



Morocco: Current Issues

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Summary

King Mohammed VI retains supreme political power in Morocco, but has taken some liberalizing steps with uncertain effects. A new wave of reform efforts were announced in March 2011 amid public demonstrations that echoed unrest elsewhere in the region. The king submitted a new constitution to a public referendum in July 2011; it passed with over 98% of the vote. The new text, drafted by a commission appointed by the king, aims to grant greater independence to the Prime Minister, the legislature, and the judiciary. Still, the king retains significant executive powers, such as the ability to fire ministers and dissolve the parliament; he remains commander-in-chief of the military and the country's preeminent religious authority. Early legislative elections were held in November, in which the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) won a plurality and is therefore set to lead the government for the first time. Protest numbers have dwindled, but activists continue to call for deeper changes to the political system.

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 political reform efforts while reiterating strong support for the monarchy.

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 regional 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 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.

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New Reforms and the “Arab Spring”

On February 20, 2011, tens of thousands of Moroccans turned out in the capital, Rabat, and other cities, in what organizers termed a “Movement for Change.” The protests spawned the “February 20 Movement,” a loosely organized, leaderless coalition that has orchestrated a number of subsequent protests criticizing Morocco’s monarchy and advocating political change. Protesters have espoused a wide range of grievances, including a lack of balance of powers in Morocco’s political system, corruption, socioeconomic issues such as high unemployment, abuse of authority by senior government officials, and concentration of political and economic power among the tiny elite (known as the *makhzen*) that surrounds the monarchy. Some have called for the transformation of Morocco’s political system into a “parliamentary monarchy,” in which the king’s role in politics would be sharply curtailed. The movement has included liberal and leftist youth leaders as well as supporters of the Islamist Justice and Charity Organization (JCO, Al Adl Wal Ihsan). The JCO is banned but officially tolerated, and is widely estimated to be among Morocco’s largest grassroots organizations.¹ Authorities have tolerated many of the protests, but in some cases security forces have used violence and arrests to disperse demonstrators.²

Coinciding with (and likely inspired by) a wave of regional unrest dubbed the “Arab Spring,” the protests’ size and scope appeared to unsettle Moroccan authorities in early 2011. In a March 9 speech, King Mohammed VI proposed a number of new political reforms. Reforms initiated in 2011 have included the passage of a new constitution, the creation of a new national human rights body, and the holding of early legislative elections (see below). The moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD, also known as Al Misbah/The Beacon) won a plurality of seats in the legislative elections, and is poised to lead the government for the first time. The monarchy has additionally pledged to strengthen economic regulations, improve transparency in the public procurement process, advance government decentralization, reform the justice sector, and expand press freedom. The government has also raised public sector salaries and the minimum wage, and announced new public hiring initiatives, among other social programs.

Moroccans continue to engage in wide-ranging discussions over the appropriate scale and pace of political change. The programs of 2011 have built on the king’s decade-long policy of initiating top-down reforms. To date, these have not significantly altered the monarchy’s political and economic prerogatives, but they have shown a responsiveness to public pressures for greater political participation. Moroccan officials have portrayed the 2011 reform process as an example of “Moroccan exceptionalism” and a model for other countries in the region.³ Some observers support this view, and most agree that the king has successfully retained his popular legitimacy and, for the time being, reclaimed the initiative from the street. The major political parties, some international observers, and some Moroccan democracy advocates have heralded the king’s

¹ The JCO does not recognize the institutions of the monarchy and is therefore barred from formal political participation.

² Human Rights Watch stated after a March 20, 2011, 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. See AFP, “Maroc: Décès d’Un Manifestant Blessé Dimanche (Officiel),” June 2, 2011; 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. Sporadic labor strikes, protests over socioeconomic grievances, and localized unrest are usually tolerated by the authorities.

³ *Le Monde*, “Maroc: Les Réformes Politiques du Roi Sont Plébiscitées,” July 3, 2011.

reform efforts as important and unique steps. At the same time, the degree to which there may be a significant (rather than symbolic) change to the political status quo rests on the details of constitutional implementation, the degree to which political parties effectively leverage the political space accorded to them, and whether the monarchy takes additional steps toward full democracy. The Moroccan public may also gauge the success of reforms in terms of whether they lead to tangible socioeconomic advances. One recent independent analysis argued that Morocco's reform program was, to date, "ostensibly bold but in reality limited," and contended that voter apathy and the ability of dissident groups to capitalize on widespread socioeconomic discontent "could still turn the king's victory into a pyrrhic one."⁴

Protesters have rejected the reform process as insufficient and overly controlled by the monarchy. Protests have continued, although they have recently dwindled in size, and the pragmatic coalition between liberal youth leaders and the JCO appears to be fracturing. Analysts have debated whether the protest movement represents an existential threat to the monarchy, with most concluding that the government's relative respect for civil liberties and the public's esteem for the king provide significant protection.⁵ While the protesters have revealed public disaffection over a range of issues, notably corruption and patronage, they do not necessarily represent a cohesive or majority view. Some Moroccans are reportedly frustrated with the protest movement, and fear its actions could lead to instability or have a negative impact on the economy. Such apprehensions may also stem from the example of turmoil in places such as Libya, Syria, and Bahrain.

Separately, Islamist activists, including religiously conservative Salafists, have escalated their calls 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 groups were critical of many of the arrests, citing a lack of due process. In April 2011, 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 included 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. They also included a handful of human rights activists and three Western Sahara independence activists who were arrested in 2009. In mid-May 2011, security forces violently dispersed a protest gathering in front of a site in Rabat that activists allege is a secret government detention center.⁶ A day later, Salafist inmates at a prison near Rabat launched a violent two-day uprising, citing alleged torture, unfair trials, and arbitrary treatment as grievances.⁷ 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.⁸

⁴ Marina Ottaway and Marwan Muasher, *Arab Monarchies: Chance for Reform, Yet Unmet*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2011.

⁵ See, e.g., Brian T. Edwards, "The Next To Tumble?" *The Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 2011.

⁶ 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 not found evidence of active illegal detention practices at the Témara site. See Human Rights Watch, *Morocco: "Stop Looking for Your Son,"* October 25, 2010; and Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP, the state-backed news agency), "Morocco's Rights Council Says It Found No Signs That Temara Building Used for Illegal Detention," May 26, 2011.

⁷ Souhail Karam, "Five Guards Taken Hostage in Morocco Jail Unrest," Reuters, May 17, 2011.

⁸ "Jihadist Establishment Sends Message: 'To Our Brothers in the Moroccan Prisons,'" April 24, 2011, via OSC.

The November 2011 Legislative Elections and a New Government

Following the promulgation of a new constitution in July, the king called for early elections to select a new Chamber of Representatives, the lower house of the legislature. The elections, which were seen as a key component of implementing the constitution, were held on November 25. International election observers were formally permitted for the first time. Observers from the U.S.-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) stated that the administration of the elections “appeared procedurally sound and transparent.” They nonetheless called for steps to increase “citizen and voter engagement at all levels of the election process,” noting uneven distribution of information on polling procedures, purportedly little government engagement with civil society on electoral legislation and preparations, and limited public enthusiasm overall.⁹ Domestic observers praised the overall conduct of the vote and stated that the reported practice of vote-buying had diminished compared to previous elections, but critiqued polling sites located far from population centers and the small number of women poll workers.¹⁰ Analysts attributed lackluster turnout (an estimated 45%, albeit higher than the 37% observed in the 2007 legislative elections) to continued popular disaffection with the legislature, despite constitutional reforms that aim, in part, to strengthen its role in politics (see below). Reports suggested that among those who turned out, a significant number of voters cast purposefully spoiled “protest” ballots.¹¹ The February 20 protest movement and the JCO had also called for a boycott.

The PJD came in first in the election, taking 107 seats, or 27% of the chamber. Morocco’s proportional representation-based electoral system tends to favor small parties and constrain clear electoral majorities, and a new electoral law had further increased the number of seats in the lower chamber from 325 to 395. The PJD’s closest competitor was the nationalist, conservative Istiqlal party, with 60 seats, followed by the National Rally of Independents (RNI), with 52 seats; the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), with 47 seats; the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), with 39 seats; the Popular Movement (MP), with 32 seats, the Constitutional Union, with 23 seats; and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), with 18 seats. Ten tiny parties recouped the remainder. Under the new constitution, the king is supposed to select a Prime Minister from the largest party in parliament. This paved the way for the king’s appointment of PJD leader Abdelilah Benkirane, and for the PJD to enter—indeed, lead—the government for the first time. Istiqlal, the MP, and the PPS opted to join the PJD to form a governing coalition. The PAM and RNI, which had led an eight-party alliance prior to the vote, may be expected to constitute the core of the pro-monarchy opposition to the PJD in the new parliament. The USFP, the largest leftist party, declined to join the government, despite reported PJD efforts to woo it.

Some observers predict the PJD will push for a larger political voice for the legislature, and that it will be more responsive to the public than other political parties. The party focused its campaign on issues with wide appeal, such as education reform, jobs, and anti-corruption efforts. Proponents of greater political independence within the PJD may be bolstered by the electoral rise of Islamist movements elsewhere in the region. The party may also take a more populist stance on economic policy than previous governments. Still, some analysts view the PJD as unlikely to significantly change “the macro political character of the Moroccan state,” as the party’s leaders have long been primarily concerned with garnering acceptance from the monarchy in exchange

⁹ NDI International Observation Mission Morocco, “Preliminary Election Statement,” November 26, 2011.

¹⁰ *Soir-Echos*, “Législatives: Le Bilan du CNDH,” November 30, 2011.

¹¹ Daphne McCurdy, “Morocco’s New Elections, Just Like the Old Elections?” *ForeignPolicy.com*, November 28, 2011.

for integration into the political system.¹² In addition to its support for the monarchy, the PJD has sought to reassure secularists by indicating that it will not impose a strict Islamic code of behavior.¹³ The party's influence over policymaking is, moreover, likely to be curtailed by its weak majority (217 seats out of 395), by the role of royal advisors who sit outside of elected government, and by limited fiscal resources given the constraints of regional economic turmoil and a recent string of new social programs.

A New Constitution

On March 9, 2011, 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.¹⁴ A commission appointed by the king submitted a draft constitutional text to the king in June after consulting with political parties, labor unions, business associations, human rights groups, and others. 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.¹⁵

The king submitted the draft constitution to a public referendum on July 1, 2011, 13 days after the text was first made public. Over 98% of votes were in favor of adoption, and officials claimed over 70% turnout. (As most observers expected the constitution to be adopted, turnout was assessed to be a key element in determining the vote's legitimacy.) Observers noted that the referendum was widely viewed as "in effect a pledge of allegiance to the king and to the institution of the monarchy," rather than, necessarily, a more narrow ruling on the constitutional text.¹⁶ Some questioned the turnout figures. The short timeframe for the referendum may have inhibited voter education on the content of the proposed draft, particularly given high illiteracy rates. 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.¹⁷ Political demonstrations continued during and following the campaign period.

The new constitution broadly aims to strengthen the prime minister (now 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 text provides greater insulation for the judiciary from executive power by increasing the independence and authority of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, although the

¹² John P. Entelis, "Morocco's 'New' Political Face: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose," POMED Policy Brief, December 5, 2011; see also Haoues Seniguer, "Au Maroc, les Islamistes Ont Bien pour Mission de Relégitimer le Roi," December 2, 2011.

¹³ *UMCI*, "Morocco's PM-Elect: No Islamic Dress Code for Women," December 10, 2011.

¹⁴ See "Moroccan King Announces Constitutional Reforms in National Address," Al-Aoula Television in Arabic, March 9, 2011, via U.S. Government Open Source Center (OSC).

¹⁵ "Moroccan King Says New Draft Constitution 'Modern, Democratic,'" Rabat Al-Aoula Television in Arabic, June 17, 2011; via OSC.

¹⁶ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Watchlist: Morocco," July 16, 2011.

¹⁷ 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. Morocco's main independent human rights group, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), stated that the use of state resources and religious forums in the pro-adoption campaign constituted "serious violations."

king would continue to chair the council (arts. 113-116). It also includes 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)¹⁸; protection from extrajudicial detention (art. 23); and access to government information (art. 27). It 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”¹⁹ (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 king nevertheless retains significant executive authorities.²⁰ For example, 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);
- 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);
- 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).

Domestic Reactions

The main political parties expressed their support for the new constitution and urged their supporters to vote “yes” in the referendum. These included the PJD, which indicated that “compared to the current constitution, this plan is an important advance.”²¹ 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

¹⁸ Only equal political rights are enshrined in the 1996 constitution.

¹⁹ 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; “Casablanca Weekly Seeks ‘Freedom of Conscience’ Article in New Constitution,” Casablanca *Telquel* Online, June 21, 2011, via OSC.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ AFP, “Several Thousand Protest Morocco Reform Plans,” June 19, 2011.

model for other countries.”²² A member of the USFP, the main leftist party, stated 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.”²³

At the same time, some Moroccan commentators contend that the new constitution does not go far enough in changing Morocco’s system of government. Exemplifying this line of thinking, one independent 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.”²⁴ 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.”²⁵ A prominent critical journalist, 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.”²⁶ Others, however, argue that “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.²⁷

The February 20 Movement declined to participate in the reform commission’s deliberations, and members of the movement called for a boycott of the referendum. A communiqué by the “Mamfakinch” coalition (loosely, “We Won’t Give Up”), which supports the protest movement, alleged that the referendum results reflected the illicit use of state resources to boost turnout and intimidate those who might vote “no.”²⁸ The Islamist JCO stated that “under the draft constitution, the king retains absolute powers and legitimate demands for freedom, dignity and social justice are ignored.”²⁹ A large trade union, the Democratic Labor Confederation (CDT), added calls for a boycott, as did three small leftist political parties.

Human Rights Council

Several days before his March 9, 2011, speech, the king announced the creation of a new National Human Rights Council (CNDH), which is to 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 cabinet—although 16 out of 27 members are appointed by either the king (8) or the parliament (8)³⁰—and its members anticipate greater investigatory access to government offices and a wider scope of potential action. Officials have indicated that it will investigate human rights issues in the Western Sahara, where advocacy groups and some

²² Xinhua, “Maroc: Les Partis Politiques Voteront ‘Oui’ à la Nouvelle Constitution,” June 18, 2011.

²³ Al Jazeera, “Rabat ‘Certain’ to Win Referendum on Reform, Protest Groups Call for Boycott,” June 21, 2011, via OSC.

²⁴ “Casablanca Weekly Gives Lukewarm Reception to Draft New Constitution,” Casablanca *Telquel* Online, June 28, 2011, via OSC.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ *Mediapart*, “Au Maroc, le Triste Jeu du ‘Oui, Non, Quoi que,’” July 4, 2011.

²⁷ Anouar Boukhars and Shadi Hamid, “Morocco’s Moment of Reform?” The Brookings Institution, June 28, 2011.

²⁸ Mamfakinch.com, “Communiqué Mamfakinch/Mamsawtinch: Appel aux Militant(e)s du 20 Février,” June 29, 2011.

²⁹ Al Jazeera, “Moroccans to Stage Protests Despite King’s ‘Reforms,’” June 18, 2011, via OSC.

³⁰ The remaining 11 members are appointed by civil society.

diplomats have called for independent (international) human rights monitoring. The CNDH is expected to be part of a new set of government institutions to promote human rights, including an inter-ministerial coordinating entity and a national Ombudsman's office. 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. 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.³¹

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. In late February 2011, amid the start of Morocco's protest movement, then-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." Burns 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."³²

The Obama Administration has characterized the king's reform program as significant and called for 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."³³ In subsequent testimony to Congress, then-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."³⁴ In a joint appearance with Moroccan then-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."³⁵

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."³⁶ On July 1, a State Department spokesman congratulated the constitutional

³¹ CRS interview with El Yazami, Washington DC, July 2011.

³² U.S. Embassy in Morocco, "Under Secretary Burns' Statement at the Moroccan MFA," February 27, 2011.

³³ State Department, "State Department on Announcement by King Mohammed VI of Morocco," March 10, 2011.

³⁴ Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, U.S. Policy and Uprisings in the Middle East, March 17, 2011, transcript via *Congressional Quarterly* (CQ).

³⁵ State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri," March 23, 2011.

³⁶ 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.”³⁷ 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.³⁸

Secretary Clinton praised the conduct of the November legislative election, reiterating her call for the king, along with “the new parliament and civil society” to “implement the amended constitution as a step toward fulfilling the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans.”³⁹ Responding to a media query on the U.S. view of the newly formed PJD-led government, a State Department spokesman stated, “They’ve, I think, been saying many of the right things and it’s been encouraging,” adding that “it’s important to see... not what a government or a particular party is called, but what it does and whether it operates according to democratic standards.”⁴⁰

Emerging Questions

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

- What are the political, economic, and foreign relations implications of the PJD’s legislative gains? What will be the likely balance of powers between the king, his royal advisors, the PJD-led cabinet, and the legislature?
- What is the timeline and process for implementing the new constitution? To what extent are constitutional changes likely to affect Morocco’s system of government, the internal balance of power, or the government’s role in the domestic economy? How might the new constitution affect the social and political role of 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 stated grievances are most important to the population at large? To what extent are protesters politically organized and united around a political platform that extends beyond criticism of the status quo? What impact has the movement had on Moroccan politics, and what role will it play in the future?
- How critical is the National Human Rights Council likely to be vis-à-vis government policies, and will it credibly investigate sensitive topics such as corruption and counterterrorism 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?

³⁷ Mark C. Toner, Deputy State Department Spokesman, Daily Press Briefing, July 1, 2011.

³⁸ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks,” State Department release, July 2, 2011.

³⁹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Morocco’s Parliamentary Elections,” State Department release, November 26, 2011.

⁴⁰ State Department regular news briefing, November 28, 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 has been the impact of recent U.S. reactions to Moroccan reforms? What benchmarks will be considered by the United States in evaluating the progress of reforms?

Figure I. Map of Morocco



Source: Map resources, adapted by CRS.

Government and Politics

The Moroccan royal dynasty has ruled the country since 1649. 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 certain powers via decree. The king also has a "shadow government" of royal advisors and is head of the military. The king also is tied to significant domestic economic enterprises. Reforms largely depend on the king's will, and he has undertaken several major liberalizing initiatives.

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 395-seat lower house, the Chamber of

Representatives, whose members are directly elected to five-year terms. Sixty seats (about 15%) in the lower house are reserved for women and 30 for candidates under 40 years of age (candidates for these seats are elected from a separate national list) and, under a rule that took effect in 2009, women are guaranteed 12% of the seats in local elections.

As of mid-December 2011, the four-party governing coalition is led by Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane of the moderate Islamist PJD (“Legislative Elections” above). Other coalition members, which may hold divergent policy views, are the conservative Istiqlal (Independence) Party, the former leader in the anti-colonial movement; the centrist Popular Movement (MP); and the leftist Progress and Socialism Party (PPS). Opposition parties are set to include the leftist Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), which was the main opposition force under King Hassan II; and the centrist National Rally of Independents (RNI) and Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM), which are considered close to the monarchy.

The 2011 legislative elections pointed to the waning influence of PAM, founded in 2008 by Fouad Ali Al Himma, a former classmate of King Mohammed VI and former deputy interior minister. Al Himma was singled out by name as a target of the February 20 Movement protests, and PAM lost seats in the 2011 legislative elections. PAM had controlled a significant bloc in parliament, mostly through alliances with other parties, and came in first place in the 2009 municipal council elections (in which the PJD finished sixth). Some politicians initially feared that PAM was a nascent state party, similar to those previously seen in Egypt and Tunisia, that might be used to dominate politics.⁴¹ 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 the PJD.⁴² In December 2011, the king appointed Al Himma to be a royal advisor, signaling the latter’s possible withdrawal from electoral politics.

The September 2002 election for the lower legislative chamber 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. Istiqlal placed first, and Istiqlal leader Abbas Al Fassi was appointed Prime Minister and formed a coalition government with a 34-member cabinet, including an unprecedented five women ministers. The other parties in the coalition were the RNI, PAM, the USFP, and the PPS. 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. In 2009, PAM pulled out of the coalition government. The MP joined the government and provided some stability as did some new appointments.

The Islamist JCO/Al Adl Wal Ihsan, led by Cheikh Abdesslem Yassine, is officially banned but is considered the largest grassroots organization in the country. It eschews violence and is viewed as more closely attuned to constituents than the main political parties. JCO called for a boycott of the 2007 and 2011 legislative elections, arguing that participation was pointless without 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.—and it

⁴¹ Socialist Union of Popular Forces politician Idriss Lashgar, quoted in *Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1-21, 2008.

⁴² James Liddell, “Morocco: Modern Politics or Politics of Modernity?” *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2008.

was initially supportive of the February 20 protest movement. The authorities periodically arrest JCO members and break up the group's meetings.

Terrorism

The monarchy long asserted that its claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed was a shield against Islamist militancy. This belief has been challenged over the past decade, 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.⁴³ Still, the State Department recently stated that “reports of Moroccans either preparing to go or going to terrorist fronts in Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan” suggest Morocco remains “a source for foreign fighter pipelines.”⁴⁴ Authorities are concerned that extremists returning from Iraq and elsewhere could conduct attacks at home. 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.⁴⁵

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.”⁴⁶ To some observers, this 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 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.”⁴⁷ The Moroccan government convicted the group’s alleged leader in absentia for his role in the Casablanca attacks, but he remained free in exile in the United Kingdom, which found insufficient evidence against him.⁴⁸

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 April 2011, a bomb exploded at a popular tourist cafe in Marrakesh, killing 17, mostly foreign nationals (see below). Moroccan

⁴³ 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 20th 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.

⁴⁴ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, released on August 18, 2011.

⁴⁵ 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. The suspects in the 2011 Marrakech bombing also appear to have been a small, isolated cell (see below).

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, “Moroccans Say Al Qaeda Masterminded and Financed Casablanca Suicide Bombings,” May 23, 2003.

⁴⁷ U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, released on August 5, 2010.

⁴⁸ Olivier Guitta, “Alive and Well and Living in London,” *Weekly Standard*, May 7, 2007.

authorities regularly report that they have disrupted terrorist cells plotting attacks against Moroccan government and military institutions, foreigners, and tourist sites. In October 2011, the police stated it had dismantled a five-person cell operating in Casablanca and near Rabat that had reported contacts with Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri.

Moroccan and European authorities continue to disrupt cells that they say are linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a group originating in Algeria with regional ambitions.⁴⁹ 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. Moroccans reportedly have joined AQIM at camps in Algeria and elsewhere outside of the country. Moroccan authorities have also arrested individuals whom they accuse of involvement in AQIM-linked narcotics smuggling activities. Officials occasionally claim that POLISARIO-controlled areas of Western Sahara could serve as a rear base for AQIM or other terrorist groups. Some analysts have questioned such assertions, although they were reinforced in October 2011, when three European humanitarian workers were kidnapped in the POLISARIO refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, reportedly by an AQIM splinter faction.⁵⁰

U.S.-Moroccan counterterrorism cooperation is extensive. The State Department reported that in 2010,

Moroccan authorities continued to disrupt plots to attack Moroccan, U.S., and other Western-affiliated targets, and aggressively investigated numerous individuals associated with international terrorist groups, often in collaboration with international partners. Morocco and the United States worked together extensively on counterterrorism efforts at the tactical level and made plans to begin joint counter-radicalization programs... Morocco has a relatively effective system through its Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), which became operational in late 2009, for disseminating U.S. government and [U.N. Security Council] terrorist freeze lists to its financial sector and legal authorities.⁵¹

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.

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 AQIM is the main regional threat. Morocco has worked with its southern neighbor, Mauritania, about improving coordination

⁴⁹ See CRS Report R41070, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, coordinated by John Rollins.

⁵⁰ The facts behind the kidnapping remain opaque, and Morocco and the POLISARIO have traded allegations of involvement.

⁵¹ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, op. cit.

on that issue as well as combating drug smuggling and illegal immigration, and also has reached out to other nearby countries such as Senegal.

The 2011 Marrakech Bombing

On April 28, 2011, a bomb exploded at a popular tourist café in Marrakesh, killing 17 people, most of them European nationals. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on Moroccan soil since the 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca, which killed 45 (including the bombers). Seven individuals, including primary suspect Adil al Othmani, were convicted with carrying out the attack in October 2011. Authorities have described Othmani and his alleged accomplices as Salafist ideologues and Al Qaeda sympathizers, without indicating evidence of current operational coordination with Al Qaeda.⁵² Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a regional Al Qaeda affiliate, released a rare statement denying responsibility for the attack. For some analysts, the attack underscored the risk posed by “lone-wolf” terrorists, i.e., single cells or individuals who plot attacks without being part of a larger organization.

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.⁵³ According to Morocco’s Interior Ministry, U.S. and European experts provided assistance with investigations.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶

⁵² AFP, “Marrakesh Bomb Suspect was Expelled from Libya: Minister,” May 6, 2011.

⁵³ Caroline Taix, “Maroc: Pas d’Arrestations ‘Aveugles’ Après l’Attentat, Se Félicitent des Islamistes,” AFP, May 4, 2011.

⁵⁴ 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).

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ See <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

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 consistently and women continue to suffer from inequality, a lack of access to the justice system, and violence.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ In 2001, he launched a dialogue on Amazigh/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.⁵⁹

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."⁶⁰ The monarchy has also been accused of using financial pressures to quiet critical media.⁶¹ 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. 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.⁶²

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.⁶³ 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

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ 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 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.

⁵⁹ The Berbers inhabited much of North Africa before Arab Muslims invaded in the 8th century CE.

⁶⁰ Rima Marrouch, "Morocco Pardons Journalist to Create Smokescreen," Committee to Protect Journalists, June 2010.

⁶¹ Ahmed Benchemsi, "Morocco and Press Freedom: A Complicated Relationship," *Nieman Reports*, September 22, 2011.

⁶² Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: Restore Accreditation to Al Jazeera; Sahara Conflict Coverage Key Factor in Effort to Silence Selected Media," April 5, 2011.

⁶³ Jill Carroll, "Morocco's Harder Line on Security Challenges Reforms," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 9, 2007.

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.⁶⁴ In 2010, according to the U.S. State Department, "the Government of Morocco generally accorded terrorist suspects and convicts their rights and due process of law, with more access for defense lawyers and more transparent court proceedings than in previous years."⁶⁵

The Moroccan Penal Code prohibits proselytizing to Muslims and the government expels foreign Christians or declares them *persona non grata* for violation of that 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 years.⁶⁶ The U.S. State Department reports that approximately 150 Christian foreign residents from 19 countries were expelled in 2009.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸ 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."⁶⁹

Over the years, Morocco has imprisoned other Sahraoui activists for alleged association with the POLISARIO Front actions; these cases have attracted international human rights criticism that has been less sensational than the Haidar case. In November 2010, the Moroccan security forces forcibly dismantled a Sahraoui protest camp near Laayoune, resulting in deaths, injuries, and arrests and prompting international condemnation. The exact number of casualties is unknown due to Morocco's control of information from the region. The Moroccan government views critical media reporting concerning Western Sahara as a threat to the country's territorial integrity.

Economy

Large portions of Morocco's gross domestic product (17.1%) and labor force (44.6%) continue to depend on agriculture and are vulnerable to rainfall fluctuations.⁷⁰ Through internal and Western

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

⁶⁵ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ "Morocco Expels Christian Missionaries," *Global Post*, March 12, 2010.

⁶⁷ 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>.

⁶⁸ See "Western Sahara" below and CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

⁶⁹ "Saharan Activist's Return to Morocco "Humanitarian" – Spokesman," MAP News Agency (Rabat) December 19, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

⁷⁰ CIA, *The World Factbook*, estimated figures dated 2010 and 2006, respectively.

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).⁷¹ Services and tourism are considered growth sectors and important sources of foreign exchange. Remittances from an estimated 3 million emigrant workers, mainly in Europe, accounted for about 6.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010.⁷²

The public sector remains large, despite an ongoing, if erratic, privatization program. Foreign direct investment has grown despite the impediments of excessive red tape and corruption,⁷³ and associated technology transfers and worker training have enabled relatively strong productivity growth in recent years in the telecommunications, transport, financial services, and real estate sectors.⁷⁴ 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 have included automobiles, technologies, aeronautics, services, and telecommunications. The fund hopes to create jobs and boost overall development.

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.⁷⁵ The royal family reportedly controls a majority stake in the National Investment Company (SNI) (although a precise account is not publicly available), which controls significant domestic financial, insurance, construction, and commodity interests.⁷⁶

Morocco's Economy: Basic Facts

Population: 31.6 million (July 2010 est.)

Gross Domestic Product Growth: 3.2% (2010 est.); 4.9% (2009 est.)

Gross Domestic Product Per Capita (purchasing power parity): \$4,800 (2010 est.)

Inflation: 1% (2010 est.)

Unemployment: 9.1% (official, 2010 est.)

Key Exports: clothing and textiles, electronic components, inorganic chemicals, transistors, crude minerals, fertilizers, petroleum products, fruit, vegetables, fish

Imports: crude petroleum, textile fabric, telecommunications equipment, wheat, gas and electricity, transistors, plastics

Major Trading Partners: France, Spain, China, United States, India, Saudi Arabia

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

⁷¹ U.S. Geological Survey, "Phosphate Rock Statistics and Information," 2011, at http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/phosphate_rock/. Despite its overwhelming proportion of global reserves, Morocco is only the third-largest producer of phosphates, after the United States and China.

⁷² World Bank, "Monthly Remittance Flows to Selected Countries," 2011, at www.worldbank.org.

⁷³ 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 Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010*, available at http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010. In June 2011, the Moroccan Justice Minister reportedly announced that over 8,000 people had been charged with corruption-related offenses in 2010.

⁷⁴ Ghazi Ben Jaballah, *Graduate Unemployment in the Maghreb*, German Marshall Fund, November 2011.

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

⁷⁶ *National*, "Moroccans March for Freedom, and Against the Royal Grip on the Country's Economy," March 28, 2011; Souhail Karam, "Morocco Regulator in Pledge on Monarchy-Owned Firms," Reuters, September 30, 2011.

Economic growth has been relatively strong in recent years, reaching an estimated 4.5%-5% in 2011, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet rising import commodity prices, a decrease in tourism due to regional turmoil, and fallout from the economic crisis in Europe could pose difficulties. Moreover, growth and reforms have not significantly reduced poverty, inequality, and unemployment, especially for the young.⁷⁷ These factors drive Moroccans abroad and may provide a breeding ground for radicalization. The government has attempted to address socioeconomic discontent through social programs, government hiring initiatives, public sector wage increases, and subsidies. Such efforts accelerated in 2011 in response to political unrest, sparking concerns for fiscal sustainability among independent analysts.⁷⁸

Although the 2008 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 (especially phosphates), tourism receipts, remittances, and foreign direct investment. Still, a surge in cereal crop yields in 2009 helped produce economic growth. The IMF praised the government's response to the crisis, including "sound macroeconomic policy and political reforms," while calling for further reforms to improve the business environment and "reorient fiscal policy" in light of recent costly "expenditures in response to social demands."⁷⁹ In June 2011, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lauded Morocco's "many efforts to improve its business climate" while calling for additional reforms to reinforce anti-corruption measures, reduce obstacles to land titling and ownership, improve infrastructure, simplify administrative procedures, and improve "institutional coordination."⁸⁰ Some observers predict that the country's weak anti-corruption and anti-trust bodies could be more active under the new PJD-led government. However, a more populist economic policy under the PJD could also lead to greater fiscal burdens.

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 planning phase.

Western Sahara⁸¹

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

⁷⁷ Unemployment among young college graduates is officially estimated at 17.7%, about twice the national average.

⁷⁸ Lahcen Achy, "Morocco Needs a New Social Contract to Promote Stability," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 3, 2011.

⁷⁹ IMF, *Morocco: Concluding Statement of the 2011 Article IV Consultation*, July 19, 2011.

⁸⁰ OECD, *Morocco: Business Climate Development Strategy*, June 8, 2011.

⁸¹ See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

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.

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.⁸² 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.”⁸³

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.”⁸⁴

⁸² For text of plan, see http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara_issue__full_t/view.

⁸³ State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011.

⁸⁴ U.N. Security Council Resolution 1979 (2011), April 27, 2011.

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 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 the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)—an organization of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, and Libya—remains inactive. Morocco refuses to compromise on the Western Sahara issue, while Algeria hosts and backs the POLISARIO. Moroccan officials frequently indicate their belief that Algeria could solve the Western Sahara issue if it wanted, presumably by pressuring the POLISARIO, while Algeria argues it is not a party to a dispute that it characterizes as between two sovereign nations (Western Sahara and Morocco). 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, 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.

Since early 2011, signs of a limited thaw between the two countries have emerged, as senior leaders on both sides—including King Mohammed VI and Algeria’s President Bouteflika—have repeatedly publicly stated a desire to improve bilateral relations. During the year, government ministers met for talks in both countries, and several economic agreements were signed, including for Morocco to import Algerian natural gas. However, prospects for further concrete steps are uncertain. In May, Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia stated that reopening the land border was not “on the agenda,” and accused Morocco of planting stories in the press of Algerian and POLISARIO “mercenaries” lending support to Libya’s Muammar Qadhafi.⁸⁵ Algeria and the POLISARIO deny the allegations; Morocco denies spreading the mercenary rumors.⁸⁶

Europe

Morocco has close ties to the European Union (EU), although relations 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. In October

⁸⁵ 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 circulated in a *Daily Telegraph* (London) report in April 2011, and were picked up in subsequent commentary by a former U.S. ambassador to Morocco who has also advised 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.

⁸⁶ AFP, “Rabat Qualifie de ‘Surprenantes’ les Déclarations d’Alger,” June 1, 2011.

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. The EU and Morocco also have bilateral economic accords, although the status of a lucrative fisheries agreement that included the coastline of disputed Western Sahara is uncertain after EU parliamentarians voted to sever the accord in mid-December 2011.⁸⁷ Morocco reacted by banning European fishing vessels from Moroccan waters. Illegal immigration of Moroccans and of Sub-Saharan Africans transiting Morocco to Europe and drug (cannabis and, more recently, cocaine) trafficking have also 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.

The EU has been strongly supportive of Morocco’s political reforms, and EU leaders hope that Morocco’s stability will be preserved amid ongoing regional upheaval. 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 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.”⁸⁸ In July 2011, the EU saluted Morocco’s adoption of a new constitution as “a significant response to the legitimate aspirations of the Moroccan people.”⁸⁹ Morocco is likely to benefit from the France-led “Deauville Partnership,” launched at the Group of Eight (G8) summit in May 2011, a multilateral aid initiative that aims to support democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.

Morocco traditionally has had good relations with France and Spain, its former colonizers. Relations with France—Morocco’s largest bilateral donor, trading partner, and source of foreign direct investment—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.⁹⁰

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

⁸⁷ Parliamentarians were split on the decision. Those who voted against the agreement cited concerns over its impact on Western Sahara’s Sahraoui population, as well as economic and environmental objections.

⁸⁸ Council of Europe, “Parliament of Morocco Joins Council of Europe’s ‘Common Home,’” June 21, 2011.

⁸⁹ *Europolitique*, “Maroc/Constitution: L’UE Salue la Résultat de Référendum,” July 5, 2011.

⁹⁰ AFP, “Nicolas Sarkozy a Félicité le Roi du Maroc pour la Nouvelle Constitution,” July 2, 2011.

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 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. In December 2011, the GCC announced a \$5 billion aid fund for Morocco and Jordan.

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.”⁹¹ In November 2009, 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

⁹¹ “King Calls for Pressure on Israel to Comply with UN Resolutions,” *Maghreb Arabe Presse*, October 28, 2009, Open Source Center Document GMP20091028950071.

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; Morocco subsequently expressed support for the Palestinian Authority's attempts to gain membership at the United Nations.⁹²

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 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.⁹³ 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."⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵

U.S. officials praised Morocco's stance on NATO-led military intervention in Libya in early 2011; Morocco backed international intervention to implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, though it did not participate militarily.⁹⁶ Morocco has also vocally expressed concerns over Syria's crackdown on anti-regime protesters, and recalled its ambassador in November 2011.

Relations with the United States

The United States and Morocco have long-term, good relations; Morocco's monarchy was one of the first governments to recognize the independence of the United States of America. 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

⁹² Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse, "Morocco Welcomes US Vision for a Sovereign Palestinian State," May 24, 2011; U.N. News, "Le Maroc Se Félicite des Bouleversements dans le Monde Arabe," September 26, 2011.

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

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

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

⁹⁶ State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri," March 23, 2011.

how satisfied I am with the special strategic partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States of America.”⁹⁷ On April 8, 2009, after meeting with then-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.”⁹⁸ 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.

Security ties have been strengthened by counterterrorism cooperation. 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. Bilateral U.S.-Moroccan military exercises are held regularly.

Morocco is seeking to diversify its arms sources, a program that has benefitted 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).⁹⁹ 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, night vision goggles, advanced AM 120-C7 air-to-air medium-range missiles systems, and 26 M198 155 mm towed guns. The sale of F-16s has drawn particular attention in the region, where Algeria—reportedly the biggest regional arms purchaser—maintains air superiority, although U.S. officials indicated the sale wouldn’t alter the regional balance of military power.¹⁰⁰ Sales of U.S.-made military radar systems and Sidewinder missiles were announced in 2011. Morocco also acquired a Gulfstream G550 aircraft for secure royal flights.

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 2010.¹⁰¹

U.S. Assistance

The United States has increased aid to Morocco in recent years to assist with countering terrorism, democratization, fighting poverty, and building trade capacity. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a regional democracy-promotion program, administers some U.S.

⁹⁷ “King Congratulates Barack Obama on Investiture,” MAP news Agency, January 20, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

⁹⁸ 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>.

⁹⁹ U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Al Arabiya, “Algeria, Polisario ‘Concerned’ Over Morocco’s Purchase of US F-16 Fighters,” August 6, 2011.

¹⁰¹ U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted May 27, 2011.

assistance funds, including programs to empower women, create jobs, improve education, build civil society capacity, enhance fiscal and trade policies, and further judicial and legal reform. Those directed at youth are intended to help prevent radicalization. The U.S. Department of Commerce has also organized trade missions to Morocco for U.S. companies, including one in March 2011. 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. MCC funding is being invested in improving fruit tree productivity, small scale fisheries, artisan production, and financial services, and in supporting private enterprises.

The Obama Administration has requested \$43.7 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2012. (This figure does not include MCC funds or Defense Department-led military cooperation programs.) 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.¹⁰²

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).¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

The State Department allocated \$5.1 in FY2009 “Section 1207” funds for counter-radicalization programs in Morocco.¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰² State Department, FY2012 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

¹⁰³ DSCA, “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), “U.S. Service Members Arrive in Morocco for African Lion,” May 17, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

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 2008.¹⁰⁶

Table I. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco, Selected Accounts
(appropriations, thousands of dollars, does not include Millennium Challenge Compact)

	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011 (est.)	FY2012 Request
ESF	15,374	0	3,000	2,281	0
FMF	3,625	3,655	9,000	8,982	9,000
IMET	1,713	1,916	1,789	1,900	1,900
INCLE	496	1,000	750	750	3,000
NADR	1,119	625	1,200	1,100	3,300
DA	4,136	18,000	19,546	19,039	26,454
Total	26,463	25,296	35,396	34,052	43,654

Source: Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2010-FY2012; FY2011 653(a) allocations.

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).

Recent Congressional Actions

A number of Members of Congress are strongly supportive of the Moroccan government and its autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara, and many have expressed appreciation for King Mohammed VI's reform initiatives in 2011. At the same time, some Members have expressed concern over Morocco's handling of the Western Sahara issue, over human rights issues, or over religious freedoms. In June 2010, the congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Morocco's expulsion of American Christians earlier that year.¹⁰⁷

Congressional concerns over human rights and the Western Sahara issue have sometimes been stated in foreign aid legislation. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (H.R. 2055, Division I, Title VII, Section 7041(g)), states that prior to the obligation of FY2012 Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds for Morocco, "the Secretary of State shall submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations on steps being taken by the Government of Morocco to (1) respect

¹⁰⁶ World Bank, "Robert B. Zoellick, President, World Bank Group Speech to Morocco Industry Summit, Casablanca, Morocco," May 5, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ 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." Hannah Armstrong, "Christians Expelled, Morocco and US Spar over Religious Freedom," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2010. The Senate expressed concerns on the issue in S.Rept. 111-237, July 29, 2010, to accompany S. 3676, the draft State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, 2011.

the right of individuals to peacefully express their opinions regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara and to document violations of human rights; and (2) provide unimpeded access to human rights organizations, journalists, and representatives of foreign governments to the Western Sahara.”

The conference report accompanying the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-117, December 16, 2009) endorsed a Senate report directing 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 to continue to make progress on human rights, 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.”¹⁰⁸ A similar reporting requirement was included in an explanatory statement accompanying the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8, March 11, 2009).¹⁰⁹ The FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act, P.L. 110-161, December 26, 2007, provided for the allocation of an additional \$1 million in FMF funding 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.¹¹⁰

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¹⁰⁸ H.Rept. 111-366, apparently referencing S.Rept. 111-44 accompanying S. 1434 (Leahy).

¹⁰⁹ 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.

¹¹⁰ 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.