

FROM ASSISTANCE TO PARTNERSHIP: MOROCCO AND ITS FOREIGN POLICY IN WEST AFRICA

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The emergence of Morocco as a nascent security provider in West Africa is a new and under-reported phenomenon in African security. Morocco's growing assertiveness in the region presents an opportunity for U.S. interests. The United States and Morocco have a common interest in preserving peace and stability in West Africa. Morocco, with its geographic location, political stability, and deep and long-standing cultural ties with sub-Saharan Africa, provides a potential bridgehead for U.S. efforts to promote its security objectives on the continent. At a time of severe defense budget constraints, bilateral cooperation of this kind with reliable and moderate regional partners can provide a multiplier effect and augment the U.S. reach into otherwise challenging regions.

Over recent years, strengthening Morocco's presence and ties with West African countries has gained significant importance for Moroccan foreign policymakers. Extended visits by the Moroccan monarch, Mohammed VI, to West and Central African countries highlight the region's new importance. Alongside investment and trade opportunities, security matters constituted an important part of the King's talks with his hosts.

The economic potential of the region in various fields remain the main driver behind renewed Moroccan interest in Africa; these fields include energy, health, infrastructure, banking, and agriculture. Morocco is keen to diversify its economic partners and reduce its significant trade dependency on Europe. But commercial opportunities are not the only driving factor. Security has also emerged as an important aspect of Morocco's relations with Western African countries. Over the last decade, Morocco has expressed

interest in supporting peace and security in the region through regional and multilateral forums such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union.

At the same time, however, the country's regional response to security has become just another front in the decade-long rivalry between Algeria and Morocco. In an effort to achieve regional dominance, both countries have launched, sponsored, and hosted different initiatives. This rivalry has deprived the region of potential synergies between the two most capable and (relatively) stable countries in the entire North and West Africa regions.

The West African security situation is marked by violent civil uprisings; sporadic terrorist attacks; cross-border trafficking of humans, weapons, and drugs; and the existence of a variety of armed militias and terrorist groups. Moroccan decisionmakers see that security developments in the Sahel are closely intertwined with some of the threats that their own country faces. One example of this is that Morocco is one of the most important final African transit countries for migrants to Europe, and, as a result, unregulated migration is one of the issues that has caused severe socioeconomic and security concern over recent years.

Morocco has adopted a multifaceted approach in its attempt to tackle the roots of instability and radicalization in the West Africa region. Morocco strongly supports a comprehensive response that seeks to address the underlying causes of instability such as poverty, poor public services, and illiteracy. Morocco's bilateral agreements, focused more on business than on aid, include building hospitals, social housing and other infrastructure; as well as strengthening institu-

tions in order to achieve stability, such as offering to train imams at Moroccan state-owned institutions to counteract Islamic radicalism along the country's southern borders.

Morocco is leveraging a range of factors – including historic ties, domestic political stability, unique economic and institutional development experience, its strategically important geographic location, and relations with Western countries – to strengthen its position in West Africa. Moroccan policymakers strive to position their country as the intermediary partner of choice for international governmental and nongovernmental organizations who are keen to invest to achieve economic development and deliver security assistance within the North and West Africa regions. This, in turn, has implications for external actors interested in fostering improved security in the West African region.

The monograph explores the geopolitical and economic drivers of the renewed Moroccan interest in West Africa. It also examines how Morocco is conducting its foreign and security policy in a variety of Western African countries, and what strategies Morocco attempts to pursue in order to tackle the socio-economic roots of terrorism. It concludes with a set

of specific implications and policy recommendations for addressing the new situation.

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