

THE QUEST FOR MILITARY COOPERATION IN NORTH AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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The fragile political and security situations in Tunisia and Libya that followed Arab Spring upheavals have contributed to the emergence of new threats that menace the stability of both countries and their neighbors. Severe terrorist incidents have become frequent throughout the region. Algeria alone was targeted by several terrorist attacks that have been linked to Libya and Tunisia. To name but one incident, the borders that Algeria shares with the two countries exposed it to a major terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas facility in January 2013.

Confronted by these common threats, North African authorities have quickly recognized the importance of establishing military-to-military cooperation. A few security initiatives were launched among most, but not all, North African countries. Algeria, a country with a sizable military capability and experience in cross-border security cooperation, has intensified its efforts to build security cooperation arrangements with its neighboring countries in order to reduce cross-border security menaces, in particular terrorism threats. The main impetus behind Algeria's engagement and deployment of significant resources to help Tunisia and Libya with their internal security challenges has been a strong desire to maintain the country's relative stability. Over the last 3 years, for instance, Algeria and Tunisia in particular have intensified their military cooperation to tackle terrorist groups in Tunisia and fight against illicit trafficking across their respective borders.

Though there has been relative success in establishing bilateral security cooperation agreements focusing mainly on border security issues, attempts to build an effective regional security structure to face many of the region's intertwined security challenges have failed. The failure to significantly expand

cooperation to include all North African countries is attributed largely to three key factors:

- First, the current fluid political and security situation in Libya and Tunisia that has made it difficult for both countries to impose control over their territories and borders.
- Second, the existence of uneven and diverse military capabilities among North Africa's armed forces that hinders interoperability and effective military cooperation. The armed forces of these three countries have significant differences, qualitatively and quantitatively, in terms of their military equipment, training, and doctrines. This is further worsened by the lack of any history of regional exercises.
- Third, the long-standing dispute and rivalry between Algeria and Morocco remains a major obstacle to building any effective regional security cooperation.

This Letort Paper examines the North African security landscape in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with particular focus on the security threats that prompted a couple of bilateral military-to-military cooperation arrangements among North African countries, and the relevance of these security dynamics to U.S. security and interests. It explains key issues and challenges impeding region-wide security cooperation encompassing all North African countries, and concludes with recommendations on how the United States could leverage its already existing military and development assistance to encourage close cooperation between North African countries, in order to foster shared goals of security and stability.

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