

# Towards a New Morocco-US Strategic Partnership

## Introduction

**F**ive renowned Washington based think tanks and academic sources have recently issued a series of papers exploring the value of the Morocco-US strategic partnership, each focusing on a different topic: reform and regionalization, cultural values, regional security, Morocco's role in Africa, and regional economics.

Two key points of commonality emerge: How Morocco's particular perspectives and experience support US interests in each area, and recommendations for how the US and Morocco can enhance their strategic partnership by further collaboration and cooperation.

It is not surprising to those who follow the Maghreb region and developments since the Arab uprisings that Morocco is one of the few countries whose stability and security make it a key strategic ally to the United States. With more than 230 years of historical ties to the US as its foundation, Morocco has made a strategic decision to join with the US to expand its sights beyond its traditional ties to Europe and the Middle East, as it seeks to build new bridges in Africa and the Middle East. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, latest in the Alaouite Dynasty that unified the country in the 1660s, has made Africa and the US key elements in expanding Morocco's economic, political, diplomatic, and security relations.

The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) expresses its appreciation to the *Fund for Peace*, the *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS)*, the *Atlantic Council's Africa Center*, the *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Middle East Program*, and the *German Marshall Fund of the United States* for permission to reprint and distribute these papers. Greater discussion of how US interests are augmented by Morocco's role in the region must be a priority for US foreign policymakers seeking to protect and promote shared Morocco-US interests in North Africa and beyond.

## ***Towards a New Morocco-US Strategic Partnership***

### **Executive Summary**

#### ***Why Morocco Matters***

**T**he five papers in this collection bring fresh thinking and perspectives to the debate in the US and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region regarding America's policy priorities, with a particular focus on the Morocco-US relationship. The five papers argue that the US has much to gain from greater collaboration with Morocco, in Africa and beyond, and that a stronger bilateral relationship will also enable Morocco to move more quickly in implementing its reform agenda.

A common theme is that Morocco and the US share both national interests and values across a broad range of issues, which provides a strong foundation for advancing increased security, reform, cultural, economic, and regional cooperation befitting a more mature and dynamic relationship. A stronger US-Morocco bond can clearly be an added force for promoting regional stability, security, and prosperity—goals Morocco shares with the US and partners in Europe and elsewhere.

This Executive Summary is not an exhaustive compilation of the insights and recommendations of the papers. Rather, it aims to capture key messages and measures that are essential for reinvigorating and reenergizing a strategic relationship that has the potential to benefit both partners and their policy objectives in the region.

#### **➤ *The Fund for Peace***



#### **“Morocco After Arab Uprisings: Evolution Not Revolution”**

##### **Professor Ricardo René Larémont**

Professor Ricardo René Larémont and *Fund for Peace* executive director Krista Hendry prepared this paper, which incorporates the views and “key policy recommendations” of distinguished experts who joined the authors in a roundtable discussion on the project at *The Fund for Peace* (FPP).

In his background discussion, Professor Larémont notes that King Mohammed VI “initiated a process of gradual opening,” building on his father’s efforts in the late 90s, which enabled him to move quickly to sanction the broad reform agenda enshrined in the 2011 Constitution. He writes “It is incumbent upon the United States administration to recognize the consistent progress that has taken place in that country and assist it. If Morocco were to be successful in the realization of democracy, it would demonstrate to the rest of the world that there is the possibility for real transition to democracy in the Muslim world.”

In its *recommendations*, the *FFP* paper notes that “The US can best support Morocco in its evolution by supporting needed economic and education reforms and supporting the development of greater technical capacity,” which includes support for capacity-building and rule of law programs for the government, parliament, officials, and civil society to advance Morocco’s regionalization and reform agenda.

The *FFP* paper also cites “the need to create an environment more conducive to entrepreneurship...as a means of addressing the concerns of unemployed youth and need for local economic development...opportunities should be more available across class levels and gender, and bureaucratic delays need to be addressed.”



➤ **Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University**  
**“Moroccan Islam—A Unique & Welcome Spirit of Moderation & Tolerance”**  
**Prof. Kenneth Honerkamp, Reverend Michael Calabria**

The *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS)* at Georgetown University hosted a roundtable discussion in October on “Cultural Heritage of Morocco,” a paper authored by Dr. Kenneth Honerkamp of the University of Georgia, with an introduction by the Reverend Michael Calabria of Georgetown. The analysis of the paper, and consensus of the roundtable participants, is that Morocco’s intrinsic blend of Maliki Islam and Sufism, and the impact of its roots in Andalusia, encourage and support a moderate, open, and tolerant Islam. This is of particular relevance and importance given the recent inroads by Islamist extremists in the region and the international concerns that has generated.

The paper notes, “For more than 1,400 years, Moroccan culture has exemplified its commitment to moderation through a pragmatic yet spiritual path within its Islamic religion. Morocco’s unique spirit of tolerance is rooted in its historical heritage, authentic values, and principles of open-mindedness and concord, and cultural enrichment through the mutual exchange among individuals, communities, and civilizations.” In today’s battles within Islam and between extremists and non-Islamic countries, Morocco’s efforts to focus more attention and advocacy on the practice of a more tolerant Islam have far-reaching and beneficial consequences. As the paper argues, “The US has much to gain from encouraging Moroccans to persevere in their efforts to promote tolerance and amity within the region and beyond.”

A number of the paper’s recommendations focus on providing support for Morocco to serve as a center of religious training and dialogue in the region — through conferences, exchanges at all levels, publications, research, and education and training outreach. In addition, Morocco should be a partner “with Turkey as a major anchor country in the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience in the Sahel region and sub-Saharan Africa.”

➤ **The Africa Center at the Atlantic Council**



**“Morocco’s Vital Role in Northwest Africa’s Security & Development”**

**Dr. J. Peter Pham, Director, Africa Center**

Dr. J. Peter Pham, director of the Africa Center, takes a fresh look at how the US and Morocco can upgrade their counterterrorism efforts both regionally and through a more holistic strategy that includes economic development and counter-radicalization programs to promote more durable solutions to instability. The paper enumerates the many agreements and initiatives shared between Morocco and the US and European allies in the areas of trafficking, illegal immigration, intelligence-sharing, and financial controls that address the root causes and structures of terrorist and criminal networks.

Given that “the Maghreb and the interconnected Sahel to the south have become one of the world’s most politically fragile regions,” the paper both highlights and supports Morocco’s multi-faceted approach in which “state-of-the-art military operations, intelligence work, and policing must be combined with anti-poverty measures, a cultural strategy to counter extremist trends, and political reforms that fight corruption and foster opportunity.”

The paper’s recommendations argue for the enhancement of US-EU-Moroccan security relations, including the expansion of “Morocco’s extensive training programs for military and security forces in the Sahel and in West Africa.” Current joint exercises “should also be expanded to serve as a platform for a regional collective security framework that addresses not only terrorist and separatist challenges, but also trafficking and other criminal networks.”

The paper also makes two important observations about US priorities in the region.

*First*, “As security in the region deteriorates, Morocco’s resources and relative stability could set the stage for new forms of political and security cooperation,” thus providing Morocco – and the US – with expanded venues for regional cooperation.

*Second*, “The United States should make the resolution of the conflict over the Western Sahara...a diplomatic priority. Washington should also reaffirm its longstanding policy of support for the Moroccan autonomy proposal as the basis for a realistic solution,” which would reduce or even eliminate this obstacle to Maghreb economic and security integration. The paper also called for greater intelligence-sharing and coordination between Morocco and the US.



➤ **Middle East Program, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)**  
**“Morocco’s Africa Future”**

**Haim Malka, deputy director, CSIS’s Middle East Program**

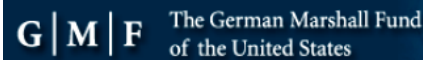
Haim Malka, deputy director of CSIS’s Middle East Program, focuses on conditions favoring Morocco’s broader strategic engagement with Africa and how Morocco should take advantage of its long-standing relations with African states to re-tool its economic and business development strategy. The report recognizes Morocco’s comparative advantage in the immediate region, noting that its “soft power is most effective in West Africa, which is not only geographically close, but where Morocco shares a common language with francophone states, shared religion and cultural ties, a strong diplomatic presence, and extensive business and trade ties.”

However, it stresses that, “to be a major player in Africa, Morocco not only needs to diversify and strengthen its manufacturing base in order to boost exports, but overcome nagging diplomatic challenges that have kept Morocco out of the African Union (AU) and soured relations with some of Africa’s largest economies.” Morocco could benefit greatly from forging stronger ties with such countries, which will require “pursuing economic and diplomatic opportunities as if there were no Western Sahara conflict.” It further notes, “Though Western Sahara has shaped Morocco’s approach to Africa for the last several decades, it can no longer afford to let the conflict shape its broader Africa policy.”

Recommendations address ways in which the “United States can play a role in fostering Morocco’s positive role in Africa as a way to both improve inclusive economic growth and stability and promote economic and political development in sub-Saharan Africa.” The report highlights the potential of triangular aid whereby “existing resources could be channeled to triangular programs where US-Moroccan cooperation can harness Morocco’s expertise and experience in specific development areas to provide training in a third sub-Saharan country.”

Other areas for bilateral and multilateral cooperation include Moroccan training programs for other African countries across a range of sectors, including “civil society group training, rural electrification, health care, broadband internet access, and food security,” the expansion of “existing training programs for African armies and security forces in coordination with the United States,” and cooperation “in renewable energy and power generation,” including partnership in the “Power Africa” program.

➤ **German Marshall Fund of the United States**



**“Morocco’s New Geo-Economics: Implications for US-Moroccan Partnership”**  
**Dr. Ian Lesser, senior director, Foreign & Security Policy, GMF**

At The German Marshall Fund (GMF), Dr. Ian Lesser authored a paper that echoes themes raised by the security and Africa papers, arguing that Morocco’s best opportunity for sustainable growth is to expand its presence and activities in Africa across a range of sectors. Although the US-Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has yet to deliver hoped-for results, other potential areas of business include renewable energy, power transmission, regional financial services, logistics, and transportation infrastructure, as well as “potentially substantial offshore oil and gas resources.”

Recognizing that the lack of Maghreb economic integration is a drag on regional growth, the paper emphasizes, “the urgent need for government and business leaders to focus on the core task of job creation, especially for large numbers of unemployed or underemployed youth.” It adds that, “Business communities on both sides [Morocco and Algeria] could well be a vehicle for détente and commercial cooperation.” Morocco’s increased engagement in the broader region could likewise impact regional dynamics: “Morocco’s expanding economic role looking south shows every sign of becoming a structural factor in regional development and a more significant facet of US interest in, and cooperation with, Morocco.”

Two other factors impacted the recommendations for US policy. First of all, “Morocco’s changing geo-economic role in Africa holds the potential to support US interests in African development and security, and opens an important new avenue for bilateral and trilateral cooperation with the United States and EU partners.” Moreover, “[w]hat happens in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Atlantic Africa—not to mention China’s evolving economic role in the Atlantic space—could be a new part of the geo-economic agenda with Morocco as an emerging economy in its own right.”

Therefore, “Morocco’s growing Atlantic engagement should be made an explicit part of the US-Morocco strategic partnership agenda, especially on trade and investment.” This will enable “[t]he United States to renew its commitment to greater regional economic cooperation and integration in the Maghreb.”

Additional recommendations focus on the critical role of the private sector, which should be encouraged through “[t]he economic working group of the US-Moroccan Strategic Dialogue...[to] involve the private sector to develop concrete projects for broadening and deepening trade and investment, particularly initiatives that create sustainable and high value-added employment...with investors from other countries on joint projects in promising sectors.”

## ***Closing Thought***

It is our strong belief that the work of these five authors and institutions in examining Morocco-US relations and what can be done to promote the strategic partnership is a welcome and needed supplement to the limited attention devoted to US-Maghreb affairs to date. It is clear from these open-eyed assessments that the US-Morocco relationship is a stable, secure, and robust platform for securing our shared values and interests in the region and beyond.