



STRENGTHENING STABILITY IN NORTHWEST AFRICA Ideas for U.S. Policy toward Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia

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The countries of northwest Africa—Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—have proven either more resilient or more adaptive than other Middle East states to the political upheavals that have engulfed the region over the last half-dozen years. To varying degrees, however, stability remains a major challenge for all these countries as they face transnational terrorism, spillover from the conflict in Libya, abrupt shifts in domestic political dynamics, potential flare-ups of regional conflicts, and unforeseen events that could ignite deep-seated resentment at a local mix of stagnant economies, endemic corruption, and profound disparities between wealth and poverty. In this Transition 2017 essay, Robert Satloff and Sarah Feuer warn against overlooking a corner of the Middle East that doesn't attract the same attention as areas facing more-acute conflict. Outlining America's key strategic interests in this region, they discuss specific ways the Trump administration can advance these interests in terms of both bilateral and regional relations.

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Introduction

The Arab uprisings that broke out in 2011 generally left chaos, repression, and war in their wake. The western edge of the Arabic-speaking world, while not immune to the tumult, has so far proven either more resilient or more adaptive than other Middle East countries.

- In Morocco, nationwide protests broke out in early 2011 calling for an end to corruption and limits on the power of the monarchy. King Mohammed VI responded by swiftly instituting a process of constitutional revision that emphasized gradual change—mild political openings and incremental economic reforms—all while preserving the centuries-old dynastic framework.
- In Algeria, a leading oil and gas producer where memories of a civil war throughout the 1990s likely suppressed the appetite for radical change this time around, the regime of the elderly and ailing president quickly answered rumblings of dissent by dipping into state revenues to expand social welfare benefits and thereby stave off wider unrest.
- And in Tunisia, citizens succeeded in bringing about a generally peaceful overthrow of their longtime autocrat and embarked on a promising, if bumpy and tragically terror-strewn, path of democratization.

Taken together, northwest Africa—comprising Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—constitutes one of the few remaining corners of relative stability in an otherwise volatile region. However, to varying degrees across these three countries, stability remains a major challenge. In addition to the domestic triggers for political change, all three have faced—and so far managed—externally driven security threats in recent years, brought on by the collapse of the Libyan state, the weakening of state structures across their southern borders in the Sahel,¹ and the spread of Sunni jihadist groups into

the region's ungoverned spaces. The stability these states currently enjoy could collapse under the weight of transnational terrorism, spillover from the conflict in Libya, abrupt shifts in domestic political dynamics, the eruption of local conflicts, and unforeseen events that ignite deep-seated resentment at a local mix of stagnant economies, endemic corruption, and poorly shrouded disparities between wealth and poverty.

With its location at the mouth of the Mediterranean and along the southwestern flank of NATO, northwest Africa carries geostrategic importance for the United States. Instability in any of these countries would significantly impede the U.S. ability to contain the terrorist threats emanating from Libya and from the largely ungoverned Sahel countries of Mali, Niger, and Chad. And instability would almost certainly trigger an even more substantial flow of refugees and migrants toward Europe, further eroding the already fragile unity of the European Union and the NATO alliance.

Preserving the stability and security of northwest Africa, therefore, will remain a key national interest for the United States for the foreseeable future. The fires burning elsewhere in the Middle East will tempt policymakers to ignore these states, but with the Libyan conflict showing no signs of abating and the world's leading terrorist organizations congregating in central Africa, the imperative to maintain and, where possible, deepen U.S. partnerships with Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco will only grow.

STRATEGIC REGIONAL OBJECTIVES

DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PAST six years have demonstrated that events in northwest Africa reverberate widely throughout the Middle East and carry serious implications for America's European allies. The overthrow of an autocrat in Tunisia—a country roughly the size of Florida—inspired a series of uprisings across the Arab world; a 2013 terrorist attack on a natural gas facility in Algeria reduced the output of Europe's

1. The Sahel is the geographic zone of transition between the Sahara Desert to the north and the Sudanian Savanna to the south. Stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea,

it includes portions of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Ethiopia.

second-largest gas supplier; and a majority of the individuals responsible for the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels had origins in the mountainous Rif region of Morocco, where jihadist groups have infiltrated longstanding criminal and drug-trafficking networks. Given the degree to which events in northwest Africa affect U.S. interests within and beyond the region, the incoming administration should prioritize three strategic objectives in its engagement with these states:

- ▶ **Maintain and strengthen stability.** The United States has an interest in seeing strong, well-functioning, preferably democratic states around the world willing to work in partnership with Washington on common objectives. In recent years, that interest has taken on increasing urgency in northwest Africa, given Libya's descent into chaos and the extent to which the Sahel states of Mali, Niger, and Chad have teetered on the verge of collapse. Shoring up and enhancing the stability of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco will be key to containing the Libyan conflict, protecting these states from terrorist groups amassing across central Africa, and ensuring they can continue to regulate the flow of migrants to Europe.
- ▶ **Prevent the spread of terrorism.** Cooperation with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—separately and together—is a critical component of any strategy to prevent the spread of terrorism emanating either from Libya or the Sahel. Preventing people and territory in northwest Africa from being used by extremist groups for terrorist operations, transit, recruitment, and financing constitutes a high priority.
- ▶ **Ensure maritime security.** Good relations with partners in northwest Africa have been necessary for maintaining freedom of operation for the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. Constructive engagement with Morocco, for example, has been key to ensuring the security of America's commercial and naval travel through the Strait of Gibraltar. In turn, freedom of movement for the U.S. Navy has been central to preserving the

security of America's NATO and non-NATO allies in the region, and a crucial component of U.S. counterterrorism operations. In this vein, airstrikes launched from U.S. ships against Islamic State targets in Libya would have been compromised without U.S. partnerships across North Africa. In recent years, Russia's navy has increased its presence in the Mediterranean, a development that may not restrict U.S. access to ports in the near term but could pose challenges to U.S. interests and counterterrorism operations in the medium to long term. Given the unpredictability of Russian actions and the legitimate concern raised by enhanced Russian naval presence in the area, preserving U.S. freedom of operation in the Mediterranean Sea will remain a critical objective in the coming years.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

At present, four overarching challenges threaten the stability of northwest Africa and U.S. interests therein:

SPREAD OF RADICALISM AND TERRORISM. Until the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2011, the dominant terrorist organization in North Africa was al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an Algerian-origin offshoot of the original "core" al-Qaeda. With the Libyan uprising and the ensuing civil war there, weapons and terrorist networks rapidly spread throughout North Africa and across the largely ungoverned space of the Sahel (principally the states of Mali, Niger, and Chad). One result was an AQIM-led insurgency in northern Mali in 2012, which precipitated a French intervention that ultimately put down the rebellion a year later. The chaos in Libya also permitted the Islamic State to establish outposts in Darnah and Sirte, Libya, though by mid-2016 Libyan military efforts, supported by U.S. airstrikes, had all but pushed IS-linked groups out of those cities.

Since the 2011 uprisings, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have contended with the growing terrorist threat. In April 2011, an explosion in a tourist area

of Marrakesh, Morocco, killed seventeen people and injured twenty-five. In 2013, AQIM-linked terrorists attacked a natural gas facility near In Amenas, Algeria. In the four-day battle that ensued, thirty-nine foreign hostages and an Algerian security guard were killed, along with twenty-nine of the attackers. Tunisia in 2015 experienced two high-profile terrorist attacks that decimated the country's tourism sector, and in early 2016 fifty militants claiming allegiance to IS staged an attack against police and National Guard headquarters in Ben Gardane, a town near the Libyan border. In the coming months, IS- and AQIM-affiliated groups are likely to congregate in southern Libya and across the Sahel, posing a continuing threat to Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Furthermore, all three countries face a serious challenge of radicalization within their borders. For all its political progress over the past five years, Tunisia has provided the world's largest contingent of "foreign fighters"—6,000, by recent estimates—to jihadist groups fighting in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and lawmakers in the emerging democracy have struggled to regain control over hundreds of mosques taken over by extremist preachers in the post-2011 security vacuum. After its own bloody experience with jihadist terrorism and regime repression in the civil conflict that killed more than 100,000 people in the 1990s, Algeria in recent years has experienced a resurgence of radical Salafism, and several hundred Algerians have reportedly left to join jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria. For its part, Morocco routinely uncovers cells of radicalized young people, despite a decade-old series of reforms aimed at "moderating" religious discourse in the kingdom, and about 2,500 of its citizens have reportedly left the country to join jihadist groups in Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES IN ALGERIA. Algeria's seventy-nine-year-old president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, confined to a wheelchair and unable to speak, was reelected to a fourth term in 2014, making him the longest-serving president in the largest country in Africa. The political and security apparatuses in Algeria remain opaque, but power is generally

presumed to reside among groups of military leaders, intelligence officials, businessmen, and politicians collectively known as *le pouvoir* (French for "the powers that be"). In recent years, Bouteflika's ailing health, coupled with a series of restructurings within and between the state's security services, raised concerns about the country's stability in the event of an unclear succession plan. Most likely, the military and security services will choose, or have already chosen, Bouteflika's successor, though a contested or rocky succession remains a possibility. Still, even with a smooth succession, the likelihood of persistently low oil prices means that the next Algerian president will inherit an increasingly dire economic outlook. The last five years have already seen thousands of small-scale protests by Algerians demanding access to housing, health care, and jobs. One reason those protests have not morphed into a national, and potentially more disruptive, force is that the state has generally managed to sufficiently compensate protestors within a relatively short period of time. Should the state's declining revenues limit its ability to respond to public discontent, growing protests could shake the foundations of the regime; in the process, rising instability would draw the state's security services away from their counterterrorism operations in the border regions and increase the risk of a major destabilizing event.

RESURGENCE OF WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT.

Since the 1991 ceasefire between the Moroccan government and the Algeria-backed Polisario Front, little progress has been made in resolving the conflict over the disputed territory of Western Sahara. The 1991 agreement called for a referendum in the territory to determine whether it would opt for independence or integration into Morocco, and the accord installed a peacekeeping force known as the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to prepare for that vote. More than a quarter-century later, the referendum has yet to take place, Morocco's control of the territory has deepened, and the region has witnessed periodic eruptions of violence. In 2006, the Moroccan government proposed a plan for regional autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty that Wash-

ington supported as “serious, realistic, and credible,” but Algeria has persisted in backing the Polisario and opposing any proposal short of independence. While the situation was long frozen in place, tensions escalated in recent months between Moroccan troops and Polisario fighters congregated in a buffer zone close to the Mauritanian border, prompting the UN to warn of the possibility of open conflict should the parties fail to exercise restraint. War in the Sahara would not only threaten the stability of Morocco, it would also significantly distract Morocco and Algeria from the one arena in which they have budding cooperation—counterterrorism—and thereby provide a windfall to jihadist groups in the region.

SOCIAL UNREST CAUSED BY LAGGING REFORM.

The daily images of chaos and war that plague much of the Arab world, especially the monumental human tragedies of Syria, Libya, and Yemen, continue to exercise a reverse demonstration effect on the three countries of northwest Africa, reducing the likelihood of a popularly driven revolt any time soon. Nevertheless, public frustration with the pace of political and economic reform, and anger at the pervasiveness of both high and petty corruption, remains widespread. In Tunisia, for example, recent polling showed that three-quarters of respondents considered the economy in “somewhat bad” or “very bad” condition and 40 percent believed corruption should be a top priority for the government.² And in Morocco, nearly half of respondents told pollsters in 2016 they had to pay a bribe to gain access to a public service.³ Such views highlight the possibility of small-scale events triggering broad social unrest. Indeed, in 2014, Algerian police—a key security pillar of the regime—surprised observers by launching a series of large-scale protests demanding improved labor conditions and an

end to corruption after two people were killed and a policeman was injured in clashes between Arab and Berber communities in the south. In January 2016, riots erupted across Tunisia after an unemployed man was electrocuted while standing atop a power pole to protest his removal from a list of recruits for public sector jobs. And in October 2016, protests broke out across Morocco following the gruesome death of a fish vendor who had been crushed in a garbage compactor while seeking to retrieve his catch that had been thrown away by a local policeman. All these incidents were eventually defused; none crossed the tipping point into nationwide protests that upended regimes earlier this decade. Still, without concerted efforts to address deep-seated animosities and frustrations, events such as these retain the potential to spark real instability.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

TO ADVANCE U.S. INTERESTS in northwest Africa—strengthening stability, preventing the spread of terrorism, and ensuring maritime security—the Trump administration should pursue a number of initiatives in both the bilateral and regional arenas. None requires enormous sums of money or substantial investments of diplomatic capital. But indifference will almost surely open the door for negative trends and developments to morph into larger problems and, possibly, crises. With relatively modest investment of diplomatic attention, economic aid, security assistance, and bureaucratic effort, the new administration will likely be able to safeguard U.S. interests in northwest Africa.

U.S.-Tunisia Relations

The United States has a strong interest in the stability of Tunisia (population 11 million) and the success of its fledgling democracy, the only to emerge from the Arab uprisings. Given that the most pressing challenges confronting the country concern security and economics, the current distribution of the \$140 million in U.S. foreign assistance allocated for fiscal year 2016/17—45 percent for security-related

2. See International Republican Institute, “Tunisia: Poll Reveals Economic Dissatisfaction, but Reduced Pessimism,” July 13, 2016, <http://www.iri.org/resource/tunisia-poll-reveals-economic-dissatisfaction-reduced-pessimism>.
3. See Zainab Calcuttawala, “48 Percent of Moroccans Paid Bribes for Public Services in Last 12 Months,” *Morocco World News*, May 3, 2016, <https://www.moroccoworld-news.com/2016/05/185623/48-percent-of-moroccans-paid-bribes-for-public-services-in-last-12-months/>.

aid; 36 percent for economic support; and 19 percent for democracy promotion, human rights, and good governance—seems reasonable. If there is to be a change in any direction, a strong case can be made for increasing the proportion of U.S. assistance directed toward the first two baskets. But even if such a reapportionment does not occur, U.S. interests in Tunisia will be best served by focusing efforts in the following ways:

- ▶ ***Continue to direct security assistance toward border control, civilian police training, and domestic counterterrorism.*** With U.S. and European assistance, Tunisia's relatively small military has seen improvements in its ability to monitor and control the country's borders with Libya and Algeria. On the Libyan side, the principal aim will continue to be reducing the inflow of weapons and terrorists. On the Algerian side, Tunisia's military will need additional assistance in battling AQIM-linked terrorist and insurgent groups in the Chaambi Mountains. In addition, U.S. training has benefited the civilian police, which was widely credited for its effective response to riots in early 2016. Future training of police should focus on civilian crowd control and forensics, which is essential to bring arrests of alleged terrorists to prosecution. Finally, Tunisia will continue to need assistance in its domestic counterterrorism planning and operations, particularly as it anticipates the return of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters from Syria, Iraq, and Libya, and seeks to balance the need for security with a desire to preserve the expansion of civil liberties in the post-2011 period.
- ▶ ***Follow through on a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact for Tunisia.*** Since its creation in 2004 by an act of Congress, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has emerged as a highly effective vehicle for U.S. development assistance to countries demonstrating a commitment to good governance. In 2011, following the ouster of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia came under consideration for an MCC grant, or "compact," in the organization's parlance, but

it soon exceeded the annual per-capita income level required of states wishing to apply for funding. The downward economic spiral of the last several years has placed Tunisia back in the lower-middle income bracket, making it eligible to reapply for a compact. In December 2016, the MCC board of directors approved Tunisia's application as a way "to encourage economic growth and reduce poverty." The new administration should follow through on this determination and help Tunisia take advantage of the MCC opportunity to address the country's pressing economic needs.

- ▶ ***Direct government assistance funds to strengthen parliament and support local elections.*** In Tunisia, having a well-functioning parliamentary system is essential to the state's effort to combat radicalism and prevent instability. This is not an example where outside parties need to invest in "nation building" but rather where a modest amount of support can help consolidate the impressive achievements Tunisians have themselves made to build an orderly, inclusive, and participatory political system. In that regard, future assistance for governance-related programs should target two areas for capacity building: the effectiveness of parliament, where many elected representatives lack the basic tools to do their jobs (e.g., functioning computers, office space, support staff), and administrative preparation for the coming local elections, widely viewed as a bellwether of democratic progress but repeatedly postponed due to insufficient resources.

U.S.-Algeria Relations

In the coming years, Algeria (population 39 million) will continue to face terrorist threats along its borders and an economy badly hit by the decline in oil prices, all against the backdrop of uncertainty surrounding the succession of President Bouteflika. Since its independence from French rule in 1962, Algeria—now the largest country in Africa—has generally eschewed deepening ties with Western countries, adopting a foreign policy of nonalignment and an

economic orientation heavily reliant on rents from the sale of oil and gas. Both stances have left the United States with little leverage in the relationship, reflected in low levels of annual foreign assistance (e.g., just \$2 million in FY 2016/17). But in recent years, the dramatic decline in world oil prices has spurred initiatives aimed at diversifying the economy to reduce the country's reliance on rents from the sale of hydrocarbons, currently constituting 96 percent of exports and up to 45 percent of GDP. Combined with the passing of the country's founding generation of independence fighters, opportunities may exist to expand the bilateral relationship to address common concerns. The new administration should be prepared to take advantage of potential openings in the following ways:

- ▶ **Approach Algeria as a partner, not a beneficiary or supplicant.** Barring a dramatic turn of events, Algeria's foreign policy orientation is likely to remain characterized by hypernationalism; a preference for nonalignment and ties with former Eastern bloc states, especially Russia; opposition to foreign intervention; and skepticism, if not suspicion, of Western motives in the region. For the Trump administration, engagement with Algeria—and America's ability to capitalize on potential openings in the relationship—will be enhanced to the extent U.S. officials can emphasize Algeria's role as a partner in addressing shared interests, rather than as a beneficiary of U.S. assistance somehow beholden to U.S. largesse. Even if the relationship remains focused on defense, security, and counterterrorism, Washington should consider inviting Algeria into related partnerships. NATO's Science and Technology Organization, which brings together scientists from around the world to share knowledge and develop technology aimed at enhancing security, could be one such venue.
- ▶ **Expand the IMET program.** Since 2008, the United States has spent roughly \$1 million per year on International Military Education and Training to bring Algerian military officers to the United States for advanced training. This has translated into an average of twenty-seven Alge-

rian officers per year. (By comparison, the United States annually hosts twice as many Moroccans and Tunisians.) More recently, U.S. officials in Algeria have registered some success engaging a younger generation of midlevel military and intelligence officials, reflecting a positive trend upon which the incoming administration could build by expanding the IMET program. Given generational changes in what is still, to a great extent, a military-led regime, IMET provides the most "bang for the buck" of U.S. assistance to Algeria.

- ▶ **Lay the foundations for greater commercial engagement.** Prompted by the decline in oil prices, Algerian leaders have begun seeking to diversify their economy by promoting state investment in nonhydrocarbon sectors, incentivizing private enterprise, and working to attract foreign investment. Though U.S. companies have begun to invest in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and other industries, such investments remain limited, partly due to a requirement that 51 percent of all companies operating in the country be Algerian-owned. The emerging consensus among Algeria watchers is that such obstacles will be eliminated in the coming years, opening substantial investment opportunities for American companies, both in the energy sector and otherwise. The incoming administration should encourage and, where possible, facilitate regular engagements between U.S. and Algerian commercial interests to ensure that American companies are well positioned to take advantage of this opening when it occurs.

U.S.-Morocco Relations

Of the three countries in northwest Africa, Morocco (population 34 million) enjoys the deepest and most longstanding ties to the United States, strengthened in the past decade by a free trade agreement, growing security cooperation, and two successful MCC compacts totaling nearly \$1.2 billion of U.S. assistance over ten years. Since 2004, Morocco has been a "major non-NATO ally" of the United States,

and since 2008, the two countries have annually held a joint military exercise (African Lion) bringing together more than 900 Moroccans and 1,200 Americans for training in aerial logistics, amphibious operations, and other areas. At the same time, the bilateral relationship has been characterized by more frequent hiccups than the U.S. relationships with Algeria and Tunisia. In the Obama administration, U.S.-Morocco relations came under considerable strain as Rabat perceived a weakening of traditional U.S. support at the United Nations for its position on Western Sahara and subsequently grew frustrated with what it viewed as an unfair and unbalanced criticism of its monarchical system in the State Department evaluation of its human rights record. Fortifying the relationship and restoring a sense of trust and confidence at the highest levels are top priorities. While this process should begin with repairing the damage from the attack on the monarchy in the human rights report, and affirming, without conditions, the U.S. position that Morocco's Sahara autonomy plan is "serious, practical, and credible," the Trump administration should pursue the following additional measures aimed at strengthening the foundations of this historic partnership:

► **Welcome and encourage Morocco's growing leadership on the African continent.** In recent years, King Mohammed VI has sought to expand the kingdom's economic, diplomatic, and security-related influence across Africa. The strategic repositioning has been reflected in efforts to establish Morocco as a financial hub for African investment, the decision to seek to rejoin the African Union after years of boycotting the organization over its stance on Western Sahara, reforms aimed at training the region's religious leaders to counter extremist ideologies, and participation in regional security initiatives such as the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership. The United States should welcome, encourage, and support these initiatives. Such support could range from efforts by the Commerce Department to highlight Morocco's role as a continental hub for U.S. businesses to bolstering the U.S. participation at

high-profile events such as the Marrakesh Security Forum, an annual gathering of African security and diplomatic officials.

- **Establish a Moroccan-American Enterprise Fund.** More than any country in North Africa, Morocco in the last fifteen years has promoted public-private partnerships aimed at spurring economic growth. Such partnerships have been credited with revitalizing local economies in cities like Tangier, where employment grew at three times the national average between 2005 and 2012, and have propelled the growth of new universities focused on the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education Morocco needs to meet its ambitious green-energy goals and, more generally, compete in the global economy. Given Morocco's relatively positive macroeconomic environment and the effectiveness of MCC programs targeting small business development, the incoming U.S. administration should consider establishing a Moroccan-American Enterprise Fund that would build on these successes by investing in business ventures across the kingdom. Such funds elsewhere have paid for themselves many times over and have proven valuable in promoting entrepreneurship and joint ventures benefiting both parties.
- **Encourage momentum in Morocco's political reform agenda.** Thus far, Morocco has eschewed the extremes of authoritarian stagnation and violent upheaval seen elsewhere in the region, opting for a gradual process of political reform within the monarchical framework. Stability in the kingdom will be enhanced to the extent citizens perceive momentum in that reform process. Currently, 20 percent of U.S. foreign assistance to Morocco (which in FY 2016/17 will total \$34 million) is earmarked for democracy, human rights, and governance-related programming supporting civil society and political parties. But given the relative vibrancy of Moroccan civil society, and the low level of public trust in the political parties (evidenced by consistently low rates of voter par-

ticipation in national elections), a strong case can be made for redirecting U.S. assistance to initiatives that would more effectively and directly propel the reform agenda launched in 2011. Three worthwhile beneficiaries of such assistance would include the institutions mandated by the 2011 constitution, such as the National Human Rights Council; capacity building and training initiatives targeting the regional and municipal councils formed out of the September 2015 local elections; and organizations working to combat both petty and high corruption.

- ▶ **Expand initiatives for English-language education and exchange.** Although Morocco's state institutions continue to be dominated by French-speaking elites, demand is growing among a younger generation of Moroccans for instruction in English, access to American-style higher education, and opportunities to study in the United States. This provides an opening of strategic consequence to expand U.S. cultural influence in a country that "punches above its weight" in regional, continental, and international arenas. The economic struggles in Europe, coupled with the continent's—and particularly France's—increasingly fraught relationship with its Muslim minorities, have enhanced the perception among many Moroccans that English and American-style education offer greater prospects for advancement. Currently, less than 20 percent of the \$34 million in U.S. assistance planned for FY 2016/17 (excluding funds disbursed through the MCC compact) will support educational programs, namely initiatives targeting primary and secondary education. A strong case can be made for increasing the proportion of aid spent on educational programs that expand Moroccans' access to instruction in English and the availability of American-style higher education and encourage U.S.-Morocco people-to-people exchanges.

U.S.-Regional Relations

Altogether, the Trump administration should follow these general guidelines in seeking to strengthen ties with the three northwest African states:

- ▶ **Promote greater regional counterterrorism cooperation.** The growing presence of jihadist groups across North Africa and the Sahel has fueled a shared perception among the governments of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia that they face a common security threat in the form of transnational terrorism. That sense of a shared threat has led to occasional instances of security cooperation among the three states, particularly in the areas of intelligence sharing and border control. However, deeper security cooperation remains hamstrung by the Algeria-Morocco conflict over Western Sahara, and by the longstanding dearth of political and economic integration across the region. American leadership, exercised through U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and in coordination with bodies such as the African Union, could go a long way toward enhancing counterterrorism cooperation among these states. Initial efforts to host events attended jointly by the Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian directors of military intelligence have been well received and would provide a constructive basis on which to build. One way to increase such cooperation would be to establish an annual exercise among U.S., Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian counterterrorism forces focused on addressing the states' internal security threats and stemming the flow of foreign fighters to theaters of jihadist activity. (Separately, it is important for the new administration to provide AFRICOM with the funds and manpower to fulfill an expanding mission in a critical conflict zone.)
- ▶ **Expand the U.S. Navy's presence in the western Mediterranean.** While the South China Sea, Arabian/Persian Gulf, and eastern Mediterranean receive most attention in terms of regions deserving of greater U.S. naval presence, it is important not to overlook the western Mediterranean.

Enhancing America's naval presence here would improve U.S. capacity to disrupt and deter terrorist activity, ensure maritime security, bolster NATO's efforts to patrol and protect the area under the framework of Operation Sea Guardian, and send a strong signal of support to U.S. allies both in North Africa and in Europe. This takes on strategic significance in light of apparent Russian naval plans to expand access to Algerian ports and perhaps even establish a base in Libya.

- ▶ **Work to deescalate tensions in the Sahara region.** Nothing could undermine U.S. efforts to promote a common sense of regional security more than renewed tensions, violence, and even war in Western Sahara. While this is an issue about which most Americans know little, it is a powerfully emotive one for leaders in the region. In this regard, the first commandment for U.S. policy is

“do no harm”—take no initiative, either bilaterally or through the UN, that any party could interpret as so blatantly one-sided that it would want to use violence to capitalize on it or need to use violence to compensate for it. For years, maintaining this policy while deepening the U.S. partnership with Morocco was no easy feat; regrettably, certain statements and actions by the Obama administration violated this commandment, enraging the Moroccans and perhaps sending the wrong signal to the Polisario and its Algerian patrons about U.S. preferences in this conflict. Fixing this dynamic requires the new administration to take the corrective measures in relations with Morocco cited above. In so doing, however, Washington needs to make special efforts to direct the attention of both Rabat and Algiers toward their common security challenges and away from an escalation of tensions over their historic dispute.

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