

Director of the Laboratory of International Relations
Research and Studies at the University of Algiers III
Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche

“Türkiye, Algeria, Syria, Libya and Egypt should form a strategic alliance against the US Mediterranean aggression”



He has Ph.D. in political sciences and international relations (1987), University of York, U.K., also a certificate from the International Center of Pedagogic Studies (C.E.P.E.C) Craaponne, Lyon, France (1993) and a Certificate on National Security, Institute of Political Science, Christian Albrechts University (1994), Kiel, Germany. He frequently wrote articles in different journals and newspapers as well as present various papers in national and international seminars about democracy, domestic politics, security, economy, cultural, strategy and international subjects especially about the Mediterranean zone, African issues, the Arab World, the Maghreb and Europe, Arab - Chinese relations, Sino - African relations. He is the Chairman of the Algerian-Chinese Friendship Association (ACFA) and a member of the Algerian Western Sahara People's Solidarity Committee (CNASPS). He has published 11 books on Algeria, Africa, Western Sahara, foreign policy and Arab Spring.

"Western Great Powers have heavily used the Mediterranean Sea in their colonial campaigns and strategic dimensions at the expense of non-Western countries in the Mediterranean Zone. No one but America gains from any aggressive military action. America profited from the invasion of Iraq, profited from its attitude towards Syria, profited from Libya, etc. That's why every country should take this seriously, especially those in the Mediterranean region that need to cooperate more. Türkiye, Algeria, Syria, Libya, and Egypt—all these countries should be strategic allies, and they should be in greater consensus with each other instead of getting into conflicts. The exploitation of petroleum and gas, which are some of the main issues that Mediterranean countries face, should be studied seriously. They should be solved politically instead of engaging in wars and conflicts with each other; if not, in the end, the winner will be America and European countries."

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche, Director of the Laboratory of International Relations Research and Studies at the University of Algiers III, answered Işıkğün Akfırat's questions.

Recently, the Mediterranean has been increasingly mentioned in military and political strategy texts. How do you see the importance of the Mediterranean in terms of world geopolitics?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: The majority of the crises that we have been experiencing over the last 15 years have occurred in the Mediterranean zone, beginning with Syria, Libya, and even the intervention in Mali via the Mediterranean Sea. The latter has always been a strategically important zone in which great powers have

fought over who gains the most. During World War II, Mediterranean countries under Western colonialism were forced to participate in colonialist struggles at the expense of the region's people. Algeria, under French colonialism, served as a military base for Britain, France, and the USA in their military attacks against Germany. Algeria, with a long and rich history as a state and an area more than four times larger than France, coupled with a Mediterranean coast almost twice as long as that of French Mediterranean Sea frontiers, was considered a part of French territory.



One of the NATO protests in Türkiye this year.
(TGB, 2023)

Western Great Powers have heavily used the Mediterranean Sea in their colonial campaigns and strategic dimensions at the expense of non-Western countries in the Mediterranean Zone. NATO used Türkiye to sow discord in Iraq (2003) and the Mediterranean region since 2011, resulting in the so-called Arab Spring. NATO doesn't serve the security of Türkiye; it serves Europe and the USA. On the contrary, an unstable situation in Türkiye means weakening Islamic countries and hence weakening anti-Israel countries. In addition, the West will never let a country like Türkiye be a leading country in the region, especially the Mediterranean zone.

In a broad picture, according to recent developments, why do you think the Mediterranean is becoming more important in Western strategy? Which state actors have been involved in a geopolitical confrontation in the eastern Mediterranean?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: I think Britain is a key state actor in recent developments. Britain is very much integrated into the eastern Mediterranean situation. As you know, they have the upper hand on most of Greece, Southern Cyprus, the Middle East, and the so-called State of Israel. So that means

Britain is a great factor in making decisions in the region.

The second reason, I think, would be Israel. Israel's cooperation with the U.S. and some European countries aims to prevent Türkiye from having an influence in the Mediterranean. If Türkiye became a great power in the Mediterranean Sea, Israel would be in a dangerous situation, and especially now, Türkiye has awakened and is alarmed by the West's tactics against it. Türkiye has begun to depart from western containment, and they see Türkiye in the next few years being more positive and more cooperative with Syria, Mediterranean countries, Arab countries, Iran, Russia, and many countries in Asia. That means the escalation of undermining Türkiye in the Mediterranean would also be increased by the U.S., some European countries, and especially by Britain and U.S. allies in the Mediterranean zone.

USA has announced that it is shifting its geopolitical focus to the Pacific from the Middle East. Some analyze this as meaning we will see a more restrained effect on the East Mediterranean and the Middle East from the USA. Do you agree with them? How do you think this shift will affect our region?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Well, I think the Ukrainian crisis has changed a lot of things. It has diverted the attention of the U.S. and Europe. The U.S. is pushing Europe more to guide its strategic presence in the Mediterranean zone. Now, Europe is in a very weak position. The U.S. guides them, and they

have become more dependent on it. The U.S. is returning to its traditional politics, which is to enforce the NATO alliance to maintain its presence in the Mediterranean countries and to impose sanctions on any country that can undermine its politics. Türkiye, Russia, and China can be considered as those countries. That's why Russia's maintaining and securing its national borders, national values, and influence mean that it will be a gain for Türkiye and a gain to weaken the western domination of the world, which is one-sided politics instead of multi-polar politics.

I think Türkiye should welcome multi-polar politics rather than stay in a uni-polar system because there's no gain for any country in the uni-polar system. Türkiye should be a part of BRICS and cooperate more with China on the Belt and Road Initiative. This will support the Turkish economy more because it is now more artificial than structural, as it is run and handed by the banks of the U.S., not Türkiye. So, if Türkiye does not establish a serious economic basis for its existence as soon as possible, the Turkish economy could be threatened at any time. We witnessed how Türkiye suffered when the U.S. tried to bring down Türkiye financially, and they still threaten Türkiye as such.

If Türkiye can now depend on itself, economic punishment will not affect Türkiye as seriously as it used to affect it 20 years ago. Economic punishment for Iran has not brought down the Iranian economy. Iran is getting out of it. Türkiye should draw lessons from Russian and Iranian politics and adopt more independent policies from America and the West.



Regarding the role of Algeria, which is a rising state both in Mediterranean politics and South African politics, we see, as you mentioned, BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization are on the agenda of the Algerian government.

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Algeria has always pursued a non-aligned policy. It means balancing relations with the West and the East, which means with the U.S. and Europe the same as with Russia and China. Of course, Europeans

and Americans prefer Algeria to be a member of their side. A position that has never been and will never be taken by Algeria. Algeria doesn't want to depend on one camp against the other. The President of Algeria, Abdel Madrid Tabboune, continuously affirms that Algeria's stance is to have friendships and strategic relations with all the great powers and to go wherever national interests lead. For now, national policy is oriented towards integrating into BRICS, while Algeria's economic relations are more with the European Union and the USA.

For decades, the West, like the East, demonstrated a relative understanding of Algeria's position. Recently, however, we have seen some Western extremists with a colonial mind criticize countries with a neutral position and seek solutions to regional and international crises, including the Ukrainian crisis.

Türkiye has announced that it has a stake in joining BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Algeria also has a stake in joining those organizations. What do you think about this new orientation considering the multi-polar world reality and its effect on the balance of power in the East Mediterranean? How do you see Russia and China involving themselves more in Mediterranean politics in this respect?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Algeria paid the price for the security of the Mediterranean through the military offensiveness of Europeans and Americans. We all witnessed the operation against Kaddafi. Algeria paid the price, including for the terrorist attacks on the gas platform and the Algerian Sahara. Unfortunately, Türkiye was used, which was a big mistake. Algeria was against any intervention. Fortunately, Türkiye is now cohesive with Algeria and more cooperative with Algeria on a non-intervention military strategy.

I think military interventions allow Western countries to continue their traditional position. No one but America will gain from any offensive military action. America gained from its occupation of Iraq,

gained from its position against Syria, gained from Libya, etc., and the other countries are out now; they just paid the price. So that's why every country should take this seriously, especially the countries in the Mediterranean zone, which should be more cooperative. Türkiye, Algeria, Syria, Libya, and Egypt—all these countries should be strategic allies, and they should be in greater consensus with each other instead of getting into conflicts. The exploitation of petroleum and gas, which are some of the main issues that Mediterranean countries face, should be studied seriously. They should be solved politically instead of engaging in wars and conflicts with each other; if not, in the end, the winner will be America and European countries.

What about the Belt and Road Initiative? What do you think about its importance, especially in the Mediterranean and North Africa? What do you think this initiative offers the region, and what can the region offer in return?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Well, as you know, the southern coast of the Mediterranean is longer and surrounded by Türkiye, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. This means the southern region has more strategic points because it opens to Asia, Africa, and the Atlantic Ocean. So that means those countries should sit together and impose policies for the presence of great powers in the region. America is 6,000 kilometers away from this region. I don't understand why America's presence in this region is not controlled by the consensus of these countries.



Demonstrators take part in an anti-NATO protest ahead of the NATO summit, which was held on June 28 and June 30, 2022, in Madrid, Spain. (BJ Review, 2022)

Considering the pressure from the West to contain the regional powers, do you think the Belt and Road Initiative can provide more space for independent policies and alternative ways for the regional countries to develop?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Yes, Algeria is a model for that. Algeria has set the structure, in terms of ports, in terms of roads, in terms of railways, in terms of setting laws and regulations for a base. Algeria is a base and a model for cooperation with China. China and Algeria have signed two strategic cooperation agreements in the last three months. That means China sees Algeria as a

serious economic partner.

That's why, as soon as Algeria demanded to be integrated into the BRICS, China accepted it and welcomed Algeria. Therefore, Algeria is a model and a door for cooperation with China in Africa. As you know, we have motorways reaching towards West Africa, South Africa, and the East of Africa. That means I think the cooperation between Algeria and China will be tripled, especially after the visit of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to China soon. He will visit both China and Russia. He will also visit France. It means they will have balanced international politics rather than going only to one camp or the other camp.

We witnessed the U.S. being more positive towards Africa at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit held in Washington, DC, rather than hawkish, pointing fingers at African states. It was like an attempt to calm down Africa. What is your prediction for the U.S.'s Mediterranean and North African policies? Recently, the U.S. said, "We respect your international affairs" regarding Algeria regarding CAATSA sanctions. Now we see a more careful, cautious approach towards the African States, so how do you evaluate their approach and the position of the African States?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: Well, the U.S. has always been as such. When the governments come together, they use their official approach, discussing concepts like solidarity, friendship, etc. Still, at the same time, they provoke other non-governmental institutions to undermine African policies, including Algeria's. It happened when 27 senators signed against Algeria for cooperating with Russia militarily. The European Parliament also made comments. They sent an issued statement about so-called human rights. That means they have two faces. The official face: "Yes, yes, we are friends, we are cooperative, we respect you." Simultaneously, they say, "It was not us; it is another non-governmental institution; we can't do that." But they know that the Mediterranean and African countries and their people are no longer the same as they have been with Europe and the U.S. before.

As you know, in 15 African countries, all the people there have been manifesting

daily against Western influence and seeking more cooperation with Russia and China. That means the absolute truth they had before is no longer apparent in the picture. That's why, perhaps, America has more appealing policies towards African governments, as seen when they met in Washington.

The final question: Do you see the U.S. and European interests completely overlap in Mediterranean affairs, or can we expect some diversions on the part of European countries from the U.S. politics regarding the Mediterranean?

Prof. Dr. Smail Debeche: There are two kinds of approaches towards the U.S. in Europe. The non-official approach is largely anti-US policy and strategy, especially in countries like France, Italy, and Germany. They see it as being used by the USA for the latter's Great Power mission rather than for European interests. Some argue that America has used Europe to further its strategic interests at the expense of Europe. Officially, the notion of an independent Europe asserted by the Council of the European Union is rapidly fading, giving way to the United States' traditional policy in Europe based on the Marshall Plan following World War II. The Ukraine Crisis affirmed such a European assumption and approach. Influential European countries such as France and Germany have been trying to differentiate themselves from the United States. However, they haven't yet put their intentions into action. 🌸