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TAKING STOCK OF THE MIDDLE EAST IN 2015

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7 Maghreb Rising: Competition and Realignment

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After decades on the margins of the Arab world, what happens in North Africa's Maghreb region now reaches into its core.¹ The "Arab West" captured attention in December 2010 when thousands of Tunisians took to the streets to protest former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's repressive rule. Those demonstrations sent shockwaves across the region and inspired millions of Arabs in Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and elsewhere to rise up against authoritarian rulers.

Since December 2010 much has changed. Libya is divided by civil war and is desta-

bilizing its neighbors, political Islamists won elections in Morocco, and Tunisia is on a fragile path toward more representative government after decades of dictatorship. These trends, combined with regional uncertainty, turmoil, and competition, increasingly affect the interests of a wide range of actors. No longer an outlier, the Maghreb is now an important strategic component of new regional alignments that have been coalescing since the uprisings.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Turkey have been the most assertive outside actors in the Maghreb. These gov-

1. The Maghreb is defined here as the states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.

ernments seek to reshape regional alliances to protect national interests—and their hold on power. They desire deeper military, diplomatic, and economic partnerships with Maghreb states to expand their spheres of influence. Moreover, these new partnerships provide strategic benefits in what these governments view as long-term regional conflicts in which the United States is either indifferent or preoccupied with different objectives.

External actors are more willing than ever to expend significant political and financial capital to influence political outcomes in the Maghreb.

Turkey has sought a greater role in Arab affairs and opportunities to promote the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s model of governance. Its efforts have often overlapped with those of Qatar, which supports Islamist movements as a tool for greater regional influence. The UAE, often in cooperation with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has supported status quo forces, including anti-Islamist political factions in Tunisia and Libya, while deepening its partnership with Morocco. Saudi Arabia and the UAE fear that if countries in the Maghreb develop transparent and representative politics or if political Islamists lead governments, it could stoke political opposition in the Gulf, undermining their own authority. Growing insecurity and radicalism fueled by jihad in Syria and the security vacuum in Libya also

affect every country in the region. For governments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt, and Turkey, these trends are not merely foreign policy issues, but directly impact their own domestic politics.

Given the stakes, these external actors are more willing to act independently and expend significant political and financial capital to influence political outcomes in the Maghreb. For the United States, the Maghreb is also increasingly important.

But unlike GCC governments and Turkey, which are working to reshape regional alliances for strategic purposes, the United States is less concerned with specific political outcomes in individual Maghreb countries than with a status quo that promotes security, government capacity to provide basic needs for citizens, and economic growth. The problem, for the United States and the region, is that the policies of other actors, including U.S. allies, often do more to prolong conflicts than to support political compromise and power-sharing in the Maghreb. These political divisions and conflicts create a vacuum exploited by radical groups, undermine state capacity to provide for citizens, and prevent consensus for urgently needed economic and political reforms.

THE NEW MAGHREB LANDSCAPE

In the past, Maghreb dynamics were relatively contained within the region. For most of the last half century, the Maghreb looked toward Europe, which had the most at stake in the region. The European Union launched the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 partly to insulate the continent from the Maghreb's challenges. The EU and its member states provided the vast majority of the Maghreb's foreign aid, foreign direct investment (FDI), and trade. European governments poured billions of euros into promoting political and economic reform intended to improve conditions to the south, and (thereby) lower incentives for migration north. Algeria and Libya provided an important source of energy. And millions of North Africans settled in Europe, mostly seeking better job prospects. Algeria's war against Islamist groups in the 1990s sparked isolated attacks in France but did not pose a strategic threat. Politics remained local, and European partners largely provided aid and support to promote stability rather than regime change to oust autocratic leaders.²

The Sunni Arab Gulf states, by contrast, largely left the Maghreb alone. Deep ties existed between Morocco and Gulf monarchies, but personal relationships, rather than overlapping interests, were paramount. Gulf Arab governments' policy priorities focused on challenges closer to home such as wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, turmoil in Yemen, and the rise of Shi'ite Iran. The Maghreb was a part of the Arab world, but it was not essential to the GCC states.

In a short period of time, however, the Maghreb changed. Some change has been revolutionary while some has been planned and evolutionary. In every case, the outcome of political struggles and the decisions of governments not only will shape individual countries in the Maghreb but also will have widespread consequences for a range of actors in the Middle East and North Africa. Leaders and societies face a number of critical choices in the future. The choices include how states respond to radicalism and violent extremism, how to solve Libya's crisis, whether to make painful economic reforms, and how to manage popular demands for more transparent government and economic opportunities. The outcomes of these trends will be felt far beyond the Maghreb's borders.

Tunisia

Of all the Maghreb countries, Tunisia has witnessed the most change and holds the most promise of creating a new political system based on representative government and consensus. Ennahda's decision in late 2013 to relinquish power was

2. In 2011 the French and British governments supported military action to overthrow the Qaddafi regime.

partially influenced by the military coup in Egypt, which ousted President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013, and declining popularity due to rising terrorist violence. Still, given Tunisia's past authoritarianism and repression of political Islamists, it was a bold move that likely saved the country from deeper polarization and political violence.

Since then, Tunisia has made historic strides forward, with another round of free and transparent parliamentary and presidential elections. Yet the lack of political and economic vision in the new government further raises doubts about whether it can make structural reforms that move Tunisia beyond its pre-revolutionary socioeconomic status quo.

Several looming challenges make Tunisia's path uncertain. Tunisia's greatest hurdle moving forward may be how to dismantle an economic system built to support authoritarianism in favor of a system that is more inclusive and spurs trade, economic growth, and job creation. Political uncertainty has hurt tourism, formerly more

than seven percent of gross domestic product (GDP),³ and European economic woes, combined with perceived political instability and labor unrest in Tunisia, have hurt foreign investment and exports to Europe, Tunisia's largest trading partner. But structural problems also undermine Tunisia's economic performance. According to the World Bank, more than half of Tunisia's economy remains closed or is subject to entry restrictions, while low productivity, lingering corruption, and inefficiencies continue.⁴ Monopolies and import laws intended to reward supporters of the Ben Ali regime remain in place, creating price distortions, informal economic activity, and lost tax revenue.⁵ The combined impact not only affects consumers but also creates an unattractive climate for investment and entrepreneurship.

Tackling many of these economic problems requires political decisions that could hurt entrenched business interests, many of which support the new government. It also means considering the interests of Tunisia's powerful labor unions, most importantly the Union Générale Tu-

Tunisia's greatest hurdle moving forward may be how to dismantle an economic system built to support authoritarianism.

3. International Monetary Fund, *Tunisia: Selected Issues* (Country Report 10/109), May 2010, 2, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10109.pdf>.

4. The World Bank, "Tunisia: Development Policy Review," May 24, 2014, 82, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/09/16/000456286_20140916144712/Rendered/PDF/861790DPR0P12800Box385314B00PUBLIC0.pdf.

5. *The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs and Greater Wealth to all Tunisians*, The World Bank, May 24, 2014, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/09/16/000456286_20140916144712/Rendered/PDF/861790DPR0P12800Box385314B00PUBLIC0.pdf.

nisienne du Travail (UGTT) and the Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat (UTICA), which together have the power to mobilize tens of thousands of members. The unions don't necessarily oppose structural reforms, though the UGTT has called for public sector salary increases and opposed loosening labor protections. Most importantly, they seek to ensure that any reforms are balanced with policies that help the middle class. The new government faces not only economic policy dilemmas but also the need to manage citizens' expectations about how quickly it can improve their lives and its ability to steer the country forward.

The backdrop of growing insecurity in Tunisia and in the region makes Tunisia's tasks much harder and creates a heightened threat environment. The March 18 attack on the Bardo Museum, which killed more than 20 people, is a stark reminder that Tunisia remains at the intersection of several radical currents including homegrown militants, al Qaeda, the Islamic State group (ISG), and various groups fighting jihad in Syria. According to Tunisian officials, between 2,400 and 3,000 Tunisians have traveled to fight in Syria since the uprising began in 2011, making Tunisians one of the largest foreign national groups fighting in Syria. Many of those joined the al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al Nusra and later the ISG. An insurgency still rages on Tunisia's western border, where the Okba ibn Nafaa Brigade, affiliated with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), has killed dozens of Tunisian security forces since 2012.⁶ Meanwhile, violence and instability in Libya heighten security risks in Tunisia.

Greater political coordination between the government, military, and interior ministry in late 2013 helped enable Tunisia's security forces to launch a more cohesive counterterrorism push on several fronts. In 2014 alone, security forces arrested more than 1,500 suspected militants, though how many are actually involved in militant activity is unclear. The danger, however, is that a strategy that relies too heavily on security or is seen as violating human rights could trigger a backlash and greater sympathy for jihadi-salafists and create a new wave of radicalization.

Libya

How to end Libya's multiple conflicts, most importantly the polarizing fight between two rival governments, is one of the Maghreb's biggest challenges. These conflicts boil down to a question of legitimacy—a battle over who has the legitimacy to head Libya's central government and begin the long process of rebuilding the country, which was left with few functioning institutions after four decades of Muammar el-

6. According to some reports the Okba ibn Nafaa Brigade has pledged allegiance to ISG Caliph Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. What is more likely is that a faction of the group has pledged allegiance to the ISG while part remains affiliated with AQIM in Algeria.

Qaddafi's rule. Those who fought Qaddafi claim revolutionary legitimacy. Some claim legitimacy from elections. Hundreds of militias claim legitimacy by force of arms or tribal affiliation. In the short period since Qaddafi's fall in October 2011, Libya has had three governing bodies: the National Transitional Council (NTC), which formed during the rebellion against Qaddafi; the General National Congress (GNC), which was elected in July 2012; and the Council of Deputies (House of Representatives), elected in June 2014. It has had six prime ministers, most of whom quit or were forced out by armed militias.

Throughout most of 2014, competing factions contested the legitimacy of elections, political officials, and government decisions through intimidation and violence. The result was intense fighting for control, which created two competing governments.

Libya Dawn, a loose coalition of Islamists and numerous militias affiliated with Misratan tribal forces, controls Tripoli. The coalition includes the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Justice and Construction Party (JCP) and members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which once fought

alongside al Qaeda in Afghanistan and is designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization.

The Tobruk-based government, the House of Representatives, allied itself with General Khalifa Hefatar, a former Qaddafi officer who spent years of exile in the United States and

Many Libyans who worked for a negotiated solution to Libya's conflicts view General Hefatar's forces as simply one more militia among many.

was at one point funded by the CIA to overthrow Qaddafi.⁷ Hefatar calls for eradicating all Islamists, including those that have participated in parliamentary elections, and in May 2014 launched air and ground attacks against Islamist forces in the Eastern city of Beng-

hazi. He has been accused of using cluster munitions in civilian areas. Many Libyans who worked for a negotiated solution to Libya's conflicts view General Hefatar's forces as simply one more militia among many.

It is tempting to boil Libya's conflict down to a battle between Islamist and nationalist forces. But the reality is more complicated. The country is divided along multiple fault lines, which fuel conflict beyond the Tripoli-Tobruk clash and include tribal, ethnic, and regional feuds. In the southern city of Sabha, for example, clashes between different tribal factions have killed hundreds of people since 2012.⁸

7. Hefatar called his force the Libyan National Army and allied himself with forces in Libya's regular army, including air force units stationed in the East. For a profile of Hefatar see Jon Lee Anderson, "The Unravelling," *New Yorker*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>.

8. "Libya's south scarred by tribal battles," *Al Jazeera*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/01/libya-south-scarred-tribal-battles-201412461116244625.html>.

Political deadlock between competing governments, meanwhile, has allowed the spread of radical militants, including those allied with the ISG. The ISG sees an opportunity to create a foothold in Libya, which it could use to expand throughout the Maghreb and Sahel. For the moment, the ISG is strongest in Derna, a coastal town of about 100,000 people, but it has branches in Fezzan and Tripolitania as well. It is increasing its operations in Sirte and Benghazi, where it is trying to co-opt Ansar al Shari'a fighters and other jihadi-salafists, and Tripoli, where it reportedly launched the attack against the Corinthia Hotel in January 2015. That attack killed 10 people, including an American security contractor.⁹ It is unclear whether Libya Dawn's approach to jihadi-salafists might shift after the Corinthia attack, leading to a military showdown at some point in the future. Should the ISG forces expand, they could also trigger a more direct clash with Misratan and other tribal militias who may not appreciate the radical group's encroachment. What is clear is that without future cooperation between the Tripoli and Tobruk governments, it will be difficult to root out the ISG and other jihadi-salafists.

In the meantime, political deadlock and insecurity threaten Libya's primary source of hard currency: energy. Hydrocarbons account for nearly 96 percent of total government revenue and 98 percent of export revenue.¹⁰ Production cuts due to violence and blockades of oil ports have caused a significant drop in production and export. Production at its low point dipped to fewer than 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) in April 2014 and hovered around 333,000 bpd for most of 2014. That is still well below the 1.6 million bpd Libya pumped during Qaddafi's rule. Over the long term, the unreliability of Libyan oil exports, the current global oversupply, and price pressures could hinder a future government's efforts to build a legitimate and functioning state system that provides security and basic services to its citizens. Without substantial oil revenue, Libya will be dependent on external aid.

Libya's conflict threatens all of its neighbors. After decades of meddling in others' internal affairs, Libya has become an arena for proxy battles by external actors. While foreign governments seek to shape political outcomes, local factions are manipulating outside political and financial support for their own agendas. This mix creates a dangerous cycle and makes establishing a legitimate government in control of Libya's territory, security, and resources a daunting challenge, which could take years, if it is even possible.

9. Daniela Deane and Adam Goldman, "American among victims of attack on hotel in Libyan capital," *Washington Post*, January 27, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunmen-storm-tripoli-luxury-hotel/2015/01/27/ae26ec1e-a611-11e4-a06b-9df2002b86a0_story.html.

10. Crude oil accounts for 79 percent of hydrocarbon exports. See U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Libya," November 25, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=LY>.

Algeria

Algeria has enjoyed a rare decade of political predictability and relative security after years of violence and terrorism. The future, however, will be complicated. Algeria is largely surrounded by insecure borders and weak governments in Mali, Tunisia, Niger, and Libya while its western border with Morocco remains shut because of diplomatic conflict. The global price of oil plummeted by nearly half in 2014, and oil contributes approximately 95 percent of export revenues and 60 percent of the state budget.¹¹ On the political front, 78-year-old President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who ushered in more than a decade of relative calm, does not have a clear successor.¹² Other senior regime figures are also aging or ill, raising the specter for some Algerians of an unmanaged, and potentially violent, generational transition.

Rising energy prices over the last two decades enabled the government to unite its own disparate factions around a shared source of income, pay off the country's external debt, boost foreign currency reserves, fund patronage networks, and buy off former militants as part of a national reconciliation process. Over the last several years, the government could respond to thousands of demonstrations and pro-

tests and placate the public by addressing a range of socioeconomic demands, from housing to jobs.

The recent drop in oil revenue already is having an impact, as Algeria is expecting a budget shortfall of more than \$50 billion in 2015.¹³ Algeria has the world's fifteenth largest foreign exchange reserves, and government savings will reportedly cover the vast majority (88.3 percent) of the projected deficit.¹⁴ Lower government revenue that leads to cuts in spending will not necessarily trigger mass protests. But it makes the government's stabilization policy harder during a tumultuous period across the region. Public demonstrations have failed to translate into structural political changes, but the specter of the oil price collapse in the 1980s and its political reverberations still weigh heavily on Algerian policymakers. In 1986 the price of oil dropped to \$10 per barrel, forcing the government to slash its public spending over the next few years. Economic crisis combined with a series of clashes between protestors and the army in 1988 contributed to the regime's decision to hold open elections, which political Islamists won. In 1991, the army stepped in and canceled the election results. A decade-long battle between the government and Islamists left approximately 150,000 people dead

11. International Monetary Fund, "Algeria: Selected Issues (Country Report 14/34)," February 2014, 26, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr1434.pdf>.

12. According to the Algerian constitution, should the president die in office or become incapacitated, the president of the upper chamber of parliament becomes interim president, followed by presidential elections 60 days later.

13. The budget law envisions revenues of 46.9 billion euros and outlays of 88.6 billion euros, an increase of 15.7 percent this year, for a deficit equivalent to 22.1 percent of GDP. "Algeria sees 42 bn euro budget deficit on weaker oil," Agence France-Presse, December 30, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2891635/Algeria-sees-42-bn-euro-budget-deficit-weaker-oil.html>.

14. Ibid.

and the country traumatized. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's rule ushered in greater stability, and high hydrocarbon prices made it possible.

Lower prices, however, aren't the only problem. Algeria's overall oil and gas production is declining.

Lower prices, however, aren't the only problem. Algeria's overall oil and gas production is declining. Since 2006, lower production, stagnant reserves, and higher domestic consumption have meant less oil and gas for export.¹⁵ To shore up its declining revenues and falling production in mature fields, Algeria has launched an

ambitious strategy to produce shale gas, including by investing \$70 billion over the next 20 years.¹⁶ Organized protests by local communities and environmental groups against developing shale in southern Algeria, however, have created a new hurdle for the government. The prime minister has promised to delay shale development for several years. Yet the centrality of energy production to government spending means that it will likely move forward despite domestic opposition.

While Algeria's domestic policy remains relatively constant, its regional policy has shifted in subtle yet significant ways. It has a longstanding policy of non-interference in neighbors' affairs and opposing foreign military intervention in the region.¹⁷ But after Algeria opposed French military intervention in Mali, France claimed that Algeria had granted it overflight rights in support of Operation Serval in January 2013 to evict Islamist militants from Mali. Then Algeria reportedly cooperated closely with Tunisian security forces in fighting militants on the Tunisian-Algerian border. Algeria also has worked more closely with Egypt to find a solution to Libya's security vacuum, although its stance on a parallel track of negotiations taking place in Morocco is unclear. In a continuation of its efforts to lead a non-Western response to instability in the Sahel over the past decade, Algeria has mediated Mali's peace talks and sought to lead a forum of Saharan countries fighting terrorism. But internal debate over intervention persists at the highest levels of government.

15. U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Algeria," July 24, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=ag>.

16. Besides six shale gas basins that Sonatrach has already listed in the Sahara desert, drilling operations are about to start offshore for the first time. "Algeria looks to invest \$70 bln in shale gas over 20 years," Agence France-Presse, January 11, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/energy/2015/01/11/Algeria-looks-to-invest-70-bln-in-shale-gas-over-20-years-.html>.

17. Algeria has repeatedly opposed requests for military intervention in Mali and Libya. "Algeria rules out military intervention in Mali," *Al Monitor*, June 16, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/06/algeria-mali-will-not-intervene.html#>.

There are also internal debates over how openly and closely to cooperate with the United States, though ties have deepened considerably under Bouteflika.

Algeria's ruling oligarchy understands that the country and the region are changing. New and old challenges create uncertainty about the future. Yet how to address those changes and challenges divides Algeria's power centers. The regime seeks to create sufficient openings to minimally satisfy popular demands while maintaining as much of the current balance of power as possible. This will require both political and economic incentives and opportunities to cooperate. Should cooperation break down, it will likely further paralyze decisionmaking on critical issues such as energy licensing, foreign investment, and political participation. As a large and influential country, Algeria's decisions on all of these issues will reverberate throughout the Maghreb and beyond.

Morocco

Morocco successfully escaped the political instability that affected its North African neighbors in 2011 by responding swiftly to popular uprisings. Less than a month after youth protests erupted in February 2011, King Mohammed VI launched a series of political reforms granting enhanced parliamentary powers through a new constitution. Later that year Morocco held parliamentary elections won by the Justice and Development Party (PJD), an Islamist political party that has competed in parliamentary politics for more than a decade.

Yet rather than addressing Morocco's socioeconomic challenges and demands for greater transparency and economic equality, the reforms reinforced the palace's control of nearly every aspect of Morocco's political, economic, religious, and security affairs. The palace-driven reforms effectively split the opposition by offering limited concessions that satisfied some but not others. Further, by allowing the PJD to head the government for the first time, the king neutralized the most organized political party that might oppose him. Through its electoral victory, the PJD went from being the loyal opposition to the king's chief defender, creating a mutually dependent relationship between the PJD and the palace.

Though there is no serious call for revolutionary change at the moment, challenges loom on several fronts that could disrupt Morocco's political stability. One is the uncertain future of the Al Adl Wa'l Ihsane (Justice and Charity) movement, a tolerated Islamist group that rejects the king's religious and political rule and is thus barred from parliamentary and municipal politics. If the movement requests to form a political party at some point in the future, it could disrupt parliament's acquiescence to the monarchy's executive powers and force a greater debate on the balance of power between king and parliament. Even absent an entry into formal politics, the group has a vibrant youth wing that is likely to play an important role in any future grassroots opposition.¹⁸

18. Justice and Charity's youth wing initially cooperated with the February 20 Movement in 2011, though it later withdrew its support.

The second challenge is tackling a long list of socioeconomic problems. Morocco's widely publicized reforms and impressive economic growth over the last few years have largely benefited the ruling elite while failing to address widespread calls to fight corruption and create greater transparency, economic opportunity, and equality. Many of these problems are deeply entrenched in Morocco's power structure and elite patronage systems. Without addressing the deeper issues of economic inequality and opportunity, however, criticism of the king and his power circle known as the *makhzen* is likely to continue, posing political challenges and greater scrutiny of the king's executive authority.¹⁹

Third, Morocco faces the common regional challenge of growing radicalization, which has lured an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 Moroccan fighters to jihad in Syria since 2011. Most originally joined Jabhat al Nusra's Moroccan led battalions, though many defected to the ISG beginning in 2014. Moroccan security services have reportedly arrested dozens of local cells they claim were either affiliated with AQIM or the ISG, planning attacks, or sending Moroccans to fight in Syria.²⁰ The issue is not new. Morocco has battled local jihadi-salafi cells in the past, and dozens of Moroccans fought with al Qaeda during the U.S.-led war in Iraq, though the numbers of Moroccan fighters today far exceed those during the U.S.-led Iraq war.²¹

Morocco has responded to growing radicalization with a program to promote a Moroccan Islamic narrative and identity based on the centrality of the king and the Maliki school of jurisprudence.²² The objective is to socialize Moroccans to respect state religious ulema (religious scholars) and by extension royal authority. One of the key challenges is creating religious leaders and institutions that resonate with young people and provide a compelling alternative to the radical and rebellious

19. Growing criticism and scrutiny of the king's executive powers and wealth has led to a crackdown on dissent and freedom of speech. Criticizing the king remains a criminal offense, though artists and journalists continue pushing the limits of this restriction. Moroccan authorities respond by using the justice system to prosecute public criticism often on trumped up charges, which usually draws more attention. In one high-profile case, a 28-year-old rapper known as "Al-Haqed" (the enraged one) has been a frequent target of the authorities for his songs which have criticized the police and indirectly criticized the king. In one song the activist substituted the word "freedom" for "the king" in a national saying "God, the nation, and the king." See "Rapper Convicted After Apparently Unfair Trial," Human Rights Watch, July 2, 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/02/morocco-rapper-convicted-after-apparently-unfair-trial>.

20. Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Moroccan government proposes penalties for nationals fighting in Syria, Iraq," Reuters, September 18, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/18/us-morocco-security-law-idUSKBN0HD2JU20140918>.

21. Craig Whitlock, "Terrorist Networks Lure Young Moroccans to War in Far-Off Iraq," *Washington Post*, February 20, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/19/AR2007021901168.html>.

22. Haim Malka, "The Struggle for Religious Identity in Tunisia and the Maghreb," CSIS, May 2, 2014, http://csis.org/files/publication/140502_Malka_Maghreb_Religious_Identity_Web.pdf.

message of jihadi-salafists. Morocco's efforts are the most comprehensive, but similar strategies are underway in Tunisia, Egypt, and the UAE. This component of what the U.S. government calls countering violent extremism (CVE) is one of the most important government strategies to fight radicalism, and it is a generational struggle. Every country in the region and European countries with sizeable Muslim populations will be affected by Morocco's success or failure and will closely watch its development.

For the GCC countries and Turkey, the Maghreb has become a primary arena for a proxy battle between Islamist and non-Islamist political forces.

PROXY BATTLES AND EXTERNAL INTERVENTION

External actors have watched these developments closely for how they affect their own interests. For the GCC countries and Turkey, the Maghreb has become a primary arena for a proxy battle between Islamist and non-Islamist political forces, and each has steered investments and aid to shore up its allies. Maghreb governments and political forces have played into this dynamic as well, seeing opportunities for aid and external support to further local agendas. GCC states in particular provide

financial aid with fewer conditions and no transparency, making them important financial backers for some Maghreb governments and political parties.²³ Results have been mixed. In some cases external support has provided badly needed funds for

governments to get through difficult periods, as in the case of Tunisia. In other cases, it deepens already polarized politics, which fuels ongoing conflict, as in Libya.

Regional Players

Since the Arab uprisings began, Qatar and Turkey have supported political Islamists across the Middle

East and North Africa. Turkey's ruling AKP shares affinity with political Islamists, and Qatar has supported both Muslim Brotherhood inspired parties and salafi groups.²⁴ The UAE and Saudi Arabia, in contrast, declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization and support nationalist or anti-revolutionary forces throughout the region. For all of these countries, supporting or fighting political Islamists is not merely a foreign policy preference, but is deeply tied to domestic political calculations. For Qatar, Islamists of various stripes have become a useful foreign policy tool.

23. For a detailed overview of GCC engagement in the Maghreb see Carolyn Barnett, "GCC-Maghreb Relations in a Changing Regional Order," CSIS, August 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/130814_Barnett_GCCMaghreb_Web_2.pdf.

24. A number of political Islamist parties operate in the Maghreb including Morocco's PJD, Tunisia's Ennahda, Algeria's Movement for a Peaceful Society (MSP), and Libya's Justice and Construction Party. They may have been inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and have sympathy for the broader movement, but none have any open affiliation with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, nor do they share a political platform with it.

In Turkey, a victory for political Islamists would enable the AKP to claim that its model is succeeding and give it greater influence in Arab affairs. For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both of which face domestic Islamist opposition, Muslim Brotherhood victories could inspire greater political opposition at home.

Libya and Tunisia have been the primary battlegrounds within the Maghreb between these competing visions. Both the UAE and Qatar participated in the coalition to defeat Qaddafi in 2011, but they backed different factions during the military campaign and in the aftermath. Now Qatar and Turkey support Libya Dawn, which seized the capital in August 2014 and expelled the elected House of Representatives.²⁵ The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt support the Tobruk-based government of Abdullah al-Thinni and military commander Heftar. Their objectives are clear: ensure that Libya doesn't undermine security and the political status quo in neighboring Egypt, and prevent Islamists from controlling Libya.

Gulf intervention did not create the divide in Libya, but strong support for rival governments in Tripoli and Tobruk has triggered more violence and deepened the country's fragmentation. General Heftar vowed to rid Libya of all Islamists, and violence surged after he launched his "Campaign Dignity" with support from the UAE. In an unprecedented move, UAE air force jets bombed Islamist forces aligned with Libya Dawn in Tripoli in August 2014 without informing the U.S. government.²⁶ Emirati commentators quoted in the press suggested that the UAE was prompted to act to protect its interests because of U.S. inaction in conflicts in Syria and Libya.²⁷ With foreign backers, rival governments have entrenched their positions and intensified fighting for Libya's oil assets, thereby undermining a UN-led process aimed at reaching a power-sharing agreement.

The United States, in contrast, worked with both the GNC and the House of Representatives when each headed Libya's government. Though it officially recognizes the Tobruk-based government, it has so far publicly refused to supply it with weapons, in part because of discomfort with General Heftar's tactics. Instead, the U.S. government supports the UN-led reconciliation process as the only option to stabilize Libya. In July 2014, the United States shuttered its embassy in Tripoli and evacuated its staff. Though Libya's predicament has an impact on other U.S. allies

25. David D. Kirkpatrick and Eric Schmitt, "Arab Nations Strike in Libya, Surprising U.S.," *New York Times*, August 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/world/africa/egypt-and-united-arab-emirates-said-to-have-secretly-carried-out-libya-airstrikes.html>.

26. Ibid.

27. Emirati academic Abdulkhaleq Abdulla for example was quoted by Reuters regarding the airstrikes: "In the light of U.S. inaction in Syria, the message is clear, that you have to take care of your own concerns." See William MacLean, "Libyan raids herald bolder Arab action as U.S. wavers," Reuters, August 26, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/26/us-libya-security-gulf-idUSKBN0GQ23220140826>.

in the region, U.S. policy objectives have remained modest, in part because of the lack of good options and the investment in resources and manpower required to help resolve Libya's multiple conflicts. Moreover, the murder of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans has distorted any rational political debate on Libya and lowered the U.S. government's risk tolerance for operating there. Whether the United States has the ability to influence political outcomes in Libya is unclear. Yet, with no formal diplomatic presence, the United States is sitting on the sidelines, while other actors attempt to shape Libya's future.

Beyond Libya, external actors also see much at stake in Tunisia's political transition. Despite overt political support for different political factions from GCC governments and Turkey, Tunisia's main political parties chose political compromise rather than conflict. Unlike Libya, Tunisia has functioning institutions, including the military and police as well political parties,

trade unions, and numerous civil society organizations, but the country was not immune to external intervention.

Qatar provided early support for Tunisia's Ennahda-led government and saw an opportunity for political Islamists to lead the country. It backed up its political support with financial assistance, loans, and investments.²⁸ In 2012 alone, Qatar pledged multiple loans totaling more than \$1.5 billion.²⁹ Following the overthrow of Ben Ali, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani visited Tunisia and proclaimed that "your martyrs and wounded are also ours."³⁰ Ennahda leader Rached Ghannouchi's first overseas visit after constituent assembly elections in October 2011 was to Qatar. Qatar provided early support for Tunisia's government at a time when other GCC governments kept Ennahda at a distance.³¹ The UAE provided some humanitarian support for Tunisia beginning in 2011 and received Ennahda-affiliated government officials.³² Still, the UAE had a clear preference for its secularist rival Nidaa Tounes once that party coalesced.³³

28. In 2011 Qatar purchased a 75 percent stake in telephone operation Tunisiana and 99 percent share in Tunisian Qatari Bank. Qatar already owned a stake in Tunisiana through its 51 percent share of Kuwait's Wataniya which controlled 50 percent of Tunisiana. "Qatar Telecom says to boost stake in Tunisiana," Reuters, June 15, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/15/qtel-tunisiana-idUSLDE75E0M620110615>; "Qatar's QNB buys further 49.96 pct in Tunisian Qatari Bank," Reuters, January 23, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/23/us-qatar-qnb-tunisiana-idUSBRE90M0OR20130123>.

29. Qatar purchased millions in Tunisian bonds, and invested and supported numerous social and economic projects, though a publicized plan for building a \$2 billion oil refinery (which had originally been signed under Ben Ali in 2007) has not materialized. Domestic criticism for the repayment of loan terms created a backlash against Qatar.

30. "Qatar's influence in Tunisia," *Tunis Times*, October 15, 2013, <http://www.thetunistimes.com/2013/10/qatars-influence-in-tunisia-91527/>.

31. Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi met the Emir of Qatar in April 2011.

32. Ola Salem, "UAE Sends Help for the 'New Tunisia'," *National*, May 4, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-sends-help-for-the-new-tunisia>.

33. Since Ennahda's resignation from office the UAE has stepped up its support for Nidaa Tounes, which was formed to challenge Ennahda. Prior to the 2014 parliamentary elections, the UAE reportedly donated two armored cars to provide security for Nidaa leader Essebsi and also reportedly flew him on a private jet to visit the country in May 2014, in violation of a 2011 law which prohibits foreign funding for political parties. Mary Atkinson, "'Luxury' cars and a foreign funding scandal in Tunisia," *Middle East Eye*, August 13, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/luxury-cars-and-foreign-funding-scandal-tunisia-1891049441>.

The UAE recalled its ambassador to Tunisia in September 2013 after President Moncef Marzouki criticized the ousting of President Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

By contrast, the United States has provided Tunisia with slightly more than \$600 million since 2011.³⁴ The sum is significant by historical standards of U.S. aid to Tunisia, but it is a fraction of what Qatar provided in a single year. It is also a fraction of what the United States spends on some other Middle Eastern countries. Jordan, for example, received \$660 million annually between FY2010-2014 as part of a five-year aid package.³⁵ That number is about to increase with a new aid package that will provide more than \$1 billion a year to Jordan.³⁶

GCC governments also took great interest in Morocco, a fellow Sunni Arab monarchy. Morocco's longstanding relations with Sunni Arab monarchies in the Gulf have deepened since the Arab uprisings. What the Gulf countries seek is relatively straightforward: to support a fellow monarchy, prevent the spread of political Islamism, and take advantage of investment opportunities where available.

Following the uprisings, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait announced a \$2.5 billion aid package for Morocco, and a \$285 million loan for Morocco from the Islamic Development Bank.³⁷ Moreover, the GCC proposed in 2011 that Morocco (and Jordan) join the Council. Though movement toward formal membership has not progressed, the GCC reportedly invited Morocco and Jordan to join a military alliance in March 2014. The proposed alliance would involve Moroccan troops shoring up GCC military forces in exchange for aid.³⁸ Moroccan military forces have a long history of cooperation with GCC militaries and already station troops in some countries for specified ongoing missions.³⁹ More recently the UAE and Morocco signed a military cooperation agreement which includes UAE command of Moroccan F-16s participating in the anti-ISG coalition in Syria.

Despite this closeness, Morocco walks a fine line with the GCC and attempts to maintain independent policies. Rather than sharing the UAE's and Saudi Arabia's

34. Alexis Arieff and Carla E. Humud, "Political Transition in Tunisia," Congressional Research Service, October 22, 2014, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21666.pdf>.

35. Jeremy Sharp, "Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, December 2, 2014, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/234976.pdf>.

36. "U.S. plans to boost aid to Jordan to \$1 billion per year," Reuters, February 3, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/03/us-jordan-aid-idUSKBN0L72ET20150203>.

37. The aid was part of a \$5 billion pledge for Morocco and Jordan.

38. Awad Mustafa, "GCC Seeks to Form Military Bloc with Jordan, Morocco," *Defense News*, April 14, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140414/DEFREG04/304140018/>.

39. *Ibid.*

opposition to political Islamists, Morocco's king cooperates with the Islamist PJD. At the same time, the monarchy shares the UAE's goal of promoting the Maliki school of Islam as a non-violent alternative to salafi-inspired Islamic teaching and Saudi-style Wahhabism. It also has balanced UAE and Saudi investment with Qatari investment, including a proposed \$2.2 billion joint investment fund in Morocco.⁴⁰

Of all the Maghreb countries, Algeria is the most impervious to outside influence and the most vehe-

ment in opposing external intervention in the region. Thus, it approaches GCC activity and other efforts in the Maghreb with suspicion. It has traditionally supported more hawkish pricing policies within OPEC. Algeria opposed the NATO-led military coalition that ousted Qaddafi, warning of dire consequences should Qaddafi be deposed. Algeria, however, has stepped up coordination with its neighbors on Libyan security issues.

France's Assertiveness

European states, most notably the former colonial powers of France, Spain, and Italy, also have direct interests in the Maghreb.

Each Maghreb country is a destination for substantial European commercial interests, and Europe hosts sizeable North African immigrant communities that maintain links with their home countries. The Maghreb has for decades provided south-

ern Europe with unskilled labor, and the vast majority of the region's economy is tied to Europe, which is the largest trading partner of each Maghreb state. European imports of Libyan and Algerian energy further bind the two regions.⁴¹ In addition, growing radicalism means that the Maghreb's security is intertwined with that

of Europe. Today, European security officials are concerned about radicalized militants moving among North Africa, the jihadi battlefields of Syria, and Europe.

France has pursued an assertive foreign policy in the Maghreb, demonstrating the country's willingness to secure its interests in the region. France was instrumental in building a NATO coalition and persuading the Obama administration to support the effort to oust Qaddafi. Ironically, the toppling of Qaddafi triggered an exodus of Tuareg mercenaries that poured into Mali the following year. A military coup followed, which paved the way for al

Of all the Maghreb countries, Algeria is the most impervious to outside influence and the most vehement in opposing external intervention in the region.

40. Souhail Karam, "Gulf states court cash-strapped Morocco with investment," Reuters, November 24, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/24/qatar-morocco-investment-idUSL5E7MO46120111124>.

41. Italy for example, is dependent on Libya for nearly one quarter of its energy imports.

Qaeda-linked militants to seize control of parts of northern Mali in 2012. In response, France launched Operation Serval. It later expanded its deployments to nearly 3,000 troops across Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad through Operation Barkane, which has replaced Serval.⁴²

The United States has supported France's military missions in the Sahel, which are also intended to secure the Maghreb, by providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support (ISR) as well as heavy lift and transport for French troops and equipment. France continues urging greater international efforts to secure Libya. President François Hollande has so far ruled out unilateral military intervention in Libya. But with forces stationed less than 100 km from Libya's border in Niger, French officials have indicated that French forces would strike militants attempting to cross Libya's border in either direction.⁴³

CONSEQUENCES OF U.S. POLICY

U.S. military intervention against Qaddafi as part of a multinational coalition in March 2011 set unrealistically high expectations in the region for greater U.S. action.⁴⁴ After the overthrow of Qaddafi, the United States largely left Libya to its own devices. The deterioration of Libya's security situation and the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi dampened U.S. willingness to risk additional lives and resources in a conflict that seemed to have no clear winners.⁴⁵ The United States provided greater support for Tunisia's transition following the overthrow of Ben Ali compared to its past support, yet overall support has declined year after year since FY2012 and remains modest compared to aid in other parts of the Middle East.⁴⁶

42. More recently French officials have indicated their willingness to deploy more troops in Africa to address the growing threat of Boko Haram in Nigeria. In February 2015 French forces reportedly struck Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria.

43. "France Says Ready to Strike Extremists on Libya Border," Associated Press, January 5, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/01/05/world/europe/ap-eu-france-libya.html?_r=0.

44. U.S. military forces also bombed Tripoli in April 1986 after a string of international terrorist incidents supported by the Qaddafi regime. See Bernard Weinraub, "U.S. Jets Hit 'Terrorist Centers' in Libya; Reagan Warns of New Attacks If Needed," *New York Times*, April 15, 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/15/politics/15REAG.html>.

45. The United States has taken direct action on several occasions, mostly special operations working with the FBI to capture militants wanted in connection with attacks against U.S. citizens. In October 2013 U.S. forces captured Nazih Abdul-Hamed al Ruqai (Abu Anas al-Libi) from the streets of Tripoli, and in June 2014 it captured Ahmed Abu Khattala, a suspected ringleader of the attack on the U.S. compound in Benghazi. U.S. forces also forced the return to port of a rogue shipment of Libyan crude oil in March 2014 to prevent secessionist forces in the east from selling oil outside of government channels. Other covert operations may have occurred without publicity. But for the most part, U.S. policy toward Libya has been minimal compared with the role the United States played in overthrowing Qaddafi. Karen DeYoung, Adam Goldman, and Julie Tate, "U.S. Captured Benghazi Suspect in Secret Raid," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-captured-benghazi-suspect-in-secret-raid/2014/06/17/7ef8746e-f5cf-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52_story.html.

46. Aid in FY15 and FY16 for Tunisia could reverse this trend.

Rather than picking sides in the Maghreb, the United States has engaged with whichever governments are in power, including those led by political Islamists. In the last decade, the United States has built positive relations with every government in the Maghreb,⁴⁷

while counterterrorism cooperation, trade, and aid have expanded. But in every case, U.S. actions support incumbent governments rather than shaping politics. The United States has an opportunity to deepen its

partnership with Morocco and build new partnerships with Tunisia and Algeria that transcend the narrow issue of counterterrorism. This not only requires greater financial investment, including aid, but a senior-level commitment on both sides to move beyond narrow security interests. The challenge for the United States is that priorities and interests in the Gulf and Levant overshadow the importance of the Maghreb, making the United States a secondary actor in the latter. The consequences of playing a secondary role affect both the United States and the region.

First, in many cases outside actors with more clearly defined interests are pro-

moting policies that undermine security and in some cases perpetuate conflicts. Libya is the most important example of where a proxy battle encourages competing governments to dig in rather than pursue power-sharing political solutions

that could stabilize the country. For the U.S. government, the risk is that its policy defaults to the agenda of its closest allies who are more engaged and invested, but whose interests in some cases diverge from those of the United States. If the

If the U.S. government is less willing to invest in political outcomes, it has to be prepared to accept suboptimal outcomes in some cases.

U.S. government is less willing to invest in political outcomes, it has to be prepared to accept suboptimal outcomes in some cases. In Libya, for example, a more formal partition of the country is one possible outcome.

Second, the United States runs the risk of being manipulated by Maghreb governments that exaggerate security threats or use U.S. support, training, and equipment to suppress legitimate political opposition. Governments in the region are using the specter of radicalism and ISG expansion to constrain personal freedoms such as freedom of speech. They are increasingly intolerant of criti-

47. Beginning in 2004 the United States and Libya began normalizing relations after decades of hostility. The outbreak of the Libyan uprising and U.S. support for NATO-led military strikes ended cooperation with the Qaddafi regime. Following the overthrow of Qaddafi, the United States recognized Libya's transitional government, the National Transitional Council. It now recognizes the Tobruk-based House of Representatives government.

cism, and some have passed sweeping anti-terrorism laws that apply broad definitions of terrorism that can be easily abused. If U.S. security cooperation, training, and aid are abused and directed against legitimate political opposition, it could deepen anti-American sentiment, potentially threatening the lives of U.S. citizens in the region while fueling greater radicalization.

Third, by not clearly defining policy objectives and interests in the Maghreb, the United States runs the risk of being manipulated by other external actors who seek to enlist U.S. help to further their own policy goals. For example, French government lobbying persuaded the U.S. government to support limited U.S. military action in Libya in March 2011. What started as an air campaign to protect the people of Benghazi turned into a de facto operation to replace Qaddafi, with no clear plan for who or what would take his place. While some in the administration did aim to topple Qaddafi from the outset, there was little public or Congressional debate about the operation's potential ramifications.

Fourth, by overemphasizing security and counterterrorism in the Maghreb, the United States is missing an opportunity to build more lasting partnerships that transcend governments. Trade and investment are important areas to expand, for example. Yet, small domestic markets, language barriers, political risk, and complicated regulatory environments are obstacles to investment by U.S. companies and more difficult to address through U.S. aid programs. The United States can work with governments to improve their economic systems, but ultimately economic reforms require difficult political decisions and commitment by governments and entrenched business interests in the region, which may benefit from maintaining the status quo.

LOOKING AHEAD

Patterns of external support for different political factions and governments in the Maghreb have strengthened alliances in the Middle East and North Africa. Overlapping interests in fighting radicalism, promoting quietist Islam, and strengthening the political status quo have deepened the UAE's engagement in the Maghreb. Qatar and Turkey continue to support political Islamists, though outside of Libya, that mission has lost some momentum. This leaves the U.S. government in the awkward position of trying to balance the competing interests of its allies both in the Maghreb and outside and finding itself distanced from its partners on a number of crucial questions, even as they share a commitment to fighting radicalism and strengthening the status quo in some countries.

While the United States is more active today in the Maghreb than ever before, it is not going to fix the region's problems or invest heavily in political outcomes.

Rather, it is prepared to accept a higher level of insecurity and uncertainty. This approach reflects the constraints and challenges of the United States' broader foreign policy and risk aversion in the Middle East and North Africa as well as its priorities. Though the current dynamics may be manageable, they will not remain static. Allowing other governments to frame the region's issues and determine policy undermines U.S. interests, risks leading to outcomes that perpetuate insecurity in the Maghreb, and in some cases deepens sources of conflict and discontent that sparked the Arab uprisings.

For the moment, the United States sees the Maghreb largely through a security lens. Whether that changes depends on developments both inside and outside the region. Maghreb governments will play a role, but so will the actions of outside actors in the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe. The United States may not prioritize the Maghreb over other foreign policy interests in the Middle East. But setting policy priorities within the region that are broader will make the United States more relevant.

How Maghreb governments play into larger external power struggles will affect their own futures. Rather than seeking to address a range of political and socioeconomic challenges, these new alliances could undermine security, open new wounds, and deepen existing fault lines. As the rapid changes in the region attest, governments and political actors in the

region will have to manage these competing interests in an increasingly complex and polarizing environment. ■

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