

FMSO's Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project

Tracking Russian and Chinese military influence in states around the world

Instruments of Russian Military Influence in Tunisia

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OVERVIEW OF FMSO'S M-DIME RESEARCH PROJECT

The Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project is a dynamic effort from researchers at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO). Its goal is to provide Army leaders with a clear, comparative understanding of how China and Russia employ instruments of national power to obtain military influence around the world. The M-DIME framework is derived from the "DIME" concept, which classes instruments of national power into four types: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic. Based on this concept, the M-DIME framework gives more narrow attention to the instruments that China and Russia employ to gain military influence in third-party countries.

The M-DIME framework's purpose is to track and analyze the military influence of "Benefactor" countries (i.e. China and Russia) in select "Recipient" countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South and South-east Asia. Benefactor countries are assumed to engage in activities that result in them having increased military influence in Recipient countries to gain leverage over global rivals, competitors, and adversaries; for China and Russia, this means the United States. Within this framework, "military influence" is defined as the ability of a Benefactor country to shape or alter the attitudes, behaviors, and capabilities of actors within—and entities associated with—the armed forces of Recipient countries.

The M-DIME framework identifies 12 distinct instruments of national power employed by Benefactor countries to gain military influence in Recipient countries, three for each of the DIME categories. They are as follows:

DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENTS

- D1 Defense-Related Diplomacy
- D2 International Military Education and Training
- D3 Soft Power Activities

INFORMATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

- I1 Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment
- I2 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Support
- I3 Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications

MILITARY INSTRUMENTS

- M1 Formal Bilateral Military Engagements
- M2 Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements
- M3 Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements

ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS

- E1 Arms Transfers
- E2 Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements
- E3 Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

M-DIME analysis is based on qualitative assessments of Benefactor influence in Recipient countries along each of the 12 M-DIME instruments of influence. These assessments are made for the Benefactor's **Current Influence** (assessed as Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low, or Unobserved) and **Projected Influence** (assessed as Increasing, Steady, Decreasing, or Unknown). Current assessments are made based on activities from 2012 to the present, while future assessments are three-year forecasts.

The bulk of activities considered in the M-DIME Research Project involve members of the armed forces or defense sector personnel in both Benefactor and Recipient countries. Such activities include formal and informal military-to-military diplomacy, security cooperation engagements, and arms transfers. However, the M-DIME Research Project also tracks and analyzes Chinese and Russian activities that employ non-military instruments of influence but ultimately bear on the decision-making and capabilities of the Recipient country's armed forces. Such activities include Chinese and Russian collaboration with Benefactor states in media, communications technology, and strategic sectors.

The M-DIME Research Project's findings are derived from open-source research. Each M-DIME product is produced with the collaboration of analysts from across FMSO, frequently with the assistance of non-Department of Defense subject matter experts coming from academia, think tanks, and the private sector. Given its basis in open-source research, the M-DIME Research Project has an inherent limitation. It cannot track Chinese and Russian military influence activities that are deliberately kept secret. Consequently, assessments of Chinese and Russian influence based on instruments for which secrecy is important or where information would typically be classified by the Benefactor or Recipient countries—for instance, military-technology sharing or intelligence collaboration—are acknowledged to be made with low confidence. Assessments of **Projected Influence**, unless otherwise stated, are also made with low confidence given pervasive information gaps and the potential for bilateral dynamics to quickly shift. In certain cases, assessments are not made where open-source data is considered inconclusive

In sum, the M-DIME Research Project is a tool for U.S. Army and U.S. Government personnel to better understand the instruments of national power employed by China and Russia to gain global military influence and the impact these activities have on U.S. national security interests. Over time, FMSO will expand the body of research and assessments based on this framework, increasing its comparative value across Benefactor and Recipient countries.











KEY ASSESSMENTS

Russia’s current M-DIME influence in Tunisia is assessed as Very Low. Some of the most important instruments contributing to Russia’s current military influence in Tunisia include:

-  **Media Collaboration, Influence, and Alignment (I1).** Russia has demonstrated interest in Tunisia’s media sector and is working toward greater bilateral cooperation in the news sector, as two of the main news agencies in both countries have signed a cooperation agreement.
-  **Influence in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector (I2).** With Russian assistance, engineers from Tunisian aerospace company TELNET launched the first of a planned constellation of domestically produced satellites in 2021.

Russia’s projected M-DIME influence in Tunisia is assessed as Steady. Some of the most dynamic instruments informing Russia’s projected military influence in Tunisia include:

-  **Defense-Related Diplomacy (D1).** Russia has recently sought to boost bilateral cooperation with Tunisia in “all areas,” including addressing the rising levels of conflict in the region. The Russian Foreign Minister has frequently met with Tunisian representatives over the past three years to discuss collaboration, and both Moscow and Tunis reiterated their commitment to further relations between the two countries at the end of 2023. Although areas like economy and agriculture have been the focus of recent talks, both Tunisia and Russia have spoken of interest in defense and security cooperation to combat terrorism and ensure Tunisian national security.
-  **Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector (I2).** As recently as September 2023, Russia and Tunisia have stated that five satellites are under joint construction, with plans to expand space cooperation in the future.

DIPLOMATIC / INFORMATION			MILITARY / ECONOMIC					
	D1	Defense-Related Diplomacy		M1	Formal Bilateral Military Engagements			
	D2	International Military Education and Training		M2	Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements			
	D3	Soft Power Activities		M3	Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements			
	I1	Cultural/Media Outreach, Collaboration, Alignment		E1	Arms Transfers			
	I2	Information/Communications Technology Support		E2	Technology-Sharing, Joint Production Agreements			
	I3	Cooperation in Military Intelligence/Communications		E3	Trade/Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors			
CURRENT DEGREE OF INFLUENCE			PROJECTED FUTURE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE					
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	None/Unobserved	Increasing 	Steady 	Decreasing 

INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIA-TUNISIA RELATIONS

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Tunisia date back to the 1950s, although military relations between the two countries have been relatively minimal over the years. After the country gained independence in 1956, the first President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, and his successor, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, purposely kept the military weak for decades in order to avoid a coup.¹ It wasn't until the popular overthrow of the Ben Ali government in 2011 that the military became more of an active and influential force within the country, although it would remain somewhat limited in its power. In its early years, the Tunisian military acted mostly as a peacekeeping force in the region, working primarily with the UN and the United States to secure the border with Algeria. In 1960, Tunisian troops were some of the first to arrive in Congo to assist with peacekeeping efforts under the auspices of the UN. Although the Russian embassy in Tunisia was opened in 1960, the first meeting between Russia and Tunisia on bilateral cooperation did not occur until 2000. Since then, military cooperation between the two countries has taken a lower priority than their cooperation in the technology and economy sectors. Although Russia has promised military supplies and educational training to Tunisia in recent years, there is little concrete evidence to suggest any of this assistance

has come to fruition.

Tunisia's military has mainly collaborated with the United States and other NATO member countries, while Russia has focused more on military relations with Tunisia's neighbors, Algeria and Libya. Tunisia's military ties with Washington date back decades, as the United States was the first major power to recognize Tunisia's sovereignty, supplying Tunisia's military as early as the late 1950s. The United States has remained among Tunisia's largest military suppliers to this day.² Washington also seeks to strengthen Tunisia's counterterrorism efforts in the region, as well as to promote good governance and economic growth.³ Additionally, the United States has an interest in preventing malign and destabilizing activity from Russia in Africa and designated Tunisia as a major non-NATO ally.⁴⁵ Military cooperation between the United States and Tunisia remains strong—the two held their 36th Joint Military Commission in 2024 to discuss the ongoing strengthening of their bilateral partnership.⁶⁷ In 2023 and 2024, Tunisia was one of the African countries to host the “Africa Lion” exercises, the largest U.S.-led military exercise on the African continent.⁸⁹

TUNISIA AT A GLANCE

Capital	Tunis ¹⁰
Population	12,048,847 (2024) ¹¹
GDP per Capita	\$12,300 (2023 est.) ¹²
Head of Government	Kamel Maddouri ¹³
Head of State	Kais Saied ¹⁴
Minister of Defense	Imed Memmich ¹⁵
Chief of General Staff	BG Mohamed El Ghoul (Army Chief of Staff) ¹⁶
Military Expenditure (total)	\$1.208 billion (2023) ¹⁷
Military Expenditure (% of GDP)	2.4% (2023) ¹⁸
Armed Service Branches	Tunisian Armed Forces: Tunisian Army, Tunisian Air Force, Tunisian Navy ¹⁹
Active Armed Forces Personnel	Approximately 35,000 Active Personnel (2023) ²⁰

D - Diplomatic Instruments

Russia's military-diplomatic relations with Tunisia have been minimal. While defense-related diplomatic visits have been rare in the past, they are becoming more frequent. There were multiple meetings in 2023, as Russia and Tunisia have expressed a willingness to cooperate at higher levels to confront rising conflict in North Africa and work toward regional security. Military education and training programs between the two countries have been minimal due to cooperation between the United States and Tunisia in this area, and Russian soft power activities relevant to military influence in Tunisia are scant.



D1: Defense-Related Diplomacy

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Steady

- **Since 2014, Russian and Tunisian foreign ministry officials have met several times to discuss collaboration regarding regional security and countering terrorism.**
 - » Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Tunisian officials twice in 2023,^{21 22 23} as well as in 2021,²⁴ 2020,²⁵ 2017,²⁶ 2016,²⁷ and 2014,²⁸ to discuss security cooperation and regional security issues, including ensuring Tunisian border security.
 - » At a meeting between Lavrov and Tunisian Minister for Foreign Affairs Nabil Ammar in Moscow in September 2023, Ammar stated that all areas of cooperation, including security and peacekeeping, are up for future discussion.²⁹
- **There have been no notable diplomatic interactions between Russian and Tunisian military personnel.**
- **Defense-related diplomacy between Russia and Tunisia is likely to remain steady as the two countries have recently expressed intent to broaden relations and bilateral cooperation but have not specified how this will impact defense collaboration.**



D2: International Military Education and Training Programs

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- **In September 2014, Russia pledged to provide Tunisia with counterterrorism training and equipment. However, it is unclear whether this training ever occurred.**
 - » Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Tunisian Foreign Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui in Moscow to discuss security threats and terrorism present at Tunisia's border with Libya. In addition to pledging to provide counterterrorism training, Russia promised equipment including helicopters, night-vision goggles, and bulletproof vests in order to fight Al-Qaeda and ISIS.³⁰ However, it is unclear if this assistance ever occurred.
- **Tunisia has established a closer relationship with the United States and other NATO countries, and in the last year has completed U.S.- and NATO-led military training exercises.**
 - » Tunisia participates in NATO's Defence Education Enhancement Program (DEEP), along with 14 other countries, working to strengthen its defense and military capabilities.³¹
 - » The 35th annual U.S.-Tunisia Joint Military Commission took place at the U.S. Africa Command headquarters located in Stuttgart, Germany, where issues such as security cooperation and strengthened bilateral relations were discussed.³²
- **Beyond seemingly unfulfilled pledges of assistance, no collaboration between Russia and Tunisia regarding military education and training programs was observed. This trend will probably remain over the next three years, given Tunisia's close relationship with the United States and NATO member countries relevant to this instrument.**



D3: Soft Power Activities

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Steady

- **Military soft power activities between Russia and Tunisia have been minimal in the past 10 years, with no evidence of military expos or humanitarian activity involving armed forces.**
 - » In December 2019, a Russian Baltic Fleet training ship, Perekop, visited Tunisia for several days. The cadets aboard the ship visited Russian historical sites in Tunisia.³³
- **Activity between Russia and Tunisia is expected to remain steady in the next three years, as there is minimal activity within this instrument and there are no signs of increasing or decreasing efforts.**

I - Informational Instruments

Russia's use of informational instruments to gain military influence in Tunisia is notable and increasingly significant. Two main news agencies in Russia and Tunisia recently signed a professional media cooperation agreement. Additionally, Russian and Tunisian space-focused civilian entities have jointly produced and launched a satellite, with several more spacecraft currently under construction.



I1: Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment

Current Influence: Low

Projected Influence: Increasing

- **In September 2023, Agence Tunis Afrique Presse—one of the three main news agencies in Tunisia—and the Russian news agency Sputnik signed a cooperation agreement with the goal of bilateral media cooperation and strengthening relations between the two countries.**
 - » Signed by Agence Tunis Afrique Presse CEO, Najeh Missaoui, and Sputnik Director for International Cooperation, Vasily Pushkov, the agreement includes the exchange of press delegations, exchange of news between the two countries, and right to access and create news content.³⁴
- **The Tunisian public appears to have relatively positive views of Russia.**
 - » A poll from January 2023 found that although a majority of respondents felt neutral about Russia, overall feelings towards Russia in Tunisia are relatively positive.³⁵ This is on par with findings from previous years, as Tunisia has consistently been one of the few Middle Eastern countries to have relatively positive feelings about Russia. In 2017 and 2018, more than half of respondents from Tunisia were found to be confident in Russia and Vladimir Putin.^{36,37}
- **Russia influence via this instrument is expected to increase, as the cooperation agreement between Agence Tunis Afrique Presse and Sputnik indicates interest from both countries in strengthening relations and promoting collaboration between major media sources.**



I2: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector

Current Influence: Medium

Projected Influence: Increasing

- **Relations between Russia and Tunisia related to ICT are especially pronounced in the space sector. The first Tunisian satellite was launched by a Russian rocket in 2021, and several agreements between civilian entities have been signed recently.**
 - » In March 2021, the first Tunisian satellite, Challenge One, was launched from the Russian rocket Soyuz-2 from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Challenge One specializes in Internet of Things technology,^{38,39} which refers to the network of internet-connected devices able to collect and exchange data.
 - » Agreements were signed between Tunisian aerospace and telecommunications company TELNET Holding and Russian entities SPUTNIX, Roscosmos State Corporation, and the Russian Space Agency in July 2019,⁴⁰ August 2021,⁴¹ and August 2023,⁴² respectively.
 - » In September 2023, Lavrov and Ammar met in Moscow, where Lavrov announced “good prospects” for space cooperation between Russia and Tunisia. Companies from both countries signed an agreement to begin work on an additional five spacecraft, following the launch of Challenge One.⁴³
 - » The goal of this cooperation is to develop Internet of Things applications, as well as space exploration and technological advancement.⁴⁴
- **ICT cooperation between Russia and Tunisia has been increasing since 2019, and the confirmed construction of five additional spacecraft indicates further future collaboration.**



I3: Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- **There is no publicly available information about Russian attempts to cooperate with Tunisia in military and intelligence communications.**
- **Due to Tunisia's close intelligence and security relationship with the United States, there is little to no future activity expected between Russia and Tunisia regarding this instrument.**

M - Military Instruments

Evidence of agreements or interactions between Russia and Tunisia in the military sphere is minimal. Tunisia is hesitant to allow a foreign military presence within its borders and has a longstanding, close military relationship with the United States.



M1: Formal Bilateral Military Engagements

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- ***There have been no reported formal military engagements between Russia and Tunisia.***
- ***Tunisia has a firm stance against foreign troops or military bases in the country.***
 - » In June 2021, Tunisian President Kais Saied announced he would not allow any foreign troops or military bases on Tunisian territory. This statement was delivered on the 65th anniversary of Tunisia's National Armed Forces and came after the United States expressed its intent to send military trainers to Tunisia, following Russia's involvement in Libya.⁴⁵
 - » In June 2020, Tunisian Defense Minister Imed Hazgui made a similar statement, asserting that Tunisia will continue to maintain control of its land, seas, and airspace.⁴⁶
- ***Projected Russian influence via this instrument in the next three years is unknown because of the lack of observed activities.***



M2: Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- ***There is no publicly available information about Russian attempts to conduct informal or multilateral military engagements with Tunisia.***
 - » Instead, Tunisia has partnered with NATO countries for multilateral military engagements, such as Africa Lion.
- ***Projected Russian influence via this instrument in the next three years is unknown because of the lack of observed activities.***



M3: Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Steady

- ***Russia and Tunisia have signed only one defense cooperation agreement since 2012.***
 - » In 2016, Russia and Tunisia signed an intergovernmental agreement on military-technical cooperation.⁴⁷ The agreement aimed to boost cooperation in the areas of weapons and military equipment supply, training, military-technical assistance, and development and production of military products.⁴⁸
- ***Russian influence in Tunisia via this instrument is likely to remain steady in the next three years given Tunisia's longstanding defense and security agreements with the United States.***

E - Economic Instruments

There is no evidence that Russia and Tunisia have engaged in arms transfers or technology-sharing and joint production agreements since 2012, and Tunisia has a longstanding relationship with the United States and other NATO member countries in this area. Trade and cooperation in strategic sectors are decreasing, as the most recent agreement between the two was signed in 2016.



E1: Arms Transfers

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- **No arms transfers have occurred between Russia and Tunisia since 2012.**
- **It is expected that Russian influence in Tunisia via this instrument will remain unobserved, as Tunisia partners with the United States and other NATO member countries when it comes to arms transfers.**
 - » Since 2012, Tunisia has imported arms exclusively from NATO member countries, with the exception of 10 armored personnel carriers received from the United Arab Emirates in 2016.⁴⁹



E2: Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- **No technology-sharing or joint production agreements were observed between Russia and Tunisia since 2012.**
- **Tunisia has made such agreements with the United States and is therefore not expected to pursue such relations with Russia in the next three years.**



E3: Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Decreasing

- **Russia has minimal trade and cooperation with Tunisia in strategic commodities and sectors; the last such agreement between the two countries, pertaining to nuclear energy cooperation, was signed in 2016.**
 - » In 2016, Russia and Tunisia signed a nuclear energy cooperation agreement intended to improve Tunisia's nuclear infrastructure, including building energy and research nuclear reactors and developing its uranium deposits.^{50 51} It is unclear how much of this development has taken place.
 - » In 2015, Russia and Tunisia signed an MoU to cooperate on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, laying the groundwork for nuclear infrastructure development, research, and other related activities.⁵²
- **Russian influence via this instrument is likely to decrease in the next three years given the drop-off in activity following the nuclear energy agreement between Russia and Tunisia in 2016.**

CONCLUSIONS

Russia's current M-DIME influence in Tunisia is assessed as Very Low. Russia's military involvement in Tunisia is minimal and mostly occurs in the informational sector, with some involvement in the diplomatic sphere. Russia and Tunisia's recent media collaboration agreement indicates that Russia could exert some narrative influence over the news that Tunisians consume (I1). *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse* has agreed to partner with Russian news outlet *Sputnik* as of 2023. There are also partnerships between Tunisia and Russia regarding space and satellite development, including agreements between Tunisian civilian aerospace and telecommunications company TELNET Holdings and multiple Russian entities in the information sector (I2). Tunisia has no such relationship with the United States nor any other NATO members, thus allowing Russia to assert itself via this instrument and seek to monopolize space relations with Tunisia. In the diplomatic sector, meetings between Tunisian and Russian officials have increased over the past few years, with greater collaboration and cooperation between the two nations in the areas of regional and border security, as well as peacekeeping (D1).

Russia's projected M-DIME influence in Tunisia is assessed as Steady. Russia's projected influence in Tunisia is expected to remain steady over the next three years, focused on informational and diplomatic instruments. The effects of the media agreement signed by *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse* and *Sputnik* in September 2023 have yet to manifest but could begin to do so in the next three years (I1). Space collaboration between Russia and Tunisia is expected to intensify after the successful launch of the Tunisian Challenge One satellite from a Russian Soyuz-2 rocket in 2021, with five additional spacecraft currently under construction (I2). The goal of this partnership is to develop a network of Internet of Things applications, as well as to assist in the training of Tunisian engineers. In the diplomatic sector, Russia's growing interest in Libya and the Sahel region suggests further increases in Russian defense-related diplomacy with Tunisia are likely (D1). Nonetheless, these meetings are unlikely to significantly undercut U.S. military influence given the United States' entrenched and longstanding diplomatic relationship with Tunisia.

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