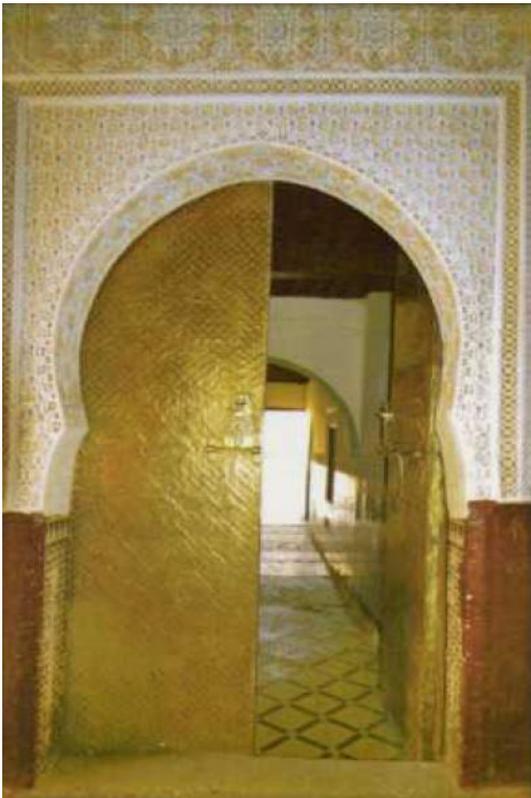

***Maghreb Facing
New Global Challenges***

**U.S.-Algerian Security Cooperation
and Regional Counterterrorism**



Alexis Arieff

July 2011

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Ifri
27 rue de la Procession
75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE
Tel: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
Email: ifri@ifri.org

Ifri-Bruxelles
Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21
1000 – Brussels – BELGIUM
Tel: +32 (0)2 238 51 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 238 51 15
Email: info.bruxelles@ifri.org

WEBSITE: ifri.org

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Introduction

This paper explores the recent evolution of security cooperation between the United States and Algeria, which have forged a strong partnership on counterterrorism despite lingering mutual distrust. The United States has strengthened its defense outreach to Algeria over the past decade, largely based on concerns over transnational terrorism, and Algeria has sought to benefit from this outreach as it positions itself as a vital player on regional issues following years of civil conflict and isolation. This paper also examines the implications of U.S.-Algerian cooperation for regional coordination on counterterrorism. Both countries espouse such coordination as the correct approach to confronting Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, an Algerian-origin terrorist/criminal network that has metastasized across the western Sahara/Sahel region, but a regional approach must also confront significant obstacles to implementation.

Although Algeria—a hydrocarbon-rich state that has paid off most of its foreign debt—receives little traditional foreign assistance from the United States, cooperation on security issues has grown significantly over the past decade. At the same time, the bilateral relationship continues to confront tensions related to broader foreign policy disagreements, Algerian sensitivities over territorial sovereignty and its attempts to project regional hegemony, and U.S. objections to Algeria’s increasingly nationalistic economic stance. A recent flare-up over the U.S. decision to downgrade Algeria’s ranking on combating human trafficking illustrates these tensions.¹ Indeed, the U.S.-Algeria relationship remains focused on security not only for reasons of *realpolitik*, but also because U.S. attempts to expand relations with regard to economic and diplomatic cooperation, civil society assistance, and educational exchanges, etc., appear to have met resistance from members of Algeria’s famously fragmented decision-making circles.² This is partly due to Algeria’s postcolonial legacy of

Alexis Arieff is Africa Analyst, Congressional Research Service.

¹ See Jamie Ingram, “Algerian Official Refutes US People-Trafficking Report Conclusions,” IHS Global Insight, June 30, 2011. The report quotes Farouk Ksentini, head of the Algerian government’s human rights commission, as accusing the United States of using its annual human trafficking report to damage Algeria’s reputation as it seeks to reintegrate into the international community.

² These stumbling blocks are alluded to, for example, in the U.S. State Department’s unusually critical annual statements on Algeria’s investment climate. The most recent statement, issued in March 2011, reports that “investment restrictions [enacted in 2009 and 2010] combined with statements by senior leaders noting the inability of

suspicion toward Western actors' intentions, and likely also to more pragmatic motivations related to the distribution of oil and gas wealth within the Algerian state.

U.S.-Algerian relations are also worth examining in the recent context of the "Arab Spring" uprisings, which have led U.S. policy makers to question a range of long-held assumptions and expectations about the supposed trade-offs between democratic openness and stability in the Middle East and North Africa. Among those who focus on the Maghreb, the uprisings have drawn attention to Algeria's apparent immunity—to date—to such populist challenges. Although the Algerian street has been roiled by riots and protests since early January, the larger ones remain discreetly organized around specific socioeconomic grievances rather than a collective expression of revolt (as in Tunisia or Egypt). Indeed, the inability of Algeria's political opposition, independent trade unions, civil society groups, and disenfranchised youth to forge a common cause in their objections to the status quo is striking, if potentially explainable given Algeria's historical legacy of civil violence and social atomization. Still, regional turbulence has nonetheless prompted Algerian authorities to engage, albeit in a limited fashion, in a public discussion over constitutional and legal reforms. Reform proposals currently being floated in Algeria touch on areas such as the electoral law, the media law, and the balance of powers within the civilian branches of government. They do not, predictably, include discussions of the role of the military and security apparatus in Algerian political life, any change to which would likely be considered a red line for the regime. Still, the issue is frequently alluded to in the Algerian press and in discussions among activists, ordinary Algerians, and the diaspora.

The upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East has likewise highlighted apparent tensions within U.S. policy toward Algeria, which, as elsewhere in the region, places a priority on security cooperation and hydrocarbon exports while acknowledging serious human rights shortcomings.³ The United States has long urged a more balanced civil-military relationship in Algeria, in line with broader

foreign investment to bring about desired growth and a focus on developing state-owned enterprises reinforce the impression of a government that has turned toward economic nationalism." (Some would argue this is a *return*, rather than a *turn*.) The annual reports are available at

<http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/>. The United States nonetheless remains the largest importer of Algerian goods—namely, hydrocarbons—and continues to seek expanded economic cooperation and investment.

³ The State Department's 2010 human rights report on Algeria states that "principal human rights problems included restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, which significantly impaired political party activities and limited citizens' ability to change the government peacefully through elections" while noting "reports of arbitrary killings," "failures to account for persons who disappeared in the 1990s," "abuse of prisoners," "lack of judicial independence," and "widespread corruption," among other abuses. The reports are at

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/index.htm>.

U.S. democracy promotion policies that support military subordination to civilian authorities, while at the same time pursuing expanded cooperation with the military that may serve to strengthen the latter's hand within the political system. This is the case notwithstanding periodic attempts to balance security cooperation with civilian engagement. For example, the State Department proposed an increase in U.S. non-military aid to Algeria for 2008, which it identified as representing a "significant realignment of U.S. assistance to increase support for democracy and governance and economic growth, while maintaining a strong security relationship."⁴ However, no bilateral democracy and governance aid was allocated in 2010 and none has been proposed for 2011 or 2012, while socio-economic aid is minimal.

The fundamentally realist U.S. stance toward Algeria has not been significantly altered, at least publicly, in light of the current regional context. Concerns over regional stability have thus placed U.S. policy makers in the sometimes awkward position of urging systemic political changes while concurrently expressing strong support for the regime, a similar approach to that taken toward other friendly Arab states. The State Department has so far reconciled this tension by supporting the Algerian government's own regime-led reform process. Thus, during a visit to Algeria in February 2011, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns noted that across the region, "people are continuing to seek freedom and opportunity and dignity," but added that

*the pursuit of those aspirations will take different shapes in different societies. How best to address them is a choice that people and leaderships in those societies will have to choose. As friends, we simply encourage that those aspirations be addressed early and openly and peacefully and seriously.*⁵

These and other recent statements by senior U.S. officials understandably reflect a desire for reforms to contribute to stability, rather than undermine it. Yet, like other aspects of U.S. policy toward Algeria (as will be discussed below), they may be seen as misguided by Algerians who view them as effectively encouraging the deep state—the opaque politico-military elite networks that Algerians refer to as *Le Pouvoir*—to retain its essential structures and control over Algeria's political system. Yet even a critic of U.S. policy would have to acknowledge that given the relatively recent nature of the U.S.-Algeria security partnership, and Algeria's famous resistance to outside pressure, the United States may enjoy few avenues of real influence.

⁴ State Department, *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*, "Algeria," Fiscal Year 2008.

⁵ U.S. Embassy Algiers, "Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in Algeria," February 25, 2011.

Background: The Rise of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

While limited bilateral engagement began in the late 1990s under President Clinton, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the prism through which the United States views Algeria. As one regional expert remarked in 2005, “The war against global terrorism has significantly raised the Maghrib’s geopolitical profile especially in American eyes. In so doing, fighting terrorism has joined access to reliable oil and gas supplies as two key concerns justifying intense foreign involvement” with governments in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.⁶ U.S.-Algeria security cooperation tightened in 2003 when 32 European tourists were kidnapped in the Algerian Sahara by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), an insurgent group rooted in Algeria’s 1990s conflict. (All but one tourist, who died of heatstroke, were subsequently released, reportedly after a ransom was paid.) The incident sparked a multi-country manhunt for Amari Saïfi (a.k.a. Abderrazak El Para), then a leader in the GSPC, that culminated in his capture by Chadian rebels and subsequent rendering to Algeria. Cooperation was reinforced in 2006-2007 as the GSPC “merged” with Al Qaeda and renamed itself Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Although the group’s structure was little altered by its new identity, its stated aims were broadened to include transnational jihad against Western interests throughout the region and in Europe, and particularly France. AQIM/GSPC is designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department.⁷

In 2007, the GSPC pulled off its most spectacular attacks to-date in Algiers, with simultaneous bombings of the Government Palace and a suburban police station (in April) and of the Constitutional Council and the U.N. headquarters (in December). Since 2008, Algerian security forces have largely reasserted control over Algiers, and AQIM has operated mostly in the so-called “Triangle of Death”—Algeria’s ethnically Berber (Amazigh) Kabylie region, just east of Algiers, where security forces withdrew from a number of areas following local Berber uprisings—and south of the Algerian

⁶ John P. Entelis, “The Democratic Imperative vs. the Authoritarian Impulse: The Maghrib State Between Transition and Terrorism,” *The Middle East Journal*, 59, 4 (Autumn 2005).

⁷ See, most recently, State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” May 19, 2011; at [<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>].

border, in the Sahel region of northern Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. Its forces have engaged in skirmishes with Sahel militaries, and alleged AQIM operatives attacked the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott in February 2008 and the French embassy there in August 2009.

AQIM appears to have maintained operational independence from Al Qaeda's central commanders (thus, Osama bin Laden's death may have little impact on the group's aims or capabilities), and it has been unable to expand its operations into Europe, as some analysts believe Al Qaeda's global leadership had hoped following the merger.⁸ Still, it continues to carry out sporadic attacks on Algerian security forces, and its southern Sahara/Sahel cells have reportedly stockpiled significant quantities of arms and cash through various criminal activities, notably kidnap-for-ransom, cigarette and arms smuggling, and the facilitation of drug trafficking toward Europe.⁹ In several cases, AQIM has killed Europeans instead of exchanging them for ransom (four French tourists in December 2007, a British tourist in May 2009, an American aid worker in June 2009, a French citizen in July 2010), but these represent a minority of cases and have been much dissected in terms of whether they were carried out by a hard-line faction.¹⁰ Two French citizens who were taken hostage in a particularly daring AQIM raid on a downtown Niamey restaurant in January 2011 were additionally killed during a failed rescue attempt by French and Nigerian forces. AQIM is currently thought to hold four French citizens kidnapped in northern Niger in September 2010, along with an Italian tourist kidnapped in southern Algeria in February 2011.

More recently, as in the June 2011 public release of President Obama's *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, U.S. officials have expressed their belief that AQIM uses its bases in the Sahara/Sahel to train fighters "from other allied organizations—such as Nigerian-based Boko Haram" and that the group "undoubtedly seeks to exploit instability in North Africa to expand its range and access to weapons and recruits."¹¹ While debated by some observers, a link between AQIM and Nigerian extremist groups (which have carried out a series of bombings over the past six months) would represent a significant increase in the organization's potential ability to strike at Western economic interests—Nigeria is a major oil exporter, and has struggled to contain its own communal divisions and insurgent groups—and further destabilize a major regional power.

⁸ Geoff D. Porter, "The Impact of Bin Ladin's Death on AQIM in North Africa," *CTC Sentinel*, May 1, 2011.

⁹ The GSCP/AQIM involvement in contraband is not new and arguably has roots in Islamist "trabendo" activity during the late 1980s and 1990s. Jean-Luc Marret, "Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A 'Global' Organization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, June 1, 2008.

¹⁰ Alex Thurston, "AQIM Kidnappings and Murders in the Sahel, 2007-Present," *Sahel Blog*, January 18, 2011.

¹¹ Office of the President of the United States, *National Strategy For Counterterrorism*, June 2011.

A surge since April 2011 in AQIM attacks on Algerian military installations in Kabylie may demonstrate the continued operational viability and entrenchment of the group's Kabyle cell, which is reportedly headed by AQIM emir Abdelmalik Droukdel (a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdulwadood), however small and isolated it has become from AQIM's Sahara/Sahel funding streams.¹² Yet some analysts view AQIM's interest in lucrative criminal activities as having eclipsed its ideological commitment, at least so far as its southern cells are concerned.¹³ Indeed, the different geographic networks of AQIM appear to be acting fairly autonomously, or even in competition, rather than in coordination with one another.¹⁴ The Algerian government's stance, predictably, is that AQIM has retained its attachment to extremist ideology and continues to pose a threat to domestic and regional security—although Algerian authorities simultaneously emphasize that the government has largely succeeded in bringing security and control to the country after the chaos of the 1990s.

¹² Djaffar Tamani, "Retour de la Peur en Kabylie," *El Watan*, April 19, 2011.

¹³ See, e.g., Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Algerian Challenge or Global Threat?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2009.

¹⁴ Filiu, *Could Al-Qaeda Turn African in the Sahel?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2010.

A Growing Security Partnership

Against this backdrop of militant activity in the region, the U.S. policy discourse justifying bilateral military engagement with Algeria has shifted over the past decade. The Algeria section of the State Department's *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations* (CBJ)—a document that accompanies the Department's annual request to Congress for funding and outlines proposed foreign aid activities worldwide—illustrates this shift.¹⁵ Each year's budget request for security assistance funding for Algeria includes a reference to the encouragement of greater respect for human rights and civilian control of the military. But the strategic justification has evolved from "a cautious, measured approach" to aiding Algeria's emergence from a domestic political crisis (the CBJ for Fiscal Year 2002, issued in early 2001 at the start of George W. Bush's presidency) to "develop[ing] relationships with members of a key military power with whom the United States has traditionally had very limited ties, but with whom we hope for deeper engagement" (FY2006), to "strengthen[ing] U.S. ties to a major regional power as it reshapes its post-Cold War orientation" and enhancing "cooperation in combating transnational crime" (FY2008).

President Barack Obama's first CBJ, issued in early 2009, notes that "the merger of Algeria's domestic terrorist group with Al-Qaeda at the start of 2006, and the subsequent adaptation of suicide bombings and similar tactics in Algeria, gave strong impetus to the U.S. Government to continue to expand its partnership with Algeria in fighting global terrorism," and it again refers to Algeria as a "major regional power." In 2005, the United States and Algeria launched a Joint Military Dialogue to oversee and encourage exchanges, training, and joint exercises. In early 2011, the two countries formed a "Contact Group" on counterterrorism, which the U.S. embassy in Algiers refers to as "a historic moment for the development of bilateral security cooperation."¹⁶

Along the way, the United States substituted condemnation of Algeria's domestic record with keen interest in its insights into counterterrorism. Thus, while Algeria's domestic military actions in the 1990s were once cause for criticism and isolation, they now ground

¹⁵ The State Department's annual CBJ is publicly available at <http://www.state.gov/f/releases/iab/index.htm>.

¹⁶ U.S. Embassy Algiers, "Bilateral Counterterrorism Contact Group Launched," March 2011.

the bilateral relationship by rendering Algerian experience valuable. One otherwise critical commentator argues that “Algeria’s experience with violence has enabled it to assume the mantle of ‘expert’ partner for the United States in the fight against terrorism and major player in the region,” a narrative that coincides with Algerian officials’ own portrayal of the relationship.¹⁷ In early June 2011, the new commander of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), General Carter Ham, visited Algiers, where he met with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and other senior defense and security officials. Gen. Ham highlighted the close cooperation between Algerian and American defense forces and praised the role played by Algeria in fighting terrorism. “We’ve talked a lot about how together we can address, particularly, the threat of extremism in the region,” Ham stated. “And we remember every day that there are brave Algerians engaged in a difficult struggle against violent extremists.”¹⁸ Although Algeria has publicly objected to NATO military intervention in Libya, the United States and Algeria have reportedly cooperated in securing Libyan weaponry, exchanging information on arms circulation and proliferation, as well as assessments of the risk of seeing such weapons falling in the hands of terrorist groups.¹⁹

The State Department’s FY2008 budget request rendered this evolution in strategic justification explicit, justifying increased U.S. security engagement by noting that “fighting a fundamentalist insurgency in the 1990s gave Algeria’s military and security services vast experience combating terrorism and extremism.” Academic and policy attention to Algeria as a potentially instructive case-study emerged soon after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and grew as the U.S. policy community debated the relative merits of holistic counterinsurgency (now referred to in government circles as COIN) versus a more targeted counterterrorism approach in Iraq and Algeria. Struck by a lack of institutional knowledge in such matters, a generation of American policy makers and graduate students discovered Gillo Pontecorvo’s classic film, “The Battle of Algiers,” and Alistair Horne’s *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (first published in 1977). Algeria’s anti-colonial insurgency of the 1950s and the civil conflict of the 1990s remain touchstones for academics and military officers interested in exploring state strategies for coping with terrorism.²⁰

¹⁷ Amel Boubekeur, *Salafism and Radical Politics in Postconflict Algeria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2008.

¹⁸ Nazim Fethi, “US General Backs Algeria Counter-Terror Efforts,” Magharebia.com [a U.S. Defense Department-sponsored website], June 2, 2011.

¹⁹ *El Watan*, “Réformes Politiques, Marché Economique, Libye: Américains et Français s’invitent à Alger,” June 14, 2011.

²⁰ This focal point interestingly places analysts on the side of French colonists and the Algerian military regime of the 1990s. See, e.g., U.S. Military Academy at West Point syllabus SS465, “Terrorism and Counterterrorism,” Spring 2011; Stephen F. Howe, *Fighting the Global War on Terror Tolerably: Augmenting the Global Counter Insurgency Strategy with Surrogates* [Monograph], Fort Leavenworth KS School of Advanced Military Studies: 2008; and Gen. Paul Aussaresses, *The Battle of the*

U.S.-Algerian senior diplomatic contacts have accelerated along with the growing security relationship. In July 2001, Bouteflika became the first Algerian President to visit the White House since 1985. President George W. Bush met again with Bouteflika in November 2001 and September 2003, and Bouteflika participated at G8 summits in June 2004 and May 2011. Ties have continued to strengthen under the Obama Administration, and Foreign Affairs Minister Mourad Medelci visited Washington DC in December 2009 and again in May 2011. The State Department states that these and other bilateral meetings are “indicative of the growing relationship between the United States and Algeria,” noting the United States and Algeria “consult closely on key international and regional issues” and that “the pace and scope of senior-level visits has accelerated.”²¹ During the latter visit by Medelci, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared, “We are very grateful for the excellent cooperation that we receive on counterterrorism and security issues, as well as a growing list of bilateral matters.”²² Algeria’s Embassy in Washington states that “relations between Algeria and the United States have entered a new, dynamic and very promising phase and are stronger than they have ever been.”²³

There is an official narrative of this shift expounded by Algerian officials. It roughly translates as the following: Islamist extremist groups took advantage of Algeria’s democratic opening in the late 1980s to manipulate the political system, and then turned to violence. Algeria took what steps were necessary in order to contain this violence, and was internationally isolated in the 1990s because the world didn’t understand the transnational threat posed by terrorism. Then, with the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, others finally understood what Algeria had experienced—and now the West has come around to the Algerian point of view, enabling greater cooperation and partnership in combating international terrorism.²⁴ This narrative accurately reflects some events, but it overlooks U.S. and French tacit acceptance of Algeria’s military coup of 1992, and the fact that international condemnation of the Algerian military’s human rights record during the 1990s conflict contributed to Algeria’s pariah status during that time.²⁵

Casbah: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Algeria 1955-1957, Enigma Books: 2004.

²¹ State Department, “Background Note: Algeria,” updated February 17, 2011, at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/8005.htm#relations>.

²² State Department, “Secretary of State Clinton Delivers Remarks with Algeria Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci Before Their Meeting,” May 3, 2011.

²³ Embassy of Algeria, “Algeria-USA Relations Overview,” at <http://www.algeria-us.org/algeria-us-relations-overview-mainmenu-227/algeria-us-relations-overview.html>.

²⁴ This paraphrasing is distilled from multiple meetings with Algerian government officials during an Algerian-sponsored visit in April 2011.

²⁵ John Entelis, “Democracy Denied: America’s Authoritarian Approach Towards the Maghreb – Causes & Consequences,” presented at the 18th World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Quebec, August 1-5, 2000; on Algeria’s

The official line also declines to confront a pervasive and defiantly unofficial inverse narrative expounded by dissident diaspora websites and, in private, by many Algerian citizens: that among the worst abuses during the 1990s were those committed by the security forces, who fought to preserve their authority within the political system and allegedly infiltrated Islamist insurgent groups, committing massacres in their name in order to discredit them, and who subsequently benefited from expansive amnesty programs and official silence initiated by President Bouteflika.²⁶ These yin-yang discourses persist, each side convinced of its righteousness, in the absence of public accountability for the worst excesses of the civil conflict. This absence was made definitive by the Law on National Reconciliation of 2006, which followed the Law on Civil Concord of 1999 and rendered much critical public discourse on the potential negative impacts of the amnesty program effectively illegal.²⁷ Some Algerians therefore see continuity, rather than rupture, between the West's silence in 1992 and the current state of cooperation, and many hold lingering suspicions that elements of Algeria's security apparatus maintain ties to insurgents (including AQIM) or perhaps encourage violent extremist activity in order to justify their hold over Algeria's political system.²⁸

Algerian security forces' tactical and informational value to U.S. counterterrorism efforts notably differentiates the U.S. partnership with Algeria from U.S. security relationships with Sahelian and Sub-Saharan African states, through which the United States seeks to impart expertise, capacity, and equipment. Notably, while Algeria does accept low levels of security assistance from the United States, it is loath to refer to U.S.-Algerian military engagement as "aid," instead viewing it as a "partnership," in line with its generally prickly stance toward foreign intervention in its domestic affairs. U.S. officials similarly portray engagement as working in both directions; indeed, it is sometimes unclear which partner benefits most from the relationship. Still, the two countries share an official vision of transnational

pariah status, see Rachid Tlemçani, *Algeria Under Bouteflika: Civil Strife and National Reconciliation*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2008.

²⁶ See, e.g., François Gèze and Salima Mellah, "Algeria: The impossible transitional justice," December 2010, forthcoming in Nadya Nedelsky and Lavinia Stan (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Transitional Justice*, Cambridge University Press, and re-posted on the website Algeria Watch, which collects critical analysis of Algeria's government and security policies (www.algeria-watch.org).

²⁷ See Eric Goldstein/Human Rights Watch, "Algeria's Amnesia Decree," *OpenDemocracy.net*, April 9, 2006. Goldstein notes that the law "provides up to five years in prison for any statement or activity concerning 'the national tragedy' which 'harms' state institutions, 'the good reputation of its agents' or 'the image of Algeria internationally.'" Prosecutions have been brought infrequently, if at all, but human rights advocates contend that maintaining such laws on the books, even if they are rarely used, inhibits open discourse on matters of national importance.

²⁸ Such theories abound on Algeria-focused websites and occasionally in the Algerian press. See, for example, *Le Quotidien d'Algérie*, "Les Fautes du DRS et de l'AQMI," April 19, 2011.

terrorism that emphasizes, for example, a hard line against negotiations with terrorist groups.²⁹ Algerian officials—backed by the United States—have also led an international campaign against the payment of ransoms, which they believe have significantly bolstered AQIM's operational capacities.

²⁹ Some observers contend that this hardline stance against negotiating with “terrorists” has complicated Algeria’s efforts to end domestic insurgent activity through the extension of its amnesty program. For example, the International Crisis Group reported in 2004 that intra-regime debates over whether to negotiate with the GSPC were complicated by the U.S.-led “war on terror.” Crisis Group quoted “a supporter of the army hard-liners” as writing in 2002 that if the government were to engage in negotiations, “Algeria risks compromising all its chances of benefiting from the international support against terrorism which developed after 11 September.” *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, ICG Middle East Report No. 29, July 30, 2004.

Algeria's Aspirations for Regional Counterterrorism Leadership

The United States has encouraged regional counterterrorism coordination in North Africa and the Sahel, a goal that suits Algeria's interests as it seeks the mantle of regional leadership—or, otherwise stated, dominance over its poorer southern neighbors. Algeria's military is widely viewed as the largest and best equipped in the region. President Obama's new counterterrorism strategy, released in June 2011, states that the United States "will seek to bolster efforts for regional cooperation against AQIM, especially between Algeria and the Sahelian countries of Mauritania, Mali, and Niger as an essential element in a strategy focused on disrupting a highly adaptive and mobile group that exploits shortfalls in regional security and governance."³⁰

Algeria's preferred vehicle for coordination on the Sahel region is the Tamanrasset Plan, agreed to by Algeria, Libya, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania in the southern Algerian city in August 2009, which calls for officials to share intelligence and conduct joint military patrols in a campaign against terrorism, organized crime, arms smuggling and kidnapping in under-surveyed border regions. (Libya subsequently declined to participate in shared security arrangements.) Through this mechanism, Algeria aims to position itself as the dominant player and natural conduit of Western counterterrorism assistance to the region, and it has provided arms, ammunition, vehicles, and training to Sahel state participants. In 2011, Algeria offered additional substantial development aid to Mali.³¹

In April 2010, Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger began establishing a joint military headquarters, which they claimed had 25,000 troops at its disposal (most of whom were presumed to be Algerian). The countries asserted they would boost troop levels in the region to a combined 75,000 within three years.³² These figures were reiterated by Malian officials in May 2011, although the level of progress from initial troop levels is unclear.³³ Tamanrasset built on previous regional security accords that were similarly encouraged by the United States. Algeria, Nigeria, Niger, and Chad had signed an

³⁰ *National Strategy For Counterterrorism*, op. cit.

³¹ Radio Netherlands, "Algeria Gives Mali \$10mn for Development," April 28, 2011.

³² Reuters, "Sahara States to Triple Anti-Qaeda Force: Algeria TV," April 27, 2010.

³³ Reuters, "Sahara Nations to Set Up Desert Patrol Force – Mali," May 20, 2011.

agreement in July 2003, Mali and Algeria had agreed to coordinate counterterrorism operations along their border, and Mali and Niger (on one side) and Mali and Mauritania (on the other) had agreed to joint border cooperation as well.³⁴ However, the grouping suffers from a lack of surveillance equipment and transportation aircraft for the quick deployment of troops.³⁵

The Tamanrasset grouping echoed in President Obama's counterterrorism strategy notably excludes Morocco, which Algeria asserts is not concerned by Sahel security issues. (Algeria's refusal to include its neighbor more likely stems from longstanding bilateral tensions over the status of Western Sahara, among other issues.) Morocco is similarly excluded from Algerian efforts to marshal African Union (AU) resources to combat regional terrorism, as Morocco seceded from the AU in 1984 over the Western Sahara issue. Algerian-sponsored AU institutions include the Algiers-hosted African Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism (CAERT), which seeks to pool information, analysis, and resources on AQIM and other regional security threats. Beyond the Algeria-Morocco rupture, various reports have underlined that regional security cooperation exists more in name than in practice; for example, a 2010 article in the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* claimed that Tunisian military and intelligence services "barely speak to their Algerian counterparts."³⁶

The U.S. policy of encouraging shared security arrangements faces a number of additional challenges. Notably, Algeria has portrayed its efforts at marshalling regional forces as an expression of affected countries' ability to confront shared challenges "with complete freedom and sovereignty."³⁷ The emphasis on sovereignty, a key Algerian political ideal, is often used by Algiers to ward off what it views as unacceptable Western direct intervention in counterterrorism—i.e., French or American military operations to free hostages or pursue AQIM units on African soil, as occurred in the recent botched French-Nigerien hostage rescue operation or in a reported joint attack by French and Mauritanian forces on an AQIM base in northern Mali in July 2010. Algerian sensitivity is particularly strong concerning its former colonial power, France, with whom relations remain complex and volatile; French intervention is also more likely as France maintains defense agreements with, and a troop presence in, several of its other former colonies in West Africa. But Algeria's defensiveness is also designed to ward off direct U.S. intervention. Still, the United

³⁴ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?*, Africa Report No. 92, March 31, 2005.

³⁵ See Ed Blanche, "Sarkozy's War Against Al Qaeda," *The Middle East*, October 2010.

³⁶ *El Pais*, "Why a Lack of Collaboration is Making the Terrorists' Job Easier," January 5, 2010, via ProQuest.

³⁷ Reuters, "Sahara Army Chiefs Meet to Draft Anti-Qaeda Plan," September 26, 2010.

States continues to pursue bilateral security relationships with Sahel states—and not solely channel aid through Algiers.

Moreover, it is unclear whether Sahel states, and particularly Mali, view direct Algerian intervention on their territories as any less a violation of sovereignty, or as any more trustworthy, than Western security assistance or joint operations.³⁸ Algerian officials and pro-government media have periodically estranged Malian leaders by hinting that they are uncommitted to the fight against terrorism or perhaps even complicit in AQIM's continued presence. Algeria particularly resents Mali's reported willingness to facilitate ransom payments to AQIM to free European hostages, a practice that Algeria adamantly opposes. Security officials in Sahel states counter—usually off the record—that terrorism is an Algerian export, and that Algeria is seeking to dominate its neighbors by asserting control over counterterrorism operations, lucrative smuggling operations, and economically promising zones of the Sahel that may hold natural gas or mineral interests.³⁹

Indeed, U.S. acceptance of Algeria's stance toward its southern neighbors overlooks the fact that Malians may nurture lingering suspicions of Algerian intentions. Mali's complex relationship with Algeria includes Algeria's reported role in periodic uprisings by Malian Tuaregs, a historically dispossessed nomadic population present on both sides of the border. Algeria mediated peace accords that ended armed Tuareg uprisings in Mali in 1991 and 2006 (and a ceasefire in 2008 when the effectiveness of the 2006 accord seemed in doubt), but has also reportedly occasionally provided support for Tuareg armed groups in Mali and Niger, at times as part of a rivalry with Libya over domination of the Sahara. Algiers has also reportedly deployed Tuareg armed groups as buffers (and trackers) against AQIM and other domestic insurgents.⁴⁰ Thus, Malian acceptance of Algerian security priorities in the Sahel may partly reflect fears that Algeria could redeploy groups prone to turning their weapons on Bamako, rather than an organic desire for security collaboration. According to some analysts, these fears are illustrated by Mali's reluctance to integrate Tuareg ex-combatants into northern military units, as called for in the 2006 Algiers accord.⁴¹ On Algeria's side,

³⁸ Afrol News, "Algeria, Mali Distrust Over Al Qaeda Fight," December 13, 2010.

³⁹ E.g., Agence France Presse, "Mistrust Among Sahel States Slowing Fight Against Al-Qaeda," July 29, 2010; Philippe Bernard, "Nouvel Axe Alger-Bamako dans la Lutte Contre AQMI," *Le Monde*, May 14, 2011; Annette Lohmann, *Who Owns the Sahara? Old Conflicts, New Menaces: Mali and the Central Sahara Between the Tuareg, Al Qaida and Organized Crime*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), June 2011.

⁴⁰ Ferdaous Bouhlel-Hardy, Yvan Guichaoua, and Abdoulaye Tamboura, "Tuareg Crises in Niger and Mali," minutes from an IFRI Seminar held in November 2007, published in January 2008. See also Reuters, "Smugglers to Help Track Al Qaeda in Sahara: Source," September 30, 2010.

⁴¹ According to Lohmann (2011, op. cit), these mixed units are now being implemented after years of delay, and Mali's northern command structure has reportedly been revised to further integrate Tuareg fighters. In 2009, a new round of

officials often imply that Malian military units cannot be trusted not to leak valuable intelligence about AQIM.⁴² As one Algerian official put it, “Mali is an exception” to Algeria’s much vaunted policy of non-intervention.⁴³

Algerian sponsored talks culminated in an agreement by former Tuareg rebels to contribute to Malian counterterrorism operations. See Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism, “Malian Tuareg Groups (Mali),” August 2009.

⁴² Author interview with Algerian counterterrorism analyst, April 2011.

⁴³ Author interview with Algerian official, June 2011.

U.S. Regional and Bilateral Assistance

U.S. counterterrorism and security assistance programs currently aim to build the capacity of Sahelian states to pursue cross-border militant and criminal groups, and to encourage regional coordination on counterterrorism. The United States' main regional security assistance programs are the State Department-led Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), initiated in 2005, and the Defense Department's Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahel (OEF-TS), which supports TSCTP. Both were launched by the Bush Administration and continued by the Obama Administration. TSCTP is the expanded successor to the 2003-2004 Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), which focused on four Sahel states (Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad) and, like TSCTP, combined both development aid and military assistance.⁴⁴ As an interagency program, TSCTP includes public diplomacy, democratic governance, and educational components in addition to specialized counterterrorism training. TSCTP currently includes activities in 10 countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria.

Total U.S. government funding for TSCTP-related programs has been estimated at \$100 million annually, which includes substantial development assistance for the Sahel and Sub-Saharan countries.⁴⁵ Of this, military and security assistance are roughly split between North African and Sahel/Sub-Saharan states, while development and educational assistance funding is weighted toward the latter. In 2010, roughly \$9.8 million was allocated for State Department-administered TSCTP regional security assistance in the Sahel and Sub-Saharan countries, and \$13.8 million budgeted for security assistance in North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). This ratio may shift in 2012, for which the Obama Administration has requested

⁴⁴ Under the PSI, the U.S. military helped train and equip a rapid-reaction company (about 150 soldiers) for border security operations in each of the four states. See U.S. Africa Command, "The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership: Program Overview," at <http://www.africom.mil/tsctp.asp>.

⁴⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Combating Terrorism: Actions Needed to Enhance Implementation of Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*, July 2008. It is difficult to track annual TSCTP-related expenditures, as they are budgeted through a range of agencies that may or may not provide country or regional funding breakdowns. Overall funding for TSCTP may decrease in the coming year due to broader debates over foreign assistance budgeting.

over \$16 million for the Sahel and Sub-Saharan participants and only \$4.5 million for North Africa. These figures do not include bilateral aid programs that support TSCTP, or Defense Department funding for joint and multinational military exercises, a significant component of TSCTP. The relative allocation of TSCTP funds for North Africa reflects several factors. First, the Maghreb states are less in need of direct aid than their poorer southern neighbors. Second, TSCTP budgeting doesn't reflect the cost of military exercises, which may benefit North African partners (who are better able to contribute to and absorb training) more than those in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Algeria participates in TSCTP, albeit to a minor extent. (Country-by-country breakouts of TSCTP funding are not publicly available.) Algerian officials prefer bilateral security cooperation that recognizes Algeria's regional preeminence, or regional cooperation programs channeled through Algiers. As part of TSCTP, U.S. Special Forces train, equip, and aid Algerian forces in fighting the AQIM in the south and the Sahel. U.S. intelligence also is shared.⁴⁶ Algerian authorities, for their part, are expected to share information with U.S. counterparts regarding reports of security threats.

As noted, Algeria receives little traditional bilateral aid from the United States, although State Department-administered bilateral security assistance increased over ten-fold from 2000, when the United States allocated \$115,000 for Algeria, and 2010, when the bilateral budget was \$1.7 million. (These figures are minuscule when compared, for example, to U.S. aid to Egypt.) The main vehicles for State Department-administered security assistance are the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, which provides several hundred thousand dollars annually for educational exchanges for Algerian military officers, and, more recently, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE) and Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) funding, which have provided training for Algerian law enforcement officers engaged in terrorism and counter-narcotics investigations.

Importantly, the above figures do not reflect military-to-military and intelligence cooperation programs that are not budgeted as "assistance" but are likely viewed by the Algerian government as a benefit while not technically considered "aid." Other U.S. agencies, including the Defense Department, also sponsor bilateral training and other forms of security assistance for Algeria, and the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provide additional non-military assistance budgeted through regional programs such as TSCTP, including education and civil society programs designed to counter the influence of "violent extremism."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Mhand Berkouk, *U.S.–Algerian Security Cooperation and the War on Terror*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2009.

⁴⁷ USAID, "Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP): U.S. Foreign Assistance Performance Publication, Fiscal Year 2009."

The aid figures also do not include bilateral arms sales, which have increased as Algeria seeks to diversify its arms sources away from traditional partners such as Russia.⁴⁸

Some critics have portrayed TSCTP as a Trojan Horse of U.S. militarism in the Sahel, designed to provide a cover for U.S. attempts to control the export of natural resources such as oil—or, more charitably, as a potential target for extremists because it may place U.S. military personnel in the region and cut off vital trade routes in the name of border security.⁴⁹ Still, TSCTP consists of relatively standard U.S. assistance programming, and while it has undoubtedly brought more U.S. funding to a previously neglected region (particularly the Sahel, a region that received little U.S. military aid prior to 2004), it is more a conglomeration of various common assistance programs loosely united under a regional umbrella than a completely new type of U.S. presence. The program's execution, however, has been near-continuously dogged within the U.S. government by interagency disagreements, funding fluctuations, and a lack of a clear definition of the program's goals or metrics for measuring success.⁵⁰

TSCTP has furthermore suffered from a divide between an Algeria-specific approach to AQIM, which has generally been led by the State Department's Near East Affairs Bureau, and a regional (i.e. Sahel-focused) approach embodied by TSCTP and OEF-TS, which are more concerned with "weak" African states and are led, respectively, by the State Department's African Affairs bureau and the Defense Department's Africa policy office. Indeed, interagency and inter-bureau disputes, including over the scale of the threat to U.S. interests posed by AQIM, continue to challenge policy formulation. While the threat posed by AQIM in the Sahel arguably mostly concerns U.S. citizens acting in a private capacity (i.e., tourists who may be kidnapped), and potentially the interests of European allies, in Algiers it directly impacts the mobility and perceived security of U.S. government personnel.⁵¹ Yet Africanists within the U.S. government

⁴⁸ For example, the State Department notified the U.S. Congress in early June of a proposed agreement for the export of defense articles worth at least \$50 million to Algeria. *Congressional Record*, p. S3497, June 6, 2011.

⁴⁹ The International Crisis Group (2005, op. cit.) warned that U.S. counterterrorism activities in the Sahel, if not "folded into a more balanced approach to the region," could give "ammunition to local anti-American or anti-Western figures who claim the PSI (and the proposed, expanded Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI [an earlier proposed acronym]), still under consideration in the U.S. government) is part of a larger plan to render Muslim populations servile; and cutting off smuggling networks that have become the economic lifeblood of Saharan peoples... without offering economic alternatives."

⁵⁰ GAO 2008, op. cit.

⁵¹ The U.S. State Department considers the potential terrorist threat to Embassy personnel in Algiers "sufficiently serious to require them to live and work under significant security restrictions," and the Algerian government requires Embassy personnel to "seek permission to travel to the Casbah [old city] within Algiers or outside the province of Algiers and to have a security escort." State Department

have, at times, advocated a more direct and aggressive approach to AQIM—sometimes playing up the (questionable) purported nexus of terrorist activity and “ungoverned spaces”—than those primarily concerned with the Maghreb, perhaps due to budgetary and other bureaucratic prerogatives related to the difficulty of placing Africa policy issues on the national agenda.

This divide in perspective is facilitated (and perhaps justified) by the structural divide within AQIM itself, i.e. between its northern and southern cells. Indeed, analysts disagree as to whether AQIM remains fundamentally Algerian in character and leadership, or whether it has “successfully integrated into local communities [in the Sahel] and established cooperation with government and security officials as well as with regional drug traffickers and other criminal organizations,” thereby structurally transforming itself into a regional insurgency.⁵² Still, the Africanist view of AQIM overlooks the Algerian roots of the insurgency, and the societal dynamics that enable AQIM to continue to operate within Algerian territory despite a large security apparatus well tested in counterinsurgency. Moreover, by taking AQIM at its word—that it is a global jihadist outlet with the potential to pose a serious threat to regional stability—the United States and other actors may risk empowering it by missing an opportunity to treat it instead as a fundamentally local, criminal organization with little to offer transnational recruits or fundraisers.⁵³

Travel Warning on Algeria, March 16, 2011. Of course, the escort requirement may equally reflect Algerian efforts to monitor the actions of U.S. personnel.

⁵² Lohmann 2011, op. cit.

⁵³ Robert G. Berschinski, *AFRICOM's Dilemma: The "Global War on Terrorism" "Capacity Building," Humanitarianism, and the Future of U.S. Security Policy in Africa* [Monograph], U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 21, 2007.

Continuing Suspicions

The U.S. desire to engage with Algeria has coincided with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's efforts since his election in 1999 to re-position Algeria as a major player in regional and international affairs. Algerian officials view these aspirations as natural for a country whose proud past as a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and other Third World circles remains a touchstone of its political identity. One skeptic acknowledges that "thanks to Bouteflika's diplomatic efforts and his cooperation with European countries and the United States in combating terrorism, Algeria is no longer an international pariah."⁵⁴ As an Algerian news commentator recently put it, "*le pays demeure fréquentable*" (Algeria has become socially acceptable).⁵⁵

Given this backdrop of Algerian diplomatic outreach, Algeria's public objections to AFRICOM—particularly voiced soon after the Command's creation was announced in 2007—as a plot to establish a base on Algerian soil are an intriguing aspect of the bilateral relationship.⁵⁶ (U.S. officials never publicly cited Algeria as a possible basing location, and it is unclear whether Algerian objections were voiced in response to a direct U.S. request.) Algiers has thus regularly questioned whether AFRICOM intends to violate Algerian sovereignty by unilaterally deploying troops—forcing U.S. officials to repeatedly deny such intentions—while simultaneously welcoming increased U.S. defense engagement.⁵⁷ Public criticism by Algerian

⁵⁴ Tlemçani 2008, op. cit.

⁵⁵ *L'Expression*, "Les Etats-Unis et l'Union Européenne Lui Font les Yeux Doux—Incontournable Algérie," May 24, 2011.

⁵⁶ E.g., Djalel Bouati: "L'Algérie Ne Veut Pas d'Africom," *El Khabar*, January 9, 2008, via BBC Monitoring; Simon Tisdall, "Africa United in Rejecting US Request for Military HQ," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2007; Craig Whitlock, "North Africa Reluctant to Host U.S. Command; Algeria and Libya Reject Pentagon's AFRICOM Proposal; Morocco Signals Its Lack of Enthusiasm," *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2007. For analysis of the AFRICOM basing debate, see Lauren Ploch, *Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa*, Congressional Research Service, March 22, 2011.

⁵⁷ In an Al Arabiya interview in mid-2008, Algerian Foreign Minister Medelci was asked why Algeria rejected the idea of hosting AFRICOM. He responded: "Why should Algeria accept it? This is the right question. We have no reason to accept foreign forces - be they American, Chinese, or others - on the land of Algeria. This is the normal situation, especially when we take into consideration the fact that Algeria fought to liberate its land." He added, "This, however, does not mean we have no ties with the United States. We have even security relations with it. We have excellent economic and other relations in the various fields, but we have to distinguish between relations and presence of foreign forces in a sovereign country." BBC

officials of AFRICOM's purported intentions appear to have faded since AFRICOM's first commander, Gen. William Ward, visited Algiers in 2009, but endemic suspicions of outside military actions that may compromise Algeria's cherished national sovereignty endure.⁵⁸ During his visit, Gen. Ward duly praised Algeria's "leadership in dealing with regional questions related to security and the fight against terrorism" while strenuously emphasizing that AFRICOM did not aim to set up any bases there.⁵⁹

Yet while the Algerian government purports to view AFRICOM as a potential threat to its sovereignty, Algerian critics (and conspiracy theorists) see the Algerian security services as all too eager to cooperate with—and potentially manipulate—the U.S. military.⁶⁰ While such theorists represent an extreme view in the debate over the value and reality of U.S.-Algerian cooperation, they also reflect widespread Algerian suspicions that may act in unpredictable ways to inhibit the security relationship. For example, some observers view Algerian expressions suspicion regarding AFRICOM's motives not as pragmatic attempts to project independence for a domestic political audience, but rather as evidence of genuine fear "in some Algerian circles of power" that AFRICOM could serve as a foil for U.S. private sector interests seeking to control North African oil flows.⁶¹

Monitoring, "Minister Explains Algeria's Stance on Mediterranean Union, Western Sahara," June 6, 2008. See also BBC Monitoring/*El Watan*, "Africom Head Visits Algeria; Says Africom HQ to Stay in Germany," December 12, 2009.

⁵⁸ E.g., Brahim Takheroubt, "Il Sera Reçu Aujourd'hui par le Président Bouteflika: Le chef d'Africom débarque à Alger," *L'Expression*, June 1, 2011.

⁵⁹ *Liberté*, "AFRICOM Commander Strengthens US-Algerian Cooperation in Algiers Visit," November 26, 2009, via BBC Monitoring; and *El Watan*, "Africom Commander Says No US Bases to be Set Up in Algeria," November 26, 2009, via BBC Monitoring.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Jeremy Keenan, *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*, Pluto Press: 2009. Keenan's work, which claims that the George W. Bush Administration and the Algerian government themselves orchestrated the spike in GSPC/AQIM hostage-taking since 2003, has been picked up by a range of leftist media critics of U.S. global security policies.

⁶¹ Boubekour 2008, op. cit.

Outlook

U.S.-Algerian security cooperation seems likely to continue as shared concerns over regional terrorism persist. Growing military and bureaucratic contacts between the two countries will also provide their own impetus to continued engagement. The recently appointed U.S. Ambassador to Algeria, Henry S. Ensher, testified during his Senate confirmation hearing that “the relationship between the United States and Algeria has never been stronger,” and noted that this relationship “is built on counterterrorism cooperation.” He added praise for Algeria’s “critical role on the front lines countering violent extremism” and as a leader in regional conflict resolution.⁶²

At the same time, many observers of the Maghreb question the premise and likely results of U.S.-Algerian cooperation. As long-time Algeria watcher John Entelis has written, “Washington’s new interest in regions like southern Algeria fit into a global geostrategic vision that dovetails with Algeria’s own domestic political agenda, including maintaining a robust authoritarian state”; he concludes that U.S. counterterrorism programs have “the counterproductive result of making the *mukhabarat* state more robust and thus less inclined to accede to societal demands for greater democracy.”⁶³ Indeed, many Algerians question their government’s reliance on security prerogatives to restrict political activity—a product, in part, of lingering distrust of the security forces’ role in the 1990s civil conflict. Some note that premising of U.S.-Algeria relations on counterterrorism cooperation may create perverse incentives for Algerian politicians and military commanders, by creating a “situation in which Algeria on the one hand is required to be tough on terrorism to convince the U.S. of its willingness and capability and on the other hand needs the instability in order to remain relevant to the US and thereby [receive] political and military support.”⁶⁴

A continuing challenge for U.S. policy makers lies in determining what fundamental U.S. interests are at stake in Algeria and the Sahel, and in ascertaining what types of cooperation and assistance serve these interests. In so doing, U.S. policy makers may ponder how

⁶² Statement of Henry S. Ensher, Ambassador-Designate to the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, May 4, 2011.

⁶³ Entelis 2005, *op. cit.* “Mukhabarat” refers to the military intelligence services or the broader security apparatus.

⁶⁴ Lohmann 2011, *op. cit.*

to avert unintended consequences, while also preventing U.S. military engagement itself to become a target for extremist activities.