



# Morocco: Current Issues

**Alexis Arieff**

Analyst in African Affairs

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## Summary

The United States government views Morocco as an important ally against terrorism and a free trade partner. Congress appropriates foreign assistance funding for Morocco for counterterrorism and socioeconomic development, including funding in support of a five-year, \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aid program agreed to in 2007. Congress also reviews and authorizes Moroccan purchases of U.S. defense articles. U.S. officials have expressed support for Morocco's current reform efforts while reiterating strong support for the Moroccan monarchy.

King Mohammed VI retains supreme political power in Morocco, but has taken some liberalizing steps with uncertain effects. Reform efforts have been stepped up since March 2011, amid a series of pro-democracy demonstrations. On July 1, the king submitted a new constitution to a public referendum; it passed with over 98% of the vote. The constitution, which was drafted by a commission appointed by the king in March, aims to grant greater independence to the prime minister, the legislature, and the judiciary, and to provide greater protections for individual rights. Nevertheless, the king retains significant executive powers, such as the ability to fire ministers and dissolve the parliament; he will chair the new body that will oversee the judiciary and remains commander-in-chief of the military and the country's preeminent religious authority. Weekly protests have continued, with activists criticizing the king's control over the reform process and calling for deeper changes to the political system. Authorities have tolerated many of the protests, but in some cases security forces have used violence to disperse demonstrators.

Morocco's comprehensive approach to countering terrorism involves security measures, economic reforms, control of religious outlets, education, and international cooperation. Morocco experienced devastating terrorist attacks in 2003, and Moroccan nationals have been implicated in attacks and plots overseas. In April 2011, after years without a major domestic attack, a bomb exploded at a tourist café in Marrakesh, killing 17 people, mostly Europeans. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), considered the greatest regional threat, has not mounted a successful attack in Morocco and denied responsibility for the April bombing. However, individual Moroccans have joined AQIM outside of the country and the group has reportedly attempted to use Moroccan territory as a transit point for transnational smuggling operations.

Morocco's human rights record is uneven. A number of abuses have been documented along with constraints on freedom of expression. At the same time, the 2004 Family Code is a significant initiative that could improve the socioeconomic rights of women if fully implemented. The king has also sought to provide a public record of abuses perpetrated before he ascended the throne in 1999 and to enhance the rights of ethnic Berbers (Amazigh/Imazighen), the original inhabitants of the region. In 2010, questions about religious freedom arose when foreign Christians were expelled for illegal proselytizing, sparking criticism by some Members of Congress.

Morocco's foreign policy focuses largely on France, Spain, and the United States. Relations with Algeria are troubled by the unresolved dispute over the Western Sahara, a territory that Morocco largely occupies and views as an integral part of its national territory. Algeria supports the POLISARIO Front in its quest for the region's self-determination. Relations between Morocco and Israel are strained, though at the same time, 600,000 Moroccan Jews are citizens of Israel. Morocco severed diplomatic ties with Iran in 2009, and was invited to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in May 2011. See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

## Contents

Recent Developments.....	1
Constitutional Referendum and Other Reform Proposals .....	1
Content of the New Constitution .....	2
Domestic Reactions .....	3
New Human Rights Council.....	4
U.S. Reactions to Moroccan Reform Proposals.....	5
Morocco’s Protest Movement.....	6
Marrakesh Bombing.....	8
Emerging Questions .....	9
Government and Politics .....	10
Terrorism .....	12
Human Rights .....	14
Economy .....	17
Western Sahara .....	18
Foreign Policy.....	19
Algeria.....	19
Europe .....	20
Middle East.....	22
Relations with the United States .....	23
U.S. Assistance .....	24
Millennium Challenge Grant .....	26
Recent Congressional Actions .....	26

## Figures

Figure 1. Map of Morocco.....	10
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## Tables

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco .....	26
Table 2. Millennium Challenge Corporation Programs .....	26

## Contacts

Author Contact Information .....	28
Acknowledgments .....	28

## Recent Developments

### Constitutional Referendum and Other Reform Proposals

On March 9, King Mohammed VI gave a nationally televised speech in which he called for a series of broad reforms to Morocco's political system, notably including a revision of the 1996 constitution.<sup>1</sup> The king appointed a commission to draft constitutional reform proposals, chaired by Abdelatif Menouni, a prominent jurist, which submitted a draft text in early June after consulting with political parties, labor unions, business associations, human rights groups, and others.<sup>2</sup> On June 17, the king expressed his support for the draft, which he said would "consecrate" parliamentary mechanisms within the political system and enhance the "separation of powers." The king added that he believed the new constitution would permit a resolution of the dispute over Western Sahara in line with Morocco's regional autonomy plan (see "Western Sahara," below).<sup>3</sup> The king announced he would submit the draft to a public referendum.

On July 1, a referendum was held on the new draft constitution, 13 days after it was first publicly announced. Over 98% of votes were in favor of adoption, and officials claimed over 70% turnout in the vote. (As most observers expected the constitution to be adopted, turnout was assessed to be a key element in determining the vote's legitimacy.) The constitutional reform process has been a relatively unique response to pro-democracy protests in the Middle East, and Moroccan officials have portrayed it as an example of "Moroccan exceptionalism" as well as a model for other countries in the region.<sup>4</sup> While some analysts agree, many contend that the degree to which the new constitution represents a significant change to the political status quo, rather than a symbolic step, rests on implementation and whether the monarchy takes additional steps toward full democracy. The constitution calls for a number of new laws and oversight bodies to be created, a process that is expected to begin in the next few months ahead of parliamentary elections in October. The Moroccan public may also gauge the success of political reforms in terms of whether they lead to tangible socioeconomic advances.

The short timeframe for the referendum may have inhibited voter education on the content of the proposed draft, particularly given that roughly 40% of Morocco's adult population is illiterate.<sup>5</sup> The support of political and civil society blocks was therefore expected to be crucial to its electoral fate (see "Domestic Reactions," below). The government also used significant state resources to mobilize support and ensured that the country's mosques broadcast messages in favor of the constitution, a process that was faulted by some critics.<sup>6</sup> Weekly political

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Open Source Center (OSC) Report GMP20110309950058, "Moroccan King Announces Constitutional Reforms in National Address," Al-Aoula Television in Arabic, March 9, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Marina Ottaway, "The New Moroccan Constitution: Real Change or More of the Same?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 20, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> OSC Report GMP20110618950001, "Moroccan King Says New Draft Constitution 'Modern, Democratic,'" Rabat Al-Aoula Television in Arabic, June 17, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Le Monde*, "Maroc: Les Réformes Politiques du Roi Sont Plébiscitées," July 3, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Hélène Despici-Popovic, "Au Maroc, un Oui Massif et des Jeunes Vindictifs," *Libération*, July 4, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Al Jazeera, "Religion Used by State to Win Support for Referendum - Moroccan Party," June 27, 2011, via OSC; Michael Mainville, "Morocco Looks to Mosques to Boost Referendum 'Yes' Vote," Agence France Presse (AFP), June 29, 2011; Paul Schemm, "Calls for a Boycott Drowned Out by Huge Campaign for New Morocco Constitution," The Canadian Press, June 30, 2011.

demonstrations in major cities, ongoing since February 2011, have continued since the constitutional draft was released and the referendum was held (see “Morocco’s Protest Movement,” below).

In his March 9 speech on political reforms, the king proposed additional steps to ensure greater government decentralization and to promote women’s participation in politics. Subsequent reform pledges have centered around improving economic regulations and the public procurement process for greater transparency, and expanding press freedom through changes to the press law.

## Content of the New Constitution

The new constitution, which is nearly twice as long as the former one, includes a number of provisions designed to strengthen the prime minister (who is now to be referred to as “head of government”), the bicameral legislature, and the judiciary; to promote human rights, women’s rights, and Berber (Amazigh) cultural rights; and to encourage decentralization and good governance. The new constitution provides greater insulation for the judiciary from executive power by increasing the independence and authority of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, although the king would continue to chair the council (arts. 113-116). It also introduces new guarantees as to the primacy of law over public figures and institutions (art. 6); the protection of political parties, unions, and civil society groups from being dissolved by the state (arts. 9 and 12); equal socioeconomic rights for women (art. 19)<sup>7</sup>; protection of citizens from extrajudicial detention (art. 23); and access to government information (art. 27). It also retains from the 1996 constitution a reference to Islam as the “religion of the state” alongside guarantees “to all” of “the free exercise of their religious affairs”<sup>8</sup> (art. 3), along with freedom of expression and association (arts. 25 and 27) and the right to free enterprise (art. 35), and it expands on several areas related to the latter two.

The drafters of the new constitution state that it is designed to introduce greater checks and balances into Morocco’s political system. The king nevertheless retains significant executive authorities. For example, under the new constitution, the king:

- continues to appoint the prime minister, although he is now required to choose a member of the party with the highest proportion of the vote in legislative elections (art. 47)<sup>9</sup>;
- continues to appoint government ministers, although he is supposed to do so based on a proposal by the prime minister (art. 47);
- retains the authority to fire government ministers (art. 47);

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<sup>7</sup> Only equal political rights are enshrined in the 1996 constitution.

<sup>8</sup> On the free exercise of religion, the wording is similar to the existing 1996 constitution; the draft also continues to define Islam as “the state religion.” Proposals to include a provision guaranteeing “freedom of religious belief” were reportedly rejected due to concerns over encouraging proselytizing, according to a reform commission member interviewed by CRS on June 27, 2011. See also David B. Ottaway, “Morocco’s Arab Spring,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 2011; OSC Doc. GMP20110628291001, “Casablanca Weekly Seeks ‘Freedom of Conscience’ Article in New Constitution,” Casablanca *Telquel* Online, June 21, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> The current prime minister could remain in his position, as he is a member of the party which gained the highest proportion of the vote in the 2007 legislative election.

- continues to preside over cabinet meetings and retains the authority to convene such meetings (art. 48);
- retains the ability to dissolve parliament (art. 51);
- remains commander-in-chief of the armed forces (art. 53);
- continues to accredit all ambassadors and to sign and ratify treaties (with certain exceptions that require parliamentary approval) (art. 55);
- continues to exercise his powers via decree (art. 42); and
- remains the country's supreme Islamic religious authority as "Commander of the Faithful" (art. 41).<sup>10</sup>

## Domestic Reactions

Most major political parties expressed their support for the draft constitution and urged their supporters to vote "yes." These included the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), which is a significant opposition voice in parliament; a PJD legislator stated that "compared to the current constitution, this plan is an important advance."<sup>11</sup> The Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), considered close to the monarchy, stated that the new constitution "is a historic pact without precedent that forms the basis for a Morocco that is evolved, developed, and modernist, and promises to be a model for other countries."<sup>12</sup> A member of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), a party in the ruling alliance, praised the process through which the constitutional revision had been formulated, stating that those on the reform commission "represent the Moroccan people, particularly well established parties that struggled for over 50 years to develop a democratic system."<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, some Moroccan activists contend that the new constitution does not go far enough in changing Morocco's system of government. Exemplifying this line of thinking, one critical media outlet argued that "we are still very far from the 'parliamentary monarchy' goal and the separation of powers does not exist since the king has relinquished none of his prerogatives nor any of his regal powers."<sup>14</sup> A Casablanca protest organizer was quoted as saying that the new constitution "keeps all the powers in the hands of the king. He refused to listen to the street."<sup>15</sup> A prominent journalist and frequent critic of the government, Aboubakr Jamaï, wrote that "you must read and re-read this constitution in order to measure to what point the text, which is supposed to be our social contract... instead consecrates authoritarianism."<sup>16</sup> Others, however, argue that

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<sup>10</sup> CRS analysis of the constitutional text was aided by Arabic-English translation and legal analysis by Issam M. Saliba, Foreign Law Specialist at the Library of Congress. CRS requests to the Moroccan embassy in Washington, DC, for an official translation had not been answered at the time of publication.

<sup>11</sup> AFP, "Several Thousand Protest Morocco Reform Plans," June 19, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Xinhua, "Maroc: Les Partis Politiques Voteront 'Oui' à la Nouvelle Constitution," June 18, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera, "Rabat 'Certain' to Win Referendum on Reform, Protest Groups Call for Boycott," June 21, 2011, via OSC.

<sup>14</sup> OSC Report GMP20110628291002, "Casablanca Weekly Gives Lukewarm Reception to Draft New Constitution," Casablanca *Telquel* Online, June 28, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> On June 19 and June 26, pro-monarchy demonstrators reportedly attacked pro-democracy protesters. Reuters, "Thousands Protest in Morocco for More Reform," June 19, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> *Mediapart*, "Au Maroc, le Triste Jeu du 'Oui, Non, Quoi que,'" July 4, 2011.

“despite its failure to significantly limit the king’s powers, the new constitution provides a margin of political maneuverability that did not previously exist,” and that it is up to political parties and activists to further the reform process by taking advantage of this new space.<sup>17</sup>

The February 20 Movement (see “Morocco’s Protest Movement,” below) declined to participate in the reform commission’s deliberations, and members of the movement rejected the draft constitution and called for a boycott of the referendum. A communiqué by the “Mamfakinch” coalition (loosely, “We Won’t Give Up”), part of the protest movement, alleged that the referendum results reflected the illicit use of state resources to boost turnout and intimidate those who might vote against the new constitution.<sup>18</sup> The Islamist grassroots Justice and Charity Organization (JCO, Al Adl Wal Ihsan), which is banned but officially tolerated, and which has supported Morocco’s protest movement, stated that “under the draft constitution, the king retains absolute powers and legitimate demands for freedom, dignity and social justice are ignored.”<sup>19</sup> A large trade union, the Democratic Labor Confederation (CDT), also called for a boycott, as did three small leftist political parties.

The king’s March 9 speech was heralded by the major political parties, international observers, and some Moroccan democracy advocates as a first step toward key internal reforms. The leader of the opposition PJD, for example, welcomed the speech as a “powerful” sign that the king had “reacted positively to the demands made by the parties and young people.”<sup>20</sup> At the same time, some domestic critics contended that the March proposals were too little, too late, and rejected the composition of the constitutional commission, which was selected by the king and included several figures reputed to be close to the monarchy.<sup>21</sup> The February 20 Movement claimed that the monarchy retained too much control over the process, and called for further protests.<sup>22</sup>

## New Human Rights Council

Several days before the March 9 speech, the king announced the creation of a new National Human Rights Council (CNDH), which authorities said would be more independent than the pre-existing Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH), created in 1990. Unlike the CCDH, the new Council does not include members of the government—although 16 out of 27 members will be appointed by either the king (8) or the parliament (8)<sup>23</sup>—and it is supposed to benefit from greater investigatory access to government offices and a wider scope of potential action. The CNDH will also oversee regional human rights commissions. Officials have indicated that it will investigate human rights issues in the Western Sahara, where advocacy groups and some diplomats have long called for independent (international) human rights monitoring. The CNDH is expected to be part of a new set of government institutions designed to promote human rights, including an inter-ministerial coordinating entity and a new national Ombudsman’s office.

<sup>17</sup> Anouar Boukhars and Shadi Hamid, “Morocco’s Moment of Reform?” The Brookings Institution, June 28, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Mamfakinch.com, “Communiqué Mamfakinch/Mamsawtinch: Appel aux Militant(e)s du 20 Février,” June 29, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Al Jazeera, “Moroccans to Stage Protests Despite King’s ‘Reforms,’” June 18, 2011, via OSC.

<sup>20</sup> AFP, “Morocco King Vows Sweeping Reforms,” March 9, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> *Le Monde*, “Au Maroc, les Promesses de Réformes du Roi n’Ont Pas Désamorcé la Contestation,” March 15, 2011; Karim Boukhari, “Between Hope and Doubt,” *Telquel*, May 16, 2011, via OSC Doc. GMP20110516291001.

<sup>22</sup> An explanation of the February 20 Movement’s position on the constitutional commission is provided in “Why No to Mennouni’s Commission: the Explanation by a #Feb20 Member,” posted on April 8, 2011, at <http://moroccansforchange.com>.

<sup>23</sup> The remaining 11 members are appointed by civil society.

Driss El Yazami, a human rights scholar who was based in France for many years and previously served as an official envoy to the Moroccan diaspora, remains president of the human rights body, as he was of the CCDH. According to El Yazami, the CNDH's national-level priorities include (1) gender equality, (2) the rights of children and young people, (3) the rights of "vulnerable" groups, and (4) the oversight and coordination of a national plan to promote human rights.<sup>24</sup>

## U.S. Reactions to Moroccan Reform Proposals

The United States' close bilateral relationship with Morocco and reliance on King Mohammed VI's support on regional security and counterterrorism issues underlie U.S. statements expressing both strong support for the monarchy and encouragement of political reforms. Similar support for the monarchy and its reform efforts has been expressed by other Moroccan allies such as France and the European Union.<sup>25</sup> In late February, amid the start of Morocco's protest movement, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, William J. Burns, stated during a visit to Morocco that "the partnership between the United States, Morocco and the Moroccan people is a very high priority for President Obama and Secretary Clinton," and that "it's never been more important than at this moment." The Under Secretary further praised Morocco's "strong record of efforts under the leadership of King Mohammed" and stated that "the United States will continue to do everything that we can to support that effort."<sup>26</sup>

The Obama Administration has been strongly supportive of the king's reform proposals, characterizing them as significant and calling for their speedy implementation. In a statement welcoming the king's March 9 speech, the State Department referred to Morocco as "a key strategic partner" and stated that "we stand ready to work with the government and the people of Morocco to realize their democratic aspirations."<sup>27</sup> In subsequent testimony to Congress, Under Secretary Burns cited Morocco (along with Jordan) as "countries working to stay ahead of the wave of popular protests" by announcing "significant reform initiatives."<sup>28</sup> In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri on March 23, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stated that Morocco was "on the road to achieving democratic change," adding that the king's reform plans "hold great promise" as "a comprehensive approach." With regard to the newly created human rights council, Clinton described it as "an excellent idea," adding, "We obviously want to see it come into effect, we want to see it in action ... we think it will serve a very important purpose."<sup>29</sup>

In May, the State Department released a written statement that "we urge continuing and rapid implementation of these crucial reforms" and reiterated the characterization of Morocco as "a strategic partner."<sup>30</sup> On July 1, a State Department spokesman referred to the constitutional

<sup>24</sup> CRS interview with El Yazami, July 2011.

<sup>25</sup> AFP, "France's Sarkozy Praises 'Crucial Progress' of Moroccan Monarch's Reforms," June 18, 2011; "EU Praises Morocco Monarch's Reform Pledges," June 19, 2011; and "Nicolas Sarkozy a Félicité le Roi du Maroc pour la Nouvelle Constitution; and *Europolitique*, "Maroc/Constitution: L'UE Salue le Résultat du Référendum," July 5, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Embassy in Morocco, "Under Secretary Burns' Statement at the Moroccan MFA," February 27, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> State Department, "State Department on Announcement by King Mohammed VI of Morocco," March 10, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, U.S. Policy and Uprisings in the Middle East, March 17, 2011, transcript via *Congressional Quarterly* (CQ).

<sup>29</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri," March 23, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> State Department, Office of the Spokesman, "Transition and Reform in Morocco," May 19, 2011.



referendum as “an important step in Morocco’s ongoing democratic development” that “did allow the people...the opportunity to express their views,” and added that “we congratulate the people of Morocco and their leadership.”<sup>31</sup> Secretary of State Clinton said in a statement on July 2 that

The United States welcomes Morocco’s July 1 constitutional referendum. We support the Moroccan people and leaders in their efforts to strengthen the rule of law, raise human rights standards, promote good governance, and work toward long-term democratic reform that incorporates checks and balances. We look forward to the full implementation of the new constitution as a step toward the fulfillment of the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans.<sup>32</sup>

## Morocco’s Protest Movement

A series of large political demonstrations have taken place in Moroccan cities since early February, amid a regional surge in popular unrest that has been dubbed the “Arab Spring.” As noted above (see “Constitutional Referendum and Other Reform Proposals,” above), weekly demonstrations have continued, and may have increased in size, since the king’s announcement of broad reform plans in early March, subsequent pledges in May to raise public sector salaries and the minimum wage, and the passage of a new constitution by referendum. Protesters have rejected the constitutional changes as insufficient and continued calls for greater democracy and anticorruption efforts; protests have drawn thousands, and in some cases tens of thousands, of participants.<sup>33</sup> Some have been challenged, at times violently, by pro-monarchy protesters.

Analysts have debated whether the protests represent an existential threat for the Moroccan monarchy, with most concluding that the government’s relative respect for civil liberties and the public’s general esteem for the institutions of the monarchy provide significant protection for the regime.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, most demonstrators express support for the monarchy while calling for a greater devolution of executive powers to elected representatives.<sup>35</sup> It is unclear to what extent protesters represent a cohesive movement or a majority view. Still, the demonstrations have revealed significant public discontent, as well as the monarchy’s apparent inability, to date, to stem the unrest through political and economic concessions.

On February 20, tens of thousands of Moroccans turned out in the capital, Rabat, and other cities in what organizers termed a “Movement for Change.” Protesters called for democratic reforms—including a new constitution—but stopped short of advocating an end to the monarchy, a stance that has continued. Some also reportedly chanted slogans against “autocracy,” corruption, and state-owned television, which is widely viewed as biased. Few uniformed security forces were present, according to press reports. Although the protests were not met with the violent retribution that has been seen elsewhere in the region, limited clashes between demonstrators and police occurred in several cities, along with looting and other localized violence. Labor strikes, protests

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<sup>31</sup> Mark C. Toner, Deputy State Department Spokesman, Daily Press Briefing, July 1, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks,” State Department release, July 2, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Reuters, “Thousands of Moroccans Protest, Unmoved by Reforms,” July 3, 2011; and “No Let Up in Moroccan Protests for Deeper Reform,” July 10, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Brian T. Edwards, “The Next To Tumble?” *The Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> The protest movement has generally refrained from direct criticism of the king, but it has called for the resignations of several powerful figures. These include Prime Minister Fassi; Mohamed Mounir Majidi, secretary to the king; and PAM founder Fouad Ali al Himma. Souhail Karam, “Thousands in Morocco March for Rights, End to Graft,” Reuters, March 20, 2011; Kristen McTighe, “Moroccan Youth Demands Action, Not Words,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2011.

over socioeconomic grievances, and localized unrest are relatively common occurrences in Morocco, and are usually tolerated by the authorities.

Protests have since continued to convene at least once a week, including several large demonstrations organized by the “February 20 Movement,” a loosely organized, leaderless coalition that has used Facebook and other social media as organizing tools. Protesters have espoused a wide range of grievances, including a lack of balance of powers in Morocco’s political system and perceived corruption, “clientelism,” social injustice, abuse of authority by senior government officials, control by the king over powerful business interests, and concentration of political and economic power among the elite (known as the *makhzen*) that surrounds the monarchy. Others have focused on socioeconomic issues, such as high youth unemployment and complaints over wages. On March 22, employees of the state-owned media agency demonstrated in favor of greater editorial independence.<sup>36</sup> Small protests and vandalism have also reportedly occurred in the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

Government officials initially signaled that the protests did not pose a threat to domestic stability, and that demonstrators would be allowed to peacefully express their views. Security forces have not opened fire on demonstrators or engaged in mass arrests (as elsewhere in the region), and many protests have been carried out without incident. However, some gatherings have been subject to violent police reprisals, and the government has occasionally accused Islamists and leftist radicals of being behind the protest movement.<sup>37</sup> The king did not overtly reference the protest movement during his speech in March announcing reforms, and has striven to appear as though reforms are being initiated organically and not in response to pressure from the public. Some analysts viewed police crackdowns on protesters in May as indicating a hardening in authorities’ stance toward critics who decline to participate in regime-directed reform efforts, although such crackdowns appear to have waned in recent weeks.<sup>38</sup>

While February 20 Movement activists have largely focused on secular political issues, their protest calls have been backed by the Islamist JCO.<sup>39</sup> (The JCO is stringently critical of the institutions of the monarchy and declines to participate in the political system.) Some analysts and politicians have accused the JCO of manipulating the protests, a charge that the movement’s leadership denies; still, perceptions that the protest movement is working closely with Islamists have reportedly hurt its credibility among some Moroccans and could presage future divisions.<sup>40</sup> Trade unions formally lent their support to demonstrations for the first time on May 1

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<sup>36</sup> AFP, “Morocco Official Agency Reporters Seek Independence,” March 22, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch stated after the March 20 rally that “the decision on whether to allow or repress the demonstrators seems to rest more with political decisions by authorities than with the behavior of the demonstrators” (“Morocco: Thousands Demonstrate Peacefully,” March 21, 2011). At least one protester reportedly died following a police beating (AFP, “Maroc: Décès d’Un Manifestant Blessé Dimanche (Officiel),” June 2, 2011). See also Adam Tanner and Souhail Karam, “Many Wounded as Moroccan Police Beat Protesters,” Reuters, May 22, 2011; and Reuters, “Morocco Says Islamists, Leftists Stirring Protests,” May 23, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> *Los Angeles Times* blog, “MOROCCO: Protest Violence Could Escalate, Intelligence Analyst Says,” Babylon and Beyond, May 23, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> In early February, the Justice and Charity organization reportedly called for “radical democratic change” in Morocco, after expressing support for protests in other Middle East and North African countries. Its youth wing, in particular, has reportedly participated in organizing demonstrations. *Akhbar al-Yaum al-Maghrebiya* online, “Politicians, Analysts Disagree Over Likelihood of Protests Reaching Morocco,” February 7, 2011, via OSC.

<sup>40</sup> Léa-Lisa Westerhoff, “Au Maroc, les Militants ‘Ne s’Arrêteront Pas Avant que le Régime Change,’” *Libération*, June 4, 2011; AFP, “Morocco’s Islamists Say Not Pushing for Religious State,” June 8, 2011; Boukhars and Hamid, op. cit.; AFP, “Maroc: Le Mouvement du 20 Février Face à la Présence des Islamistes,” July 9, 2011.

(international labor day). The leadership of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), a moderate Islamist opposition political party, has indicated it will not participate in the organization of protests, though PJD members have reportedly joined some demonstrations.

Protesters, including Islamists, have also called for the release of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of individuals who were jailed in security sweeps that followed the 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca. Human rights advocates contend that many of the arrests and subsequent convictions were carried out without due process. Protesters have simultaneously decried terrorism, particularly in the aftermath of the April 14, 2011, bombing in Marrakesh (see below). On April 14, the king ordered the release of over 90 detainees, mostly hard-line Islamists, many of whom were held on terrorism-related accusations. Nearly 100 more had their sentences reduced. Those released include Cheikh Mohamed Fizazi, a Salafist leader who was convicted of preaching radical Islamist doctrine and meeting the perpetrators of the 2003 Casablanca bomb attacks (he has since espoused a more moderate rhetoric); Moustapha Moatassim, leader of an Islamist movement that was banned by the government in 2008; and Abdelhafiz Esriti, a correspondent of Hezbollah's TV station, Al Manar. They also included a handful of human rights activists, along with three prominent Western Sahara independence activists who were arrested in 2009.

Rights activists and figures in Morocco's Salafist community continue to call for further releases or reviews of cases. On May 15, security forces violently dispersed a protest gathering in Rabat in front of a site that activists allege is a secret government detention center where terrorist suspects have been held incommunicado and sometimes tortured.<sup>41</sup> Several demonstrators were badly injured. The next day, hundreds of Salafist inmates at a formal prison near Rabat launched a two-day violent uprising, citing alleged torture, unfair trials, and arbitrary treatment as grievances.<sup>42</sup> Security forces put down the unrest, but at least 50 officers were injured along with dozens of detainees, according to news reports. The rioting followed a Salafist Jihadist media message released in late April that expressed solidarity with Islamist prisoners in Morocco and called for their release.<sup>43</sup>

## Marrakesh Bombing

On April 28, 2011, a bomb exploded at a popular tourist café in Marrakesh, killing 17 people, most of them European nationals, and wounding two dozen others. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on Moroccan soil since the 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca, which killed 45 (including the bombers). Seven suspects have been charged with carrying out the attack and belonging to an unspecified "banned religious group." Their trial opened in late June. The primary suspect, Adil Al Othmani, is accused of placing explosives in the cafe to be detonated by remote trigger. Authorities have described the suspects as Salafist ideologues and Al Qaeda sympathizers, and allege that Othmani (whose nationality is unclear) was previously expelled from Libya and Portugal, without indicating evidence of current operational contacts or

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<sup>41</sup> The location is in Témara, a Rabat suburb that is reportedly home to the headquarters of Morocco's domestic intelligence agency. The newly created National Council for Human Rights reported in late May that it had found no signs of illegal detention at the Témara site. See Human Rights Watch, *Morocco: "Stop Looking for Your Son,"* October 25, 2010; and Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP), "Morocco's Rights Council Says It Found No Signs That Temara Building Used for Illegal Detention," May 26, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Souhail Karam, "Five Guards Taken Hostage in Morocco Jail Unrest," Reuters, May 17, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> OSC Report GMP20110424113009, "Jihadist Establishment Sends Message: 'To Our Brothers in the Moroccan Prisons,'" April 24, 2011.

coordination with Al Qaeda leaders.<sup>44</sup> Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a regional Al Qaeda affiliate, released a rare statement denying responsibility for the attack. According to Morocco's Interior Ministry, U.S. and European experts provided assistance with investigations.<sup>45</sup>

Moroccan citizens have organized demonstrations near the site of the attack to condemn terrorism and also previous government counterterrorism actions that, they contend, were repressive. Some Muslim leaders and human rights advocates have praised the government for its handling of the aftermath of the attack, noting that unlike in 2003, when security forces carried out mass arrests and detentions, at times allegedly without due process, this time authorities have shown relative restraint by leading a targeted probe focused on the suspected perpetrators.<sup>46</sup>

## Emerging Questions

Recent events in Morocco raise a number of questions for U.S. policy. These include:

- Was the July 1 referendum vote widely perceived as legitimate, and are official turnout figures accurate? What is the timeline and process for implementing the new constitution? In practice, will reforms radically change Morocco's system of government, the balance of power between branches of government, or the government's role in the domestic economy? How might changes proposed in the new constitution affect the social and political role of currently banned groups such as the Islamist Justice and Charity Organization?
- To what extent do protest groups such as the February 20 Movement represent public opinion in Morocco, and which of their grievances are most important to the population at large? To what extent are protesters—who include secular youth activists, leftist groups, and Islamists—politically organized and united around a political platform that extends beyond criticism of the status quo? Has the protest movement led to a fundamental realignment of Moroccan politics? What role will the movement play in Moroccan politics if the proposed constitutional reforms are adopted? Are large demonstrations likely to continue, and under what circumstances? What will be the impact if protest leaders continue to refuse to engage with the monarchy's regime-led reform process, and could this potentially lead to greater unrest or violence?
- What issues will the newly created National Human Rights Council focus on? How critical will it be vis-à-vis government policies, and will it credibly investigate sensitive topics such as counterterrorism detention practices? Is the new Council a credible substitute for international human rights monitoring in the Western Sahara, which has not been permitted by Moroccan authorities?

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<sup>44</sup> AFP, "Marrakesh Bomb Suspect was Expelled from Libya: Minister," May 6, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> The State Department released a statement offering "our full assistance to the Moroccan government as it works to investigate this attack and bring those accountable to justice" ("Secretary Clinton: Terrorist Attack in Marrakesh, Morocco," April 28, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Caroline Taix, "Maroc: Pas d'Arrestations 'Aveugles' Après l'Attentat, Se Félicitent des Islamistes," AFP, May 4, 2011.

- How will the king's recent decision to pardon or commute the sentences of Islamist detainees affect the environment for violent extremism in Morocco? Will proposed reforms extend to counterterrorism laws and practices?
- How might U.S.-Moroccan relations be affected by political upheaval and change across the region? What benchmarks will be considered by the United States in evaluating the progress of Moroccan reforms?

**Figure 1. Map of Morocco**



Source: Map resources, adapted by CRS.

## Government and Politics

The Moroccan royal dynasty has ruled the country since 1649. Morocco's monarchy was one of the first governments to recognize the independence of the United States of America. The reigning king, Mohammed VI, ascended to the throne in 1999, following his father, King Hassan II, who died at age 70. King Mohammed VI remains the pre-eminent state authority in Morocco's political system, though he has said he is committed to building a democracy and granted limited executive powers to the prime minister under the July 2011 constitutional revision. The king chairs the Council of State that endorses all legislation before it goes to parliament, and approves and may dismiss government ministers. He may dissolve parliament, call elections, and exercise his powers via decree. The king also has a "shadow government" of royal advisors and is head of the military. Reforms largely depend on the king's will, and he has undertaken several major liberalizing initiatives. The king also is also tied to significant domestic economic enterprises.

The bicameral legislature consists of a 270-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, whose members are indirectly elected to nine-year terms, and a 325-seat lower house, the Chamber of

Representatives, whose members are directly elected to five-year terms. Thirty seats (about 10%) in the lower house are reserved for women (candidates for these seats are elected from a separate women's list) and, under a rule that took effect in 2009, women are guaranteed 12% of the seats in local elections.

The five-party governing coalition is led by the conservative-leaning Istiqlal (Independence) Party (PI), the former leader in the anti-colonial movement (France and Spain occupied Morocco) and the party of the prime minister, Abbas Al Fassi. The other coalition members, which often hold divergent policy views and compete for influence, are the left-leaning Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), which was the main opposition force under King Hassan II; the centrist National Rally of Independents (RNI); the Popular Movement (MP); and the Progress and Socialism Party (PPS). The moderate Islamist and well-organized Justice and Development Party (PJD), also known as Al Misbah ("the beacon"), is considered the main opposition party that has remained outside the government and does not have ties to the monarchy.

The September 2002 election for the Chamber of Representatives, the weak lower house, was deemed to be relatively free and fair by observers, and to have increased women's political participation. The September 2007 election also met international standards, but only 37% of the voters turned out and 19% of those cast blank ballots, reflecting widespread disillusionment with the political process and popular understanding of the powerlessness of the legislature. The Istiqlal Party placed first, and Abbas Al Fassi was appointed prime minister and formed a coalition government with a 34-member cabinet, including an unprecedented five women ministers. The PJD had been widely expected to win the largest share of the vote; it instead placed second and charged irregularities, but accepted the legitimacy of the outcome. Some 23 parties and blocs, plus independents, are represented in the current legislature.

In August 2008, Fouad Ali Al Himma established the Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM). Al Himma is a former classmate of King Mohammed VI and former deputy interior minister. He was elected to parliament as an independent in 2007 and became chairman of its Committee on Foreign, Defense, and Islamic Affairs. Al Himma has not assumed the leadership of PAM; he is deputy leader, but is considered the party's de facto head. PAM has sought alliances with parties known to be recipients of royal patronage and won over many deputies who defected from other parties. Thus, although the party only ostensibly holds three seats in parliament (the three deputies, formerly independent, formed the PAM after their election in 2007), it controls a large bloc in parliament. PAM's ideology is incoherent, but its goals reportedly are to "rationalize" the political landscape by diminishing the number of parties, encourage more participation in politics, and challenge or marginalize the PJD.<sup>47</sup> In May 2009, PAM pulled out of the coalition government. The MP joined the government and provided some stability as did some new appointments.

Some politicians initially feared that PAM was a nascent state party similar to those in Egypt and Tunisia that might be used to dominate politics.<sup>48</sup> Few were surprised by PAM's first place finish with 21.6% of the vote in elections for seats on municipal councils on June 12, 2009, when PJD took sixth place. PAM also placed first in the October 2, 2009 elections for one-third of the 270

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<sup>47</sup> James Liddell, "Morocco: Modern Politics or Politics of Modernity?" *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Socialist Union of Popular Forces politician Idriss Lashgar, quoted in *Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1-21, 2008, p. 17714.

seats in the Chamber of Counselors, the upper house. PAM offered a sharp contrast to other parties, which are led by much older men who view women with suspicion and probably put them on electoral lists mainly to meet official quotas, and reach out to voters only before elections. In reaction to the PAM's momentum, the PJD and the USFP formed an unusual alliance to run some local councils. However, PAM's influence has since appeared to subside amid reports of internal divisions and strong opposition voiced by protesters since February 2011. Al Himma offered to resign on May 17, but his resignation was reportedly rejected by PAM's national bureau.<sup>49</sup>

The Islamist Al Adl Wal Ihsan (Justice and Charity Organization/JCO), led by Cheikh Abdessalem Yassine, is officially banned as a political movement but is the largest grassroots organization in the country. It eschews violence and is considered more closely attuned to constituents than the main political parties. JCO called for a boycott of the 2007 national election, arguing that participation was pointless without constitutional reform aimed at diminishing the role of the monarchy. It often conveys its views in street demonstrations, for example, against the Family Code, in support of the Palestinians and against Israel, etc. The authorities periodically arrest JCO members and break up the group's meetings. JCO leaders have been supportive of the protest movement that began in February 2011.

## Terrorism

The monarchy long asserted that its claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed was a shield against Islamist militancy. This belief was shattered after September 11, 2001, as expatriate Moroccans have been implicated in terrorism abroad, and Morocco has suffered from terrorism at home. Morocco has tried to distance itself from its expatriates, blaming their experiences in exile for their radicalization.<sup>50</sup> Numerous small, isolated, tactically limited, extremist cells, which adhere to the Salafiya Jihadiya (Reformist Holy War/"Jihadist") ideology, are viewed as the main threat to Morocco's domestic security.<sup>51</sup>

In February 2003, Osama Bin Laden listed Morocco among the "oppressive, unjust, apostate ruling governments," which he characterized as "enslaved by America" and, therefore, "most eligible for liberation."<sup>52</sup> To some observers, this *fatwa* or religious edict appeared to trigger attacks in Morocco on May 16, 2003, in which 12 suicide bombers identified as Salafiya Jihadiya adherents linked to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) and Al Qaeda attacked five Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca, killing themselves and 33 others and injuring more than 100. A large GICM network was implicated in the March 2004 Madrid train bombings, for which two Moroccans were convicted in Spain. (A Moroccan court convicted one of their accomplices.) Moroccans suspected of GICM affiliation were arrested in several European

<sup>49</sup> *Le Nouvel Observateur*, "Maroc: Le PAM Rejette la Demande de Démission d'El Himma," May 17, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Noteworthy developments abroad include the trial of two Moroccans in German courts for aiding the 9/11 terrorists and the revelation that a Moroccan imam was "the spiritual father of the Hamburg cell" that helped execute the 9/11 attacks. A French-Moroccan, Zacarias Moussaoui, was tried in the United States as the 20<sup>th</sup> hijacker for 9/11. In addition, 18 Moroccans allegedly linked to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan were detained at the U.S. Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; several reportedly remain there. Returnees have been convicted in Moroccan courts.

<sup>51</sup> Such cells perpetrated their major attacks in 2002, with the murders of locals who had committed "impure acts" such as drinking alcohol. In 2003, Moroccan courts convicted a jihadist spiritual leader, who had fought in Afghanistan and praised the 9/11 attacks and Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, of inciting violence against Westerners.

<sup>52</sup> "Moroccans Say Al Qaeda Masterminded and Financed Casablanca Suicide Bombings," *New York Times*, May 23, 2003.

countries. In 2005, the U.S. State Department designated GICM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), but the Department stated as of mid-2010 that “much of the GICM’s leadership in Morocco and Europe has been killed, imprisoned, or are awaiting trial.”<sup>53</sup> The Moroccan government convicted the group’s alleged leader in absentia for his role in the Casablanca attacks, but he remains free in exile in the United Kingdom, which found insufficient evidence against him.<sup>54</sup>

Moroccan and European authorities continue to disrupt cells that they say are linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, also known as Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb or AQLIM), formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a group originating in Algeria with regional ambitions.<sup>55</sup> AQIM has not perpetrated a successful terrorist attack in Morocco, where its threat has stemmed mainly from the potential transfer of operational capabilities to inexperienced radicals and from its active efforts to recruit and incite Moroccans. In November 2010, however, Moroccan authorities seized 34 Moroccans and hundreds of pounds of cocaine that they allegedly were transporting from Algeria and Mauritania through Morocco. Those apprehended were linked to AQIM, which, analysts contend, benefits financially from trans-Saharan cocaine trafficking and other regional criminal activities. In addition, Moroccans reportedly have joined AQIM at camps in Algeria and elsewhere outside of the country.

In April 2007, two suicide attacks occurred near the U.S. Consulate and the American Language Center in Casablanca; the bombers killed only themselves. In September 2009, Moroccan security services arrested 24 suspects who allegedly were linked to a terrorist network linked to Al Qaeda that specialized in recruiting volunteers for Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Moroccans have fought alongside insurgents in Iraq. In April 2011, a bomb exploded at a popular tourist cafe in Marrakesh, killing 17, mostly foreign nationals (see “Marrakesh Bombing,” above).

Morocco is cooperating with U.S. and European agencies to counter terrorism at home and abroad. The U.S. State Department recognized that in 2009:

The Moroccan government pursued a comprehensive counterterrorism approach that, building on popular rejection of terrorism, emphasized neutralizing existing terrorist cells through traditional intelligence work and preemptive security measures. Morocco aggressively targeted and dismantled terrorist cells within the Kingdom by leveraging intelligence collection, police work, and collaboration with regional and other international partners. These efforts resulted in the disruption of several terrorist groups.<sup>56</sup>

To counter radical Islamism, Morocco also has exerted greater control over religious leaders and councils, created new theological councils, retrained imams, deployed supervisors to oversee their sermons, closed unregulated mosques, retrained and rehabilitated some individuals convicted of terror-related crimes to correct their understanding of Islam, and launched radio and television stations and a website to transmit “Moroccan religious values” of tolerance. In 2005, the king launched a \$1.2 billion National Initiative for Human Development to redress socioeconomic conditions that extremists exploit for recruitment. Observers have questioned its effectiveness.

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<sup>53</sup> U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, released on August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/cret/2009/index.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Olivier Guitta, “Alive and Well and Living in London,” *Weekly Standard*, May 7, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> See CRS Report R41070, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, coordinated by John Rollins.

<sup>56</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism*, op. cit.



Morocco's counterterrorism efforts have emphasized international cooperation, particularly with the United States and European governments. However, Algeria has taken the lead in promoting regional cooperation to counter terrorism and has excluded Morocco from those endeavors due to ongoing differences over the Western Sahara issue (see "Western Sahara," below). Nonetheless, Rabat shares the view of its neighbors and the United States that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is the main threat to the region. Morocco has worked with its southern neighbor, Mauritania, about improving coordination on that subject as well as combating drug smuggling and illegal immigration, and also has reached out to Senegal.

## Human Rights

The U.S. State Department described the human rights situation in Morocco in 2010 in the following way:

Citizens did not have the right to change the constitutional provisions establishing the country's monarchical form of government or those designating Islam the state religion. There were reports of torture and other abuses by various branches of the security forces. Prison conditions remained below international standards. Reports of arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, and police and security force impunity continued. Politics, as well as corruption and inefficiency, influenced the judiciary, which was not fully independent. The government restricted press freedoms. Corruption was a serious problem in all branches of government. Child labor, particularly in the unregulated informal sector, and trafficking in persons remained problems.<sup>57</sup>

Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2010* survey concluded that Morocco is a "partly free" country, and noted a downward trend owing to "increased concentration of power in the hands of political elites aligned with the monarchy."<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, the king has undertaken several initiatives that are marked advances in selected areas of human rights practices. Most notably, the parliament enacted revolutionary changes to the Family Code, or *Moudawana*, in January 2004, making polygamy rare by requiring permission of a judge and the man's first wife, raising the legal age for marriage for girls to 18, and simplifying divorce procedures for women, among other changes aimed at improving the status of women. However, family court judges have not applied the law strictly and women continue to suffer from inequality, a lack of access to the justice system, and violence.<sup>59</sup> The king also created an Equity and Reconciliation Commission to provide an historical record of abuses before 1999, to account for the "disappeared," and to compensate victims.<sup>60</sup> In 2001, he launched

<sup>57</sup> State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2010, Morocco*, April 8, 2011, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154468.htm>. The U.S. State Department judges Morocco to be a Tier 2 country with regard to trafficking in persons as it is "a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking." The government "does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so." State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011*, June 2011.

<sup>58</sup> See <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

<sup>59</sup> Inter Press News Service, "Morocco: New Law, Same Old Men," July 31, 2009; see also Steven Erlanger and Souad Mekhennet, "Law Empowering Women Leaves Many Behind," *International Herald Tribune*, August 20, 2009 and Lucy Lamble, "UN Women Report: Access to Justice in Morocco," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Rights advocates, while welcoming the Commission as an important precedent in the Arab world, contend that some of the Commission's recommendations related to enhancing the rule of law have not been implemented, that senior (continued...)

a dialogue on Berber culture, and the government has since authorized the teaching of Berber dialects, issued a textbook in Berber, and launched a state-funded Tamazigh (Berber dialect) TV channel.<sup>61</sup>

Rights advocates have criticized restrictions on freedom of expression, as has the European Union. Although press freedom is more widely upheld than in some countries in the region, direct criticism of the monarchy or the government's stance on the Western Sahara is not tolerated, and self-censorship is reportedly practiced. The Committee to Protect Journalists, which has criticized what it views as a decline in press freedom in recent years, has documented a number of criminal prosecutions of critical journalists on charges ostensibly unrelated to journalism, but which, the organization contends, are "meant to silence a critical voice."<sup>62</sup> In 2010, two prominent private newspapers were forced to close following years of court battles and an alleged government campaign to enforce an advertising boycott.<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch contends that critical coverage of the Western Sahara issue, including by foreign correspondents, frequently leads to the revocation or denial of press credentials.<sup>64</sup>

After the May 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, parliament passed broad antiterrorism laws to define terrorist crimes and establish procedures for tracking terrorist finances. Human rights activists expressed concern about their legislative restrictions on the press, detention without charge, and reduced requirements for the death penalty. Other observers questioned whether elements in the regime were using the threat of Islamist terror to roll back reforms. Some worried that detentions could create radicals who would eventually be released into society.<sup>65</sup> A 2010 Human Rights Watch report contended that a "pattern of abuse" under counterterrorism laws included extrajudicial detentions, allegedly by intelligence agents in unacknowledged detention facilities; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; and coerced confessions. Moroccan authorities rejected the report's primary allegations and refuted the details of cases cited in it.<sup>66</sup>

The Moroccan Penal Code prohibits proselytizing to Muslims and the government expels foreign Christians or declares them *persona non grata* for violation of the law, without prosecuting them or affording them due process. Some U.S. Christian groups have criticized enforcement of the law, such as in March 2010, when the government expelled 16 foreign Christian volunteers, including some Americans, who had run a charity center/orphanage in Ifrane, in the Atlas Mountains, for some 10 years. Other similar expulsions also have taken place, and some of those targeted have alleged that an unprecedented number of deportations have been occurring in recent

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(...continued)

officials accused of serious abuses before the Commission should have been prosecuted, and that the Commission declined to focus sufficiently on abuses that took place in Western Sahara. See Amnesty International, *Broken Promises: The Equity and Reconciliation Commission and Its Follow-Up*, January 2010.

<sup>61</sup> The Berbers inhabited much of North Africa before Arab Muslims invaded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>62</sup> Rima Marrouch, "Morocco Pardons Journalist to Create Smokescreen," Committee to Protect Journalists, June 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2010: Morocco," at <http://www.cpj.org/2011/02/attacks-on-the-press-2010-morocco.php>.

<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: Restore Accreditation to Al Jazeera; Sahara Conflict Coverage Key Factor in Effort to Silence Selected Media," April 5, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Jill Carroll, "Morocco's Harder Line on Security Challenges Reforms," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 9, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

years.<sup>67</sup> The U.S. State Department reports that approximately 150 Christian foreign residents from 19 countries were expelled in 2009.<sup>68</sup>

Problems with human rights practices in Morocco also are linked to the Western Sahara issue, as seen in the case of Aminatou Haidar, an advocate for Sahraoui self-determination.<sup>69</sup> When she returned from receiving a human rights prize in the United States in November 2009, Haidar wrote “Western Sahara” as her address on customs forms to re-enter the Moroccan-administered Western Sahara city of Laayoune (alt: El Ayoun or Al Ayun), but the authorities rejected the forms, claimed that she had thereby renounced her citizenship, confiscated her passport, and expelled her to the Spanish Canary Islands. Haidar then went on a highly publicized 32-day hunger strike. After reported pressure from the United States, Haidar was allowed into Laayoune in what Moroccan authorities described as “a humanitarian gesture.”<sup>70</sup>

Over the years, Morocco has imprisoned other Sahraoui activists for alleged association with the POLISARIO Front actions which have attracted criticism from international human rights groups that has been less sensational than the Haidar case. As noted above, the Moroccan’s government sensitivity concerning the Western Sahara issue also has prompted it to treat journalists reporting or commenting on the issue harshly and to suspend the activities of domestic and foreign media outlets accused of “irresponsible” conduct. The government terms their offenses threats to the country’s territorial integrity. Finally, there has been international condemnation of the excessively forceful way in which Moroccan security forces dismantled a Sahraoui protest camp near Laayoune in November 2010, resulting in deaths, injuries, and arrests. The exact number of casualties is unknown due to Morocco’s control of information from the region.

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<sup>67</sup> “Morocco Expels Christian Missionaries,” *Global Post*, March 12, 2010.

<sup>68</sup> See U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, Released November 17, 2010, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148834.htm>.

<sup>69</sup> See “Western Sahara” below and CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

<sup>70</sup> “Saharan Activist’s Return to Morocco “Humanitarian” – Spokesman,” MAP News Agency (Rabat) December 19, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

## Economy

Large portions of Morocco's gross domestic product (19.2%) and labor force (44.6%) continue to depend on agriculture and are vulnerable to rainfall fluctuations.<sup>71</sup> Through internal and Western Saharan mines, Morocco controls over 75% of world reserves of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers (and of which the United States is the world's largest consumer).<sup>72</sup> Services and tourism are considered growth sectors and important sources of foreign exchange. Remittances from an estimated 3 million expatriate workers, mainly in France, Spain, Italy, and Belgium, account for about 9% of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>73</sup>

The public sector remains large, although there is a successful, if erratic, privatization program. Foreign direct investment has grown despite the impediments of excessive red tape and corruption.<sup>74</sup> Still, the royal family's intervention in the economy has been criticized by some analysts. The phosphate industry and much of the economy are dominated by the royal family and the so-called "500 families" who control large, multi-sectoral holding companies and are close to the monarchy. (The Royal Office of Phosphates, or OCP, has a monopoly on the mineral's extraction, processing, and commercialization. It reportedly employs 19,000 and contributes 2-3% of gross domestic product.<sup>75</sup>) The royal investment fund, known as SNI, reportedly controls significant domestic financial, insurance, construction, and commodity interests.<sup>76</sup>

Economic growth and reforms have been insufficient to reduce unemployment, especially for the young, and poverty. These factors drive Moroccans abroad and may provide a breeding ground for radicalization. The current government's goals include achieving 6% GDP growth rate,

### Morocco's Economy: Basic Facts

**Population:** 31.6 million (July 2010 est.)

**Gross Domestic Product growth:** 4.2% (2010 est.)

**Gross Domestic Product per capita** (purchasing power parity): \$4,900 (2010 est.)

**Inflation:** 2.5% (2009 est.)

**Unemployment:** 9.8% (official, 2010 est.)

**Exports:** clothing, electronic components, inorganic chemicals, transistors, crude minerals, fertilizers, petroleum products, fruit, vegetables

**Imports:** crude petroleum, textile fabric, telecommunications equipment, wheat, gas, electricity

**Major Trading Partners:** France, Spain, Italy, China, Germany, United States, Saudi Arabia

**Source:** CIA, *The World Factbook*, May 2011.

<sup>71</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook*, November 24, 2010.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, "Phosphate Rock Statistics and Information," 2011, at [http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/phosphate\\_rock/](http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/phosphate_rock/). Despite its overwhelming proportion of global reserves, Morocco is the third-largest producer of phosphates, after the United States and China.

<sup>73</sup> World Bank, "Migration and Remittances in Morocco," at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1181678518183/Morocco.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> The U.S. State Department reported that in 2010 "corruption was a serious problem in all branches of government." U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2010, Morocco*, April 8, 2011. Morocco is ranked 85 out of 178 countries on the Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010*, available at [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010). In June 2011, the Moroccan Justice Minister announced that over 8,000 people had been charged with corruption-related offenses in 2010 (Xinhua, "Plus de 8.000 Personnes Corrompues au Maroc en 2010," June 10, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, "Au Royaume des Phosphates," December 26, 2010-January 8, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> *The National*, "Moroccans March for Freedom, and Against the Royal Grip on the Country's Economy," March 28, 2011.

creating 250,000 new jobs, and building 150,000 housing units a year until 2013. While perhaps overambitious, these targets reflect the government's intent to combat poverty, unemployment, and terrorism. The government's plans have been affected by the global financial crisis/recession, which has resulted in thousands of job losses in textiles and automotives, as well as in decreases in tourist spending, expatriate remittances, and exports, especially phosphates. In February 2010, the government unveiled a \$206 million state-guaranteed public-private sector fund to increase the competitiveness of key industrial sectors by financing credits, banking services, and real estate costs. Targeted sectors include automobiles, technologies, aeronautics, services, and telecommunications. The fund hopes to create up to 220,000 jobs and boost overall development.

Although the global financial crisis had a limited impact on Morocco, as its financial system has limited exposure to international markets, the resulting global recession had a negative impact on Moroccan exports, tourism receipts, remittances, and foreign direct investment. Still, a surge in cereal crop yields in 2009 helped produce economic growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) praised the government's response to the crisis, while calling for further reforms to improve the business environment and increase productivity.<sup>77</sup> In June, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) praised Morocco's "many efforts to improve its business climate" but called for additional reforms to reinforce anti-corruption measures, reduce obstacles to land titling and ownership, improve infrastructure, simplify administrative procedures, and improve "institutional coordination."<sup>78</sup>

Oil imports (largely from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Nigeria) supply 97% of the country's energy needs, and price increases have therefore had detrimental effects on the economy. Morocco has adopted a proactive approach to finding renewable energy sources with the goal of producing 42% of the country's electrical capacity from them by 2020. In November 2009, the government announced plans to invest more than \$9 billion to install 2,000 megawatts of solar power. It also expressed interest in an ambitious European plan, called Desertec, to draw solar power from the Sahara. In June 2010, the king inaugurated a \$300 million wind turbine farm off Tangiers to generate 140 megawatts of energy when completed. Morocco's reported plans to pursue a domestic nuclear energy program have not advanced beyond the consideration and planning phase.

## **Western Sahara<sup>79</sup>**

The dispute between Morocco and the independence-seeking Popular Front for the Liberation of Saqiat al-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) over the former Spanish colony south of Morocco remains unresolved. Morocco occupies 80% of the Western Sahara, considers the region its three southern provinces, will only accept a solution that guarantees it sovereignty over "the whole of its territories," and will only negotiate on that basis. A U.N. peacekeeping mission, originally designed to oversee a referendum on independence, has monitored a ceasefire between Morocco and the POLISARIO since 1991. In October 2001, Morocco authorized French and U.S. oil companies to explore off the Saharan coast, and the prospect of discoveries, as yet unrealized, may have hardened Morocco's resolve to retain the region.

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<sup>77</sup> IMF, *Morocco: 2009 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report*, March 2010.

<sup>78</sup> OECD, *Morocco: Business Climate Development Strategy*, June 8, 2011.

<sup>79</sup> See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

The king submitted an autonomy plan for the region to the U.N. in April 2007, which asserts Moroccan sovereignty, and Moroccan and POLISARIO negotiators continue to meet for informal talks under U.N. auspices.<sup>80</sup> In line with his autonomy initiative, King Mohammed VI has pursued policies of decentralization or regionalization that he says are intended to empower residents of his Saharan provinces. On April 10, 2007, then-Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns stated that the United States considers the Moroccan autonomy plan for the Western Sahara “serious and credible.” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton indicated in 2009 that U.S. policy on the issue was unchanged, and the United States continues to call on Morocco and Algeria to engage in unconditional negotiations. In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri in March 2011, Clinton stated that the United States views the Moroccan autonomy plan as “serious, realistic, and credible—a potential approach to satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity.” She also reiterated U.S. support for the U.N.-backed talks aimed at “resolving this issue.”<sup>81</sup>

The current Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General for the Western Sahara, former U.S. Ambassador Christopher Ross, was appointed in January 2009. He has tried to obtain greater support from interested countries, such as France, made several trips to the region for consultations. Ross continues to convene informal talks between the parties (the latest round was held in early 2011), but he has not reported any progress on core issues. Neither Morocco nor the POLISARIO has shown interest in a compromise. Morocco believes that its autonomy initiative is itself a compromise.

As noted above, Morocco’s policy on the Western Sahara issue has been accompanied by or enforced with human rights abuses both in Morocco and in the Western Sahara. (See “Human Rights,” above.) Rights advocates and some diplomats have long called for the inclusion of an independent international human rights monitoring element in MINURSO’s mandate. Such efforts have not gained traction at the U.N. Security Council, where France (a veto-capable permanent member) has supported Moroccan objections. Still, MINURSO’s latest mandate renewal by the Security Council, in April 2011, includes language stressing “the importance of improving the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps [refugee camps administered by the POLISARIO],” and encourages “the parties to work with the international community to develop and implement independent and credible measures to ensure full respect for human rights.” The Security Council also welcomed “the establishment of a National Council on Human Rights in Morocco and the proposed component regarding Western Sahara.”<sup>82</sup>

## Foreign Policy

### Algeria

Morocco and Algeria are the largest countries in North Africa and are neighbors, but they had different colonial experiences and emerged as rivals with distinctly different forms of government. Algeria achieved its independence via a bloody revolution and emerged as a republic

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<sup>80</sup> For text of plan, see [http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara\\_issue\\_\\_full\\_t/view](http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara_issue__full_t/view).

<sup>81</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011.

<sup>82</sup> U.N. Security Council Resolution 1979 (2011), April 27, 2011.

with military or military-influenced governments. Morocco is a centuries-old monarchy that made a more peaceful transition from French control. Shortly after Algeria became independent, Morocco laid claim to some Algerian territory, and they went to war for about five months in 1963-1964. The border was not demarcated until 1972.

The Western Sahara is now the main impediment to improving their bilateral relations and to reviving the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), an inactive organization of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, and Libya. Morocco refuses to compromise on the Western Sahara issue, while Algeria hosts and backs the POLISARIO. In July 2004, the king abolished visa requirements for Algerians entering Morocco; in April 2006, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika reciprocated the gesture. Since 2008, Morocco has repeatedly requested that Algeria reopen their land border, which has been closed since 1994, but Algeria refuses to do so on the grounds that it would be detrimental to its national security and benefit Morocco more than Algeria.

In April 2011, signs of a thaw between the two countries briefly emerged. Algeria's President Bouteflika stated in a public address on April 17 that "there is no problem between Morocco and Algeria," adding that "the problem of the Western Sahara is a U.N. problem. Morocco is a neighbor and friend." In a media interview the same month, Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci suggested that Algeria would consider opening the border.<sup>83</sup> However, prospects for concrete steps toward improved bilateral relations are unclear. In May, Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia stated at a press conference that reopening the land border was not "on the agenda," and accused Moroccan authorities of paying lobbyists to plant stories of Algerian and POLISARIO mercenaries lending support to Libya's Muammar Qadhafi, rumors of which have circulated in the international press.<sup>84</sup> Algeria and the POLISARIO deny the allegations; Morocco denies spreading the mercenary rumors.<sup>85</sup> In June, the two countries nonetheless signed a series of agricultural cooperation agreements, and in early July, King Mohammed VI publicly stated that he was "determined" to work toward closer relations with Algeria.<sup>86</sup>

## Europe

Morocco has close ties to the European Union (EU), although they are occasionally troubled by issues of human rights and the Western Sahara. Morocco's Association Agreement with the EU came into force on March 1, 2000, and is supposed to lead to a free trade agreement by 2012. In October 2008, Morocco became the first southern Mediterranean country to be granted "advanced status relations" by the EU, which further opened EU markets for Moroccan products. Morocco participates in the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and its Neighborhood Policy Plan and receives considerable EU aid—€190 million (\$265 million ) annually. The EU and Morocco also

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<sup>83</sup> *El Watan*, "La Politique des Petits Pas," April 28, 2011; and "Mourad Medelci Evoque la Reprise des Relations avec le Maroc : 'Il n'Est Pas Logique que les Frontières Restent Fermées,'" April 26, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Global Insight Daily Analysis, "Algerian Prime Minister Dismisses Rumors That Moroccan Border Will Be Reopened," May 31, 2011; Embassy of Algeria to the United States, "Is Morocco Seeking Regional Unity or Hegemony Over Its Neighbors?" May 2011. Allegations of POLISARIO mercenaries fighting for Qadhafi first circulated in a *Daily Telegraph* (London) report in April 2011, but were picked up in subsequent commentary by a former U.S. ambassador to Morocco who serves as an advisor to the Moroccan monarchy. See Con Coughlin, "Libya: Col Gaddafi 'Has Spent £2.1m on Mercenaries,'" *Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 2011; Edward M. Gabriel, "Mercenaries in Libya: Gadhafi's Hired Terrorists," *The Hill*, May 16, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> AFP, "Rabat Qualifie de 'Surprenantes' les Déclarations d'Alger," June 1, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> *Ennahar Online*, "Mohammed VI Pour 'Une Nouvelle Dynamique' Avec l'Algérie," July 5, 2011.

have bilateral economic accords, such as a lucrative fisheries agreement that includes the coastline of disputed Western Sahara.<sup>87</sup> In March 2010, Morocco and the EU held their first summit, which Prime Minister Abbas Al Fassi, EU President Herman Van Rompuy, and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, among others, attended. In June 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe accorded Morocco's parliament the status of "Partner for Democracy." The designation, of which Morocco is the first beneficiary, was introduced in 2010 to "strengthen institutional cooperation with parliaments of non-member states in neighboring regions wishing to participate in the political debate on common challenges that transcend European boundaries."<sup>88</sup> In July, the EU saluted Morocco's adoption of a new constitution by referendum as "a significant response to the legitimate aspirations of the Moroccan people."<sup>89</sup>

Illegal immigration of Moroccans and of Sub-Saharan Africans transiting Morocco to Europe and drug (cannabis and, more recently, cocaine) trafficking have occasionally caused friction in Moroccan-European relations. High unemployment drives Moroccan youths to Europe and EU-funded programs to shift farmers in the underdeveloped Rif Mountains from cannabis cultivation to alternative crops have not been successful.

Morocco traditionally has had good relations with France and Spain, its former colonizers. Relations with France, Morocco's largest trading partner, are particularly close. Paris officially supports U.N. efforts to resolve the Western Sahara dispute and Morocco's autonomy proposal for the region, and blocks Security Council initiatives on the matter that Morocco rejects. In turn, Morocco has been a strong supporter of the EU's Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) that Paris initiated, but that has faced obstacles due to Arab objections to Israel's participation. In July 2011, French President Nicolas Sarkozy congratulated King Mohammed VI on the passage of a new constitution by referendum and suggested that Morocco may be eligible for funding allocated by the Group of Eight (G8) to support democratic transitions in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>90</sup>

Relations with Spain have been intermittently discordant. Spain possesses two territorial enclaves on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, Ceuta and Melilla, that are vestiges of colonialism, are claimed by Morocco, and sometimes cause bilateral tensions, as do other territorial disputes and the Western Sahara issue. In October 2001, Morocco recalled its ambassador from Madrid after pro-Saharan groups in Spain conducted a mock referendum on the fate of the region. In July 2002, Spanish troops ejected Moroccan soldiers from the uninhabited Perejel/Parsley or Leila Island off the Moroccan coast that Spain says it has controlled for centuries. Diplomatic ties were not restored until January 2003. That July, Morocco complained that Spain lacked neutrality on the Sahara issue when it chaired the Security Council and, in October, Spain suspended arms sales to Morocco due to the Perejel crisis. Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero visited Morocco in April 2004, and King Juan Carlos I visited in January 2005; on both occasions, joint statements called for a negotiated settlement to the Sahara issue—the Moroccan position. However, visits to Ceuta and Melilla by the Spanish prime minister in January 2006 and monarchs in November 2007 again set back relations. The two neighbors also have an unresolved

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<sup>87</sup> In July 2011, the EU decided to extend the agreement for one year, albeit with several countries opposing the extension, after reportedly requesting additional information on how Morocco plans to spend revenues in the Western Sahara.

<sup>88</sup> Council of Europe, "Parliament of Morocco Joins Council of Europe's 'Common Home,'" June 21, 2011.

<sup>89</sup> *Europolitique*, "Maroc/Constitution: L'UE Salue le Résultat de Référendum," July 5, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> AFP, "Nicolas Sarkozy a Félicité le Roi du Maroc pour la Nouvelle Constitution," July 2, 2011.



dispute concerning territorial waters between Morocco and the Spanish Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Morocco's "super port" at Tangiers will pose competition that concerns Spanish ports. Financed by Gulf countries, its construction began in June 2009 and it is expected to achieve full capacity in 2014.

Territorial disputes, despite their drama, appear secondary to the continuing and productive cooperation of Morocco and Spain in counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and efforts to stem illegal immigration. Morocco notably assisted Spanish authorities in the investigation of the March 2004 bombings in Madrid and this relationship continues. Moroccan soldiers have served under Spanish command in the U.N. stabilization mission in Haiti and Moroccan gendarmes have joined Spanish patrols to combat illegal immigration in the Strait of Gibraltar.

## Middle East

The king chairs the Jerusalem Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and supports international efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resulting in a viable, contiguous, Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. He recognized President Mahmud Abbas as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people in Abbas's dispute with Hamas and has urged Palestinian national unity in order to achieve their rights. In May 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional grouping that includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, said it would consider membership for Morocco, even though Morocco is not a Gulf state and does not have economic resources similar to existing member states. Most analysts interpreted the GCC's offer, which was also extended to Jordan, as an attempt to shore up the two poorer, non-Gulf monarchies amid protests, shifting U.S. policy, and growing Iranian influence in the region.

Morocco closed Israel's liaison bureau in Morocco and Morocco's office in Tel Aviv in reaction to Israel's conduct during the Palestinian *intifadah* (uprising) in 2001. The offices have not reopened. Morocco condemned Israel's conduct against Palestinian civilians during its December 2008/January 2009 military operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Moroccan political groups of all stripes held some of the largest rallies in the Arab world in protest. In October 2009, Mohammed VI called on "the international community ... to exert pressure on Israel to make it cease its oppressive practices directed against the helpless Palestinian people, and to compel it to return forthwith to the negotiating table, comply with UN resolutions."<sup>91</sup> In November, Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said that normalization of relations with Israel was not on the table under current conditions and that Morocco continued to support that Arab Peace Initiative—which promised Israel full normalization of relations in exchange for its withdrawal from all Arab territories. The foreign ministry has denounced Israel's settlement activity in east Jerusalem and its attack on a flotilla attempting to deliver aid to the Gaza Strip in May 2010. In October 2010, Israeli President Shimon Peres cancelled a visit to Morocco for the World Economic Forum because he could not get a guaranteed meeting with the king. In May 2011, Morocco welcomed President Obama's efforts to achieve a negotiated agreement on Palestinian statehood.<sup>92</sup>

However, the king and others had maintained contacts with Israeli officials until the current government took power in Jerusalem. In August 2005, he personally congratulated Prime

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<sup>91</sup> "King Calls for Pressure on Israel to Comply with UN Resolutions," *Maghreb Arabe Presse*, October 28, 2009, Open Source Center Document GMP20091028950071,

<sup>92</sup> *Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse*, "Morocco Welcomes US Vision for a Sovereign Palestinian State," May 24, 2011.

Minister Ariel Sharon on Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The bilateral link may be unbreakable because some 600,000 Israelis are of Moroccan origin, and about 25,000 of them travel to Morocco yearly. (There are about 5,000 Moroccan Jews still in Morocco.)

In March 2009, Morocco severed diplomatic relations with Iran, blaming it for "intolerable interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom." The Foreign Ministry accused the Iranian Embassy in Rabat of seeking to spread Shi'a Islam in the 99% Sunni kingdom. It also charged Iranian officials with making unacceptable remarks following Morocco's expression of solidarity with Bahrain in the face of Iran's claim to Bahrain.<sup>93</sup> The situation rapidly deteriorated. Tehran charged that Morocco's decision harmed "the unity of the Islamic world" and the solidarity needed to support the Palestinian people. Rabat rejected the allegation and argued that, "Iran is not qualified to speak for the Islamic world... Morocco does not need lessons from Iran or anybody else to show solidarity with the Palestinian people."<sup>94</sup> Shortly after the dispute began, King Mohammed VI acknowledged the Holocaust in a speech read in his name at a ceremony in Paris, thereby indirectly answering Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's Holocaust denials. It was said that the speech was the first time an Arab leader took such a stand on the Holocaust.<sup>95</sup>

## Relations with the United States

The United States and Morocco have long-term, good relations; Morocco was among the first countries to recognize U.S. independence. Successive U.S. Administrations, of both political parties, have viewed Morocco as a steady and close ally and as a moderate Arab state that supports the Arab-Israeli peace process. In January 2009, King Mohammed VI congratulated President Obama on his election and seized the opportunity "to say how satisfied I am with the special strategic partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States of America."<sup>96</sup> On April 8, 2009, after meeting Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri, Secretary of State Clinton said, "We are so committed to our relationship and have a very high regard for the extraordinary progress that has taken place in Morocco ... and we look forward to deepening and strengthening our relationship."<sup>97</sup> Senior U.S. officials continue to emphasize warm U.S.-Moroccan relations and to characterize bilateral ties as a "strategic partnership." Amid the widespread political upheaval that has accompanied the 2011 "Arab Spring," Moroccan officials have sought to portray the United States partnership with Morocco as a key tool for furthering U.S. policy interests in the region, and have urged the United States to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship.

Recently, U.S. officials have praised Morocco's stance on NATO-led military intervention in Libya. Morocco backs international intervention to implement U.N. Security Council Resolution

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<sup>93</sup> Statement of Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, MAP News Agency, March 6, 2009, BBC Monitoring Newsfile.

<sup>94</sup> "Moroccan Government Spokesman on Reasons Behind Severing Ties with Iran," *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 9, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

<sup>95</sup> Alfred de Montesquiou, "Morocco Challenges Middle East's Holocaust Mindset," Associated Press, July 27, 2009.

<sup>96</sup> "King Congratulates Barack Obama on Investiture," MAP news Agency, January 20, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

<sup>97</sup> Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Dr. Taieb Fassi Fihri before their Meeting, April 8, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/04/121509.htm>.

1973 and has provided humanitarian aid, though it has not participated militarily.<sup>98</sup> In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri in March 2011, Secretary of State Clinton thanked Fihri “for Morocco’s leadership at the summit in Paris [an emergency meeting of allied and Arab leaders on March 19 which endorsed military action and the establishment of a no-fly zone]... and for Morocco’s important role in the Arab League’s decision to call for the protection of Libyan civilians.”<sup>99</sup> Morocco has also reportedly tried (to date, unsuccessfully), to initiate and mediate negotiations between rebels and the Libyan government.

Security ties have been strengthened by cooperation in the fight against terrorism. An FBI team helped investigate the 2003 Casablanca bombings, and the FBI and CIA Directors have visited Rabat for consultations. In 2004, President Bush designated Morocco a major non-NATO ally. Morocco is part of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, has hosted and participated in NATO military exercises, and has joined NATO’s Operation Active Endeavor, monitoring the Mediterranean Sea for terrorists. In addition, bilateral U.S.-Moroccan military exercises are held regularly.

Morocco is seeking to diversify its arms sources, a program that is benefitting U.S. companies. Foreign military sales totaled \$91.8 million in FY2010 and direct commercial sales totaled \$86.0 million in FY2008 (latest figures available).<sup>100</sup> Recent purchases have included 24 F-16 aircraft, 2 T-6 training aircraft, 90 AGM-D Maverick air-to-ground missiles, 200 Abrams M1A1 tanks, and AN/AVS 9 night vision goggles. Advanced AM 120-C7 air-to-air medium-range missiles systems and 26 advanced M198 155 mm towed guns are on order, with delivery expected in 2011. Morocco also acquired a Gulfstream G550 aircraft for secure royal flights. Acquisitions of military radar systems are also anticipated in 2011.<sup>101</sup>

Bilateral relations have also focused on improving trade ties. A free trade agreement (FTA) with Morocco (P.L. 108-302, August 17, 2004) came into effect on January 1, 2006. U.S. exports to Morocco totaled over \$1.5 billion in 2008, over \$1.6 billion in 2009, and over \$1.9 billion in 2010. Imports from Morocco were valued at \$878.7 million in 2008, fell to \$468 million in 2009 (in part due to the economic recession), and rose again to \$685.4 million in 2010.<sup>102</sup>

## U.S. Assistance

Morocco receives significant levels of U.S. development aid and benefits from security assistance and cooperation programs. The United States has increased aid to Morocco to assist with countering terrorism, democratization, fighting poverty, and the Free Trade Agreement. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a regional democracy-promotion program, administers some U.S. assistance funds, including programs to empower women, create jobs, improve education, build trade union capacity, enhance fiscal and trade policies, and further judicial and legal reform. Those directed at youth are intended to help prevent radicalization. In FY2009, \$5.1

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<sup>98</sup> See CRS Report R41725, *Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Jeremiah Gertler.

<sup>99</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011.

<sup>100</sup> U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> CRS interview with Defense Department official, July 2011.

<sup>102</sup> U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted May 27, 2011.

in “Section 1207” funds were allocated for a program in Morocco to teach life skills to at-risk youth viewed as susceptible to terrorist messages.<sup>103</sup> Morocco also benefits from assistance administered through the U.S. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an interagency program (State Department, Defense Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development) aimed at increasing North and West African states’ capacity to counter terrorism.

The Obama Administration has requested \$43.7 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2012. Proposed aid will focus on education, economic growth, countering violent extremism; strengthening civil society, local government, political parties, and justice sector; improving human rights and anticorruption efforts in the criminal justice system; enhancing counterterrorism capacities and cooperation; providing training for police and border security agents; and military training and professionalization.<sup>104</sup>

Security assistance includes Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to maintain aging U.S.-origin equipment, including aircrafts and transportation vehicles; boost maritime surveillance to address illegal immigration, smuggling, drug trafficking, and illicit fishing; procure transport and logistics equipment; and upgrade aerial surveillance. Morocco is one of the top 20 recipients worldwide of International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance, through which senior military officers have received training in the United States. Morocco is one of the top five recipients of Excess Defense Articles grants, and relies heavily on the program for the procurement of trucks, tracked vehicles (tanks) and associated equipment. Morocco also benefits from a U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program with Utah, which was established in 2003. The State Department intends to provide training for Moroccan troops participating in multilateral peacekeeping missions through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI).<sup>105</sup> In May 2010, nearly 1,000 U.S. military personnel from across the services and 1,000 members of the Moroccan military participated in the latest iteration of an annual military exercise known as African Lion. The exercise is designed to promote interoperability and mutual understanding of military tactics, techniques and procedures.<sup>106</sup>

Morocco further benefits from assistance and grants administered by international financial institutions that receive significant U.S. support. The World Bank, for example, has provided an average of \$700 million in assistance for Morocco (including aid programs focusing on education, water, agriculture, environmental, and transportation) since 2008.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Until the end of FY2011, when this authority expired, Section 1207 funds were appropriated for the Department of Defense and transferred to the State Department for “Stabilization and Security.” For more on this program, see CRS Report RS22871, *Department of Defense “Section 1207” Security and Stabilization Assistance: Background and Congressional Concerns, FY2006-FY2010*, by Nina M. Serafino

<sup>104</sup> State Department, FY2012 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

<sup>105</sup> DSCA, “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

<sup>106</sup> U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), “U.S. Service Members Arrive in Morocco for African Lion,” May 17, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> World Bank, “Robert B. Zoellick, President, World Bank Group Speech to Morocco Industry Summit, Casablanca, Morocco,” May 5, 2011.

**Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco**  
(appropriations, thousands of dollars)

	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011 Request <sup>a</sup>	FY2012 Request
ESF	15,374	0	3,000	3,000	0
FMF	3,625	3,655	9,000	9,000	9,000
IMET	1,713	1,916	1,789	1,900	1,900
INCLE	496	1,000	750	3,000	3,000
NADR	1,119	625	1,200	1,100	3,300
DA	4,136	18,000	19,546	24,500	26,454
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,463</b>	<b>25,296</b>	<b>35,396</b>	<b>42,500</b>	<b>43,654</b>

**Source:** Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2010-FY2012.

**Notes:** (1) FMF=Foreign Military Financing, ESF=Economic Support Funds, IMET=International Military Education and Training, INCLE=International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, NADR=Non-Proliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Activities, DA=Development Assistance. (2) Figures are not adjusted for inflation. (3) Does not reflect assistance administered through regional programs, such as MEPI and TSCTP, or by U.S. departments or agencies other than the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

a. Actual FY2011 foreign aid allocations by country are not yet available.

## Millennium Challenge Grant

In August 2007, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) approved a five-year, \$697.5 million grant for Morocco to encourage economic growth by stimulating productivity and increasing employment levels. At the time, it was the largest MCC grant to date.

**Table 2. Millennium Challenge Corporation Programs**  
\$ Millions

Program	Amount
Fruit Tree Productivity	\$300.90
Small Scale Fisheries	\$116.70
Artisan and Fez Medina	\$111.87
Financial Services	\$46.20
Enterprise Support	\$33.50

**Source:** Millennium Challenge Corporation Announcement, October 12, 2007.

**Note:** The figures in the chart only total \$609.17 million.

## Recent Congressional Actions

Some Members of Congress have, at times, sought to restrict U.S. assistance to Morocco in connection with the Western Sahara issue, related human rights concerns, or concerns over religious freedoms. Others are strongly supportive of the Moroccan government and its autonomy

proposal for the Western Sahara. Several Members of Congress expressed strong support for King Mohammed VI's announcement of reforms in March 2011.

In June 2010, the Congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Morocco's expulsion of American Christians in March 2010. Representative Frank Wolf urged suspension of Millennium funding "to a nation which blatantly disregards the rights of American citizens residing in Morocco and forcibly expels American citizens without due process of law."<sup>108</sup> In an explanatory statement accompanying the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8, March 11, 2009), appropriators directed the Secretary of State to report on "steps taken by the Government of Morocco to protect human rights, and whether it is allowing all persons to (1) freely advocate their views regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara through the exercise of their rights to peaceful expression and association; and (2) document violations of human rights in the territory without harassment."<sup>109</sup> A similar reporting requirement was included in the conference report accompanying the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-117, December 16, 2009).<sup>110</sup> In January 2011, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen temporarily placed a hold on the U.S. grant transfer to Morocco of trucks valued at about \$1.34 million, citing concerns over human rights in the Western Sahara.

Previously, the FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act, P.L. 110-161, December 26, 2007, provided for the allocation of an additional \$1 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Morocco if the Secretary of State certified, among other things, that Morocco was allowing all persons to advocate freely their views regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara through the exercise of their rights to peaceful expression, association, and assembly and to document violations of human rights in that territory without harassment. The original amendment (S.Amdt. 2738), proposed by Senator Patrick Leahy and included in the Senate version of the bill, would have allowed the appropriation of not more than \$2 million in FMF for Morocco until the Secretary of State certified that the government of Morocco had ceased to persecute, detain, and prosecute individuals for peacefully expressing their opinions regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara and for documenting violations of human rights, and provided unimpeded access to internationally recognized human rights organizations, journalists, and representatives of foreign governments to the Western Sahara..

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<sup>108</sup> Hannah Armstrong, "Christians Expelled, Morocco and US Spar over Religious Freedom," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2010. The Senate expressed its concerns on the issue in S.Rept. 111-237, July 29, 2010, to accompany S. 3676, State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, 2011. "The Committee on Appropriations directs the Secretary of State to submit a report not later than 45 days after enactment of this act, detailing steps taken by the Government of Morocco in the previous 12 months on human rights, including deportation of U.S. citizens in Morocco without due process of law, and whether it is allowing all persons to advocate freely their views regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara through the exercise of their rights to peaceful expression and association, and to document violations of human rights in the territory without harassment."

<sup>109</sup> Explanatory statement submitted by the Chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations "as if it were a joint explanatory statement of a committee of conference," February 23, 2009; Congressional Record, p. H2417.

<sup>110</sup> H.Rept. 111-366, Congressional Record p. H14356.

## **Author Contact Information**

Alexis Arieff  
Analyst in African Affairs  
aarieff@crs.loc.gov, 7-2459

## **Acknowledgments**

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