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To Contain or to Transform: Algerian Preventive Diplomacy in the Libyan Crisis (2011–2026)

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011, the Libyan crisis has tested Algeria's doctrine of non-interference and political settlement. Situating Algeria's role within the literature on preventive diplomacy and international mediation, this article argues that diplomatic presence, measured by the initiatives and meetings a mediator convenes, does not necessarily translate into influence over the settlement. Combining structured, focused comparison with process tracing across five phases (2011–2026), it identifies a structural paradox: Algeria contained security spillover and preserved principled credibility among Libyan parties, but could not convert that credibility into binding leverage in an arena crowded with materially stronger actors. Developments in 2025–2026 confirm the pattern: Algeria revived the tripartite neighbourhood mechanism with Egypt and Tunisia, yet the main breakthrough, the August 2026 agreement to hold elections within 24 months, came through the UN track alongside US economic incentives. In preventive diplomacy, containing a crisis is not the same as transforming it.

Keywords: Preventive diplomacy, regional mediation, Libyan crisis, Algerian foreign policy, constrained mediator paradox

Résumé :

Depuis 2011, la crise libyenne a mis à l'épreuve la doctrine algérienne de non-ingérence et de règlement politique. Situant le rôle de l'Algérie dans la littérature sur la diplomatie préventive et la médiation internationale, cet article soutient que la présence diplomatique, mesurée par les initiatives et les réunions convoquées par un médiateur, ne se traduit pas nécessairement par une influence sur le règlement. Combinant une comparaison structurée et ciblée avec le traçage de processus à travers cinq phases (2011–2026), il identifie un paradoxe structurel : l'Algérie a contenu les retombées sécuritaires et préservé une crédibilité de principe auprès des parties libyennes, mais n'a pas pu convertir cette crédibilité en un levier contraignant dans une arène encombrée d'acteurs matériellement plus puissants. Les développements de 2025–2026 confirment cette tendance : l'Algérie a relancé le mécanisme tripartite de voisinage avec l'Égypte et la Tunisie, mais la principale avancée, à savoir l'accord d'août 2026 prévoyant la tenue d'élections dans un délai de 24 mois, a été obtenue par la voie des Nations unies parallèlement aux incitations économiques des États-Unis. En matière de diplomatie préventive, contenir une crise ne revient pas à la transformer.

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Mots-clés : Diplomatie préventive, médiation régionale, crise libyenne, politique étrangère algérienne, paradoxe du médiateur constraint

INTRODUCTION:

"Algeria regards Tripoli as a red line and expects no one to cross it."

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Algiers (6 January 2020)

On 6 January 2020, as Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's offensive on Tripoli entered its ninth month, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune received Fayez al-Sarraj, head of the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord (GNA), and declared Tripoli a "red line" (Al Jazeera, 2020). The statement followed the strike on Tripoli's military academy that killed some thirty cadets and the Turkish parliament's authorisation of troops for the GNA (Al Jazeera, 2020). Within three weeks, Algiers hosted the foreign ministers of Egypt, Turkey, France and Italy and convened Libya's neighbours on 23 January 2020, four days after the Berlin Conference (Arab News, 2020; CIDOB, 2020). It was Algeria's most intensive engagement in Libya since 2011; whether it changed the crisis's trajectory remained open.

This episode reflected a broader post-2019 shift. After a period of retrenchment linked to the domestic crisis and the 2019 Hirak, Algeria sought to recover its voice in North Africa and the Sahel, amending its constitution in November 2020 to allow, for the first time since independence, the deployment of army units abroad by presidential decision with the approval of two-thirds of both houses of parliament (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020; Atalayar, 2020). Official discourse nonetheless retained the same principles: non-interference, rejection of military solutions and inclusive intra-Libyan dialogue (Porter, 2015; Toumi, 2020).

In internationalised crises, mediation itself becomes competitive. Libya turned into a "crowded stage" of regional and international powers, each with its own initiative and instruments (Crocker et al., 2001), so a regional mediator's effectiveness depends on standing out amid the crowd rather than on its intentions.

The question has gained salience since 2025. Algeria held a non-permanent Security Council seat in 2024–2025 and, with Egypt and Tunisia, reactivated the tripartite mechanism of Libya's neighbours in Cairo on 31 May 2025, dormant since 2019, before hosting its ministerial meeting in November 2025 (Middle East Monitor, 2025; MFA Algeria, 2025). Yet the main breakthrough, the agreement signed in Tripoli on 30 August 2026 to hold elections under a unified executive within 24 months, came through a UN channel coinciding with a US initiative linking unification to oil investment (Al Jazeera, 2026a; Al Jazeera, 2026b): more Algerian presence in regional frameworks, decisive influence from outside them.

Existing studies leave a pivotal question insufficiently addressed: does extensive diplomatic presence translate into influence over the settlement? A state may host dozens of meetings without leaving any imprint on a final agreement. Did Algerian preventive diplomacy transform the crisis, or merely contain its repercussions?

The puzzle rests on a distinction between the defensive function of preventive diplomacy, insulating the mediating state and measured by the absence of spillover onto its territory, and its transformative function, reshaping the parties' calculations and settlement outcomes. A state may succeed in the first and fail in the second, yet systematic comparisons of the two in the Algerian case are scarce.

The study therefore proposes a three-stage framework, from containment through mediation to transformation, on the premise that effective preventive diplomacy must convert convening power into influence over the substance of the settlement. Three questions guide the analysis:

- **RQ1 (Containment):** To what extent did Algeria's preventive instruments insulate national security from the Libyan crisis, and with what limits?
- **RQ2 (Mediation):** Did Algeria convert its convening power into binding leverage, or did compellence remain the preserve of materially stronger actors?
- **RQ3 (Transformation):** Do the outcomes of the major tracks (Skhirat 2015, Berlin 2020, the 2021 unified executive and the August 2026 agreement) bear a traceable Algerian imprint?

Literature Review: This section reviews preventive diplomacy, neutral versus biased mediation, and the conditions for transformation in crowded environments.

Preventive Diplomacy: From Concept to Practice: Preventive diplomacy dates back, in its UN formulation, to Dag Hammarskjöld and gained momentum after the Cold War (Jenča, 2013). Boutros-Ghali's An Agenda for

Peace (1992) codified it as action to prevent disputes from arising, escalating into conflict or spreading (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), identifying fact-finding, confidence-building, early warning and preventive deployment as its components (Jenča, 2013).

Michael Lund later distinguished it from routine diplomacy and crisis management, proposing a "conflict life cycle" from durable peace to crisis and war in which appropriate instruments change with the phase (Lund, 1996), which makes timing a central analytical variable.

Its instruments include special envoys, fact-finding missions (ASEAN Regional Forum and CSCAP, 2018), shuttle diplomacy and negotiations with governments or armed factions, mediation being its most direct form (Breslawski et al., 2024). Regional organisations are increasingly central, as they detect local tensions earlier and enjoy greater legitimacy (OSCE, 2019).

The literature acknowledges structural limits: preventive instruments work best before escalation, after which costlier efforts are needed and national authorities' will is decisive (Jenča, 2013). Two gaps follow. The literature presupposes a cohesive state, an assumption voided by Libya's collapse, and lacks a model of when dialogue suffices and when more coercive tools are required. Applied studies also rarely distinguish what a mediator achieves for itself from what it achieves for the settlement.

Neutral and Biased Mediators: Traditionally, mediator neutrality was considered a precondition of effectiveness. Andrew Kydd's game-theoretic model complicated this: a mediator concerned only with preventing war has an incentive to exaggerate each side's resolve and is not believed when counselling moderation, whereas a mediator "biased" towards a party is believed when advising it to back down (Kydd, 2003).

Empirically, Isak Svensson found that biased mediators are more likely than neutral ones to produce agreements with detailed institutional arrangements such as power-sharing and guarantees (Svensson, 2009). Neutrality thus secures acceptability, not compellence: it opens the door, while bias or material leverage pushes the parties through it.

Algeria is a striking case. Non-interference is the backbone of its security doctrine: it refused to intervene in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Mali and declined to join the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (Benantar, 2022). Its Libya policy since 2011 has rested on non-interference, the primacy of a political solution, rejection of foreign intervention and no military operations abroad (Porter, 2015). These constants were not rigid: in Mali, Algeria opposed external intervention rhetorically yet opened its airspace to French aircraft in January 2013 (Benantar, 2022; Jamestown Foundation, 2013).

Algeria thus sits uncomfortably on the theoretical spectrum: not a disinterested neutral, given its border of nearly 1,000 kilometres with Libya and direct security interests, nor a biased mediator able to support one party materially, which its principles preclude. We term this the position of the "constrained mediator": interests without instruments, credibility without compellence.

From Containment to Transformation: Ripeness, Spoilers and Multiple Mediators: What allows a mediator to transform rather than manage a conflict? The literature offers three answers. First, I. William Zartman's "ripeness": parties negotiate seriously only when they perceive a "mutually hurting stalemate" and a way out (Zartman, 2000), a perception mediators can cultivate.

Second, Stephen Stedman's "spoilers", actors who use violence to undermine a peace threatening their power. Managing them depends on custodians' ability to forge a cohesive external coalition and on resources for inducement, socialisation or coercion (Stedman, 1997). A mediator that rejects coercion and lacks inducements is confined to socialisation.

Third, multiparty mediation: multiple mediators strengthen a process when complementary but burden it when competing, encouraging "forum shopping"; coordinating them resembles "herding cats" (Crocker et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 2001).

A principled "facilitator" can thus convene efficiently but lacks the ripeness-making and spoiler-management tools that transformation requires. We propose that principled credibility grants acceptance but not influence: the "credibility premium" eases entry into a process rather than shaping its outcomes. The study tests whether Algeria's presence closed this gap or whether transformative capacity remained with materially equipped actors.

Methodology: The framework assesses preventive diplomacy by results rather than intentions (Figure 1), in three steps: periodising the crisis into five phases as units of analysis and constructing the source corpus;

converting qualitative evidence into comparable indicators of containment, mediation and transformation; and verifying assessments through triangulation, with process tracing as the main tool.

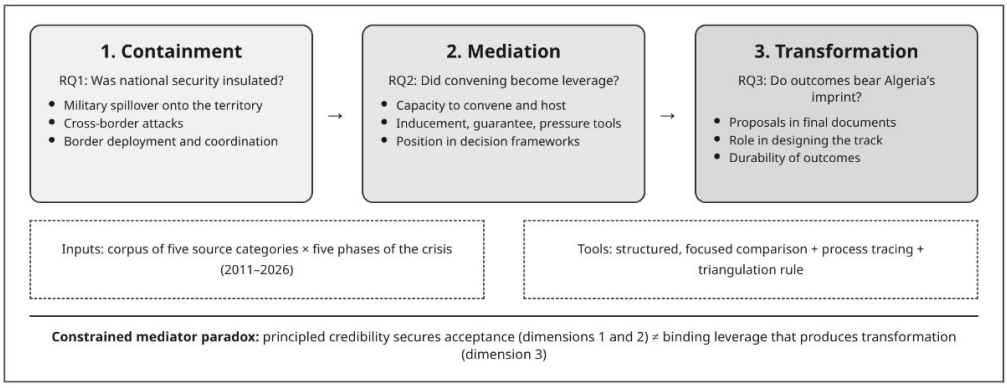


Figure 1: Analytical framework of the study: from containment to transformation.

Source: Prepared by the authors (Mounir Biskri and Abdellatif Bari), based on the analytical framework of preventive diplomacy and mediation (2011–2026).

Structured, Focused Case Study: The study applies George and Bennett's "structured, focused comparison" to a single case (George and Bennett, 2005): the same questions are asked of each phase, and the analysis is confined to aspects bearing on the three research questions.

Two modes of analysis are combined:

- **Mode (a) – Cross-sectional:** each phase is a unit of analysis to which the three questions are posed, recording Algeria's instruments and their results.
- **Mode (b) – Longitudinal:** Algerian instruments are traced over time against negotiated outcomes to identify any causal chain linking Algerian initiatives to final settlement documents.

Mode (b) uses process tracing as developed by Beach and Pedersen, examining causal mechanisms within a case and the probative strength of each piece of evidence (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). We adopt the explaining-outcome variant: the aim is not to test a general theory but to explain why Algeria's presence did not become influence.

Periodisation and Units of Analysis: Periodisation follows two criteria: changes in the domestic conflict structure (regime collapse, institutional division, war on the capital, unified authority, restructuring of the UN track) and in the nature of external intervention (Table 1).

Table 1: Phases of the Libyan crisis and units of analysis.

Phase	Period	Dominant feature	Reference events
First	2011–2014	Regime collapse and NATO intervention	Resolution 1973 (March 2011); Tiguentourine attack (January 2013)
Second	2014–2019	Institutional division and the Skhirat track	Libyan Political Agreement (December 2015); neighbouring-states meetings
Third	2019–2020	War on Tripoli and internationalisation of the conflict	Haftar offensive (April 2019); "Tripoli is a red line", Berlin Conference and Algiers meeting (January 2020)
Fourth	2021–2024	Unified authority and electoral deadlock	Government of National Unity (2021); Algiers ministerial meeting (August 2021); Boukadoum nomination (June 2022)
Fifth	2025–2026	Restructuring of the UN track and multiple mediation channels	Tripoli clashes (May 2025); revival of the tripartite mechanism (May 2025); Tetteh roadmap (August 2025); elections agreement (August 2026)

Source: compiled by the authors from UNSC (2011, 2015, 2020, 2025); Jamestown Foundation (2013); CIDOB (2020); Libya Security Monitor (2022); Middle East Monitor (2025); Al Jazeera (2026a).

Constructing the Source Corpus: The corpus covers March 2011 to October 2026 across five categories (Table 2), enabling triangulation among theoretical literature, peer-reviewed case studies, official documents, think-tank reports and press coverage.

No finding rests on a single category: facts require a press or official source, interpretations a peer-reviewed or analytical source, and assessments criteria drawn from the literature.

Table 2: Distribution of the source corpus by category and analytical function.

Source category	Number	Analytical function
Theoretical and methodological literature (books and peer-reviewed articles)	12	Defining assessment criteria and inferential logic
Peer-reviewed studies of the case	2	Interpreting Algerian doctrine and conduct in the Libyan file
UN and institutional documents	8	Establishing official facts and decision-making frameworks
Think-tank reports	8	Contemporaneous analytical readings of events
Press coverage and magazines	19	Establishing dates of events and statements
Total	49	—

Source: cover the period from March 2011 to October 2026. Given the recency of fifth-phase events, their documentation relies mainly on UN documents, press coverage and think-tank reports. The full list appears in the References.

Operationalising Indicators and Verification: Each research question was operationalised as qualitative indicators with specified evidence and scored on a three-point ordinal scale (Table 3).

Table 3: Operationalisation of the research questions into assessable indicators.

Dimension	Central question	Indicators	Type of evidence
Containment (RQ1)	Was national security insulated?	Absence of military spillover onto the territory; occurrence of cross-border attacks; evolution of border deployment	Press coverage; think-tank reports
Mediation (RQ2)	Did convening translate into binding leverage?	Number of initiatives and level of participation; possession of inducement, guarantee or pressure instruments; Algeria's position in decision-making frameworks	Official documents; peer-reviewed studies
Transformation (RQ3)	Do the outcomes bear an Algerian imprint?	Inclusion of Algerian proposals in final documents; role in designing the track; durability of outcomes	UN documents; process tracing

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the operationalisation of research questions and the ordinal scale definitions.

Note. Ordinal scale: "limited" = no evidence of Algerian influence beyond participation; "moderate" = partial or indirect influence; "high" = direct influence traceable in the outcomes.

In lieu of double coding, a triangulation rule applies: a score is accepted only if at least two source categories concur on its direction; conflicting sources are reported and weighed by proximity to the event. Scores nonetheless remain interpretive judgements by the authors.

Analysis and Discussion:

RQ1 (Containment): To what extent did Algeria's preventive instruments succeed in insulating national security from the repercussions of the Libyan crisis?

Across the five phases, the record shows genuine defensive success: the Libyan war did not spread to Algerian territory, and Algeria did not become a proxy arena, a rare outcome in a region where collapse tends to spread (Manara Magazine, 2026). This rested on intensive surveillance of the 1,000-kilometre border, expanded counter-terrorism operations and quiet mediation channels with rival factions (Manara Magazine, 2026).

Success was not absolute. On 16 January 2013, an armed group seized the Tiguentourine gas facility near In Amenas, close to the Libyan border, in a hostage crisis that left dozens dead. Official accounts diverged on whether the attackers came from northern Mali or Libya (Jamestown Foundation, 2013), but the site's location, the security vacuum in southern Libya and post-2011 arms flows tied the attack to the Libyan crisis.

Containment was thus reactive rather than pre-emptive: border fortification followed the shock, consistent with the literature on the timing of prevention (Table 4).

Table 4: Containment indicators across the phases of the crisis.

Phase	Predominant Algerian instrument	Outcome indicator	Assessment
First	Rejection of NATO intervention; conventional border security	Major security breach (Tiguentourine 2013)	Limited
Second	Reinforced border deployment; security coordination within neighbourhood mechanisms	No major cross-border attacks	High
Third	Deterrent rhetoric ("red line"); intensive diplomatic activity	War did not spread to the western border	High
Fourth	Constitutional amendment permitting deployment abroad; regional coordination	Relative border stability	High

Table 4: Containment indicators across the phases of the crisis. *(continued)*

Phase	Predominant Algerian instrument	Outcome indicator	Assessment
Fifth	Coordination within the tripartite mechanism; border control as pressure shifted to the Sahel front	Tripoli (2025) and Zawiya (2026) clashes did not reach the border; acute tension with Mali	High

Source: Assessment by the authors according to the scale in Table 3, following triangulation across sources.

The more assertive post-2019 discourse marked a shift. The "red line" declaration and accompanying diplomacy were read as an attempt to pull Algerian diplomacy out of stagnation (CIDOB, 2020), and the 2020 constitutional amendment as a lesson from failures in Libya since 2011, although some analysts judged it too late to make a difference (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020).

In the fifth phase, defensive success withstood the Tripoli clashes that erupted on 12 May 2025 after the killing of Stability Support Apparatus commander Abdul Ghani al-Kikli, and the fighting in Zawiya and Sorman on 3–4 August 2026, followed by attacks on oil infrastructure (Libya Security Monitor, 2025; Security Council Report, 2026). The main threat shifted south: Algeria shot down a Malian drone near Tinzaouaten on 31 March–1 April 2025, prompting the Alliance of Sahel States to recall their ambassadors and Algeria to close its airspace to Malian aircraft (Al Jazeera, 2025). Containment on the Libyan border thus coexists with a fragile southern environment.

Rising presence coincided with continued internationalisation, suggesting self-insulation rather than influence over others, which calls for examining whether presence became leverage.

RQ2 (Mediation): Was Algeria able to convert its convening power into binding negotiating leverage?

Algeria's convening power is undisputed. It draws on a record of neutral regional mediation and on principles of sovereignty, peoples' choices and peaceful solutions (Toumi, 2020), as shown by the neighbours' meeting of 23 January 2020 (Arab News, 2020) and the Algiers ministerial meeting of 30–31 August 2021 with neighbouring ministers, the Arab League, the African Union and the UN envoy (The National, 2021). Its approach involves the full range of stakeholders and privileges negotiated over military solutions (Porter, 2015).

In the fifth phase, convening became collective. The tripartite mechanism (Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia) was reactivated in Cairo on 31 May 2025 and met in Algiers in November 2025, in Tunis on 26 January 2026 with UN envoy Hanna Tetteh, and in Cairo on 21 May 2026 (Middle East Monitor, 2025; MFA Algeria, 2025; Egypt Today, 2026; Al-Wasat, 2026). Algeria also used its Security Council seat (2024–2025) to press for protecting Libya's frozen assets (MFA Algeria, 2025). Yet the Government of National Unity objected to the Tunis meeting being held without official Libyan participation (Le Courrier de l'Atlas, 2026): collective frameworks do not resolve the compellence dilemma and may add sovereignty sensitivities.

Comparison with other actors reveals a structural gap: they could support one side militarily or financially, whereas Algeria relied on dialogue and facilitation (Table 5).

Table 5. Matrix of leverage instruments among the most prominent regional actors in the third phase (2019–2020).

Dimension	Algeria	Egypt	UAE	Turkey
Positioning vis-à-vis the two sides	Recognition of the GNA with rejection of a military solution	Support for the eastern camp	Support for the eastern camp	Support for the GNA
Material instrument of compellence	Absent (principled constraint)	Available	Available	Available (military deployment)
Participation in the Berlin Conference	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Capacity for inducement or coercion	Limited	High	High	High

Sources: Anadolu Agency (2020); Al Jazeera (2020); CIDOB (2020); assessment of the last two rows by the authors.

Unlike Algeria, the other three actors combined forum presence with material instruments on the ground. As Kydd argues, a mediator that "takes no side" is not readily believed when urging a party to back down (Kydd, 2003). When Algeria declared Tripoli a red line, some Libyan parties read it as taking sides, so Algeria lost neutrality capital without gaining the leverage that bias confers.

In June 2022, the UN Secretary-General proposed former Algerian foreign minister Sabri Boukadoum as Special Envoy for Libya, but the United Arab Emirates, then a non-permanent Council member, objected, citing reservations among Libyan parties and Arab states (Libya Security Monitor, 2022). Convening power, in short, did not shield Algeria from the veto of better-equipped actors. Algerian–Moroccan rivalry also hampered coordination at times (theSquare Centre, 2022).

This fits the multiparty mediation literature: parties shop among forums for the sponsor best able to offer guarantees or resources (Crocker et al., 2001). Principled credibility buys entry, not centrality. The 2025–2026 US track illustrates this: Massad Boulos's initiative tied unification to oil-sector investment and helped produce unprecedented military unification talks in Sirte in July 2026 (Al Jazeera, 2026b; The National, 2026). Material inducement, not principled credibility, restarted the process.

RQ3 (Transformation): To what extent do settlement outcomes bear a traceable Algerian imprint?

Transformation was assessed by the substance of outcomes, asking of each of the four major tracks whether Algerian proposals appeared in the final document, whether Algeria helped design the track and whether outcomes endured. The analysis relies on published documents and contemporaneous readings, avoiding unverifiable claims about secret negotiations.

The Skhirat track (2015). The UN-sponsored track produced the Libyan Political Agreement of December 2015, welcomed by the Security Council (UNSC, 2015). Algeria hosted one dialogue round, but the framework was UN-led and the signing took place in Morocco: a supportive rather than formative contribution.

The Berlin track (2020). Algeria attended the 19 January 2020 conference, whose conclusions the Council endorsed (UNSC, 2020), and hosted a neighbours' meeting that month (NESA Center for Strategic Studies, 2021). Yet fighting around Tripoli continued, and the permanent ceasefire was signed only on 23 October 2020 in Geneva by the UN-facilitated 5+5 Joint Military Commission (UNSMIL, 2020), outside forums where Algeria played a direct role.

The unified executive (2021). The UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum produced a unified executive in early 2021, independently of Algerian initiatives. Algeria's August 2021 meeting supported the elections scheduled for 24 December 2021, which have been postponed indefinitely.

The elections agreement (2026). UN envoy Hanna Tetteh, appointed in January 2025, presented a roadmap in August 2025 based on an electoral framework, a unified government and a structured dialogue, and the Council renewed the mission's mandate through Resolution 2796 on 31 October 2025 (UNSC, 2025; Security Council Report, 2026). A smaller committee of the main parties, meeting in Rome, Tunis and Tripoli, signed an agreement in Tripoli on 30 August 2026 to reconstitute the High National Elections Commission board and hold elections under a unified executive within 24 months (Al Jazeera, 2026a). The Council welcomed it on 8 September 2026 and the House of Representatives endorsed it, while the High Council of State reportedly rejected it (Security Council Report, 2026). Algeria did not facilitate this track; the tripartite mechanism merely backed the UN process.

Table 6: Composite assessment of Algerian preventive diplomacy across the three dimensions.

Dimension	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Containment	Limited	High	High	High	High
Mediation (convening capacity)	Limited	Moderate	High	High	High
Mediation (capacity to compel)	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited
Transformation	Limited	Moderate	Limited	Limited	Limited

Source: Assessment by the authors according to the scale in Table 3. The mediation dimension is split into two components to highlight the gap between convening and compelling.

Table 6 shows a clear divergence. Containment rises after the first phase and stabilises; convening capacity rises in the third to fifth phases with the post-2019 diplomatic surge and the 2025 revival of the tripartite mechanism; the capacity to compel stays at its lowest level throughout.

Transformation peaked at “moderate” in the second phase, when the framework was wholly UN-led, and declined thereafter despite rising presence, including in 2026, when the agreement came through channels Algeria did not facilitate. Greater presence was a reaction to internationalisation rather than the acquisition of new instruments: principled credibility brings Algeria to the table, but not into the outcomes.

Robustness check. To rule out Libyan peculiarities such as exceptional complexity or internationalisation, we compared Mali, a “most-likely case” in which Algeria was the lead mediator and the agreement was signed in Algiers.

Mali confirms the pattern (Table 7): high capacity to convene and produce an agreement, low capacity to secure its durability. The 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation was terminated “with immediate effect” by Mali’s junta on 25 January 2024, which accused Algeria of hostile acts and interference (Africanews, 2024). After the April 2025 drone incident, the Alliance of Sahel States recalled its ambassadors, and Mali brought a case against Algeria before the International Court of Justice in September 2025 (Al Jazeera, 2025; The New Arab, 2025).

Table 7: Robustness check: comparing the Libyan and Malian cases.

Indicator	Libya (2011–2026)	Mali (2014–2026)
Algeria’s position in the process	One mediator on a crowded stage	Lead mediator
Convening capacity	High	High
Producing an agreement with an Algerian imprint	Limited	High (Algiers Agreement 2015)
Instruments of compellence and guarantee	Limited	Limited
Durability of outcomes	Limited	Limited (agreement terminated January 2024; diplomatic rupture in 2025)

Sources: Africanews (2024); The Republic (2025); Al Jazeera (2025); The New Arab (2025); assessment by the authors.

One might attribute weak influence to the domestic crisis and the 2019 Hirak. Excluding 2019 does not alter the pattern: compellence remains limited in the fourth and fifth phases despite restored institutional stability, renewed diplomacy and a Security Council seat, pointing to the doctrinal structure of Algeria’s instruments rather than domestic circumstances.

CONCLUSION:

This study traced Algerian preventive diplomacy in Libya from 2011 to 2026—ranging from quiet mediation to an intensive diplomatic presence after 2019—to examine whether diplomatic presence successfully translated into structural influence. The findings uncover a fundamental trade-off between self-insulation and regional transformation, highlighting what is defined here as the "constrained mediator paradox." While adherence to the doctrine of non-interference secured principled credibility and high convening power, the doctrinal absence of robust economic and coercive instruments limited binding leverage in an arena crowded with materially stronger actors.

FINDINGS:

1. Algeria successfully insulated its national territory from military spillover and avoided becoming a proxy arena, representing a major strategic achievement, yet this self-insulation did not yield direct transformative leverage over Libya's political outcome.
2. After 2019, Algeria closed the "presence gap" by regaining relevance across all major forums; however, convening power increased without a corresponding gain in compellence, as demonstrated by the coexistence of revived regional mechanisms with UN-led breakthroughs.
3. Firm adherence to principled neutrality maximizes acceptance among domestic parties and secures convening power, but simultaneously restricts the mediator's capacity to deliver settlements requiring coercive or material inducements.
4. The study provides a robust three-dimensional analytical framework—combining structured, focused comparison with process tracing—that rigorously separates diplomatic presence from effective influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Complement traditional non-interference and political mediation with binding non-military tools, such as targeted economic guarantees, development incentives, and conditional security coordination.
2. Deepen and institutionalize the tripartite neighbourhood mechanism (involving Egypt and Tunisia) to ensure a unified regional stance that aligns with international mediation tracks.
3. Avoid strategic vacuums where opportunistic external actors can fill the void, ensuring that alternative engagement relies on diverse diplomatic and economic levers rather than complete disengagement.
4. Establish systematic academic and institutional tracking systems to monitor regional mediation outcomes, reducing reliance on open-source press reports and interpretive ordinal scoring.

Research Prospects:

Future research should prioritize archival corroboration of classified diplomatic records as they become available, alongside empirical field studies examining the long-term implementation of the August 2026 electoral agreement. Furthermore, applying this three-dimensional framework to other regional middle-power mediators (such as Turkey or Gulf states) will test its generalizability across different settings of state collapse.

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