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# U.S. Policy Toward North Africa

By

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee: I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss with you U.S. policy toward, and our relations with the countries of North Africa.

North Africa is in many ways a microcosm of the developing world. Its societies are at different stages of economic development and are responding in different ways to the demands being made on their governments for political participation and economic well-being. Algeria confronts a violent insurgency brought on in part by the failure of the promises of revolutionary socialism; it highlights the challenges posed by political Islam. Libya is a rogue state rightly sanctioned by the international community for sponsoring unpardonable acts of terrorism. Tunisia and Morocco, more traditional states with a history quite divergent from that of their neighbors, are facing the challenges of development in their own unique fashion.

President Clinton and Secretary Christopher have outlined the broad basic principles that frame our foreign policy: the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights together with the fostering of market-led economic development and the encouragement of regional policies that promote stability. As will become clear in the course of my testimony, Mr. Chairman, those principles animate and are fully integrated into U.S. policy toward the states of the Maghreb [the Arabic name for northwest Africa].

Mr. Chairman, before moving on to address the specifics of our relations with the countries of the region, I'd like to say a few words about the phenomenon of political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism in North Africa. This tendency—it is too diffuse and varied to be called a movement—shows a variety of faces in the Maghreb, ranging from violent confrontation in Algeria to nuanced forms of interaction with traditional leadership in Morocco. Local conditions largely determine the character of each country's Islamists, and we on the outside need to be careful to avoid sweeping characterizations of a complex phenomenon.

While a major component of political Islam in the Maghreb is dissatisfaction with socioeconomic conditions, another factor fueling this tendency is a search for a unique identity grounded in tradition. The legacy of colonialism and the rise and fall of intellectual tides that have swept the Arab world—socialism and Pan-Arabism among them—have left some in these societies feeling adrift as they confront the challenges of the modern world. It is worthwhile to make a few basic points concerning our approach to this phenomenon.

- Islam, one of the world's great religions, is not our enemy, and we are not its enemy.
- U.S. policy is firmly opposed to fanaticism and extremism, whether religious or secular in nature. We resolutely oppose those who preach intolerance, abuse human rights, or seek to impose their will on others by violence.

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- While the United States recognizes that each country has its own unique path to both development and identity, we will support the values of democracy, pluralism, and respect for individual human rights and the rule of law that are part of who we are as a nation.

Though the excesses of some Islamist political movements in North Africa attract a great deal of attention, they should not obscure our many and long-standing common interests with the countries of North Africa. Our efforts have and will continue to make a difference in this important part of the world. Morocco and Tunisia have played vital roles in fostering the Arab-Israeli peace process, a key area of U.S. foreign policy, and Morocco has recently established formal links to Israel. Let me now turn to the individual nations and outline for you some of the challenges we face.

## ALGERIA

The United States remains concerned over the situation in Algeria. There are some recent positive developments, which are encouraging, but violence between the regime's security forces and armed insurgents has steadily risen since the suspension of the electoral process in 1992 and the banning of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). A renewed government offensive last April failed to crush the insurgency. Daily attacks on police, military targets, and civilians continue and have become more lethal. The Algerian Government recently indicated that over 10,000 have died so far.

Algerian society as a whole is paying the price for this increasingly brutal internal conflict. A relatively new and virulent band of Islamic extremists called the Armed Islamic Group has carried out a campaign of terror and intimidation against innocent Algerians, including journalists, academics, and political figures as well as foreign residents of Algeria. It is difficult to understand how these reprehensible acts of terrorism advance in any way the principles of Islam, a religion which preaches tolerance and respect for human life. [The Armed Islamic Group received worldwide attention when four of its members hijacked a Paris-bound Airbus at the Algiers airport on 24 December 1994 and were subsequently killed on 26 December 1994 at the Marseille airport when French commandos stormed the airliner.] There can be no justification for such actions. Islamist figures who are sincere about finding a nonviolent solution to Algeria's problems should clearly disassociate themselves from this type of blind fanaticism.

At the same time, excesses by government security forces in their efforts to contain the insurgency continue. We are disturbed by reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, and detention without trial. The United States condemns violations of basic human rights by all sides. Algeria's problems will not be solved by an endless cycle of violence and counterviolence, atrocity, and counter-atrocity. Algeria's crisis is rooted in frustration arising from political exclusion, economic misery, and social injustice—conditions which have facilitated the growth of the armed Islamist insurgency. The evidence suggests that large numbers of Algerians seek a more meaningful voice in their political system and the opportunity to build a better life. The failure of security measures alone to end Algeria's crisis is testimony to the depth of such feelings. Any realistic hope for ending the crisis peacefully must respond to them.

We thus applaud the current government's efforts to transform Algeria's stagnant economy into a market-based system capable of fulfilling the needs of its people. The decision to sign and implement an economic reform program with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last spring was an important first step. The United States encouraged the Algerian Government in its negotiations with the IMF and participated in a Paris Club rescheduling of its official debts on favorable terms.

Economic performance has improved under the IMF-sponsored program. The government has begun to implement recommended structural reforms as well as fiscal and monetary policy

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measures in a manner which has drawn favorable comment from the IMF and many Algerians. We support this approach, which is essential for eventual economic recovery and for the long-term well-being of the Algerian people.

Economic measures, however, can only be part of the solution. Ultimately, the many Algerians who have become alienated by past governmental policies must be convinced that they will be able, in a meaningful way, to participate in a process which can lead to national reconciliation. The U.S. Government has thus repeatedly stressed to Algerian leaders at the highest levels the need for concrete steps to establish a dialogue with opposition elements—secular and Islamist—willing to work toward a nonviolent solution to Algeria's crisis. Such a strategy offers the best chance to reinforce pragmatic tendencies within the Islamist movement and to marginalize the most violent extremists.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the U.S. Government is encouraged by renewed efforts to negotiate a peaceful solution, including President Zeroual's decision earlier this month to release from prison Abassi Madani and Ali Belhadj—the two principal leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front generally referred to as the FIS or "fees"—along with three members of the FIS executive bureau. This decision comes amid other signs of greater interest on the part of President Zeroual and FIS leaders in moving toward dialogue. These moves, which we and such interested countries as France, Spain, and Italy have welcomed, offer hope for the emergence of a political process of national reconciliation.

Numerous obstacles remain. Hardliners in the military and in the Islamist opposition may act to block any movement toward compromise. The regime, Islamist opposition leaders, and Algeria's other political parties which participate in any negotiations, will need to overcome the distrust and animosity which have deepened over two and a half years of bloodshed. All participants in the dialogue will face the challenge of designing a formula which gives all Algerians a meaningful stake in its success.

Notwithstanding these problems, these recent developments offer the first—albeit tentative—indications that a negotiated solution to the crisis might be possible. We have used this opportunity to reiterate our message on the need for all parties to engage in a process which broadens political participation, prepares for an eventual return to elections, and protects the rights of all Algerians.

Those who say that the United States is resigned to—or is willing to condone—a victory of extremism in Algeria are wrong. They clearly are not listening to what we are saying. Beyond the far-reaching consequences for Algeria itself, further radical Islamist gains there could embolden extremists in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco—key U.S. allies in the region. Instability in Algeria could provoke an influx of refugees into France and elsewhere in Western Europe.

The goal of U.S. policy toward Algeria is to avoid such developments. The question is—"how?" We are convinced that attempts to suppress the insurgency through military means alone will prove insufficient. That is the lesson of the past two years. The best hope for a solution that will guarantee Algeria's internal peace and prospects, as well as its contribution to long-term regional stability, lies not in a strategy of repression, but in one of inclusion and reconciliation.

## TUNISIA

Having previously had the honor of serving as U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our appreciation for Tunisia's long-standing commitment to forging a lasting peace in the Middle East. In October of last year, Tunisia was the first Arab country to host a multilateral working group session of the Middle East peace process. Tunisia has offered to host the arms control and disarmament working group in December.

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Tunisia's commitment to peace is not just confined to the Arab world. As this year's president of the Organization of African Unity, Tunisia has dispatched an advance party of military officers to Kigali who are paving the way for some 958 peacekeepers scheduled to arrive in Rwanda shortly. The Tunisians are seasoned peacekeepers with experience in Somalia and Cambodia.

Tunisia is a testament to the success that assistance programs can achieve. After 40 years and some \$1.5 billion in funding for economic and social programs, Tunisia has in a sense "graduated" from U.S. assistance and is now in the enviable position of being able to offer assistance and training to lesser developed countries. Foreign military financing for Tunisia ended in FY 1994, but Tunisia remains eligible for excess defense articles and military education programs. I am pleased to report that the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce has grown in size and effectiveness since my departure in 1991, in step with the rising confidence and activity of the private sector.

We will remain supportive of Tunisia's commitment to enlarge the private sector's role in its economic modernization program. Our housing loan guarantee program reflects the maturity of our bilateral economic relationship and the transition Tunisia has made toward an alliance based more on trade and investment than foreign aid.

When I was last here before you in March, Tunisia was two weeks away from presidential and parliamentary elections. Let me review the results of those elections. President Ben Ali was re-elected to a second five-year term capturing 99.91 percent of the vote in what was widely viewed as a predetermined outcome. Political observers on the scene reported some incidents of inappropriate election activities such as the removal or closure of some voting stations. Two presidential candidates were imprisoned for a period of time and then released. On the other hand, these elections saw 19 seats go to opposition parties, making the current parliament the first to contain representation by the opposition.

The economic development of Tunisia is the achievement of a well-educated and hard-working population with a vigorous middle class. This is a principal strength of Tunisian society. We believe that Tunisians want and deserve the kind of open political system that goes hand-in-hand with the stability and prosperity so evident in the country today. We also believe it should be possible to handle challenges from the extremes—even in this volatile part of the world—without compromising these principles. This is the basis of our ongoing dialogue with Tunisia on human rights and democracy.

## MOROCCO

Let me now turn to Morocco, a country that we have long relied upon as a stable and constructive force in the region. The United States and Morocco have one of our oldest diplomatic relationships, one that has evolved constructively toward cooperation on key U.S. foreign policy goals—Arab-Israeli peace, security in the Persian Gulf, and moderation in North Africa. Morocco and Israel announced on September 1 their decision to open liaison offices in one another's countries. This action further advances both the Arab-Israeli peace process and the important goal of full normalization of ties between Arab states and Israel. Together with steady progress in the cultural, religious, and commercial fields between Morocco and Israel, it is a testament to the vital role Morocco has and will continue to play in forging a comprehensive Middle East peace.

Under King Hassan's leadership, Morocco has implemented sound economic policies that are now bearing fruit in an expansion of the private sector and increasing interest from international investors. Morocco will host the Middle East and North Africa economic summit conference in Casablanca from October 30 to November 1, an event that will advance the economic potential of the region and build on the political momentum of the peace process.

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U.S. security and economic assistance to Morocco has been a significant component of our bilateral relations, and, though security assistance has been greatly reduced, we continue to provide economic assistance to help Morocco meet its important development goals. Morocco's continued eligibility for excess defense articles under the Southern Region Amendment will allow us to continue our military cooperation that has yielded concrete benefits in the Gulf war, where Morocco was the first Arab country to commit troops, and in Somalia, where Morocco made a significant contribution to UNOSOM.

Morocco has made progress in the areas of human rights and democratization by establishing a Deputy Minister for Human Rights, proclaiming an amnesty for political prisoners, and legitimizing the use of the Berber languages during this past year. But problems remain. We continue to receive credible reports of torture, restrictions on freedom of speech and the press, and a lack of access to a fair trial. While King Hassan has spoken of his commitment to constitutional democracy, the results have been uneven. In the first round of parliamentary elections last year, opposition parties did very well, and these elections received generally favorable marks from international observers. The second round of "indirect" elections reversed these gains amid widespread charges of manipulation. Working with the Moroccan Government to advance the process of institutional democratization is a top U.S. priority.

Moroccan society is clearly evolving from its traditional agrarian base into a more urbanized and politicized nation, a trend we see throughout the region. King Hassan's challenge is to manage this transition, and he enjoys important advantages, not the least of which is a high degree of consensus around the monarchy as a central institution in Moroccan political and religious life. Islamic militancy in Morocco takes the form of various social and student movements, some of them legal and others suppressed, but focused largely on socioeconomic issues. U.S. policy in Morocco seeks to preserve the long friendship and cooperation we enjoy on a variety of issues and to encourage Morocco's role as a stable anchor in the region.

## LIBYA

Turning to Libya, the challenge that we face in dealing with Colonel Qadhafi's Libya is of an entirely different nature than that which we confront elsewhere in the Maghreb. Libya's behavior under Qadhafi has placed it outside the parameters of acceptable interstate action, resulting in international and unilateral sanctions.

The current focus of our attention regarding Libya is, of course, the Pan Am 103 and UTA 772 bombings and our insistence that Libya comply fully with the UN Security Council's demands concerning these horrendous crimes. We are now working with the international community to ensure effective implementation of the sanctions against Libya. We reserve the right, however, to seek even stronger measures—including a worldwide oil embargo—if Libya continues to defy the demands of the international community.

Qadhafi's preemptive strike against alleged coup plotters in October 1993 and the security crackdown that followed demonstrate his firm control over the Libyan regime. Qadhafi's public calls for the murder of Libyan dissidents—in Libya or abroad—demonstrate his continued willingness to employ terrorism as a tool of Libyan policy. Libya is a prime suspect in the December 1993 disappearance of dissident Mansur Kikhya from Cairo.

We have declined to conduct a direct dialogue with Libya since the 1986 bombing of a Berlin discotheque. Libya's continued solicitation of intermediaries and disingenuous "compromise" proposals are attempts to evade full compliance with UN Security Council demands. Let me state as clearly as I know how: the United States is not interested in such ploys. We insist upon full compliance with UN Security Council resolutions 731, 748, and 883. Libya must:

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- Surrender the two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing for trial in the United States or United Kingdom,
  - Cooperate fully with U.S., British, and French investigations into the Pan Am and UTA bombings,
  - Compensate the victims of Pan Am 103, and
  - Sever all ties to terrorism.

The resolutions also make clear that the channel for communication on these subjects is the Secretary General of the United Nations.

We also desire to see Libya end support for destabilization activities, abandon chemical weapons and other nonconventional warfare programs, and cease pursuit of offensive ballistic missile capabilities.

## **WESTERN SAHARA**

Mr. Chairman, I would like to close my prepared remarks with a few words about the still unresolved Western Sahara mediation. This former Spanish colony, as you well know, is disputed territory awaiting implementation of a UN-planned referendum to determine its final status. We consider it important that any referendum organized by the UN be perceived as free and fair so that the results will be respected and enduring and contribute to the stability of the region. The United States has worked with the Secretary General and other members of the Security Council to try to bring this about.

Some progress has followed passage of UN Security Council Resolution 907 on March 29, 1994. MINURSO has collected tens of thousands of voter registration applications and has actually registered the first several hundred potential voters in the referendum. The Secretary General reported to the Security Council in July his satisfaction with the progress achieved and his intent to provide a final report, due shortly, that would assess the prospects for a vote and set a date for the referendum.

Logistical and technical problems have delayed MINURSO's work more than we would have liked, and we hope the start which has been made this summer will gain momentum. The U.S., while continuing to urge flexibility and compromise on the parties, recognizes and appreciates that continuing UN involvement is costly and that the patience of the international community is not inexhaustible on this issue. We will work hard to assist the UN in this goal, but the parties to the dispute must exhibit a parallel, sustained commitment to seeing the matter resolved.