



BORDER SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE GRAND MAGHREB

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UNITED STATES
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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report—part of a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) project—draws on extensive interviews conducted by the authors and a team of researchers in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco with NGO personnel, journalists, border community members, and representatives of security entities tasked with border security. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USIP, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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Cover illustration: Maghreb and Sahel Political Map with capitals and national borders. English labeling and scaling. Created by Peter Hermes Furian, Shutterstock.

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Summary

- Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco have struggled since independence to exert effective control over large sections of their borders. Armed with tools that predate the Arab Spring, they now face a brave and complex new world—one in which the borders, rather than the protecting states, are a challenge and a threat.
- Smuggling in the Maghreb is long standing. The bulk of it historically involved food, fuel, and tobacco. This has changed over the last decade, however. Drug, weapon, and human traffickers are now forging new routes through the region.
- Terrorist groups in the region are benefiting from the contraband economy, the culture of low-level corruption, and the porous borders such practices engender.
- Efforts to limit smuggling actually increase radicalization, given that heightened border enforcement limits livelihood options, sparks grievances, and can increase the reach of radical ideologies.
- Across the region, border security capacity is uneven and responses are poorly coordinated.
- Regional governments have invested in more troops, improved training, or new technology—or have evinced a desire to do so. Border management systems differ substantially in capabilities, organization, effectiveness, and coordination.
- The gaps in capacity in the region and the political disagreements that stymie effective cooperation have raised the risks to the region and increased the likelihood that these risks will escalate in scope and intensity in the future.
- Border security in North Africa hinges not only on national capabilities but also on international cooperation. When systems exist side by side but do not coordinate or collaborate, they create security vacuums and opportunities that can be and are exploited by militant actors in the region.
- Old approaches that focus exclusively on bilateral cooperation are no longer appropriate. What is needed to address the new threats in the region—issues about which all North African states are concerned—is a multilateral, cross-border approach.

Introduction

Borders in the Maghreb are increasingly dangerous. Armed with tools designed for the pre-Arab Spring environment, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco face a complex new world of transnational actors that leverage borders for profit and for sanctuary. Rather than protecting states, a Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) official noted, the borders themselves are now the “challenge and threat.” Radical change is needed in national and regional approaches to border security to combat today’s threats. Going it alone is no longer an option in North Africa.

Numerous factors contributed to this new world. The Arab Spring weakened states in the region and diverted their focus from the borders to resistive urban areas. New markets and opportunities have since emerged, driving fresh demand for smuggled goods. Weakened border capacity has also eased terrorist recruitment and movement across North Africa’s borders. Although it is difficult to generalize across the Maghreb, these states have tried to respond, but their reaction has been impeded by a lack of resources, domestic turf battles among the security services, the competing demands of post-authoritarian transition, and international political rivalries. Nonetheless, interest in cooperation among regional security services and their frank admission that they face a new and dangerous regional security dynamic is promising.

Since independence, the countries of the western Maghreb—Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria—have struggled to exert effective control over their border regions (see figure 1). Development efforts in these areas have had mixed success and have left the current governments with economically marginalized and politically disaffected populations. In some instances, a weak state presence, a dearth of economic opportunity, and strong cross-border ties among local communities have led to the development of robust illicit trade networks. The bulk of smuggling historically has involved sundry goods, namely food, fuel, and tobacco.

Figure 1. Survey Locations



However, the smuggling challenge has changed over the last five years. Drug smugglers have increasingly turned to violence in their encounters with state security forces, and the narcotics moving from Morocco along the Mediterranean coast and the prescription pills smuggled from Algeria into Morocco's cities have further strained tensions between those countries. The collapse of Gadhafi's regime in 2011 reinvigorated weapons smuggling, driven in part by Libyans seeking to barter guns and ammunition for food and transportation. Finally, smuggling groups are now arming themselves and demonstrating a willingness to confront any and all who get in their way. Regional governments are deeply concerned by these ominous developments.

Indications are scant that terrorist groups in the region are active participants in the smuggling economy, but they do benefit from it. A culture of low-level corruption engendered by generations of smugglers makes it easy for terrorist groups to move people and supplies throughout the region. They can also easily disguise their movement within the high volume of illegal crossings. Finally, terrorist groups have been able to recruit among the economically marginalized and politically disaffected border populations. Ironically, some efforts by the regional governments to limit smuggling actually increase radicalization because heightened border enforcement can limit livelihood options, spark grievances, and drive people to support—or join—extremist groups.

Regional governments are aware of the challenges and have sought to respond. But cooperation is nascent, spotty, and under-resourced. Political rivalry and weak government capacity have created vulnerabilities in the regional security architecture that a host of transnational criminal and terrorist networks are actively exploiting. The need for greater regional cooperation is clear. Significant capacity gaps and border security asymmetries also need to be addressed. Until this occurs, both smuggling networks and regional terrorist groups will continue to make the most of the vacuum of authority in the borderlands for their own interests.

This report is based on hundreds of interviews with government officials, former diplomats, journalists, civil society activists, businessmen, security experts, trade union leaders, and others in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (see figure 1). Interviews were conducted from March through June 2014. Sources for the report, unless otherwise cited in the notes, are drawn from these interviews.

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Regional Panorama

Vast, lightly populated spaces, adversarial states, and closed borders define the twenty-first-century Maghreb. Historically, the Grand Maghreb was among the most integrated regions of the world, caravans and commerce moving freely from Tangiers to Tobruk and from the Mediterranean down to trading cities buried deep in the Sahara. But today, stymied by red tape and closed borders, legal cross-border trade among the Maghreb countries is miniscule. Illicit trade, on the other hand, is booming. Things were supposed to be different.

Founded in 1989 by the governments of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) was designed to deepen cooperation among the Maghreb states, buttress the region's economy through greater interregional trade, enable the free movement of people, and lay the groundwork for future political integration. The vision was a revived Grand Maghreb. King Hassan II of Morocco proclaimed that the ultimate goal of the union was to “turn the Arab Maghreb into one country, with one passport, one identity and a single currency.”¹ However, the promise of an integrated Maghreb has not materialized, though the union still exists.² The region is divided politically and, according to official statistics, one of the world's least economically integrated.³

A visit to any urban hub close to a border reveals that official statistics do not tell the full story. Border communities in the Maghreb show signs of economic dynamism and, in many cases, a surprising level of wealth. Along the Tunisian-Algerian border, informal markets are bustling. Roads feature stacks of jerry cans with black market petrol for sale. The story is much the same along the Algerian-Moroccan frontier. Although the border has been officially closed for two decades, towns on both sides are booming, shops are fully stocked, large houses are under construction, and new cars crowd the roads.

North Africa's border regions are stitched together by a robust and dynamic regional trading economy. All manner of goods—subsidized petrol, food, clothing, and cigarettes being among the most common—are transported along multiple conduits. This trade is driven by dramatic price differences for basic goods between Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—price differences that are the result not of market fluctuations but of government subsidy and tariff policies designed to buy social peace.

Smuggling poses a pernicious economic and taxation challenge to the Maghreb countries but does not directly threaten their stability. However, the high levels of smuggling do indicate significant gaps in the border security architecture. These vulnerabilities can be exploited by a number of other actors who pose far more serious threats.

First are the smugglers of controlled or illegal goods—including arms, people, and drugs—that move across borders on a daily basis. This trade is increasing across the region, driven by a combination of security sector challenges after the Arab Spring, newly effective border security policies by EU nations in the western Mediterranean, and emerging markets for drugs and weapons in North Africa and abroad. The networks—and there are many—that are engaged in moving contraband and smuggling weapons and drugs have become effective, resilient, and rich.

Second are the terrorist groups that ghost across the region's borders. By exploiting gaps in border security that have been identified, used, and widened by smugglers, terrorist groups have been able to expand their operational reach. Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian government officials are suspicious that deeper ties exist between terrorist organizations and smuggling groups. Nonetheless, North Africa's borders are better described as porous barriers than as solid walls, easy for those determined, connected, or wealthy to penetrate.

The risks both sets of actors pose are enormous. The petite Maghreb that exists today is being transformed into the Grand Maghreb, not by political bargains or economic settlements but by the pernicious, vibrant, and highly effective networks of terrorists and contraband traders, who both stand to benefit from a more integrated region and who circumvent porous borders to make it a reality. The governments of the region are deeply concerned.

The AMU's failure to launch stems in large part from the inability of the region's two dominant states—Algeria and Morocco—to bury a half-century of political tension and suspicion. The two fought a war in 1962, and though their dispute over the status of the Western Sahara is the most overt point of friction, it is far from the only one; others include accusations of support for terrorist groups and drug smugglers. Perceptions in Algiers and Rabat are colored by old suspicions and grievances. This has decimated security coordination along their shared border and impeded cooperation in the Maghreb, opening space for nonstate armed groups to thrive.

The icy tension between Algeria and Morocco is clearly visible at their mutual frontier. The border has been shuttered for twenty years, leaving overgrown border posts and rusting vehicle barriers. Near the Mediterranean coast, families divided by the border gather in a narrow valley where Moroccan and Algerian roads come close, shouting greetings and news back and forth

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as border guards look on. For Morocco and Algeria, border closure is the norm. Since Algerian independence in 1962, the border has been closed nearly twice as long as it has been open. The situation is now mirrored on Algeria's other borders, most of which have been intermittently shut in mid-2014. Only the border with Tunisia remains consistently open.⁴

Closed borders, however, are never truly closed. They “are only closed for legal things,” a Moroccan security expert explained. When borders are closed, even pedestrian cross-border commerce transits surreptitiously, presenting open opportunities for smugglers willing to run the risk to get across. An intimate knowledge of the border and high levels of corruption among the region's poorly paid border guards ease the smugglers' transit. For their efforts, the smugglers are able to earn high profits. As one smuggler in eastern Algeria explained, “What one makes in smuggling is a lot more than the highest salary an employee gets in the city.” Rather than shutting down connections, border closures in the Maghreb help knit together borderland peoples, albeit in a way that falls well outside of formal state control.

Mapping the Threats

“Our border problem,” a senior Algerian official explained, “can be summarized quite simply as a problem of tomatoes and terrorists.” Terrorist groups can use the same techniques and routes as smugglers of tomatoes do. These routes have existed for centuries and only became illicit after national borders were established in the region. But today many new groups travel these old routes. These travelers—and the regional governments' inability to manage them—have made the Maghreb's borders dangerous. The travelers, both old and new, fall into one of three categories—commodity smugglers, smugglers of controlled or illicit goods (arms, people, and drugs), and terrorists.

Commodity smugglers are the region's established travelers. Most illicit cross-border activity in North Africa involves legal commodities. Smugglers profit from regional variation in commodity prices and product availability—buying goods where they are cheap and selling below the market price in areas where they are expensive. Many Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians rely on smuggling for their livelihoods, and the number of smugglers seems to have increased since the Arab Spring. The sheer volume of smuggled goods has blown holes in Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan border security efforts. Everything from tomatoes to terrorists flows along these channels.

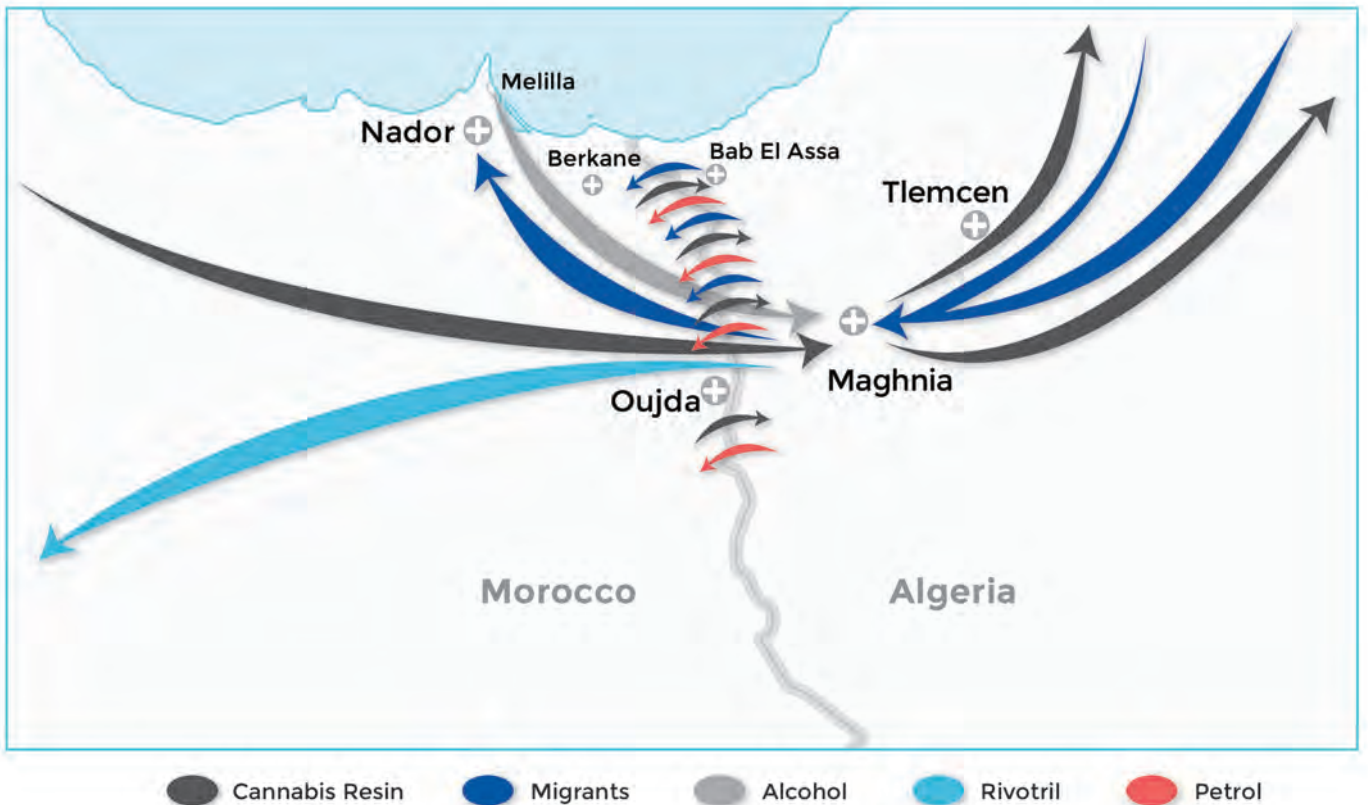
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Algerian-Moroccan Border

Today's smuggling on the Algerian-Moroccan border is a modern incarnation of age-old trade networks, enabled by deep cross-border ethnic and tribal connections (see figure 2).

What is new is the type and volume of goods, which have shifted as fresh demands and opportunities have emerged. For example, during the Algerian war of independence, arms smugglers from Morocco successfully evaded the heavily mined Morice line along the Algerian border. During the 1970s and 1980s, import controls in Algeria sparked a demand for smuggled luxury goods, a market that Moroccan smugglers were only too happy to satisfy.⁵ More recently, the flow of goods has reversed, in large part because Algeria's generous subsidy program has ensured that all manner of consumer goods—especially petroleum—are far cheaper in Algeria than in Morocco. This price differential has fueled a thriving, though illicit, cross-border trade in subsidized products, prompting an Algerian customs official to remark that “Algeria now feeds the whole region.”

Figure 2. Smuggling on the Moroccan-Algerian Frontier



The borderlands of Algeria and Morocco are a cohesive economic unit despite the twenty-year closure of their border. As one Moroccan official observed, “There are tribal and family relations—cousins and family ties through marriage—on both sides of the border, and these people have worked in contraband since the border came into being.” These long-standing family and trading connections form the basis of the well-organized contraband networks now active on the border. The dynamism of the trade and dearth of alternate employment opportunities ensure that a very large population in both Morocco and Algeria survive on this contraband.

Smuggling occurs all along the Algerian-Moroccan frontier but is particularly intense between the Algerian Wilaya of Tlemcen and Morocco’s Préfecture of Oujda-Angad and Province of Berkane. These regions have the largest population centers along the border,⁶ and these populations are growing rapidly. Modern highways also connect Oujda and Tlemcen to their respective capitals, enabling drivers to reach either Algiers or Rabat in five to six hours. The roads are used to move products quickly and cheaply to the border regions for onward smuggling and from the border regions to large urban centers in Algeria and Morocco. A senior Moroccan official indicated that “when goods are smuggled across the Algerian-Moroccan frontier, they quickly arrive in Casablanca.” Farther south along the border, the population decreases and spreads out, lengthening the distances smugglers must transport contraband and thereby heightening their risk of arrest. According to a senior official in the Moroccan Province of Figuig, “If you want to smuggle contraband through here you need to drive two hundred kilometers, and so we face very little drug and contraband smuggling.”

The vast majority of cross-border smuggling in the north involves consumer goods—products that are generally legal in both Algeria and Morocco but are smuggled because of price asymmetries between the countries. Consumer goods smuggled from Algeria to Morocco include petrol, medicines, scrap metal, household appliances, tobacco, some agricultural goods, and vehicle parts. Those smuggled from Morocco into Algeria include agricultural goods, some spare parts, and alcohol (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Products Smuggled Across the Moroccan-Algerian Frontier



The most lucrative legal product smuggled across the frontier is petrol. How petrol is smuggled illustrates how other goods are smuggled. Petrol—both gasoline and diesel—is heavily subsidized in Algeria, consumers paying roughly \$0.26 for a liter of gasoline.⁷ In Morocco, on the other hand, a liter of gasoline is roughly six times more expensive, with prices rising significantly over the last five years.⁸ The rise in prices transformed what had been a fairly small market for

smuggled petrol into a massive trade flow. The *wali* (provincial governor) of Tlemcen indicated in 2013 that 265 million liters of petrol were smuggled out of the *wilaya* (province) per year.⁹ Although increased enforcement along the border and gas rationing in Tlemcen have reportedly led to a steep decline in smuggling between 2013 and 2014, border residents in Algeria indicated that, as of 2014, the trade in petrol was still booming.

The smuggling networks responsible for the trade in fuel operate simply yet effectively. They rely on young men to source fuel from gas stations in Tlemcen and the surrounding area, using cars with a second fuel tank welded on or industrial vehicles with extra large tanks. The men then drive to storage points, usually warehouses in towns along the border, such as Maghnia and Bab El Assa, and transfer the gasoline into holding cisterns. In the evening, when the cisterns are full, the gas is divided into jerry cans. It is then loaded onto donkeys, motorcycles, or vehicles for transport to the border. Efforts by the Moroccan and Algerian governments to tighten security over the last year have led smugglers to turn increasingly to donkeys and, in some cases, mules—which can carry twenty to thirty jerry cans—as their transport of choice. At night, the languid villages and desolate roads along the border come alive as smugglers flood to meeting points arranged beforehand with their Moroccan counterparts.

At the border, the Algerian networks either barter or sell the petrol to the Moroccans. In turn, the Moroccan networks move the petrol to staging points near the border and either sell it to local distributors or move it to other markets in Morocco. The roadsides of Oujda and Berkane are full of black market petrol vendors, dispensing their product from either one- or five-liter soda bottles (see photo 1). Many of the vendors are old men or teenage boys and use a simple funnel to fill their customers' tanks. Their price depends on the wholesalers, whose price in turn hinges on the intensity of enforcement along the border and the ease of sourcing petrol in Algeria. The men on the roadside do not make a lot. "I usually work from 3 a.m. to sunset and earn 152 dirhams [about \$19]," one vendor explained.



Photo 1. Empty containers at illicit petrol stand, Berkane, Morocco.

The real profits from petrol smuggling accrue to the smuggling networks. For every 150 liters the vendor on the side of the road buys from them, the Algerian and Moroccan smugglers gross roughly \$112 in profit. When spread across millions of liters per year, the profitability of the smuggling networks becomes quite clear. The profits from the trade are reportedly laundered through the real estate sector, helping drive the building boom apparent in many border towns and cities. According to one border resident, the boom has also had political ramifications: The “money involved in smuggling has made some people very powerful and influential.”

The smuggling networks themselves are well organized and appear to have a loose hierarchical structure. They are led by barons, often men who have been involved in smuggling for a number of years. Barons lead negotiations with their counterparts across the border, ensuring shipments are paid for and delivered. They rarely engage in smuggling themselves. It is instead young men, between sixteen and thirty years old, who do most of the actual smuggling. Female smugglers exist but are rare along the Algerian-Moroccan border. In some cases, the networks employ minors, assuming that they will face less punitive sanctions if caught.¹⁰ Smuggling is often a family affair. One border resident explained that “because it so profitable with so little effort, it is passed down from father to son and entire families are involved.” Another remarked, “The people who work well have families and connections on the other side.” Although most of those involved in smuggling come from the border area, the barriers to entry into the trade are not insurmountable for those coming from inland areas. In some cases, men marry into smuggling families and are then accepted into the networks. When they do not have a family sponsor, those looking to become smugglers require a backer, usually a well-known member of the smuggling community. One Moroccan expert explained that the smuggling trade is conducted the old way, based on trust, and so smugglers look for prospective partners who are “good Muslims with calm heads.”

Illicit businessmen may have a reputation for being calm, but their transporters are known for brashness. Many of the transporters are young men from the border, known in Morocco as *al Moukatilat* (the Warriors), who rely on speed to evade border enforcement efforts. They are so named for their willingness to run extreme risks and for their propensity for getting into high-speed accidents. “Al Moukatilat don’t respect anything,” a journalist in the Moroccan town of Oujda noted. The warrior phenomenon is recent, emerging only in the last three to four years. Bands of *al Moukatilat* are active from the northern areas of the border around Oujda down to the far south.

Smugglers use their extensive knowledge of the terrain and of secondary and tertiary routes through the border area to avoid security service patrols.¹¹ Smuggling networks also leverage border populations to gather information on these patrols.¹² A degree of complicity among security service personnel on the border is likely despite strong efforts by governments to combat it. In both Algeria and Morocco, border security forces are not well paid; the bribes from a large smuggling operation can sometimes garner them twice their monthly pay. The smugglers do not need to buy everyone, just those officers vital for the transit. According to one journalist, in Tlemcen “the smugglers know the details of the security sector—when, who, where—in the areas they operate in. Smugglers know the checkpoints where they can bribe, and where they cannot.” Allegedly, corruption in the Tlemcen area reached a peak in 2012 and 2013. Since then, the government of Algeria has reportedly changed out a number of officers and commanders in the area, lessening the susceptibility to bribery. Alongside other efforts to buttress border security, Algerian anticorruption efforts seem to have tamped down smuggling between 2013 and 2014. However, as a Moroccan researcher explained, “When our borders are reinforced, the networks put in place new systems, use new routes, design new strategies, and identify new people to corrupt.” The smugglers adapt rapidly, and so the process must begin again.

In both Algeria and Morocco, border security forces are not well paid; the bribes from a large smuggling operation can sometimes garner them twice their monthly pay.

Along the Moroccan frontier, much of the corruption appears to involve low-level security service personnel collecting bribes from smugglers and migrants. Corruption is often facilitated, a smuggling expert explained, by tribal connections between smugglers and security service members. In other cases, security personnel on the borders simply shake down smugglers—and especially illegal migrants—stealing valuables, clothes, and shoes.¹³

Corruption complicates border security efforts and raises the risk that even with more forces and better technology, criminal and terrorist groups will still be able to penetrate the border at will as long as they can either bribe or recruit security forces and officials. According to a senior Moroccan border security official, “Even with the best technology, if there is complicity on the part of the security forces, there are things that will get through the border.”

When they are pursued or engaged by security forces, smugglers often flee across the border in either direction. Rarely are they apprehended and extradited. This has bred suspicion on both sides about possible coordination between smugglers and the rival security services, but it is more likely that the gap in communication prevents effective deployment of forces to ensure capture.

Smugglers on the Algerian-Moroccan border rarely use violence against security service personnel. One Algerian customs official who had also been stationed on Algeria’s border with Tunisia explained, “Here the smugglers are calm. While you do find some stones thrown, the mentality is completely different [than on the Tunisian border].” But the Algerian-Moroccan border is not entirely peaceful. Gunfights have been reported in the south around Bechar between smugglers and Algerian forces, and an ambush in 2012 killed three border guards in Tlemcen.¹⁴ Drug smugglers are reportedly responsible for many of the attacks.

Over the past year, getting across the frontier has become more difficult. Both the Algerian and Moroccan governments have cracked down on smuggling. The Algerians are worried mainly about what is being transported out of their country (subsidized petrol, medicines, and other goods). The Moroccans are more concerned by what is coming in, especially undocumented migrants and cheap Algerian petrol. On both sides of the border, steps have been taken to tighten border control. Nonetheless, smuggling still continues at a brisk pace.¹⁵

Algerian-Tunisian Border

Eleven hundred kilometers (684 miles) to the east, a remarkably similar situation is playing out along Algeria’s border with Tunisia. The 965-kilometer (600-mile) frontier is the only one of Algeria’s borders that is consistently open. Ports of entry (POEs) along the border are busy with traders, tourists, and trucks, all queuing to move between the countries. Informal commerce is also rampant here, driven by the difference in pricing for goods in Algeria and Tunisia. This informal trade has surged over the last three years as the Tunisian security services withdrew from controlling the border in the wake of the 2011 revolution. Despite reinvigorated efforts by both the Algerian and Tunisian governments to tighten their border control, Tunisian services say that the smuggling continues alongside a more dangerous flow of militants, arms, and drugs.

Although commerce between eastern Algeria and western Tunisia is long standing, its illicit variant began in earnest only during the Algerian revolution and in the years immediately following (see figure 4). During the revolution, western Tunisia became host to a flood of Algerian refugees, a back base for Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) fighters and a platform for weapons smugglers.¹⁶ After the war, former refugees had both limited economic options in the eastern areas of Algeria and few skills beyond smuggling. To survive, those in

Corruption is often facilitated, a smuggling expert explained, by tribal connections between smugglers and security service members.

Figure 4. Smuggling on the Algerian-Tunisian Frontier



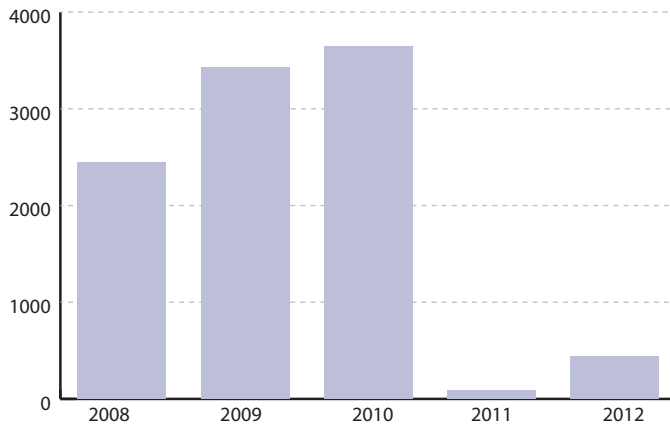
the border areas turned to what they knew. Working alongside their Tunisian counterparts, Algerian smugglers trafficked mainly in luxury goods, such as blue jeans and Coca-Cola, which were unavailable in Algeria. For the Tunisian government, the growth of smuggling served a practical purpose, bringing economic opportunity to an area of the country that was otherwise economically marginalized. A senior Tunisian border security expert explained, “Smuggling was a solution to the economic and social challenges in the border regions.” Under the Ben Ali government, the head of the Tunisian Anti-Corruption Agency added, smuggling was also “the only way to ensure the political control of [border] populations.”

The smuggling of goods from Tunisia into Algeria accelerated during the presidency of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987–2011), who allowed his wife’s family to exercise a strong degree of control over cross-border commerce. Reportedly, the Trabelsi family received a substantial percentage of the Tunisian smuggling profits during these years.¹⁷ Luxury goods continued to make up much of the trade, supplemented by some agricultural products and electronics. A countercyclical trade emerged as Algerian smugglers sought to move subsidized petrol and counterfeit tobacco products into Tunisia. During that time, an informal deal existed between the security forces and border populations: Security forces could turn a blind eye to low-level smuggling if the border communities kept watch on the border, but drug and weapon smuggling were prohibited. As one Tunisian researcher emphasized, in all these interactions “the [Ministry of Interior] was in control of everything. But this is no longer the case.”¹⁸

The collapse of the Ben Ali regime changed the dynamics along the border. First, the revolution led to a disruption of the operational activity of border security forces. The units were

still in place but were less willing to confront smugglers. “Today everyone has a Kalashnikov,” a Tunisian police officer explained. Before the collapse of the Ben Ali regime, the biggest threat a police officer was likely to face “was fists.”¹⁹ A look at official statistics reveals a drop in the number of anti-contraband operations conducted by the Tunisian National Guard, from 3,650 in 2010 to 91 in 2011 (see figure 5).²⁰ One of the most ominous consequences of the collapse of the informal agreement and the loss of operational control was that the security services lost control of their intelligence network on the border.

Figure 5. National Guard Operations Against Contraband



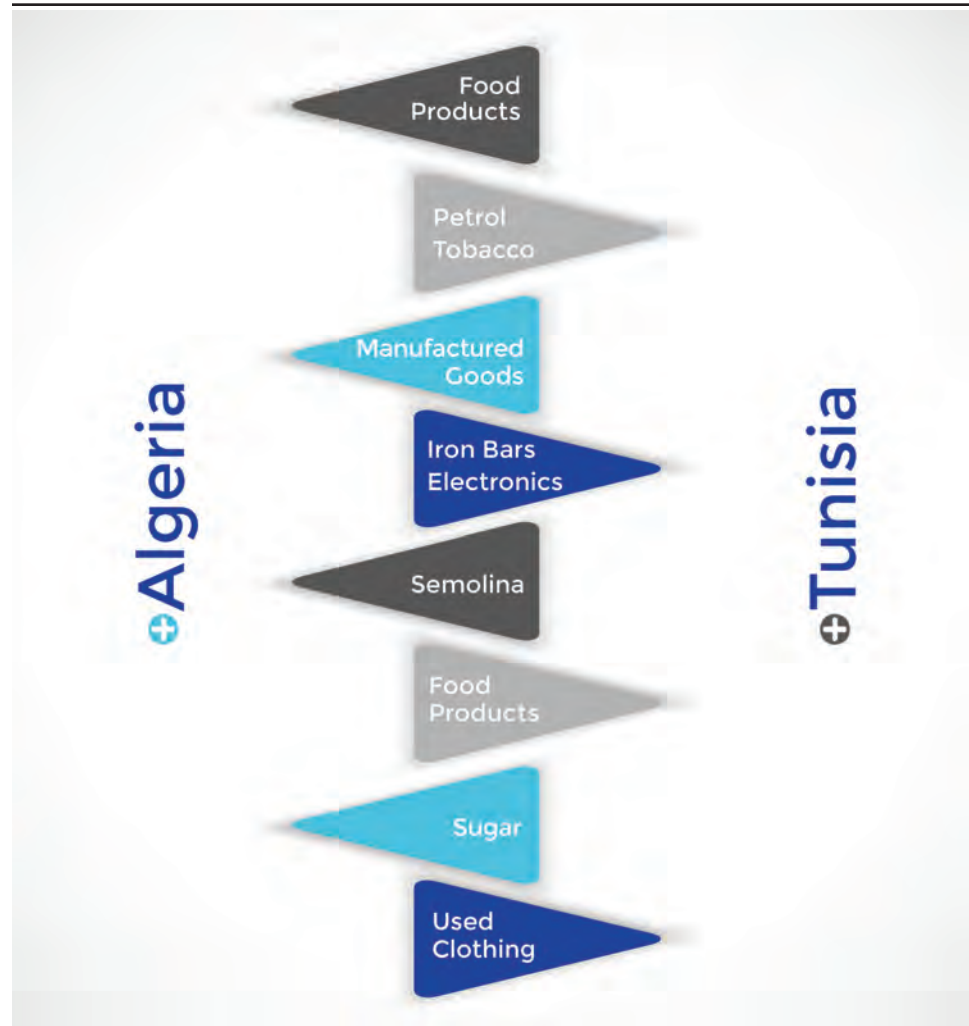
The fall of President Ben Ali and the withdrawal of the security services meant that after the revolution no real structures existed to control who was involved in smuggling and what products they were moving. The revolution also intensified a long-term economic crisis in the border areas, in part by propelling a rise in prices. The combination of economic need and lessened sanctions produced a rapid increase in cross-border smuggling. According to an activist in the western town of Thala, “Since the revolution, the economic situation has gotten crazy on the border. Children are now dropping out of school to sell petrol. They want to get rich. They want to exploit the absence of the police and National Guard.”

Commodity smuggling runs the length of the Algerian-Tunisian frontier. Most, however, is concentrated in the northern section, encompassing the Algerian wilayas of Tabessa, Souk Ahras, and El Taref and the Tunisian governorates of Gafsa, Kasserine, Kef, and Jendouba. The population density is highest in these areas and the territory rough, making it difficult for security forces to monitor the border with aircraft and radar, a retired Tunisian military officer explained. Smuggling nodes along the border include the Algerian cities of Tabessa and Annaba and the Tunisian cities of Jendouba, El Kef, Kasserine, and Gafsa. Smuggling is also carried out at south of Gafsa, though it is less frequent and easier for security forces to interdict.

Most smuggling along the Algerian-Tunisian border involves what the Tunisians term *innocent smuggling*—smuggling that exploits price differentials on otherwise legal commodities. Goods sent from Tunisia to Algeria include food products, some manufactured goods, semolina, and sugar. Goods from Algeria to Tunisia include petrol, tobacco, iron bars, electronics,

food, and used clothing (see figure 6). Save for the trade in petrol, commodity smuggling along the border is conducted by small traders and border residents. Much of it involves barter, though large amounts of cash also change hands.

Figure 6. Products Smuggled Across the Algerian-Tunisian Frontier



As on the Algerian-Moroccan border, the most significant and most visible commodity traded is petrol. Along a large arc of western Tunisia, it is common to encounter stacks of colorful jerry cans on the side of the road (see photo 2). Young men, usually in their teens, cluster around them with a gravity-operated pump system. Vendors are little concerned that the security services might disrupt their activities, and these informal locations can be found close to government checkpoints.

This trade predates the revolution, some fuel smugglers reporting that they got into the trade in the 1990s. Trade reportedly increased dramatically after 2004. A journalist from Tabessa remarked that today's method of smuggling petrol was learned from those who were involved in the trade on the Moroccan-Algerian border.



Photo 2. Illicit petrol stand, Western Tunisia.

Algerian petrol is both sourced locally along the border and at cities further inland, where it is transported to the border by large tanker trucks, first to small towns close to the border and then by secondary roads to the border, where it is passed off to Tunisian smuggling networks, which then store it in houses along the border before selling it to street-level distributors. According to Tunisian smugglers, their profit per smuggling trip is about \$40, and they average three to four trips per day. This is far better than the street-level distributors, who reportedly make \$6 to \$9 per day. In some rural areas in Tunisia, smuggling and selling are a family affair, with “men doing the smuggling and women doing the distribution.”

The trade in petrol is one of the more dangerous forms of smuggling, given the highly combustible nature of the product and the frequency with which the smugglers’ vehicles crash. Many vehicle accidents result in people being burned to death. However, according to an activist in Kasserine, the smugglers are convinced that this is the risk that comes with the job. They believe, a local trade union leader explained, that it is “better to do this job than to rob, mug, or starve to death.”

Local security officials view the smugglers on the Algerian-Tunisian border as dangerous but not particularly well organized. According to an Algerian customs official, on the Tunisian border, “the smuggling is conducted on a lower level, and the people there don’t tend to get rich from it.” After the revolution, smuggling has reportedly been “democratized,” and numerous small smuggling networks now operate along the border.²¹ The barriers to entry are low, requiring only connections on the other side of the border and transportation. A Tunisian fuel smuggler explained, “You hear about how to smuggle fuel in cafes or on the border, and you borrow from your family to buy a vehicle. Of course, if you’re arrested they’ll seize your vehicle, and your family will starve.” In the borderlands, cross-border contacts are easy to come by. As one Algerian noted, all along the border, “the families are the same; the only thing that divides them is the border.”

Some of the smuggling networks are more organized and maintain a certain hierarchic structure. Barons, frequently local businessmen, control these organizations, providing direction, financing, and cultivating relationships with security officials on the border. Although some tribes along the border are involved in illicit trading, smuggling on the Tunisian-Algerian border does not appear to be dominated by tribes to the degree seen along the Tunisian-Libyan frontier.

As on the Algerian-Moroccan border, smuggler strategies for crossing the border depend on stealth, corruption, and coercion. Stealth is the basic tactic, most smugglers operating in rough country and along secondary roads to avoid security patrols. If security forces do give chase, smugglers sometimes flee across the border—though coordination between the Algerian and Tunisian security services makes this tactic less useful than on the Algerian-Moroccan border.²²

Collusion is a key challenge. Bribes are the glue that holds the relationship together: One Tunisian smuggler remarked prosaically that his three big business expenses were “gas costs, employee costs, and bribes.” The Algerian army is reportedly the only force on the border impervious to bribes. One journalist emphasized that it shows “no mercy for the smugglers.”

Violent confrontations among smugglers and between smugglers and the security services have become more common since the Arab Spring. An Algerian customs commander observed that “smugglers on the Tunisian border are aggressive, and there are a lot of incidents. Their mentality is tribal; if you arrest one smuggler, the tribe will attack you.” In one recent incident, an armed tribal network attacked a Tunisian border post in Bouchebka after a member had been arrested.²³ The smuggling networks also stage demonstrations and civic unrest to free their members. Violence and unrest have occurred on both sides of the border, though it appears that demonstrations are marginally more common in Algeria. These have reportedly had an effect on the operations of the security forces. “Because of the demonstrations,” an Algerian journalist remarked, “they don’t arrest a lot of people.”

Despite the “innocent” moniker used by many Tunisians to describe smuggling, commodity smuggling has negative consequences. The smugglers operating along the Algerian-Tunisian border may view their activities as economically harmless, but those activities create gaps and vulnerabilities in the border security architecture of both countries. Bribery and coercion of the security services diminishes the effectiveness of the border forces, leaving them incapable of securing a vital frontier in a dangerous area.

In Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, corruption is like a gateway drug. Although most bribes are offered by smugglers to move “innocent” goods, a willingness by government officials to accept these bribes can increase their susceptibility to do the same for terrorists or terrorist facilitators. Once they accept a bribe to move such goods, the door is open to their accepting other bribes for more dangerous goods and nefarious activities.

Some who defend smuggling claim that it provides a vital livelihood in an area swamped by unemployment. This is true but overlooks the reality that smuggling has a dampening effect on legal job creation and engenders a get-rich-quick mentality that in turn disincentivizes involvement with the formal sector even when jobs are available. This mentality also raises the likelihood that some smugglers will move from smuggling innocent goods to far more dangerous and lucrative commodities. Already, certain indications suggest that the drug trade is increasing in the Tunisian border city of Kasserine. Even more ominous are the terrorist groups operating in the mountains above Kasserine, part of an increasing transborder contingent of al-Qaeda linked militants.

Libyan and Malian Borders

Although neither Libya nor Mali is the focus of this report, it is impossible to investigate border security in North Africa without touching on them. The violence and chaos in these countries has a fundamental impact on security in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. According to the Tunisian authorities, “Libya is the center of gravity, and the center of trouble.” Some observers in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia view Libya and Mali as cautionary examples of re-

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form and revolution run amok. However, for officials and border residents, the chaos radiating from the dysfunctional borders is an active threat. “The fire that has erupted in the neighboring countries threatens to spread to Algeria, beginning with the borders,” warned one resident of the southern Algerian city of Tamanrasset.

The easternmost of the Maghreb states, Libya has long been linked into the region’s smuggling economy.²⁴ Along the Tunisian-Libyan border, cross-border tribal networks have spent decades smuggling people, petrol, and other commodities over the frequently shuttered border.²⁵ Prior to the Arab Spring, the governments of both Libya and Tunisia tacitly allowed this informal trade, leveraging it to ensure social stability in the borderlands as well as corrupt financial gains for state officials.²⁶ As with the Algerian-Tunisian border, certain types of goods—mainly weapons and drugs—were banned.

The Tunisian and Libyan revolutions led to the upheaval of this system as security services in both countries lost control over the border, with refugees flooding into Tunisia and long-established tacit agreements and taboos evaporating. Some smuggling networks began to trade in drugs and weapons.²⁷ Petrol smuggling between the two countries also increased dramatically. Some of the cross-border commerce transits the border through the open desert, but a surprisingly large portion is moved through the large port of entry at Ras Adjir. The border security situation has stabilized somewhat in Tunisia, but the effectiveness of these advances has been stymied by the chaotic situation on the Libyan side. “The problem we face with Libya,” explained a Tunisian security official, “is that the changeover in officials has made it extremely difficult to find a partner on the other side who we can work with effectively.”

Farther to the south, a similar situation exists along the Algerian-Libyan border. Trade connections between central-east and south-east Algeria and western Libya are long standing. During Gadhafi’s regime, luxury goods were sourced from Algeria, as were sundry items such as cooking oil and semolina. In the other direction, electronics, vehicles, vehicle parts, and weapons crossed the border from Libya to Algeria. Algeria has two major hubs for Libya-bound trade: the eastern city of Oued Souf (El Oued) and the southern city of Tamanrasset. Trade bound for central and northern Algeria, as well as smuggled products arriving from the west—such as cannabis resin from Morocco—transit through Oued Souf.

The other key node for Algerian-Libyan trade is the fast-growing southern city of Tamanrasset. Situated nearly two thousand kilometers (1,240 miles) south of Algiers and trebling in size over the last ten years, the city is, according to one expert on illicit trade in the region, “an example of a city in a place you would not expect a city to be.” The city’s growth has been propelled by its location, which has allowed it to act as a key node for licit and illicit trading between Libya, Algeria, Mali, and Niger. “There is a saying here in Tamanrasset,” one smuggler explained: “Northerners do the formal economy, and the southerners handle the informal economy.”

The revolution in Libya and the continuing civil war in Mali have invigorated illicit trading networks operating in both Oued Souf and Tamanrasset. On the Libyan border, smuggling reached a new level of intensity in 2014 despite the deployment of thousands of Algerian soldiers along the frontier. The postrevolutionary chaos in Libya changed the smuggling patterns, as food and petrol shortages in the southwest drove a demand for basic commodities. “They aren’t looking for luxuries anymore,” an Algerian journalist emphasized. Lacking dollars—the only currency accepted by the Algerian smugglers—the Libyans pay for their purchases by bartering 4x4 vehicles, weapons, and ammunition. However, the increasing violence in recent months may change smuggling flows yet again. Reportedly, Libyans have started to rearm, driving a demand for weapons—especially low-visibility weapons—from regional smuggling networks.

Most smuggling in the region involves commodities. Tamanrasset, however, has emerged in recent years as an important trading point for weapons and narcotics. Despite an increasingly large deployment of army and security service personnel to the areas along the Malian and Libyan border, Algeria faces a robust challenge in securing this border.

Smuggling in these areas has also been driven by the Algerian government's response to conflicts in Mali and Libya. The Algerian government's intermittent closure of its borders with Mali, Niger, and Libya has adversely affected local merchants, whose legal trade, according to one local resident, has dried up: "This situation has only benefited the smuggling bosses." Many smuggling bosses, and a large number of network members, reportedly come from the Touadj tribe of the Touaregs. Other ethnic groups are involved as well, however. Young men have reportedly become involved due to chronic unemployment in the area and the dearth of alternative economic options. The turn toward smuggling has also been propelled by a steep decline in tourism in southeast Algeria.²⁸ "The desert," explained a civic leader in Tamanrasset, "which used to attract lots of tourists, is now overrun by smugglers."

New Travelers, Old Routes

Four new travelers now move along the Maghreb's old routes: terrorists and smugglers of people, drugs, and arms. Smugglers of banned and controlled products have become common in the region's borderlands and are increasingly adopting the cross-border routes and tactics that commodity smugglers use. In a sharp departure from years past, it is now far easier to get guns in small Tunisian towns and cannabis resin in Algerian schools.²⁹ Terrorist groups are also surging through the Maghreb, radicalizing, recruiting, and training in areas where state capacity is weak. They move arms, men, and material along old smuggling pathways, exploiting gaps and vulnerabilities that smugglers have opened in the region's borders. Their attacks are sophisticated, bloody, and difficult to prevent. The region's governments have expressed deep concern over the evolving terrorist threat. A senior foreign ministry official in the region identified terrorism as "our biggest threat. We are not in a region that is really safe."

Terrorists

Terrorism is the largest and most immediate danger for Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Officials in all three countries emphasized that terrorist groups in the region are growing in size, geographic scope, and capabilities and that impeding their infiltration is the dominant challenge. Changes in the nature and locus of terrorist activity in the region have heightened the importance of effective and smart border control in the counterterrorism struggle. Unfortunately, the gaps in border security that commodity and drug smugglers exploit enable terrorist groups to do the same.

In the Maghreb, terrorist groups are shifting from a national to a regional strategic approach. Historically, North African terrorism was centered in Algeria, where the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) and its offshoot the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) waged a bloody civil war against the state beginning in 1992. Throughout that decade, both the GIA and GSPC were essentially domestic terrorist groups who recruited, trained, and staged attacks within Algeria, primarily in the north. A small number of attacks were staged internationally, primarily in France, but were intended to further strategic objectives within Algeria. Other terrorist groups in the Maghreb—such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and the Tunisian Islamic Front—followed a similar, though far less bloody, trajectory, with their operational activity limited to their respective nations.

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In 2001, terrorist groups in Algeria began to change their strategy. To get away from the constant counterterrorism pressure from the Algerian security sector, an Algerian journalist explained, the GSPC implemented a Maghrebi strategy, actively recruiting in Tunisia and other North African countries and increasing their presence outside northern Algeria. Although some regional attacks were launched, notably in Djerba (Tunisia) and Casablanca (Morocco), the strategy took nearly a decade to bloom due to security pressure in Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco.

The Tunisian and Libyan revolutions opened operational space for terrorist groups, easing their recruitment, training, and movement. Bases and safe havens in these countries have allowed groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—formerly the GSPC—to pose a renewed threat to Algeria as well as a pernicious security challenge in Tunisia’s borderlands. Alaya Allani, a Tunisian terrorism expert, explained that AQIM has created a “jihadist triangle encompassing Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria.”

Even though AQIM is pursuing a regional strategy, its main target is still Algeria. Several hundred militants are active in the north-central region of Kabylie, staging sporadic but bloody attacks on Algerian security services and civilians. Farther to the south, on the Tunisian border in the wilaya of Tabessa, another large AQIM-affiliated militant group is active. For AQIM, the unit in Tabessa and a related group operating in the Tunisian governorate of Kasserine provide a logistical link between AQIM units operating in the south of Algeria and those in Kabylie.

Terrorist groups are also developing new strategies and learning new tactics. According to a senior police commander, “They know our tactics and are adapting to them. We need to learn and find new tactics to combat them.” An example of this problem is the bloody 2013 raid on the Tigantourine gas facility in Amenas, Algeria. Conducted by an offshoot of AQIM, the al-Mua’qi’oon Biddam Brigade, the attack was the first on critical economic infrastructure in Algeria’s southeast and featured the employment of hostages as human shields. Fears that such tactics and targets could be replicated led the Algerian government to build up its military forces in the southeast. The attack also vividly demonstrated that Algeria is not only menaced by terrorists based within its borders but also by groups operating in neighboring states.

Tunisia also faces a complex terrorism challenge, much of which is focused on the governorates along the country’s border with Algeria. Drawing on a mix of local recruits and seasoned terrorists from other countries in the region, the groups in the west are well armed, well funded, and not afraid to attack members of the Tunisian Army and National Guard. For this reason, according to a senior customs official, “our war with the terrorists begins on the border.”

Since the early 1990s, three Tunisian governorates—Kasserine, Kef, and Jendouba—have been active routes of terrorist infiltration into Algeria.³⁰ Each saw some clashes and attacks between GSPC terrorists and government forces in the early 2000s, including an attack on a border post in Thala and an army patrol in Oum Ali. Otherwise, however, the majority of the terrorist activity in the area involved supplying arms and ammunition to the groups fighting in Algeria.³¹

The terrorist threat in Tunisia fundamentally changed after the revolution. State institutions became a target. Terrorist activity increased throughout the country and included the unprecedented assassinations of two opposition politicians in Tunis. Starting in December 2012, militants in the border regions began to stage attacks in Kasserine governorate. Although the initial incidents were close to the Bouchebka border crossing with Algeria, most since that time have been either in the town of Kasserine or on Djebel Chambi, a mountain that stretches from Kasserine to the Algerian border. Militants reportedly established a base and training camp there.

The terrorist cell on Djebel Chambi is composed of both Algerian and Tunisian members. “The militants on Djebel Chambi initially came from Algeria, exploiting the postrevolutionary MOI [Ministry of Interior] collapse,” a Tunisian military official explained. Once established on the mountain, the militants recruited locally, enlisting supporters from El Kef, Kasserine, Tunis, Thala, and Sidi Bouzid towns. At least some of these supporters appear to have been drawn more by financial needs than by ideology. “I know two militants who were on Djebel Chambi,” explained a community organizer in the town of Thala. “Both guys say ‘they gave us money,’ and they needed to earn money for their families. This was the reason they went to Chambi.”

Soon after the Djebel Chambi base was established, the Tunisian military turned the mountain into a military zone and began to sweep the area. Attacks on these patrols have made up the majority of terrorist incidents attributed to the Djebel Chambi group. Most attacks have involved homemade land mines, though recently the cell has started using more professional mines. Despite the deaths of twenty soldiers and the arrests of a number of militants, indication is scant that the terrorist group on Djebel Chambi is close to being eliminated. A Tunisian security official emphasized, “It is difficult to defeat those guys up on Chambi as they avoid confrontation.” “The group on Chambi is surrounded,” a union leader in the town of El Kef noted in the spring of 2014, “they’re trapped, so it is not scary. But what is worrying is that there are cells outside of Chambi, enticing poor people with money and at the mosque.” A few months later, attacks on National Guard barracks in nearby Sbeitla and on the minister of interior’s home in Kasserine suggest that the operational capacity of the group on Djebel Chambi has not been fully degraded by the counterterrorism operations of Tunisia’s security forces.

Tunisia’s government faces a real radicalization challenge in its borderlands. Grinding poverty and a persistent sense of marginalization among border communities seem to be the drivers.

Tunisia’s government faces a real radicalization challenge in its borderlands. Grinding poverty and a persistent sense of marginalization among border communities seem to be the drivers. According to activists in Kasserine, “There are small communities on the border that don’t have electricity or clean water; they’re vulnerable to radicalization.” In El Kef, a union leader noted that “the first and main reason people are attracted to the militants is poverty, people don’t have enough to survive. This allows them to be brainwashed.” The well-financed extremists active in some mosques in the region have sought to exploit the situation and are, in the words of another union leader, “investing a lot of money in brainwashing people.”

Although the Tunisian and Algerian security services have a close working relationship, they have not prevented terrorist groups from crossing the border.³² According to Allani, in the area between Kasserine and Jendouba and on the Algerian side of the border as well, “Algerian and Tunisian authorities have a degree of control, but the jihadists can move there.” According to some security officials, the major result of Tunisian security operations has been a migration of terrorist units into the string of mountains between Kasserine and Jendouba.

Along the Algeria-Morocco border, terrorism is also seen as a central threat. Both nations have experienced bloody terrorist incidents in the recent past.³³ A Moroccan official on the border admitted that “until 2002, the GIA was active in the borders of Figuig and Berkane, infiltrating around our strong points.” Despite the deployment of more manpower and better technology to the border by both Moroccans and Algerians, the frequency with which smugglers and migrants cross those borders suggests that the risk of transnational terrorist infiltration is all too real.

This risk is heightened by the dearth of binational cooperation on border security and terrorism. Ironically, it was a terrorist attack that prompted the two nations to close their border in 1994. By forestalling effective coordination and information sharing, the closure of the border has made both Morocco and Algeria more vulnerable to cross-border terrorist threats. Both nations are now trying to secure the border single-handedly. This is ultimately an un-

tenable situation. According to Morocco's border czar, "Border control cannot be divided; it needs to be done together."

The Moroccan and Algerian governments can take such a divided stance because the level of terrorist incidents along the border is low. Most terrorist attacks in Morocco have been in the urban areas along the Atlantic coast and involved attackers native to those areas. Additionally, some evidence suggests radicalization in the Rif region of northern Morocco.³⁴ Most Moroccans engaged in terrorism do so outside the country, specifically in Syria and Libya. Indication is scant that regional terrorist groups, such as AQIM and al-Murabitoun, have sought to infiltrate across Morocco's land borders. This is likely the result of practical constraints. Morocco is distant from the primary terrorist sanctuaries in the region—Mali and Libya—and, despite the dearth of cooperation between the countries, Algeria's effective interdiction of terrorist groups in its territory shields Morocco from attack. The most acute terrorist threat to Morocco is not from infiltration across its land borders but rather from the return of experienced terrorists from Syria and Libya. Personnel at the nation's ports and airports are an important frontline in Morocco's counterterrorism struggle. The Algerian side of the border also sees few attacks, despite a stated desire by AQIM to move their operations in Algeria more toward the western border. Nothing indicates either that they have accomplished this move or that they enjoy significant operational reach in the area.

Although this border is the most secure in the region, it does present a latent risk. The frequency and ease with which smugglers and migrants move across it exemplifies its porous nature. If regional conditions continue to deteriorate, security forces are unlikely to be able to hold the line without coordinating their efforts. Binational cooperation is vital.

Human Smuggling

Human smuggling is, from the point of view of the Moroccan government, one of the most pressing challenges along its frontier. For a decade, streams of migrants intent on getting to Europe have flooded the country. Most are from sub-Saharan Africa, their transit arranged by well-organized smuggling networks. Morocco is the most vocal of the Maghreb countries on illegal immigration, but smuggling networks operate throughout the region.

Most of the migrants enter the Maghreb from Mali, a smaller number moving north through Mauritania and Niger. Many of the routes north start in the Malian town of Gao, flowing through the Algerian cities of Tamanrasset or Bordj Badji Mokhtar and then on to Ghardia and Adrar. From there, they move toward the coastal city of Oran, where they organize for the final push over the border into Morocco. This push typically occurs around the Algerian town of Maghnia, which sits across from the Moroccan city of Oujda.

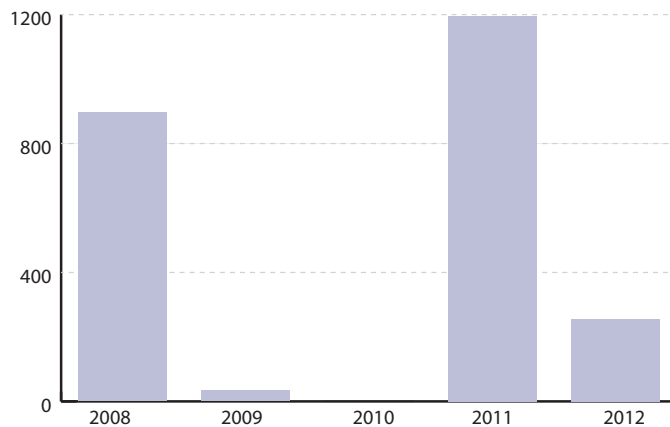
The migrant smuggling networks in Maghnia and Oujda are run by sub-Saharan Africans, primarily from Nigeria. These networks hire Moroccan and Algerian *passeurs* (smuggling specialists) to move the migrants over the border. On average, it costs migrants \$36 to \$50 for the border crossing, to be paid on arrival in Oujda.³⁵ Most migrants (70 to 80 percent) cross the border during the night. The rest move in the early morning hours (between five and eight). The groups are small (no more than ten to twenty people).

An increase in the cost of transiting from Morocco into Europe has led some migrants in the Moroccan-Algerian border area to engage in prostitution, begging, and the informal sale of alcohol. The smuggling networks are highly involved in these trades, at times coercing migrants into engaging in them but then keeping much of the profits for themselves. Border residents report that the involvement of smuggling networks in other types of criminal activity has grown in recent years.

More recently, Syrian refugees have also begun to use the border area around Maghnia to cross into Morocco. Most of the Syrians fly into Algiers from Turkey and Lebanon, leveraging their ability to travel to Algeria without a visa. A minority fly into the airport in Oran, which lies farther east. Syrians reportedly have their own networks for getting across the border. Most Syrians coming to Morocco aim to eventually get to Europe. Some Moroccans in Nador sell their passports to the Syrians, allowing them to transit into the Spanish enclave of Melilla and then declare the passports stolen. In some cases, children are handed over to smugglers in Nador who can get them into Europe. No figures are published, but the number of Syrian refugees in Morocco is believed to be about three to four thousand.

Human smuggling networks are also active in Tunisia, though migrant smuggling is less common now than in Morocco. Nonetheless, migrant smuggling networks exploited the collapse of border control during and immediately after the revolution to stage migrants in Tunisia for maritime transport to Europe (see figure 7).³⁶ Tunisian officials note that Syrian refugees are also being smuggled through their territory as they attempt to reach Europe. The refugees reportedly fly into Algiers before traveling to the Tunisian–Algerian frontier. Many reportedly cross the border in Kasserine governorate. From Kasserine, they then travel to the Libyan border, where they hire maritime smugglers to bring them to Europe.

Figure 7. Illegal Immigrants Apprehended by Tunisian Coast Guard



Migrants in and of themselves are not a major threat to the North African states. The threat instead is that the networks active along the border are transporting those who can pay across regional borders without regard for why the individual wants to move.

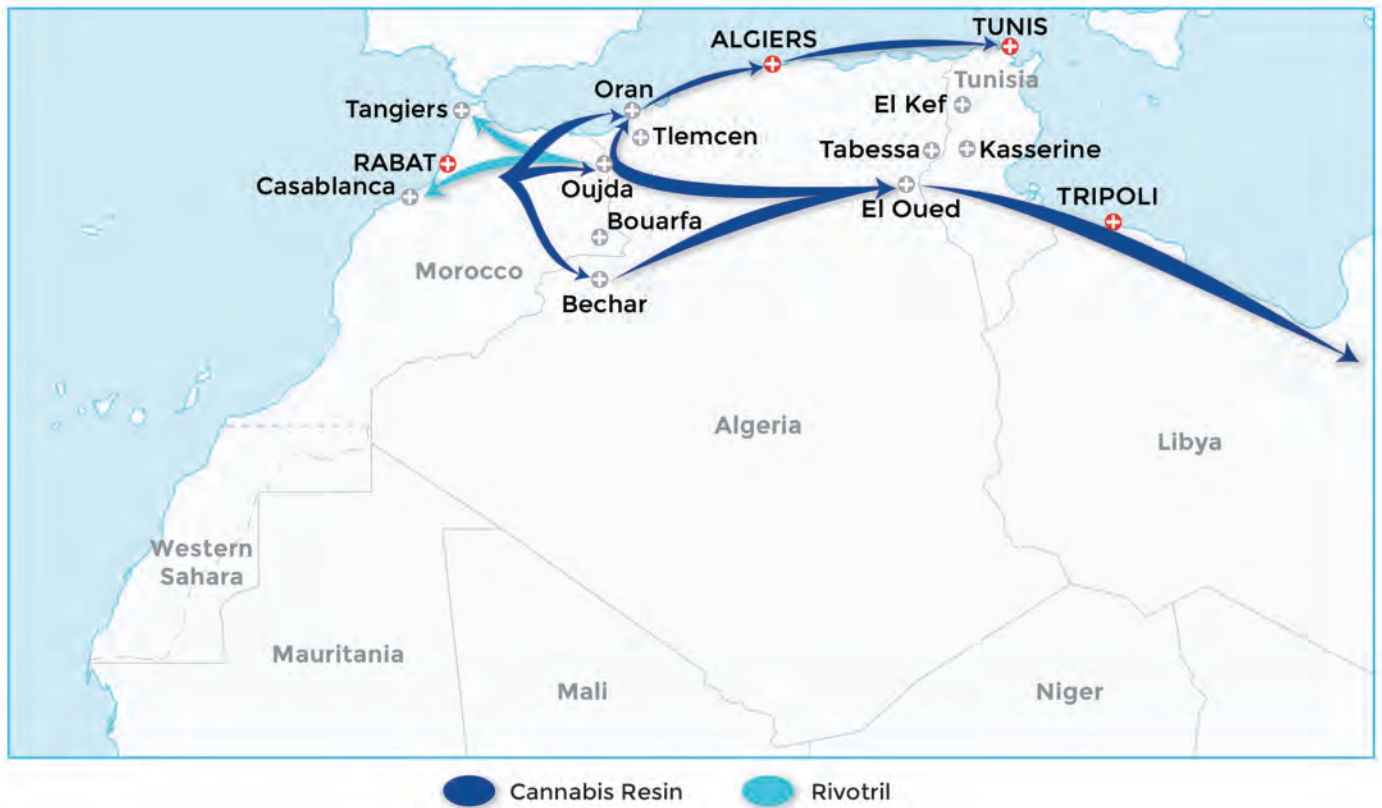
Migrants in and of themselves are not a major threat to the North African states. The threat instead is that the networks active along the border are transporting those who can pay across regional borders without regard for why the individual wants to move. These networks can be leveraged by nefarious actors—such as terrorist organizations—to move their personnel throughout the region. Their existence carries a risk for the entire region.

Drug Smuggling

The growing regional trade in drugs in North Africa, and the perceptions as to why this trade is flourishing, is widely seen as the principal obstacle to any efforts to promote border security collaboration between Algiers and Rabat. Its growth is marked by the development of nascent drug markets in Algeria and Morocco, an attendant increase in tensions between those states, and an increased incidence of violence by smugglers.

Although small amounts of drugs have long leaked across the region's frontiers, in the last decade the volume, value, and trafficking routes in the Maghreb have changed. Historically, cannabis grown in Morocco was smuggled across the western Mediterranean to Europe.³⁷ This route still exists, but increased European enforcement has rerouted an increasing proportion of Morocco's cannabis southeast across the Sahara or east across Algeria.³⁸ "In the past," an Algerian official observed, "the amount of drug smuggling in Algeria was quite low and mainly occurred in the deep south. Now it is surging here in the north, and we now catch a lot of drugs, especially within city borders" (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Cannabis and Rivotril Smuggling in North Africa



From the Algerian border, the drugs flow either east toward the town of El Oued or north toward the coastal cities of Oran and Algiers. The shipments through El Oued are smuggled on through Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, finally arriving in eastern Europe. Shipments sent to Oran and Algiers are shipped to Europe via the ferries linking those cities to Spain, France, and Italy.

"Of course drug smuggling goes both ways along the frontier," a Moroccan journalist explained. "From Morocco to Algeria you have *Kif* [the colloquial name for cannabis], and from Algeria to Morocco you have *Karkoubi* [the colloquial name for the prescription drug Rivotril]." Most shipments are transported across the Moroccan border between the prefecture of Oujda or the province of Figuig before being moved toward the coastal cities.

Rumors are widespread in Morocco that the rise in drug trafficking and consumption is part of an Algerian strategy to undermine Morocco. Nearly identical rumors—differing only in the drug involved—exist in Algeria.

The emergence of these new drug trafficking routes has spurred domestic drug consumption in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. In Algeria, officials express concern that cannabis resin is increasingly popular amongst the nation's youth. In Morocco, Karkoubi has become a popular and cheap recreational drug. A series of violent crimes allegedly committed by youth under the influence of Karkoubi has prompted deep concerns in Morocco about the increased popularity of the drug.

Rising drug consumption in Algeria and Morocco has strained relations between the two countries. Rumors are widespread in Morocco that the rise in drug trafficking and consumption is part of an Algerian strategy to undermine Morocco. Nearly identical rumors—differing only in the drug involved—exist in Algeria. Moroccan cooperation in countering drug trafficking has emerged as a key Algerian stipulation for opening the border.³⁹ Increased domestic tensions surrounding drug use in both Algeria and Morocco seem destined to further strain relations, making efforts to strengthen the border far more difficult.

Drug trafficking in the Maghreb is increasingly paramilitarized, involving heavily armed actors willing to violently confront security officials. According to one journalist, “There have been attacks on Algerian gendarmerie, customs, and police officials.” This trend dates to the mid-2000s, arising as the volume and value of narcotics transported across the Maghreb rapidly increased.⁴⁰ The Libyan revolution further exacerbated the trend as theft from government stockpiles eased trafficker access to military-grade weaponry. The violence tends to occur in areas where drug trafficking routes intersect with borders—primarily along the Algerian-Moroccan frontier and in the deep south of Algeria. The willingness of the drug smugglers to engage state security forces further complicates an already difficult situation along the borders of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, impeding efforts to effectively seal the region's borders against the cross-border movement of illicit actors.

Regional government officials have publicly linked drug traffickers to terrorist groups—most commonly AQIM. Indications are that terrorist groups in the Sahara tax drug traffickers moving through the regions they control and have at times provided protection for the traffickers.⁴¹ These connections appear to be contained to the Saharan nations south of the Maghreb, with little suggestion that drug traffickers moving laterally across Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have significant involvement with terrorist groups. However, the increasing presence of terrorist groups in Tunisia and Libya, coupled with the increasing value of drugs trafficked through these areas, raise the possibility that such linkages could emerge in the future to the benefit of both types of actors.

Arms Smuggling

The Libyan revolution fundamentally changed arms smuggling patterns in North Africa. “The Libyans had the arms, and now we have a major problem with weapons control,” explained a Tunisian expert. Libya's revolution led to the private appropriation of the nation's weaponry, fueling chaos within the country and flooding the region with arms. Terrorist groups and smugglers have been enthusiastic consumers. Government officials in Tunisia and Morocco emphasize that arms smuggling and terrorism are their main border security threats. These two threats are linked. One Moroccan security official noted that “the fight against arms smuggling is part of the fight against terrorism.” Officials from all three governments are deeply concerned about the chaotic situation in Libya and its impact on weapons smuggling and thus regional security. According to a regional customs official, “There has long been trouble with Libya and weapons. It is the classical product smuggled out of that country.”

The magnitude of the threat changed in 2011 and 2012 as the disintegration of the Gadhafi regime led a large quantity of weaponry to fall into the hands of merchants, militias, and even ordinary civilians. In the words of one security official, “Libya became an open arms market for all kinds of weapons.” Civilians also engaged in this market, sometimes bartering their weapons for food, fuel, and vehicles. Flowing along long-established smuggling pathways, the weapons soon spread across the countries of the Maghreb and Sahel.

Sharing borders with Libya, Tunisia and Algeria have faced the most immediate challenges from the new flow of arms. In Tunisia, the majority of inbound arms smuggling occurs either through coastal areas close to the Ras Adjir border crossing or in the deep south of the country.⁴² A number of weapons caches have been uncovered in Tunisia, including one only fifteen kilometers from Tunis. Some of these caches have included heavy weaponry, such as man-portable air defense systems.⁴³ Terrorist groups operating in western Tunisia are believed to have sourced arms and explosives from Libya. Some weaponry is also smuggled in from other sources, including Europe. In June 2014, at least three arms seizures were made at Tunis’s port, including one involving thirty weapons of different calibers destined for the western town of Kasserine.⁴⁴

In Algeria, a number of arms caches have been uncovered in the south and center of the country, and encounters between security service personnel and convoys of arms smugglers in the southeast are fairly frequent.⁴⁵ Residents in the southeastern city of Tamanrasset indicated that over the last two to three years, the rate of weapons smuggling through the area has increased dramatically. At least some of the weapons smuggled through southeastern Algeria are intended for distribution in Mali and other nations in sub-Saharan Africa.

Arms from Libya are also routed toward areas in the northeast and north-central parts of Algeria where AQIM is operating. In some cases, these weapons are first smuggled across the minimally populated areas of southern Tunisia and then on toward Algeria’s Kabylie region.⁴⁶ Networks involved in the transportation of Libyan arms have been disrupted in the wilayas of Tabessa and Annaba, suggesting that weaponry may also be moving through the rough country along the Tunisian-Algerian border.⁴⁷

Indication is scant that arms smuggling is regular along the Algerian-Moroccan frontier. Nonetheless, reports of increasing numbers of armed drug smugglers along the border indicate that efforts to control arms proliferation in the region have yet to prove fully effective.

Terrorist-Smuggler Nexus

Government officials in Algeria believe that there is a connection between smugglers and terrorists in the Maghreb. Their Tunisian and Moroccan counterparts agree. Some evidence supports this belief.

Terrorist and smugglers in the Maghreb are most commonly connected by logistics, specifically, terrorists purchasing both food and arms from smugglers. “We see organized crime groups providing logistical support to the terrorist groups around our borders,” one Moroccan official pointed out. This support appears to supplement, though not replace, parallel logistical networks operated by the terrorist groups.⁴⁸ In some cases, terrorist groups looking to finance their operations have employed these logistical networks to smuggle commodities and drugs. Long before Mokhtar Belmokhtar became infamous as the leader of the al-Mua’qi’oon Bidam Brigade, he was known as the King of Marlboros and was heavily involved in commodity smuggling on behalf of AQIM throughout the Sahara. Profits from smuggling were, and still are, an important AQIM funding stream.⁴⁹

In June 2014, at least three arms seizures were made at Tunis’s port, including one involving thirty weapons of different calibers destined for the western town of Kasserine.

Although the connection to smuggling is a great benefit for terrorists, for smugglers it is at best a risky proposition. Terrorist groups in the Maghreb pay smugglers well, but the association can bring unwanted security service attention and boosts the risk that smugglers will be arrested for terrorist crimes. A Tunisian security official emphasized that “for a lot of people, smuggling is a livelihood, and they wouldn’t risk that by getting involved with terrorists.” The presence of terrorists in a border area increases the likelihood that security service efforts will be focused there. A heightened security service presence impedes smuggling and impacts smuggling profits. An Algerian journalist explained, for the most part, “cartels of smugglers don’t want to have terrorists in their area. Save for a few paths used by a few terrorists and smugglers, it’s a competition.”

In assessing the risk of a terrorist-smuggling nexus in the Maghreb, it is important to focus not only on direct connections but also on how smugglers have created an environment conducive to terrorist groups operating in the borderlands. Smuggling has weakened the integrity of the border security system in these countries, which, in turn, has opened operational space for terrorist networks.

Terrorist networks in the region have adopted smugglers’ routes and operational methods, easing their movement across the region’s borders. Communities reliant on smuggling have ambivalent relationships with government officials and view them as impediments rather than as protectors and providers. In communities where grievances are the most intense, these conditions seem to help terrorist recruitment. Although only a small percentage of Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan smugglers would consider involvement in terrorism, their everyday commercial actions alone are enough to increase the terrorist threat in their countries.

A Faustian Choice

Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco face two equally unpalatable options. They can increase border security efforts, limiting smuggling, and thereby risk exacerbating political unrest in the border regions. Or they can accept a status quo where organized nonstate groups facilitate the movement of goods and risk the exploitation of these smuggling networks and routes for more nefarious goods and actors. Officials in the region are well aware of the trade-offs, but no solution has emerged to address them.

The borderlands of North Africa are among the most economically marginalized areas in the region (see photo 3). “The situation all along the border is miserable,” a businessman in the western Tunisian town of El Kef explained. “The government has always focused on the coast and neglected the west. We have no industry and no employment.” The dearth of economic opportunity in the border areas has resulted in the growth of smuggling in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Because of its informal nature, the region’s states cannot tax the activity and thus do not economically benefit from it. They reap some political and security benefits from decreased unemployment in the border regions. These benefits, however, have not fully eliminated political dissatisfaction among the populations in the border regions.

Over the last decade, the region’s governments have come to view their borders less as a protective shield and more as a threat to their national security. The democratization of smuggling after the Arab Spring has also introduced a host of new actors who reject the old arrangements with the security services. Reestablishing those arrangements, however, has been complicated. When governments have sought to crack down on smuggling without providing viable economic alternatives, affected populations see their livelihoods eliminated. As one activist in western Tunisia remarked, “If the security forces tried to stop smuggling, people would go to the streets.”

When governments have sought to crack down on smuggling without providing viable economic alternatives, affected populations see their livelihoods eliminated.



Photo 3. Looking into Algeria, Saidia, Morocco.

In different places and at different times in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, efforts to control smuggling have fueled anger, protests, and violence. Given the interconnected nature of the borders, states can suffer unrest not just when they act but when neighboring states attempt to crack down. “When something happens in Algeria [a terrorist incident], they crack down on [illicit] border traffic, and here in northwest [Tunisia], we suffer,” a Tunisian activist explained. The eastern Tunisian city of Ben Gardane saw riots when a Libyan militia unilaterally closed that border, effectively shuttering livelihoods for some Tunisians. The loss of livelihood opportunities can magnify latent disaffection against national governments, opening some individuals to proselytization, radicalization, and recruitment by terrorist groups.

Mapping Capabilities, Capacity, and Coordination

“The central problematic of the region,” a senior Tunisian security official explained, “is that [the threat of] terrorism and salafism and [the instability in] Libya have made the entire region unsafe.” “Our high officials,” he added, “know what we have to do to master the problems,” but first we “must work on our limitations.”

Across the region, border security capacity is uneven and responses are poorly coordinated. Tunisia and Algeria have no counterpart on the Libyan border. Algeria’s capabilities dwarf those of its neighbors. Technical capabilities, such as surveillance and mobility, also vary. But even for Algeria, perhaps the most advanced in the region, the sheer magnitude of its borders and the intensity of the militant threat it faces means that those capabilities are not enough.

Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have invested in more troops, new or improved training, and new technology, or have evinced a desire to do so. However, their border management systems differ substantially in capabilities, organization, effectiveness, and coordination. In many respects, these systems evolved in response to threats faced years ago and are not tailored to those of today.

Heavily influenced by two decades of bloody fighting against terrorist groups, Algeria’s border security policy is focused on hard, kinetic solutions. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) is the dominant actor on border security issues, primarily through the Gendarmerie’s Frontier Guards. However, since the Arab Spring, the Algerian army has assumed a far more active role in border security, driving the use of military solutions to border security challenges. While effective in the short term, the long-term utility of these tactics is not yet clear. But one Algerian journalist observed that the violent tactics have “led the smugglers to become armed and to fight the army.”

Morocco is far less menaced (see photo 4). Although its political rivalry with Algeria has impeded cooperation on border issues, Algeria’s force posture on the borders effectively buffers Morocco from regional terrorist threats. Apart from Western Sahara, Morocco has developed a border security architecture that could be termed *military lite*. Border security is firmly under the control of the MOI. While the borders are technically military zones, most of the forces active along them belong to or report to other ministries. In its efforts to seal its borders, Morocco has deployed more forces and acquired new technology over the last decade, but its borders are still extremely vulnerable and frequently crossed by smugglers and migrants.



Photo 4. Border meets beach, Saidia, Morocco.

Tunisia’s security forces are only just regaining their balance after the tumult of the collapse of the Ben Ali regime. Ben Ali’s security apparatus was focused on protecting the regime—not from external threats across its borders but from internal dissent. The bulk of its resources were spent on building a robust police apparatus focused on urban centers, not on developing an intelligence apparatus capable of uncovering militant threats or cross-border infiltration. After Ben Ali, the transition regimes have struggled to find their footing and to balance the need for security with reform—and all this in a rapidly deteriorating security environment that is unlike anything Tunisia has faced in the past. The unspoken accord between smugglers and border security agents that served as a de facto border management system, kept the smuggling of dangerous goods in check, and provided valuable intelligence has collapsed—and with it the eyes,

ears, and supplemental income of the border agents. A host of dangerous actors have profited from this vacuum.

The gaps in capacity in the region and the political disagreements that stymie effective cooperation have raised the risks to the region and increased the likelihood that those risks will escalate in scope and intensity in the future.

Algeria

“In the 1990s, we tried to explain that the terrorist threat to the Maghreb was real and that it was growing,” a senior Algerian diplomat explained. “We told our neighbors that we should cooperate to counter this threat. But no [one] listened to us, and now we are all suffering.” The feeling is strong in Algeria that its neighbors and the international community have largely abandoned the country. It had to fight a bloody war against terrorist groups, and it had to do so largely alone. This experience left an indelible mark and continues to shape how Algiers responds to cross-border threats and its force posture for doing so. Given its history, that Algeria maintains the largest security service in the western Maghreb is not surprising, nor that its security budget is also the largest in Africa and growing.⁵⁰

The fear that weakness along its border could enable a resurgence of terrorist violence has prompted the Algerian government to respond aggressively to all threats. The MOD—and particularly the army—is the lead agency for border security. Operational forces with border security mandates employ the tactics, techniques, and procedures they developed during the decade of bloody conflict.⁵¹ Smugglers both in Algeria and across its border fear the Algerian army. The best strategy for the Algerian army, they say, is to avoid it altogether.

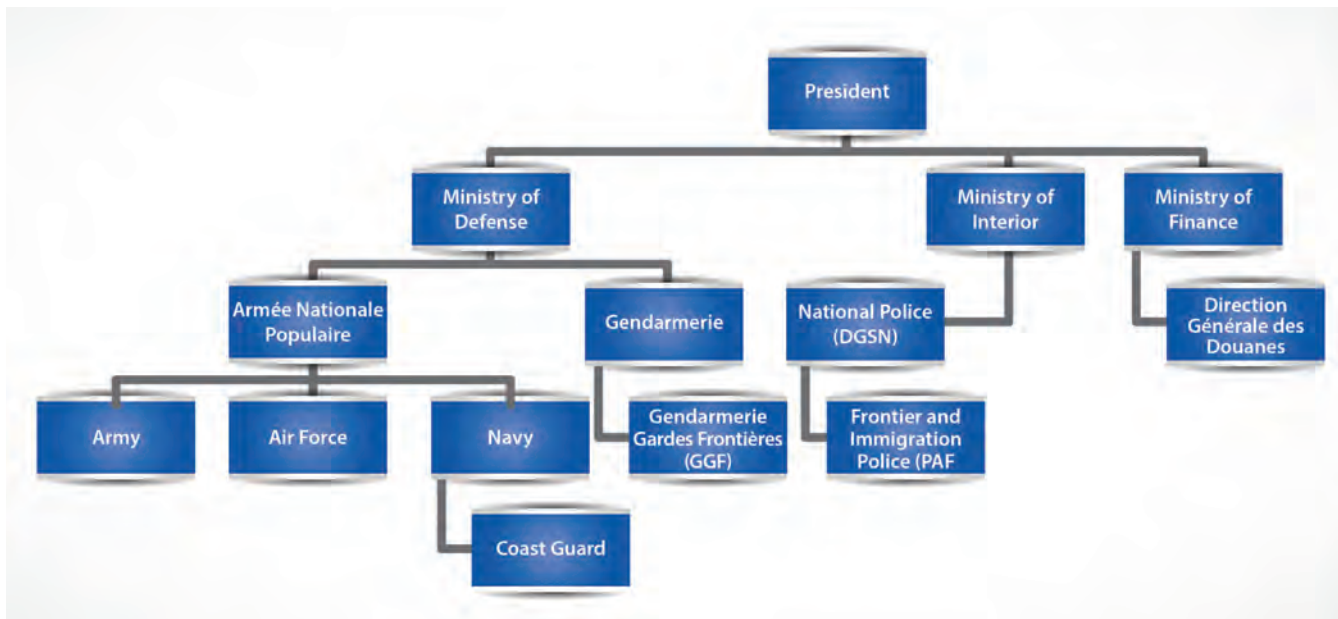
Algeria’s strategic approach and force posture on the borders is also shaped by the complicated security dynamics of the Maghreb—all of which are on Algeria’s borders. Three of Algeria’s neighbors—Tunisia, Libya, and Mali—have undergone a revolution or civil war in the last three years, and another two—Niger and Mauritania—enjoy only minimal state capacity to control their remote and often restive border regions. Only Morocco, Algeria’s foremost antagonist in the region, has remained largely immune from the events of the Arab Spring. Thus this sense of isolation continues—Algerian officials fear they do not have reliable partners with whom to coordinate to manage Algeria’s lengthy borders. This said, with Tunisia, coordination has much improved.

A third factor in understanding Algeria’s approach and force posture is the sheer size of the country. Algeria is almost four times larger than Morocco and Tunisia combined, and its 6,343-kilometer (3,941-mile) border abuts six countries and one disputed territory. From the highly populated areas along the Mediterranean to the vast wastes of the central Sahara, border security forces in Algeria face the daunting task of managing borders so long that even Algeria’s robust forces cannot fully close. In the desolate south of the country, it is thus a requirement that cars have their license plate numbers clearly visible—painted on the roofs.

Border security in Algeria is under the purview of the MOD, though the MOI, and Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the walis also have border security missions (see figure 9). They appear to coordinate at least some activities on the border. In 2014, when Algeria closed its borders with Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Libya, it also appears to have transferred significant border security functions in militarized border zones from civilian wali oversight to the MOD.⁵² Although the gendarmerie continues to play a vital operational role, this command shift reflects an increased reliance on the military, and specifically the army, for border security, counterterrorism, and counter-organized crime functions.⁵³

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Figure 9. Algerian Border Security Forces



Within the MOD, border security is the responsibility of the armed forces (Armée Nationale Populaire) and the gendarmerie. The armed forces are the dominant border security actors in Algeria and are constitutionally tasked with protecting the land, air, and maritime territory.⁵⁴ For much of Algeria's history, the armed forces were deployed to defend against state rivals—primarily Morocco. A counterterrorism mission was added after the civil war, in the early 1990s. It was not until 2012 that the Algerian armed forces were specifically tasked with countering cross-border drug smuggling. In 2014, with the creation of militarized zones on Algeria's borders, the MOD role in border security was further expanded. Access to these zones now requires a permit from the MOD.⁵⁵

The dominant actor within the MOD is the Algerian army. Reportedly numbering some 110,000 forces, the army is deployed in eight military regions, seven of which cover border areas. Two were created as recently as 2012, reflecting a heightened attention on border security. The army maintains a presence in all border regions but has built up a larger presence—reportedly some twenty-three thousand forces in 2013—on the eastern and southeastern borders.⁵⁶ It conducts electronic surveillance, regular patrols, and ambushes and provides operational support to other government security forces on the border. It is also empowered, in some cases, to make arrests.

The Algerian air force works closely with the army on border security and counterterrorism missions. Given Algeria's size and the often-remote terrain along its borders, the air force conducts surveillance, provides mobility and close air support for the army and other security service elements, and both interdicts and destroys convoys that have illegally crossed Algeria's borders.

The other border security actor in Algeria is the gendarmerie. The gendarmerie is tasked with traditional policing duties in rural areas and along the nation's roads. It also has a counterterrorism mission. The gendarmerie force is estimated to number seventy thousand personnel. The gendarmerie oversees a specialized border unit, the Gendarmerie Gardes-Frontières (GGF), formed in 1977, which is charged with defending and policing Algeria's territorial border and was placed under gendarmerie control in 1991. The GGF is organized into regional districts, and its units are lightly armed.

The GGF has both a defense and a policing mission. It conducts permanent surveillance of the border areas, collects intelligence for the military authorities, detects and observes any attempts to cross the border, and interdicts and neutralizes movements that undermine the security of the borders. As part of its policing mission, the GGF officials and officers note that they work to “control people and goods within the border region and to prevent and repress illegal immigration, smuggling, drugs, and terrorist activity.” The GGF protects foreign workers in border areas and was the first force to engage the attackers at In Amenas. The GGF also has the authority to make arrests and to confiscate goods. Because of its mission, light armaments, and remote areas of operation, the GGF has been involved in bloody clashes and has suffered high casualty rates in these engagements.

The MOF also has a border function in overseeing the Algerian Customs Directorate (*La Direction Générale des Douanes*), which has three roles: First, it is involved in taxation and provides advice on the economy. Second, it protects the economy and the country by countering contraband smuggling, drug smuggling, illegal immigration, and capital flight. Third, it works alongside MOD security forces to secure the border areas. As the threats facing Algeria have shifted, so too has the focus of customs. As one official explained, “Before, we used to have a classical mission, collecting taxes and saving the economy. Now though, we have begun to intervene in security.”

On the borders, the Customs Directorate employs fixed surveillance posts, fixed checkpoints, mobile checkpoints, ambushes, patrols, and targeted raids on residences.⁵⁷ Raids usually involve either police or *gendarmerie* and target smugglers. Additionally, customs agents are deployed at ports of entry. Finally, the Customs Directorate operates special customs zones (*Le Rayon des Douanes*) that stretch thirty to sixty kilometers (roughly twenty to forty miles) from the borders on the eastern and western frontier and two hundred to four hundred kilometers (roughly one hundred to three hundred miles) from the border in the southern wilayas of Tindouf, Adrar, Tamanrasset, and Illizi. Within these zones, the Customs Directorate is empowered to demand paperwork, taxation information, and justification for the transportation of commercial goods.

Within the MOI, the Frontier and Immigration Police—*Direction de la Police des Frontières et de l’Immigration (PAF)*—also have a border security mandate. The PAF is the only MOI agency tasked with border security responsibilities. It secures the POEs—including maritime ports, airports, border crossings, and rail crossings—and prevents illegal immigration, drug smuggling, and arms smuggling along the border. The strength of the force stands at around seven thousand.⁵⁸

Algeria maintains a multilayered border security system that is being robustly reinforced. GGF personnel are the first line of control on the border. This line of control consists of observation posts, advanced posts, regular mobile patrols, surveillance systems, and, in some cases, physical barriers. On the Moroccan border, the posts resemble medieval castles—low slung white and green buildings with towers on which CCTV cameras have been installed. Between Chayeb Rassou and Maghnia, these posts are placed within sight line of each other. A number of new such posts are currently being constructed in Tlemcen Wilaya.

Many of these posts belong to the GGF, but a number of new posts are being built for the Customs Directorate. Twenty-three customs observation posts are planned for Tlemcen, each housing roughly forty customs officers.⁵⁹ Construction is a manifestation of a larger shift in the posture of the Customs Directorate toward forward posts—at least eighty new observation posts are being planned along the nation’s borders.⁶⁰ The GGF is also building more posts, primarily along the eastern and southern borders. Sixteen GGF posts were opened in Tabessa Wilaya alone between May and June of 2014.⁶¹

GGF patrols are also a central component within this first line of defense, providing additional surveillance, security coverage, and interdiction capacity in the areas between the posts. In some areas of Algeria, the sheer size of the border area and dearth of fixed posts has entailed a

heavy reliance on such patrols. The first line of defense also includes—for those borders that are open—POEs staffed by PAF and customs personnel.

Customs units form a second line of defense. Mobile customs units are active as both a surveillance and an interdiction force, responding in some cases to information relayed from the advanced observation posts. Customs units also operate mobile and fixed checkpoints focused on goods moving both to and from the border. In some cases, these checkpoints are operated in conjunction with GGF forces. Outside the town of Maghnia, in Tlemcen Wilaya, for example, customs, police, and the GGF operate one such checkpoint. There the goal is not simply to stymie efforts to smuggle goods into Algeria but also to thwart efforts to smuggle goods subsidized in Algeria across the border to Morocco. The checkpoint may be necessary from a security perspective, but it has also led to friction with the local population.⁶²

The army is also part of the border defense posture, but its precise disposition vis-à-vis the GGF and customs force is unclear. The army is the lead for all terrorism actions, and all other forces work under its direct operational control. The army has also been newly empowered as the lead agency on drug smuggling, coordinating the actions of the GGF, customs, and other security services. It is unclear whether command is unified on drug smuggling operations or each security service maintains its own command structure.

Algeria's border security efforts also rely on a multilayered surveillance system in the border areas. On the ground, radar systems, surveillance cameras, and sensors monitor movement along the frontier.⁶³ Airborne surveillance systems are used extensively along Algeria's land borders. These include helicopters, manned fixed wing craft, and satellites. The airborne systems are particularly important elements in the southern and southeastern border regions, enabling the security services to cover far larger areas on a more frequent basis than ground patrol units could achieve.

Algeria's border surveillance architecture also involves human sources. As one customs official remarked, "We have good allies in the local community, good eyes." Historically, the Customs Directorate used local communities to keep a look out on the borders. The GGF also ran an informal unit of Tuareg scouts in the far south, known as the Regiment of the Camel Riders. The "regiment" consisted only of "Tuaregs on a camel with an AK-47, binoculars, and a salary." These scouts were "far more effective than the GGF because they knew the terrain." Despite its success, the program was reportedly ended in the late 1980s.

Finally, Algeria's border security architecture relies on physical barriers constructed in the border regions. The barrier system is most advanced around the northwest town of Maghnia, which sits across the border from the Moroccan town of Oujda, and is intended to counter the widespread smuggling that occurs in that area. The barrier there consists of a berm and trench system. The trench is six meters wide and six meters deep. Immediately behind it is a large berm—basically the materiel excavated from the trench—that provides a further impediment to movement. Under construction for about a year, the trench is reportedly 50 to 60 percent complete. Barriers along the more difficult border terrain—such as the mountainous area along the border—have yet to be constructed. The barrier system has worked to a degree, reducing cross-border smuggling of goods by vehicles and impeding other smuggling methods. "But, over time," one observer in Maghnia noted, "the smugglers have discovered weaknesses in the system." A similar barrier is under construction in Tabessa Wilaya on the Tunisian border. The system seems to have a degree of impact on smuggling in that area, though the volume of traffic flowing across the border suggests that the real impact of the barrier system is limited.

Algeria's security services engage in close coordination and occasionally stage combined operations against transborder crime, terrorism, and drug smuggling.⁶⁴ The new threats facing Algeria

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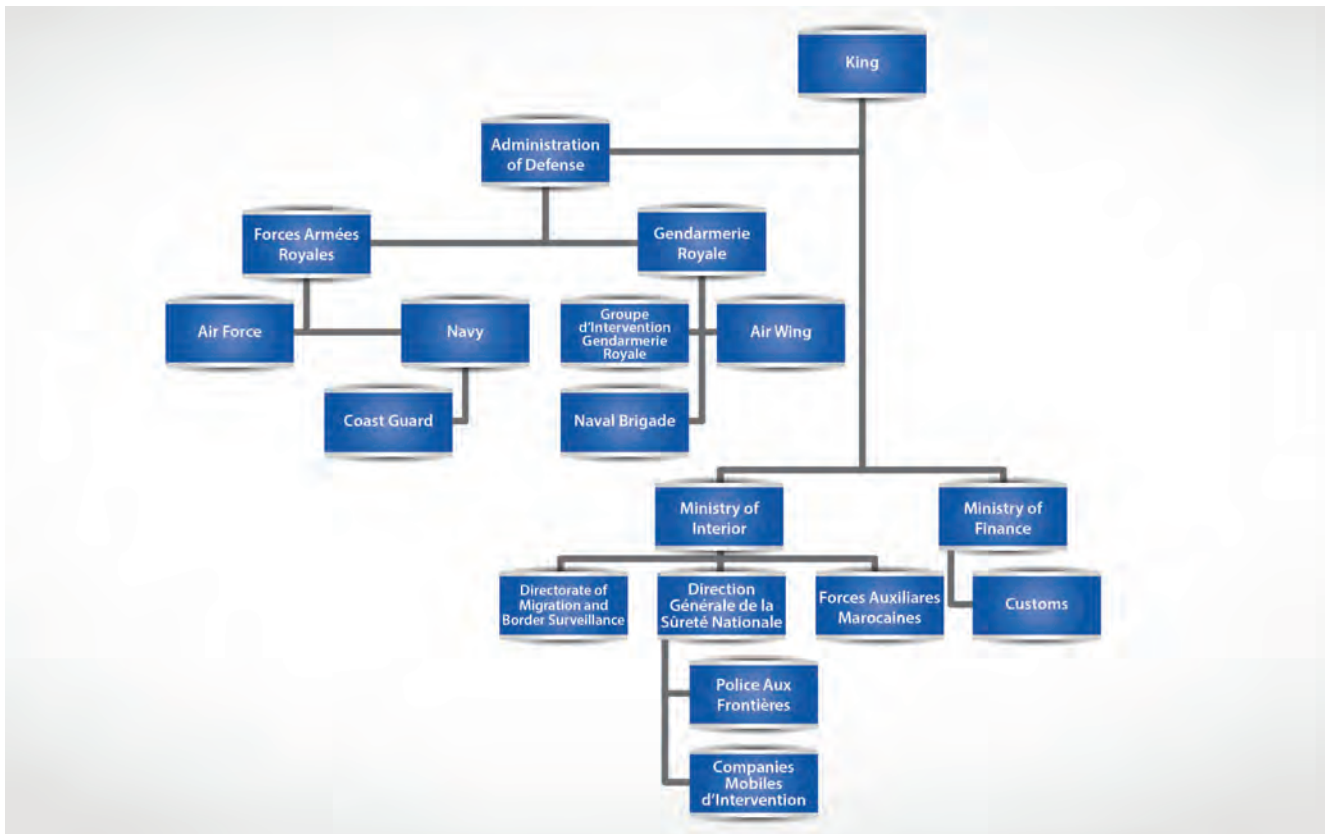
have prompted the security services and the national defense structure to buttress their cooperation, coordination, and joint training efforts.

Morocco

Isolated on the far western edge of the Maghreb, Morocco’s border security challenges appear at first glance to be far less complex than those of either Algeria or Tunisia. Morocco has only two land borders—a seventeen-kilometer border with Spain and 1,600-kilometer border with Algeria. Additionally, Morocco exerts border security control over much of the 1,600-kilometer border between Western Sahara and Mauritania. The threats on these borders differ. Along the Algerian border and the border with Spain, the principal challenges are preventing illegal immigration, inbound drug smuggling, and the smuggling of consumer goods. On the Western Sahara and Mauritania border, the principal challenges are guarding against cross-border infiltration and attacks by the Polisario Front. According to Moroccan security officials, large transnational terrorist groups in the Maghreb—AQIM and Ansar al-Sharia—have not yet shown an interest in regularly operating in Morocco. It is thus not surprising that Morocco’s border security strategy is focused on prevention rather than interdiction.

Mapping Morocco’s security sector, let alone its border security functions, is a complicated task given the complexity of actors and chains of command (see figure 10).⁶⁵ The MOI has been charged by King Mohammad VI to coordinate all border security activities, but the armed forces and the MOF also have border security functions.

Figure 10. Moroccan Border Security Forces



The MOI oversees operational units with border security missions, but its most important role is the coordination of forces on the border and the implementation of the national border strategy. The coordination function is the responsibility of MOI officials—at the provincial and commune level. Created in 2003, the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance in the MOI, headed by a wali-rank official who is effectively Morocco’s border czar, is tasked with implementing the national border control strategy. It is unclear whether the border czar convenes the national level security coordination meetings for border security. In 2004, the MOI was also given responsibility for tackling networks of human smugglers. The MOI border mission also includes control of POEs and border surveillance.⁶⁶

The MOI oversees three operational units with border security responsibilities—the Auxiliary Forces (Forces Auxiliaires Marocaines or FAM), the Border Police (Police Aux Frontières), and the Mobile Intervention Companies (Compagnies Mobiles d’Intervention). The FAM is a frontline border security force. Also known as the Makhzani, the FAM is a lightly armed paramilitary force. Deployed throughout the country, the FAM is believed to number between twenty-five and thirty-thousand.⁶⁷ As recently as 2004, the number of Auxiliary Forces personnel tasked with a border security mission was rather modest: 1,500 on land borders, 2,500 on the Mediterranean coast, and 500 covering the Atlantic coast.⁶⁸ As border security has been hardened in Morocco, the number of FAM officers devoted to that mission has reportedly increased. One high-ranking MOI official explained: “We have eleven thousand Auxiliary Forces stationed from the north through to Kenitra, along the beaches.”

The Border Police report to the Directorate General for National Police (Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale or DGSN) and are stationed at all POEs. Their mission is to implement Morocco’s immigration laws. The DGSN also oversees the Mobile Intervention Companies, a five-thousand-strong paramilitary force tasked with crowd control and an undefined set of border security responsibilities.⁶⁹

The armed forces include the army (Forces Armées Royales or FAR) and the Gendarmerie Royale (GR) as well as the air force (Forces Royales Air du Maroc), which plays a modest role in the border security via surveillance and transport missions. All of Morocco’s borders are classified as military zones, and the FAR and the Auxiliary Forces are the frontline border security forces in Morocco. A Moroccan border official pointed out that on the borders, the FAR also has “the power to intercept [smugglers and migrants] and then provide the suspects to the appropriate authorities”—usually either the MOI or the MOF.

The FAR is organized into two commands: The northern command, headquartered in Rabat, focuses on the territorial defense of Morocco proper. The southern command, headquartered in Agadir, directs forces deployed in Western Sahara.⁷⁰ The precise breakdown of forces between the commands is unclear, but most of the FAR’s 170,000 to 180,000 forces, perhaps as many as 160,000, are deployed in the southern command zone.⁷¹ Morocco thus relies on a very modest force to control the border areas between Morocco and Algeria—the region’s least restive border.

The GR is a paramilitary force tasked with security and defense missions. It is responsible for providing law enforcement and security in rural areas, along Morocco’s highways, at points of national importance, and at military installations. Given the GR’s law enforcement duties, it has linkages with the MOI (involving their administrative policing duties) and the Ministry of Justice (for judicial policing duties). On the borders, it effectively provides the second line of control, patrolling and maintaining mobile checkpoints behind the military. An elite force with the Moroccan armed forces, the GR is relatively small—it numbers only 22,000 to Algeria’s 130,000. It recruits the top graduates from the military academy and absorbs 22 percent of

the military budget (the army takes only 17 percent).⁷² The GR also includes specialized units, including the antiterrorist unit (Groupe d'Intervention Gendarmerie Royale) and a coast guard unit (Gendarmerie marine).

Under the MOF, the Administration for Customs and Indirect Taxes is active throughout Morocco's border areas and at the major POEs. Customs is organized into eight regional directorates in Morocco and one in Western Sahara. In turn, these directorates are divided into subdirectorates and districts and have 4,517 agents.⁷³ The customs force is tasked with countering smuggling of goods and drugs, money-laundering, and counterfeiting and collecting taxes. The customs administration is often described as the “merchandise police”—when goods are seized during an arrest they are turned over to the customs authority. In border areas, customs agents are either deployed at POEs or at mobile checkpoints. Along the Algerian border, the dearth of active POEs means that customs forces operate primarily through mobile checkpoints on main roads.

Morocco's border security architecture involves three distinct bands. In the first band, which is closest to the border, are the FAR and the FAM, who maintain outposts and patrol the frontier between the POEs, which are also staffed by the Border Police. The second band, behind the FAR and FAM, is controlled by the GR, which maintains bases and checkpoints set back from the frontier. Finally, in the third band, are the police, who control urban areas along the border, and customs agents, who are active in both rural and urban areas countering contraband smugglers. The police, customs, and gendarmerie operate mobile and fixed checkpoints along the roads in border areas. It is not uncommon to have a number of checkpoints densely clustered along the main roads leading into urban areas. Apart from the military control over the border itself, the precise deployment of security forces appears somewhat flexible.

The armed forces and the MOI also operate a robust network of surveillance assets, electronic detection systems, and human sources in the border regions. In addition to enhanced electronic surveillance, a Moroccan official explained, the Moroccan government leverages border community members as its “eyes and ears.” This program is fairly long standing and involves communities “keep[ing] a close watch on the contraband that comes across the border and not accept[ing] arms,” as well as identifying and reporting terrorists attempting to infiltrate the county. Government officials exhort border populations to participate, reminding them that they “have an important role in security, and it is thanks to them that the security of the country is strong.”

Like Algeria, Morocco has also created physical barriers on the borders. The most famous of these is a system of stone and sand walls (known as the berm) that stretches 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) from southeastern Morocco through Western Sahara to the coast near the Mauritanian border. The barrier includes manned posts, radar installations, and mine fields. Morocco has also begun constructing a large fence in the area around Oujda. The fence, which currently stretches for ten to twelve kilometers (six to eight miles), will eventually stretch 140 kilometers (87 miles) and encompass the border areas of Berkane, Jerada, and Oujda. A key goal of the barrier construction in the North is to constrain cross-border human smuggling.

Morocco appears to have a well-developed and effective system for ensuring coordination and information sharing among its security agencies through regularly convened security committees that identify and mitigate challenges at the national, regional, and local levels.⁷⁴ Convened by the MOI, the committees bring together all the security stakeholders—police, military, gendarmerie, and customs—to discuss security issues and share information on a regular basis.

One MOI official explained that the meetings not only address “contraband and terrorism, but also things like the border, droughts, the economy—everything which can impact the area.”

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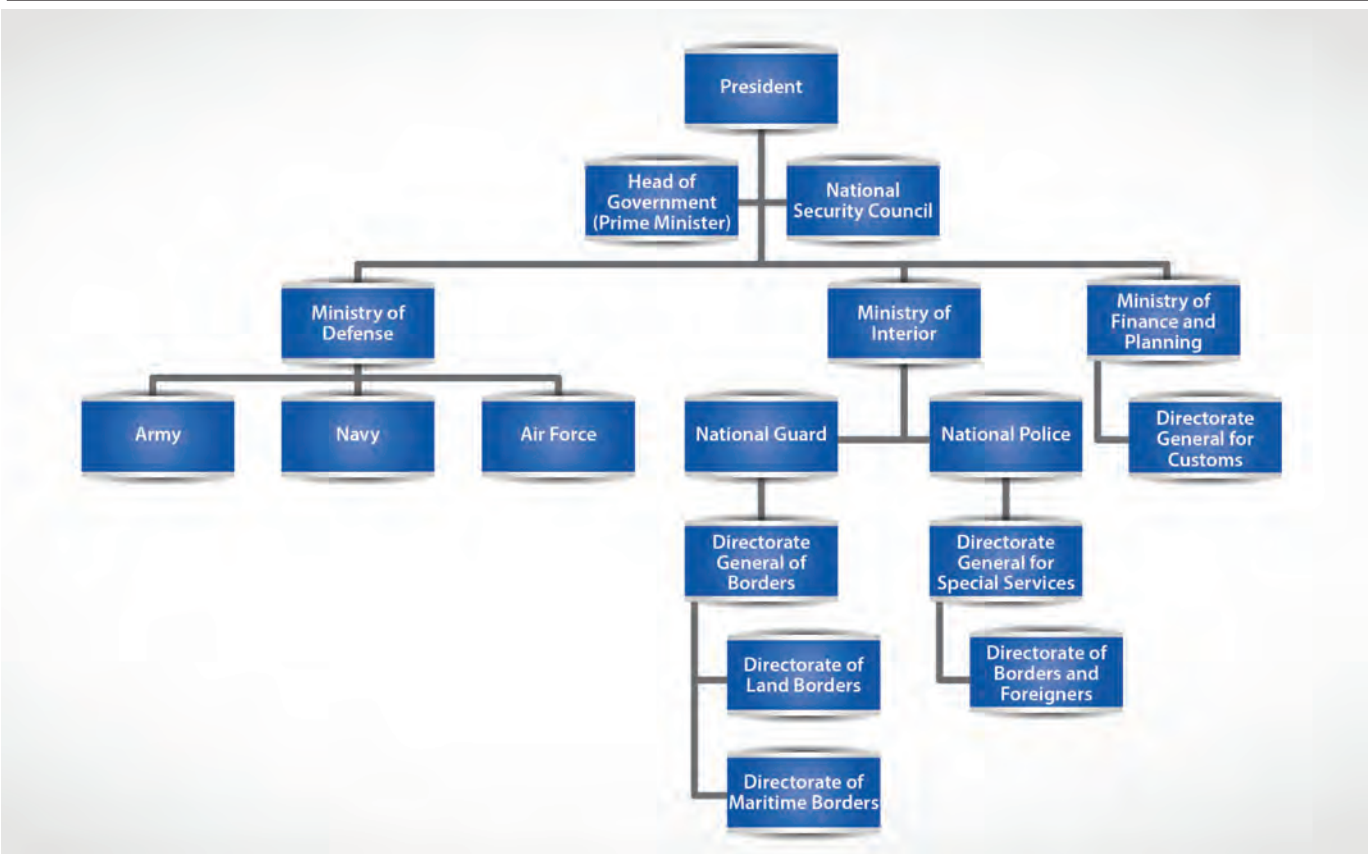
In some cases, elected members of the community are invited to participate. The local security committees also transmit information, issues, and solutions up the chain of command to the wilaya-level security committees. This basic model is replicated at both the wilaya and national level. The Moroccan system provides one model for enhanced cooperation on border security.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, border security is under the purview of the MOD, the MOI, and the Ministry of Finance and Planning (MFP), which oversees the Customs Directorate (see figure 11). Tunisia has no formal national border strategy, no integrated command or incident response center, and no fusion cell to share information among the entities with a border security mission, although efforts to close these gaps began in 2014. Overall, coordination among the security services since the collapse of the Ben Ali regime has “drastically improved,” and each of the border security agencies recognizes that border security and terrorism are Tunisia’s two largest threats. Cooperation with Algeria is established and has improved in the last year, but on the Libyan border, Tunisian security officials told us, “We are doing the work of two.”

The Tunisian Armed Forces, which report to the MOD, include the army, navy, and air force. The army numbers only twenty-seven thousand forces, and the navy has no deep water ships. The air force has fewer than twenty working helicopters.⁷⁵ The National Police and the National Guard together make up Tunisia’s police forces, and both are under the control of the

Figure 11. Tunisian Border Security Forces



MOI. The police operate principally in urban areas and the National Guard in rural areas. The National Guard forces number twelve thousand. It has the primary responsibility for border security in the MOI. Under the Directorate General of Borders are departments that manage maritime borders and land borders. The National Police have responsibilities at official POEs, such as airports and border crossings. The Directorate of Borders and Foreigners under the Directorate General for Special Services oversee their border functions. Under the MOI are also specialized SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics Team) units that have a tactical counterterrorism mission. These include the Brigade Anti-Terrorisme (BAT) under the National Police and the Unité Spéciale de la Garde Nationale (USGN). The Directorate General for Customs in the MFP manages customs. Customs officers are present at POEs along with the National Guard and the police. Finally, the Forest Guards, which report to the Ministry of Agriculture, also have a border security responsibility. Recruited locally, they provide information about suspicious people or situations they encounter.

Along Tunisia's land borders, which stretch 905 kilometers (562 miles) on the western side and 459 kilometers (285 miles) to the east, are nine official POEs. On the Algerian border, these are, from north to south, Melloula–Oum Tebboul, Babouch–El Aioun, Sakiet Sidi Youssef–Haddada, Haïdra, Bouchebka, and Hazoua. On the Libyan border, these are, from north to south, Ras Jdir and Dhehiba–Wazen. The southernmost POE is Borj-el Khadra, across from Ghadames, Libya.

Belts and zones determine responsibility for border security. The military has primary responsibility in the military zone—a border buffer zone—created in September 2013 in the southernmost third of the country. Movement in the border zone is monitored but not restricted. The southeastern portion has a large population, but the rest is sparsely populated. Visitors must secure a pass from the government to travel to the zone, and the army chief of staff has the authority to close the military zone if there is a threat. Military officers describe the military border zone as a success. “We believe the border zone is working well, and we think we will continue it for another year. Even the Libyans are very happy with the border buffer zone. There is very little pushback from the population, although the smugglers,” the official noted, laughing, “are unhappy.”

North of the military zone, border security is the shared responsibility of the MOI and the MOD, with National Guard forces in the lead and the army in a support and, if needed, surge function. Their force posture along the border is determined by three distinct belts. The first line of control—the first belt—is closest to the border and is controlled by the National Guard only. It features National Guard fixed posts and patrols that monitor the sectors between them. The second line of control—the second belt—features both the National Guard and the army conducting joint border patrols, airborne patrols, and electronic surveillance. The final line of control—the third belt—is the farthest inland from the border and is staffed by regular army units and Quick Response Teams, which are used to intervene in “acute situations” in any of the three zones.

The army and the National Guard operate closely together in the border regions and use the same frequencies for communications on the border.⁷⁶ In Tunisia, relationships are a bit more tense, although the National Guard and the military have a closer relationship than either the National Guard or the military have with the National Police. Coordination along the border began to improve in the 1990s on the basis of a real fear that terrorism could spill over from neighboring Algeria. But the close relationship that National Guard and military officials describe as existing today is directly the result of the collapse of the Ben Ali regime. According to a former MOD spokesman, “The coordination between the security forces has drastically improved over the last two years, especially the exchange of information.”

Under Ben Ali, himself a former interior minister, the internal security forces were at the apex of the Tunisian security apparatus and the military at the bottom. “We were always last,” one senior officer noted. “The regime did not like us,” another said. Indeed, the military’s distance from the regime was deliberately created by Tunisia’s first president, who feared a possible coup and sought to institutionalize the military’s distance from the center of power. Ben Ali continued this policy while buttressing the capabilities and size of the MOI security forces and keeping the military engaged elsewhere. In minimizing and sidelining the military, Ben Ali created a professional, apolitical institution that refused to fire on the demonstrators and emerged in post-Ben Ali Tunisia as one of the only respected institutions of the ancien régime. Mistrust of the internal security services, however, continues to run deep.⁷⁷

Corruption is a pervasive legacy of the Ben Ali regime. According to the president of the Tunisian Anti-Corruption Authority, corruption was so extensive under Ben Ali that “no square of the country was untouched.”⁷⁸ Bribes and other forms of corruption were such a common practice among customs agents that there was reportedly little effort to hide it.⁷⁹ One case uncovered after the revolution featured a customs agent who openly received into his personal bank account a regular monthly transfer equal to twice his official salary from a known smuggler. Customs officials feel that this reputation is unfair. Corruption was pervasive in the Ben Ali security apparatus, involving entire networks of customs agents, police officers, and senior officials. During that time, the lion’s share of the proceeds from bribes and other illicit activities—as much as 80 percent—went to Ben Ali and his immediate family. After the revolution, these networks continued, but the money accrued to lower level officials. Tunisians who interacted with customs agents three years after the revolution noted that demands for bribes to “facilitate” goods remain a common practice.

Another Ben Ali legacy, even three years after the revolution, is the Byzantine-like organizational structure of Ben Ali’s security apparatus, which reflects classic “coup-proofing” features that continue to hinder closer coordination.⁸⁰ Outsiders who attended meetings in the ministry after the revolution were shocked to discover that senior officials who had offices near one another or who worked on similar issues had, over the course of their careers, never met each other before these meetings. Officers who attended the military academy together but subsequently entered different institutions in the security sector reported having no contact after graduation. “This is only beginning to change now, slowly, two years after the revolution,” one officer remarked.⁸¹ Another agreed: “It is beginning to be possible to speak with former classmates.”⁸² Three years after the revolution, relationships created among young cadets at the academy, where all land forces officers—army, National Guard, police and customs—are educated together, are providing a basis for cooperation. “Our experience,” one senior officer explained, “means that we speak the same language and have the same approach.” Necessity has also played a role. The threats of terrorism and unstable borders following the Arab Spring have added impetus to overcoming the Ben Ali legacy of taboo coordination and siloed security actors.

In addition to their border security mission, the MOD and MOI share responsibility for detecting, deterring, and preventing terrorism in Tunisia. Two special units under the MOI, the BAT and the USGN, have a specific counterterrorism mission, the BAT focused mostly on urban centers, though either unit can be called upon to support the other. These specialized MOI forces, however, do not coordinate with their counterparts in the armed forces.

Coordination and information sharing does occur regularly at the battalion (regional) and at the central levels. At the battalion level there are the so-called white exercises, in which army and security forces can “check their capabilities.” Meetings are held monthly or when specific threats arise and do not require higher-level authorization. Many of the protocols for information shar-

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ing, white exercises, and regular meetings were developed in the 1990s, when the current security architecture for the borders was first developed. Security officials indicated that the number of meetings and exercises have increased since the revolution. Significant gaps remain, however.

No formalized structure of communication is in place beyond shared frequencies on the border. Information exchanges and even communications tend to occur informally through personal networks rather than official structures, particularly at national or headquarters levels. As one military officer noted, “We can solve many problems [now] by just picking up the phone.” But the exchange of information alone “is not sufficient,” a retired general officer remarked. “In field operations,” he added, “you need unity of command. We need to gather the security services together in a joint command in order to better foresee threats.”

A particularly significant gap is the lack of a centralized incident response capability in the event of a serious security threat or incident—as was the case in the attack on the U.S. Embassy in September 2012. The failure of Tunisia’s security forces to respond quickly and effectively exposed serious gaps in institutional capacity—particularly in situational awareness, command and control, and coordination among the security forces and among senior government leaders. Amazingly, while the attacks were under way, many senior leaders and commanders were completely in the dark about the severity of the attack or about actions being taken to respond.⁸³ A senior military officer was moved to tears that the attack had been allowed to escalate and that the army had not been notified to deploy in time to prevent the destruction of the school and the damage to the embassy compound. Experienced police were embarrassed and demoralized by the very public failure of their institution to do its job and protect such a high-profile location. “As the protestors marched by, we just stood there,” one police officer said, “waiting for instructions.”⁸⁴

Tunisian security officials are candid about the threats they face and the gaps in capacity and equipment they need to fill. The army’s principal needs are training, equipment, and enhanced joint operations. The National Guard emphasized the lack of surveillance capabilities and the ability to transmit information quickly to where it is needed on the borders. “What we need,” a senior security official concluded, is “smart borders.”

The Maritime Dimension

It is easy to forget that maritime borders are a critical component of the border security landscape in North Africa. But “terrorists look for holes in Tunisia’s security architecture,” a senior Tunisian security official explained, “and they see the sea as one of them.”⁸⁵ The seizure of an arms shipment of some thirty guns of different caliber destined for two Algerians in Kasserine on a car ferry transiting from Marseilles to the Tunisian port of La Goulette on June 2, 2014, underscores the threat.⁸⁶ Nor was this an isolated incident. A routine inspection had caught the shipment, the third such in fifteen days.⁸⁷

Most international attention is paid to what is leaving North Africa for destinations in Europe. Traffic in the other direction is also significant, however. The sea lanes around Tunisia especially are heavily trafficked by all manner of international commercial vessels, including tankers. According to the Tunisian MOD, 350 merchant vessels pass Tunisia each day, the vast majority of these off the northern and northeastern coasts. Some forty oil tankers pass Tunisia’s coastline on a daily basis. Although most of the traffic is ordinary maritime commerce, the fear is that terrorist groups will exploit maritime border gaps as they have done on land and truly “go to sea.” These concerns are echoed by the Moroccan authorities, who fear that “migrants could also be terrorists.”

According to the Tunisian MOD, 350 merchant vessels pass Tunisia each day. Some forty oil tankers pass Tunisia’s coastline on a daily basis. Although most of the traffic is ordinary maritime commerce, the fear is that terrorist groups will exploit maritime border gaps as they have done on land.

A serious and more immediate challenge is the increasing number of migrants, primarily from Libya but also from Tunisia, attempting to reach Europe by sea. Moroccan authorities faced a similar challenge with migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia but have taken steps that appear to have reduced the number of would-be migrants to Europe. According to a Moroccan MOI official, “We used to have a major issue with human smuggling. Migrants attempting to get to Europe used us in the past as a transit platform. However, this has been shrunk by 90 percent in recent years. We did this by sealing the borders, both land borders and the coast.”

Along the Tunisian coastline, offshore narcotics smuggling is minimal, but along the Moroccan and western Algerian coast, it is a significant challenge. Drug smugglers rely on go-fasts along the coast. Narcotics are trafficked to Spain using helicopters and small aircraft. The extent of narcotics smuggling in this manner is unclear, though the cannabis resin that washes ashore with some regularity on Algeria’s beaches suggests a significant maritime smuggling pathway there.

Morocco’s maritime border management mirrors its land capabilities. The gendarmerie operates a coast guard unit tasked with countering narcotics smuggling and illegal immigration. In these roles, the gendarmerie unit reportedly partners with other government ministries, including Fisheries, Finance (customs), and possibly the Moroccan coast guard under the command of the navy, separate from the gendarmerie maritime unit.⁸⁸ The Royal Moroccan Navy (Marine Royale) forces provide the first line of defense at sea, and on shore, the FAM patrols the nation’s beaches. The overall force structure is based on a “coherent approach, involving a lot of physical presence,” a Moroccan official explained.

The Algerian National Navy is responsible for guarding the nation’s 998-kilometer coastline and protecting the national interest at sea in the exclusive economic zone.⁸⁹ The six-thousand-man force is split between three military districts: east, center, and west.⁹⁰ The majority of the navy’s missions center on surveillance, maritime security, and coastal defense and operate from six main bases: Algiers, Annaba, Mers el-Kebir, Oran, Skikda, and Tamentfoust. The navy also commands the Algerian coast guard (Service National des Garde-Côtes), which is responsible for “all matters relating to the police of navigation and fisheries, seafarers, ships, exploitation of marine resources, and in general, everything that concerns the public maritime domain and the sea.”⁹¹

In Tunisia, maritime border security is the responsibility of the MOD, MOI, and customs (under the MOF). The force structure on the maritime border mirrors the three belts on the land border. On the maritime border, in the first belt, closest to shore, navy forces work with maritime guard and customs forces deployed at coastal stations and rely on fast-response boats with boarding teams for quick response interdiction. The second belt, at a medium range from the shore, is patrolled by navy forces alone. In the final belt, farthest from shore, Navy forces act alone, using off-shore patrol vessels to maintain a vigilant watch over vessels approaching Tunisia’s coastline. One important difference between the land and maritime border security force structure is that the navy does have arrest authority at sea—and thus no MOI presence is needed onboard navy vessels.

On the maritime frontier in the Maghreb, human and drug smuggling have long been central issues. More recently, however, the growing concern about transnational terrorist networks in the region has lent new urgency to managing cross-border flows at sea.

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Regional Cooperation and Assistance: The Missing Link

Border security in North Africa hinges not only on national capabilities but also on international cooperation. Simply put, it is no longer possible to go it alone on borders in North Africa. When systems exist side by side but do not coordinate or collaborate, security vacuums and opportunities are created that can be and are exploited by militant actors in the region. The degree of international coordination in North Africa differs dramatically, based on both political relationships

and the commonality of threats. Coordination between Tunisia and Algeria occurs regularly and seems to be deepening. Concerns in both Tunis and Algiers about the security situation in the Tunisian borderlands have helped drive regular information sharing and coordinated operations. In stark contrast, the Algerians and the Moroccans barely communicate, and their cooperation is restricted to customs issues and the repatriation of border tribesmen. However, threats are growing rapidly in the Maghreb, and even the relative isolation of Morocco's border with Algeria may not be enough to protect it. Old operational models only go so far in the new Maghreb.

The closest cooperative relationship among the North African states is between Tunisia and Algeria. Tunisian officials suggested that it might serve as a model for the region. The focus of the relationship is their shared border, where they “face the same threats, both old and new.” While cooperation has been ongoing since the 1990s, it has deepened over the last three years, largely due to the developing terrorist threat along the Tunisian–Algerian border. The partnership is grounded in bilateral agreements, commissions, and increasingly frequent ministerial visits. Information sharing and operational coordination occur at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. From the chief of the army down to more junior officers, communication between counterparts on each side of the border is regular. Officials in both Tunisia and Algeria have noted the improvement in communication and the importance of deepened trust between units assigned to their shared border.

Recently, Algeria and Tunisia moved to formalize their cooperation and coordination. In an agreement signed on May 27, 2014, the states committed to hold bilateral meetings between relevant government agencies in charge of border security; coordinate field operations and engage in operational cooperation to secure borders to fight terrorism, smuggling, and cross-border crime; establish a partnership for information sharing on border security issues; and exchange experiences on border security and undertake specialized training to enhance the competency of military officers in joint activities.⁹²

Algeria's cooperation and coordination with Tunisia contrasts starkly with its relationship with Morocco. The lack of cooperation arises from the long-standing political tensions between the two countries. It is widely believed that these tensions, especially regarding the Western Sahara and drug trafficking, “have to be solved before Morocco and Algeria can cooperate on any other issues.”

Evidence indicates some low-level cooperation between the countries. When it does occur, it is either extremely technical, such as collaboration between the headquarters components of the Algerian and Moroccan customs directorates, or limited to specific incidents, such as the repatriation of citizens who have wandered across the border. While minimal, coordination does exist and may serve as a platform, albeit in a very limited form, for further coordination and trust building in the future.

For its part, the government of Morocco recognizes that many of the threats along the Morocco–Algeria border can only be addressed through collaboration with neighboring countries. As one Moroccan official stated, “Al-Qaeda, the Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, and smugglers; these threats are transnational, our responses can't be national.”

Overall, coordination and cooperation in the Maghreb is distinctly mixed and highly dependent on the existence of shared interests. The relationship between Algeria and Tunisia provides a model on cooperative border security in North Africa. That model is far from perfect, however, and has yet to prove effective in eliminating the terrorist groups in the borderlands. Morocco and Algeria are a vivid example of how not to structure a bilateral relationship. Despite this, the two nations have relatively few threats in their border areas, a consequence of luck and location more than anything else. However, Morocco's location—isolated from the rest of the Maghreb—may not be enough to ensure its protection. Binational coordination and cooperation along Morocco's border with Algeria should be a priority for officials in both Algiers and Rabat.

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Old approaches that focus exclusively on bilateral cooperation are no longer appropriate for addressing the region's new threats. What is needed is a multilateral approach to address the issues in which all North African states share a concern. Chief among these is managing the new travelers on the old routes throughout the Maghreb.

Recommendations

Broadly defined, border management in the Maghreb can be strengthened and regional border security enhanced in nine ways.

First, border security needs to be conceptualized and implemented with a regional context in mind. Currently, the states in the region share little to no information, counterparts across borders do not know each other or have never trained or interacted in an official setting, and institutions are unfamiliar with their counterpart's tactics, techniques, and procedures for border management. A significant gap is the lack of a strategic framework to bind them.

A common operating picture (COP) facilitates collaborative planning, operational cooperation, and information sharing. Security service representatives from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia evince competing perspectives on shared challenges, a tendency that has impeded cross-border security collaboration. A critical way to address this gap is to facilitate the development of a COP for North Africa. Designing a COP will, in turn, break down informational silos and build trust in a region that has little history of information exchange or cooperation.

Second, the regional border management challenges of the Maghreb are not just about improving tactical skills. A key gap is the lack of strategic thinking, planning, engagement, and response. The problems are strategic; the solutions cannot be merely tactical. And strategic thinking cannot be delivered through tactical skills training. Any capacity building at the technical, operational, and strategic levels should be conducted with counterparts from across the border—MOD, MOI, and customs. Finally, civilian officials should not be overlooked. Officials who have a border security function need to be engaged in strategy design and relationship-building across the region. Engagement builds relationships that endure in the field.

Third, the solutions to the gaps in border security cannot be addressed with off-the-shelf training. Solutions need to be tailored to the North Africa operating environment, taking into account the region's dynamic—though informal—trading networks and the deep connections between border communities in neighboring states. Of course, certain border security dynamics in North Africa mirror those in regions with similar traditions of trade and movement, but North Africa is sufficiently unique to warrant a tailored set of responses.

Fourth, although the contentious relations between Morocco and Algeria preclude the sort of cooperation necessary to secure their joint frontier, the emergence of new and shared threats in the region may make efforts to harden borders a natural point of entry for trust building and cooperation. Continued engagement in a regional setting may gradually help build relationships between the security services of these two countries.

Fifth, highly technical capacity gaps undermine efforts to ensure regional border management. Border management in rural areas is one of the most significant. Additionally, false document recognition remains a challenge. Training should improve skills, especially in border control management, to buttress security and capacity at POEs. Finally, effective air surveillance in border security efforts, and how to integrate information collected, could be addressed. New tactics, technology, and strategy for border management in North Africa should be encouraged.

Sixth, despite improvements, information sharing among security service agencies in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco remains inconsistent. Creating fusion cells, where border security service

representatives are colocated and explicitly tasked with information sharing and joint analysis, is one way to enhance border management. Shared space breeds familiarity, builds trust, and eases information sharing. Senior officials from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco have few opportunities to engage and build trust. Opportunities are needed for senior officials to engage constructively with their counterparts on current and emerging border security challenges on a regular basis.

Seventh, it is an opportune time to build on and refine existing community engagement, or sensibilization, initiatives. Efforts by North African security services to engage with border communities are only minimally effective and have in some cases collapsed. Sensibilization initiatives are generally designed to gather information on cross-border activities and to dissuade communities from smuggling. Used effectively in the Maghreb, these initiatives could draw border communities into the existing border security architecture as partners.

Eighth, corruption enables all manner of nefarious activity and must be addressed for effective border security in the Maghreb to be more than aspirational. Specialized training should be provided to security managers on international best practices in detecting and combatting corruption along international borders and to legal professionals on international best practices in prosecuting and adjudicating corruption related cases.

Finally, border management efforts that focus only on security hardening may ultimately do more harm than good. Many border communities rely on smuggling for their livelihoods. Hardening borders without providing other opportunities will increase distrust and fuel anger. Border management should be human centric. A human-centric approach to border management and border security is focused on the needs of individuals in the communities and in the border security agencies within the context of the national security priorities of the government. In practice, such an approach assesses and weighs the social, economic, and security needs of border communities and the needs of border security agencies, which are often assumed to be at odds but in practice may overlap. Such an approach would also encourage synergy among programs and avoid needless duplication or divergence of effort. Finally, such an approach should be judged by its effectiveness in securing and managing the border for all stakeholders.

Notes

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6. Algeria's 2008 census recorded the Tlemcen Wilaya population at 949,135 residents, while Morocco's 2004 census documented Oujda Prefecture's population at 477,100 and Berkane Province's at 270,328. Interviews in both Algeria and Morocco indicate that the populations in these areas—especially in Tlemcen and Oujda—are growing rapidly, including both urban centers and towns along the border.
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9. Nazim Fethi, “Smuggling Epidemic Spurs Algeria Fuel Crisis,” *Magharebia*, July 26, 2013, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/reportage/2013/07/26/reportage-01.
10. Presentation by Ghodbane Fadila Epouse Mokrani, Inspectrice Divisionnaire Sous Directrice Dlcf/Dgd, “Problematique du Trafic du Gaz-Oil Aux Frontieres,” at the Direction Generale Des Douanes—Direction de La Lutte Contre la Fraude, <http://www.mem-algeria.com>.
11. Mokrani, “Problematique du Trafic.”
12. Ibid.
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15. A journalist in the Algerian city of Tlemcen noted that close to “50 percent of youth on the border are involved in smuggling.”
16. Mount Chambi, in Tunisia, was a particularly important base for FLN fighters during the revolution, a retired Algerian military officer noted.
17. Michael Ayari, International Crisis Group, interview, Tunis, Tunisia, June 2014.
18. Tarek Kahlaoui, Institute of Strategic Studies, interview, Tunis, Tunisia, April 2014.
19. Author interview with a Tunisian police officer, Tunis, Tunisia, January 2013. See also Querine Hanlon, “Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: A Year After the Jasmine Revolution,” Special Report no. 304 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2012).
20. “Opérations de Contrebande Déjouées par les Unités sur le Terrain de la Garde Nationale,” Ministère de l’Intérieur de la République Tunisienne, March 31, 2013, <http://opendata.interieur.gov.tn/fr/catalog/operations-de-contrebande-dejouees-par-les-unites-sur-le-terrain-de-la-garde-nationale>.
21. Michael Ayari, interview, Tunis, Tunisia, June 2014.
22. According to smugglers in the Tunisian town of Thala, Algerian security service personnel sometimes chase them two to three hundred meters inside Tunisia.
23. Tarek Kahlaoui, interview, April 2014.
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30. Alaya Allani, interview, Tunis, Tunisia, April 2014.
31. “Tunisia: Border Guards Reportedly Kill Three ‘Terrorists’ Coming from Algeria,” Republic of Tunisia Radio, May 18, 2000, trans. by BBC Worldwide Monitoring, LexisNexusAcademic; “Three Tunisian Soldiers Killed in Terrorist Explosion on Border with Algeria,” *El Watan* (Algeria), October 27, 2001, LexisNexusAcademic; “Explosives Trafficking Ring Broken up in Tunisia,” *Le Quotidien d’Oran* (Algeria), November 7, 2002, LexisNexusAcademic.
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38. Wolfram Lacher, “Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region,” in *Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara*, ed. Frederic Wehrey and Anouar Boukhars (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).
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48. Tarek Kahlaoui, interview, April 2014.
49. Morten Bøås, “Guns, Money and Prayers: AQIM’s Blueprint for Securing Control of Northern Mali,” *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 4 (April 2014).
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51. “Once the terrorism threat emerged in Algeria, we completely reorganized our security system. In 1992, Algeria’s police corps for the entire country was smaller than the number of police in Casablanca! But once terrorism emerged as a threat, we had to completely change our security system. We had to do new training and acquire new equipment, not just for the police, but also for the gendarmerie and the army.” Interview, former Algerian diplomat and an Algerian security expert in Casablanca, Morocco, June 2013.
52. Ben Ahmad, “Algeria Closes Most of its Land Borders.”
53. In July 2013, the army was tasked with fighting drug trafficking, termed by one Algerian official as the nation’s “number one security threat.” Lamine Chikhi, “Algeria Puts Army in Charge of Fighting Drug Trafficking,” *Reuters.com*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/25/us-algeria-drugs-trafficking-idUSBRE96O0ZX20130725>.
54. Article 25 of the Algerian Constitution of 1996 (Amended in 2008): “La consolidation et le développement du potentiel de défense de la Nation s’organisent autour de l’Armée Nationale Populaire. L’Armée Nationale Populaire a pour mission permanente la sauvegarde de l’indépendance nationale et la défense de la souveraineté nationale. Elle est chargée d’assurer la défense de l’unité et de l’intégrité territoriale du pays, ainsi que la protection de son espace terrestre, de son espace aérien et des différentes zones de son domaine maritime.”
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57. According to an Algerian customs official, there are around eighty surveillance posts at present. A number of posts are also in the process of being built.
58. “Lazreg Ghali, Directeur de la Police des Frontières, ‘2766 étrangers ont été refoulés en 2012,’” *Algerie360.com*, February 13, 2014, <http://www.algerie360.com/algerie/nation/lazreg-ghalidirecteur-de-la-police-des-frontieres-2766-etrangeurs-ont-ete-refoules-en-2012/>.
59. These customs observation posts have six main tasks: First is observing and monitoring the movement of merchandise, its means of transport, and those transporting it and signaling to the customs mobile units and GGF units all actions which might involve fraud entering or leaving Algerian territory. Second is monitoring, identifying, and repressing all customs offenses, especially regarding matters of contraband smuggling and drug trafficking. Third is ensuring strict enforcement of Articles 60 and 61 of the Customs Code. Fourth is supporting and assisting other brigades. Fifth is informing customs teams operating in the second line of defense on the movements and suspicious border crossings of goods, people, and means of transport. Sixth is developing and

- strengthening consultation and coordination with the GGF. Mokrani, “Problematic du Trafic.” See also Walid Ramzi, “Algeria Takes Aim at Drug Rings,” *Magharebia*, November 12, 2013, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/11/12/feature-04.
60. Ramzi, “Algeria Takes Aim at Drug Rings.”
 61. “Seize Postes de Surveillance Installés en un Mois à Tébessa,” *Horizons: Quotidien National D’information*, June 17, 2014, <http://www.horizons-dz.com/?Seize-postes-de-surveillance>.
 62. One smuggler in Maghnia explained, “The general population and especially the wholesalers and retailers here have protested against the checkpoint. It is what has caused the rise in prices for all products.”
 63. “Security and Foreign Forces, Algeria,” Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, Defense and Security Intelligence and Analysis, IHS Jane’s, May 21, 2014.
 64. When a GGF official was asked to define combined operations, he noted they are when “we do the work together, we go together.”
 65. Derek Lutterbeck, “The Paradox of Gendarmeries: Between Expansion, Demilitarization and Dissolution,” SSR Paper 8, Center for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, 2013, 43.
 66. Khadija Elmadmad, “La Gestion des Frontières au Maroc” (Florence: European University Institute, 2007), 8.
 67. “Chapter Seven,” 337; “Security and Foreign Forces, Algeria.”
 68. Elmadmad, “La Gestion,” 9.
 69. “Security and Foreign Forces, Algeria”; “Chapter Seven,” 337.
 70. “Security and Foreign Forces, Morocco,” Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, May 19, 2014; “Chapter Seven,” 335.
 71. “Security and Foreign Forces, Morocco.”
 72. Lutterbeck, *The Paradox of Gendarmeries*, 43.
 73. Unusual for the region, Morocco’s customs administration has a well-organized, easy to navigate, informative website. See “Administration des Douanes et Impôts Indirects,” <http://www.douane.gov.ma>.
 74. Author interview with a senior Moroccan Ministry of Interior official in Rabat, Morocco, May 2014.
 75. “Chapter Seven,” 352; Ellen Knickmeyer, “Just Whose Side Are Arab Armies On, Anyway?” Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, January 28, 2011, <http://pulitzercenter.org/articles/arab-armies-tunisia-military-egypt-yemen?format=print>.
 76. MOI officials were careful to emphasize that shared frequencies for communication between the MOI and the MOD occurred only in the field.
 77. Hanlon, “Security Sector Reform.”
 78. Samir Annabi, interview, Tunis, Tunisia, March 2014.
 79. According to Samir Annabi, the three most corrupt activities under Ben Ali were government procurement, state farms, and customs.
 80. Hanlon, “Security Sector Reform.”
 81. Author interview with senior Tunisian military officers in Tunis, Tunisia, January 2013.
 82. Author interview with Tunisian police officers in Tunis, Tunisia, January 2013.
 83. See Querine Hanlon, “Dismantling Tunisia’s Security Apparatus: The SSR Challenges in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia,” (forthcoming 2015).
 84. Author interviews with Tunisian police officers in Tunis, Tunisia, January 2013.
 85. Author interview with Tunisian military officers in Tunis, Tunisia, May 2014.
 86. “Saisie de 30 armes.”
 87. “Port la Goulette: Mise en Échec d’une Tentative d’Introduction d’Arme à Feu en Tunisie,” Shems FM Online, June 2, 2014, <http://www.shemsfm.net/fr/actualite/port-la-goulette-mise-en-echec-d-une-tentative-d-introduction-d-arme-a-feu-en-tunisie-82663>; “Tunisie: Les Armes Saisies à La Goulette Destinées à un Algérien à Kasserine,” Kapitalis, June 2, 2014, <http://www.kapitalis.com/societe/22656-tunisie-les-armes-saisies-a-la-goulette-destinees-a-un-algerien-a-kasserine.html>; “Société: Saisie d’une Quantité d’Armes au Port de La Goulette,” Kapitalis, June 2, 2014, <http://www.kapitalis.com/societe/22649-societe-saisie-d-une-quantite-d-armes-au-port-de-la-goulette.html>.
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In the wake of the Arab Spring, border security in North Africa is newly dangerous. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco face a brave and complex new world in which the borders, rather than protecting the states, are a challenge and a threat. When border management systems exist side by side—as those in the Maghreb do—but do not coordinate or collaborate, they create security vacuums and opportunities that can be and are exploited by nefarious actors in the region. Old approaches that focus exclusively on bilateral cooperation are thus no longer appropriate in the face of an increasing illicit drug trade and in the presence of terrorist groups. What is needed to address the new threats in the region—issues about which all North African states are concerned—are multilateral, cross-border strategies.

Of Related Interest

- *Managing Conflict in a World Adrift* edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (USIP Press, 2015)
- *Illicit Trafficking and Libya's Transition: Profits and Losses* by Mark Shaw and Fiona Mangan (Peaceworks, February 2014)
- *Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: A Year after the Jasmine Revolution* by Querine Hanlon (Special Report, March 2012)
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