



THE NAVAL FORCES OF MAGHREB

In North Africa, marked by the historic rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, the naval arms race resembles more a game of influence than of belligerent intent. The accession of Tunisia, and moreover of Morocco (1995) and Algeria (2000) to the "Mediterranean Dialogue" of NATO underlines this will to exist on the international stage as indispensable Mediterranean actors.

GEOPOLITICS IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

As soon as one crosses the Strait of Gibraltar, under British rule, maritime issues of surrounding countries converge and intermingle. The safety of the Strait, crossed by 100 000 vessels per year, represents a major challenge for the world maritime trade. The two shores of the Mediterranean are taking advantage of this momentum by harbouring two of the fifty largest ports globally: Algeciras in Spain and Tangiers Med in Morocco.

While the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla prevent Morocco from asserting sovereignty over any territory claimed, the question of the demarcation between Moroccan and Algerian waters remains, too, unresolved. Only the maritime delimitation between Algeria and Tunisia, based on the principle of equidistance, was finally adopted in 2009. In addition to the relations between the Maghreb's nations, the development of their Navies is driven by the fight against drug trafficking and smuggling, as well as the migration and geopolitical consequences of the Libyan civil war.

MOROCCO, AN ALLY TO THE WEST

The historic rivalry between Morocco and Algeria, revived by the conflict in Western Sahara, is present in the maritime field. Stimulated by this competition, the two states have focused on the renovation and development of their naval forces. As for Tunisia, the Arab Spring and the consequences of the Libyan civil war have not allowed its navy to expand in step with its Maghreb neighbours.

The Royal Navy of Morocco, known for its efficiency and operational quality, differs from the quantitative logic of Algerian naval forces engaged in an important process of acquiring ships. In January 2014, the *Mohamed VI* multi-mission frigate (FREMM) with anti-submarine warfare vocation entered active service in the Moroccan navy. It is the largest warship of the country and reflects both the desire to compete with its neighbour and the objective to become an important ally for the West. The "5 + 5 Dialogue" is the preferred interface for discussions and training with the countries of the northern Mediterranean, but also one of the few exchange places with neighbouring Algeria. The country is also involved in NATO through the Mediterranean Dialogue and cooperates with France through the annual *Chebec* joint exercises. Meanwhile, Morocco intensely fight against drug traffickers crossing the sea to Spain to provide the European market with cannabis.

ALGERIA, FIRST IMPORTER OF WEAPONS IN MAGHREB

Algeria is one of the ten biggest arms importers in the world, with a budget of € 13 billion reserved for military spending. With its four *Kilo*-class submarines, plus two more under construction, the country is fast becoming a submarine power equal or superior to Italy, Spain or Germany. The navy has also strengthened its capacity for landing and logistical support, with the reception of two *Kalaat Beni* ships, modernized in Spain. Morocco seems convinced that this arms race is destined to threaten the balance of the Maghreb, while Algeria has its own objectives. The Libyan revolution has raised concerns related to immigration, to drug trafficking, but also to possible attacks against oil tankers and civil ships. From the East to the West, the country alternates between privileged relations with Russia, acquisition of Chinese heavy corvettes and enhanced cooperation project with NATO in the fight against terrorism at sea. Algeria seems to nurture new international ambitions and is positioned as a key state in the Mediterranean, both as an actor in the oil and gas trade and as a key driver of regional stability.

The Algerian Navy ranked 34th of world's combat fleets in 2014 whereas Morocco reached 40th place and Tunisia - whose naval forces concentrated on the coastal surveillance - the 61st position. Thus, beyond any classification, the missions of Maghreb's navies reflect well today's national issues, whether coastal defence, economic security or projection capabilities.



Joint exercise – French Navy and Algerian Navy (fight against pollution and distressed vessel assistance). Here Ailette towed by RHM El Mousir R703 (Toulon, April 2014) © V. Orsini / Navy