing narratives, symbols, commemorations, educational curricula, and public discourses that shape national identity, historical consciousness, and foreign policy

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts. Third Edition* (London: Routledge, 2013), 204-205.

⁵ G. Sreevarsha, "Post-Colonial Theory," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science and Technology* 11, no. 1 (2021): 302, <https://www.ijarst.in/public/uploads/paper/980671726043702.pdf>.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 54.

⁷ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 47.

⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 45-47.

orientations⁹. Such memories are not neutral repositories of the past but active components in political negotiation, affecting how states and societies interpret historical grievances, assert sovereignty, and engage with former colonizers.

Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic and phenomenological insights enrich this discourse by illuminating the intimate violence of colonial domination on subjectivity. Fanon contends that colonialism imposes a dehumanizing “racial epidermal schema” that fractures the colonized's sense of self, inducing a pathological inferiority complex and internalized subjugation¹⁰. Decolonization, therefore, transcends political sovereignty and requires an ontological rupture – an existential reconstitution of identity that dismantles colonial subjectivities and asserts agency. This theoretical lens underlines the deep symbolic struggles embedded in postcolonial statecraft and international diplomacy, where claims to dignity and recognition contest residual imperial legacies.

Achille Mbembe extends these insights by diagnosing the postcolony as a site where colonial power's symbolic architecture persists through mechanisms of “commandment” that obscure, exclude, and silence alternative histories¹¹. This framework problematizes simplistic narratives of postcolonial emancipation by revealing how postcolonial governance often replicates exclusionary and opaque power structures inherited from colonial administration. Such dynamics complicate international relations by embedding historical grievances and contested memories within diplomatic encounters.

Furthermore, Vijay Prashad highlights the strategic role of collective memory in postcolonial sovereignty construction. Memory, far from being a passive repository of trauma, is actively mobilized to produce counter-narratives that challenge colonial epistemologies and assert political agency¹². Through this lens, the reframing of colonial histories becomes an emancipatory practice that legitimizes claims to self-determination and resistance against neocolonial encroachments.

Lastly, in this brief postcolonial overview, Homi Bhabha's theorization of ambivalence and hybridity provides critical conceptual tools for understanding the paradoxical nature of postcolonial identity formation¹³. Bhabha argues that colonial and postcolonial subjects inhabit a liminal space characterized by ambivalence, wherein mimicry of colonial cultural forms coexists with subversive resistance¹⁴. This hybridity destabilizes rigid colonial

⁹ Itay Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France: The Sins of Silence* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 19-20.

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 112-115.

¹¹ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 25-27.

¹² Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 104.

¹³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 92.

¹⁴ Ibid.

binaries, producing complex interstitial cultural and political formations that challenge essentialist notions of identity and power. The postcolonial subject, therefore, is neither wholly colonized nor fully sovereign but negotiates a dynamic, contested identity that permeates both domestic politics and international relations.

In sum, postcolonial theory offers a comprehensive analytic apparatus that reveals how colonial histories, epistemologies, and power asymmetries continue to shape international political structures, state identities, and diplomatic practices. It underscores the persistence of symbolic violence and cultural hegemony alongside formal political independence, rendering postcolonial international relations an arena of ongoing negotiation, contestation, and transformation.

II.2. Neoclassical Realism Theory: Bridging Systemic Structure and Domestic Agency

Neoclassical realism constitutes a significant evolution within the realist theory in international relations by addressing the explanatory shortcomings of classical realism and structural realism through a more nuanced understanding of how systemic pressures interact with domestic-level variables to shape foreign policy outcomes¹⁵. While classical realism focuses primarily on the anarchic international system and the distribution of material power as the key drivers of state behavior, neoclassical realism insists that this systemic influence is neither direct nor mechanical. Instead, it is filtered through domestic political structures, decision-making processes, elite perceptions, and strategic cultures, which ultimately mediate how states perceive, prioritize, and respond to external threats and opportunities¹⁶.

This theoretical approach acknowledges the “black box” of the state, emphasizing that foreign policy cannot be understood solely by examining external factors but must consider how internal political dynamics affect a state’s ability and willingness to act on international imperatives¹⁷. Institutions, regime stability, bureaucratic politics, and societal cohesion determine whether and how a state balances against threats or pursues strategic objectives. This domestic mediation explains divergences in foreign policy responses among states facing similar external environments, as domestic constraints may lead to underbalancing or selective engagement.

¹⁵ Gideon Rose, “Review Article; Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”, *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144.

¹⁶ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy”, in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

¹⁷ Randall L. Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing”, *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 161.

Central to neoclassical realism is the role of elite perceptions and cognitive biases. Unlike purely structural accounts, this theory foregrounds how decision-makers' interpretations shaped by historical memory, identity narratives, and political culture influence threat assessment and policy choices¹⁸. This interpretive lens allows for an understanding of phenomena such as threat inflation or misperception, which can exacerbate tensions or generate policy inconsistencies despite objective material conditions. Elite beliefs about national interests and external actors may diverge significantly, affecting how systemic pressures translate into specific foreign policies¹⁹.

The theory further foregrounds regime type and legitimacy as crucial variables shaping strategic behavior. Regimes facing internal legitimacy crises or factional disputes often prioritize regime survival and domestic consolidation over consistent external balancing, leading to erratic or constrained foreign policies²⁰. Stable, cohesive regimes are better positioned to translate systemic pressures into coherent strategic action and to mobilize resources effectively. Thus, internal political dynamics are key determinants of a state's external posture, impacting its capacity for balancing or bandwagoning in the international system²¹.

Moreover, neoclassical realism elaborates on the dynamic process of strategic adjustment, where states actively interpret and respond to systemic changes through deliberate foreign policy innovations such as alliance formation, hedging, or diversification of partnerships²². This agency-driven perspective contrasts with more deterministic structural accounts, highlighting the capacity of states to shape their strategic environment through calculated domestic and international actions. For example, states may seek to offset relative declines in power by cultivating new partnerships or recalibrating diplomatic alignments based on domestic preferences and political calculations.

Finally, neoclassical realism's integrative framework – combining structural constraints with domestic and ideational factors – provides a comprehensive understanding of state behavior as contingent, context-dependent, and mediated by multiple levels of analysis²³. This framework is particularly useful for explaining protracted crises or complex bilateral relations

¹⁸ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 50.

¹⁹ Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.

²⁰ Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In", *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 71-75.

²¹ Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay", *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 185.

²² Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 92.

²³ Elias Götz, "Neoclassical Realist Theories, Intervening Variables, and Paradigmatic Boundaries", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 2 (2021): 6.

where historical grievances, identity politics, and internal legitimacy concerns intersect with shifting international power dynamics.

In applying neoclassical realism to the Algerian-French case, the study emphasizes the centrality of elite perceptions in mediating systemic pressures. In France, the growing influence of the far-right shapes narratives regarding immigration, national identity, and postcolonial responsibilities, which in turn frame Algeria alternately as a partner and a competitor, particularly with regards to the security and migration policies. In Algeria, elite perceptions are expressed through the post-Hirak regime's sovereignty discourse, emphasizing historical grievances, national autonomy, and strategic diversification. By linking these elite perceptions to observable policy choices and diplomatic rhetoric, the study demonstrates how domestic interpretations of systemic pressures contribute to the specific patterns of the Algerian-French crisis between 2019 and 2025.

III. Algerian-France Relations (1962-2018): Between Rupture and Normalization

Since 1962, the bilateral relationship between Algeria and France has evolved within a complex postcolonial framework where historical memory, structural asymmetries, and shifting regional dynamics intersect to shape patterns of rupture and attempts at normalization. Far from being linear, the trajectory of Algeria-France relations has unfolded through cycles of confrontation, cautious rapprochement, and recurring crises, revealing the deep entanglement between decolonization struggles and the persistence of symbolic and material dependencies. Understanding these phases is essential to grasp how unresolved colonial legacies and divergent strategic visions continue to structure contemporary tensions between the two countries.

Following independence, Algeria under Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumédiène prioritized radical decolonization through non-alignment, anti-imperialist solidarity, and state-led development as a means of consolidating sovereignty²⁴. The 1971 nationalization of French hydrocarbon assets and Algeria's support for African and Palestinian liberation movements positioned it as a leader within the Global South while intensifying tensions with France, which struggled to redefine its role as a postcolonial power²⁵. France oscillated

²⁴ Robert A. Mortimer, “Algerian Foreign Policy: From Revolution to National Interest,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 3 (2015): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2014.990961>.

²⁵ Khadija Mohsen-Finan, “Entre la France et l’Algérie, une relation ponctuée de crises”, *Le Centre arabe de recherches et d’études politiques de Paris (CAREP Paris)*, March 31, 2025, <https://carep-paris.org/recherche/europe-monde-arabe/entre-la-france-et-lalgerie-une-relation-ponctuée-de-crisées/>.

between paternalistic post-imperial ties and strategic withdrawal, maintaining cultural and economic connections while failing to establish a stable partnership, leading to distrust and diplomatic crises. The colonial past remained a latent fracture in bilateral interactions, resurfacing whenever symbolic or strategic interests collided.

The arrival of Chadli Bendjedid and François Mitterrand in the early 1980s introduced cautious normalization, with France and Algeria expanding economic cooperation, engaging in debt restructuring, and deepening energy ties²⁶. However, this rapprochement occurred within asymmetrical frameworks: France retained dominance in economic and linguistic spheres, while Algeria preserved political distance, wary of neo-colonial dependency. Symbolically, Mitterrand's ambiguous stance on the Algerian War and the absence of official recognition of colonial violence obstructed genuine reconciliation. The 1990s, marked by Algeria's civil conflict, deepened this ambiguity, as France adopted a dual-track approach – publicly condemning violence while secretly collaborating on counterterrorism – reflecting a securitization of Algerian affairs within French domestic politics and reinforcing mutual suspicion²⁷.

The election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999 opened a period of partial normalization characterized by efforts to formalize cooperation through the 2003 Declaration of Algiers and the proposed Friendship Treaty. However, the 2005 French parliamentary law praising the “positive role” of colonialism rekindled historical grievances, leading to the treaty's collapse and exposing the fragility of symbolic reconciliation²⁸. Despite increasing economic interdependence in energy and infrastructure, unresolved disputes over colonial memory, migration policies, and visa restrictions continued to strain relations. Symbolic gestures, such as François Hollande's 2012 acknowledgment of colonial brutality without issuing a formal apology, highlighted the discursive limitations of France's approach to historical reconciliation. Meanwhile, divergent regional strategies in the Sahel, Libya, and Western Sahara further illustrated strategic misalignments, with Algeria asserting non-aligned autonomy and France defending its traditional zones of influence²⁹.

From radical rupture and anti-colonial assertion to ambiguous rapprochement and fragile normalization, Algeria-France relations from 1962 to 2018 demonstrate that the colonial past remains an unresolved structural and symbolic fault line in the bilateral relationship. The comparative table synthesizes the key phases of Algeria-France relations, highlighting Algeria's and

²⁶ Frédéric Charillon, “La relation franco-algérienne au regard de l'analyse de politique étrangère”, *Questions internationales* 81 (September-October 2016): 100.

²⁷ Pierre Vermeren, “Petite histoire de l'Algérie depuis l'indépendance”, *Questions internationales* 81 (September-October 2016): 15.

²⁸ Aomar Baghzouz, “Algeria-France: Permanent Normalisation”, in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir (London: Routledge, 2020), 183.

²⁹ Ibid., 188.

France's respective positions, the central characteristics of each phase, and the enduring structural fault lines that continued to shape the bilateral relationship across decades (see Table no. 1). As the table illustrates, Algeria-France relations have followed a cyclical trajectory characterized by moments of cautious rapprochement, repeatedly undermined by symbolic, structural, and geopolitical asymmetries. While economic cooperation and partial normalization emerged during periods of stability, unresolved issues related to colonial memory, migration, and regional competition have continued to generate friction, preventing the relationship from achieving a sustainable partnership.

Phase	Period	Key Features	Algeria's Position	France's Position	Structural Fault Lines
1	1962–1978	Radical decolonization, non-alignment, nationalization of hydrocarbons, support for liberation movements	Assertive anti-imperialist sovereignty, Global South leadership, rejection of neocolonial ties	Paternalistic post-imperial ambiguity, strategic disengagement, cultural ties maintained	Colonial memory tensions, economic disputes, political mistrust
2	1979–1999	Economic cooperation (debt restructuring, energy), cautious diplomatic rapprochement during Bendjedid/Mitterrand, Algerian civil conflict	Maintained political distance, utilized memory for legitimacy, security challenges during the civil war	Economic and cultural influence retained, dual-track approach (public condemnation, covert cooperation)	Historical reconciliation absent, securitization of Algerian issues, diaspora tensions
3	2000–2018	Declaration of Algiers, proposed Friendship Treaty, economic interdependence, symbolic gestures without formal apology	Partial engagement, sovereignty-sensitive, defensive nationalism, assertive regional autonomy	Pursuit of pragmatic cooperation, limited symbolic reconciliation, traditional regional interests	Colonial memory gap, migration and visa disputes, economic asymmetry, regional competition

Table 1: Comparative Phases of Algeria-France Relations (1962–2018)

Source: Author's elaboration based on the studies by Aomar Baghzouz, "Algeria-France: Permanent Normalisation", in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir (London: Routledge, 2020) and Khadija Mohsen-Finan, "Entre la France et l'Algérie, une relation ponctuée de crises", *Le Centre arabe de recherches et d'études politiques de Paris (CAREP Paris)*, March 31, 2025, <https://carep-paris.org/recherche/europe-monde-arabe/entre-la-france-et-lalgerie-une-relation-ponctuee-de-crises/>.

This historical background sets the stage for understanding how domestic variables in both Algeria and France, analyzed in the following section, interact with the enduring fault lines to produce recurring crises in the bilateral relationship.

IV. Domestic Politics and the Enduring Diplomatic Stalemate in Algeria-France Relations since 2019

The ongoing crisis in Algeria-France relations since 2019 is deeply rooted in domestic political dynamics on both sides. In France, postcolonial memory politics, rising populism, and the securitization of migration have constrained diplomatic flexibility and fueled tensions with Algeria. Simultaneously, Algeria's post-Hirak domestic landscape has reinforced sovereignty narratives and anti-colonial identity discourses, framing France as both a historical adversary and a contemporary challenge to national dignity. These intertwined domestic drivers have entrenched the current diplomatic impasse, shaping a bilateral relationship marked by mutual distrust, symbolic confrontations, and strategic ambiguities.

IV.1. France: Populism, Colonial Memory, and Strategic Ambiguities

France's domestic drivers shaping its foreign policy toward Algeria are deeply intertwined with postcolonial memory politics, rising populism, the securitization of migration, and shifting elite calculations about national identity and global positioning. These factors collectively constrain France's diplomatic flexibility and contribute to the structural entrenchment of crises in its relations with Algeria.

At the core of these dynamics lies the legacy of colonialism, particularly concerning Algeria, which remains a contentious element within French national identity debates. Despite partial gestures toward recognition – such as President Macron's acknowledgment of France's responsibility for the death of Algerian nationalist Ali Boumendjel³⁰, France has refrained from issuing a formal apology or reparations for colonial crimes due to domestic political sensitivities. As Todd Shepard argues, the end of the Algerian war did not signify the end of France's colonial entanglement but rather transformed it into a “domestic problem” tied to immigration and identity³¹. This refusal to address colonial

³⁰ Frédéric Bobin and Olivier Faye, “Emmanuel Macron ‘reconnait’ la responsabilité de la France dans l'assassinat d'Ali Boumendjel en Algérie”, *Le Monde*, March 3, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/03/03/france-algerie-emmanuel-macron-reconnait-la-responsabilite-de-la-france-dans-l-assassinat-d-ali-boumendjel_6071806_3212.html

³¹ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

injustices is deeply rooted in the French republican model of universalism, which resists identity-based recognition and reparative policies, perceiving them as threats to the secular fabric of the state. Consequently, this ideological stance contributes to the denial or minimization of colonial violence within political discourse.

Further illustrating France's selective approach to colonial memory, Macron acknowledged the “debt of the French State” toward the Harkis³², requesting forgiveness for them and their descendants. An independent committee, chaired by Jean-Marie Bockel, was established to handle “recognition and compensation” for the Harkis, including opening archives and restoring certain graves. Following legislation adopted in February 2022, millions of euros were paid as compensation to Harki families. According to official figures, approximately 90,000 Harkis and their families fled Algeria after independence, and about 50,000 individuals are eligible for this indemnification, with a total allocation of around 310 million euros over six years³³. These official measures demonstrate the symbolic emphasis of French memory policy: partial recognition and targeted reparations for specific historical grievances, rather than comprehensive acknowledgment of colonial crimes.

Compounding this ideological rigidity is the rise of far-right movements and populist rhetoric, which have weaponized memory politics to oppose conciliatory gestures toward Algeria. Figures like Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour have capitalized on nostalgia for “French Algeria” and narratives of lost grandeur, framing North African migration as a civilizational threat³⁴. These narratives exert electoral pressures that constrain centrist and leftist politicians, disincentivizing them from pursuing reconciliation or adopting more open migration frameworks. Closely tied to these identity debates is the securitization of migration, which has become a central domestic factor influencing France's

³² The *Harkis* were Muslim Algerians “contracted to support the French armed forces” during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). They “were an essential part of French military strategy”, recruited to fight against the National Liberation Front (FLN). After Algeria gained independence in 1962, many Harkis “paid a considerable price for their support of the French. They and their families were subject to FLN retribution during the war. When the war was over, despite promises of reconciliation, they were the targets of severe reprisals” since they were seen as collaborators with the colonial regime. “As many as 88,000 Harkis and their families fled to France with help from members of the French army or through other semi-clandestine methods”, where they resettled, though they were often marginalized and lived under difficult conditions (The Open University, “*Harkis* and the Algerian War”, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=115066§ion=1>).

³³ Présidence de la République, “Loi du 23 février 2022 sur la reconnaissance et la réparation pour les harkis...”, *Vie-publique*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/282261-loi-23-fevrier-2022-reconnaissance-et-reparation-pour-les-harkis>

³⁴ Vincent Geisser, “Décrypter la controverse France-Algérie: des populismes identitaires en miroir et au mépris de la démocratie”, *Migrations Société*, no. 199, (2025/1): 10, <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-migrations-societe-2025-1-page-5?lang=fr>.

foreign policy stance toward Algeria. In the wake of terrorist attacks, North African communities have faced intensified scrutiny under counterterrorism policies, linking security concerns with migration restrictions and debates on integration³⁵. Populations of Algerian-origin/descent in France, among the largest immigrant communities, are frequently positioned at the intersection of concerns around radicalization, unemployment, and integration failures, reinforcing stereotypes and driving restrictive visa and deportation policies.

These securitarian discourses frequently impact bilateral relations, transforming visa quotas, deportation measures, and demands for Algerian cooperation on irregular migration into sources of diplomatic tension. France's 2021 decision to reduce visas for Algerians by 50%, framed domestically as a security and migration control measure, was perceived in Algeria as a humiliating and neocolonial gesture, intensifying bilateral friction³⁶. Furthermore, domestic lobbying networks shape France's foreign policy discourse toward Algeria. Organizations such as the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France* (CRIF), often aligned with securitarian and pro-Israel positions, indirectly influence how Algeria's pro-Palestinian stance is perceived in France³⁷. These alliances reinforce negative portrayals of Algeria within French political debates, further complicating diplomatic engagement.

Despite these domestic constraints, France continues to maintain significant economic and security interests in Algeria, particularly in energy cooperation and counterterrorism partnerships in the Sahel. However, the interplay of memory politics, identity anxieties, and securitarian imperatives ensures that France's engagement with Algeria remains strategically ambiguous, oscillating between pragmatic cooperation and symbolic distancing. This ambiguity extends to France's broader strategic recalibrations in Africa, including its pivot toward Morocco in the Western Sahara dispute, shaped by domestic pressures tied to historical ties with North Africa and the interests of economic and defense lobbies. Thus, domestic political imperatives, ideological frameworks, and security concerns collectively ensure that France's relationship with Algeria remains structurally constrained, producing a foreign policy that is reactive, inconsistent, and often hostage to domestic electoral and identity calculations.

³⁵ Gilles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 142.

³⁶ Jean-Marc Leclerc and Luc Lenoir, "Fin de la restriction des visas: en contrepartie, l'Algérie va-t-elle reprendre ses clandestins?", *Le Figaro*, le 20 décembre 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/fin-de-la-restriction-des-visas-en-contrepartie-l-algerie-va-t-elle-reprendre-ses-clandestins-20221219>

³⁷ Jessica Stern, "France-Israël. Lobby or Not Lobby?", *Orient XXI*, January 12, 2021, <https://orientxxi.info/dossiers-et-series/france-israel-lobby-or-not-lobby,4404>.

IV.2 Algeria: Post-Hirak Sovereignty, Memory Politics, and Regime Legitimacy

The domestic landscape in Algeria has profoundly shaped its foreign policy posture toward France, particularly since the Hirak movement in 2019, which challenged the legitimacy of the ruling elite while reaffirming the centrality of anti-colonial identity and sovereignty narratives within state discourse. These domestic drivers have positioned France not simply as a historical adversary but as a contemporary symbol against which Algeria asserts its autonomy and dignity, using foreign policy as a stage for consolidating domestic legitimacy.

The Hirak movement, which erupted in February 2019 demanding systemic change and an end to entrenched authoritarian practices, initially created an opening for democratization and political renewal. However, the post-Hirak period witnessed the regime reconstituting its legitimacy around discourses of sovereignty, emphasizing non-interference and resistance to perceived foreign tutelage, with France often cast as the primary external “other”³⁸. This framing serves the dual purpose of rallying domestic support while deflecting criticism during periods of economic hardship and political stagnation, allowing the regime to reassert itself as the guardian of Algeria’s independence and dignity.

The centrality of memory politics in Algeria’s foreign policy became vividly apparent during the diplomatic crisis of October 2021, when Algiers recalled its ambassador to Paris following President Emmanuel Macron’s remarks questioning whether there had been “an Algerian nation before French colonization” and suggesting that post-1962 Algeria was built on a form of “memory rent”³⁹. As Yahia Zoubir notes, the reaction of the Algerian authorities was firm and uncompromising, reflecting the extent to which historical memory constitutes a non-negotiable pillar of state legitimacy⁴⁰. The episode reaffirmed that any perceived French trivialization of colonial violence or undermining of Algeria’s national narrative triggers immediate and sharp official responses.

Aligned with its historical non-aligned stance, Algeria’s foreign policy in the post-Hirak era has further emphasized resistance to external pressures from

³⁸ Mohamed Hemchi and Abdennour Benantar, “The 2019 Hirak and the Arab Spring Uprisings: The Limits of the Algerian Exception Narrative?”, *Al-Muntaqa* 6, no. 2 (May/June 2023): 36, <https://almuntaqa.dohainstitute.org/en/issue013/Documents/almuntaqa-13-2023-Hemchi-Benantar.pdf>.

³⁹ Sofiane Orus-Boudjema, “Algérie-France: y avait-il une nation algérienne avant la colonisation française?” [Eng. trans.: “Algeria-France: was there an Algerian nation before French colonization?”], *Jeune Afrique*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1247481/politique/algerie-france-y-avait-il-une-nation-algerienne-avant-la-colonisation-francaise/>

⁴⁰ Yahia H. Zoubir, “Algeria’s Foreign Policy in the Post Hirak Era”, *The Middle East Council on Global Affairs* Issue Brief, September 2022, 4, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/algerias-foreign-policy-in-the-post-hirak-era/>.

European powers, including France, regarding political and economic reforms⁴¹. Foreign policy thus becomes a tool for demonstrating sovereignty and reinforcing Algeria's aspiration to act as an independent regional actor within the Maghreb, Sahel, and broader African contexts. Central to this approach is memory politics, which remains a cornerstone of the regime's legitimacy structures. The valorization of the anti-colonial struggle and the sacrifices of the *Moudjahidines* are consistently invoked to foster unity, especially during moments of domestic crisis⁴². Any perceived French minimization of colonial violence triggers sharp official reactions in Algeria, reinforcing perceptions of France as dismissive of Algeria's historical suffering.

This memory-based legitimacy is coupled with nationalist populism, which frequently positions France as a symbolic scapegoat to manage internal contestations and redirect popular frustrations outward. Economic challenges, youth unemployment, and broader social discontent are often externalized through narratives portraying France as a neocolonial power seeking to destabilize Algeria and undermine its sovereignty⁴³. This dynamic has intensified since the Hirak period, as the regime seeks to consolidate its domestic position by presenting itself as the defender of Algeria's independence against external pressures and interference.

In sum, Algeria's post-Hirak foreign policy toward France is deeply intertwined with domestic imperatives of regime legitimacy, sovereignty narratives, and a persistent struggle over postcolonial memory. These internal drivers ensure that the bilateral relationship remains structurally constrained, as memory politics and unresolved colonial injustices continue to frame France not merely as a historical counterpart but as an active participant in shaping Algeria's contemporary foreign policy identity.

V. Strategic Divergence and Regional Repositioning: Algeria and France in the Changing Maghreb-Sahel Context

This section explores how Algerian-French relations have shifted from postcolonial contention to direct geopolitical divergence. Beyond symbolic disputes, strategic disagreements – particularly over the Western Sahara, military

⁴¹ Laurence Thieux and Rachid Farrah, "Algeria and Western Sahara: Reactivating the Principle of Just Cause in the Post Hirak Era", *The Journal of North African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2025): 228, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2480737>.

⁴² Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 88.

⁴³ Denis Bauchard, "Algérie-France: Réflexions sur une crise", *Esprit IFRI (Institut français des relations internationales)* (May 2025): 15, <https://www.ifri.org/fr/articles/publications-exterieures/algérie-france-reflexions-sur-une-crise>.

alignment, and energy diplomacy – have deepened the bilateral rift. These divergences reflect not only conflicting national interests but also distinct visions for regional order in North Africa and the Sahel region.

V.1. The Western Sahara Dispute: Geopolitical Betrayal

The Western Sahara issue remains a fundamental fault line in Algerian-French relations, shaping perceptions of trust and regional balance. France's steady alignment with Morocco's autonomy proposal, particularly under President Macron, has been perceived in Algiers as a strategic betrayal undermining Algeria's regional leadership and principled stance on decolonization and self-determination. In 2022, France reaffirmed its support for Morocco's position, echoing the U.S. recognition in 2020 under the Trump Administration, signaling to Algiers that Western actors were consolidating support for Morocco outside the UN-led negotiation framework⁴⁴.

In July 2024, during the 25th anniversary of King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne, President Emmanuel Macron sent an official letter to the Moroccan monarch recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara – an unprecedented diplomatic move that crystallized Algerian suspicions of a full strategic realignment and the marginalization of Algeria's position within European and transatlantic frameworks⁴⁵. This alignment reinforced Morocco's narrative of irreversible sovereignty, emboldening Rabat's diplomatic outreach across Africa and the Arab world while isolating Algiers within the African Union and complicating its advocacy for the Sahrawi cause.

Algeria, historically a staunch supporter of Sahrawi self-determination and a principal backer of the Polisario Front, perceives French support for Morocco as undermining its credibility within the African Union and the United Nations, particularly amid renewed African Union calls for a referendum on self-determination. This strategic shift has led to the freezing of bilateral forums, suspension of high-level visits, and delays in intergovernmental consultations, reinforcing mutual distrust and resulting in a more confrontational diplomatic posture from Algiers toward Paris⁴⁶.

Furthermore, Algeria views France's position as reflective of broader Western inconsistencies regarding territorial integrity and self-determination, particularly in the post-Ukraine invasion context, deepening Algerian skepticism toward French and Western claims of adherence to international law. Consequently, the Western Sahara dispute has evolved from a peripheral point

⁴⁴ Samir Zaaimi, “France Has Sided with Morocco on the Western Sahara. How Might Algeria Respond?”, *Atlantic Council*, August 1, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/france-has-sided-with-morocco-on-the-western-sahara-how-might-algeria-respond/>.

⁴⁵ Oumansour, “Relations franco-algériennes”.

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, “Managing Tensions between Algeria and Morocco”, *Middle East and North Africa Report* no. 247, November 29, 2024, 19, https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/247-managing-algeria-morocco_0.pdf.

of divergence into a central axis of friction, limiting opportunities for strategic dialogue and regional cooperation between Algeria and France in North Africa and the Sahel⁴⁷.

V.2. Recalibrating External Alignments: Algeria's Shift from Historical Dependence to Strategic Diversification

In response to perceived Western bias, Algeria has reoriented its foreign policy toward a multi-vectorial framework. Strategic partnerships with Russia (notably military and energy cooperation), China (infrastructure and technology), and Turkey (economic and cultural exchange) have gained momentum since 2020. These alignments are not merely tactical but reflect a long-term diversification strategy aimed at reducing dependency on French and Western institutions. France, once Algeria's dominant economic partner, has witnessed a marked decline in trade volume, diplomatic engagement, and cultural influence.

Notably, French-language education is being replaced with English in Algerian schools⁴⁸. This erosion is mirrored in a deliberate linguistic and educational shift within Algeria, as highlighted by a *Le Monde* investigation published on September 30, 2025, which reports that the Algerian authorities are actively seeking to marginalize French in favor of English. In primary schools, weekly hours dedicated to French instruction have been reduced, while English is being reinforced. In higher education, faculties of medicine, pharmacy, and dental surgery are transitioning their curricula to English starting from the 2025-2026 academic year⁴⁹.

Beyond education, this shift extends to public services: Air Algérie no longer issues tickets in French, and Algérie Télécom now publishes invoices and payment receipts exclusively in English and Arabic. This transformation is further reflected in the declining interest in French, with enrollment in courses at the five branches of the French Institute dropping from 18,000 students in 2022 to around 16,000 in 2024⁵⁰. These measures, framed as both practical and symbolic, reflect not only an effort to modernize Algeria's linguistic infrastructure but also a conscious distancing from France's historic cultural dominance. In this context, the diminishing role of French underscores broader

⁴⁷ Muhammad Arshad, “France Shifts Its Position on Western Sahara: The Implications for Algeria and Morocco”, *Indian Council of World Affairs*, November 21, 2024, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=12046&lid=7339

⁴⁸ Wagdy Sawahel, “Algeria Drops French, Adopts English as University Language”, *University World News*, April 17, 2025, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20250415221857998>.

⁴⁹ Simon Roger and Hamid Nasri, “Algeria seeks to sideline French in favor of English”, *Le Monde*, September 30, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2025/09/30/algiers-seeks-to-sideline-speaking-french-in-favor-of-english_6745915_124.html.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

transformations in Algeria's international orientation and domestic identity, signaling a strategic rebalancing of economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties.

French investments face competition from Gulf, Turkish, and Chinese capital. This development signals a structural decentering of France in Algeria's international calculus⁵¹. This trend can be captured by examining Algeria's evolving trade landscape from 2019 to mid-2025. Figure no. 1 illustrates the shifting shares of Algeria's top five trading partners over this period, highlighting France's gradual decline relative to the consistent presence of China, the rise of Italy due to expanded energy ties, and the steady ascent of Turkey as a significant economic partner. This graphic representation contextualizes the structural decentering of France within Algeria's broader strategy of diversifying its external economic engagements.

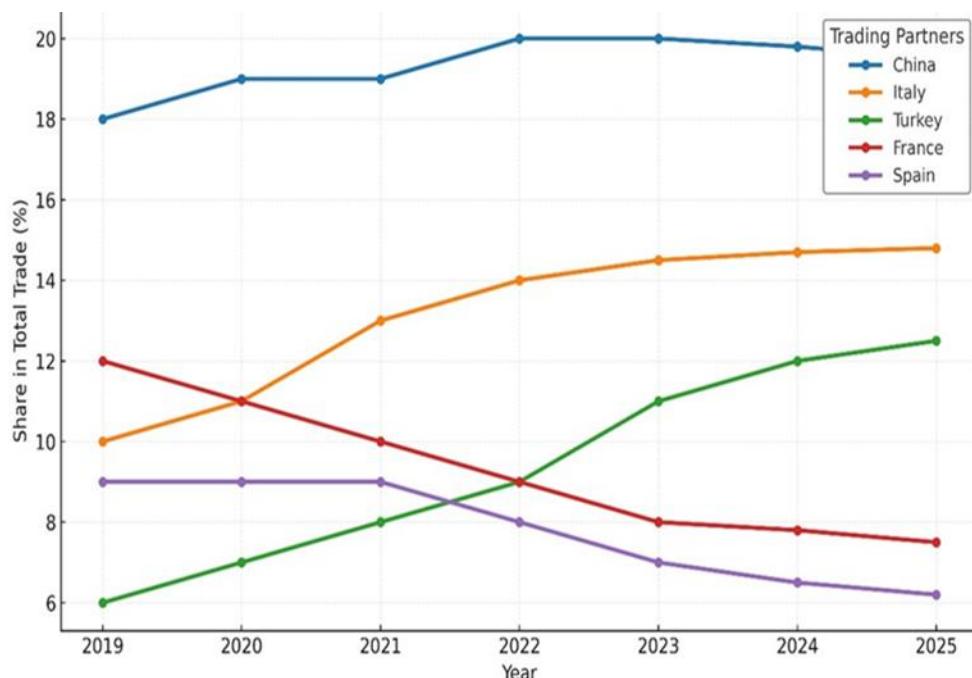


Figure no. 1: Algeria's Top 5 Trading Partners Share in Total Trade (2019-Mid 2025)
 Source: Compiled by the author based on data from UN Comtrade Database, ONS Algeria, and French Treasury (2019–2025)

Recent economic data underscore the tangible impact of diplomatic tensions on Franco-Algerian trade. Trade analytics show that during Q1 of 2025, French exports to Algeria fell sharply by 21%, dropping from €1.255

⁵¹ Brahim Oumansour, “Tensions entre l'Algérie et la France: une crise à enjeux multiples”, *Le Rubicon*, May 14, 2025, <https://lerubicon.org/tensions-entre-lalgerie-et-la-france-une-crise-a-enjeux-multiples/>.

billion in Q1 of 2024 to €992.5 million. Algerian exports to France also declined, albeit more moderately, from €1.42 billion to €1.36 billion – a 3.9% decrease⁵². This contraction was widespread across sectors including machinery, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and food products, highlighting a comprehensive downturn in commercial exchange. While Algeria continued minimal hydrocarbon shipments, refined petroleum and nitrogenous products experienced significant declines of 17.1% and 22.7%, respectively. These figures follow a broader downward trend: total bilateral trade dropped 4.3% year-on-year in 2024, falling from €11.8 billion to €11.1 billion⁵³.

This downward trajectory is further illustrated by trade share analytics, which reveal France's declining position within Algeria's overall trade landscape between 2019 and mid-2025. Data from the *Office National des Statistiques* in its March 2024 report on “*Commerce Extérieur 2018–2023*” indicate that while France was Algeria's second-largest trading partner in 2019, it had been overtaken by Italy and Turkey by 2023, relegating it to fourth place. Concurrent reports from the DG Trésor confirm that China remained the dominant supplier (≈22.9%)⁵⁴. France's share has steadily declined from around 12% in 2019 to approximately 7.5% by mid-2025⁵⁵. This decline is symptomatic of Algeria's broader pivot toward diversified strategic partnerships with Asian and alternative European partners and reflects the concrete economic consequences of political tensions, notably following France's recognition of Moroccan claims over Western Sahara.

Taken together, these indicators crystallize a structural realignment in Algeria's foreign economic relations, where France's traditional dominance is eroding amidst Algeria's proactive pursuit of diversification, making space for rising actors such as China, Italy, and Turkey within Algeria's trade calculus.

V.3. Algeria's Energy Diplomacy and Regional Security Competition

The war in Ukraine and Europe's scramble for alternative gas suppliers have elevated Algeria's geopolitical value, positioning it as a pivotal energy actor in the Mediterranean region and North Africa. Leveraging its vast natural gas reserves and established export infrastructure, Algeria has repositioned itself as a critical energy partner for Italy, Germany, and Spain, which seek to diversify

⁵² Hamza Saada, “Algeria–France Trade Relations Plunge Sharply in Q1 2025 amid Political Tensions”, *Dzair Tube*, May 16, 2025, <https://www.dzair-tube.dz/en/algeria-france-trade-relations-plunge-sharply-in-q1-2025-amid-political-tensions/>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Office National des Statistiques (Alger), “Evolution des échanges extérieurs de marchandises de 2018 à 2023”, *Collections Statistiques* no 242, 2024, 16, https://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/c.echanges_ext2018_2023.pdf?utm

⁵⁵ Saada, “Algeria–France Trade Relations”.

away from Russian gas dependencies⁵⁶. Italy, for instance, secured a landmark agreement in July 2022 between the energy companies of the two countries, ENI and Sonatrach, expanding gas supplies through the TransMed pipeline and enabling Algeria to overtake Russia as Italy's primary gas supplier by early 2023⁵⁷. Similarly, Germany has increased LNG and pipeline-based imports from Algeria, viewing Algiers as a strategic partner in its energy transition efforts.

France, however, has failed to secure comparable long-term energy contracts, reflecting the cooling of bilateral relations amid disputes over visa policies, historical memory, and France's stance on the Western Sahara issue. Algerian policymakers interpreted Paris's inability to negotiate energy agreements similar to those with the Italian ENI or the Spanish Naturgy as indicative of France's diminishing leverage – aspect further evidenced by France's declining share in Algeria's trade profile since 2019. This energy diplomacy forms part of Algeria's broader strategy to assert itself as an autonomous regional actor, leveraging its energy resources to reinforce foreign policy objectives and diversify partnerships beyond traditional postcolonial ties⁵⁸.

Concurrently, the Sahel region has emerged as a theatre of contestation between competing security approaches, particularly between Algeria and France. France's military withdrawal from Mali in 2022, followed by its forced exit from Burkina Faso and increasing challenges to its presence in Niger, has created a vacuum that Algeria seeks to fill through diplomatic mediation and intelligence-sharing initiatives⁵⁹. Algeria's engagement in the Sahel is underpinned by its November 2020 constitutional amendments, which formally permit the deployment of the People's National Army in peacekeeping operations within the frameworks of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Arab League, provided such deployments align with the principles of these organizations. These reforms mark a limited but notable shift in Algeria's security doctrine, enabling external operations while maintaining principled opposition to the permanent presence of foreign military bases in the region.

Algeria's constitutional mandate reaffirms the army's primary mission of safeguarding national sovereignty and defending territorial integrity, while also allowing selective external engagements to protect the country's vital and

⁵⁶ Riad Khelfi et al., “The Impact of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict on Algeria–EU Energy”, *Revista Processus de Estudos de Gestão, Jurídicos e Financeiros* 16, no. 50 (2025): 8, <https://periodicos.processus.com.br/index.php/egjf/article/view/1418>.

⁵⁷ Umberto Profazio, “Pipeline Politics: Algeria, Italy and the Great Game in North Africa”, *Observatory of the Maghreb – IRIS* (Institut de relations Internationales et Stratégiques), April 2025, https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ObsMaghreb_2025_04_17_Pipeline_algerie_Note_EN.pdf.

⁵⁸ Mohammed Almahi, “Multipolar World Order and Algeria Leadership”, *Jazair Hope*, February 7, 2025, <https://jazairhope.org/en/multipolar-world-order-and-algeria-leadership/>.

⁵⁹ Lotfi Sour, “French Interventionism in the Sahel: A Flawed Strategy, Imperfect Geopolitics”, *Przegląd Geopolityczny* 48 (2024): 104.

strategic interests abroad⁶⁰. Within this framework, Algeria's approach to the Sahel prioritizes regional dialogue, mediation, and support for African-led solutions over unilateral military interventions, contrasting sharply with France's expeditionary posture exemplified by Operation Barkhane, a counterinsurgency operation ^{in the Sahel between 2014-2022}⁶¹. By leveraging this constitutional flexibility, Algeria seeks to position itself as a regional stabilizer in the Sahel, using diplomatic channels and targeted security cooperation to fill the vacuum left by France's retreat while ensuring its engagements remain aligned with its principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty.

The divergence in security doctrines between the two countries is evident: France has historically favored expeditionary interventions, which relied on direct military action against jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel. In contrast, Algeria advocates for regional ownership of security, emphasizing political dialogue, intelligence cooperation, and cross-border security arrangements with Sahelian states to address the root causes of insecurity, such as governance deficits and socio-economic marginalization⁶². Algeria's approach is operationalized through mechanisms like the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC) in Tamanrasset and mediation efforts in Mali and Niger, reflecting its commitment to African solutions for African problems⁶³.

Furthermore, Algeria has utilized its renewed energy relations with European partners to expand diplomatic leverage, advocating for security approaches that align with its principles while positioning itself as a stabilizing force in the Sahel amid the geopolitical void left by France's partial retreat. Collectively, Algeria's energy diplomacy and approach to regional security in the Sahel illustrate its evolving foreign policy strategy – one that seeks to leverage natural resources to reinforce geopolitical influence while promoting security doctrines aligned with its historical commitment to non-interference and regional dialogue. This dual-track strategy reflects Algeria's pursuit of strategic autonomy in a rapidly shifting regional and international environment, reshaping relations with traditional powers like France while expanding partnerships with alternative European actors and regional stakeholders.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

⁶¹ Arslan Chikhaoui, “Algeria, a Key Player for Reconciliation in Mali and Sustainable Peace in the Sahel”, *Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESAS)*, March 30, 2021, <https://nesa-center.org/algeria-a-key-player-for-reconciliation-in-mali-and-sustainable-peace-in-the-sahel/>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lotfi Sour, “Algeria's Role in the African Sahel: Toward a New Security Paradigm”, *International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies* 15, no. 2 (2022): 158-159, <https://emuni.si/ISSN/2232-6022/15.155-177.pdf>.

VI. Conclusion

The analysis of Algerian-French relations from 2019 to 2025 demonstrates that the bilateral crisis is structural, rooted in two interrelated dynamics: the persistent weight of colonial memory shaping elite perceptions and national identity discourses, and the accelerating divergence in strategic orientations, particularly in North Africa and the Sahel region. Rather than representing a series of episodic disputes, the rift reflects profound transformations in the international positioning and foreign policy trajectories of both states. In France, support for Morocco's autonomy plan in Western Sahara, combined with the securitization of the Algerian diaspora and the growing influence of the far-right has exacerbated Algerian perceptions of marginalization. In Algeria, the post-Hirak regime's reassertion of sovereignty, diversification of international partnerships, and proactive engagement in regional security frameworks indicate a deliberate shift away from traditional postcolonial alignments.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings underscore the value of integrating neoclassical realism with postcolonial insights in foreign policy analysis. The study demonstrates that elite perceptions, shaped by historical memory and domestic political dynamics, mediate the influence of structural pressures and systemic changes on state behavior. At the same time, postcolonial frameworks illuminate how symbolic disputes – over memory, identity, and historical grievances – intersect with strategic calculations, producing multidimensional crises that cannot be explained solely through material power or systemic considerations.

Looking ahead, Algerian-French relations are likely to evolve into a pattern of selective cooperation, limited to areas of mutual interest such as energy or counterterrorism, while deep-rooted symbolic ruptures and political mistrust will continue to persist. Without deliberate measures to address historical grievances and institutionalize a revised framework of engagement, the crisis risks becoming chronic. Thus, the study illustrates that postcolonial relationships in foreign policy are not only shaped by historical legacies but are continuously renegotiated through elite perceptions, strategic interests, and systemic transformations, a dynamic that has profound implications for both theory and practice, even more so when considering the precarious nature of the bilateral relations analyzed.

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