



The Evgeny Primakov
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Cooperation

Policy brief

Russian-Algerian relations: more than they seem, less than desired

Vasiliy Kuznetsov

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The policy brief

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Main points

- Russian-Algerian relations are built on a solid historical legacy of Soviet-Algerian cooperation, particularly in the military and educational spheres. The two countries share a commitment to shaping a more just world order, although their interpretations of multipolarity and foreign policy priorities differ.
- The institutional framework for cooperation is defined by the Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation, signed in 2023, which outlines shared principles but does not imply deep political cohesion.
- Beyond military-technical cooperation, trade, economic, and humanitarian ties remain limited and vulnerable to shifts in the international political climate.
- Strengthening academic and scientific-technological exchanges offers opportunities to expand the partnership and build trust between the emerging generations of elites in both countries.

Introduction

Any discussion of Russian-Algerian relations usually begins with the statement that the largest country in Africa and the Arab world, on one side, and the largest country in the world in general, on the other, have enormous potential for cooperation. This is typically followed by four assertions, all of them being most indisputable:

- Russian-Algerian relations are sustained by a rich and positive history of past cooperation.
- They are also grounded in a shared aspiration to build a more just, multipolar world order, that would be free from the dominance of any single center of power and the lingering legacy of colonialism.
- In 2023, the two countries signed the Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation, which serves as the legal and normative foundation of their relations¹.
- Bilateral relations beyond military-technical cooperation, especially in trade, economic, and humanitarian areas, have remained quite modest in scope.

These four points suggest that neither the historical legacy nor the legal framework of Russian-Algerian relations aligns with their actual substance, which remains far more modest than could be expected.

This raises two questions: 1) Is this conclusion accurate? And if so, 2) is the mismatch the result of coincidence or oversight, or does it reflect a deeper, systemic issue?

Let us elaborate on each of these propositions in greater detail.

¹ Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation between Russia and Algeria, dated June 15, 2023. Source: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5954> [accessed: 13.03.2025]

Memory of the Heart

It is a common knowledge that in the 20th century, the Soviet Union provided tremendous support to the Algerian people in their struggle for independence and later played a significant role in establishing of a revolutionary democratic state in Algeria. This remarkable legacy of cooperation was strong enough to withstand the difficult 1990s, a challenging period for both countries, and laid the groundwork for renewed efforts to strengthen relations in the 2000s.

Many of those directly involved in this process, politicians, diplomats, military officers, and scholars, had studied or worked together just a decade or two earlier and enjoyed mutual trust. One illustrative example is the fact that all the Chiefs of Staff of Algeria's National People's Army in recent decades were educated in the Soviet Union: Abdelmalek Guenaizia (Chief of Staff, 1990–1993), Mohamed Lamari (1993–2004), Ahmed Gaid Salah (2004–2019), and Saïd Chengriha (2019–present).

However, the civilians from among the political establishment in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria (PDRA) had significantly less experience in engaging with the USSR and, later, Russia. None of Algeria's prime ministers over the past 25 years studied or worked in the Soviet Union. The only partial exception is Redha Malek (1992–1993), who served as ambassador to Moscow for seven years during the 1970s.

Thus, as the civilians are likely gaining greater influence within Algeria's political elite, and as a new generation of politicians emerges in both countries, the value of personal connections dating back to the Soviet era is inevitably declining. For instance, the average age of MPs in the State Duma of the Russian Federation today is 53, while among Algerian members of Parliament it is 46². Consequently, in the coming decade, politics in both countries will increasingly be shaped by individuals born in the late 1970s or later. These are generations whose political and social development took place during a time when any of a special relationship between Russia and Algeria was out of question.

² Data on age: By country // Global data on national parliaments. – URL: <https://data.ipu.org/age-brackets/> [accessed 15.03.2025]

Different multipolarities

A more substantive issue concerns the shared commitment to multipolarity. The challenge lies in how each side interprets this concept. For Algeria, the central issues are UN reform and the resolution of the Western Sahara and Palestinian questions, both of which are framed within an anti-colonial agenda.

Moscow, while generally aligning with Algeria's stance on the future of the UN and the need to overcome the legacy of colonialism, places emphasis elsewhere. For example, although Russian diplomats agree with Algeria on the need to strengthen the representation of the Global Majority in the UN Security Council, they tend to designate such countries as India and Brazil. When it comes to Africa, they stress that decisions about representation should be determined by the African countries themselves³.

Although the fundamental principles and parameters of multipolarity remain undefined, both sides continue to emphasize in public statements the need to build a more just world order. However, amid growing and persistent global uncertainty, their immediate objective is to secure the resources necessary to preserve and strengthen national sovereignty. Only then mitigating the potential risks associated with constructing a new international order comes a fore.

It is evident that the world is still in the phase of a sovereignty race. The next stage, focused on risk reduction and requiring a revision of the institutional structure of the global order, has yet to arrive. In this context, it becomes especially important to establish effective and productive bilateral communication.

The abovementioned Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation between Russia and Algeria can set a regulatory framework for establishing such communication. A careful reading of the text reveals that the political commitments between the two countries are actually quite limited. Of the seventeen sections, only one is dedicated to cooperation in the political sphere, with the main focus placed on communication.

It emphasizes commitments to strengthen ties between the regions of both countries, enhance parliamentary contacts, hold regular consultations between foreign ministries, and exchange high-level visits. It also highlights a shared determination to uphold the principle of non-distortion of history,

³ Russia considers reaching consensus on expanding the UN Security Council important // TASS, October 9, 2025. – URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/22078223> [accessed: 16.03.2025]

reinforce the role of international law, and cooperate within international organizations, primarily the United Nations, mainly on the climate agenda.

Finally, it includes an explicit pledge to “not participate in any treaties or agreements that infringe upon the independence, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of the other Party”.⁴

Thus, there is no question of coordinating foreign policies between the two countries. The parties agreed only to establish a dialogue on the international agenda and share a common foreign policy outlook.

⁴ Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation between Russia and Algeria, dated June 15, 2023. Source: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5954> [accessed: 15.03.2025]

Partnership Means Partnership

If we outline the foreign policy priorities of the two countries, it is difficult to find much overlap.

For Algeria, the situation in the Sahel region is of key importance, particularly the Western Sahara issue and containing threats emanating from Libya. Additionally, the broader Maghreb and pan-Arab agendas remain highly significant (the latter focusing specifically on the Palestinian question). Of course, relations with the EU countries, especially France, also remain a priority.

The significance of these priorities is shaped both by geography and by Algeria's longstanding economic, political, and cultural ties, as well as by its elites' view of the country's role in the world.

At the same time, none of these issues are priorities for Russia, and on some key points, Russian and Algerian positions are strikingly different. For instance, Moscow regards its policy in the Sahel as fully aligned with anti-colonial principles and supportive of regional sovereignty. In contrast, Algeria has often seen Russian actions there as contrary to its own interests.

While both countries advocate for a just resolution to the Palestinian conflict, Russia views Algeria's position as somewhat too radical. On the Western Sahara issue, Russia criticizes the predominantly pro-Moroccan stance in the West but insists that the final settlement should rest on mutually acceptable solutions that ensure a fair political resolution acceptable to both Morocco and the Polisario Front⁵. Finally, France, which is still Algeria's key economic partner, has in recent years become one of the most unfriendly states toward Russia. In this context, the frequent ups and downs of Algerian-French relations, often charged with melodramatic tension, evoke little sympathy in Moscow.

It is clear that Algeria largely mirrors Russian foreign policy. Issues such as Ukraine, European security, relations with NATO, the situation in the post-Soviet space, and even Moscow's Middle Eastern priorities, where Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies play central roles, are on the sidelines of Algerian policy.

To put it simply, the shared political agenda of the two countries is too limited to speak of a strong alliance. This raises at least two interesting theoretical

⁵ Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative D.A. Polyansky following the vote on the UN Security Council draft resolution to extend the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara // Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN. – URL: <https://russiaun.ru/ru/news/1301023> [accessed: 16.03.2025]

questions. The first is how we should understand the concepts of alliance and partnership in the current reality. Timofei Bordachev⁶ recently questioned the very notion of alliance in the emerging multipolar world, where, at least for some time, the countries' self-interests are once again playing a decisive role globally. The West features a clear example of declining relevance of alliances today with growing discord within NATO's foreign policies and in the European Union, which is facing one crisis after another.

However, similar trends emerged even earlier in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where occasional alliances, formed anew each time, have dominated since the early 2010s.

In this context, both Russia and Algeria, countries that emphasize their sovereignty, may interpret alliance in an extremely minimalist way, as reflected in the Declaration. In essence it can be boiled down to a shared recognition of certain fundamental principles of international relations and foreign policy, along with a commitment not to engage in actions that directly threaten the partner.

The crisis of the alliances brings to the light the idea of partnership, which assumes that participants seek to maximize mutual benefits. This, incidentally, aligns fully with the growing transactional nature of global politics.

However, this raises another question, directly related to the fourth thesis mentioned at the start of the article: how does the weakness of a shared political agenda affect the development of economic relations between the two countries?

6 Bordachev T., Alliances and Allies in a New Era //the Valdai Discussion Club, 24.06.2024. – <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/soyuzy-i-soyuzniki-v-novuyu-epokhu/> [accessed: 16.03.2025]

Military-Technical, Agro-technical cooperation and more: politics or economy?

In theory, this should have a positive effect, since nothing prevents the two sides from trading with each other. However, in practice, the situation is not quite so simple.

For decades, military-technical cooperation has been the main component of trade and economic relations between Russia and Algeria. This cooperation is naturally shaped not only by market forces but also carries significant political and ideological weight. Indeed, for Russia, military-technical cooperation with Algeria has been one of the key tools for maintaining its influence in the region. It is telling that the strategic partnership agreement between the two countries was signed as early as 2001, almost a decade and a half before Russia's well-known return to the Middle East. This agreement reflected Moscow's renewed foreign policy ambitions and, at the same time, symbolized the strengthening of Algeria's role on the world stage following the end of its Black Decade.

Since then and up to the present, both countries have moved toward strengthening their sovereignty, with Algeria, by 2025, becoming the only North African country not tied by alliances to any Western state.

The picture is quite different in other areas of cooperation. After 2022, the structure of bilateral trade shifted significantly, with agricultural products becoming the second most important sector of collaboration. As Dmitry Patrushev, Deputy Prime Minister and co-chair of the Russian-Algerian Intergovernmental Commission, noted in January 2025, Russian agricultural exports surpassed \$850 million last year, boosted by increased shipments of barley, lentils, soybean oil, and powdered milk⁷. In 2024, Russian wheat shipments to Algeria reached 2.8 million tons⁸, which is more than any other country. At the same time, as noted by D. Patrushev, Moscow is interested in expanding the range of agricultural products supplied to Algeria, particularly through the actively developing halal production sectors in our country.

⁷ Dmitri Patrushev held a meeting of the Intergovernmental Russian-Algerian Commission // Government of Russia, 30.01.2025. – URL: <http://government.ru/news/54098/> [accessed: 17.03.2025]

⁸ La Russie révèle l'énorme montant de ses exportations agricoles vers l'Algérie en 2024 // Observ.Algeria, 25.02.2025. – URL: <https://observalgerie.com/2025/02/15/economie/russie-revele-énorme-montant-exportations-agricoles-algerie-2024/> [accessed: 17.03.2025]

In addition, increasing the supply of veterinary vaccines looks promising.

Thus, it is nearly an established fact that Russia has replaced France in Algeria's agricultural market, which previously played a key role in ensuring the food security of the Algerian People's Democratic Republic. For example, as early as 2022, the export of French agricultural products to Algeria was estimated at 1.3 billion euros, but by 2023 it fell to 628 million, although it later somewhat recovered. In 2018, France supplied 5.4 million tons of grain to the country, while in 2023 this figure dropped to 608 thousand.⁹ In 2024, it rose to approximately 1.5 billion, but in 2025 it threatens to fall again to almost zero.

This whole story clearly demonstrates the direct dependence of agrotechnical cooperation on the political agenda. Russia's expansion into global agricultural markets became especially active against the backdrop of the special military operation that began in 2022, while the collapse of Algerian-French cooperation in this area was directly linked to multiple diplomatic crises between the two countries.

In addition to military-technical cooperation and agrotechnical cooperation, the development of trade and economic ties between the two countries apparently may include cooperation in the fields of energy (including green energy), mineral resource development, and pharmaceuticals. Furthermore, Algeria has become more interested in modernizing the country's transport and logistics infrastructure and accelerating digital transformation. Russia, reportedly, has accumulated comprehensive and useful experience in both of these areas.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that so far, there are no breakthrough projects in any of these areas. Partly, as noted by Russian researcher A. Vasilenko, this is due to the fact that "the sectors in which Algeria wants to develop import substitution and reduce external dependence coincide with those in which Russia would like to expand trade relations. These include the mining industry, pharmaceuticals, and mechanical engineering."¹⁰

⁹ Les exportations de la France vers l'Algérie en forte baisse // Observ.Algeria, 11.02.2025. – URL: <https://observalgerie.com/2025/02/11/economie/les-exportations-de-la-france-vers-lalgerie-en-forte-baisse/>

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1671271/economie-entreprises/algerie-france-comment-les-exportations-de-ble-tricolore-ont-chute-de-1-milliard-deuros-a-zero/> [accessed: 17.03.2025]

¹⁰ A. Vasilenko. With Nostalgia for the Future: Prospects for Russian-Algerian. Economic Cooperation // Russian International Affairs Council, 13.06.2023. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/s-nostalgiey-o-budushchem-perspektivy-rossiysko-alzhirskogo-ekonomicheskogo-sotrudnichestva/> [accessed: 18.03.2025]

Scientific and technical cooperation and humanitarian ties

The prospects for scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries, as well as partnerships in the field of higher education, deserve special mention.

As of today, about 2,000 Algerian students¹¹ are studying in Russia (out of a total of 389,000 international students¹²). This number remains modest. Still, during the intergovernmental commission meeting, the two sides signed a Mutual Recognition Agreement covering education, qualifications, and academic degrees. They also finalized seven inter-university deals to expand academic exchanges and launch joint degree programs. Additionally, three Algerian universities joined the Russian-African Network University¹³ consortium, thus further strengthening ties.

In the medium and longer run, this deepening of cooperation in higher education could help restore the model of engagement that sustained close partnership and mutual trust between the two countries in the post-Soviet era. Moreover, expanding the range of academic disciplines available to Algerian students in Russia, particularly in fields such as public administration, political science, and international relations, would make it possible, over time, to build trust not only between the military elites.

Moreover, deeper cooperation in the field of education is expected to encourage the development of scientific and technological ties, which so far remain negligible: less than 0.37% of all articles published by Russian

11 Commission intergouvernementale mixte algéro-russe: signature de 9 accords et mémorandums d'entente dans plusieurs domaines // Algerie Presse Service, 30.01.2025. – URL: <https://www.aps.dz/sante-science-technologie/182278-commission-intergouvernementale-mixte-algero-russe-signature-de-9-accords-et-memorandums-d-entente-dans-plusieurs-domaines> [accessed: 18.03.2025]

12 Unified Plan for Achieving the National Development Goals of the Russian Federation up to 2030 and for the Period until 2036, p. 59. URL: <http://static.government.ru/media/files/ZsnFICpxWknEXeTfQdmcFHNei2FhcR0A.pdf> [accessed: 18.03.2025]

13 Russia and Algeria Strengthen Scientific and Educational Cooperation // Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia, 31.01.2025 – URL: <https://www.minobrnauki.gov.ru/press-center/news/mezhdunarodnoe-sotrudnichestvo/94551/> [accessed: 18.03.2025]

researchers in international collaborations between 1991 and 2022¹⁴ involved Algerian partners. Likewise, only around 0.7% of all Algerian publications produced in cooperation with foreign institutions.

There is no doubting the mutual interest of both sides in developing scientific and technological cooperation. This is evidenced by Russia's updated Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development¹⁵, adopted in 2024, as well as Algeria's Government Action Plan for the Implementation of the President of the Republic's Program, adopted in 2021 and still in force today. Notably, despite falling hydrocarbon prices in the first half of 2024, Algeria's GDP grew by 3.9%. At the same time, the Algerian government has set a goal of reaching \$29 billion in non-hydrocarbon exports by 2030, a target that will require rapid development of high-tech, knowledge-intensive sectors, in many ways echoing Russia's own experience.

Given both nations' economic trajectories, the most promising sectors for bilateral scientific and technological cooperation likely include: information technology, energy, geology, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, and agricultural development.

14 Fiala, Dalibor & Maltseva, Daria. Russian Publications in Web of Science: A bibliometric study// COLLNET Journal of Scientometrics and Information Management, 17(2):217–245.- URL: [\(PDF\) Russian Publications in Web of Science: A bibliometric study](#) [accessed: 19.03.2025]

15 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 145 dated February 28, 2024. – URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/50358/page/1> [accessed: 19.03.2025]

Conclusions

Overall, it can be stated that the signing of the Declaration on Enhanced Strategic Cooperation in 2023, combined with Russia's renewed focus on its African foreign policy and Algerian increased efforts to diversify its foreign policy and economic ties, has given the relationship between the two countries a fresh momentum. However, its further development will seemingly require addressing three key challenges.

First, there is a need to strengthen continuous dialogue between the parties, not only at the high political level but also among civil society institutions, businesses, and experts. Such dialogue will enable both sides to achieve better mutual understanding and make their expectations of each other more realistic.

Second, it is necessary to overcome the clear contradiction between Moscow's and Algeria's external economic priorities. While Russia primarily aims to expand trade relations, Algeria shows much greater interest in attracting investments. Notably, since 2023, Algeria has been taking steps to improve its investment climate.

Third, there is a need to deepen economic ties between the two sides, which so far remain largely confined to major businesses. The notably active work of the Russian Trade Mission in Algeria and the recently revitalized Russian-Algerian Business Council provide grounds for hope that a broader range of actors will become involved. At the same time, persistent challenges, such as limited awareness of each other's business communities and difficulties in obtaining visas, make a rapid change in this situation unlikely.



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