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**Turkey and Algeria:
Rekindling historic closeness**

Mohammad Pervez Bilgrami
Political analyst

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Turkey-Algeria relations are now transforming into a new partnership. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's January 26, 2020 visit to Algeria to discuss regional issues and future Turkish investments signals this paradigm shift. Historical ties and growing economic cooperation have made Algeria an important partner for Turkey, whose help can be used to re-establish stronger ties with Africa.

In the 1950s, when Turkey was under the huge influence of France, it voted adversely in 1955 and then remained absent in 1958 in the vote on Algeria's independence at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The then Turkish leaders thought that supporting Algerian independence would negatively affect French-Turkish relations. Ankara's exclusively Western-oriented foreign policy in that period made its relations with non-Western parts of the world conditional on its relations with the West. In a simpler language, Turkey was a hostage to Western tutelage.

Algeria gained independence from France in 1962. The Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal visited Algeria in 1985 and apologised for Turkey's unfavourable vote in the UN. In 1986, the Algerian Prime Minister Abdelhamid Brahimi paid a visit to Turkey, in the first ever official Algerian visit to the country, during which an oil trade deal with Turkey was signed. Later, frequent mutual visits by leaders of both countries have strengthened bilateral relations as well as cemented a close friendship between the two countries under the AK Party's government.

Algeria's importance for Turkey

Turkey's foreign policy efforts in the Middle East and North Africa region, its investments in Algeria and its soft power instruments, such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) projects and TV series, have positively impacted Algerians' perception of Turkey. Bilateral relations between the two countries have gained impetus over the past few years. The Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika made an official visit to Turkey in 2005, during which he suggested establishing a "Commonwealth of Ottoman States" under Turkey's leadership.

Algeria's importance can be understood from the number of visits made by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his leadership both as Prime minister and President of Turkey. Since assuming power in 2003, Erdoğan visited Algeria five times, twice as a Prime minister in 2006 and 2013 and as President in 2014, 2018 and recently in January 2020. Being the largest country by area in Africa and the second largest population next to Egypt in North Africa, with huge hydrocarbon reserves, make Algeria one of the most important countries in North Africa. With its potential for attracting investment, it is now playing a central role in Turkey's foreign policy equation in Africa and the Mediterranean.

After the 2013 coup in Egypt that ousted President Mohammad Morsi from power, Turkey's relations with Egypt have hit rock bottom. Ankara's political differences with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have relegated its foreign policy in the Arab World to a precarious and fragile position. Hence, Algeria becomes an important conduit for Turkey to secure strategic depth in North Africa. Algeria has maintained a neutral position in relation to the civil wars in Syria and Yemen and Turkey would ideally like to see Algeria abandon its principle of neutrality in Libya. The two countries now seem to be on the same page in ending the Libyan civil war: on the sidelines of an international conference on Libya in Berlin, President Erdoğan held talks with President Tebboune about the situation in that country. Recent signals by Algeria indicated that its position on Libya is moving closer to that of Turkey than to the warlord Khalifa Haftar and his backers -- UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In what proved to be a

significant move, Algeria was instrumental in preventing the Egyptian attempt to condemn Turkey in the Arab League, and it also supports the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the political process.

On the instructions of President Tebboune Algeria held a referendum on constitutional changes on November 1, 2020 that include foreign military deployment among a few other amendments. The Algerian President can consult parliament before allowing the Algerian military to take part in missions outside the country's borders. Algeria's constitutional reforms are expected to bring a major change to the country's historic position on military and diplomatic issues. Turkey would welcome Algeria's decision to deploy its peacekeeping forces in neighbouring Libya and other conflict areas in Africa.

The Turkish President is known to have developed close personal relationships with some world leaders and it seems that relations with his Algerian counterpart are developing in the same direction. On December 20 President Erdoğan spoke on the phone with his Algerian counterpart, who recently recovered from COVID-19 after treatment in Germany, to convey get-well wishes.

Strengthening economic ties

Algeria is Turkey's 23rd largest export market and the 25th largest supplier of goods, with a total trade volume of \$4.1 billion, while Turkey is Algeria's 6th biggest economic partner. Turkey has \$3.5 billion dollar worth of investments in Algeria, making it one of the top investors and therefore the largest foreign provider of employment in Algeria. On the other hand, Algeria is Turkey's fourth largest natural gas supplier after Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan. Algeria's Sonatrach Petroleum Investment Corp and the Turkish conglomerate Ronesans Holding are building a \$1.4 billion petrochemical complex in the Ceyhan region of Turkey. In 2018 Africa's largest textile company, Tayal SPA, was established by Turkey's Taypa textile in a joint venture with the government of Algeria in the northwest Relizane province, and in 2013 the Turkish company Tossiali steel set up an iron and steel plant in the Oran province of Algeria. Turkish companies are engaged in a wide range of projects in Algeria, including construction of low cost housing estates, hospitals, dams, highways, tunnels and ports. The number of investment projects is increasing, under the encouragement of both governments. With 377 investments projects, Algeria ranks third in terms of presence of Turkish companies in the world.

TİKA restored the historic Ketchaoua Mosque in Algiers: the mosque is one of the symbols of the 500-year-old friendship between Turkey and Algeria. It is also a monument of Algeria's independence and a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site. With such projects Algerians are now reconnecting with their Ottoman past. In the last few years Turkey has become one of the most popular tourist destinations for Algerians. Some 300,000 Algerian tourists annually choose Turkey as their holiday destination.

Though French colonisation ended nearly six decades ago, French lobbies remained very powerful in Algeria and have wielded serious influence over the country's foreign policy and the media. Over the last two decades of Bouteflika's rule, the French lobby was extremely powerful in terms of bilateral business cooperation, which opened the state institutions to French policy preferences. The oligarchs who deliberately harmed Turkish-Algerian relations are now vacating power corridors.

As both Turkey and Algeria are eager to foster stronger ties, their relations are expected to further improve, given the fact that President Tebboune is known to be independent of French influence in business, trade and state affairs. He has banned the import of French apples after it was found that the French were overcharging Algeria for their agricultural produce.

Now Algeria can rely on Turkey to create more room to diversify its foreign policy choices. By aligning with an assertive Turkey free from Western tutelage, Algeria sees the opportunity to reassert its own role in Libya and thus maintain the balance of power in Africa. By aligning itself with Turkey, Algeria has the capacity to counterbalance Egypt's destructive regional influence. Erdoğan's visit has softened the diplomatic missteps of former Prime minister Ouyahia and Francophone newspapers' statements against Turkish officials and leaders. The relations between Ankara and Algiers are entering a new phase to influence regional politics.