

Algeria's diplomatic depth in a volatile environment: Vulnerabilities and response mechanisms

العمق الدبلوماسي للجزائر في بيئة مضطربة:

نقاط الضعف وآليات الاستجابة

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Abstract:

Given the highly instable, profoundly worrying situation in the Algerian bordering regions ; namely Libya and Mali, not to mention the cross-border threats in the Sahel, which kept the security environment there so fragile and explosive, due to the complexity and multiplicity of threats, both traditional and non-traditional, states and non-states challenges are seriously seen as a window of opportunity, now more than ever, by Algeria, as an ever key player, both regionally and internationally, to act diplomatically on several issues pertaining to the sovereignty, cooperation, security coordination and conflict resolution, and so forth, which would spur Algerian policy makers and scholars alike to think thoroughly about a resurgence of its role and enhance its status, image and viable endeavors in the region.

Keywords: diplomatic depth; volatile environment; vulnerabilities; cross-border threats.

ملخص:

نظرا لعدم الاستقرار والوضع المقلق جدا في المناطق الحدودية للجزائر ، سيما في ليبيا ومالي، ناهيك عن التهديدات العابرة للحدود في منطقة الساحل، والتي أبقت على هشاشة البيئة الأمنية هناك واحتقانها، بسبب تعقيدها وتعددتها سواء كانت تقليدية أو غير تقليدية، وتحديات الدول وغير الدول، أصبح ينظر إليها بجدية على أنها فرصة سانحة أكثر من أي وقت مضى، من قبل الجزائر، باعتبارها لاعبا رئيسيا دائما على الصعيدين الإقليمي والدولي، للعمل دبلوماسيا في العديد من القضايا المتعلقة بالسيادة والتعاون والتنسيق الأمني وحل النزاعات وما إلى ذلك، الأمر الذي من شأنه أن يدفع صانعي السياسات والعلماء الجزائريين على حد سواء على التفكير مليا في إحياء دورها وتعزيز مكانتها وصورتها ومساعدتها القابلة للاستمرار في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العمق الدبلوماسي؛ البيئة المتقلبة؛ نقاط الضعف؛ التهديدات العابرة للحدود.

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Introduction:

It is argued in the literature of international relations in general, and in foreign policy in particular, that states in pursuit of national pride, security and survival, power and status, find always opportunities to do so, especially when it comes to key actors in a given region, as they define themselves as indispensable and leading in the context of security and strategy, furthermore, history is replete with cases when regional powers defined their vital lines of action, both regionally and globally, like the case of European powers during the two world wars, the two superpowers under the cold war, and other states, in recent days, keep to follow the same line of action to defend their national interests and challenges the security threats approaching to their borders, and in doing so, they mobilize their security, strategic and diplomatic apparatus to fulfill the mission to the fullest extent.

Algeria, as an influential model of dealing with security concerns, both internally in 1990s, and externally, with its constant efforts of diplomacy to foster its survival and bring the peace and stability in the region, The Maghreb and North Africa in general, in this regard, many practitioners and policy makers highlight the significant role of Algerian diplomacy in tackling its regional worries emanated from asymmetrical turbulences and their connection to supranational sources of unrest and chaos, especially terrorist groups which act out of states control, additionally, the Sahelian security web seems intertwined and entangled with the loose mobility of all kinds of criminal groups; drug traffickers, money laundering networks, gangs and illegal suppliers, thus, Algeria feels obliged to move its diplomatic apparatus to drive away all insecurity actors, especially in coordination with regional bloc, called the African Union, and the UN as a global organization, in addition to regional players, like Egypt, Tunisia, and, sometime, EU partners, within a strict set of measures that don't erode Algerian philosophy of non-intervention and respect of sovereignty of other states.

Based on the foregoing, and in light of theoretical inquiry and the reality on the ground, this paper seeks to shed light on how Algeria perceives its regional instable neighborhood, and what should be done, more importantly, with its diplomatic depth, to tackle the serious vulnerabilities that need effective and quick responses, at least, in the short run. In this regard, we can pose the following research questions as follows:

which options Algeria can employ to redirect its energies from developing norms (intervention, non-intervention, prevention of conflicts) to enforcing their application on the ground, amid calls for a more active Algerian role in a region seen regionally as too volatile, and internationally too polarized, especially with all eyes riveted to the strategic doctrine of intervention?

Given the significance of the study, theoretically speaking, some assumptions could be employed, as the state's role in its regional arena needs to be highlighted through some plausible statements; first, a viable diplomatic role of Algeria in its regional environment is shaped by the extent to which it can deal soundly with the hot spots surrounding it; like Mali, Libya, and the Sahel region, in general.

Second, Algeria's approach of security is not only reduced to its military dimension, as global security landscape focus eslargely on an integrated view point ; in which all elements and variables are taken in to account ; political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, technological ,....etc



1. Algeria in face of a daunting security landscape

It is widely assumed that states live in constant fear within an anarchical system of competitors, as realists put¹, and the history of international relations is replete with illustrated cases of wars and protracted conflicts in the cause of seeking power and influence, especially once the state finds itself in face of an explosive security complex and rivals of all kinds and at all levels, states and non-states.

Since the end of the cold war, we have witnessed a number of challenges to the traditional thinking of security. These challenges were a response to the evolving international system and security paradigm in the post-Cold War environment. AstriSuhrke has talked about the rethinking of the old security paradigm as follows: "The new orientations reflected changes in the international system, which downgraded the traditional importance of military security of the Western states. At the same time, structural changes in the international system- the collapse of the Soviet empire, 'failing' states in the developing world, and resurgent ethnic conflict-generated new insecurities"²

Rosenau has talked about a world in which history is accelerating, a world characterized by bifurcation of global structures, diffusion of actors, technological revolutions, globalization of economic exchange, interdependence/collective-goods, weak state power, collectivism sub-groupism, increasing numbers of skilled individuals, and a widening income gap both within and between countries, reflecting a perception of those who benefit from globalization and those who do not³.

In this regard, James Rosenau has been the first theorist who highlighted the ground work of changing international relations, as hereferred to "Turbulence" since the birth of states system, four centuries ago, notingthatthis international turbulence iscaused by the confluence of values between individuals, and shifting authority and legitimacy to non-state entities, in addition to the mounting influence of non-state actors (creating a multicentre world. He saidthat the era of world and post-international relations has come⁴.

and as Algeria is one of regional actors, despite the wide opposition that was expressed against that view (the central role of Algeria), the deteriorating security situation on the border with Mali and Libya, where about 50.000 soldiers are mobilized, coupled with the serious concerns about the activities of terrorist groups, will be an eye-opener to all regional actors, most notably, Algeria.

For a long time, much has been said about the need for planned security arrangements, by regional actors and international assistance, in order to avoid much disorder which ensues,

¹ - Offensive realism, a theory of international relations, holds that states are disposed to competition and conflict because they are self-interested, power maximizing, and fearful of other states. Moreover, it argues that states are obliged to behave this way because doing so favors survival in the international system, for more details, see: Dominic D. P. Johnson, Bradley A. Thayer, The evolution of offensive realism Survival under anarchy from the Pleistocene to the present, **Politics and the Life Sciences**. Volume 35, Num 1, Cambridge University Press, 21 June 2016, pp 1-26.

² - Jack Mangala, New Security Threats and Crises in Africa: Regional and International Perspectives, (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p3.

³ - James.N. rosenau, **Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier ExploringGovernance in a Turbulent World**. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp 56-77.

⁴ - Charles-Philippe David, La Guerre et La Paix: ApprochesContemporaines de La Sécurité et de La Stratégie, 26, Sciences Po Les Presses, 2006, p100.

undoubtedly, from the extremely fragile situation in hotspots there, namely, Libya, Mali, and the remaining countries, like Niger and the neighboring environment that have always stressed the dire need to strengthen regional cooperation and coordination to counter the threat posed by Boko-Haram in the Central African region. However, any policy to follow in this regard, should be based on measures of full confidence and mutual understanding, and with good intentions, otherwise, it will raise the doubts of other actors in the region.

The international community is known to be ever changing, with its actors and interactions, as the state is no more the only source of challenges to other states, especially in hotspots like the Sahel, where all various sources of threats can be spotted, militarily and non-militarily, because nobody can deny the fact that terrorist groups resort to criminal financing methods to add strength within their ranges, and later, it will be easy for them to blackmail states and harm them, in a way or another. Equally disquieting, and for instance, a deal between France and militant group JamaatNusrat al-Islam walMuslimeen (JNIM), also known as the group for support of Islam and Muslims, that freed French hostage Sophie Petronin caused serious concern in Algeria, which had not been informed of the agreement¹.

In general, several variables can be used to understand the reality, in theory, and the ongoing developments on the ground, for instance, the proliferation of terrorist groups in Libya in post-Qaddafi era, is helped by the political vacuum, the economic fragility and the international failure to treat the issue adequately after Libya drowned in chaos.

We also note that the same situation in Mali has enabled terrorist and criminal networks to find sanctuaries in some parts of these countries, as Algeria warned, such serious realities have resulted in an altered security landscape with high risks for regional and international security, against the backdrop of the regional instability, highly felt by Algeria and other states, governments and peoples alike.

The security landscape as worrisome and very complex is perceived serious and costly in terms of state policies and its implications on peoples of the region:

* with the endemic sources of conflict (Libyan and Malian dilemmas) and the porosity of borders and the lack of adequate controls (the easy infiltration of terrorists and the return of foreign fighters to their homelands), it seems so hard to tackle the issue through traditional tools of confrontation, as Algeria confirms in the AU's last session a worrying picture of the situation in the Sahel region and related security, economic and humanitarian concerns.

* the vulnerabilities and perils that define daily life across the region; poverty and lack of development chances in the most African states, the movement of illegal migrants, the water crisis, and the list is long, added to that is the fluctuating role of Algeria since the inception of the oil crisis, and its internal uneasiness that its people witnessed for years, reduced the security scene in North Africa to a mere impasse.

In parallel, Algerian diplomacy is moving towards a fait accompli action to reinvigorate multilateral action in the realm of development, peace and security, as they are deeply interconnected, additionally, as the opportunities, challenges and risks of globalization are highly interrelated, a new, broad and coordinated development framework is needed to address them.

¹- For more details, see: The arabweekly, "Algeria sees regional security threats despite ebbing of terrorism", 04/01/2021, Available at : <https://bit.ly/3qwgLVM>. (21/9/2021).

* the lack of a viable coordinated security roadmap, at regional level, due to clashed individual interests and perspectives of nation states, in addition to the disagreement between the states of the region (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and EU partners, especially France) on the core strategic issues they are facing, and on what should be done to cope with the insecurity problem/solution equation, leave Algeria puzzled about its role, as it had been in the post 1990 period, when it managed to mediate in regional disputes, like in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict 2000) to solve the Libyan conflict and reach a global solution in Mali.

In addition to the fact that there have been mixed views regarding the regional obligations of Algeria, France and its allies on the one hand, while, on the other, several actors, African states, Maghreb neighbors and regional blocs "AU" continue to believe that there is a glimmer of hope that Algeria, with its diplomatic wit and strategic statecraft, will find a way to restore its standing among the community of nations, including its neighbors.

2. Towards a viable Algerian diplomatic approach vis-à-vis a turbulent region "Algeria's three thematic lenses"

Undoubtedly, Algeria's stability has long been its calling card, since it had gone through severe tests across years, from colonialism to reconstruction ending up with terrorism and its fighting strategies in 2000s, and the state's foreign policy doctrine is inspired by past hard ordeals and the present challenges, with a offering a looking ahead which is nothing but a careful consideration of factors of instability/stability equation.

Given that Algeria, strategically located in the northwestern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean sea between Morocco and Tunisia, and its potential both economically and geographically made it- metaphorically speaking- the sleeping giant of North Africa¹, because through history, it had been a region of world competition, military and non-military, and the French occupation for a long time is the best evidence.

Algeria is facing several security challenges alongside its borders and beyond, especially with the flared belt (Libya-Mali) and the turbulent Sahel that continues unabated with terrorist/ jihadi groups (Boko Haram, AL-Qaeda, or IS-Affiliated groups and the separatist Tuaregrebels.) drug smuggling rings, trafficking networks and illegal migration groups which transcend State borders in the Maghreb-Sahel region.

Algeria has interpreted the crises in other countries in the region in light of its own political experience, and as a result, has two main objectives: firstly, to present a national reconciliation model that integrates a portion of the Isla-mists armed after the 'Black Decade' as a successful way to resolve the conflict and counterbalance terrorism (ICG 2015); and, secondly, to maintain strong centralised states in its neighbouring countries that are capable of containing movements that advocate territorial partition, which Algeria ultimately considers a threat to its own territorial integrity².

¹ - Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, "Algeria, the Sleeping Giant of North Africa", the Broker, November, 2015. Available in: <https://bit.ly/3sBuJIF>

² - Laurence Thieux, The dilemmas of Algerian foreign policy since 2011: between normative entrapment and pragmatic responses to the new regional security challenges, **The Journal of North African Studies**, GRESAM/Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Toledo, Spain, p8. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3sCXYe5>. (21/09/2021).

Despite the existence of regional and international initiatives to counter terrorism and enhance the security map in the region, like the G5 Sahel Cross-Border Joint Force, the Sahel Alliance, and the operation Barkhane in Mali, Algeria sought to play its role exceptionally and intelligently, so after a long isolation due to the black decade '1991-2000' and years that followed the economic crisis and social upheaval in 2019, it seems that it is back in the game, showing courageous readiness to play its role in the stability of the region, like NEPAD plan with which Algeria is looking for a more developed African-African partnership, rather, a regional strategic vision and policy framework for accelerating economic cooperation and integration among African countries.

The fall of the Gaddafi regime led to a permanent crisis regarding border control of large swaths of land along the 4,300-kilometre Libyan border, as the Libyan armed forces were unable to control immigration, smuggling and illegal trade, and local conflicts erupted over border posts and trade.

Cross-border between rival tribes and also between the central government and many battalions, which obliged the government of Algeria and Libya to sign in March/April 2012, a joint security agreement containing the content of addressing the incursions of smugglers and terrorists across the border, which resulted in the activation of a joint committee to monitor the situation and Libya was consolidated in the field of military and police development through training courses¹.

Algeria closed its embassy in Tripoli and evacuated its diplomatic staff in May 2014 after receiving information about "terrorist groups" planning to storm the building hosting the mission. But later, with the Algerian foreign minister visit to Libya, there has been a new line of thinking of Algeria's diplomacy in renewing its presence there, this move, analysts say, translates Algeria's desire to expedite its diplomatic comeback in a country with which it shares about 1,000 kilometers of border area. It also paves the way for Algeria to play a more active diplomatic role beyond Libya.²

Besides, as evidenced by the recent steps taken by the President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algeria is seeking to recapture lost influence in Africa; as the government announced the creation of an "Algerian Agency for International Cooperation for Solidarity and Development" with which it will restore its diplomatic and strategic weight in the region and the world.

However, Algerian policymakers underscore the importance of employing various tools to move the diplomatic apparatus adequately; furthermore, they hold that international relations in practice need rational actions that integrate both hard and soft power, at least, for less damages to endure, without ignoring the regional calculations of neighbors and external partners:

1/ stick to the old and sacred principles of Non-Interventionism and the inviolability of borders and sovereignty whatever the circumstances, since the decision makers in Algeria keep crediting any strategy (mediations/negotiations/consultations/talks/conflict settlement and resolution) carefully so that not to infringe on such principles.

¹- Peter Cole, **borderline chaos ? Securing libya'speriphery**,carnegie middle east center, 18 october2012, Available at : <https://bit.ly/3et5uQx>. (13/09/2021).

²- Saber Bliji, "Algeria intensifies efforts to resume role in Libya", The Arab Weekly, Friday 29/01/2021.

It can be called the rational mixed calculation (to intervene wisely or to not intervene if need be) in this regard, Algeria has been playing an important role in terms of training and logistical aid to its neighbors, and it spent more than US\$ 100 Million on Mali, Chad, Niger, Libya and Mauritania, to form and train special forces squads as well as provided them with adequate equipment¹.

2/ perceive the regional security landscape (North Africa/Sahel) as interdependent, intertwined and certainly volatile, lacking the required framework to effectively combat terrorism and its concomitant ill².

Based on that, the Algerian authorities have always pointed out that any security evil in the shared region should be dealt with in a multilateral way, in which all physical and human resources must be mobilized in due time, irrespective of the political differences of governments, at regional and international levels, and in this regard, one can wonder why there isn't a strong and effective framework involving all states of the regions and other non-state actors to treat the security concerns without resorting to only hard power tools ?

3/ urge the African Union and the UN to act collectively and harmoniously for a good building of the weak state structures in the troubled countries or those which are still grappled with escalated violence as it is a tradition in Algerian diplomatic philosophy, since the independence 1962.

Furthermore, Algeria political academics have long praised the vital missions played by regional actors in dealing with insecurity at many levels; economic, healthcare, social, education, not to mention the military and logistical assistance provided to countries infested by poverty, pandemics, wars and rebellions, recalling the fact that only a concerted effort by the countries of the region and the regional organizations will achieve any meaningful success.

In the context of the heightened regional security climate, as mentioned before, **Algeria's three thematic lenses' diplomatic approach** is much needed and it has to be pursued in a balanced way. As it is the case in its three-pronged goal of global development as a way to get Africa out of its several calamities inherited from colonial era and its serious implications for communities and governments. Besides, the new context of the world order (Technology and Governance) will require three levels of action; governmental, sub-governmental and global, with which Algeria has formulated its long-term strategy in its region.

The diplomatic approach of Algeria towards the security situation in its regional environment is based on the division of levels of actions and responses;

National: in which governments and state must follow planned and balance policies to assist their people and combat all forms of extremism with economic and social programs; giving priority to development programs and addressing the deep roots of insecurity and deprivation which are the main causes of conflicts in Africa.

¹-YahiaH.Zoubir, The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations, (New York, Routledge, 2020), p201.

²-Thieux Laurence, The Dilemmas of Algerian Foreign Policy Since 2011: Between Normative Entrapment and Pragmatic Responses to The New Regional Security Challenges, (Spain,GRESAM/Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2018).



Sub-national: in the literature of international conflicts, it is widely assumed that sources of conflict are not only states (pursuit of power to maximize security and challenge rivals in an anarchic international system) rather, the main sub-actors that attracted attention since the collapse of the soviet union and the flare-up of ethnic and racial violence in large parts of Africa and Asia, are ethnic groups, criminal gangs, religious movements, traffickers of all sorts, arms merchants, smugglers, and so on, which cannot be ignored by leaders, as they are challenging states in asymmetrical ways, even if they cannot make victory in traditional way, African countries are continuously suffering from their militants and rebels (kidnappings, suicide bombings, killings), and Algeria thinks that such grassroots level should never be underestimated in efforts of peace and security, whether by single governments or in collective agendas of regional blocs, like the African Union.

Supranational: this level can be ascribed to all movements, actors, operations that are over the authority of nation-states, leaving no doubt about their seriousness, weight and hard way to cope with them.

The following table illustrates **Algeria's three thematic lenses' diplomatic approach as indicated above:**

Different Challenges:	Volatile Regional Environment
Supranational National Sub-national	Maghreb Sahel
Urgent Responses: regional front united Human security enhanced Foreign agendas denied Coordinated policies made	Lessons learned: The need of multilateralism The need of shared concerns = shared solutions The need of rejecting the military first in resolving conflicts (Libya / Mali)

As Morocco declared its normalization agreement with Israel, based on the United states announcement on December, 2020, algerian officials find a golden opportunity to deep entheir state's stance on the serious step of Morocco, going further to raise, once again, their country's voice against Israel and its constant pursuits to getin volved in the region, and pushing more towards supporting the legitimate rights of oppressed peoples, since both the Sahrawi and Palestinian issues are internationally recognized as legal and deserve world wide backing.

Further more, it is appropriately possible to assume that the algerian diplomatic experience is being largely enhanced by the regional developments, namely, in Mali and Libya, where the algerian role is more than necessary, especially after our Minister of foreign affairs and national community, Ramtane Lamamra held talks with the Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres on regional issues on September 2021.



Conclusion:

At the end of the analysis of the subject, it seems so significant to ascertain the fact that Algeria has well studied and dealt with the regional dilemma with all its implications, since it had a long experience in tackling the terrorism scourge and making peace at home and abroad, as evidenced by the experience of history that is still praised by the community of nations.

Furthermore, it will be good at integrating the conditions of peace and development at continental level, since the stability in any region needs economic and social plans of recovery and assistance, a new thinking of the security that goes beyond military power and more soft power urged to be used by African leaders to serve their communities. Luckily, Algerian leaders could embrace a three-dimensional image of security building in Africa; national, sub-national and supranational, which does give the diplomacy more weight, depth and efficacy.

From the previous analysis, the following recommendations can be made:

Algeria, as seen and appreciated at foreign policy viability level, can do more to enhance its three-dimensional task regionally, especially with more security threats being emerged and unfolded through years, and our political officials don't hesitate to call for adopting severe and serious stances towards issues of illegal immigration, human trafficking, terrorism funding and mercenaries support in the Sahel.

The more a various arsenal of statecraft tools, political, economic and strategic, are employed by the Algerian government in coordination with neighboring players, the less security threats can pose a tangible challenge to states policies of development, stability and peace at regional level. Truth be told, international relations in their cooperative aspect, will not be strengthened without regional synergies, at military and non-military levels, irrespective of the form or the status of states being involved in this regard.

Based on the theoretical tradition of security studies and international relations theorizing, self-interests, egoistic policies and unilateral vision of the world will hinder the community of nations, whether at regional or international levels, in efforts of peace-building and confidence restoration in places suffering from all forms of instability, like the case of Libya and Mali, in which Algeria never ceases to call for an integrated and long-term approach of security building, especially after the flare-up of situation in the Sahel.

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