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**MATRIC NO: 17/SMS09/070**

**COURE: IRD 322**

**Question: Discus in NOT MORE THAN 2 pages, China – North African and the Maghreb Relations**

China’s presence in the Maghreb has increased in recent years, raising concerns among Western powers. China has focused on bilateral relations with these countries while also working within the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the China–Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF). However, this engagement has limited strategic value compared to relations China has with Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates.Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China has shown greater interest in the Maghreb as an entry point to European and African markets. China has pursued commercial relations over political influence in the region. Morocco and Tunisia are still dependent on France, their former colonial power, and the European Union, which exert great political, economic, security and cultural influence over the two countries.

    China’s influence in the Maghreb remains minimal. Due to Its soft power push, China has struggled to promote some advantages and development of strong relations with China beyond economics. Furthermore, Morocco and Tunisia’s populations have generally scant knowledge about China’s politics and culture. China has tried to address this lack of familiarity through the establishment of Confucius Institutes and other cultural activities. Although commentaries on China’s engagement with sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the Middle East abound, far fewer address Beijing’s penetration into North Africa, also known as the Maghreb. The ones that do tend to focus on economic ties while overlooking other areas. Growing economic cooperation, driven mainly by the BRI, comprises the lion’s share of Sino-North African ties. Yet there’s more at play than business interests. China is on the offensive in the Maghreb, and the West has ignored the threat. It does so at its peril.

Of the Maghreb countries, Algeria has, perhaps, the closest ties to China. The two states agree on ideology the former has long seen itself as a radical champion of Third World causes, and the latter ostensibly retains its Marxist-Leninist tradition. In 2016, China surpassed France as Algeria’s largest exporter and Beijing enjoys an enormous trade surplus with the North African nation.

     However, Both the language and cultural barriers still hinder the easy development of close relations, contrast to those China has with other countries in Africa. Another piece in China’s global strategy that deserves recognition is North Africa. The Chinese however, largely through its behemoth Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is also an expansion of the political power building as business dealings. Through loans to developing countries, this increases its political influence on land and sea and other means. Its policy for development aid and military sales has enticed many countries while serving as an alternative to Western engagement. This great power rivalry has come to every corner of the globe.

Chinese engagement will not help the Maghreb. Though some may argue otherwise, China’s transactional foreign-policy approach has little to no regard for the wellbeing of other countries. The PRC is fundamentally a mercantilist power that sees all roads leading to the Middle Kingdom. Fragile states in North Africa need partners like the United States and Europe that promote 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 exploit the weak.

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