

**Written Statement for Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Senior Bureau Official Robert Palladino Before the Senate Foreign Relations
Committee Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and
Counterterrorism**

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Good afternoon, Chairman McCormick, Ranking Member Rosen, and distinguished Members of this subcommittee. Thank you for your invitation to testify here today. It is an honor, and I look forward to discussing how our counterterrorism efforts in North Africa help us advance our broader interests across the region.

As the Senior Bureau Official for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA), I can attest that we work closely with the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) to counter terrorist threats across the Middle East and North Africa. It is through this collaboration that we are able to advance President Trump's vision for the region.

NEA seeks to protect American citizens in the region by providing essential services that safeguard their personal well-being and commercial interests. Our diplomacy is focused on ensuring Middle Eastern conflicts and regional security threats do not threaten the United States directly. We help counter destabilizing mass and illegal immigration by ensuring travel and migration consistent with U.S. law. And we support American businesses as they pursue opportunities for trade and profitable investment across the region.

Countering and preventing terrorist threats in North Africa ensures that we can protect Americans, promote peace, and secure opportunities for increased American prosperity. We work closely with CT to achieve these broader Administration goals. NEA works with CT and interagency partners to identify and counter terrorist threats abroad before they reach our shores. Simultaneously we work together to disrupt and destroy terrorist operations that target our citizens and our economic interests in the region.

A key driver of NEA's work is to identify capable partners in the Middle East and North Africa and encourage them to take increased responsibility both for their own security and the security of their region. The United States is focusing resources on immediate threats to the U.S. Homeland and emphasizing burden

shifting to capable partners to address local and regional threats. In this light, we have refocused our CT relationship with North African countries, with them taking primary responsibility for regional CT.

In the 2010s, terrorism in North Africa represented a significant threat to the United States and our interests in the region. From Morocco to Egypt, terrorist attacks killed thousands, including Americans. In response, the United States invested heavily in improving the CT capacity of North African partner countries. As a result of our efforts, many of these countries have significantly degraded Foreign Terrorist Organizations operating in their territories. For example, Tunisia has neutralized terrorist cells and prevented potential attacks, recently foiling a suspected terror plot at a market in western Tunisia and eliminating a wanted terrorist affiliated with ISIS. In 2023, when a member of the Tunisian National Guard opened fire at Africa's largest synagogue in Djerba, killing five, U.S.-trained Tunisian police officers neutralized the shooter within minutes, saving the lives of hundreds of visitors present.

As a reflection of the region's success in countering terrorist threats, we seek to encourage states such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to become security exporters in the region. Morocco and Tunisia have benefitted from multilateral military exercises such as Phoenix Express and African Lion, the largest joint military exercise on the continent, which the Moroccans and Tunisians have co-hosted for years. Major non-NATO allies Morocco and Tunisia have leveraged our deep security partnerships towards training security personnel from across Sub-Saharan Africa, on their own dime. The United States is now successfully encouraging eastern and western Libyan leaders to integrate their security institutions to address shared terror threats. This year and for the first time, Libya will host a training location for AFRICOM's flagship special operations exercise, FLINTLOCK to enhance interoperability with partners on border security and counterterrorism operations.

Algeria's CT successes also make it a critical pillar of stability in the region. African leaders' recognition of Algeria's success in the CT field is reflected in their designation of the Algerian Head of State as the African Union's Champion for Preventing and Combating Terrorism since the role was established in 2017. As the United States shifts our priorities and resources to the Western Hemisphere and Indo-Pacific Regions, as outlined in the President's National Security Strategy and the State Department's Agency Strategic Plan, we are counting on North African states to build on their successes and share their best practices with neighboring countries that are facing significant terrorist threats.

For decades, CT has been at the center of many of the bilateral relationships with North African countries. Thanks to our productive CT relationship with these countries, we have partners we can work with to advance a number of the President's initiatives. A clear example is our work to counter threats from the Muslim Brotherhood and its violent ideology. Additionally, we are working with countries across the NEA region to counter ISIS in Syria, take responsibility for their nationals in northeast Syria displaced persons camps and detention facilities, and give the Syrian people a chance to succeed. We also look to North African countries to provide critical support to ensuring terrorist activity in the Sahel does not spread west to the Gulf of Guinea or north to regain a foothold in North Africa where it would present a more immediate threat to the United States and our interests.

In conclusion, with this Committee's support, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs intends to continue working with CT and other bureaus across the Department, as well as our interagency and regional partners, to counter terrorism in the region to protect the American people and expand space for investment opportunities that will benefit the American people.

Thank you for your attention and leadership on this topic. I welcome your questions.