

ALGERIA

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ISSUES

- Algeria will press for the old plan of a U.N.-organized referendum in the Western Sahara and the reversal of the Trump administration's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory that was part of the deal to normalize relations between Morocco and Israel.
- Bilateral cooperation with Algeria has increased greatly in the past 15 years because of Algerian concerns about extremist groups operating in the neighboring states of Libya, Mali, and Niger.
- Domestically, Algeria's leaders are old and President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, strongly backed by the army, is ailing; he was abroad for medical treatment for three months earlier this winter. The political system is ossified but the aging leaders reject any genuine opening. As the pandemic recedes, massive street protests are resuming.
- Algeria's economy is stagnant and the young population is frustrated. Higher world oil prices will ease some immediate pressure, but the government has no vision or desire to undertake deep reforms.

US INTERESTS

- Continued cooperation with the Algerian government on regional counter-terrorism, especially in Libya and Mali.
- Helping avoid domestic political instability stirring up violence and extremist recruitment.
- American firms should have fair access to Algerian markets. U.S. firms, mostly energy companies, have about \$3 billion in direct investment in Algeria, which is a major regional trading partner with the U.S.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Avoid sharp public criticism of the Algerian government's domestic program and its handling of political unrest. The government would use American criticism as an excuse to crack down harder against "foreign-instigated" opposition. Moreover, we should not prescribe a detailed plan to resolve the impasse between the government and opposition. Instead, encourage a purely Algerian approach that wins wide public support.
- Support the protesters' rights to freedom of speech, association, and peaceful assembly, as enumerated in the U.N. Covenant on Political Rights.
- Maintain discrete counter-terrorism cooperation with Algerian intelligence and the military. Behind closed doors with these Algerian security contacts we should counsel restraint and dialogue with the opposition and protest movement.
- Boost working-level bilateral talks on regional security and continue the American assistance program on rule of law through the FBI and the State Department's counter-terrorism office.
- Expand our low-cost bilateral cooperation in education reform to boost longer-term Algerian economic prospects, helping undermine extremist recruitment.