

# US-Algeria Cooperation in Transnational Counterterrorism

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Hakim Gherieb is an expert in security and strategic affairs.

The escalation of conflicts, whether in nature or number, has captured the attention of major international powers, especially the United States. In the aftermath of 9/11, the 'War on Terror' became the most important theme of international security cooperation in the United States and the defining feature of its national and international policy. The United States thus normalized new counterterrorism measures, including preventive war, humanitarian intervention, and countering the risks arising from failed states.

The 9/11 attacks changed the world's perception of terrorism. The United States resorted to conventional means to counter terrorism on an international scale, despite its advanced technology and systems. The United States helped issue UN Security Council Resolution 1373, which called on countries' worldwide cooperation to dry up terrorist funding sources and deprive terrorist groups of a safe haven. These efforts confirmed the validity of Algeria's warnings from the phenomenon it witnessed between 1992 and 1999.

For a decade, Algeria dealt with terrorist groups and learned their tactics. It managed to restrain them and curb their power such that its counterterrorism expertise is now required by Western capitals, namely Washington. This prompted the United States to conclude a security cooperation agreement on counterterrorism with Algeria.

As the world learned that terrorism knows no boundaries or religion, it shifted its attention to Algeria in order to benefit from its experience in counterterrorism. Security cooperation was not limited to counterterrorism but also included support for peaceful political solutions to the region's conflicts, especially in Mali and Libya. That was mainly illustrated by the support provided by Washington and the international community to the Algerian mediation that aimed to resolve the political crisis in Northern Mali and to establish an inclusive dialogue among Libyan stakeholders, putting an end to chaos and division in Libya.

Unless one weakens the Islamic State's affiliated networks and destroys its ideological foundations, dismantling the group will not be achieved. The Islamic State has become a direct threat to Maghreb, Sahel, and European countries via its offshoots in the Maghreb, particularly in Libya. Algeria has contained the terrorist threat by targeting the leaders of terrorist groups and destroying their ideology and combat capabilities. Algeria was also able to contain the various local networks created by the group in Tunisia and the African Sahel countries. Consequently, the United States has increasingly counted on security cooperation with Algeria and tap into intelligence-sharing opportunities.

Algeria has previous experience in dealing with threats posed by Algerian armed groups having sworn allegiance to IS and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Since Algeria is quite familiar with this particular enemy, it can provide the United States with detailed information on how to confront it.

By way of cooperation within the framework of intelligence-sharing with Algeria and other African countries, the United States seeks to establish a cooperative framework, which would allow it to obtain accurate information without raising alarms among international stakeholders. The U.S. national security strategy highlighted the necessity of reinforcing ties with allies within the intelligence framework, as well as consolidating partnerships with international intelligence agencies. Algeria cooperates in this regard with the United States at the intelligence level in order to counter terrorism in neighboring Libya, northern Mali and within the Algerian borders themselves. Therefore, the United States placed great emphasis on the importance of regular communication with Algeria, a major partner in the region and in international counterterrorism efforts.

Algeria adopted an open policy towards the United States and other Western countries and was the first to warn against the transnational aspect of terrorism at all international events, including their very own Global Counterterrorism Forum. Moreover, Algeria is an active member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and co-chairs the Sahel Region Capacity Building Working Group of the Global Counterterrorism Forum. Finally, it also provides logistical support to United Nations and African Union peacekeeping operations.

Within the framework of U.S.-Algerian cooperation to counter terrorism, a U.S. program was agreed upon to support the capabilities of the Algerian army. U.S. authorities endeavored via the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) to support the counterterrorism capabilities of Algerian army units and assigned the training and framing mission to L-3 Communications, a spin-off from Lockheed Martin that specializes in defense and weapons, particularly explosives. L-3 Communications will provide specialized training courses in order to support analysis and terrorism prevention capabilities, especially those involving conventional explosives.

It is noteworthy that U.S.-Algerian relations are based on political and military dialogue, including meaningful visits exchanged over the last two years, such as the U.S-Algeria Strategic Dialogue held in Washington in 2015, as well as visits made by senior political and military US officials to Algeria in 2016. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue on counterterrorism is also another form of countering the transcontinental phenomenon at the international level, by promoting security cooperation and the exchange of military and technical information and expertise.

In conclusion, one can state that Algeria has expressed renewed interest in African issues at various global summits and maintained its mediation efforts among disputing parties in Africa, such as the Horn of Africa in 2000, and the Tuareg cause with the central government in Mali in 2006-2012. Then Algeria sponsored the peace and reconciliation agreement in Mali and finally supported the inter-Libyan dialogue, thus proving that its position with Africa is still the same as it was before the security political crisis that struck the country during the nineties.

Within the framework of cooperation between both sides, Algerian authorities provided Washington with two lists of over 1,000 suspects linked to terrorist groups, offering its cooperation in terms of security and information exchange. In return, Algeria hoped that the United States and Europe would do the same by delivering wanted Algerian terrorists. The first list included 350 names of suspects linked to the al-Qaeda organization active on European and U.S. territories, while the other list contained around 1,000 names of active terrorists in Algeria.

The United States was prompted to cooperate with Algeria in its quest for expertise by the fact that both countries now share the same threat, since the armed group that was active within Algerian borders wished to gain global exposure by declaring that it joined IS and AQIM. Therefore, Algeria is quite familiar with this rival and can provide the United States with all the necessary information on how to confront it. U.S.-Algerian cooperation has yet to make enough progress since both countries need to bolster their relation with qualitative support. The United States should show further commitment in its support for political and economic reforms in Algeria.

The funds allocated to Algeria as part of the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative are not sufficient and the United States cannot continue developing its security cooperation with Algeria while the latter is being

marginalized compared to its neighbors in the Maghreb region. Even though it is ranked sixth in terms of natural gas and oil provision, Algeria remains the second-highest recipient of direct U.S. investment in the region, amounting to around 5 billion USD towards the hydrocarbon and manufacturing sector.

If Algeria is to enhance cooperation with the United States, it needs to develop more balanced relations in North Africa. In particular, Algeria should push Morocco to resolve its conflict with the Western Sahara by acknowledging the Saharan people's right to self-determination. Aside from the Western Sahara issue, the United States must take into consideration Algeria's relevance for the region as a key stakeholder for the U.S. strategy in North Africa and the Sahel. ❖

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