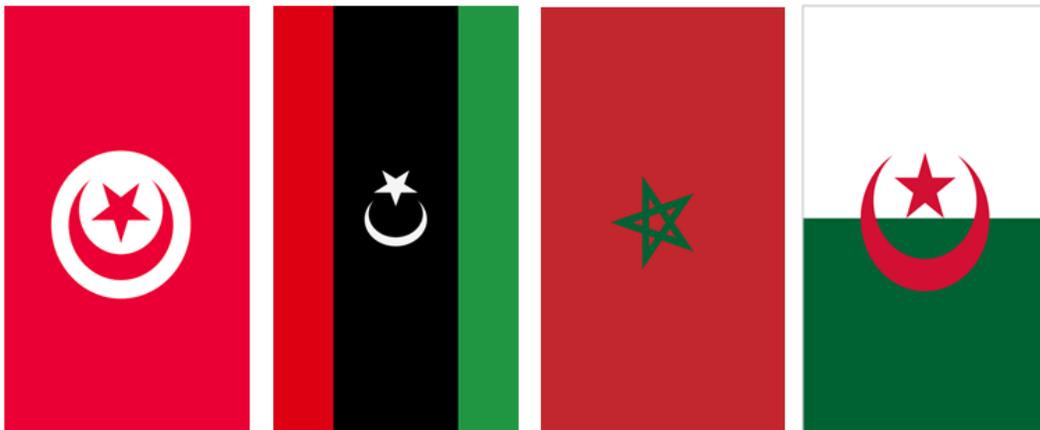


The Same, Yet Different: United States and Gulf State Interests in the Post-Arab Spring Maghreb

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Abstract

The 2010-2011 Arab Spring caused upheaval in North Africa's Maghreb region, which comprises Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. This upheaval elevated the Maghreb's importance globally, including for the United States and the Gulf Arab states—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar in particular. The Gulf Arab countries' increased engagement in the Maghreb is the result of shifts within the internal politics of the Arab world. In the Maghreb, U.S. and Gulf state interests overlap to the extent that all players want stability, but each state has its own definition of what stability means. The U.S. and the Gulf states all support the Moroccan and Algerian regimes, but intra-Gulf rivalries are helping destabilize Libya, where different Gulf-backed proxy forces are exacerbating that country's civil war. Moving forward, the United States and the Gulf states may find areas where their interests converge (e.g., stabilizing Tunisian politics, fighting terrorism, and promoting development) but also areas where they diverge, especially in Libya.

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Glossary

AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNC	General National Congress
HoR	House of Representatives
IBD	Islamic Development Bank
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
TSCTP	Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollars

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Introduction

The wave of unrest that swept across the Arab world in 2010-2011, often referred to as the “Arab Spring,” caused significant upheaval in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya—a region of North Africa collectively known as the Maghreb.¹ This upheaval and its destabilizing effects elevated the Maghreb’s importance globally. The United States now has a greater focus on the Maghreb as it seeks to promote democracy and restore stability there. North Africa also has newfound prominence in the United States’ global counterterrorism efforts, in part due to the emergence of the Islamic State in Libya. Over the past year, the United States has expanded its military actions against the Islamic State to include North Africa, most notably in the form of airstrikes in Libya to support local forces in their efforts to liberate the Islamic State-held city of Sirte.

The United States, however, is not the only country that has taken an increased interest in the Maghreb. A number of European powers who have had long-standing relationships in the region—including France, Italy, and the United Kingdom—have become increasingly engaged in this part of the world. In addition, a number of the Gulf Arab states have also become more active in North Africa, pursuing their own political, economic, and security-related interests.² The Gulf Arab countries have traditionally stayed focused on the Gulf region itself, or on its immediate borders, in places such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Jordan. As a result, their increased interest and engagement in the Maghreb, which is outside their immediate

¹ *Maghreb*, which means “where the sun sets, the west” in Arabic, was the name given to North Africa in pre-modern times. The term is commonly used today to refer to the region. Definitions of “the Maghreb” vary. Some include Mauritania, and others expand into Egypt. For the purpose of this analysis, we will focus on the four states named above, which lie to the west of Egypt’s western border. We acknowledge that Egypt is also of significant interest to the Gulf states, but for the purpose of this report, we limit our analysis to just the Maghreb countries.

² For the purpose of this report, we are focusing on the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which is a political, economic, and security organization that includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Bahrain. Our research indicated that Oman and Bahrain have almost no involvement in the Maghreb region, so we will not focus on them here.

neighborhood, is representative of shifts within the internal politics of the Arab world.

In order to understand the Gulf states' evolving foreign policy interests and to effectively craft the United States' own policies in the Maghreb, it behooves U.S. decision-makers and planners to understand what actions the Gulf Arab states are pursuing in North Africa, and why. As we will show, Gulf states' policies have bolstered the Moroccan monarchy, irritated the Algerian regime, influenced Tunisian electoral politics, and exacerbated Libya's civil war. Accounting for Gulf states' actions can help the U.S. government identify mutual areas of interest, such as the stability of Morocco and Algeria, and manage areas of competition, such as the vision for Libya's future.

In addition, the U.S. government and the Gulf Arab states have deep historical ties to each other and foreign policy interests that intersect not only within the Gulf region itself, but also in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, and Iraq. An understanding of what actions the Gulf states are pursuing in the Maghreb can establish a clearer image of what these states are trying to achieve as their foreign policy interests extend geographically over time. Such an understanding can also help synchronize U.S. policies, since the issue of Gulf states' actions in the Maghreb crosses numerous bureaucratic lines, to include combatant command boundaries and State Department bureaus.

This occasional paper seeks to bring greater understanding to the issue of Gulf state interests in the Maghreb and the implications of those interests for U.S. goals in the region. It is the result of an initial exploration on this topic, comprising roughly three months' of research. Therefore, it should be considered a foundational document upon which additional research can be done.

Approach

We conducted extensive research on current U.S. and Gulf states' interests and activities in the Maghreb, with an emphasis on the past five years. This research included an in-depth review of English and Arabic literature (e.g., from academia, journalism, social media, government, and other open sources). We also engaged in semi-structured discussions with a number of former U.S. officials and subject matter experts from academia and non-governmental organizations in order to draw out deeper insights about the priorities and motivations of the Gulf states. Using these data, we identified the strategic interests of each Gulf state in the Maghreb by theme and then categorized U.S. and Gulf state activities using these themes. We then compared the interests and activities of the United States to those of the Gulf states in order to identify where overlaps exist and where interests diverge. Finally, we drew conclusions from these comparisons that identify the implications of the

convergence and divergence of U.S. and Gulf state interests and activities in the Maghreb.

Organization

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. We first provide a brief introduction to the Maghreb region. We then identify U.S. priorities and interests in the Maghreb. Following that, we capture Gulf states' interests and activities in the Maghreb and compare them to those of the United States. In the conclusion, we present our findings.

The Maghreb

Geography

The Maghreb comprises the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya (see Figure 1).³ Although considered part of the broader Arab world, the Maghreb countries share geographical and cultural commonalities that distinguish them from the Arab states to the east. Culturally, Maghreb countries have a mixed Arab and Berber population and are overwhelmingly Sunni, making their societies fundamentally different from those of the east, many of which have more ethnically and religiously heterogeneous populations. Arabs did not come to the Maghreb until the Muslim invasions of the seventh century, and Arabization was not as thorough in the Maghreb as in the east. In recent decades and especially since the “Arab Spring,” Berbers have consistently demanded greater recognition in politics, education, and language policy. Meanwhile, the relative absence of Shi’i Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Maghreb means that there are fewer sectarian conflicts there than in the Arab countries to the east.

Geographically, given their location adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, Maghreb countries have historically been more oriented toward Europe than to other regions. Former colonial powers France, Italy, and Spain see the Maghreb countries as strategic for economic, political, and security reasons. This perception has been reinforced by sustained migration from Maghreb countries into Europe, a phenomenon that has grown recently amid Libya’s chaos. Europe’s interest in the Maghreb has also been stoked by the problem of terrorism during and after Algeria’s 1991-2002 civil war. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Maghreb-linked security issues have only grown in Europe: Maghreb country nationals and Europeans of Maghrebi descent participated in the 2004 Madrid bombings and in several recent attacks in France. In addition to terrorism, in more recent years migration and illicit activities from North Africa have ranked high on European Maghreb-related priorities.

³ The desert region that encompasses the south of Libya and Algeria in addition to eight other northwest African countries is commonly referred to as the Sahel.

Figure 1. Map of the Maghreb



Source: Michael Markowitz, CNA.

Arab Spring

Since the Arab Spring, which occurred in 2010-2011, the four countries in the Maghreb have experienced some degree of political, social, and/or economic upheaval. Morocco, the region's only monarchy, is faring the best. Morocco reacted to the Arab Spring with a major constitutional reform in 2011 and with intensified security measures, which enabled it to blunt the momentum of an incipient protest movement. Regional heavyweight Algeria contained its own opposition forces during the Arab Spring, and has done so since then, but it will face uncertainty and potential destabilization when current president Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, who is 79 years old, passes. Bouteflika took office in 1999 during the waning years of Algeria's civil war, and has overseen a period of greater peace for the country. It is unclear who the next president will be or how he or she will be selected.

Tunisia, whose people overthrew long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, is considered the Arab Spring's sole success story. But Tunisia faces challenges to its future stability and prosperity, including pervasive corruption, terrorist attacks, and unmet promises of change.⁴ Finally, Libya, where long-time dictator Muammar

⁴ Marwan Muasher, Marc Pierini, and Alexander Djerassi, *Between Peril and a New Framework for Partnership with Tunisia*, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 4, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/04/14/between-peril-and-promise-new-framework-for-partnership-with-tunisia-pub-63269>.

Qadhafi was toppled in a violent civil war in 2011, has been embroiled in a new and more complex civil war since 2014.⁵ Competing for power are multiple governments and hundreds of militias. Foreign countries support Libyan proxy forces with money and weapons, all on behalf of their own individual (often competing) interests.

Post-Arab Spring

The political landscape of the Maghreb has changed in two key ways since the Arab Spring. First, mainstream Islamists—Muslim activists who want the Islamization of the state and are willing to compete in elections—are more prominent than ever before (except perhaps in Algeria, where they remain minor political players). In Morocco, an Islamist party took power after the 2011 elections, although its effective power is highly constrained by the monarchy. In Tunisia, a mainstream Islamist party, al-Nahda, was in power from 2012 to 2014. In Libya, mainstream Islamists dominated one of the country’s rival governments from 2014 to 2016, and are now a key force within the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord (GNA).

Second, the Maghreb region has experienced an increase in activity by jihadist groups that reject elections, constitutions, and secularism, and want to Islamize states and societies by force. For example, North Africa has been one of the largest contributors of foreign fighters to the civil war in Syria. In spring 2015, 6,500 Tunisians were reported to be fighting in Iraq and Syria with the self-declared Islamic State, and officials have prevented another 5,000 from leaving the country to do so.⁶ Also, 1,350 individuals from Morocco are believed to be fighting in Syria and Iraq.⁷ Algeria, with its long history of jihadi groups, continues to fight al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), an organization with its roots in the Algerian civil war. Algeria has also experienced internal attacks by small groups affiliated with the Islamic State. In post-Qadhafi Libya, the Islamic State emerged in several cities, eventually taking over Sirte, a port city and former Qadhafi stronghold. The Islamic State-Libya not only has operated in Libya, but also has trained fighters and launched attacks on tourist sites in neighboring Tunisia, injuring Tunisia’s vulnerable economy.

⁵⁵ Julia McQuaid, David Knoll, Pamela Faber, Jonathan Schroden, and Alexander Thurston, *Libya’s Civil War: Root Causes and Conflict Drivers*, CNA, DRM-2016-U-014080-Final, October 2016.

⁶ The Soufan Group data, reported in: Ashley Kirk, “Iraq and Syria, how many foreign fighters are fighting for ISIL?” *The Telegraph*, March 2016: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Given these developments, the Maghreb region is in a period of transition that could become more unstable, depending on what developments occur. Outside actors, including the United States and a number of the Gulf state countries, have the potential to impact the outcome for this region. Understanding each other's actions and motives can perhaps contribute to more supportive interventions and engagements that will lead to a more stable future.

The United States and the Maghreb

Historically, the Maghreb has not been of vital strategic importance to the United States. After the Maghreb countries became independent (during 1951 and 1962), U.S. interests in the Maghreb focused on Cold War priorities, in terms of limiting the spread of Communism and supporting political liberalization.⁸ Maintaining stability, particularly in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution in Iran, was also a U.S. interest in North Africa. The United States considered the monarchs of Morocco, the authoritarian rulers in Tunisia, and the military regime in Algeria to be guarantors of stability. The United States viewed Islamist parties in the Maghreb—the main challengers to authoritarian rule from the 1980s on—with skepticism and concern. After 9/11, the United States forged closer security and military ties with the Maghreb countries, including a closer relationship with Algeria, based on mutual concerns over Islamic terrorism.⁹ The United States has also promoted economic development and integration in the Maghreb, supporting the formation of the Arab Maghreb Union in 1989.¹⁰ However, due to a number of factors—most prominently the row between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara (which Morocco claims and whose independence Algeria supports)—efforts to consolidate such a union have failed.

The major exception to U.S. support for Maghreb regimes has been Libya. The United States sanctioned and sometimes militarily punished long-time Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi for his erratic behavior, exceptionally repressive rule, and involvement in international terrorism. In 1986, the United States bombed Qadhafi's compound, after accusing him of orchestrating an attack in Germany that killed 10

⁸ Herman J. Cohen, "The United States and Africa: Non-vital interests also require attention, American Diplomacy," August 2003, http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2003_07-09/cohen_africa/cohen_africa.html.

⁹ Vish Sakthivel, "Taking Stock of U.S. Policy Options in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia," Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 2, 2016: <http://www.fpri.org/article/2016/09/taking-stock-u-s-policy-options-algeria-morocco-tunisia/>.

¹⁰ Institut MEDEA, "Maghreb Arab Union," accessed September 12, 2016, <http://www.medeabe/en/countries/arab-world-general/maghreb-arab-union-mau/>.

Americans.¹¹ In 1988, Libya was behind the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland; in connection with that incident, the UN imposed sanctions on Libya in 1992. Relations between the United States and Libya were partly normalized starting in 2004, when Qadhafi displayed greater cooperation on counterterrorism and anti-nuclear proliferation issues, but mistrust between Washington and Tripoli lingered until Qadhafi's fall in 2011.

U.S. policy in North Africa took a turn following the Arab Spring protests. The uprisings upset the status quo for U.S. policy in the region and made North Africa more prominent in U.S. policy than before. The United States had to balance its core goal of restoring stability to the region while at the same time appearing to stay true to its stated principles of supporting the emergence of democratic governance there. Doing so meant withdrawing support from Tunisia's Ben Ali, who was considered a close friend of the United States. The U.S. took a similar path in Egypt with President Hosni Mubarak, siding with the protesters once the tide turned in their favor. At the same time, the U.S. continued to support the regimes in Morocco and Algeria in their efforts to stave off revolutionary forces, generating accusations of hypocrisy. In Libya, the United States helped establish a government after the revolution but was driven out of the country in 2012 after the attack on its consulate in Benghazi killed the U.S. ambassador and three others. Since 2015, the U.S. has become more engaged in Libya as part of an international effort to establish a new government, the GNA. The United States also sought to degrade and destroy the Islamic State after it emerged in several Libyan cities.

U.S. priorities in the Maghreb

Other than the general goal of promoting regional stability, the United States does not have a unified policy toward the Maghreb. Rather, it maintains a series of bilateral relationships. An analysis of policy statements, current programming, and U.S. government activities shows that U.S. policy and engagement in the Maghreb tend to focus on seven priorities for the region. These are not mutually exclusive, and most ultimately feed into the first, which is focused on stabilizing the region.

1. **Supporting/restoring stability in the region:** In the wake of the Arab Spring, the United States sees the Moroccan monarchy and Algeria's military regime as key partners in counterterrorism and ensuring regional stability, not only

¹¹ Staff, BBC "On this day," BBC Website, accessed September 8, 2016: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/15/newsid_3975000/3975455.stm.

within these countries but across the region. A collapse of one or both regimes could further destabilize the Maghreb.

2. **Ending the civil war in Libya:** In May 2016, then-Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the U.S. goal for Libya was “to bring unity to Libya and the long-term goal of a stable Libya that is at peace with itself, which is unified and secure.”¹² To that end, the United States supports the UN-backed GNA. However, the U.S. has proceeded cautiously regarding some of the GNA’s enemies, and may be quietly and partially supporting the anti-Islamist Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army, who has openly declared his opposition to the GNA.¹³
3. **Degrading and destroying the Islamic State and al-Qaida:** U.S. global efforts to degrade and destroy the Islamic State include counterterrorism in the Maghreb. The United States seeks to deny ISIS any safe havens in the Maghreb, and to drive the group out of Libya, where it has gained a foothold. In support of that goal, the United States conducted significant numbers of airstrikes in support of the GNA-led assault on ISIS fighters in Sirte. These efforts were successful in driving ISIS out of its stronghold in Sirte, but the U.S. remains concerned about the Islamic State’s ability to revive itself in Libya, especially as the pressure on the group in Iraq and Syria continues to increase. The U.S. has also conducted airstrikes in Libya against affiliates of al-Qaida, such as the June 2015 strike in Ajdabiya that targeted AQIM commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar (who likely escaped) and killed Tunisian jihadi Saifallah Ben Hassine.
4. **Preventing further destabilization of the Sahel:** Following the jihadi takeover of northern Mali in 2012-2013 and amid recurring AQIM attacks in Sahelian cities, the United States is working to prevent further destabilization in the Sahel. It sees Maghreb countries as key actors in the Sahelian crisis. Morocco and Algeria both have strong diplomatic influence in the Sahel. Algeria, for example, has been instrumental in building and implementing the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali after that country’s 2012 civil war.¹⁴ Morocco also has increasing ambitions to act as a continent-wide power in Africa,

¹² John Kerry, “Remarks at the Libya Ministerial,” 05/16/16, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/05/257266.htm>, visited 08/25/2016.

¹³ “Leaked Tapes Expose Western Support for Libyan General,” Al-Jazeera, July 19, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/leaked-tapes-expose-western-support-libyan-general-160708182646443.html>.

¹⁴ “Algeria: Implementation of Mali Peace Agreement - Lamamra Calls for Concrete Results,” *All Africa*, June 20, 2016: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201606210359.html>.

especially in West Africa. Libya's instability, meanwhile, exacerbates instability and conflict in the Sahel, and ethnic conflict and smuggling in southern Libya has spillover effects in Niger, Chad, and beyond.

5. **Ensuring Tunisia doesn't collapse:** The United States sees Tunisia as a key test case for Arab democracy. It also worries that state failure in Tunisia would open the door to jihadis, particularly given the relatively high number of Tunisians fighting for the Islamic State in Libya and Syria. Furthermore, Tunisia's political stability is critical to regional stability. Given the unrest in neighboring Libya, and the potential spillover effects that could include an increased presence of the Islamic State within Tunisian borders, the country is seen as vulnerable.
6. **Supporting a peaceful transition of power in Algeria:** The long-term illness of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the lingering jihadi presence in Algeria, and the pressure from decreased state revenue from low oil prices all raise the specter of a potentially tumultuous transition when Bouteflika eventually passes. There is uncertainty about how the transition to a new regime will occur and what forces could be unleashed when it finally happens. The United States hopes to see a credible successor emerge, but most of all would like for the transition to be peaceful and non-disruptive.
7. **Peacefully settling the Western Sahara conflict:** In 1975, Morocco claimed control of the Western Sahara, a region that had previously been colonized by Spain. Algeria has opposed that claim and supported the independence of the Sahawri population living under Moroccan authority. This has led to decades of Moroccan-Algerian tensions. These tensions have complicated regional integration and undermined efforts to coordinate counterterrorism. The United States supports Morocco's autonomy plan for the Western Sahara and a settlement that would lead to improved coordination between the two regional powers.¹⁵

U.S. activities in the Maghreb

The U.S. government implements a wide range of activities and programs in support of these seven interests.¹⁶ The United States has a variety of programs focused on

¹⁵ "U.S. supports Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara," Reuters, March 19, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-westernsahara-usa-idUSKCN0WL00X>.

¹⁶ The U.S. government has many programs and activities in the four Maghreb countries, beyond the examples listed in this report.

democratization, for example.¹⁷ It is worth noting that these programs concentrate on Tunisia and Morocco, with very little in Algeria,¹⁸ where the bilateral relationship focuses on security cooperation. The U.S. government supports economic development, promotes political transparency, and fights corruption through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other agencies in the region. The United States has also participated in high-level diplomatic efforts to broker a government in Libya. In that country, the U.S. provides assistance in the development of critical infrastructure, government transparency, and women's political participation.¹⁹

U.S. military and security assistance with Maghreb countries focuses on developing special operations capabilities, border security, and countering terrorism.²⁰ In the case of Tunisia and Morocco, this assistance is coupled with programs concentrating on security sector reform.²¹ For Tunisia in particular, the goal of security sector reform is much more overtly attached to human rights than it is in any of the other countries in the region.²² In addition, Tunisia was the only Maghreb country selected for the Security Governance Initiative, a White House program focusing on six key African partners.²³ To the extent that the United States supports the development of Maghreb partner capabilities for extra-territorial use, the intention is that they should be employed in the Sahel to fight terrorism.²⁴ The regional security initiative known as the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)²⁵ centers on the

¹⁷ U.S. State Department, 'Congressional Budget Justification: FY 2017,' Foreign Operations, Appendix 3, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252734.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "How the United States Partners with the Government of Libya and the Libyan People," accessed August 25, 2016, <http://libya.usembassy.gov/partnerships.html>.

²⁰ U.S. State Department, Congressional Budget Justification.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Security Governance Initiative: 2015 Review," March 2, 2016, US Department of State, accessed August 21, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/2016/253906.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Until 2005, the (TSCTP) was known as the focus of the Pan-Sahel Initiative and included Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania. In 2005, it changed to the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative to add Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia among others and in 2010 it was renamed the TSCTP. For additional reading, please see: Lesley Anne Warner, *The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership Building Partner Capacity to Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, CNA Research Memorandum CRM-2014-U-007203-Final, March 2014.

Sahel region.²⁶ Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are part of TSCTP, in addition to eight other African countries.

In summation, U.S. engagement in the Maghreb today is a mix of long-standing programs such as those in the areas of economic and political development, and a range of more recent programs that reflect emerging issues and priorities—in particular, those related to counterterrorism.

²⁶ Interview with academic expert, September 2016.

The Gulf States and the Maghreb

The Arab Gulf states are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—a political, security, and economic organization whose members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The GCC states, like the Maghreb states, share cultural, historical, and economic commonalities that define them as a discrete sub-region. Member states sometimes conduct their foreign policy multilaterally through the GCC, but they pursue individual foreign policies outside of the GCC as well.

We found that the GCC as an institution does not have a clearly articulated strategy for the Maghreb and most engagement between GCC states and those of the Maghreb takes place bilaterally. With the exception of Saudi Arabia's global efforts to export its brand of Salafi/Wahhabi Islam, the GCC states traditionally have had limited foreign policy interests. GCC states maintained strong relationships with the U.S. and the UK, a former colonial power in the region, but otherwise they tended to focus on issues within the GCC or on influencing situations immediately outside their borders in places such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Jordan.²⁷

Among GCC member states, the most activist and influential in foreign policy are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and sometimes Kuwait. Saudi Arabia is usually the most dominant, given that its population, economy, and geopolitical clout vastly exceed those of the other Gulf states. However, since the ascension of Qatar's previous emir in 1995, Qatar has been an activist and a maverick in foreign affairs, often acting independently of or even counter to Saudi foreign policy. The other Gulf states—Bahrain and Oman—tend to focus more on domestic affairs and are less interested in projecting influence abroad, at least overtly. Of these quieter states, Oman is distinctive for its willingness to stand aloof from GCC policy—for example, by maintaining a good working relationship with Iran.²⁸

²⁷ Interview with former U.S. official, August 2016.

²⁸ Shohini Gupta, "Oman the unsung hero of the Iranian Nuclear Deal," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2015: <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/07/23/oman-the-unsung-hero-of-the-iranian-nuclear-deal/>

Historically, Gulf states' interests in the Maghreb were primarily political and economic. Strong friendships have existed for many years between countries such as Saudi Arabia and Morocco, both of which are monarchies and have a mutual interest in supporting each other politically. Economically, Gulf members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar—have also had ties to Libya and Algeria, two major oil-producing OPEC members in the Maghreb. The GCC has periodically attempted to rally support from Maghreb states, especially during the Gulf War, but it had limited interest in the internal affairs of Maghreb states before the Arab Spring and seldom intervened blatantly in Maghreb countries' politics.

Moreover, the Maghreb was more culturally distant from the Gulf than other parts of the Middle East. Unlike Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, there has not been considerable labor migration from the Maghreb to the Gulf. (*Maghrebis* tend to go to Europe, where strong ties from colonial times remain.) Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian migrants in the Gulf have strengthened intra-regional ties, whereas Gulf Arabs have seen the Maghreb as tourist destination,²⁹ rather than as a next-door neighbor. There are religious commonalities between the two sub-regions: like their Maghreb counterparts, the Gulf states' populations are also predominantly Sunni Muslim.³⁰ Beyond the common denominator of Sunni identity, however, Islam in the Maghreb has different foundations (the Maliki legal school and a strong influence of Sufi orders, for example) than Islam in the Gulf (which, as discussed below, is often strongly influenced by Wahhabism/Salafism, a literalist, anti-Sufi school).

Gulf state interests after the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring had major repercussions for the Gulf countries and resulted in changes to their domestic and foreign policies. The GCC as a whole was keen to stifle the Arab Spring within the Gulf and to contain and shape its effects across the Arab world. As part of this effort, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have developed an increased strategic interest, and in some areas an increased assertiveness, in the Maghreb. Several developments caused this shift.

²⁹ Henkelman, "American Real Estate Firms' Failure," pp. 44-45; and "Morocco, First Destination for Gulf Tourists," *Morocco World News*, 29 December 2014, <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2014/12/148379/morocco-first-destination-for-gulf-tourists/>.

³⁰ The exception is Oman, which is Ibadi. Ibadis are neither Sunni nor Shi'i. There are Ibadi minority communities across North Africa, but they are not politically significant.

First, Gulf monarchies feared for their own survival and stability after seeing the fall of three strong Arab leaders in North Africa (Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Qadhafi). Indeed, the uprisings in Bahrain in 2011 demonstrated that no Arab state was immune from the forces that the Arab Spring uprisings unleashed. Bahrain's protests were ultimately put down by the GCC's Peninsula Shield forces, employing primarily Saudi and Emirati troops.

Second, the Gulf countries came to see the United States as less stalwart in its backing for Arab regimes. Gulf states saw Washington's abandonment of Ben Ali and Mubarak as an about-face. Gulf states were also unprepared for the abrupt shift from the U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military mission to protect civilians in Libya, to one of regime change. Following these developments, Gulf states saw a vacuum in the Maghreb, particularly when the United States and NATO disengaged from Libya. The Gulf states saw an opportunity and a need to fill the vacuum before others did.

Third, the Gulf countries have increasingly feared Iran's expanding influence in Iraq and Syria, and Saudi Arabia and Iran are racing to compete for influence throughout the Middle East. The Maghreb is a natural place for the Gulf Arab states to expand their influence, politically and religiously, in the face of Iran's expansionism.

Saudi Arabia also seeks political and at times materiel support from the Maghreb, most prominently in its war in Yemen against the Iranian-backed Houthis. The Moroccan government has supported Saudi Arabia in the campaign, stating it was in "complete solidarity" with the Saudis, joining the formal coalition, and contributing 1,500 troops to the fight.³¹

Fourth, the Gulf States had mixed reactions as the Arab Spring opened the door to greater success for Islamist political parties. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which had long and contentious relationships with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Arab Spring contributed to the decision to outlaw the Brotherhood and declare it a terrorist organization in 2014.³² For Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the sanctioned participation of Islamist parties in North African political systems after the 2011 revolutions was also threatening to their own political futures and to their visions of regional order. Qatar,

³¹ "Morocco voices full support for Saudi Arabia," Al-Arabiya, March 26, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/03/26/Morocco-voices-full-support-for-Saudi-Arabia.html>.

³² The Muslim Brotherhood's mainstream is not Wahhabi/Salafi, and so Saudi repression of the Brotherhood does not conflict with Saudi Arabia's goal of promoting Wahhabism abroad; additionally, a hybrid Brotherhood/Salafi movement challenged the Saudi Arabian monarchy during and after the Gulf War, creating lasting antipathy toward the Brotherhood on the part of the monarchy.

in contrast, had embraced and supported the Brotherhood and Islamist parties even before the Arab Spring. Qatar's government has supported Islamists in the Maghreb, especially in Libya and Tunisia.

Fifth, as the GCC countries have faced lower oil prices in recent years, some are thinking about economic diversification; they are interested in economic investment and closer economic ties in sectors beyond oil. In June 2016, Saudi Arabia launched *Vision 2030*, an economic plan that seeks to move the economy away from oil dependency.³³ There are economic opportunities for the Gulf states in North Africa, both in the stable countries and potentially in a future Libya. Gulf aid and investment in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria aim to promote political stability, but also to deepen Gulf involvement in tourism, real estate, and other non-oil sectors such as industry and defense. There is particular interest in getting Libya's oil back up to pre-revolution production (and revenue) in order for its government to be able to invest in large infrastructure projects for which GCC companies could land the contracts.³⁴

Sixth, the Gulf countries are taking the problem of the Islamic State and regional jihadism more seriously than before. Amid the rise of the Islamic State, Gulf states have faced renewed scrutiny regarding domestic fundraising for jihadism. The Islamic State's attacks have reached Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and its appropriation of Salafi/Wahhabi ideas has placed the Saudi Arabian religious establishment in a deeply awkward position.³⁵ As the Gulf States respond more aggressively to jihadism, they must consider the role of the Maghreb—not only as the site of significant Islamic State and al-Qaida activity (in Libya and Tunisia), but also as a key source of foreign fighters for the Islamic State.

Gulf state responses to the Arab Spring

In response to post-Arab Spring developments, the GCC countries to one degree or another implemented domestic changes to prevent destabilization within their borders. In addition, as part of their overall response, a number of them also shifted

³³ "Saudi economic diversification plan finalized," *Middle East Eye*, June 6, 2016, Accessed September 10, 2016: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-economic-diversification-plan-finalised-2079548267>.

³⁴ Simone Kerr, "GCC and Maghreb: Countries are long on initiatives, short on execution," FT.com, September 28, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cdc16aae-e2bf-11e0-897a-00144feabdc0.html#axzz4GIF8YdqB>

³⁵ Interview with former U.S. official, August 2016. See also Cole Bunzel, *The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Dual of the Islamic States*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_265_Bunzel_Islamic_States_Final.pdf.

their policies in the Maghreb to a more activist stance given that the Arab Spring had its origins in that part of the world. This activism, some Gulf states believe, protects their political interests and prevents destabilization from spreading within the Maghreb and into the Gulf.

In terms of domestic changes, the GCC states reacted with a combination of repression, political reform, security measures, and state *largesse* to essentially gain the acquiescence of the population and avoid any domestic repercussions. Gulf regimes, for example, increased subsidies and salaries, offered cash bonuses, and provided employment and housing to their people.³⁶ In Saudi Arabia, official clerics condemned the North African protests on religious grounds, while dissident shaykhs celebrated the toppling of authoritarian regimes. Saudi authorities arrested hundreds of Sunni activists during the initial months of the Arab Spring, contained Shi'i protests in the Eastern Province, and launched a \$130 billion package of new domestic subsidies in early 2011.³⁷

Outside their borders, some of the GCC states have also tried to contain and shape the effects of the Arab Spring by intervening in other countries. The most prominent example of this has been in Syria, where the Gulf states have prioritized countering Iranian influence by funding various Sunni rebel groups. Some of the Gulf states have also extended some of these activities into the Maghreb. There, in addition to other economic and political objectives, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are interested in promoting stability and marginalizing Islamists, and Qatar seeks to empower Islamists.

Gulf state activities in the post-Arab Spring Maghreb

The Gulf States have pursued a range of activities and engagement in the Maghreb in recent years. Some of these build on long-standing interests, but others have emerged within the past several years as the post-Arab Spring political and security environment has evolved.

³⁶ Zoltan Barany, "After the Arab Spring Revolt and Resilience in the Arab Kingdoms," *Parameters*, Summer 2013, http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Issues/Summer_2013/9_Barany_Article.pdf

³⁷ Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy: Loss Without Gain?" in *New Politics of Intervention*, 32-40, pp. 33-34.

Bolstering Morocco and Algeria

The Gulf countries took steps to ensure that Morocco and Algeria, the two regimes that did not fall, would remain stable. Morocco, the Maghreb country to which most GCC members are closest, received the most attention. In May 2011, the GCC invited Morocco (and fellow monarchy Jordan) to apply for membership in the organization. The invitation reflected Morocco and Jordan's position as fellow monarchies, but it also highlighted GCC members' anxieties about the potential of the Arab Spring to topple monarchs.³⁸ The invitation was driven by Saudi Arabia, aimed in part at recruiting Jordan and Morocco into the anti-Islamist bloc.³⁹ Neither Morocco nor Jordan has formally joined the GCC (due in part to the disinterest of Morocco),⁴⁰ and the idea appears to have been shelved. Yet Morocco has moved closer, politically, to the GCC, participating in Saudi Arabia's campaign against the Houthis in Yemen and welcoming Saudi Arabia's diplomatic support for Moroccan claims in the Western Sahara.

In addition, the GCC members extended an aid package to Morocco totaling \$5 billion. The aid package was meant to shore up Morocco's regime against popular discontent. Since the 1970s, Morocco has usually topped the list of favored recipients of Gulf aid to other Arab countries. It retained this position after the Arab Spring began.⁴¹ In 2012, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE each pledged to give \$1.25 billion in aid to Morocco for the period 2012-2017 (a similar package was extended to Jordan).⁴² The aid package will plug Moroccan government budget deficits and will continue to develop Moroccan industries, especially tourism.⁴³ Aid

³⁸ Sara Hamdan, "Gulf Council Reaches Out to Morocco and Jordan," *New York Times*, 25 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/world/middleeast/26iht-M26-GCC.html?_r=0.

³⁹ On Saudi Arabia and Jordan, see Neil Partrick, "Saudi Arabia and Jordan: Friends in Adversity," London School of Economics Kuwait Program on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, No. 31 (July 2013), <http://www.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/kuwait/documents/Saudi-Arabia-and-Jordan-Friends-in-adversity.pdf>.

⁴⁰ On Kuwait and Jordan, see Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy," p. 37.

⁴¹ Sally Isaac, "Gulf Assistance Funds Post-2011: Allocation, Motivation and Influence," *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2015* (Barcelona: IEMed, 2015), 262-265, http://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2015/IEMed%20Yearbook%202015_Panorama_GulfAssistanceFunds_SallyKhalifaIsaac.pdf.

⁴² "Qatar Signs Aid Deal Worth \$1.25 Billion for Morocco," Reuters, 28 December 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-qatar-aid-idUSBRE9BR06520131228>.

⁴³ "Saudi Arabia Signs Agreement for \$230 Mln of Aid to Morocco," Al Arabiya/Reuters, 7 April 2016, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2016/04/07/Saudi-Arabia-signs-agreement-for-230-mln-of-aid-to-Morocco.html>.

from the Gulf provides the Moroccan government, which is poorer than those of the Gulf, with the financial resources to address such issues as unemployment, lack of housing, and education. In other words, the Gulf helped Morocco replicate the strategy of reducing dissent by increasing largesse.

In addition, Saudi Arabia's defense and security interests in North Africa extend from its overall foreign policy objectives of maintaining stability in Morocco.⁴⁴ Saudi Arabia and Morocco have a long history of military cooperation, which has grown over time. It began with Saudi support to Morocco's war in the Western Sahara in the 1970s and 1980s. The Saudis have stood by the Moroccan regime on that issue politically ever since.⁴⁵ In return, Morocco has contributed troops in support of Saudi Arabia, including in 1991 in defense of Saddam Hussein's aggressive actions in the Gulf. In 2015, the Moroccans also contributed troops to the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi movement in Yemen. It provided air support to the campaign as well.⁴⁶

Saudi's defense and security ties to Algeria have been weaker, given tensions between Algeria and neighboring Morocco. The Saudis also supported the leadership of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the Islamist opposition group that threatened the Algerian regime in the 1990s.⁴⁷ Finally, Algerian military doctrine prevents the deployment of troops abroad and so it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia would benefit from Algerian military expertise and know-how in real ways, as it does from the military expertise of Morocco or other outsiders such as the Pakistanis and the Sudanese. Given Algeria's oil wealth, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia would be able to change Algerian anti-interventionist policy with monetary offerings.⁴⁸

Politically, in general GCC countries are closer to Morocco than to Algeria, given Algeria's enduring wariness of interventionism—including Gulf interventionism—in other countries' affairs. Nevertheless, Algeria is a key investment destination for Gulf countries. This pattern emerged before the Arab Spring but has grown stronger since. For example, Emirati investments in Algeria appear to be growing. Despite Algerian elites' reservations about growing Gulf investments in Morocco, Algeria and the UAE

⁴⁴ Neil Patrick, *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy: Conflict and Cooperation in Uncertain Times* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Moroccan Soldiers Participate in Ground Offensive," *Moroccan Times*, September 2015, <http://themoroccantimes.com/2015/09/16688/moroccan-soldiers-participate-ground-offensive-yemen>.

⁴⁷ Patrick, *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy*.

⁴⁸ Patrick, *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy*.

retain strong shared interests in both the economic and political spheres (especially, in the latter sphere, a strong anti-Brotherhood outlook).⁴⁹ Qatar and Algeria have increasing economic cooperation as well, partly due to their status as major gas producers. From 2009 to 2014, Qatar invested approximately \$600 million in Algeria, into sectors such as tourism, banking, trade, and real estate. In November 2014, the two countries signed 15 different economic agreements.⁵⁰ This economic relationship, however, has not erased lingering ambivalence in Algerian-Qatari relations, given Algerian objections to Qatar's interventions in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere.⁵¹

Reacting to the political victories of Islamist parties

After the Arab Spring, Islamists emerged as newly successful actors in North African politics. While Islamists have always been an influential voice in Maghreb politics, the Arab Spring allowed them to move from the sidelines to the main stage. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and al-Nahda in Tunisia, for example, were both elected to power in post-revolutionary governments. Having Islamist political parties participating in government alarmed regimes that outlaw Islamist parties, such as Saudi Arabia.

Given the split within the GCC regarding Islamism, GCC countries reacted in different ways to the newfound success of Islamists in North Africa. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have emerged as strong backers of anti-Islamist political forces, such as the current military regime in Egypt, the secularist Nidaa Tunes party in Tunisia, and the coalition of Khalifa Haftar and the House of Representatives in eastern Libya. Qatar, meanwhile, has backed Islamists in all of those countries.

⁴⁹ Carolyn Barnett, "GCC-Maghreb Relations in a Changing Regional Order," Center for Strategic and International Studies Analysis Paper (August 2013), p. 6, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130814_Barnett_GCCMaghreb_Web.pdf.

⁵⁰ "15 Ittifaqiyya Ta'awun wa-Baramij 'Amal Bayna Qatar wa-l-Jaza'ir," Al Araby, 24 November 2014, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/2014/11/24/15-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AC-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1>.

⁵¹ Mehdi Lazar, "Qatar/Algérie: quelles relations?" Diploweb, 18 March 2013, <http://www.diploweb.com/Qatar-Algerie-queles-relations.html>; and "Algeria, Qatar Ink Several Agreements," *Lemaq*, 25 March 2013, http://www.lemag.ma/english/Algeria-Qatar-ink-several-agreements_a3786.html.

In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and elsewhere, the Saudi-Emirati bloc has waged a political proxy war with Qatar through aid. In Egypt, whereas Qatar backed the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of Muhammad Morsi in 2012-2013, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have financed the government of the anti-Islamist military ruler Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. Financial support to Libyan factions follows a similar pattern, with Saudi-Emirati support going to Haftar and Qatari support going to various Islamist groups.⁵² Qatar has provided aid to other Islamist governments—for example, lending \$500 million to Tunisia’s central bank in April 2012 and November 2013 as part of its support for al-Nahda.⁵³

Qatar, however, has sometimes overreached in the Maghreb. For example, Qatar has angered some Maghreb countries by hosting prominent Islamist dissidents who are no longer welcome in their home countries. Key examples include Morocco’s Ahmed Raïssouni, Algeria’s Abbasi Madani, Libya’s Ali al-Sallabi, and—most prominently—Egypt’s Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The Maghreb country least comfortable with this trend seems to be Algeria, which is suspicious of Qatari activist foreign policy generally and of Qatar’s role in Libya specifically.⁵⁴ Qatar has also lost support among some Maghreb citizens due to its overt meddling in their countries’ politics. In Libya, Qatari intervention elicited major criticism and protests by Libyan politicians and citizens as early as late 2011.⁵⁵

Other Gulf countries have more complicated relationships with the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists. Kuwait, for example, has taken a softer line against the Muslim Brotherhood than Saudi Arabia and the UAE have. Kuwait rhetorically

⁵² Isaac, “Gulf Assistance Funds,” pp. 264-265.

⁵³ “Qatar Lends Tunisia \$500 Mln: C. Bank,” Reuters, 19 April 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/ozabs-tunisia-loan-idAFJ0E83I00R20120419>; and Tarek Amara, “Qatar Bank Grants Tunisia \$500 Mln to Support Currency Reserve,” Reuters, 23 November 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/tunisia-economy-idUSL5N0J808320131123>.

⁵⁴ Samir Allam, “Alger s’inquiète de l’influence grandissante du Qatar auprès d’une partie de l’opposition algérienne,” TSA, 15 November 2011, http://archives.tsa-algerie.com/diplomatie/alger-s-inquiete-de-l-influence-grandissante-du-qatar-aupres-d-une-partie-de-l-opposition_18169.html.

⁵⁵ Steven Sotloff, “Why the Libyans Have Fallen Out of Love with Qatar,” *Time*, 2 January 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2103409,00.html>; Sam Dagher, Charles Levinson, and Margaret Coker, “Tiny Kingdom’s Huge Role in Libya Draws Concern,” *Wall Street Journal*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204002304576627000922764650>; and Carolyn Barnett, “GCC-Maghreb Relations in a Changing Regional Order,” Center for Strategic and International Studies Analysis Paper (August 2013), p. 6, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130814_Barnett_GCCMaghreb_Web.pdf and Barnett, “GCC-Maghreb Relations,” pp. 7-8.

supports Saudi and Emirati anti-Muslim Brotherhood moves but has only mildly repressed the Brotherhood at home.⁵⁶ Kuwait also quietly attempted to mediate between the UAE and Qatar when it came to the disagreement about the Brotherhood.⁵⁷ Kuwait reportedly sought Algeria's help in the mediation effort,⁵⁸ representing a subtle confluence of interests between two countries that each attempt to chart a middle path in their respective sub-regions. Another Gulf country attempting a balancing act with the Brotherhood is Bahrain, which partly relied on the Brotherhood to counter Shi'i domestic dissent but which also joined in the Emirati-Saudi anti-Brotherhood campaign.⁵⁹ Bahrain has not followed Qatar's lead in attempting to promote the Brotherhood's fortunes abroad.

The dynamics of the Saudi-Qatari rivalry over Islamism have shifted in 2014-2016. After Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in March-November 2014, Qatar decreased (though by no means halted) its support to the Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile, since King Salman took the throne in Saudi Arabia in 2015, there have been signs that the kingdom is softening its opposition to the Brotherhood. One symbol of this softening was the visit of Rashid al-Ghannushi, head of Tunisia's al-Nahda, to Saudi Arabia in 2015.⁶⁰

For Saudi Arabia, the ultimate priority is regional stability, rather than repression of the Brotherhood at any cost. The UAE, for its part, remains harshly critical of the

⁵⁶ Courtney Freer, "The Rise of Pragmatic Islamism in Kuwait's Post-Arab Spring Opposition Movement," Brookings Institution, August 2015, p. 1, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kuwait_Freer-FINALE.pdf.

⁵⁷ Courtney Freer, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Post-Arab Spring Legacy in the Smaller Gulf States," *Gulf Affairs* (Spring 2016): 18-21; p. 18, http://www.oxgaps.org/files/analysis_freer.pdf.

⁵⁸ "Kuwait Asks for Help from Algeria to Promote Meditation with Qatar," *Middle East Monitor*, 12 April 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140412-kuwait-asks-for-help-from-algeria-to-promote-meditation-with-qatar/>.

⁵⁹ Ibrahim Hatlani, "Bahrain Between Its Backers and the Brotherhood," Carnegie Endowment, 20 May 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=55653>.

⁶⁰ Hussein Ibish, "Saudi Arabia's New Sunni Alliance," *New York Times*, 31 July 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/opinion/hussein-ibish-saudi-arabias-new-sunni-alliance.html?_r=0; and Walid al-Talili, "Al-Ghannushi fi al-Sa'udiyya Mu'tamiran wa-Mubadiran li-Masalaha Misriyya," *Al Arabiya*, 11 June 2015, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2015/6/11/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B4%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9->

Brotherhood, but recognizes that the Brotherhood has been greatly weakened in recent years.⁶¹

Shaping post-revolutionary Tunisia

The GCC states have sought to stabilize post-revolutionary Tunisia, which has gone through four major governments since the overthrow of Ben Ali. As noted above, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have backed the current government led by the secularist Nidaa Tunes,⁶² whereas Qatar backed the Islamist al-Nahda party while it was part of governing coalitions from 2011 to 2014.⁶³

Alongside their interventions in politics, some Gulf states have sought to stabilize Tunisia's economy and reduce the economic grievances that led to the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia, for example, gave money to Tunisia after the revolution to help with the political transition, presumably to combat the negative perceptions that Tunisians might have had regarding Saudi Arabia's decision to host Ben Ali in Jeddah.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia, approved a new, above-budget \$250 million Youth Employment Support Program for the Arab world in February 2011. The IDB launched youth employment programs in Egypt and Tunisia in November 2011.⁶⁵ The IDB emphasized the theme of job creation in its 2013-2015 country strategy for Tunisia, which pledged \$390 million per year for the relevant period. The strategy also

⁶¹ Matthias Sailer, "Changed Priorities in the Gulf: Saudi Arabia and the Emirates Rethink Their Relationship with Egypt," *SWP Comments* 8 (January 2016), pp 1-4, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2016C08_sil.pdf; Ali al-Arian, "Is Saudi Arabia Warming Up to the Muslim Brotherhood?" *Al Jazeera*, 29 July 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/saudi-arabia-warming-muslim-brotherhood-150727121500912.html>; and David B. Roberts, "Qatar's Strained Gulf Relationships" in *The New Politics of Intervention of Gulf Arab States*, 23-32, p. 29.

⁶² Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: PublicAffairs, 2016), Chapter Three.

⁶³ Youssef Cherif, "Tunisia's Elections Amid a Middle East Cold War," Atlantic Council, 22 October 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/tunisian-elections-amid-a-middle-eastern-cold-war>; Kristina Kausch, "'Foreign Funding' in Post-Revolution Tunisia," FRIDE, 2013, p. 7, http://fride.org/download/WP_Tunisia.pdf; and Barnett, "GCC-Maghreb Relations," pp. 5-6.

⁶⁴ Patrick, *Saudi Arabian Foreign Policy*.

⁶⁵ Islamic Development Bank Group, "Role of IsDB Group in Supporting Employment Growth in Member Countries: Past Practices and Future Approaches," May 2012, pp. 9-10, http://www.isdb.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/IDBDevelopments/Internet/English/IDB/CM/Publications/Occasional%20Papers/EmploymentCirculation_at_UN_Forum_17May12.pdf.

prioritized developing infrastructure (with the aim of reducing regional disparities within Tunisia), supporting regional integration among Maghreb states, and cultivating linkages between Tunisia and other members of the Bank.⁶⁶ Gulf aid organizations, in other words, hope to support a more stable and more Gulf-oriented Maghreb in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Choosing sides in Libya's civil war

Gulf Arab states have been involved in Libya since the beginning of the Arab Spring protests and remain active in the ongoing civil war today. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have been the primary Gulf actors involved in the Libyan since the end of the Qadhafi government. All three have picked specific groups that they are supporting in hopes of shaping the post-war government.

Qatar funded the revolutionaries that overthrew Qadhafi in 2011, especially Islamist revolutionaries. Qatar sent hundreds of troops to support the rebels against Qadhafi, and its air force participated in the NATO-led air campaign.⁶⁷ The tiny Gulf state was also a major political backer of Islamists such as 'Ali al-Sallabi of Benghazi and 'Abd al-Hakim Belhadj of Tripoli. However, Libyans have become hostile to foreign intervention and such maneuvers have partly backfired for Qatar. Many Libyans came to see al-Sallabi and Belhadj as Qatari proxies lacking domestic legitimacy.⁶⁸ By 2013, prominent Libyan politicians were calling for an end to Qatari interference in Libya, and anti-Qatar demonstrations were occurring.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Islamic Development Bank Group, "Member Country Partnership Strategy for Tunisia (2013-2015)," June 2013, p. i and pp. 20-21, http://www.isdb.org/irj/go/km/docs/documents/IDBDevelopments/Internet/English/IDB/CM/Publications/Partnership_Strategies/Tunisia_Final.pdf.

⁶⁷ Ian Black, "Qatar admits sending hundreds of troops to support Libya rebels," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2011, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/26/qatar-troops-libya-rebels-support>.

⁶⁸ Marc Fisher, "Meet the Architect of the New Libya," *Washington Post*, 9 December 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/meet-the-architect-of-the-new-libya/2011/12/06/gIQAfPm8hO_story.html; and Sam Dagher, Charles Levinson, and Margaret Coker, "Tiny Kingdom's Huge Role in Libya Draws Concern," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 October 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204002304576627000922764650>.

⁶⁹ Carolyn Barnett, "GCC-Maghreb Relations in a Changing Regional Order," Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2013, p. 6, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/130814_Barnett_GCCMaghreb_Web_2.pdf.

Kuwait was the second Gulf country after Qatar to recognize the rebel forces against Qadhafi. The government of Kuwait supported the rebel council by pledge \$177.2 million “to help pay salaries in the breakaway east of the country.”⁷⁰

Since the beginning of internal hostilities in 2014, the conflict has broken down along two lines: in the east, there is a more secular government, based in Tobruk, that is aligned with the secular Field Marshal Haftar. In the west, Islamist militias at first supported the Islamist-dominated General National Congress (GNC). With the establishment of the GNA, Islamist militias are split between supporting the GNC and the GNA. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have backed Haftar’s Operation Dignity in the east, while Qatar supports Islamists based in the west. The UAE and Qatar have supported the two opposing sides in the civil war in several ways. The UAE (and Egypt) backs the anti-Islamist Haftar through the provision of aid, military equipment, and airstrikes.⁷¹

The Emiratis also have troops fighting on the ground in Libya and have set up an operations room to help coordinate the fight.⁷² In the fall of 2016, images showed that the UAE had built a forward operating base in Eastern Libya which it uses to launch light aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in support of Haftar’s forces.⁷³ Saudi Arabia, more quietly, also reportedly funds Haftar, and Kuwait backs the Tobruk-based government.⁷⁴ Qatar (along with Turkey) has continued to back

⁷⁰ Eman Goman, “Kuwait pledge \$117.2 Million to Libya’s rebel council,” Reuters, April 24, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-council-idUSTRE73N1M920110424>.

⁷¹ David Kirkpatrick, “Leaked Emirati Emails Could Threaten Peace Talks in Libya,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2015, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/world/middleeast/leaked-emirati-emails-could-threaten-peace-talks-in-libya.html>. Patrick Kingsley, Chris Stephen, and Dan Roberts, “UAE and Egypt behind bombing raids against Libyan militias, say US officials,” *The Guardian*, August 26, 2014, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/26/united-arab-emirates-bombing-raids-libyan-militias>; *Libyan Gazette* Editorial Staff, “UAE’s Intervention has Prolonged and Intensified Libya’s Multitude of Problems,” *Libyan Gazette*, April 30, 2016, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.libyangazette.net/2016/04/30/uaes-intervention-has-prolonged-and-intensified-libyas-multitude-of-problems/>.

⁷² Frederic Wehrey, “Is Libya a proxy war?” *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2014, accessed September 16, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/10/24/is-libya-a-proxy-war/>; Kirkpatrick and Schmitt, “Arab Nations Strike in Libya, Surprising U.S.”

⁷³ Jeremy Binnie, “UAE’s Forward Operating Base in Libya Revealed,” *IHS Janes Military Capability*, October 26, 2016, <http://www.janes.com/article/64980/uae-s-forward-operating-base-in-libya-revealed>.

⁷⁴ Jon Lee Anderson, “Letter from Libya: The Unravelling,” *The New Yorker*, 23 February 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>; and “Libya’s Haftar Vows to ‘Take Tripoli’ from Islamists,” AFP/Al Arabiya, 28 November 2014,

Islamist forces associated with the now-defunct GNC. They have provided both weapons and training to their preferred rebel forces.⁷⁵

Quietly promoting Wahhabism/Salafism, but with limits

Salafism is a Sunni school of literalist interpretation that has state backing from Saudi Arabia and widespread influence in the Gulf. Increasingly, Salafism has strong religious influence and a growing constituency in the Maghreb, partly due to Gulf influences but also due to local drivers such as a search for identity among youth. Saudi Arabia has promoted the export of Salafism to the Maghreb. A number of leading Salafis from the Maghreb studied, formally or informally, in Saudi Arabia. Many of these Maghrebi Salafis have maintained strong connections to Saudi universities, particularly the Islamic University of Medina, or to Saudi religious networks. Prominent Maghrebi Salafis with Saudi connections include some politically controversial figures, such as Tunisia's Al-Khatib al-Idrissi⁷⁶ and Algeria's 'Abd al-Fattah Hamadache.⁷⁷ Such connections can help Maghreb states to use the Gulf as a pressure release valve for outspoken Salafis: for example, when the hardline Moroccan Salafi Shaykh Muhammad al-Maghraoui outraged Moroccan authorities in 2008 by stating that it was legitimate for men to marry girls as young as nine, Morocco exiled him to Saudi Arabia from 2008 to 2011.

Despite significant Gulf influences on Maghrebi Salafism, however, there are three caveats to note. First, in the Maghreb, there is a limited role for the major Saudi proselytizing organizations. Although the Gulf is interested in promoting Salafism in the Maghreb, some of the foremost Saudi-led institutions for promoting Salafism, such as the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, do not have offices or centers in the Maghreb countries; rather, the League and the

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/11/28/Libya-s-Haftar-vows-to-take-Tripoli-from-Islamists.html>. Anadolu Agency Staff, "Kuwait rescinds accreditation of Libya's Tripoli envoy," Anadolu Agency, March 17, 2015, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/en/politics/kuwait-rescinds-accreditation-of-libyas-tripoli-envoy/66098>.

⁷⁵ Kirkpatrick, "Leaked Emirati Emails Could Threaten Peace Talks in Libya." Kingsley, Stephen, and Roberts, "UAE and Egypt behind bombing raids against Libyan militias, say US officials."

⁷⁶ Aaron Zelin, "Who Is Tunisia's Salafi Cleric Shaykh al-Khatib al-Idrissi?" *Al-Wasat*, 24 October 2013, <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2013/10/24/who-is-tunisias-salafi-cleric-shaykh-al-khatib-al-idrissi/>.

⁷⁷ 'Abd al-Fattah Hamadache, "Tarjamat Fadilat al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattah Zarawi Hamdash," Aliklil, 20 November 2010, <http://www.aliklil.com/vb/showthread.php?t=42101>.

Assembly concentrate on outreach to Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South and Southeast Asia.⁷⁸

Second, most Maghreb states are currently promoting anti-Salafi policies. In recent years, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have taken an implicitly anti-Salafi stand in official statements, focusing instead on promoting Sufism and Malikism (historically pillars of Maghrebi Islam, and movements that most Salafis oppose).⁷⁹ Gulf countries accept such policies without public complaint, adopting a long-term, pragmatic approach to their relationships with figures such as Kings Hassan II and Muhammad VI of Morocco. Gulf countries can afford to ignore or endure variations in North African religious policies provided that the underlying bilateral relationships between rulers remain stable.

Finally, Gulf efforts to proselytize can cause backlash: Secularists in the Maghreb have deep-seated fears about Saudi proselytization, particularly in Tunisia, which has a strong secularist movement.⁸⁰ Tunisian fears about Gulf influences can even lead to misperceptions, as when many Tunisians believed that a controversial Egyptian preacher was in fact Saudi.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See the lists of these organizations' offices and centers at <http://www.themwl.org/GLOBAL/ar/mwl-all-offices-ar> and http://www.wamy.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=78&lang=ar

⁷⁹ Hassan al-Ashraf, "Morocco Fights Islamist Extremism with Sufism," *Al Arabiya*, 26 September 2010, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/09/26/120366.html>; Kaci Racelma, "Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs Warns Against Extremism," *Al-Monitor*, 17 May 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2013/05/algeria-ministry-religious-affairs-warning-extremism.html>; and Haim Malka, "The Struggle for Religious Identity in Tunisia and the Maghreb," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2014, especially pp. 4-8, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/140502_Malka_Maghreb_Religious_Identity_Web.pdf.

⁸⁰ Thomas Bass, "How Tunisia Is Turning into a Salafist Battleground," *The Atlantic*, 20 June 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-tunisia-is-turning-into-a-salafist-battleground/277058/>.

⁸¹ Sons, Sebastian, and Inken Wiese, "Engagement of Arab Gulf States in Egypt and Tunisia since 2011," *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP)*. October 16, 2015. As of September 21, 2016. <https://dgap.org/en/think-tank/publications/dgapanalysis/engagement-arab-gulf-states-egypt-and-tunisia-2011>.

Conclusion

The United States and the Gulf Arab states—especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—have interests in the Maghreb and are implementing policies and pursuing activities in support of their interests. Given the current level of instability in the Maghreb and the potential that this instability could become worse or impact other parts of the region and beyond, all of these countries will likely remain active in the region for the foreseeable future. With that in mind, we offer the following findings and recommendations.

Findings

There are important areas of overlap, but also major differences, among U.S. and Gulf interests in the Maghreb. For general situational awareness, and to devise more effective policies for the region, U.S. decision-makers and planners should understand where these interests converge and diverge (see Table 1).

First, the United States and the Gulf States all have an interest in stability across the region, but what that stability looks like differs. The United States sees stability as the foundation for its political, economic, and security objectives in the region and as an important factor in curbing the spread of international terrorism. Ideally, stability comes in the form of a legitimate, participatory government. The Gulf Arab states have more recently prioritized stability in the Maghreb because, among other things, further destabilization in that part of the world could impact their own stability at home.

The type of governance envisioned for the future of the region is one area of difference between the U.S. and the Gulf states. U.S. policy is more supportive of representative forms of government for the region—ones that try to take into account the people’s demands for democracy that were made throughout the Arab Spring. The Gulf States tend to support political forces (and militias, in the case of Libya) that forward their own internal political interests (i.e., ensuring that the pressures from the political change in the region do not give rise to internal dissent); serve inter-GCC interests (such as the rivalry between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, over the role of Islamists); and feed into broader Middle East priorities (such as containing Iranian influence). Legitimate, participatory governments are not the priority for these Gulf states.

Table 1. United States and Gulf state interests in the Maghreb

Interest	United States	Gulf States
Maintaining/establishing stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Morocco's political reform. • Continue political development programs in Morocco. • Cooperate with Algeria to improve security in the region. • Support solution to the Western Sahara conflict; provide economic assistance; encourage trade and investment in the region. • Bolster struggling government in Tunisia. • Help Tunisia avoid Islamic State infiltration. • Contain fall-out from Libyan civil war. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster Morocco and Algeria economically and politically, and in terms of security. • Provide political and ideological support, but in ways that do not cross red lines. • Be more open to secularist forces (e.g., Saudi Arabia taking a softer stance towards the secularist Nidaa Tunis in Tunisia). • Provide economic assistance to Tunisia.
Counter-terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold bilateral and multilateral activities with Maghreb and European Union governments (e.g., exercises, training, assistance, intelligence sharing). • Build capability and capacity of Maghreb state military and counter-terrorism forces. • Take kinetic action against the Islamic State. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase cooperation such as intelligence sharing on mutual threats from the Islamic State (e.g., Saudi-Morocco); foreign fighter flows (e.g., from Maghreb).
Shaping the future of Libya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the GNA. • Counter the Islamic State. • Seek to stabilize. • Contain violence and upheaval, and prevent them from destabilizing neighboring states. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support competing groups largely based on split between GCC countries' views towards Islamist groups (i.e., Saudi Arabia and UAE support anti-Islamist militias; Qatar supports Islamists). • Set the stage for economic relationships.
Influence of Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. government does not appear to have a stated position on the role of Iran in the Maghreb, but it is likely that containing the influence of the Iranians there is a U.S. interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gulf states, and Saudi Arabia in particular, are interested in ensuring Iran does not have influence in the Maghreb.
Future of governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the emergence of representative political systems for the Maghreb. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative governments are not a priority for the Gulf Arab states. • Qatar supports the emergence of Islamist leaning governments in the region; the extent to which it will go to support this is not clear, but based on actions to date it appears this is the priority for that country.

No one wants the fall of the Moroccan monarchy or the Algerian military regime. There is agreement that these two states are pillars of stability, not only for the Maghreb, but for the broader Arab world. In Tunisia and Libya, Saudi Arabia and the UAE want to see secularists hold power whereas Qatar seeks to empower Islamists.

Second, the United States and the Gulf states all prioritize counterterrorism across the Maghreb—in particular, containing the threat from the Islamic State. The United States has been pursuing a broad range of CT efforts in this part of the world for over 15 years as the terrorism threat has expanded and morphed over time. Recently, this has led to kinetic action in Libya against the Islamic State. The Gulf states are also focused on this issue and have pursued cooperative security agreements, intelligence sharing arrangements, and other defense-related activities in support of their counterterrorism interests.

Third, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar each have a vision for Libya that they are pursuing; these visions are not shared. All are actively shaping Libya's future with a variety of activities. Some of these activities align, others do not. The United States supports the GNA, provides assistance, and is degrading and destroying the Islamic State. The Gulf states are supporting their forces in line with their own strategic interests. The bottom line is that not everyone can get what they want in Libya, and Gulf support for competing forces in that country will arguably contribute to prolonging the conflict there. Gulf States involved in Libya have mutually exclusive visions for its future. In addition, they are supporting forces that are not aligned with the GNA, the government that the United States is backing.

Fourth, containing the influence of Iran is a top priority for some of the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia in particular. The United States also watches this, but does not appear to prioritize it. The competition with Iran and the Gulf states is primarily played out in the Middle East, but increasingly is extending into other regions, including the Maghreb. The United States also has interests in tracking and potentially limiting Iranian influence in the Maghreb, insofar as it can potentially negatively impact Washington's relationships in the region, such as the one with Algeria. However, we did not uncover much to suggest that the U.S. has this as a priority for the region.

Fifth, at the level of the entire Maghreb, many recent Gulf activities in the region are somewhat experimental, and therefore prone to failure and backlash. While the GCC countries have political, ideological, and economic history in the Maghreb, they do not have extensive experience in the military/security realm. Saudi Arabia has done very little in this arena, and the UAE and Qatar are also expeditionary novices relative to the United States, Europe, and other global powers. Saudi Arabia's ongoing struggle in Yemen against the Houthi movement is a good reminder that for all its

wealth and influence, it is not an experienced military power.⁸² The same is true for all of the Gulf states. As such, it is important to understand that what these countries are doing—for example, in Libya—is a bit of an experiment. As a result, their actions could be unpredictable, short lived, and confusing. Most importantly for U.S. interests, they could also result in unintended consequences for all involved.⁸³ Additionally, Gulf countries’ interventionism could draw a backlash both from Maghreb populations (as when Libyans protested Qatari interventions in 2013) and from Maghreb states, particularly the intervention-averse Algeria.

Sixth, Gulf involvement in the Maghreb is influencing society in the region. Maghrebi societies are already seeing increasingly strong Salafi movements, more Gulf tourism, and farther-reaching Gulf investments. The Maghreb’s close connections to European countries will not go away, and the Maghreb’s leaders are wary of Gulf influences and of Salafism. Nevertheless, the Gulf is one major influence on societies (particularly youth) that are experiencing an ongoing revolution not just in politics but also in identity. In 10 years’ time, it is likely that the Maghreb will be more politically, religiously, and economically interlinked with the Gulf than it is today.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations for U.S. officials and personnel responsible for the Maghreb.

First, based on mutual interests, the United States should consider two potential areas of cooperation with the Gulf states in the Maghreb:

- Counterterrorism: The United States and the Gulf states share combatting the Islamic State and other jihadi groups as a priority, and this will likely continue to be the case as long as the threat is present. The United States may want to consider how to improve cooperation and coordination with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates on CT efforts, ideally in conjunction with regional governments. For example, regional multilateral CT exercises could include personnel from Gulf militaries, intelligence services, and/or law enforcement agencies.

⁸² Yiftah Shafir, “Saudi Arabia Goes to War,” The National Interest Blog, February 29, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/saudi-arabia-goes-war-15349>.

⁸³ Interview with former U.S. government official, September 10, 2016.

- Stabilizing Morocco, Tunisia, and, to a lesser extent, Algeria: Gulf countries are willing to spend a lot of money to prevent another Arab Spring. U.S. policy in the Maghreb, particularly efforts to shape Maghreb economies in order to reduce discontent, could benefit from working more closely with the Gulf countries and the multi-lateral Gulf-backed institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank.

Second, in Libya, the Gulf states play an influential role that the United States needs to remain aware of, and manage if possible. Libya is involved in a complex, multi-level civil war with myriad internal actors, many of which are supported by external actors pursuing their own interests. There is no easy solution for the United States or any other stakeholder in Libya. From the U.S. perspective, some of the Gulf states are supporting spoilers to a resolution that would see the GNA emerge as the legitimate, widely accepted central government. Therefore, for the United States, an important step in resolving the Libyan crisis may be to put pressure on some of the Gulf States to stop backing spoilers. At the very least, the United States needs to recognize the importance of this dynamic as a hindrance to its objectives and be realistic about the plausibility of an end to the conflict as long as such external support continues.

Third, the United States and the Gulf states will need to make concessions concerning the future of governance in the region—but must avoid doing so in a way that ignores the political drivers of the Arab Spring. This will not be easy, but there are examples that it has already occurred. For example, U.S. rhetoric on Libya has recently been ratcheted down, focusing less on a government that is “democratic” and more on one that is stable, legitimate, and accepted by the people.⁸⁴ This does not suggest that the United States is abandoning those goals, but perhaps that it is being more realistic as to how to support Libya move towards a more stable future.

Similarly, the Gulf states have also shown flexibility. For example, compromise is possible in Tunisia, but Saudi Arabia and the UAE currently have the upper hand over Qatar, and they are involved in shaping a government that looks like a partial restoration of the Ben Ali regime. The United States should recognize that while Gulf countries’ visions for Tunisia allow a greater degree of compromise and flexibility (Saudi Arabia has partially warmed to al-Nahda, and Qatar seems resigned to Nidaa Tunes’ current rule), Gulf countries are still keen to shape Tunisia’s ongoing transition. By backing Nidaa Tunes, which includes a number of former regime

⁸⁴ John Kerry, “Remarks at the Libya Ministerial,” May 16, 2016. As of September 20, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/05/257266.htm>, visited 08/25/2016.

members, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are signaling that they prefer a return to something that resembles the *status quo ante*. That strategy has brought some short-term stability, but it could leave the Arab Spring's economic and political drivers relatively untouched.

Finally, the U.S. government needs to be aware of and respond to the fact that the Gulf states are more involved militarily in the Maghreb than ever before and the direction of this involvement is unclear. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are both involved in Libya militarily (if not directly, than through support to others). To an extent, they are also involved in Tunisia. Morocco and Saudi Arabia have strong defense ties, and Moroccans have joined the Saudi coalition against the Houthis in Yemen. Finally, there are strong indications that in the event of a destabilized Tunisia or Algeria, one or some combination of the Gulf states could get involved militarily should significant turmoil or violence ensue, in order to shape the outcome. Of course, they all are involved on the CT front as well.

As such, the U.S. government needs robust coordination not only across the interagency (i.e., Department of State, Department of Defense, intelligence community, etc.) but also within the Department of Defense itself. For example, DOD needs to manage the seams among the three areas of responsibility that encompass the Maghreb and the Gulf. There are three geographic combatant commands responsible for Maghreb-GCC issues:

- Africa Command (AFRICOM), which is responsible for Africa with the exception of Egypt
- Central Command (CENTCOM), which is responsible for the Middle East
- European Command (EUCOM), which is responsible for the Mediterranean Sea.

There should be regular coordination and communication, particularly between AFRICOM and CENTCOM, on these issues. AFRICOM should share what activities and interests it is observing in the Maghreb on the part of the GCC countries, and CENTCOM should be sharing major developments it sees within the GCC that could impact those countries' interests and activities in the Maghreb. In addition, Special Operations Command (SOCOM) also needs to be brought into this coordination, given the counterterrorism interests of the U.S. and the Gulf states in the Maghreb.

Final thoughts

In summation, the increasing interest on the part of external actors in the Maghreb since the Arab Spring has resulted in a busy playing field. With the exception of

Libya, the United States has had long-standing relationships with these countries, but their importance has become elevated with the ongoing political instability across the region, the civil war in Libya, and the ongoing threat from terrorism. Historically, the Gulf states have had limited links to the Maghreb, and these have traditionally focused on cultural and religious commonalities, some political support, and economic ties. Gulf interests in the Maghreb too have increased since 2011, and today Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are involved there in ways they have never been before. Gulf state involvement in the Maghreb is a developing trend that U.S. decision-makers and planners need to better understand, because the activities of these countries have real and potential impact on U.S. objectives for the region. We conclude that there appear to be some promising areas for cooperation, but also important differences that could undermine what the United States is trying to achieve if the interests of the Gulf states are not properly understood and taken into account.

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