

Algeria: Britain Fuels Regime's Repression

Thursday 25 June 2020, by [HAMOUCHE Hamza](#) (Date first published: 3 June 2020).

BP signed its first joint venture in Algeria in 1995, only three years after the military coup that cancelled the first multi-party legislative elections in Algeria since independence from French colonial rule.

The contract was signed while a brutal civil war was raging, with systematic violence from both the state and Islamist fundamentalists.

This signature has framed both the British government's and BP's engagement with Algeria over the past 30 years. It continues to shape the current context of repression, impunity, and corruption. Their eagerness to break into Algeria in the 1990s, despite the violent crackdown being enacted by the state, indicates the priorities of the British establishment. The UK favoured its own economic interests and acquiesced in the Algerian regime's 'Dirty War' of the 1990s. The same approach has continued ever since.

UK foreign policy aims to lock North African natural gas into the European and British grids and is heavily influenced by arms and fossil fuel interests. As a result, the Conservative government has courted the Algerian regime and supported arms sales between British companies and Algeria as well as encouraging an expanded role for BP. In 2010 Algeria was listed as a 'priority market' by UK Trade and Investment's Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO).

A report produced by UKTI DSO in 2013 claimed "Algeria has arguably supplanted South Africa as the African region's largest and most dynamic market, affording major export opportunities for global suppliers."

One of the suppliers to take advantage was British-Italian military helicopter manufacturer AgustaWestland, which secured a deal to produce helicopters reportedly worth over \$1bn in 2016.

This comes despite the regime's dismal human rights record and intense repression of democratic movements in recent years.

The Conservative government has also worked to encourage investment in Algeria by other UK firms: total trade between the two countries was £3.2bn in 2019, up 68 percent on the previous year.

Today, Algeria is still ruled by a military dictatorship with a civilian façade.

Yet BP and the British government continue to ignore social movements and civil society, instead working with the intelligence agencies, training Special Forces and strengthening military and economic cooperation.

Despite its strategic importance and growing relations with Britain, Algeria is barely mentioned in the British media, due to a colonial perspective where the country is seen as the special reserve of France.

Gas Deals Ignore Human Rights

Algeria is one of the UK's closest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) providing countries. The UK and Algeria have a long history of LNG collaboration spanning fifty years, with the world's first commercial LNG shipment delivering fuel from Arzew to Canvey Island in the Thames Estuary.

Lord Risby, in his capacity as a special envoy, has paid several visits to Algeria since 2012, the latest took place in February 2020. The Algeria British Business Council, headed by Lady Olga Maitland, has also played a key role in facilitating these links, and counts oil companies BP, Equinor, Sunny Hill Energy and Petrofac as members. ABBC charges members for access to UK and Algerian government officials and hosts business networking events.

Such visits ignore the Foreign Affairs Committee's conclusions that business interests must be balanced with human rights.

Instead, the sole priority is making connections between British companies like BP and Shell and members of the Algerian regime. Britain consistently prioritises fossil fuel interests over human rights and democratic principles, and in the process is actively shoring up a highly repressive and corrupt regime.

Hamza Hamouchene is a London-based Algerian researcher and activist. He works for the Transnational Institute (TNI).

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Transnational Institute (TNI)

https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tradeunions_algerianuprising_0520_hires-1.pdf

Introduction: Trade unions and the Algerian uprising

A Year in the Streets

By: SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53734>

Algeria's Trade Unions: A history

By: LARABI Samir and SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53735>

Algeria: The Struggle in Kabylia

By: HAMOUCHENE Hamza and SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53736>

Algeria: The Battle for Change in the Classroom

By: HAMOUCHENE Hamza, SAMIR Bordj and SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53737>

Algeria: The Unemployed Movement

By: HAMOUCHENE Hamza

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53738>

Algeria: Trade Unions and the Hirak

By: LARABI Samir and SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53739>

Algeria: Women and the Fight for Liberation

By: SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53740>

Algeria: Students Build Unity in Struggle

By: LARABI Samir

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53741>

Algeria: Britain Fuels Regime's Repression

By: HAMOUCHENE Hamza

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53742>

Algeria: Preparing for the Struggle Ahead

By: HAMOUCHENE Hamza

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53743>

Algeria: Solidarity: A Guide to Action

By: SMITH Shelagh

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article53744>