**NAME: JACKSON ERUCHI**

**COLLEGE: SMS**

**DEPARTMENT: IRD**

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**QUESTION**

Discuss in not more than 4 pages, china – North Africa and the Maghreb Relations.

The North Africa and the Maghreb relations with China date back to the 1950s. The first Arab and African country to establish diplomatic relations with china was Egypt, in 1956, china also occupies a special in Algerian diplomacy because it was the first non- Arab country to recognize Algeria’s independence in 1962.

China has increased its presence in North Africa and the Maghreb in terms of trade investments over the past two decades. Concerns among the western powers have been raised because of china’s presence in the Maghreb in recent years. China has focused on bilateral relations with these countries while also working within the Forum on China-African Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF).

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, which most African countries have signed up to, China has reaffirmed its strategic interests in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). At the Ministerial Meeting of the CASCF in 2014, President Xi Jinping declared that ‘the establishment of the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum was a strategic step the two sides took for the long-term development of the China–Arab relations’. (Xi, J. (2014), ‘Promoting the Silk Road Spirit and Deepening China-Arab Cooperation’, speech at the opening ceremony of the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum).

Chinese policy in North Africa combines both soft power and hard power element, but soft power has been particularly used. Economic power is understood to be seen as a form of hard power but china engages a softer form of economic influence, using economic diplomacy. Chinas relationship with Algeria and Egypt is mostly diplomatic and security partnership. But its influence on countries like Morocco and Tunisia is primarily economic and cultural.

Beijing’s political, diplomatic, economic and commercial relations in this region are strongest with Algeria 1, Morocco and Tunisia are not really part of china’s interest, but these countries need china’s investments to fix the infrastructure gaps, reduce poverty, expand trade, and increase foreign investments.

Looking at trade, china has increased trade investments in North Africa from Morocco to Egypt. And the economic strategy they used for each country differs. According to the Egyptian ministry of trade and industry, Egypt is Chinas third largest trading partner in Africa (Ahmed Shafiq and Abel Maguid, “interview; China-Egypt ties. August 28, 2018 <http://www.xinuhuanet.com> . In 2017, the trade volume between the two countries reached $10.87 billion, while the value of Egypt’s imports from china was over $8 billion, the highest in North Africa. 26. In Chinas trade with morocco, Morocco’s imports from china were worth $3.14 billion in 2017, behind those from Spain and France. Algeria is one of China’s oldest and largest economic partners in North Africa. In 2018 Algeria’s import from china was valued at $7.85 billion. (Xinhua Silk Road information service, February 11, 2019) Trade has also risen between China and Tunisia, with the latter’s import from the former valued at $1.85 billion in 2017, ranking third behind France and Italy. <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/tun>

Chinese companies are primarily interested in housing, construction sectors in Algeria, in Morocco and Egypt its focus is on free trade zones, industrial zones, and financial centers.

China engages in two main types of “partnership diplomacy” in the MENA region; Strategic Partnership (SPs) and Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships (CSPs). The establishment of China’s CSPs with both Egypt and Algeria shows the role they play in the MENA region; it also shows the bilateral relationship in terms of trade, arm sales, and infrastructure projects.

Algeria is a major supplier of oil and gas to Europe, as well as a key economic and security actor in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Sahel regions. It has the largest military budget in Africa having spent $9.6 billion in 2018, and acts as a leading “regional security provider”. Algeria has resolved many conflicts within the region for example conflicts in Mali and Libya, Algeria has also acted as key regional blocs such as the African union.(Anouar Boukar, reassessing the power of regional security providers, no2, February 2019) <http://doi.org/10.1080/00263206>

Egypt on the other hand controls one of the most strategic water ways in the world, the Suez Canal, and Egypt is also becoming a major gas hub in the Eastern Mediterranean they also act as a security provider managing one Africa’s largest military force, also Egypt is allied with the Saudi- Emirates Axis, which has sought to exert influence in Libya, Sudan and anywhere else in the region. In conclusion China has made a notable entry into North Africa and the Maghreb. Even though its engagement with Morocco and Tunisia can potentially support the two countries’ economic growth, industrialization and social development. Morocco and Tunisia have important geopolitical value in Beijing’s eyes due to their location in Africa, their role in the Arab-Muslim world and their proximity to Europe. Their inclusion in the BRI is significant only insofar as it is a strategic project for China. For their part, the two countries see cooperation with China as an opportunity to reduce Western influence in the context of multi-centric globalization. Through the BRI, china has made significant inroads into North Africa but its political and economic connections to the region are still relatively low. China can be expected to expand and increase these connections in the coming years, given the regions strategic significance.

**References**

* Ahmed Shafiq and Abel Maguid, “interview; China-Egypt ties. August 28, 2018, <http://www.xinuhuanet.com>
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* (Xi, J. (2014), ‘Promoting the Silk Road Spirit and Deepening China-Arab Cooperation’, speech at the opening ceremony of the 6th Ministerial Meeting of the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum).
* Xinhua silk Road information service, February 11, 2019 <http://en.silkroad.news.cm/2019/0211/130229.shml>