

Morocco Combats Terrorism at Home and Abroad

- In response to new and evolving regional security risks, Morocco has ramped up its already robust counterterrorism efforts both at home and abroad. Morocco's multifaceted approach to countering terrorism includes hard security measures, regional cooperation and intelligence sharing, and efforts to counter violent extremism through legislation, development, and the promotion of moderate Islam.

Domestic Security Initiatives

- Moroccans were outraged by the May 16, 2003 attacks on foreign and Jewish targets in their country. More than one million citizens participated in a peaceful march through Casablanca, demonstrating the country's unity and resolve to fight terrorism. Since that time, Morocco resolved to fight both terrorism and its root causes through a combination of security sector reform and counter-radicalization initiatives.
- This resolve has been strengthened by subsequent attacks in [March and April 2007](#) and [April 2011](#) and increased threats from the [Islamic State](#), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and other groups operating in the broader Sahara-Sahel region.
- Over the last few years, Morocco has undertaken security sector and legislative reform aimed principally at disrupting recruitment and monitoring terrorist returnees (approximately 1,500 Moroccans have joined terrorist organizations since 2011). In May 2015, Morocco established the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) with principal law enforcement responsibility for counterterrorism. By bringing various elements of the security sector under a central institution, the BCIJ works to bolster "security governance nationwide within a legal and transparent framework," as noted 2015 State Department [Report](#) on Terrorism.
- This reform has reinforced the security services. Morocco has been successful in dismantling numerous [terrorist cells](#) "by leveraging intelligence collection, police work, and collaboration with international partners," per the State Department Report.
- Morocco also sought to bring the legal system to the fight against terrorism. In January 2015, the Chamber of Representatives of the Moroccan Parliament adopted a new [anti-terrorism law](#) aimed at strengthening legal measures to prevent citizens from leaving the country to join foreign terrorist groups. The Parliament agreed to impose 5-15 year prison sentences on citizens attempting to join the Islamic State. The bill amends the Code of Criminal Procedure to allow any Moroccan within the country or abroad, as well as any foreign national in Morocco, to be prosecuted for terrorist offences committed overseas.
- In June 2015, Parliament enacted amendments to the criminal code to address the issue of foreign fighters. These amendments [criminalize](#) "joining, or attempting to join a terrorist group; receiving terrorist training; and terrorist recruiting."
- In addition to the anti-terrorist activities of its security forces, efforts are being made to block terrorists' access to financial resources and monitor religious organizations to ensure that donations are not used to finance terrorist activities.

Cooperation with the US

- Morocco's counterterrorism efforts involve close cooperation with the US and regional neighbors. As the [US Department of State](#) affirms, "Morocco was among the first Arab and Islamic states to denounce the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and declare solidarity with the American people in the war against terror."
- Noting the value of Morocco as a partner in combating terrorism, the US has doubled military assistance to the country, signed the Morocco-US Free Trade Agreement in 2004, and honored Morocco with "[major non-NATO ally status](#)," which qualifies Morocco for increased US military cooperation.
- Morocco has also worked with the US to further improve its domestic capabilities. Initiatives include:
 - Cooperation with US Customs and Border Protection and DHS to address watch-listed travelers;
 - Participation in the State Department Antiterrorism Assistance program, "which provided the DGSN and the Royal Gendarmerie with training in investigating terrorist incidents, post-blast investigations, cyber forensics, crime scene forensics, critical incident management, and executive leadership;"
 - Partnership to "improve the police criminal investigation process through the development and implementation of chain of custody and evidence management procedures; forensic evidence collection and analysis, including DNA; and mentoring and training;"
 - Participation in DHS-sponsored training on "border security, financial investigation, and counter-proliferation topics" and FBI-sponsored training to "improve capacity in intelligence analysis, facial recognition, and leadership and management;" and
 - Support from the Department of State to reform and modernize the prison system, with a focus on limiting the spread of extremism in prisons and rehabilitating and reintegrating prisoners upon release.

Regional Cooperation

- Morocco is also a leading global partner for the US, participating in US-led regional and global initiatives to combat terrorism.
- In 2005, Morocco joined the [Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership](#) (TSCTP), to "assist partners in West and North Africa increase their immediate and long-term capabilities to address terrorist threats and prevent the spread of violent extremism." Through the TSCTP and annual military exercises such as African Lion, Morocco works with the US and neighbors in North and West Africa to enhance the capacity of militaries and law enforcement to conduct counterterrorism operations, including border security, and to improve interoperability among partner nations.
- In 2011, Morocco joined the US and 28 other countries as founding members of the [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#) – an initiative to "reduce the vulnerability of people everywhere to terrorism by effectively preventing, combating, and prosecuting terrorist attacks and countering incitement and recruitment to terrorism." In April 2016, Morocco took over as Co-Chair of the Forum, after having served for a number of years as Co-Chair of the Working Group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

- In 2014, the US and Morocco signed a [Framework for Cooperation on Training for Civil Security Services](#) in order to develop “mutual expertise in the areas of crisis management, border security, and terrorism investigations to strengthen regional counterterrorism capability and to deny space to terrorism and terrorist networks.” The Framework agreement also aims to serve as a force multiplier by developing a cadre of Moroccan training experts to jointly train the counterparts in partner countries in the greater Maghreb and Sahel regions.
- Morocco maintains close intelligence relations with countries throughout Europe and the Middle East and has provided crucial intelligence and operational support. Following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, Morocco provided the [intelligence](#) that enabled French police to locate the mastermind of the attacks and [arrest](#) a Belgian of Moroccan descent with direct links to the Islamist gunmen and bombers who carried out the attacks. France and Belgium have subsequently deepened long-standing intelligence cooperation with Morocco, a country increasingly seen as a key ally in the fight against global terrorism.

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