



## Defense or Domination? Building Algerian Power With Russian Arms

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**OE Watch Commentary:** Algeria is undertaking a major arms acquisition program designed to enhance its regional standing and make it difficult for terrorists or insurgent forces to operate on Algerian territory. To this end, it has become a major purchaser of Russian arms that are often battle-proven in Syria. When it was initially formed in 1962 from anti-colonial guerrilla units, the Algerian People's National Armed Forces (Armée Nationale Populaire—ANP) possessed only captured or abandoned French arms as well as some Chinese and Egyptian equipment. Within a year, the Soviet Union began offering weapons on credit at favorable terms. By the time of the Soviet collapse, some 90 percent of the ANP arsenal was Soviet in origin. With the military gear came thousands of Soviet advisors.

To reestablish Russia's role as Algeria's main arms supplier, President Vladimir Putin canceled a Soviet-era Algerian military debt of \$4.7 billion dollars in 2006, in return for an Algerian commitment to buy \$7.5 billion worth of Russian weaponry. Aided by an upsurge in energy prices that helped fund the purchases, Algeria became Russia's third largest customer for military goods. A quick look at some of Algeria's most recent Russian arms purchases illustrates how this North African state is building a modern and capable army:

- Two hundred modernized Russian T-90SA main battle tanks were delivered to Algeria in 2016. This year, Algeria is taking delivery of roughly 300 BMPT Terminator II armored fighting vehicles.
- In May, Algeria became the fifth known purchaser of Russia's TOS-1A Blazing Sun multi-barrel mobile rocket launcher.
- Earlier this year, Russia began delivery of four regiments of the Iskander-E (SS-26 Stone) short-range mobile ballistic-missile system. Each regiment consists of 12 launchers and about 30 support vehicles.
- In a sign of the enhanced defense cooperation between Russia and Algeria, the latter field-tested the new Russian Pantsir-SM mobile anti-aircraft system in June. The Pantsir-SM is a greatly improved version of the Pantsir-S1 system, using phased-array radars for target acquisition and tracking. Algeria is expected to be a major purchaser.

Precision targeting of Algerian weapons will be much improved thanks to the ten-year agreement Algeria signed in June, allowing its military to use the Russian Global Navigation Satellite System (Globalnaya Navigatsionnaya Sputnikovaya Sistema—GLONASS). Heretofore, India has been the only other state granted use of the system.

This summer, Algeria is receiving the last of its 42 previously purchased Russian Mi-28NE Night Hunters, an all-weather, two-seat attack helicopter designed to target armor but also useful for reconnaissance and operations against ground forces. Moreover, the ANP is taking delivery of 39 upgraded Mi-171Sh SuperHip military transport helicopters, refurbished in Russia with the addition of an optronic ball, the Shturm-V precision-guided-missile system and Ataka supersonic missiles.

In September, Algiers will take delivery of its first Russian-made Project 22160 patrol vessel. Three more of the 1,300-ton ships will be built in Algeria. Other naval acquisitions include four Russian-made Project 636 Varshavyanka Kilo-class submarines, with one already delivered and another undergoing sea trials. These new submarines are an improvement on the two Project 636M Kilo-class submarines already in Algerian service and are largely intended for coastal defense.

Moscow hopes that arms sales and military cooperation agreements will bolster Russia's position in Algeria, but its goal of establishing a naval base at the port of Mers al-Kabir still appears distant. Algeria continues to try to establish some balance in its international arms purchases, but has let it be known that it is increasingly interested in technology-transfer agreements to permit the development of its own arms industry.

Algeria maintains its constitutional prohibition on military deployment outside the country and a strict policy of regional non-interference. While some of the Russian equipment is useful for counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism work, the rest seems better suited for defensive use against Moroccan, Libyan or European opponents. With Russian assistance, the ANP is now the second-most powerful military in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (McGregor)**

**Source:** "Algeria orders Project 22160 patrol vessels from Russia," *Defence Web*, 29 May 2018. [http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51857:algeria-orders-project-22160-patrol-vessels-from-russia&catid=51:Sea&Itemid=106](http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51857:algeria-orders-project-22160-patrol-vessels-from-russia&catid=51:Sea&Itemid=106)

*Algeria has agreed to acquire one new Project 22160 patrol vessel from Russia and build another three locally...Russian defence minister Sergey Shoigu said one of the reasons for Algeria acquiring the Project 22160 was its performance off the Syrian coast...*

*Algeria is receiving two new Project 636 Kilo class submarines from Russia, with the first about to be delivered and the second nearing sea trials. Algeria has apparently also ordered two additional Kilo 877EKM vessels, for delivery in 2020-2022.*