

The European Union's counter-terrorism policy towards the Maghreb: trapped between democratisation, economic interests and the fear of destabilisation

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(Received 12 April 2011; final version received 25 July 2011)

This article sheds light on the European Union's counter-terrorism policy in the Maghreb taking into account the diverse influences and interests shaping its strategic thinking. To explain the complex web of opportunities and constraints, the article refers to Terry Deibel's framework for the analysis of foreign and security affairs. The author concludes that the Union's counter-terrorism policy in the Maghreb has been shaped more by the desire for regional stability and greater trade relations and energy security than by the goal of promoting democratic values and human rights. Moreover, the promotion of democracy is perceived by EU policy-makers as a destabilising factor that could endanger counter-terrorism efforts.

Keywords: European Union; Maghreb; terrorism; energy security; democracy; foreign policy analysis

Introduction

The popular overthrow of Tunisian President Ben Ali and his Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak not only shocked neighbouring countries and the Arab world, but also surprised the European Union (EU), which wilfully overlooked the authoritarian trends in both countries for years. Both regimes were regarded as guarantors of stability and as reliable partners in the fight against transnational terrorism, especially since 9/11 and the bombings in Madrid and London. This threat of terrorism coming from the Maghreb poses a serious challenge for the EU, at least at a rhetorical level. The impression of a lasting menace is conveyed by frequent reports of North African terrorist plots and attacks completed in Europe (Taheri 2008, Willey 2008, Bordonaro 2009, Bremner and Sage 2009). Thus, the president of the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), the German foreign intelligence service, was lead to describe terrorist movements and cells in the Maghreb as one of the most serious dangers facing the EU and its citizens (Jansen and Monath 2008).

The regions of the Mediterranean and Europe have long been interdependent, both in terms of development and security.¹ After the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2006, the EU and its member states have grown increasingly concerned over the radicalisation of Maghrebi youths

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