

The Geostrategic Alignment of Africa: What the Trans-Sahel Gas Pipeline Project Exposes

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Abstract

As the African Sahel attempts to address endemic challenges of climate change, intrastate conflict, and human insecurity, the continent also finds itself at a crucial inflection point in its geostrategic alignment. Over the past two years, Egypt, Nigeria, and Ethiopia joined South Africa in the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) consortium. With the ejection of French and U.S. forces from West Africa in 2024, the growing use of Russia's Africa Corps for security provisioning, and heavy infrastructure and mining investments from China, some countries in Africa appear to be leaving the Western diplomatic orbit and moving decidedly east.

Keywords: BRICS, Sahel, climate change, human security, strategic studies, economic security, strategic competition, energy security, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, China, terrorism

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Introduction

Many African states are significantly increasing their economic and diplomatic ties with China, prominently including Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Zambia, amongst many others. These African partnerships are additionally serving to isolate Taipei. Presently, only one African country recognizes Taiwan as a separate entity – the small state of Eswatini.³ While it remains pertinent to understand the driving force behind this trend in strengthening Sino-African relations, it is also imperative to acknowledge growing distrust in the region with Western governments, perhaps owing to a perceived neocolonial agenda. For instance, the democratic relapses in the Sahelian states of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger were partly informed by anti-French sentiments – leading to the removal of French forces from the region.

In February 2025, Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria signed an agreement to implement a massive Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) project. More than simply a commercial endeavor, TSGP represents how West Africa and the Western Sahel will maneuver the strategic environment to form future financial investments, diplomatic alliances, and security partnerships. Through a data-centric analysis of resilience and resistance factors, as well as a comparative case study of similar gas line projects in Sudan, this paper reviews the challenges and trajectory of TSGP and offers a microcosm of how Africa itself will steer the changing international order, having far-reaching consequences for Europe, the United States, and global modes of behavior.

Humanity's mother continent sits at an inflection point in its strategic trajectory to (a) align itself with the rise of the exemplified by the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) bloc, (b) maintain its postcolonial antecedents with European nations like the United Kingdom and France, (c) strike an altered course favoring relations with the United States, or (d) reinforce the regional framework of the African Union. Recent evidence suggests the region favors the first option—cementing closer ties with China and the BRICS conglomerate, while also partnering with dominant Middle Eastern powers like Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Simultaneously, relations with European nations are declining, the United States is withdrawing, and the African Union is losing influence as a continental construct.

This article takes a discerning look at the proposed TSGP project in Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria, and what this undertaking can tell us about both intrastate conflict and strategic competition in the near Sahel. It starts by explaining the unique environment of strategic competition on the continent and in the region. It then explains the resistance environments in Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria as rife with intrastate conflicts that pose risks to the construction and maintenance of the TSGP, necessitating domestic strategies, and possibly regional collaboration, to address. It then utilizes the Sudan and South Sudan gas pipeline projects on the east coast as case study to explore the potential pitfalls of a future TSGP on the west coast. Finally, this essay embodies a microlevel analysis regarding competition between the West and BRICS within a unique near-Sahel environment which

³ Paul Nantulya, 2023, "Africa's Role in China's Multilateralism Strategy," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 24 January, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-china-multilateralism/>.

remains indicative of the prospects and risks of how Africa generally may align itself within a changing global order.

The Trans-Sahel Pipeline Project

In today's era of strategic competition, defined by shifting alliances and continual realignments, the African continent stands out as a clear example of middle powers navigating relationships among rival major powers, like the United States, China, and Russia.⁴ After years of strained relations with the West, a period shaped in part by narratives that cast Africa as having limited agency, the continent is increasingly reasserting itself, seeking to redefine its strategic partnerships by engaging alternative partners beyond traditional colonial powers in pursuit of economic and political gains. Some of these preferred alternatives include China, Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. These unfolding interactions have cut across various factors of mutual interest including trade, foreign relations, and defense, and the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) embodies one example that addresses all three factors.

On 11 February 2025, Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria signed an agreement to implement a massive TSGP project. In truth, these three nations have been negotiating this project since 2009, which could provide Europe with 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually.⁵ Figure 1 illustrates this massive project, at 2,565 miles, which originates in Nigeria, transits through Niger and Algeria, and ends at Hassi R'Mel. This research presents insights into the African Sahel in particular, a region ripe with fragile governance, intrastate conflict, interstate competition, and climate change. In short, the future success or failure of the TSGP may serve to answer numerous outstanding questions regarding (1) the direction of strategic competition in the subregion, (2) the possibilities of addressing endemic terrorism and insurgency in the Sahel, and (3) using economic statecraft to stabilize some of the world's most fragile states and conflict-affected settings.

As a business endeavor, TSGP ostensibly appears transparent. Industrialized nations making use of Africa's natural resources is an age-old story. The European economy has a huge appetite for fossil fuels, made even more urgent by the desire to decrease dependence on Russian supplies. Nigeria, Algeria, and Egypt have large oil reserves, and already account for around 80% of Africa's gas production.⁶ Meanwhile, the landlocked Niger is simultaneously itching to tap its natural gas reserves and needs a transportation network to export them. TSGP is anticipated to cost \$13 billion and could provide a number of positive impacts on the three African states, including (1) reversing adverse macroeconomic trends,

4 Grace Jones and Nils Olsen, 2024, "The New Influencers: A Primer on the Expanding Role of Middle Powers in Africa," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, 5 August, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/new-influencers-middle-powers-africa>.

5 Randy Fabi, 2009, "Nigeria, Algeria Agree to Build Sahara Gas Link," *Reuters*, 3 July, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/africa/nigeria-algeria-agree-to-build-sahara-gas-link-idUSL3457666/>.

6 Anne Laure Kline, 2024, "Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline: What it Means for West Africa," *Energy Capital & Power*, 5 February, <https://energycapitalpower.com/trans-saharan-gas-pipeline-west-africa-iae/>.



Figure 1: Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline Project (Source:Wiki).

(2) increasing commercial activity and industrialization, (3) reducing energy poverty, and (4) enhancing corporate social impact.⁷

Unfortunately, the African Sahel is unusually rife with conflict. Nigeria itself ranks fifth on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data conflict index, sandwiched between Mexico and Ecuador.⁸ This violence could pose huge risks on such a business proposal as TSGP. Government stability generally remains questionable across the region. Niger experienced a military coup in July 2023,⁹ subsequently expelling all U.S. special operations forces in country, who were postured to combat terrorism.¹⁰ Niger also ended its military cooperation activities with France.¹¹ In fact, Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria face endemic problems with rebel and insurgent groups. Insurgent groups operate within the areas proposed for the pipeline, and criminal organizations control extensive underground and illicit networks as well.¹² These issues have severe consequences for regional peace, security and stability, posing direct and indirect threats to the operationalization of the TSGP.

Strategic Competition

Western Influence Waning

In many ways, Africa rests at the center of strategic competition between the East and the West, as both seek to influence its populations and leverage its resources. Simultaneously, the continent appears to defy many traditional theories in international relations.¹³ Some scholars have argued that a primary reason for abnormal state development in Africa derives from the fact that the many tribal nations and armed groups existing beyond typical constructs defy the Westphalian state model.¹⁴ This dynamic of substate activity appears to fuel increased intrastate conflict and makes foreign policy on the continent challenging to manage or to predict outcomes. Intrastate conflict remains predominant in the Sahel, and in countries which border the Sahel. Seven of these nations have experienced recent military coups since 2020 – Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Gabon, Tunisia, Chad, and

7 Freeman, 2020.

8 “Conflict Index,” *EnArmed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, 2025, n.d., <https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index>.

9 Gilles Yabi, 2023, “The Niger Coup’s Outsized Global Impact,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 August, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/08/the-niger-coups-outsized-global-impact?lang=en>.

10 “Conflict Index,” *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, 2025, n.d., <https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index>.

11 “Last French Troops Leave Niger as Military Cooperation Officially Ends,” *Reuters*, 2023, 22 December, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/last-french-troops-leave-niger-military-cooperation-officially-ends-2023-12-22/>.

12 Matthew La Lime, 2024, “Black Axe—Nigeria’s Most Notorious Transnational Criminal Organization,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 29 October, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/black-axe-nigeria-transnational-organized-crime/>.

13 Timothy M. Shaw and Kevin C. Dunn, 2001, *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory*, Palgrave, p. 4.

14 Assis Malaquias, 2001, “Reformulating IR Theory,” in *Africa’s Challenge to International Relations Theory*, eds. Timothy M. Shaw and Kevin C. Dunn, Palgrave, pp. 12-23.

Sudan.¹⁵ Some have even claimed that the strategic competition from internationalized intrastate conflict has been partly at fault for the instability of governance. This context of pluralist states which defy traditional international relations theories prove an essential backdrop to discuss the TSGP.

Of late, the near Sahel has simultaneously faced several transnational criminal threats posing risks to their stability while also experiencing negative sentiments to Western partnerships. Examples of countries that have barred the French or U.S. militaries from a boots-on-the-ground presence include Niger, Mali, Chad, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso.¹⁶ So, while near Sahel states still desire partnerships to counter domestic threats and improve governance structures, the partner of choice appears to be vectoring towards partners in BRICS.¹⁷ The reason appears to derive from a desire for beneficial economic and security cooperation which remains free from “interfering in their domestic affairs and imposing strict conditions on their governance in return for good relations and aid.”¹⁸

As an emerging leader in the African economy, Nigeria lies at the center of ongoing strategic competition between the West on one hand, and China and Russia on the other. The World Bank assessed Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as \$363.846 billion in 2023, between that of South Africa and Colombia.¹⁹ Despite this, international corporations are reading the signs of government instability and exiting the country at an alarming rate.²⁰ From 2020 to 2024, twenty-five major companies have left Nigeria, and Shell recently announced it will follow this trend.²¹ Interestingly though, some other investors are growing confident in the Nigerian economy in the wake of ongoing economic reforms.

Chinese Economic Partnerships Increasing

As illustrated in Figure 2, China has been increasing its influence in Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger. The largest recent Chinese loans included \$61 million to Algeria in 2021, \$1 billion for Niger in 2019, and \$3 billion to Nigeria in 2020.²² Figure 2 shows the most recently available data on investments and aid from Western nations in these three countries in

15 Sohaib Mahmoud and Mohamed Taifouri, 2023, “The Coups d’État of the Sahel Region: Domestic Causes and International Competition,” *Arab Center*, 27 September, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-coups-detat-of-the-sahel-region-domestic-causes-and-international-competition/>.

16 Monika Ponczuk and Sulvie Corbet, 2024, “France’s Military is Being Ousted from More African Countries,” *Defense News*, 25 December, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2024/12/25/frances-military-is-being-ousted-from-more-african-countries/>.

17 Kester Kenn Klomegah, 2024, “Why Are African States Joining BRICS?” *Modern Diplomacy*, 17 October, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/10/17/why-are-african-states-joining-brics/>.

18 Dan M. Ford, 2024, “African juntas’ defense pact makes mockery of US policy,” *Responsible Statecraft*, 11 July, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/alliance-of-sahel-states/>.

19 “Gross Domestic Product,” *World Bank*, n.d., https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true.

20 Adetutu Sobowale, 2024, “Firms that left Nigeria from 2020 to 2024 Over Economic Challenges,” *Punch*, 29 October, <https://punchng.com/full-list-firms-that-left-nigeria-from-2020-to-2024-over-economic-challenges/>.

21 Elisha Bala-Gbogbo, 2024, “Nigeria approves Shell’s \$2.4 billion asset sale to Renaissance,” *Reuters*, 18 December, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/alliance-of-sahel-states/>.

22 “Aid Data,” *William & Mary*, 2022, n.d., <https://china.aiddata.org/>.

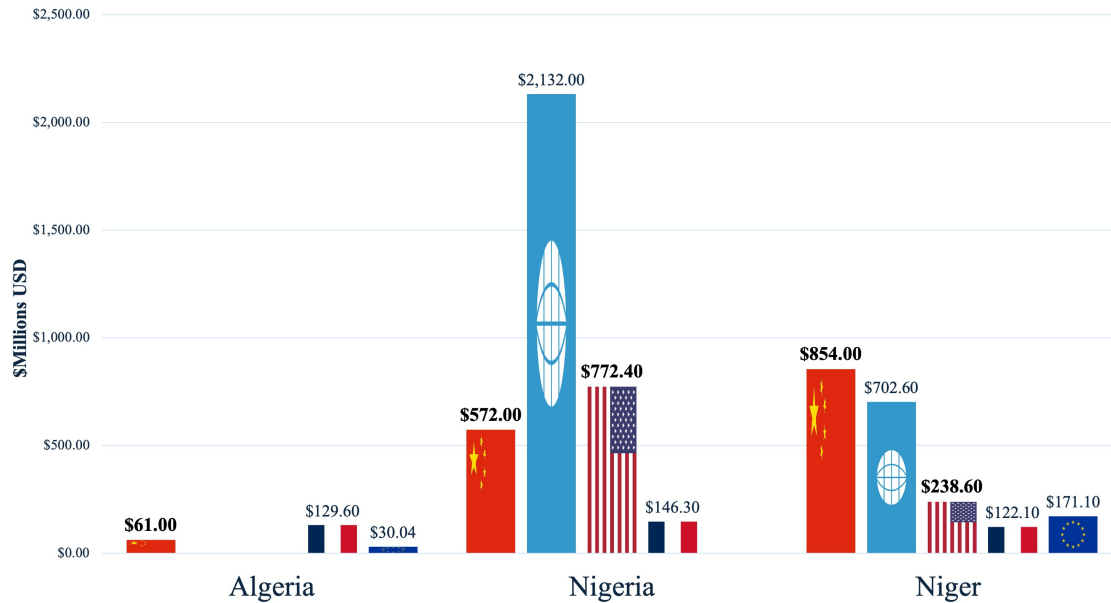


Figure 2: Foreign Aid to Algeria, Nigeria and Niger in Millions USD, circa 2022 (Source: Authors’ compilation).

2022, compared with China’s investments in 2021. To summarize this comparison, the World Bank made the most ventures with \$2.835 billion, China with \$1.487 billion, United States with \$1.011 billion, and France and the European Union (EU) combined with \$599 million.²³

In addition to foreign aid, foreign direct investment (FDI) from multinational corporations, as well as military support, also remain important considerations. Historically, Western nations have utilized FDI more than China and Russia (China’s is valued at just \$70 billion globally in 2024).²⁴ Of the three nations, Algeria remains the most attractive for FDI, as economic speculation in Nigeria and Niger appears far riskier in comparison. In 2023, total Western FDI in Algeria was \$1.04 billion, of which U.S. companies contributed 29%, Italian 10%, France 10%, Spain 7%, and United Kingdom 6%. In short, Algeria remains far more integrated into Western markets than the other two. U.S. arms deliveries to Algeria in 2022 were valued at \$271 million, \$9.4 million to Niger, and \$48 million to Nigeria. Historically, Russia’s arms sales to Algeria have also been significant, valued at \$447 million in 2020, but this has significantly dropped off since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.²⁵ China also historically has exported arms to Algeria and Nigeria, averaging about \$116

²³ *ForeignAssistance.gov*, 2022, <https://www.foreignassistance.gov/>.

²⁴ Giulia Interesse, 2024, “Decoding China’s H1 2024 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Performance,” *China Briefing*, 29 August, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/decoding-chinas-h1-2024-foreign-direct-investment-fdi-performance/>.

²⁵ “Arms Exports from Russia from 2020 to 2023, by Country,” *Statista*, 2024, 21 June, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1296249/russia-arms-exports-by-country/>.

million annually to the former.²⁶ To summarize this tangled landscape of aid, investments, and security cooperation, there remains serious competition between the United States, Europe, China, and Russia in the tristate TSGP corridor. While not definitively, the West has receded serious influence in Nigeria and Niger, while the trajectory of Algeria remains contested.

Strategically, China has been selectively investing in North Africa and the Sahel, and in this case, building strategic influence with Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger in particular. One telling sign is that Nigeria joined BRICS in 2024.²⁷ The same year, China made plans to collaborate with Niger in harvesting its vast uranium deposits – coming at a time when Niger made the decision to kick out the French state-owned mining company Orano and prevent it from doing the same.²⁸ To further illustrate its intentions, in 2025, Niger announced its desire to strengthen its relationship with BRICS because “this group offers a different approach to cooperation.”²⁹ While the vast sea changes in Niger are insightful, China’s largest investment plans are in Algeria. The two nations signed a Belt and Road Initiative plan in 2022,³⁰ followed by long-term Chinese ventures in the country estimated at \$36 billion across numerous sectors.³¹

Russian Security Cooperation Evolving

While China has advanced economic interests in this subregion, Russia has been capitalizing on the exit of French and U.S. advisory missions with the goal of filling the security vacuum this exit has created, using its private military company, Africa Corps, in alternative security provisioning. U.S. Africa Command was still unraveling the impacts of Niger’s demand to exit when Russia’s Africa Corps arrived in April of 2024.³² While Africa Corps does not currently appear to hold a significant footprint in Algeria and Nigeria, it has made key strategic footholds throughout the region, including in Libya and Mali. In the case of Nigeria, the country has remained averse to the idea of having foreign boots on the ground, in part due to its status as a regional hegemon. For certain, Russia’s access to

26 “How Dominant is China in the Global Arms Trade,” *China Power*, 2021, 27 May, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-global-arms-trade/>.

27 Stephen Onyeiwu, 2025, “Nigeria’s BRICS Partnership: Economist Outlines Potential Benefits,” *The Conversation*, 5 February, <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-brics-partnership-economist-outlines-potential-benefits-248943>.

28 Hugh Harsono, 2024, “China Has an Opportunity to Grow Its Military Influence in Niger,” *The Diplomat*, 17 July, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/china-has-an-opportunity-to-grow-its-military-influence-in-niger/>.

29 Kevin Aka, 2025, “Niger announces intention to strengthen ties with BRICS,” *Beninwebtv*, 10 February, <https://beninwebtv.com/le-niger-annonce-son-intention-de-renforcer-ses-liens-avec-les-brics/>.

30 “Algeria: Two Agreements Signed with China to Boost Investment,” *HKTDC Research*, 2022, 20 December, <https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/MTI1MjAyMTM2NA>.

31 “China to Invest \$36 billion Across Multiple Sectors in Algeria, Ennahar TV reports,” *Reuters*, 2023, 20 July, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/china-invest-36-bln-across-multiple-sectors-algeria-ennahar-tv-2023-07-20/>.

32 “Africa File Special Edition: Russia’s Africa Corps Arrives in Niger. What’s Next?” *Institute for the Study of War*, 2024, 21 April, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/africa-file-special-edition-russias-africa-corps-arrives-in-niger-whats-next/>.

North Africa and the Sahel makes it a serious competitor to the United States and France for politico-military influence in this region ripe with potential conflict.

More important than its advantage in forward force posture, Africa Corps primarily offers an alternative to the liberal peacebuilding methods of Western states. Instead of addressing the root factors of social grievance, Africa Corps supports authoritarian conflict management, which controls the information environment, natural resources, and operating space of a population while denying the same to resistance elements.³³ Without a doubt, this approach has reinforced concerns over human rights violations. Authoritarian African regimes have frequently found Africa Corps' security approach complementary to their own, requiring little of the progressive methods required for democracy-building initiatives and offering potentially immediate results. However, authoritarian conflict management has limitations in that suppression does not solve injustice, inequality, and lack of opportunity—all three factors of which stoke the flames of resistance. The resistance-rich conflict environment of the tri-state TSGP corridor may find Africa Corps directly opposing several prominent and successful insurgent groups—a contest in which the capabilities of this private military company could be severely tested, as was the case in Mali recently.

Summary

Within the context of strategic competition, the near Sahel, and even the continent, have increased their collaborations with nations within BRICS. Both Chinese investment ventures and Russian private military companies have attained an increased regional market share of partnerships, while that of Western competitors is decreasing (but India and Malaysia also play significant parts in economic collaboration, which is highlighted later). Of the two, China remains the dominant competitor to outsiders in Africa, evolving into what Chido Munyati explains as the continent's "largest trading partner and creditor in recent years under programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative."³⁴ For the countries of Algeria, Nigeria and Niger, changing partnerships appears to be a matter of choice, rather than one of necessity. These new partnerships could ensure "mutual benefits and sustainable growth for Africa and China."³⁵ Simultaneously, states may also remain or regress in authoritarian systems to ensure domestic stability in pluralist nations. Amid the renewed engagement of external powers such as China, Russia, and the United States across the continent, African countries face a critical opening for strategic realignment, one that enables them to center their own priorities and advance goals of economic autonomy and greater geopolitical influence in an era of intensifying competition.

33 Christopher Spearin, 2023, "Russia's Wagner Group/Africa Corps: An Authoritarian Conflict Management Examination," *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 480-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2024.2415659>.

34 Chido Munyati, 2024, "Why strong regional value chains will be vital to the next chapter of China and Africa's economic relationship," *World Economic Forum*, 25 June, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/why-strong-regional-value-chains-will-be-vital-to-the-next-chapter-of-china-and-africas-economic-relationship/>.

35 Munyati, 2024.

Pervasive Resistance

Resistance in and along the TSGP corridor in Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger spans multiple methodologies and ideologies, ranging from nonviolent legal protest, illegal protest, criminality, insurgency, and even the potential for belligerency, including civil war. As such, a massive infrastructure project like TSGP can expect to attract resistance from multiple fronts, ranging from labor organizations, environmentalists, illicit criminals, and armed belligerents.

From 2020 to 2024, this tri-state region experienced 9,436 peaceful protests, violent demonstrations, and riots – 4,794 in Algeria, 146 in Niger, and 4,496 in Nigeria.³⁶ In contrast, Angola, as a comparison in Central Africa, experienced 812 similar incidents over the same period and far less active resistance to governance per capita.³⁷ Some of the major nonviolent organizations operating in the troubled subregion include the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN). Headquartered in Husainiyya Baqiyatullah, IMN aims to establish an Islamic State and maintains a popular membership of 5 million.³⁸ Meanwhile, in Niger, M62 (or the Sacred Union for Safeguarding of Sovereignty and Dignity of the People) consistently advocates for more African agency and less foreign influence, particularly from France.³⁹ Student protests are common in all three nations, totaling at 575 separate protests in four years. These groups can be represented comprehensively by the All-African Students Union.⁴⁰ Labor groups in both Algeria and Nigeria consistently protest, sometimes resulting in riots, for increased wages and a fairer economy. In terms of legal forms of resistance to current governance, two of the major trade unions in both countries are the General Union of Algerian Workers and the Nigerian Labor Congress.

Criminal enterprises plague the oil industry in West Africa. In Nigeria, these organizations use hot-tapping and cold-tapping methods to break into oil infrastructure, stealing an estimated thousands of barrels each day.⁴¹ As a biproduct, these activities cause massive environmental damage, stemming from illegal oil bunkering and spillage. Furthermore, the prevalence of this activity indicates the extent of the illicit underground oil economy in Nigeria. One of the most successful of the transnational criminal organizations is Black Axe,⁴² which alone accounted for over 300 violent acts between 2020 and 2024.⁴³ Another criminal organization with a similar background, includes Supreme Eiyé Confraternity (SEC). Should a pipeline extend 2,565 miles through unregulated and uncontrolled terrain

36 ACLED, 2025.

37 ACLED, 2025.

38 Al Chukwuma Okoli, 2019, “ODR: An Islamic Jurisprudence Perspective,” *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, vol. 26, 5 January, pp. 53-67, <https://www.csq.ro/wp-content/uploads/Sodiq-O.-OMOOLA.pdf>.

39 Hermine Sam, 2023, “The Coup in Niger,” *Insights*, 13 October, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/coup-niger>.

40 *All African Student Union*, n.d., <https://aasunonline.org/>.

41 Ian Ralby and David Soud, 2018, “Oil on the Water: Illicit Hydrocarbons Activity in the Maritime Domain,” *Atlantic Council*, 10 April, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/oil-on-the-water-illicit-hydrocarbons-activity-in-the-maritime-domain/>.

42 Sean Williams, 2019, “The Black Axe,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 28 August, <https://harpers.org/2019/08/the-black-axe-nigera-cult-fraternity/>.

43 ACLED, 2025.

across the heart of Africa, the probabilities of oil theft and environmental damage loom large and could be carried out by a variety of actors.

Violence in the region is even more pervasive than peaceful demonstrations and criminality, particularly in Nigeria, with 20,306 separate acts recorded from 2020 to 2024.⁴⁴ Some of this violence demonstrates both Niger's and Nigeria's inability to police the state effectively, as non-state militias commonly conduct security functions. This includes Amotekun Corps in southwestern Nigeria, Benue Communal Militia in central Nigeria, the Deebam militia in the Niger Delta, Djerma Ethnic Militia in Niger, the Niger Communal Militia, Ebube Agu Corps in southern Nigeria, Kaduna Communal Militia in central Nigeria, Zamfara Communal Militia in northwestern Nigeria, and Sokoto Communal Militia in northern Nigeria.⁴⁵

More clearly defying the state, several groups might be categorized as insurgents or terrorists. This includes the Fulani Ethnic Militia. The Fulani consist of nomadic peoples, who use grazing lands in Nigeria but also in Mali, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic. The Fulani militia remains independent from the state and quite powerful. In contrast, Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) comprises a long-running separatist movement, desiring to restore the Republic of Biafra and break away from Nigeria. Terrorist groups in the tri-state region include those affiliated with Al Qaeda and Islamic State, ranging from small factions to larger ones. These include Ansaru, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jamaatu Ahli is-Sunnah lid-Dawati wal-Jihad (Boko Haram), Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).⁴⁶

Figure 3 illustrates the resistance continuum in the region proposed for the TSGP project. On the left side of the figure, there are five major nonviolent protest movements, but labor organizations are most prone to using illegal methods, like rioting, to achieve their aims. Two illicit criminal organizations are in the middle of the continuum and represent a larger trend of groups who would seek to profit from the gas line project. There are many insurgent and terrorist organizations in the tristate region, the most prevalent and powerful listed on the right side of the figure. To summarize, resistance to governance exist throughout, with violent resistance most prevalent in Nigeria, but many of the terrorist groups retain mobility and could potentially change their areas of operation for self-interest. For certain, the region retains fragility and the success of a future TSGP will need to address the illicit activities and violence at a minimum. In the longer term, the threat of civil disobedience over the endemic issues of financial inequality, environmental insecurity, and political injustice and marginalization, could adversely impact the project's sustainability if left unaddressed.

44 ACLED, 2025.

45 ACLED, 2025.

46 ACLED, 2025.

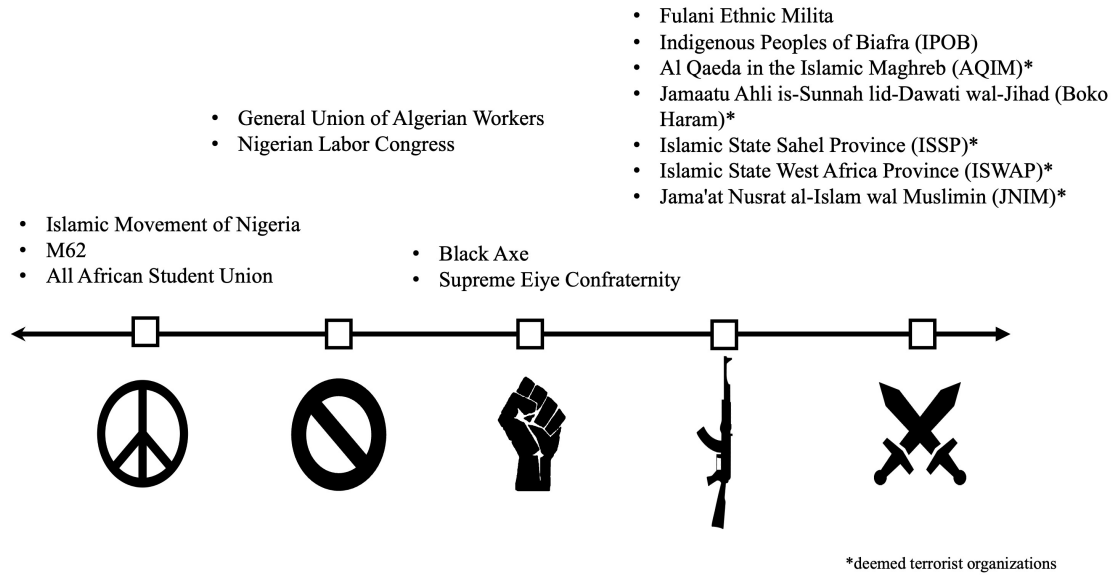


Figure 3: Resistance Continuum of Nonstate Groups in Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria, 2024 (Source: Authors).

The Sudan Pipelines Case Study

Nation-states in Africa’s Sahel region share similar geography, as well as linguistic, religious, and ethnic fractionalization challenges. Remarkably, both the east and west flanks of the African Sahel include similar gas pipeline projects constructed within comparable compound security dilemmas (see Figure 4).⁴⁷ Like TSGP, the Greater Nile Pipeline and Petrodar Pipelines located in Sudan and South Sudan offer interesting insights about the viability of such projects completed in fragile states in an era of strategic competition.

The preceding map illustrates both the Greater Nile Pipeline and the Petrodar Pipeline projects of South Sudan and Sudan. The Greater Nile Pipeline currently runs from landlocked South Sudan through Sudan about 990 miles to the Port of Sudan. It was constructed in 1999 and is operated by China National Petroleum Corporation, where this Chinese firm maintains a majority stakeholder at 40%.⁴⁸ Similarly, built in 2001, the Petrodar Pipeline starts in South Sudan and runs 934 miles through Sudan to the same port. It is also partially funded by China National Petroleum Corporation and China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation, with Chinese companies again attaining a total 47% stake.⁴⁹ However, when companies from BRICS nations, particularly India and Egypt, are considered

47 Isaiah Wilson III and Scott A. Smitson, 2020, “The Compound Security Dilemma: Threats at the Nexus of War,” *Parameters*, vol. 50, no. 2, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss2/3/>.

48 “Sudan’s Oil Sector: History Policies, and Outlook,” *International Monetary Fund*, 2020, 10 March, <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2020/073/article-A003-en.xml>.

49 IMF, 2020.



Figure 4: Greater Nile Oil Pipeline, 2001 (Created using maps4news).

alongside those from countries seeking to join the bloc, such as Malaysia, BRICS-linked actors account for a substantial share of these projects. In this context, their stake is estimated at approximately 95% in the Greater Nile Pipeline and 92% in the Petrodar project.⁵⁰ Figure 5 presents more precise statistics, which demonstrate that BRICS nations and Malaysia, which is courting BRICS membership, operate the entirety of external investment in these two pipelines.

Despite what appeared to be an auspicious oil exploration project initially for investors, the nations involved, and local communities, it quickly undermined local governance structures and encouraged intrastate conflict. From 1983 through 2005, the secessionist Sudan People’s Liberation Movement fought the state of Sudan, initially resulting in a South Sudan autonomous region. Then, South Sudan succeeded entirely from Sudan in 2011 to form the Republic of South Sudan. However, this autonomy resulted in civil war within South Sudan from 2013-2020. The violence included at least 383,000 fatalities and millions of displaced persons.⁵¹ The South Sudanese government and the ethnic militias fought for control over the lucrative oil fields, and the violence proved a major disruption to their operation.⁵² Meanwhile, one United Nations panel implicated Chinese and Malaysian oil companies as taking sides to protect their financial interests as the oil proceeds funded

50 IMG, 2020.

51 Megan Specia, 2018, “383,000: Estimated Death Toll in South Sudan’s War,” *The New York Times*, 27 September, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/world/africa/south-sudan-civil-war-deaths.html>.

52 Megan Specia, 2019, “South Sudan Oil Consortium Funded Brutal Militias, Report Says,” *The New York Times*, 20 September, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/world/africa/south-sudan-oil-militias.html>.

Consortium Project	Shareholders	Percentage	Country of Origin
GREATER NILE PIPELINE	China National Petroleum Corporation	40	China (BRICS)
	Petronas	30	Malaysia (BRICS courtship)
	Indian Oil and Natural Gas Company	25	India (BRICS)
	Sudapet	5	Sudan
Consortium Project	Shareholders	Percentage	Country of Origin
PETORDAR PIPELINE	China National Petroleum Corporation	41	China (BRICS)
	Petronas	40	Malaysia (BRICS courtship)
	Sudapet	8	Sudan
	China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation	6	China (BRICS)
	Tri-Ocean Energy	5	Egypt (BRICS)

Figure 5: BRICS investments into the Greater Nile and Petrodar Pipelines (Source: Authors’ compilation).

government-controlled security forces.⁵³

As South Sudan spun into further domestic chaos following its civil war, Sudan in the north imploded. Widespread civil disobedience promised the hope of democracy, but the ensuing domestic volatility instead facilitated a military coup in 2019, bringing the demise of the country’s longtime dictator, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir. After a brief spell of peace, ambitions for control of the country led to widespread hostilities in 2023 between several major factions, predominantly featuring war between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Force (RSF), with experts characterizing the conduct from both sides as genocide.⁵⁴ In just two years, the Sudan Civil War has resulted in largest humanitarian crisis since World War II, with over 11 million people displaced and an additional 3 million fleeing to neighboring nations.⁵⁵ Even in a region with a history of atrocities, the crimes against humanity on both sides appear horrifyingly extraordinary.⁵⁶

Over the past two decades, revenue from the two pipeline projects has not only proven domestically destabilizing but also economically erratic. Only during the years of peace

⁵³ Specia, 2019.

⁵⁴ “Sudan’s RSF, Accused of Genocide, Signs Charter to Form Rival Government,” *Al Jazeera*, 2025, 23 February, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/23/sudans-rsf-allies-sign-charter-for-rival-government-despite-criticisms>.

⁵⁵ “Crisis in Sudan: What is happening and how to help,” *Rescue.org*, 2025, 7 January, <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-sudan-what-happening-and-how-help>.

⁵⁶ “War in Sudan is ‘A Crisis of Epic Proportions’ as Atrocities Abound,” *United Nations*, 2024, 19 April, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148791>.

between Sudan and South Sudan (2005-2011) did oil sales boom. In this period, Sudan grew into the third-largest exporter in Africa, and oil comprised 60% of its gross domestic product. However, during South Sudan's civil war (2013-2020), exports dwindled. By 2018, the levels of oil output were less than half that of its peak in 2010.⁵⁷ Even after the South Sudanese civil war ended in 2020, the lucrative oil revenue continued to further destabilize the country with factional infighting over the proceeds. In 2023, Sudan too plunged into civil war between the SAF and the RSF, which remains unresolved. Since SAF revenue mostly derives from oil exports, the subsequent RSF attacks on oil infrastructure resulted in a complete shutdown of Greater Nile and Petrodar Pipelines. In South Sudan, where oil reserves remain the primary domestic product, the economy virtually collapsed. Meanwhile, the dangerous violence between 1999 and 2025 has taken its toll on broken and aging oil infrastructure, as well as environmental degradation from the carnage. Most foreign investors removed their personnel from projects by 2020 due to the high risk, with only the Chinese corporations remaining to operate them.⁵⁸

Lessons from the Sudan Case

The Greater Nile Pipeline and Petrodar Pipeline projects and the Sahel ecosystem offer some unique lessons which likely may have applicability to a future TSGP. First, most Western corporations and financial institutions will find TSGP too risky an investment. This creates operating space for strategic competitors like China, Russia, or BRICS members to create a pipeline consortium. Of these, perhaps only Chinese firms have the patience and grand strategic outlook to commit major resources to TSGP, exemplified by its pledging of resources from state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in conflict-prone environments.⁵⁹

Second, the monetary worth and political significance of TGSP will most likely act as a lightning rod to exacerbate interstate conflict in Nigeria, Niger, and Algeria, with long-term destabilization effects over decades—resulting in violence, human suffering, and far-reaching consequences to neighboring regions. For example, Niger and Nigeria already share a natural gas pipeline (the Trans Niger Pipeline), which Adebisi Olusolape notes has been “the target of repeated oil theft, vandalism and sabotage.”⁶⁰ While countering both demonstrations and violent rebellion to current authorities is possible, doing so will require deliberate planning and skilled security forces—making the employment of private military companies likely, including Russia's Africa Corps, South Africa's Executive Outcomes, or Chinese alternatives—leading African nations to what becomes essentially a BRICS-centric

57 D.P. Akashraj and Kuol Deng Maleith, 2020, “The Impact of Ageing Facilities on Oil Production in South Sudan,” *International Journal of Research and Review*, vol. 7, iss. 11, p. 489-98, https://www.ijrrjournal.com/IJRR_Vol.7_Issue.11_Nov2020/IJRR0066.pdf.

58 IMF, 2020.

59 C. Byamungu and Géraud Neema, 2025, “Two Chinese Oil Workers Kidnapped in Niger,” *China Global South Project*, 5 February, <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news-and-insights/latest-market-news/2669719-nigeria-s-trans-niger-oil-pipeline-restarts-after-fire>.

60 Adebisi Olusolape, 2025, “Nigeria's Trans-Niger oil pipeline restarts after fire,” *Argus Media*, 20 March, <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/2025/02/05/two-chinese-oil-workers-kidnapped-in-niger/>.

solution.

There remains great hope that the economic prospects of TSGP can bring much needed employment to the region and potentially stabilizing effects to governance by increasing royalties, taxes, and tariffs.⁶¹ To make the project operationally feasible, Nigeria, Niger, and Algeria will require financial partners to back the initial investment as well as security assistance partnerships to address the subsequent resistance dynamics. In 2024, Algeria stated that it abandoned its desired membership in BRICS.⁶² However, simultaneously, it retains its membership in the BRICS Development Bank. Going forward, TSGP may push a closer partnership of Algeria and BRICS, including membership, in direct alignment with TSGP's future.

Conclusion

China

The financial prospects of a successful TSGP have already garnered much enthusiasm from the governments of Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria. It might also serve to incentivize actors in BRICS to invest in the project. In terms of strategic competition between the United States and China, TSGP would serve three major grand strategic objectives for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). First, TSGP can cement North, West, and Central Africa national economic interests in alignment with China. Second, TSGP would prove fundamental to the EU's energy sector, providing China as an investor increased influence in the West. Third, with the inclusion of South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nigeria into BRICS, TSGP can serve as a major instrument for the CCP to shift Africa's geostrategic alignment toward the East.

Europe

Despite its recent setback, the EU, and France in particular, also has an opportunity to shape the strategic trajectory of Africa as TSGP progresses. For decades after colonialism, France has partnered at times with Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria. France's relationships in Africa over the years have ebbed and flowed and appear at a low point, combined with a mass exodus of European companies from the region.⁶³ Should France and the EU attempt to rebuild economic and security interests in these states or cut their losses? Should the EU accept the benefits and subsequent reliance on a completed TSGP for its fossil fuel demands? What is the grand strategy of the EU in Africa, and will it work collaboratively

61 Freeman, 2020.

62 "Algeria Ends Bid to Join BRICS, but Stays in Group's Development Bank," *Middle East Monitor*, 2024, 2 October, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241002-algeria-ends-bid-to-join-brics-but-stays-in-groups-development-bank/>.

63 Assoumi Harouna and Abdoul Karim, 2024, "Assessing the Geo-Strategic Implications of France's Withdrawal from the Sahel," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2 February, <https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/?p=26359>.

with China or BRICS to serve its own interests despite a potential reorganization of the world order?

United States

The prospect of TSGP similarly leaves the United States with several foreign policy considerations. First, the United States could write off the future geostrategic alignment of Africa in terms of grand strategy, essentially allowing Africa to continue its alignment with China. Such a strategy could downsize or even disband the geographically aligned Africa Command but also provide less foreign aid in general. Such a decision would accept a change in the international order. In contrast, if U.S. grand strategy includes competing with China in Africa, then foreign aid, economic investment, and security assistance in relation to Chinese investments could comprise programs to consider modification for Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger. This strategy could also include forcing African nations to make a choice in terms of geostrategic alignment in favor of the West. A last option would include better positioning U.S. foreign policy in collaboration with that of China and BRICS in cases where investments would bring better stability to African nations. This is a pragmatic approach but also an idealized one. In any case, TSGP should inspire the West to reevaluate their long-term grand strategy for Africa.

Africa

Finally, Africa remains in the driver's seat of its future trajectory in terms of strategic alignment and partnerships. Optimally, it might leverage multiple collaborations without choosing one partner over the other. This is particularly beneficial given the realities of strategic competition. States across the region are primarily driven by the need to ensure regime survival – be it politically, economically, or militarily. African states are aware of the strategic advantage in a competitive world order, especially concerning the renewed interest in the continent's resources by international powers (and more recently, middle powers). They also have every intention to make the most of it – part of which will entail pivoting and forging new alliances, while also ensuring that old friends are not completely cut off. Their ability to pivot efficiently and effectively will play a part in the emerging global order. At the moment, leaders in the near Sahel appear to be marching out in cooperation with BRICS as Western influence wanes. Autocratic tendencies have increasingly prevailed in near-Sahel states, fueled by high levels of intrastate conflict and the sharing of borders with competing nations and nonstate armed groups. Consequently, this massive project imposes additional risks to frail governmental structures. While embarking on TSGP, Algeria, Niger, and Algeria's diplomatic, economic, and security partnerships will be tested, leaving foreign policy opportunities for both the East and the West.

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content, however, remains that of the authors.

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