

## Little Evidence That Algeria Is Shifting From Russian to Chinese Arms Imports Amid Ukraine Conflict

By Lucas Winter  
OE Watch Commentary

The Algerian government recently announced a substantial increase to its 2023 defense budget, thanks largely to windfall profits from high global energy prices. The announcement has led to various rumors about the weapons systems that Algeria may seek to purchase from abroad. For years, the preponderance of Algerian advanced weaponry has been sourced from Russia. Russian weapons sales, however, are expected to decline as international sanctions and Ukraine-related domestic needs cut into export production. This had led to speculation that Chinese manufacturers will compete for market share in traditional Russian markets, including Algeria.

**The Russian official's visit coincided with media reports about Algeria allocating a huge budget for armaments in the coming years ...**

Belying speculation of declines in Russian arms exports to Algeria, the English-language news website *Africa Intelligence* recently published an unverified claim that Algeria will soon ink a 10-year "mega-contract" for Russian equipment, worth more than \$10 billion dollars.<sup>1</sup> The report, which is behind a paywall, was picked up and amplified by prominent Arabic-language news outlets. As reported in the first accompanying excerpt, from the Russian news website *RT Arabic*, the deal would likely include submarines, advanced Sukhoi aircraft, and long-range air defense systems. The rumored deal received some indirect support with the early November visit to Algiers by Dmitry Shugaev, director of Russia's Federal Service of Military-Technical Cooperation.

As reported in the second accompanying excerpt, from the Arabic-language website of the Turkish *Anadolu News Agency*, Shugaev heads a Russian state institution that oversees arms deals and foreign military cooperation. Some days prior, an Algeria-focused military observer who goes by the Twitter handle *@fares4302* circulated a photograph of an Algerian-Chinese meeting purportedly discussing the Chinese *SY-400* platform, which can be configured as a Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) or Short-Range Ballistic Missile System (SRBM).<sup>2</sup> The same user had earlier circulated a photograph that showed what appeared to be a model SY-400 in the headquarters of the Algerian



SR-5 Chinese 220mm Multiple Rocket Launcher (MRL).

Source: TRADOC Worldwide Equipment Guide, [https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/mediawiki/images/1/1a/SR-5\\_Chines\\_Guided\\_%28D%29.jpg](https://odin.tradoc.army.mil/mediawiki/images/1/1a/SR-5_Chines_Guided_%28D%29.jpg) Attribution: Public Domain

Land Forces.<sup>3</sup> The timing of the tweets suggested a link between Algerian interest in these systems and the current context, specifically the expected attrition of Russian SRBM exports due to the Ukraine conflict. However, the photograph of Chinese-Algerian SY-400 discussions turned out to be from Abu Dhabi's biannual IDEX weapons expo, which last occurred in February 2021—a full year before the Ukraine invasion. The photo displaying a model SY-400 in the headquarters of the Algerian Land Forces, furthermore, was from 2020 and may well depict a visually similar system possessed by Algerian forces, such as the Chinese *SR-5 MLRS*, which Algeria acquired in 2017. In sum, while China may indeed be moving to compete with Russia in certain market segments, there is of yet no hard evidence that it is doing so in response to a Ukraine-related decline in Russian exports, at least insofar as Algeria is concerned.

In mid-November, the Algerian president's office issued a decree forbidding government officials from talking to the media about defense issues without permission from the Defense Ministry. As reported in the third accompanying excerpt, from the Qatar-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, it is unclear whether the measure applies to media-friendly Army Chief of Staff Said Chengriha. The measure may well be related to the various rumors surrounding Algerian arms purchases, but it should also be considered in the context of an ongoing and highly opaque power struggle between competing factions in the Algerian military.

## Continued: Little Evidence That Algeria Is Shifting From Russian to Chinese Arms Imports Amid Ukraine Conflict

### Source:

مصدر إعلامي: الجزائر تتجه لتوقيع صفقة أسلحة ضخمة مع روسيا

(Media source: Algeria plans to sign huge weapons deal with Russia)," *RT Arabic* (Russian Arabic-language media outlet), 31 October 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/4s6f8c74>

*"Africa Intelligence" reported that negotiations are underway to conclude an agreement on Russian military supplies to Algeria over the next ten years. The deal will occur within the framework of Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's official visit to Moscow next December. The Algerian military leadership is particularly interested in acquiring submarines, aircraft including the Su-57, Su-34 and Su-30, and new air defense systems such as the S-400, Viking (Buk-M3) and Antey-4000.*

### Source:

إيران والمغرب: تشيخ وصواريخ ودرنوز

(Algerian military leader discusses military cooperation with Russian official)," *Anadolu News Agency*, 10 November 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/4tfdc5m5>

*"The Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation is a state institution that reports to the presidency in Moscow and oversees all arms deals and foreign military cooperation. The Russian official's visit coincided with media reports about Algeria allocating a huge budget for armaments in the coming years, amounting to about \$10 billion, though the Algerian authorities have not confirmed this information."*

### Source:

الرئيس الجزائري يقرر منع الحديث في مسائل الدفاع إلا بترخيص منه

(Algerian president forbids talking about defense matters without his permission)," *al-Araby al-Jadeed* (Qatari-aligned daily), 14 November 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8m36te>

*On Monday, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune issued a decree banning military and government officials from speaking to the press about information about military issues without permission from the Minister of Defense... It is not known whether this decision also includes the statements of the Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Said Chengriha, who constantly appears in speeches on state television during army-related activities.*

### Notes:

[1] The paywalled article can be found at: <https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa/2022/10/31/armaments-algiers-to-sign-new-dollars12bn-mega-contract-with-moscow,109839871-art>

[2] The tweet reads: "An Algerian military delegation in China is probably receiving explanations about the Sy-400 missile system." A comment below notes that the picture is from IDEX. <https://twitter.com/fares4302/status/1588516913541705729>

[3] The tweet reads: "From the headquarters of the Algerian Land Forces a mock-up of a surface-to-surface missile system appears, apparently the Chinese system SY-400." <https://twitter.com/fares4302/status/1583753579399036928>