
**The American Presence in the Maghreb Region
Its History and Dimensions**



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Received date: 30/04/2024

Accepted date: 19/05/2024

Publication date: 01/07/2024

Abstract:

This article aims to explore the Maghreb region's significance within American strategic interests by examining the mechanisms and dimensions of U.S. policy in the area. Stretching along North Africa's coast, The Maghreb region holds strategic importance to global powers, especially the United States. This study discusses the comprehensive nature of American presence in the region, encompassing economic, political, and security aspects.

This descriptive analytical study addresses the U.S. presence in the Maghreb, highlighting its various impacts on the local and regional landscapes. It reviews economic interactions, particularly in the context of the region's market and energy sector, and the political and security dimensions that govern U.S.-Maghreb relations. Understanding this American presence enhances our comprehension of current geopolitical shifts and their impact on shaping the political and economic landscape of this vital region.

Keywords: Maghreb; United States of America; American Presence; History of American Presence; Dimensions of American Presence.

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Introduction:

The Maghreb region's strategic location has historically made it a focal point for many global powers. Starting with the colonial movement led by European countries and culminating with the United States of America, the region has been a key area for extending power and influence, particularly in the quest for new spheres of influence post-World War II. This pursuit was conducted without regard for the principle of respecting other countries' spheres of influence. Notably, France considers the Maghreb its historical sphere of influence, leading to competition and rivalry with its allies. This context raises a pertinent question: What are the strategic dimensions of American policy towards the Maghreb?

To address this research question, we hypothesise that the American presence in the Maghreb results from overlapping economic and security interests, positioning American relations with the Maghreb as a strategic cornerstone in achieving U.S. political objectives. We employ a descriptive analytical method to delve into the United States' stance in the Maghreb, offering insights into the nuanced interplay of interests shaping this crucial region's political and economic landscape.

1.The Strategic Importance of the Maghreb Region:

The Maghreb region, situated in North Africa, encompasses five countries: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. This region holds significant strategic and economic value, acting as a geo-civilisation bridge connecting Africa, Europe, and the Arab world.

a. Geographical Features of the Maghreb Region:

Stretching from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, and bordered by Egypt and Sudan to the east, and Senegal, Niger, Chad, and Mali to the south, the Maghreb spans latitudes 15° to 37° North and longitudes 25° East to 17° West.

The collective land area of the Maghreb countries is approximately 5,961,783 km², accounting for about 19% of Africa's total area, 4.43% of the global land area, and 42% of the Arab world. Algeria alone makes up 41% of the Maghreb's total area. The region boasts a lengthy coastline of around 7,000 km, with about 4,200 km along the Mediterranean and 2,600 km along the Atlantic. The terrain across the Maghreb countries varies, featuring plains, mountains, plateaus, and deserts. Unlike the three countries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, Libya and Mauritania are primarily desert, except for specific areas like the Senegal River region in Mauritania and the Green Mountain in Libya (Bakhoush, 2010, pp. 76-77-78).

The climate of the Maghreb is characterised by its diversity, owing to the region's vast expanse. The northern areas enjoy a Mediterranean climate with

generally moderate temperatures, while the southern parts are marked by a desert climate, with temperature differences in Mauritania sometimes exceeding 50°. This variation correlates with a decrease in rainfall moving from north to south, featuring irregular patterns year to year (Brahimi, 1996, p.28).



Figure 1: Map of the Arab Maghreb

The source: <https://bitly.ws/3gJN3>

b. Demographic and Ideological Composition of the Maghreb's Population:

As of 2018, the population of the Maghreb countries was approximately 100 million, comprising mainly Arab and Amazigh (Berber) ethnic groups.

Arabic is the official language in all Maghreb countries, with Berber and French also widely spoken, the latter owing to the legacy of French colonialism, especially prevalent in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Mauritania (Obaid, 2007, p.17).

The majority **religion** in the Maghreb is Islam, with Muslims constituting over 98% of the population in most of these countries. Historically, Jewish communities were also present, numbering around 250,000 in 1940, many of whom have since migrated to various parts of the world, including Israel. The

largest Jewish community resides in Casablanca, Morocco, with smaller numbers in Tunisia. Algeria, Libya, and Mauritania have laws restricting their entry. Additionally, the Maghreb is home to Christian communities, including European expatriates who are contractors and employees of multinational companies, as well as those who settled during the colonial era and now reside primarily in the capitals or major cities. Additionally, there are Christian groups among the Arab or Amazigh citizens who have converted to Christianity.

c. Natural and Economic Resources of the Maghreb Countries:

The natural conditions and geological structure play a crucial role in the economic distribution among the Maghreb countries. Agriculture, tourism, and phosphate mining are significant in Morocco and Tunisia, while Algeria and Libya focus on heavy industries and oil resources. Mauritania is known for its iron resources and is also an oil exporter.

The diversity in economic resources across these countries suggests potential for cooperation, with each country finding some of its needs met within the region. There are significant oil and natural gas reserves in Libya and in the southern and south-eastern regions of Algeria, with smaller quantities in southern Tunisia (Brahimi, p.30).

Table1: Economic Resources of Maghreb Countries

Economic Resources	Mauritania	Morocco	Algeria	Tunisia	Libya
Wheat (million tons) 2018	0.340	7.3	4	1.1	0.130
Petroleum (million barrels/day) 2021	0.005	0.55	1.022	0.40	1.189
Natural Gas (million m ³) 2021	Discovery in 2021 reserves 100 trillion m ³	96	152000	157	3000
Phosphates (million tons) 2019	-----	36	3	4.1	-----
Gold reserves (tons) 2021	1.02	22.1	173.6	6.8	116.6
Iron (thousand tons) 2017	13,300	600	15	200	1750

The source: The researcher prepared this table based on data issued by the OPEC organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Ministry of Commerce, Agriculture, and Energy and Mines of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The table below presents the principal natural resources found across the five Maghreb countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania.

A noticeable variance in resources exists among these nations, with Algeria's and Libya's oil production capacity exceeding one million barrels per day.

Additionally, Algeria's substantial natural gas production contrasts with Morocco's comparatively minimal output.

This analysis reveals that Algeria and Libya are predominant in energy capabilities within the region. Mauritania, possessing the least gold reserves among the five, hosts significant iron ore mines. Morocco, renowned for its extensive phosphate mines, ranks as the world's leading phosphate producer.

Such disparities render these countries complementary to one another, with geographical proximity facilitating their collaboration. Collectively, they form a strategically significant region, attracting the attention of major global powers.

The Maghreb's geographical positioning holds substantial strategic and geopolitical value, bridging Europe and Africa. This nexus has historically facilitated civilisation and religious exchanges and served as a hub for economic and cultural interchange, primarily due to its Mediterranean facade. As a confluence point for Asia, Africa, and Europe, the Maghreb's Mediterranean coastline serves as a strategic link for numerous maritime and international trade routes, such as the Strait of Gibraltar, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Atlantic Ocean. Similarly, the Suez Canal links the Mediterranean to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, underscoring the region's role in global commerce. Remarkably, 50% of the petroleum consumed by Western Europe transits through the Mediterranean, highlighting the 100% dependence of countries like Italy, Greece, Switzerland, and Austria on petroleum shipped through the region's southern ports. A prolonged disruption in supply could precipitate economic crises in these nations.

Moreover, the Maghreb is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, underscoring the economic diversity across its member states. These resources present opportunities for collaborative projects that could benefit the region's populations. The Mediterranean Sea also plays a pivotal role in the geopolitical landscape, reflecting its sensitivity in international relations (El Harathi, 1994, p.48).

Economically and strategically vital, the Maghreb region's geopolitical significance is magnified by its energy resources and natural wealth, drawing the interest of major powers, particularly the United States.

2. American-Maghreb Relations:

a. The American interest in the Maghreb region during the Cold War:

Historically, Morocco was the first country in the Maghreb Region that recognized the United States in 1787, and the oldest extant friendship treaty between the United States and another nation was signed with Morocco - and has not been broken since then. In 1805, Tunisia appointed the first Arab ambassador to Washington. References such as "the shores of Tripoli" in the Marines' Hymn

underscore the longstanding, though sometimes tumultuous, yet always consistent relations between the regions (Zartman, 2011, p. 217).

America's post-World War II realisation of the Maghreb's strategic value, primarily as an optimal base for the southern front against the burgeoning power of the Eastern Front (formerly the Soviet Union), catalysed its interest. Factors influencing this interest included Soviet incursions into Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, the implications for America's European allies, and challenges to containment policies. Concerns over Algerian policies under Boumediene, American hostility towards Libya and its role in the region, imposing an economic blockade on it and labelling it a "state sponsor of terrorism", and the broader implications of the Arab-Israeli conflict further defined U.S. relations with the Maghreb (El Bar, Baskri, 2014, pp.37-38).

b. American interest in the Maghreb region after the Cold War:

The cessation of the Cold War prompted a strategic reassessment by Washington, surpassing outdated spheres under which the Maghreb was a French sphere of influence and engaging in a new phase of competition for dominance, aligned with evolving interests. This strategic reorientation became evident in President George Bush's August 2, 1990, address, a policy trajectory continued by President Clinton's administration. However, in the early 1990s the Maghreb remained a secondary concern in American strategic priorities. According to Richard Parker, an expert on Maghreb affairs, U.S. diplomacy in the region traditionally activated only in crisis situations, with Libya being a notable exception due to the low intensity of regional conflicts (Kodmani, 1990, pp.361-379).

Post-Cold War, an amalgamation of **regional and international dynamics** significantly heightened American strategic interests in the Maghreb region. **A pivotal factor was the Algerian crisis and its far-reaching effects.** President George H.W. Bush articulated a policy stance indicating that the United States would navigate the challenges posed by the forces identified by the International Monetary Fund. In a notable engagement, the United States sought dialogue with Anwar Haddam, a leader of the Islamic Salvation Front residing in the U.S., to delineate future bilateral relations in anticipation of the Front's potential electoral success, a scenario anticipated by orientalist scholarship (Teqmonin, 2005, p.55). However, the annulment of the electoral process in Algeria, the ascent of the armed Islamic movement, the deteriorating Franco-Algerian relations under the new military regime, and the escalation of violence within Algeria—culminating in the 1995 Paris bombings attributed to Algerian Islamists—coupled with growing NATO concerns and apprehensions within Arab states (Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt) about the situation, significantly shaped the U.S. engagement with Algeria. These developments, alongside the geopolitical shifts precipitated by the Second Gulf War, including the disintegration of Iraq and the subsequent assertion of American hegemony across the Arab domain, marked a transformative epoch in

U.S.-Algeria relations (Ben Antar, 2005, p.70). Additionally, **the political and economic** shifts towards normalisation of relations with Israel by Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania, were influenced by the intricate interplay between these nations' elites and the American administration (Belqaziz, 2004, pp. 73-75).

The Western Sahara dispute also emerged as a critical element driving American interest in the Maghreb. The United States leveraged the Moroccan-Algerian contention over Western Sahara to deepen its regional penetration, navigating a conflict historically moderated by France within the ambit of the Organization of African Unity—a dispute intimately linked with French foreign policy (Haqi, 2003, p.63).

Another consequential factor was the imposition of an air blockade on Libya, which facilitated a notable political breakthrough for the United States, enhancing its influence through proactive engagement in the Maghreb capitals and significantly impacting decision-making processes (Belqaziz, p.41).

The cataclysmic events of September 11, 2001, catalysed a decisive American intervention in the Maghreb, responding to the assault on its own soil with President George Bush's proclamation of a "just war against terrorism." This period saw the Maghreb nations swiftly aligning with the international coalition spearheaded by the United States, underscoring the multifaceted security cooperation between the United States and the regional states.

3. The dimensions and mechanisms of U.S. Policy in the Maghreb Region:

a. The Economic Dimension of U.S. Policy in the Maghreb:

Since the mid-1990s, the Maghreb has progressively garnered the attention of American economic interests, focusing on the region's substantial energy resources. This interest also aims at broadening the entry of American firms into these markets. The U.S. economic strategy in the Maghreb is characterised by two principal approaches: a multilateral framework, notably through the Eizenstat Initiative, aiming to transform the entire Maghreb into a unified market devoid of border constraints or tariffs, and a bilateral framework, through which the United States has cultivated individual trade and investment relationships with each country, with a particular emphasis on Algeria as an oil supplier (Qatt, 2017, p.134).

The Eizenstat Initiative: launched in 1998 and later revitalised under the moniker "The American Economic Program for North Africa," seeks to establish a partnership between the United States and three Maghreb countries—Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—temporarily excluding Libya and Mauritania. This initiative aims to create an American-Maghreb free trade zone, quickly advancing, especially with Algeria, following American officials' visits and American corporate investments in the Algerian oil sector, adversely affecting their European competitors. Moreover, the establishment of a free trade zone aims to provide

America, alongside its NAFTA partners, Mexico and Canada, access to an expansive Maghreb market (Benantar, 2004, p.144). This initiative was conceived in response to the strategic necessity for the U.S. to expand its influence across a broader Mediterranean sphere, extending from the Maghreb to Central Asia, encapsulating the Middle East and the Gulf region, and serving as a counterbalance to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (El Laoundi, 2003, p. 76).

In contrast to European strategies, the U.S. views the establishment of a free trade area among Maghreb nations as a prerequisite for free trade between the U.S. and these countries. Engaging with a large, unrestricted Maghreb market, home to approximately 100 million consumers, is perceived as advantageous for the United States.

The American Partnership Initiative with the Middle East: initiated in December 2002, succeeded the Eizenstat Initiative and the subsequent American Economic Partnership with North Africa, responding to the strategic realignment of U.S. policy following the events of September 11, 2001. This initiative encompasses 14 Arab countries, segmented across three regional offices: Tunisia (the Maghreb), Egypt (the Middle East), and Abu Dhabi (the Gulf), with the Tunis office overseeing Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon. Predicated on economic, political, educational, and gender pillars, the U.S. administration has allocated approximately \$293 million over four years, with the Maghreb countries receiving \$18.5 million in 2004 for educational and judicial partnership projects.

The Greater Middle East Project: an American initiative promoted throughout 2003 and formally introduced at the G8 summit in Georgia, USA, in June 2004, aims to foster political, economic, and social reforms across the Middle East. The initiative, welcoming leaders from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, and Turkey, envisages a broadened Middle East, extending to include Africa (El Mokhadeni, 2005, p.57).

The initiative encompasses three fundamental axes (El Mokhamdi, pp.63-66):

Encouraging democracy, which includes a series of reform proposals in the political realm.

Building a knowledge-based society, covering aspects related to the scientific and knowledge sectors.

Expanding economic opportunities, the most audacious axis, calling for a significant economic transformation akin to what occurred in the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The key to this transformation, of course, lies in strengthening the private sector.

Additionally, the project proposes the creation of a Middle East Bank and designated zones to bolster regional cooperation.

These initiatives have culminated in the conceptualization of a Middle Eastern market, incorporating specific cooperation programs in natural resources, technology, human resources, scientific research, and market expansion, alongside the establishment of a regional development fund.

A tacit objective of these initiatives includes integrating Israel into the region, seeking Arab recognition and making it an integral part of the regional framework.

✱ **The Dynamics of U.S.-Maghreb Economic Relations:**

Despite witnessing considerable advancements, U.S.-Maghreb economic relations remain relatively subdued when juxtaposed with European counterparts. Notably, American investments in **Algeria**, beyond the hydrocarbons sector, have not experienced growth comparable to the oil sector, positioning Algeria as the third-largest supplier of energy commodities to the United States, trailing only behind Saudi Arabia and Iraq. American officials attribute this investment reticence outside the hydrocarbons domain to an uninviting investment climate, particularly due to the persistence of the 49/51 rule, alongside the Algerian state's predominant role in the economy, which ostensibly limits the scope for private sector engagement. Conversely, **Morocco**, having entered into a Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 2004, exhibited a 52% growth in bilateral trade exchanges. However, this figure pales in comparison to its trade interactions with the European Union. **Tunisia**-U.S. trade relations are characterised by a chronic structural deficit, detrimental to Tunisia, with its principal exports to the U.S. encompassing modest quantities of lubricants, animal and vegetable oils, and selected manufactured goods. Its imports primarily include machinery, transportation equipment, foodstuffs, chemical fertilisers, raw materials, tobacco, and various other commodities. Intriguingly, these exchanges constitute merely 2% of Tunisia's external trade (Qatt, pp.134-135).

Despite the encouragement from both the United States and the European Union for Maghreb countries to implement counterterrorism measures, Washington persists in its endeavours to consolidate the Maghreb as a unified economic entity. From a longitudinal American perspective, mutual economic dependency is deemed conducive to fostering peaceful interstate relations, thereby serving as a guarantor of peace. As articulated by a former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, security initiatives in North Africa ought to be complemented by economic collaboration to imbue the region with enduring stability. However, the recurrent shortcomings in this domain cast a shadow over the prospects for a promising future (Ekovich, 2016, p.71).

b. Security Aspects of U.S. Policy in the Maghreb Region:

The Maghreb's Security Landscape:

The Maghreb region's strategic relevance is amplified by its geographical nexus, intersecting the Mediterranean, the African coast, West Africa, and the Middle East. This strategic crossroads accentuates the region's value from a security standpoint, as it grapples with an escalation in novel security threats, notably terrorist activities spearheaded by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and various other active factions. Additionally, the region has emerged as a pivotal conduit for the trafficking of illicit goods and drugs from Latin America and the African coast to global markets in Europe and the Middle East. Morocco, in particular, stands as the world's leading producer of hashish, accounting for 21% of global output (Simon, 2012, p.18).

The Maghreb has also witnessed a proliferation of arms, particularly in the aftermath of the Libyan revolution, which led to the dispersal of arms from Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Moreover, the region is experiencing a surge in illegal migration, posing a significant challenge to European societal security and identity.

U.S.-Maghreb Security Cooperation:

The events of September 11, 2001, constituted a pivotal moment in the U.S. adoption of the global war on terrorism, heightening American interest in the Maghreb as a source region for such phenomena. The Bush administration's integration of the Maghreb into its broader Middle East counterterrorism policy marked a departure from a solely bilateral approach towards viewing the region as a cohesive whole.

✦ The Atlantic-Mediterranean Security Dialogue:

The United States leveraged NATO as a platform for strategic dialogue and consultation with Maghreb nations. Launched in 1995, the Mediterranean Dialogue initiative engaged six Mediterranean countries, initially excluding Algeria due to its internal crisis, which later joined in March 2000. The initiative aimed at fostering political and security ties between NATO and these nations to enhance stability in the Mediterranean region. The dynamics of this relationship evolved following the September 11 attacks and subsequent terrorist incidents, with the partnership increasingly focused on combating international terrorism and organised crime (Ben Khalif, 2014, p.90).

✦ The Pan-Sahel Initiative:

Aimed at operational cooperation to prevent the region from becoming a sanctuary for global terrorism, this program was initiated in 2002, with a budget aimed at training and equipping military units from Chad, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, in collaboration with U.S. Special Forces and Marines. One notable operation under this initiative was the March 2004 battle that resulted in the deaths of 43 members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat,

demonstrating the initiative's partial success in preventing the establishment of terrorist safe havens in the desert (Ellis, 2004, p.462).

✦ **The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative:**

Succeeding the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2005, this program, with an annual budget of \$100 million over five years, expanded to include six additional countries: Nigeria, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. It aims to build local capacities and foster intergovernmental cooperation to eradicate terrorist groups in the Sahel, representing a comprehensive U.S. security effort in the region to combat terrorism, promote governance and democracy, counter terrorist ideology, and enhance bilateral military relations (Davis, 2007, p.154). Libya's refusal to join this initiative stemmed from its belief in its ability to independently combat terrorism within its borders.

These multifaceted U.S. efforts in the Sahel and Maghreb aim to strengthen regional counterterrorism capabilities, foster governance, democracy, and counter terrorist ideologies while enhancing military and diplomatic cooperation between the United States and the region's nations, ultimately aiming to improve the Sahel and Maghreb governments' capabilities and facilitate cooperation (Ekovich, p.71).

c. U.S. Military Engagement in the Maghreb Region:

The United States has established a military footprint in the Maghreb through the acquisition of military bases. This presence was secured via an agreement with France within the NATO framework in 1951, recognizing the Maghreb's strategic importance. The region's significance to the United States arguably surpasses that of Europe due to its geographical position facing the eastern shores of the Atlantic. In 1982, an accord with **Morocco** permitted the United States the use of Moroccan airports for landing and refuelling purposes. Morocco also engaged in joint military exercises with the U.S. Navy (Al-Zoubai, 2022, p.73). By 1978, U.S. military bases in Morocco were closed and evacuated, supplanted by U.S. Army technological programs.

Furthermore, in 1954, the United Kingdom transferred control of the strategic Wheelus Base in **Libya** to the United States, establishing it as a pivotal command centre for air force operations and a critical link in the U.S. strategic air base network. It served as a major preparation and training hub, representing the largest air and naval base within the U.S. strategic framework for the Maghreb, being the most significant military base in the region (Belqaziz, p.77). However, this base has since been evacuated and is no longer operational.

Despite the intensive collaboration between Western nations and **Algeria** in counterterrorism within North Africa, Algeria steadfastly opposes any foreign military presence on its soil. It also expresses concerns regarding the establishment

of military bases in neighbouring countries, attributed by experts to its political doctrine that eschews military alliances and external influence over its sovereignty. Dr. Ibn Moussa Jamal Eddine, a specialist in U.S.-Arab relations at the University of Algiers, describes Algeria as "a partner in the war on terrorism, not a subordinate ally" (Abderrazak, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3EqntoD>).

Tunisia has refuted claims of hosting U.S. military bases, aligning with its policy principle of neutrality as articulated by Brigadier General Mokhtar Ben Nasr, former head of Tunisia's National Counter-Terrorism Commission. In 2012, a U.S. military base was established in **Mauritania**, located in "Tiaret Asder," serving as a forward base for the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and has hosted U.S. units redeployed from Iraq.

✦ **U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM):**

Following the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative, AFRICOM was inaugurated to symbolise the enduring U.S. military presence in Africa, officially becoming operational in November 2008 with its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. This location was chosen due to the refusal of African nations, primarily Algeria and Libya, to host the command within the continent. Efforts by the United States to relocate AFRICOM to Morocco, despite offering support for Morocco's stance on Western Sahara, were unsuccessful. However, the base was successfully moved from Germany to Senegal in 2016, where it is also home to the largest French military installation.

AFRICOM has delineated its role as fostering military-to-military partnerships, with its mission focusing on disrupting transnational threats, notably terrorism, safeguarding U.S. personnel and facilities, preventing conflicts, and enhancing defence capabilities to promote regional stability and prosperity (Vilboux, 2017, p. 31).

The command's pivotal role in Libya in 2011, executing United Nations resolutions related to no-fly zones during the Libyan crisis, marked a significant operational shift. Instead of merely protecting civilians, AFRICOM actively participated in military engagements that diverged from its initial humanitarian mandate, complicating African diplomatic efforts for a political settlement.

4. The Future Trajectory of United States Policy Towards the Maghreb Region

The strategic direction of United States policy towards the Maghreb hinges on a constellation of factors intricately linked to the region's internal dynamics and the broader spectrum of global crises with potential regional repercussions.

a. Continuity in U.S. Policy towards the Maghreb:

The prevailing strategic stance of the United States within the Maghreb is anchored in its array of direct and indirect regional interests, against the backdrop

of persistent security volatility. The suite of assistance encapsulated in various initiatives epitomises the embodiment of U.S. strategic intent in the Maghreb, extending beyond mere military engagement.

Predicated on the stability observed in historical and contemporary contexts, this linear scenario presumes the perpetuation of existing paradigms into the foreseeable future, devoid of substantive transformations as postulated by more radical perspectives (Zahran, 2003, p. 206).

This scenario envisions sustained U.S. support for Maghreb governments aimed at catalysing economic and social advancement, safeguarding human rights, and bolstering democracy. Concurrently, it foresees continued collaboration with these governments to navigate present and emerging challenges, thereby ensuring regional stability and security, ultimately fostering a milieu of enhanced prosperity and stability.

The enduring nature of current U.S. policy towards the Maghreb is attributable to specific factors, notably the relatively manageable security climate within the region, as evidenced by the receding tide of terrorism threats relative to the previous decade, thanks to collaborative regional efforts aimed at curtailing and containing such phenomena alongside other emergent challenges. Despite the escalating discord between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara issue, the magnitude of security threats in the Maghreb does not ascend to a level of significant concern.

Therefore, it is anticipated that U.S. policy will persist in its existing modality of cooperation and solidarity, maintaining a consistent level of engagement without veering towards either marginalisation or intensified focus on the region. However, shifts in the global landscape could precipitate adjustments in the American policy orientation towards the Maghreb.

b. Transformation in U.S. Policy Towards the Maghreb:

The American strategic posture towards the Maghreb has oscillated between continuity and change, underscored by a protracted history of engagement. Traditionally aimed at fortifying security and stability, the U.S. has pursued these objectives indirectly through the fortification of economic linkages, the promotion of democratic governance, and human rights, and directly through interventions, thereby amplifying its political, economic, and military influence, as exemplified by the U.S.-led intervention in Libya in 2011 aimed at toppling Muammar Gaddafi.

Given the geopolitical and economic significance of the region, American interest in the Maghreb is poised for escalation. This interest manifests in a potential uptick in military presence and the deepening of diplomatic and economic ties, aimed at safeguarding U.S. interests and underpinning the region's

stability and security. U.S. predisposition towards military intervention, motivated by deteriorating security conditions, including the ascendancy of terrorist activities and the proliferation of organised crime, furnishes a primary rationale for engagement, reminiscent of the intervention in Afghanistan. Internal challenges, including poverty, marginalisation, and the inability to surveil vast unmonitored terrains, coupled with the burgeoning Tuareg issue, are likely to exacerbate the region's security predicaments. The competitive dynamics among global powers over the Maghreb could further incentivize direct U.S. military intervention to decisively tilt the scales of competition in its favour. Nevertheless, the prospect of military intervention remains marginally conceivable in the current and future context, as the United States endeavours to rehabilitate its international stature and ameliorate its image post the Iraq and Afghanistan engagements.

Forecasting the evolution of U.S. foreign policy towards the Maghreb presents complexities. The United States has historically been committed to promoting regional stability and democratic principles, a commitment expected to persist. Yet, the United States may recalibrate its strategic approach within the Maghreb, contingent upon the fluid geopolitical landscape and its bespoke strategic interests.

Conclusion:

The Maghreb region holds a strategic position for the United States, encompassing political, economic, security, and strategic dimensions. The American engagement in the region is intricately linked to a broader strategy aimed at safeguarding vital national interests that necessitate vigilant defence. The United States' strategic objectives in positioning itself within the Maghreb are multifaceted, aiming to secure the region as a crucial corridor to the Arabian Gulf, while also leveraging it as a pivotal observation point against the southern flank of Europe. This positioning is intended not only for surveillance purposes but also to preserve American interests from a more advantageous vantage point than Italy could offer. Moreover, the United States perceives the Maghreb as a strategic void that must be filled to ensure the protection and promotion of American economic and strategic interests, within the ambit of global dominance and leadership.

In the aftermath of September 11, the U.S. strategy identified the Maghreb as a critical zone for neutralising and combating terrorism, particularly in collaboration with Algeria. This approach stems from a belief that the European Union alone is insufficient to establish security and stability in the region.

Additionally, the Maghreb serves as a vital market for the consumption of American products and as a key source for securing the continuous flow of oil and petroleum, essential for diversifying energy sources. Noam Chomsky, an American political theorist, encapsulates the U.S. policy perspective by noting, "Oil, a fundamental natural resource for the American economy, resides in territories not

owned by Americans. It is imperative for it to remain accessible to the United States, which is prepared to wage wars to secure oil that it does not own, determining the quantity and price." Consequently, America has endeavoured to bind the Maghreb countries with economic, security, and political initiatives that predominantly serve its interests, framed within its value-driven perspective.

To encapsulate, the governance of U.S. policy towards the Maghreb is anchored in core principles focused on ensuring the security of oil supplies and Israel, confronting the escalation of Islamic fundamentalism, safeguarding economic interests, and precluding the emergence of any regional power that could unify the region's countries under its aegis, thereby challenging the European Union's influence over the area.

The Maghreb's strategic significance has subjected it to intense competition and a fervent race among global powers, engendering multiple threats to its multifaceted security. The pivotal question remains: Can the countries of the Maghreb harness this competitive dynamic to their advantage, or will they perpetually remain the passive recipients within this geopolitical equation.

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