



Chinese Military and Commercial Cooperation with Tunisia

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese investments in Tunisia appear to be on the rise, particularly after the Tunisian government signed up for China's One Belt One Road Initiative in July 2018. Furthermore, the Chinese military is looking to deepen relations with its Tunisian counterpart in the next year, as detailed in the accompanying passages from local media sources.

In the spring of 2018, the Tunisian government put out a tender for bids to extract phosphate ore from the Sra Ouertane deposits, located in the country's economically depressed central province of El Kef. As noted in the first accompanying passage, from Tunisia's official press agency, the sole offer came from China. The government appears intent on opening the mine to generate valuable employment and revenue opportunities, though environmental and profitability concerns may yet prevent the project from going forward.

A more ambitious Chinese investment proposal, detailed in the second accompanying excerpt from *Sputnik*, involves Tunisia's Mediterranean port city of Zarzis (Jarjis), located in the southern province of Medenine near the border with Libya. A September 2018 Memorandum of Understanding calls for Chinese investment to expand the city's existing industrial zone, along with the construction of a 2.5-kilometer bridge connecting it to the nearby island of Djerba and a 140-kilometer railway connecting it to the main land route linking Tunisia and Libya. These projects, according to a Tunisian minister, would "change the face" of southern Tunisia.

China is also strengthening its linkages with Tunisia's military. The third accompanying excerpt, from a 31 December 2018 Tunisian Defense Ministry press release, notes that China recently pledged to provide Tunisia with unspecified military equipment, "according to the needs of the military." Military collaboration between the two is expected to grow in 2019, with a newly established "joint Tunisian-Chinese military committee" to be the main vehicle for this cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Tunisia Administrative Map.

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“...the creation of a joint Tunisian-Chinese military committee, which will hold its first round in China in 2019, and which will represent a good framework for supporting this cooperation.”

Source:

من أكبر المناجم في العالم : تونس تتلقى عرضا وحيدا من الصين لاستغلال منجم سراورتان بالكاف
“One of the largest deposits in the world: Tunisia receives a single bid from China to mine the Sra Ouertane deposit in El Kef,” *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse* via *Jawhara FM*, 27 December 2018. <https://goo.gl/KYY3Eg>

The only bid for exploiting the Sra Ouertane Phosphate mine, in the south of El Kef Province, is currently being studied. It was made by China and aims at extracting the surface phosphate ore deposits, which according to initial estimates total 10 billion tons, making it one of the largest deposits in the world and which can be mined for many consecutive decades.

Source:

وقعت الحكومة التونسية والصين على اتفاقيات لتنفيذ مشاريع بنى تحتية وإنشاء منطقة صناعية جنوبي تونس
“Tunisian and Chinese governments sign agreement on infrastructure and industrial zone projects in southern Tunisia,” *Sputnik*, 5 September 2018. <https://goo.gl/UdpPqM>

In press statements, the Tunisian minister of state and real estate affairs said that these projects will change the face of the south and benefit all of Tunisia. “China and Tunisia have been quietly working on these intended projects for two years. Other similar projects are being worked on in the center and northwest areas”... this China-Tunisia agreement aims to build a close partnership, especially given Tunisia's joining the One Belt One Road Initiative in July 2018. These projects are particularly important given their proximity to the Tunisia-Libya border along the Mediterranean Sea, which will contribute to strengthening trade and economic flows between the countries, provided the situation stabilizes in Libya.

Source:

إمضاء اتفاقية هبة صينية لفائدة المؤسسة العسكرية
“Agreement signed for Chinese gift to the military,” *National Defense Ministry Press Office*, 31 December 2018. <http://www.press.defense.tn/?p=1256>

During the meeting between Tunisian Defense Minister Abdel Karim al-Zubaidi and Chinese Ambassador Wang Wenbin at the defense ministry headquarters this afternoon, an agreement was signed for China to donate equipment to Tunisia, according to the needs of the military. The defense minister praised Chinese support for Tunisia in all domains, including military cooperation, which has in recent years grown and which the military has used to improve its capabilities. He noted that the creation of a joint Tunisian-Chinese military committee, which will hold its first round in China in 2019, and which will represent a good framework for supporting this cooperation.