

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Morocco: Royal Succession and Other Developments

(name redacted)

Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

King Hassan II of Morocco died on July 24, 1999, and was succeeded by his 36-year old elder son, who became King Mohammed VI. The new King's progressive agenda highlights efforts to fight poverty, advance economic development, support the opposition-led government, and redress human rights abuses. In foreign policy, his priorities include improving relations with Europe and Algeria, and he has reached out to the Moroccan Jews of Israel. The long-standing U.S. friendship with Morocco continues. For background, see CRS Report 98-663, *Morocco: Political and Economic Changes and U.S. Policy*. This report will be updated if developments warrant.

Introduction

King Hassan II of Morocco died suddenly of a heart attack on July 24, 1999, after having ruled the strategically-located northwest African country of 30 million people for 38 years. He was succeeded immediately and smoothly by his elder son, who became King Mohammed VI. The new king has made an unexpectedly vigorous start to his reign, which Morocco's allies hope will be stable and progressive.

Profile of Mohammed VI

Mohammed VI is 36 years old. He graduated from Mohammed V University in Rabat and pursued graduate studies there and in France, where he earned a doctorate in law in 1993. Mohammed VI, whose doctoral thesis was on cooperation between the European Union and the Maghreb, served briefly as an intern for former European Commission President Jacques Delors in Brussels. The King speaks Arabic, French, Spanish, and English.

Mohammed VI uses a peer group of young technocrats concerned with modernization as advisers. He is particularly concerned about the poor and economic development, and these concerns bond the King and his socialist Prime Minister, Abderrahmane Yousoufi.

Mohammed VI has good relations with the armed forces. In 1985, Hassan II had appointed his heir Coordinator of the armed forces, a position second only to the King's as commander-in-chief, and, in 1994, promoted him to major general. Military officers of all ranks have paid their respects to Mohammed VI since he ascended to the throne.

The unmarried Mohammed VI named his only brother, Moulay Rachid, to be crown prince. The royal family also includes his sister Lalla Hasna, who has two sons, and two first cousins, Princes Moulay Hisham and Moulay Ismail. Mohammed VI's siblings and cousins are performing official duties of varying importance.

Domestic Politics

King Mohammed VI is continuing the process of managed democratization that his father had begun in the 1990s and capped with the appointment of opposition leader Youssoufi as Prime Minister in 1997. King Hassan's overbearing leadership style, however, had diminished Youssoufi's scope of authority. The Prime Minister also was stymied by his unwieldy seven-party coalition, which is opposed by seven other parties, and by a lack of funds. In a July 30, 1999 speech, Mohammed VI said that he was "committed to the system of constitutional monarchy, political pluralism, economic liberalism, regional and decentralized government, the establishment of the state of rights and law, and preserving human rights and individual and collective liberties...."¹ The King and Prime Minister agree on these matters and royal support may enable Youssoufi to overcome some of the difficulties he has experienced in governing.

Mohammed VI is a populist who reaches out to his subjects personally. He appointed the first ever palace spokesman to communicate his policies. The King also traveled to the neglected, poverty-stricken north, including the Rif Mountains, site of past Berber uprisings where no monarch had traveled in more than 40 years.

Mohammed VI took his most significant political step on November 9, 1999, when he summarily fired Driss Basri, the feared Interior Minister who commanded the police and intelligence services. Hassan II had survived two coup attempts in the 1970s and relied on Basri to protect his regime, sometimes by draconian measures. The new king, however, had ill-concealed contempt for Basri.² Mohammed VI initially circumscribed Basri's power by removing two issues, counterespionage and the Western Sahara, from his portfolio. The latter action reportedly resulted from royal displeasure with heavy-handed police suppression of riots in the region in September/October. The King used Foreign Minister Mohammed Benaissa as his personal envoy to Algeria, a task that Basri had often performed for Hassan II. Then, on November 9, the King replaced Basri with a former ministry technocrat whom Basri had sacked in 1997 and named a friend and classmate to be the new Minister's second-in-command and the royal eyes and ears in the ministry. Many of Basri's appointees as governors and Ministry officials were relieved of their duties later. Basri's removal affirmed Mohammed VI's credibility as a force for positive change in the country.

¹ RTM TV, Rabat, in Arabic, excerpt translated by BBC Monitoring Newsfile, July 30, 1999.

² Elaine Ganley, *Young King, an enigma to all....*, Associated Press, July 28, 1999; George Joffe, *The legacy of Hassan II*, Middle East International, July 30, 1999, p. 5.

Human Rights

Morocco had a record of human rights abuses. In his last years, Hassan II improved the record, and Mohammed VI is accelerating the process and making amends for the past. On July 30, 1999, he released almost 8,000 prisoners and reduced the sentences of over 38,000 others. More releases followed. On August 2, he called for a “state of right and law, within the framework of liberties guaranteed to the individuals and institutions by the constitution.” He formed an independent arbitration committee to determine ways of compensating those “who have been the subject of disappearances and unjust arrest....”³ This royal acknowledgment that such practices had existed may be interpreted as a slap at the Interior Ministry, which had been accused of the worst abuses.⁴

Mohammed VI has made other highly symbolic moves. On September 30, 1999, he allowed dissident exile Ibrahim Serfaty to return home from France. The Marxist Serfaty had been expelled in 1991 after serving 17 years in prison for statements favoring self-determination for the Western Sahara, and his fate had become an international *cause celebre*. Serfaty is old and wheel-chair bound, but remains outspoken. In other reversals, the King allowed the family of Mehdi Ben Barka⁵ to return to Morocco and lifted a 12-year ban on television appearances by political satirist Ahmad Sanoussi, known as Bziz. Finally, Islamist leader Shaykh Abdessalam Yassine’s daughter and spokeswoman reports that the King’s representatives have discussed Yassine’s release from house arrest, but that Yassine is holding out for an unconditional release.⁶ Perhaps foreshadowing what may happen with greater frequency when Yassine is freed, Islamists mobilized several hundred thousand demonstrators in Casablanca in March 2000 to protest a government plan, supported by the King, to raise the legal status of women. They are likely to oppose other similarly “western-oriented” changes.

Economy⁷

Mohammed VI inherited an economy with mixed prospects. On the positive side, the budget deficit is down to 2% of gross domestic product (GDP), hard currency reserves are up to \$59 billion, inflation is under control at 2 to 3% per annum, and direct foreign investment is rising. The textile industry, tourism, remittances from workers in Europe, and the fishing sector are growing. On the negative side, the economy is vulnerable to cyclical droughts. Agriculture contributes about 25% to the annual GDP and employs 50% of the labor force. Thus, although GDP grew at a rate of 6.2% in 1998 with

³ RTM TV, Rabat, in Arabic, translated by BBC Monitoring Middle East, August 21, 1999.

⁴ For example, the U.S. Department of State, Morocco Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1999.

⁵ Ben Barka, a political party leader, was accused of plotting to overthrow Hassan II in 1963. He fled to Paris, where he disappeared in 1963. A French court implicated Hassan II’s Interior Minister at the time, Mohammed Oufkir, in the affair.

⁶ Moroccan Islamist wants leader freed, Reuters, January 30, 2000.

⁷ Economic data in this report are drawn from CIA, The World Factbook 1999, [<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/mo.html>], and U.S. Department of State, 1998 Country Reports on Economic Policy and Trade Practices: Morocco.

favorable rainfalls, growth rate fell to 1.6% in 1999, when drought conditions returned. An 8.4% growth rate is projected for 2000.

A lack of funds has constrained the government's ability to undertake social and economic programs to address unemployment, which registered an 18% rate in 1998. The government payroll consumes some 50% of the budget, while service of an external debt of about \$18 billion consumes another third. Meanwhile, excessive red tape, high tariffs and lack of consistently transparent business practices have hampered foreign investment. On October 29, 1999, the Prime Minister announced public administration reforms that are intended to improve investor confidence.

In Hassan II's final days, Morocco earned \$1.1 billion from the sale of the license for a global standard mobile telephone system (GSM) to a consortium led by Spanish Telefonica with Portuguese and Moroccan participation. The sale was achieved by a specially created independent agency employing transparent practices free of Morocco's endemic corruption. The government is expected to apply lessons from the favorable experience to future privatizations. The money from the sale has enabled Mohammed VI to create the King Hassan II Trust Fund for Development.

Foreign Policy

Mohammed VI's priorities include relations with Europe, Algeria, the Western Sahara (which he does not consider foreign), and Arab-Israeli affairs. He also made an early trip to royal regimes of the Persian Gulf region to cement brotherly ties.

Algeria. Morocco and Algeria are regional rivals. For over two decades, they have differed about the Western Sahara. Morocco claims the territory, while Algeria supports and hosts the independence-seeking Popular Front for Saqiat al Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO). Bilateral relations were strained further during Algeria's civil war, when Algiers accused Morocco of supporting Algerian Islamist terrorists. Morocco denied the charge, but the quarrel led to a 1994 border closing. The border remains closed, costing Morocco \$2 billion in trade annually.

It briefly seemed as if a new king and a new Algerian president, elected in April 1999, might improve relations rapidly. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika attended King Hassan's funeral and declared three days of official mourning for his "brother." In response, Mohammed VI called for a return to good neighborly relations and sent Foreign Minister Benaissa as his personal envoy to Bouteflika in August. A bilateral summit was expected to be held after the 40-day period of mourning for Hassan II, but it did not occur. In September, Bouteflika claimed that members of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of terrorists had fled to Morocco after perpetrating a massacre in western Algeria and asserted that he had "categorical evidence" that the GIA used bases in Morocco.⁸ The next day, he accused Morocco of exporting drugs to Algeria.⁹ Moroccan officials denied

⁸ Algerian President Bouteflika criticizes Morocco's "double standards." Algerian TV, in Arabic, September 1, 1999, translated by BBC Monitoring Middle East, September 2, 1999. Also Rawhi Abeidoh, Algeria urges Morocco to act over rebels, Reuters, September 1, 1999.

⁹ Algerian President renews attack on Morocco. Algerian TV, September 2, 1999, BBC (continued...)

the charges and expressed “deep astonishment” at Bouteflika’s statements, but did not counterattack. The palace spokesman reiterated that Morocco was committed to non-aggressive ties with Algeria and to building up the Arab Maghreb Union, of which both countries are members. Bouteflika claimed that the Moroccans had misunderstood what he had said.¹⁰ Mohammed VI congratulated Bouteflika on winning a national referendum on his policy of civil concord in mid-September. In early October, Bouteflika vowed again to improve ties, but in November he repeated, “our youths are being destroyed by drugs coming from Morocco.”¹¹ Prime Minister Youssoufi said that Morocco chose not to reply and would “wait for the President to change his course.”¹²

Western Sahara.¹³ Mohammed VI has asserted that “the issue of our Saharan provinces constitutes the central national issue”¹⁴ and appears to be as uncompromising on the question of Morocco’s sovereignty over the region as his father. Following student and worker demonstrations in the Western Sahara in September 1999, Mohammed VI established a ministerial-level Royal Committee for Saharan Affairs and created a fund to ease unemployment and assist students. He advocates a solution based on decentralization to increase local power, which some interpret as a policy favoring reconciliation over force. The U.N. has postponed its much delayed referendum on sovereignty, partly to fulfill a Moroccan demand that 79,000 applicants denied voter registration have the right to appeal. The referendum will probably only occur if Morocco is assured that it will win, unless some kind of compromise settlement is reached without a referendum. At this time, the U.N. is not considering alternatives to a referendum.

Europe. Mohammed VI enjoys good relations with Europe, especially with Morocco’s former colonizers, France and Spain. The two are Morocco’s largest trading partners and investors. France provides about 25% of Morocco’s imports and takes about 33% of its exports. France, Spain, and Italy have programs to convert 30% of bilateral debt to equity in Morocco’s private sector, giving them a major stake in Morocco’s privatization plans.

Moroccan-European relations are intermittently troubled by disputes over illegal immigration, fishing rights, drug traffic, agricultural produce, and territory. The southern European countries want to help Mohammed VI address the social and economic causes of illegal immigration to Europe. The European Union (EU) wants Morocco to make greater efforts to curb the production of hashish and its shipment to Western Europe. Spain and Portugal are interested in a new EU-Morocco fishing agreement. For its part, Morocco seeks sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves situated on what

⁹ (...continued)

Monitoring Middle East, September 3, 1999.

¹⁰ Algeria’s Bouteflika tries to soothe Morocco, Reuters, September 13, 1999.

¹¹ Interview with Lebanese TV, rerun by Algerian TV on November 9, 1999, BBC Monitoring Middle East, November 10, 1999.

¹² Moroccan Premier Youssoufi says relations with Algeria in “difficult phase,” Moroccan Arab news agency (MAP) report, BBC Monitoring Middle East, November 11, 1999.

¹³ For background, see CRS Report 95-844, Western Sahara: Background to Referendum.

¹⁴ RTM TV, July 30, 1999.

Morocco views as its Mediterranean coast, better access for its produce to European markets, and improved treatment of Moroccan immigrants in Europe.

Arab-Israeli Affairs. King Hassan II was active in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Mohammed VI is not as active, but he has been elected chairman of Organization of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee to succeed his father and is developing relations with Israeli leaders. Israeli Prime Minister Barak and a large delegation attended Hassan's funeral, and Mohammed VI sent his Foreign Minister to a November 1999 Oslo peace summit and memorial for Yitzhak Rabin. About 700,000 Israeli citizens were born in Morocco or are of Moroccan origin. The new king invited Moroccan-born Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef to visit. He warmly received Levy in January 2000 but did not respond to Levy's request that diplomatic ties be upgraded. Nonetheless, Morocco has not followed Syrian and Arab League recommendations not to conduct normal relations with Israel until it withdraws from occupied Arab territory.

U.S. Policy

President Clinton and a large official delegation attended King Hassan II's funeral out of respect for two centuries of U.S.-Moroccan friendship and for the role Hassan had played in facilitating the Middle East peace process. On September 1, 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met King Mohammed VI and Prime Minister Youssef. She referred to Morocco as "a valued and special partner" and promised 100,000 tons of wheat valued at \$15-\$20 million to help alleviate effects of the drought. Youssef expressed a desire for debt relief in the form of debt-equity swaps comparable to those Morocco has with its European partners,¹⁵ but the Administration has not responded. During a February 2000 visit to Morocco, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced an expanded bilateral security and defense dialogue to enhance cooperation. The United States officially supports the U.N. referendum process for the Western Sahara but probably would be wary of any result that might destabilize the Moroccan regime.

The Administration emphasizes commercial relations more than aid for Morocco. In FY2000, Morocco received \$9,750,000 in Development Assistance (DA), \$900,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance, and \$1.5 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). U.S. officials are encouraging the formation of a common market among Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia that would create economies of scale to attract American investors more than the smaller, separate markets of each of the three countries. This is called the Eisenstadt Initiative, after former Undersecretary of State Stuart Eisenstadt who proposed it. The Administration also is encouraging private investment in Morocco, partly by overseeing orientation visits by U.S. businessmen.

¹⁵ As of the end of 1997, Morocco owed the United States \$811 million in direct loans and \$559 million in guaranteed loans. The largest portion of the loans were Commodity Credit Corporation credits. Smaller amounts were for Agency for International Development and Export-Import Bank and defense-related loans.

EveryCRSReport.com

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is a federal legislative branch agency, housed inside the Library of Congress, charged with providing the United States Congress non-partisan advice on issues that may come before Congress.

EveryCRSReport.com republishes CRS reports that are available to all Congressional staff. The reports are not classified, and Members of Congress routinely make individual reports available to the public.

Prior to our republication, we redacted names, phone numbers and email addresses of analysts who produced the reports. We also added this page to the report. We have not intentionally made any other changes to any report published on EveryCRSReport.com.

CRS reports, as a work of the United States government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.

Information in a CRS report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to members of Congress in connection with CRS' institutional role.

EveryCRSReport.com is not a government website and is not affiliated with CRS. We do not claim copyright on any CRS report we have republished.