

Taking Stock of U.S. Policy Options in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia

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The three countries that comprise the Maghreb region -- Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia -- are bound by important cultural, linguistic, and economic ties, and by a shared history of French occupation. Even after Africa's official decolonization, the Maghreb has remained a close and intense sphere of European, and especially French, influence (and the Maghreb in turn exerts a measure of influence over France). As for the United States, engagement since decolonization has focused on building new economic, inter-cultural, military, and political ties, and collaborating on international diplomatic efforts of mutual interest.

Whatever the ties among the three countries of the Maghreb, what is needed is a sensitive appraisal of each country's own unique trajectory. Algeria, for its part, has remained a behemoth in regional mediation while its changing internal politics has received minimal attention. Morocco has remained a steadfast ally and has ramped up its counterterrorism cooperation while presenting some human rights conundrums to U.S. engagement. And Tunisia's democratic progress has been marred by economic crisis and increased terror. While for years, the U.S. has engaged North Africa as a geostrategic location insofar as it has facilitated policy elsewhere -- whether in the Sahel, the Mediterranean, or the Middle East -- the time is ripe to elevate the Maghreb's profile in the minds of American policymakers...

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