

From Gold to Gas: Abu Dhabi's Tools to Encircle Algeria in Africa



A growing body of evidence suggests that diplomatic relations between Algeria and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are at their lowest point in years. Algiers accuses Abu Dhabi of playing a “disingenuous” role in the Maghreb and the African Sahel, seeking to reshape regional alliances in line with the Abraham Accords.

The latest turning point in the deteriorating Algeria-UAE relationship came when the UAE publicly supported UN Security Council Resolution 2797, which endorses Morocco's 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara a disputed territory for nearly five decades.

This stance reflects the broader strategy pursued by Abu Dhabi to realign regional alliances in favor of its strategic allies, Morocco and Israel, while systematically undermining Algeria's regional role. Algerian media outlets have reported on intensive political maneuvering behind closed doors at the United Nations, allegedly led by a tripartite alliance of France, the UAE, and Israel.

The effort reportedly sought to push through a resolution that would legitimize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and portray Algeria as a destabilizing

force, in spite of its longstanding advocacy for self-determination and the rights of oppressed peoples.

This is far from an isolated development. In November 2020, the UAE inaugurated a consulate in Laayoune, the largest city in Western Sahara, signaling unequivocal support for Morocco's claim. Since then, Abu Dhabi has worked to entrench its presence in the region by investing in critical infrastructure projects.

These include the Dakhla Hub airport, the Atlantic Dakhla Port, the integrated Dakhla Gateway to Africa initiative, and the development of the coastline from Dakhla to Tarfaya. The UAE has also poured funding into renewable energy ventures, including green hydrogen production and related industries.

Strategic Financier for Morocco

Dr. Teli Abdallah, Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Tlemcen, told Noon Post that "the UAE has become the financial engine of Morocco's geopolitical strategy in the region." He points to initiatives like the Morocco-West Africa gas pipeline as clear evidence of Abu Dhabi's role in promoting Morocco's economic integration with the Sahel.

"The UAE's pro-Moroccan bias in the Western Sahara conflict is well documented. It was the first Arab state to open a consulate in the occupied territory, violating international norms," Abdallah said.

Moreover, he added, "the UAE has championed Morocco's autonomy plan and leveraged its diplomatic influence to help secure the passage of the UN resolution. Its investments in Morocco's southern provinces have exceeded \$30 billion, largely directed at strategic projects."

UAE's Geopolitical Engineering in the Sahel

The rivalry between Algeria and the UAE extends well beyond Western Sahara, as Abu Dhabi's imperial ambitions now stretch across the African Sahel. Starting from Benghazi in eastern Libya, the UAE has expanded its influence through Niamey and Bamako, all the way to Ouagadougou, the capital and largest city of Burkina Faso. The overarching objective: to geopolitically encircle Algeria and tilt regional balances in its favor.

In an interview with Noon Post, Professor Nour Sabah Akknouch of the University of Biskra explained: "The UAE's behavior from the Red Sea to the Atlantic is part of a long-standing foreign policy aimed at containing Algeria. Abu Dhabi supports fragile, illegitimate regimes and uses them as leverage to threaten Algeria's strategic depth in Mali, Niger, and Libya."

According to Akknouch, one tactic involves exploiting Mali's gold reserves with the backing of Western powers a glaring example of resource extraction by Abu

Dhabi in East Africa. Another key factor is Israel, as the UAE actively facilitates a Zionist foothold in the region through massive funding and sustained backing of local factions involved in internal conflicts.

Sheikh Shakhbout bin Nahyan Al Nahyan's diplomatic tour of Sahelian countries in May 2025 reflects an unprecedented convergence of strategic interests. The tour raised questions about its unannounced objectives, especially in light of rising tensions between Algeria and Mali's transitional government.

Recent shifts in the positions of new ruling capitals in Bamako and Niamey also underscore the evolving dynamics.

Funding Fragile Regimes

The UAE has offered military juntas in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso aid packages unmatched even by global powers. In Bamako, for example, the UAE pledged \$29 million through its sovereign fund to finance a new gold refinery in the southern district of Seno. The refinery will also include workshops for fine jewelry production a sign of Abu Dhabi's long-term economic engagement.

The second meeting of the UAE-Mali Joint Committee, held in August 2025, resulted in 11 agreements and memoranda of understanding in sectors including security, agriculture, and renewable energy. Among them were two solar power plants, each with a capacity of 50 megawatts. In Niger, unconfirmed reports suggest a new informal mining cooperation between Niamey and Abu Dhabi is underway.

According to Dr. Teli Abdallah, the UAE's moves come at a time when the region is experiencing a vacuum left by the waning French presence and the rise of new powers. He highlighted the UAE's military support to several Sahelian countries, including armored vehicles for the armies of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso; the funding of a military college in Mauritania; and the donation of diverse equipment such as transport aircraft and military vehicles. The UAE also committed €30 million to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

On December 13, 2024, Algeria's top leadership, via state-run media, directly accused the UAE of financing a massive media campaign aimed at undermining Algeria's image and relations with the Sahel states. Reports claimed Abu Dhabi had provided Morocco with €15 million to spearhead disinformation efforts across traditional and social media platforms to destabilize the region.

Sabotaging the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline

The UAE's far-reaching influence has also targeted strategic economic ventures, most notably the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) that connects Nigeria to Europe via Algeria. In May 2025, the UAE formally joined the list of main funders

of a rival pipeline between Nigeria and Morocco an ambitious 5,660-kilometer project that would traverse 15 countries and potentially cost up to \$50 billion. A senior official at Algeria's state-owned energy company, Sonatrach, speaking on condition of anonymity, noted several key obstacles to the Morocco route: financing gaps, political and security risks, and the need for multilateral approval from all transit states—including the disputed Western Sahara. As Nigerian Oil Minister Timipre Sylva told AFP in March 2023, "The Morocco pipeline project hinges on consent from all participating countries."

By bankrolling Morocco's pipeline, Abu Dhabi seeks to derail the Algeria-backed TSGP, which offers a more feasible alternative. Stretching approximately 4,000 kilometers through Niger into Algeria, the TSGP enjoys a major logistical advantage: it connects directly to the Medgaz pipeline from Hassi R'mel to the Algerian coastal city of Beni Saf, and onward to Almería, Spain. This infrastructure allows for immediate transmission of Nigerian gas to European markets.

In May 2024, the UAE attempted to acquire a stake in Spain's Naturgy, Sonatrach's partner in the European gas market, during a period of strained Algeria-Spain relations. Algiers thwarted the move, threatening to cancel gas shipments to Naturgy, which has long-term contracts with Sonatrach for up to 5 billion cubic meters of gas annually.