

NAME: SAM-ANYAKWU UGOCHI

MATRIC NO: 18/SMS09/095

**COURSE TITLE: INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA AND
THE MAGHREB**

COURSE CODE: IRD 322

**QUESTION: CHINA-NORTH AFRICAN
AND THE MAGHREB RELATIONS.**

North Africa and the Maghreb relations with China has increased in recent years; as China's presence has been seen in the Maghreb and this has raised concerns among the Western powers. China has focused on bilateral trade relations with nations of the North Africa and the Maghreb and also working on the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC) and the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) (Xinhua, 2017). The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2018, has led to China showing great interest in the Maghreb as an entry point to the African and European markets. China has pursued commercial relations over political influence in the region.

The relations between China and the Maghreb countries' has grown rapidly; with Algeria forming the closest relationship. Although, Morocco and Tunisia are eager to attract China's involvement and investment on major construction and infrastructure projects to boost and improve industrial and economic development. Also, the trade relations in both countries (Morocco and Tunisia) has grown steadily. Politically, China's policy of non-interference in domestic affairs appeals to Maghreb states, which resents Western interference. China's influence in North Africa and the Maghreb remains minimal. Also, Morocco and Tunisia's populations have generally inadequate knowledge about China's politics and culture. China has tried to address this lack of knowledge through the establishment of Confucius Institutes and other cultural activities. However, language and barrier still prevent the development of close relations, compared to those China has other countries in Africa.

The People's Republic of China is the world's fourth largest country. It gained its independence in 1949. It has a population of over 1.3 billion people. China is often referred to as the world's factory given its huge manufacturing and its export base. It also has a buoyant economy with a GDP of \$25.27 trillion. Although, its economy shrank by 6.8% in the first three months of 2020 as it battled coronavirus and lockdowns which forced factories and businesses to close.

The China and North Africa and the Maghreb relations can be divided into three aspects: The political relations, economic relations, and security relations. Firstly, political relations. The Belt and Road initiative of China is an expansion of political power disguising as business dealings.

Algeria is perhaps the closest to China. The two states agree on ideology. North Africa matters to China. In strategic terms, it is part of China's comprehensive political strategy known as the 'Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation'.

Secondly, economic relations. In 2016, China surpassed France as Algeria's largest exporter and Beijing enjoys an enormous trade surplus with the North African nation. Chinese engagement will not help the Maghreb in a way; as China's transactional foreign policy approach has little to no regard for the wellbeing of other countries (Corkin 2011). The People's Republic of China is basically a mercantilist power that sees all roads leading to the Middle Kingdom (China). Vulnerable states in North Africa need partners like Europe and the United States that advance strong, open, and free institutions. China considers its relations with the Maghreb as with the rest of the world a zero-sum game in which the strong benefits unfairly from the weak. Economic exchange is the fundamental driver of China's relations with North Africa. Since the year 2000, China has rapidly become a leading trade and investment partner to North Africa, giving it significant new political influence in the region. But as this trade with the region represents only a small proportion of China's total overseas exchanges, North Africa does not figure in the first rank of Beijing's foreign policy priorities. Also China's relations with the close United States' partner, Morocco, are growing rapidly with the extensive economic and diplomatic exchanges encouraged by Mohammed VI. Since 2014, China has established four strategic partnerships in North Africa, with Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, and Egypt, having Morocco and Sudan at 'comprehensive' level. China is a top-three import origin for all North African countries and is a top-ten export market for Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and Mauritania (Olimat 2013). A prominent factor in China's economic arrival in North Africa has been its quest for resources to power its industrialization, most notably hydrocarbons from Algeria, Sudan, and Libya, as well as Mauritanian iron ore and Moroccan copper, zinc and lead. China imports North-African resources and low-value products and in return provides manufactured goods, an increasing share of which are high technology goods.

Also, security relations. Algeria is China's third largest arms buyer globally (Zembelis 2010). In 2013, Beijing gave an 8 million dinar grant to the Tunisian military, reportedly to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) proclaimed the involvement of one of its ships in an international naval parade in Tunisia last year. Beijing is seeking a greater role in African peace and security while also looking to address the perceived

connection between its own domestic security and developments in WANA (West Asia and Northern Africa) -in the shape of Islamist extremism. China's approach to this problem may in coming years threaten its relations with North Africa and the Maghreb, as its increasing suppression of Islam at home estrange publics in the region. Beijing is encouraging Chinese enterprises to increase investment in manufacturing within North Africa, as flagged by Xi Jinping at 2018's FOCAC summit.

In conclusion, North African states need to carefully plan their economic and political engagement with China, or risk complications down the line. Secondly, the North African governments should be able to speak in a unified voice with the Chinese. Currently, these nations engage with China bilaterally, or through multilateral regional forums. The developing relationship between China and North African countries promises a host of benefits to all involved, but there are unforeseen dangers that should be avoided and they should be cautious of debt and surveillance risks.

REFERENCES:

“China’s Belt and Road Initiative: 5 Years Later”, posted by Bloomberg Markets and Finance, February 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>

China Exerting ‘Sharp Power’ Influence on American institutions”, April 2019, <https://www.iris-france.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/04/Asia-Focus-109>. Pdf.

Corkin, L. Redefining Foreign Policy Impulses toward Africa: The roles of the MFA, the Mofcom and the China Exim Bank, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 2011, p.61-90.

David H. Shinn & Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), <https://journals.openedition.org/regulation/12230>.

Guy Burton, “What Protests in Algeria and Sudan Mean for China,” *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/what-protests-in-algeria-and-sudan-mean-for-china/>.

Olimat, M. *China and the Middle East: from Silk Road to Arab Spring*, Routledge, Londres, 2013.

Xinhua, “Morocco, China give new impetus to bilateral partnership in 2017”, *Global Times*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1082762.shtml>.

Zembelis, C. *China’s Inroads into North Africa: an assessment of Sino-Algerian Relations*, China brief, The Jamestown foundation, volume X, January 2010.