

Terrorism in North Africa: Before and After Benghazi

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Chairmen Poe and Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Members Sherman and Deutch, distinguished members of the subcommittees and staff, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am honored to be here to express my views. I am also humbled to be here on the panel with Michael Lovelady. Please know that my thoughts go out to him and the other relatives of those Americans who have died in Algeria and from other terrorist attacks.

The terrorist attacks in Benghazi that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans have received exhaustive coverage, yet many of the long-term implications have not been fully considered. Future attacks, particularly those in North Africa, are likely to involve a Benghazi-style mix of jihadists of different nationalities, making it difficult to determine exactly who is responsible. Libya remains troubled, and the broader Maghreb and Sahel areas are unstable. Greater state weakness, not more stability, is likely in the years to come. So similar plots may be in our future.

I believe the U.S. reaction to the Benghazi attack, however, is likely to leave us less prepared for future terrorism. U.S. knowledge of Libya and the region has always been limited. Unfortunately, the political and bureaucratic lesson of Benghazi is clear – avoid risks at all costs. American diplomats and spies will be more confined to well-guarded parts of capital cities and more removed from local populations. This will keep them safer, but U.S. intelligence is likely to decline, and U.S. statecraft to diminish. In the long-run, diminishing U.S. capabilities could pose a grave danger to U.S. security, increasing the risk of a surprise attack or a regional development that catches the United States unawares. In addition, jihadists may point to any U.S. retreat after Benghazi as proof of U.S. cowardice.

The United States should bolster, not draw down, its presence in North Africa. America has important interests in the region and in any case the threats will not disappear simply because the U.S. chooses to ignore them. The region is now an important arena for jihadists, and the size

of their area of operation is growing. In addition, jihadists from the region and weapons from Libya are showing up in places like Syria and Sinai.

We should seek to understand and engage regional governments and peoples to counter the threats that emanate from North Africa. To this end, Washington should maintain a robust and energetic intelligence and diplomatic presence, even in dangerous countries or ones that suffer from governments that reject democratic practices. Because the operating environment is risky, the United States should augment and systematize its rapid response capabilities and its post-attack procedures. In addition, Washington should adopt a more regional response to the terrorism threat, work more with allies like France to prepare for contingencies, and increase overall intelligence and diplomatic attention to the Maghreb and surrounding areas.

The remainder of my testimony has three parts. First, I briefly discuss the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi and assess what it means for the state of Al Qaeda today. Second, I discuss future challenges in the Maghreb, including Algeria as well as Libya, from a counterterrorism point of view. Third, I present implications and recommendations for the United States.

I. The Benghazi Attack and the State of Al Qaeda

The Benghazi attack exhibited several characteristics that are likely to manifest in future terrorist attacks in the Maghreb region. The attacks were:

- ***Of Limited Sophistication.*** In contrast to the years of planning that went into the 9/11 attacks and other terrorism “spectaculars,” the attackers in Benghazi used military methods suggesting basic coordination and training but not more cutting-edge methods. The weapons used – RPGs, AK-47s, heavy machine guns and artillery mounted on trucks, and so on – are not advanced and are widely available. Many fighters from Al Qaeda, associated movements, and jihadist local organizations have these skills and similar weapons.
- ***Not Tied to Particular Events.*** Although some initial reports suggested that the attackers used the “Innocence of Muslims” video and associated demonstrations as justification, subsequent information makes clear this was at most a pretext. The United States was supporting efforts of the government of Libya to consolidate control over the eastern part of the country, but there was no single identifiable U.S. government action at the time that drew the ire of local terrorists: rather local jihadists simply wanted to attack U.S. personnel and facilities and did so. Even assuming the video in question mattered, there will always be similar pretexts that terrorist groups can cite to justify their attacks.
- ***Continued Vulnerability of Diplomatic Facilities.*** Diplomatic facilities, like military forces and civil aviation, remain a constant source of targeting interest for jihadist attackers. Between 1998 and 2011 there were 13 deadly attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities, most of which were linked to Al Qaeda, associated movements, or those who share aspects of its ideology. There were also innumerable attempted attacks and plots that were abandoned because of effective intelligence and defensive measures.

- ***Not a Reflection of Al Qaeda Popularity.*** Extremist Islamist movements are not particularly strong and popular in the Maghreb. In Algeria in particular they are less popular than they were in the 1990s. Rather, as discussed below, these groups take advantage of weak governments and a chaotic operating environment more than they depend on public support.
- ***Not Linked to U.S. Popularity.*** Some polls showed Libyans in general to be the most pro-American of all Arab states, with eastern Libya in particular having a favorable view of Americans due to the prominent American role in helping the Libyan revolution defeat Qaddafi's forces.¹ Although foreigners and foreign influence are unpopular in parts of Libya and the United States is seen as supporting some factions over others, only a minority of Libyans supported the attacks, and only a minority of a minority was actively involved.
- ***A Mix of Groups and Individuals.*** It does not appear that the Al Qaeda core orchestrated the Benghazi attack, and the assault shows how the core has spawned a variety of lesser but lethal movements. The attack involved individuals from multiple groups, making it difficult to narrow responsibility even months after the attack. In addition to Libya itself groups and factions from Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Algeria all seem to have been involved.² This sort of networked coordination, where like-minded individuals from different organizations cooperate in limited ways, is typical of Al Qaeda and associated movements as well as individuals who share no formal affiliation with the mother movement but embrace parts of its ideology.

The Nature and Limits of Al Qaeda-Type Groups in the Maghreb

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other groups in the region are capable of massive violence, even by the standards of the broader Al Qaeda-linked movements. During the 1990s, the Algerian civil war saw unspeakable horrors against civilians. According to Canadian diplomat Robert Fowler, who was kidnapped by AQIM, the terrorists whom he came to know were far more impressed with the late Iraqi leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who personally beheaded captives and favored bloody attacks on fellow Muslims who would not support his leadership, over the (relatively) more muted and anti-Western approach favored by Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.³

The various organizations in the Maghreb are divided but not necessarily hostile to one another. Many are linked in one way or another to AQIM, whose key leaders are Algerian but whose membership includes a wider range of individuals from around the region. Although AQIM has many splinters, the splinters often work together, cooperating on attacks, kidnappings, and other operations.

¹ Jay Loschky, "Opinion Briefing: Libyans eye New Relations with the West," August 18, 2012.

www.gallup.com/poll/156539/Opinion-Briefing-Libyans-Eye-New-Relations-West.aspx; Dan Murphy, "Eastern Libya poll indicates political Islam will closely follow democracy," December 26, 2011, *Christian Science Monitor*.

² Paul Cruickshank, Tim Lister, Nic Robertson, and Fran Townshend, "Sources: 3 al Qaeda operatives took part in Benghazi attack," CNN, May 4, 2013

³ Robert Fowler, *A Season in Hell* (Harper Collins, 2011).

Al Qaeda affiliates and local organizations, like Ansar al-Sharia embrace some of Al Qaeda's rhetoric, but they are not under Zawahiri's thumb and many have little direct organizational relationship. The core organization under Bin Ladin, and now Zawahiri, used to bring people under its banner because it could offer money and useful services like training camps. Both these incentives have been diminished.⁴ Affiliates and local groups often disagree with core leadership on a wide variety of issues, ranging from target prioritization to the degree and types of civilians who might be attacked. To the disappointment of al-Qaeda's core leadership, AQIM leaders have not tried hard to mobilize supporters in Europe on behalf of global jihad and have not brought the "war" to the Continent.⁵ As Jean-Pierre Filiu comments, AQIM "is the branch of the global jihad that has most clearly failed to follow its founding guidelines."⁶

In addition, the highly effective U.S. drone campaign has not only removed key Al Qaeda core leaders but has also made it far harder for them to communicate with one another and exercise command over the broader jihadist movement. A tip sheet found among jihadists in Mali advised militants to avoid drones by maintaining "complete silence of all wireless contacts," to "avoid gathering in open areas," noting that leaders "should not use communications equipment," and taking strenuous measures to root out spies, among other suggestions.⁷ The implications for group effectiveness are staggering. In essence group leaders cannot lead as they must hide or remain incommunicado. Training on a large-scale is hard if not impossible, as large gatherings can be lethal. In combat, they cannot mass or bring in significant reinforcements. In other words, the drones turn al-Qa'ida's command and control structure into a liability, forcing it to have no leaders or risk dead leaders.

The bad news is that affiliates themselves are filling the void created by the weakness of the core. For years Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was a strong and powerful force that influenced other jihadist groups. AQIM is trying to play that role in the Maghreb, working as we have seen with groups in Libya and Mali, and expanding ties to Nigeria's Boko Haram.

Al Qaeda and its allies are likely to see the U.S. response to the Benghazi attack as a victory and proof of America's cowardice. Bin Ladin had long claimed that the United States hid behind defenses and technology and pointed to U.S. withdrawals from Lebanon and Somalia after terrorist attacks as "proof" that the United States will fold if hit hard. The U.S. retreat from Benghazi and the handwringing in the United States risk encouraging the jihadist perception that the United States has not changed even after 9/11.

II. Future Counterterrorism Challenges in the Maghreb

Beyond the specific implications for Al Qaeda and associated movements in the Maghreb, the United States is likely to find counterterrorism more difficult because of the high level of instability in the region and the difficulty of working with key partners like Algeria.

⁴ Daniel Byman, "Breaking the Bonds between Al-Qa'ida and Its Affiliate Organizations," Saban Center at Brookings Analysis Paper 27 (August 2012), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/07/alqaida-terrorism-byman>

⁵ Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (Allen Lane, 2011), p. 417.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb: A Case Study in the Opportunism of Global Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 3 (April 2010): p. 14.

⁷ Associated Press, "The Al Qaida Papers: Drones," (no date), http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-drones.pdf

The Spread of Instability

A functional Libyan state has never really existed. Qaddafi, rather than building one, ruled through fear and vision. Enabled by its vast hydrocarbon wealth, the Libyan economy was top-down, never allowing the private sector and an independent middle class to develop.

The stability of Libya today has not fundamentally changed since the September 11, 2012 attacks: anarchy does not reign complete, but neither has the government consolidated power. Since the revolution the country has had successful elections, and its economy has recovered reasonably though oil exports still remain less than pre-revolutionary levels. Islam and some sense of Libyan identity are unifying forces. In addition, Libya's neighbors – in contrast, to say, Syria's – have not actively intervened to back one faction over another.

On the other hand, the state still does not function: the army, the police, the judiciary, and other basic security institutions are weak and politicized.⁸ Armed gangs and militias, some of which reflect tribal or regional forces and others leftovers from the revolution, remain active almost two years of the revolution. The militias vary in type, legitimacy, and size: some have revolutionary legitimacy and local support; others are criminals masquerading as community defenders. The country lacks an effective judicial system, so militias rather than the police or authorized officials arrest those suspected of crimes, run prisons, and otherwise offer a form of rough justice.⁹ When powerful sub-state actors oppose any particular government action, they simply seize the ministry or surround the Congress and force the government to acquiesce. These militias are both the source of many problems, particularly the lack of government authority and legitimacy, and a reflection of them. Libyan institutions and security forces remain weak and discredited, so people turn to militias; because militias are strong, Libya's state remains weak. On balance conflicts in Libya are limited, but they are not moving toward resolution. Because of this weakness, the Libyan state has not consolidated power in much of the country and is unable to disarm or crush groups like Ansar al-Sharia. This includes much of eastern Libya, but also much of the southern desert regions.

Libya is ripe for homegrown terrorists and foreign terrorist penetration. The Al Qaeda core has long included Libyans in its ranks and reportedly dispatched operatives to build an organization in the post-Qaddafi era. Jihadists of various stripes were released from jail, and some returned to Libya from exile. Homegrown groups like Ansar Al-Sharia have found room to operate. In addition, the Libyan civil war has opened up Qaddafi's vast arsenals to Libyan groups, and Libyan weapons have found their way not only to its neighbors like Mali but also to Gaza, Sinai, and even Syria.¹⁰

More broadly, the Maghreb and the Sahel region are highly unstable. Two of Libya's neighbors, Egypt and Tunisia, have undergone dramatic regime changes in recent years, and at the date of this testimony Egypt's future course is anyone's guess. Sudan recently saw the secession of its southern region while other parts of the country clamor for independence. Nigeria and Mali suffer civil wars. Chad is poor, corrupt, and plagued by coups and has suffered several dramatic terrorist attacks in recent months. Borders in the Maghreb are porous. Part of

⁸ Daniel Graeber, "Libyan Oil Production Slows as World Looks Elsewhere for Fuel," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/Energy-Voices/2013/0613/Libya-oil-production-slows-as-world-looks-elsewhere-for-fuel>

⁹ International Crisis Group, "Trial by Error: Justice in Post-Qadhafi Libya," April 17, 2013.

¹⁰ Phoebe Greenwood, "Looted Libyan Arms Flowing Into Gaza," *The Telegraph*, August 23, 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8718704/Looted-Libyan-arms-flooding-into-Gaza.html>

this is geographic and historical – various tribes have long had economic and kinship ties that transcend borders – but the biggest problem is government weakness. So even if one country is adopting policies that make it stronger, it can still suffer violence emanating from its neighbors.

Not only does instability in one regional state affect its neighbors, but the Maghreb in general is an exporter of radicalism. A recent Washington Institute for Near East Policy study found Tunisia and Libya – more even than traditional producers of radicals like Saudi Arabia – was a source of suicide bombers for the Syrian conflict.¹¹ So the United States cannot write off this region in the hope that its trouble will remain geographically confined.

Algerian Dilemmas

The only strong regime in the region is Algeria – and the United States knows relatively little about this country and has at best a lukewarm relationship with its government. Algerians are the core of AQIM, and the government runs the most extensive spy network in the region: so we must look to Algeria to get at both the problem and the solution. Algeria was more pro-Soviet than pro-American in the Cold War, and it is prickly about its independence. Part of this is because of the secretive nature of the Algerian regime. However, Algeria has not been an intelligence or diplomatic priority. Algeria has long bristled at many cooperation requests, though intelligence cooperation did improve after 9/11 and is now far better. However, from an intelligence point of view, the Algerian government has a history of manipulating opposition groups, including violent terrorists, making it difficult to trust the information it provides. In particular, there are rumors that Algerian intelligence has worked with Iyad Ag Ghali, the head of Ansar al-Dine in Mali, and also with Mukhtar Belmukhtar. The Algerian government seeks to divert these groups against other targets and divide the movement, but in doing so it is playing with fire.¹²

Despite its relative strength, Algeria's own stability is in question. Predicting social revolution is notoriously difficult, but Algeria seems ripe for dramatic change. Algeria has resisted the Arab spring so far: the regime's ruthless and effective repression, its ability to coopt potential rivals, and the memory of a horrific civil war that left an estimated 200,000 dead in the 1990s have dissuaded citizens from taking to the streets in large numbers. However, with neighbors like Tunisia and Libya in the throes of change, a stagnant economy, a large youth population, and a government with weak legitimacy, mass protests could sweep Algeria. In particular, the recent stroke of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, though his role was largely to offer a façade for military rule, could foster a succession question that leads Algerians to demand more serious change – this may occur even before the scheduled 2014 Presidential elections. What the future holds is unclear: the United States must be prepared for revolution, instability, or continued rule by the military and security services.

III. Implications and Recommendations for the United States

The aftermath of the Benghazi attack and subsequent events in North Africa suggest four areas in which the United States must improve: bolstering *local* intelligence and diplomacy,

¹¹ Aaron Zelin, Evan Kohlmann, and Laith al-Khouri, "Convoy of Martyrs in the Levant," Washington Institute for Near East Policy (June 2013) <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Zelin20130601-FlashpointReport-v2.pdf>

¹² Bruce Riedel, "Algeria a Complex Ally in the War against al Qaeda," *AL Monitor*, February 3, 2013.

augmenting rapid reaction capabilities, making foreign policy reflect regional as well as state-focused concerns, and increasing overall attention to the Maghreb and surrounding areas.

Local Intelligence and Diplomacy

Better intelligence and good local relations are important for keeping Americans safe in different parts in the world and in the U.S. homeland. It is impossible to quantify the benefits derived, but better intelligence allows numerous plots to be disrupted, and better relations reduces hostility to the United States and improves cooperation when trying to disrupt attacks or manage their consequences. Trying to improve intelligence and relations, however, will put those Americans charged with gathering intelligence and improving relations at more risk.

That Benghazi was dangerous was well-known to all. Before the September 11 attack, an IED breached the U.S. consulate in Benghazi's perimeter. The International Committee of the Red Cross, in general a bold organization, had suspended operations there before the attack that killed Ambassador Stevens. There had been attacks on the British ambassador and on the Tunisian embassy. Other diplomats and foreign citizens were kidnapped or attacked. Indeed, the presence of terrorism was the reason for such a large intelligence presence in Benghazi.

Ambassador Stevens knew Libya and Benghazi well. He was popular among Libyans and his worry about the dangerous security environment in Benghazi stemmed in part from this knowledge. During my time as a staff member of the 9/11 Commission and for the House and Senate joint committee investigating 9/11, we constantly pushed for a CIA and a State Department that was more expeditionary and willing to take risks – in short, we wanted more people with the courage, experience, skill, and mindset of Ambassador Stevens. His loss was a great tragedy for our country.

The U.S. reaction to his death, however, risks putting undue constraints on American intelligence and diplomacy. These will ultimately undermine rather than protect U.S. interests abroad and safety at home. The bureaucratic and political lesson of Benghazi is to further confine American diplomats and spies in well-guarded parts of a capital city and remove them even more from the local population. This will keep them safer, but it will also make them less effective. They will not mingle with the local population and learn their concerns and gain their support (indeed, a recent attempted attack on Italian diplomats in Libya was foiled by an alert and supportive Libyan citizen).¹³ They will be less able to gather intelligence on local groups. They will not take risks. And America will be less able to stop terrorism and secure its interests.

The United States will also become more dependent on foreign governments to provide intelligence. At times, reliance on foreign governments is beneficial – even ideal. In Morocco, for example, the local intelligence service is skilled and an important partner of the United States. In Algeria, however, the intelligence service is often suspicious of close cooperation with the United States. In countries like Libya and Mali, the intelligence services are weak and do not have access to or extensive sources in much of their countries. In such cases the United States needs to develop its own sources.

In Sudan, the United States closed its embassy in 1996 due to the high risk of a terrorist attack. From a force protection perspective, this made sense: the danger was quite real. It also meant, however, the United States lost valuable intelligence on a nascent Al Qaeda and was unable to recognize important shifts in the attitude of the government of Sudan toward

¹³ Essam Mohammad, "Tripoli Car Bomb Targets Italian Diplomats," June 12, 2013, *Magharebia*, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/06/12/feature-01

counterterrorism cooperation. In the long-term the loss of this information may have cost American lives. Cutting and running from places like Benghazi may lead to similar losses.

The United States still needs to deploy diplomats and spies in danger zones. In many ways, they are America's first line of defense, learning about problems before they are apparent in Washington and cultivating assets to handle them. In addition, the United States needs local access after any attack. As the problems the FBI has incurred in its Benghazi investigation suggest, the government in Tripoli cannot ensure access to the scene of the attack and other important investigative needs. Washington also needs local sources to learn more about the identity of the attackers and possible follow-on attacks.

The Obama administration and the U.S. Congress – including the leadership of both parties – should make it clear that “failures” like Benghazi will be scrutinized, but also that we should expect losses when diplomats and spies operate in remote parts of unstable countries about which we know little where terrorist groups are also active. Surprise, mistakes, and bureaucratic confusion will be inevitable, and risk-taking should be rewarded over a caution that leaves the United States blinded, uninformed, and with few local friends as trouble develops.

Rapid Reaction Standardization

It would have been difficult for outside forces to have rescued Ambassador Stevens and his colleagues given the ferocity and rapid nature of the attack. And, in general, tactical warning is usually absent when it comes to terrorist attacks. One of the responses to this lack of tactical warning was to improve the defenses at U.S. embassies – the so-called “Inman guidelines.”¹⁴ Although U.S. defenses are far from foolproof, they have saved many lives as terrorist groups have been foiled or have moved on to other targets.

The United States must improve its ability to respond rapidly to unexpected terrorist attacks like the Benghazi assault. Anticipating the type of motley medley of groups and individuals involved in Benghazi is difficult. Moreover, given the unsure security situation in Libya – and problems facing the United States elsewhere in the region given government weakness and limits on intelligence – we should expect regular surprises from groups and cells of which we were previously unaware.

In some cases even careful advanced preparation will matter little, but in others it may prove the difference between life and death. In April 2013, the Pentagon announced that the U.S. Marines had developed a rapid reaction force for North Africa that could quickly deploy 500 Marines within 12 hours.¹⁵ This is impressive progress, but the time window needs to be smaller. This may involve deploying a smaller force – again, which means incurring more risk – but this could save many lives while enabling more expeditionary U.S. intelligence and diplomacy. Nevertheless, we must move away from the idea that spies and diplomats will have absolute protection. Even spending vast amounts of money to improve rapid reaction will still leave U.S. officials vulnerable if they are aggressively gathering information and trying to win over locals as they should be.

A Regional Response

¹⁴ See “Report of the Secretary of State’s Advisory Panel on Embassy Security,” (The “Inman Panel”), 1985, <https://www.fas.org/irp/threat/inman/part02.htm>

¹⁵ Barbara Starr, “After Benghazi, Marines approved for crisis response force,” CNN, April 2, 2013.

U.S. diplomacy in North Africa and the Sahel area is still divided by country, and in some cases by geographic divisions (“Near East” vs. “Africa”). There is no ideal bureaucratic organization that perfectly balances state-specific concerns with ones that cross borders like terrorism, but in general U.S. bureaucracies are not well coordinated across regional lines. But terrorist groups from Algeria operate in Libya, what happens in Libya shapes Mali, and what happened in Mali contributed to terrorist attacks in Algeria and Niger. Although the terrorism problem crosses borders, different ambassadors have different policies regarding counterterrorism efforts. North Africa and the Sahel region tend to be separate bureaucratically even though many of their problems are linked. The U.S. military has steadily developed and expanded regional bodies like AFRICOM to meet this challenge. Intelligence and diplomatic structures need to follow suit.

Prioritizing the Maghreb and Surrounding Areas

Often with justification, the United States has not made Algeria, Libya, Mali, and other states in the region priorities. Historic ties are limited, their energy supplies were not under threat, and their role in issues such as the Arab-Israeli dispute was marginal.

With the spread of Al Qaeda-focused international terrorism, however, the balance of interests has changed. The region itself is now an important theater of jihad, with AQIM playing a regional role and numerous smaller groups showing up elsewhere in the several countries. Even worse, as the Syrian civil war indicates, the region is now an exporter of terror, with volunteers from the Maghreb and weapons from Libya showing up many miles away.

Part of what is required is simply beefing up the U.S. diplomatic and intelligence presence in the region. This is a long-term effort, requiring training, rewards for deployment, and promotion of officers with expertise in this area. The military’s effort with AFRICOM is one valuable step, and this should be encouraged. So too should similar efforts by the Joint Special Operations Command to work more with local officials. However, it is often cheaper and wins more friends if intelligence officials and diplomats, not soldiers, take the lead on many issues.

One tricky issue concerns the Algerian government. It is corrupt and brutal – and it is a strong candidate for revolution. Moreover, its intelligence services are shadowy and duplicitous. Despite all these problems, greater engagement is necessary because of Algeria’s importance and the knowledge of the security services there. In addition, the United States is not likely to have a significant impact on the nature of the Algerian regime: because we have little leverage, an aggressive democracy promotion strategy could lose us cooperation but at the same time do little to help those who want better government in Algeria. However, the United States should lay the groundwork for better politics over time – supporting NGOs that seek to advance democracy and liberal values, promoting vocational education, and trying to bring Algerian society and its youth in particular in contact with the broader world.

Particularly important is hedging as we expand ties to the regime. This involves expanding the range of American contacts across government and society, consulting more with allies on joint policies, and trying to find alternative solutions to dependence on Algeria for key security issues (such as bases for U.S. drones). Such hedging allows the United States to protect its interests yet make clear to regime figures that the United States is not completely dependent on them. This both makes U.S. pressure more credible and leaves the United States in a better position to deal with the aftermath of succession or revolution.

More broadly, the United States will be working with weak governments like Mali and Libya as well as more established and stable ones like Morocco. Some of these governments, like Mali, will suffer coups or otherwise have unacceptable and anti-democratic practices. The United States, however, cannot simply drop its relations with regional states and then resume them a few years later when the dust settles. Although principled abstention plays well at home, in that interim we lose valuable intelligence and relationships. Steady contact and pressure to improve governance is often more useful than dramatic gestures that burn bridges but do little to help foster democracy.

Often the United States will need to rely more on regional allies, particularly France. U.S support for French military efforts in Mali, though grudging at first, was a valuable step given both France's historical ties and associated knowledge of the region and Paris' willingness to act as the Mali problem metastasized. Given France's ties to other hotspots like Mali and Algeria, the United States should engage in serious contingency planning with France for the region to identify ways to burden share and otherwise take advantage of what each country has to offer.

Terrorism in and emanating from the Maghreb and Sahel regions, both of which threaten American lives and interests, will continue and may even grow in the years to come. The tragic attack in Benghazi and other subsequent terrorism in North Africa is not a reason to retreat. An effective response will require more local and regional partners, more cooperation with allies, more resources, and most of all a willingness to accept risk.