



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. In 2011, following popular demonstrations that echoed unrest elsewhere in the region, the king proposed a new constitution that may provide greater independence to the Prime Minister, the legislature, and the judiciary. It was overwhelmingly approved in a public referendum. The moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) is leading the government for the first time after winning a plurality of seats in November 2011 legislative elections. While the party has been legally recognized for two decades, its leaders continue to grapple with their transition from outsider opposition status to the day-to-day responsibilities of running the government amid an economic downturn and responding to vast and divided expectations. The PJD's campaign promises to crack down on corruption and cronyism may also place it on a collision course with pro-palace elites. Protests have dwindled since their apogee in early 2011, but sporadic demonstrations continue over economic grievances, and some activists continue to call for deeper changes to the political system.

The U.S. government views Morocco as an important ally against terrorism and as a free trade partner. Congress appropriates foreign assistance funding for Morocco for counterterrorism and socioeconomic development, including in support of a five-year, \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact 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 approach to countering terrorism involves security measures, economic reforms, education, international cooperation, and control of religious outlets. Morocco experienced devastating terrorist attacks in 2003, and Moroccan nationals have been implicated in attacks and plots overseas. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a regional criminal-terrorist network, has not mounted a successful attack in Morocco. 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. The country is currently serving a two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. 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 some 600,000 Moroccan Jews are citizens of Israel. Morocco severed diplomatic ties with Iran in 2009, and was invited to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in May 2011. See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

Contents

Overview: Morocco and the “Arab Spring”	1
U.S. Reactions to Moroccan Reforms	3
Emerging Questions	5
Government and Politics.....	5
Terrorism.....	6
Human Rights	8
The Economy.....	11
Western Sahara	12
Foreign Policy.....	13
Algeria	14
Europe	14
Middle East.....	15
Relations with the United States	17
U.S. Assistance	18
Recent Congressional Actions.....	19

Figures

Figure 1. Map of Morocco.....	4
-------------------------------	---

Tables

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco, Selected Accounts.....	19
---	----

Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	20
---------------------------------	----

Overview: Morocco and the “Arab Spring”

Moroccan citizens and foreign analysts are divided over whether the tumultuous events of 2011 represent a deep change in Moroccan politics, or merely a reshuffle. In response to large public demonstrations in early 2011, which were inspired by the regional “Arab Spring,” King Mohammed VI initiated a series of reforms that he said would strengthen human rights, democracy, good governance, and economic transparency. The government also raised public sector salaries and the minimum wage, and announced new public hiring initiatives, among other social programs.

The centerpiece of the king’s reforms program was a revision of Morocco’s constitution. The new constitution was drafted by a commission appointed by the king (with some input from political parties, civil society groups, and others) and adopted in a popular referendum in July 2011.¹ It broadly aims to strengthen the role of the prime minister (now referred to as “head of government”), the legislature, and the judiciary; to promote human rights, women’s rights, and Berber (Amazigh) cultural rights; and to encourage decentralization. The king nevertheless retains significant authorities, including the ability to dissolve parliament; he remains commander in chief of the armed forces and the country’s preeminent religious authority.² Still, the constitution’s provisions on greater power-sharing between the monarchy and elected government, along with the precedent of the 2011 protest movement, may provide increased leverage for Morocco’s political parties and democracy advocates. In addition to the new constitution, the king announced a new human rights council (with jurisdiction over the Western Sahara) and new regulatory bodies. The king also pardoned and commuted the sentences of a handful of human rights and Western Sahara independence activists, as well as dozens of religiously conservative Salafist prisoners, many of whom were arrested in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca terrorist bombing.³

Morocco at a Glance

Population: 32.3 million (2011 est.)

GDP Growth: 4.6% (2011 est.)

Religion: Muslim 99% (official), Christian 1%, tiny Jewish community (~6,000)

Literacy: 56% (2006)

Unemployment: 8.9% (2011 est.)

Female Labor Participation (% of total female population): 26%

Urban Population: 58% of total population

Infant Mortality: 26.49 deaths/1,000 live births

Life Expectancy: 76.1 years (2011 est.)

Key Exports: clothing and textiles, electric components, inorganic chemicals, transistors, crude minerals, fertilizers (including phosphates), petroleum products, citrus fruits, vegetables, fish

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

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

Sources: CIA World Factbook, World Bank

¹ 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; some critics questioned the official rate.) The short timeframe for the vote 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.

² 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.

³ Human rights groups had been critical of many of the arrests of Salafists in 2003, citing a lack of due process. Those released in 2011 included Mohamed Fizazi, a Salafist leader who was convicted of preaching radical Islamist doctrine (continued...)

Like other instances of the king's decade-long policy of initiating top-down reforms, the changes of 2011 did not significantly alter the monarchy's political and economic prerogatives, but they showed a responsiveness to public pressures for greater political participation. Moroccan officials portrayed the 2011 reform process as an example of "Moroccan exceptionalism" and a model for other countries in the region.⁴ Some observers support this view, and most agree that the king successfully retained his popular legitimacy and, at least for now, reclaimed the initiative from the street. 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 genuine democracy. The Moroccan public may also gauge the success of reforms in terms of whether they lead to tangible socioeconomic advances.

The moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD, also known as Al Misbah/The Beacon) won a plurality of seats in early legislative elections held in November 2011. The elections were the first under the new constitution, and came to be perceived as a critical test of public confidence in the reform agenda.⁵ The party is now leading the government for the first time in a coalition with the nationalist, conservative party Istiqlal (Independence) Party, the centrist Popular Movement (MP), and the smaller, leftist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Officially, the king appointed the cabinet based on the ruling coalition's suggestions, and the PJD managed to appoint as Justice Minister Mustapha Ramid, a vocal critic of the United States and of Morocco's anti-terrorism detention policies, over reported objections from the palace. However, most analysts perceived royal interference behind the appointments of several close palace allies to key positions.⁶ The PJD has openly participated in Moroccan politics since the 1990s, longer than Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia. However, it continues to grapple with its transition from outsider opposition group to one preoccupied with the day-to-day concerns of running the government and responding to vast and divided public expectations.⁷ Sporadic protests and riots continue to occur, largely over socioeconomic grievances.

The PJD's campaign focus on good governance and anti-corruption measures was popular but may place the party in conflict with elites close to the palace, some of whom likely benefit from Morocco's opaque economic governance. Many analysts view the PJD as more driven by constituent concerns than are other political parties. Still, the PJD is 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 for

(...continued)

and meeting the perpetrators of the 2003 Casablanca attacks. Fizazi has since espoused a more moderate rhetoric. Additional pardons were granted in February 2012.

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

⁵ Observers from the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) noted generally sound procedures, but noted poor civic education and outreach by both the government and the candidates and limited public enthusiasm overall. 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 to strengthen its role in politics. Reports suggested that among voters who turned out, a significant number cast purposefully spoiled "protest" ballots. See NDI, *Final Report on the Moroccan Legislative Elections*, June 2012.

⁶ See, e.g., *UMCI News*, "Morocco King Keeps Checks on Islamist Govt," January 4, 2012; Driss Bennani andn Fahd Iraqi, "Enquête. Et le roi créa le gouvernement!" *TelQuel*, January 7, 2012.

⁷ See Marina Ottaway and Marwan Muasher, "Islamist Parties in Power: A Work in Progress," Carnegie Endowment, May 23, 2012.

integration into the political system.⁸ 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.⁹ The party's influence over policymaking is, moreover, likely to be curtailed by its weak legislative plurality (107 out of 395 seats, or just over 27%), 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 the recent enlargement of spending on social programs. Still, the party has engaged in several high-profile campaigns within the government over the religious and cultural content of state-owned television broadcasts and over the degree to which the elected government (as opposed to the palace) can exert oversight over independent state agencies.

Morocco's 2011 Protest Movement

On February 20, 2011, tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands of Moroccans in major cities turned out in what organizers termed a “Movement for Change.” The protests spawned the “February 20 Movement,” a loosely organized, leaderless coalition that orchestrated a number of subsequent large demonstrations criticizing Morocco's governance and advocating political change. Protesters 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 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 appeared to arise from a loose alliance of convenience between liberal and leftist youth leaders and 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.¹⁰ Authorities tolerated many of the protests, but in some cases security forces resorted to violence and arrests to disperse demonstrators.¹¹

The February 20 Movement rejected the 2011 constitutional revision process as insufficient and overly controlled by the monarchy. Some protests have continued, but they have dwindled in size. As of early 2012, the pragmatic coordination between liberals and the JCO had fractured, and many Moroccans appear to prefer to let the new government prove itself than to return to the street. Some Moroccans also appear frustrated with the protest movement, fearing 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.

U.S. Reactions to Moroccan Reforms

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. During a visit to Morocco in February 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that King Mohammed VI and the people of Morocco had

⁸ 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.

⁹ *UMCI*, “Morocco's PM-Elect: No Islamic Dress Code for Women,” December 10, 2011.

¹⁰ The JCO does not recognize the institutions of the monarchy and is therefore barred from formal political participation.

¹¹ 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 Agence France Presse (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.

showed great political maturity, and it was a successful transition to a new constitution, to elections that were held and hailed as successful, and now to a new government that is very much in keeping with the democratic trends but within a stable, functioning society and country. So we look at that and we compare it to what is happening elsewhere in the region and around the world, and it is quite admired in the United States.¹²

Clinton added, in response to a question on the economy, “I think we look to Morocco quite often as an example of how you create a climate in which businesses are welcomed, investors are attracted, people have jobs because of that.” In an earlier statement praising the conduct of the November elections, Secretary Clinton called on 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.”¹³ 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.”¹⁴

Figure I. Map of Morocco



Source: Map resources, adapted by CRS.

¹² State Department, “Secretary of State Clinton Interviewed on 2M [transcript],” February 26, 2012.

¹³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Morocco’s Parliamentary Elections,” State Department release, November 26, 2011.

¹⁴ State Department regular news briefing, November 28, 2011.

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 rise to lead the government? What is the emerging 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 status of banned groups such as the Islamist Justice and Charity Organization?
- What impact has the pro-democracy protest movement had on Moroccan politics, and what role, if any, will it play in the future? What is the likely impact of the past year's events on the role of civil society groups?
- To what extent is the newly created National Human Rights Council likely to criticize 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?
- How will the king's decision to pardon or commute the sentences of numerous Salafist 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?

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.

The four-party governing coalition is led by Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane of the moderate Islamist PJD. Other coalition members, which hold divergent policy views in some areas, are the conservative Istiqlal Party, the former leader in the anti-colonial movement; the centrist Popular Movement (MP); and the leftist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS). Opposition parties 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 demonstrated the waning electoral influence of PAM, founded in 2008 by Fouad Ali Al Himma, a former classmate of King Mohammed VI and former deputy interior minister.¹⁵ In December 2011, the king appointed Al Himma as a royal advisor, signaling the latter's apparent withdrawal from electoral politics.

The Islamist Justice and Charity Organization (Al Adl Wal Ihsan), led by Cheikh Abdessalem 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 without diminishing the role of the monarchy was pointless. 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 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 the legitimacy from 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 these expatriates, blaming their experiences overseas for their radicalization.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷ Five Moroccan detainees were transferred to Morocco from Guantánamo between 2004 and 2009; two were subsequently convicted of recruiting Moroccans to fight for Al Qaeda in Iraq.¹⁸ A Moroccan national was arrested in Washington DC in February 2012 and accused of plotting to bomb the U.S. Capitol building. Authorities are also concerned that extremists returning from abroad could conduct attacks at home. Numerous small, isolated, tactically limited, extremist cells, which

¹⁵ Al Himma was singled out by name as a target of the 2011 protests, and PAM lost seats in the 2011 vote. PAM had previously controlled a bloc in parliament, mostly through alliances with other parties, and came in first place in the 2009 local 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, released on August 18, 2011.

¹⁸ In January 2012, the House Armed Services Committee published a report critical of executive branch detainee transfer policies that referenced these cases. See *Leaving Guantánamo: Policies, Pressures, and Detainees Returning to the Fight*, HASC Committee Print 112-4.

adhere to the Salafiya Jihadiya (Reformist Holy War/“Jihadist”) ideology, are viewed as the main threat to Morocco’s domestic security.¹⁹ A number of individual Salafiya Jihadiya adherents have been granted pardons over the past year, with uncertain security implications; the many who remain in prison continue to protest the conditions and reasons for their detention.

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.”²⁰ 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. The U.S. State Department designated GICM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 2005, but currently states that the group is “largely inactive” and that “much of the GICM’s leadership in Morocco and Europe has been killed, imprisoned, or are awaiting trial.”²¹

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.²² Moroccan 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.²³ 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

¹⁹ Such cells perpetrated major attacks in 2002, with the murders of locals who had committed “impure acts” such as drinking alcohol. Several Salafiya Jihadiya religious leaders were convicted in 2003 of inciting the Casablanca bombings. A 2011 bombing in the tourist-destination city of Marrakesh, which killed 17 people, most of them European, was also blamed on a single, isolated cell.

²⁰ *New York Times*, “Moroccans Say Al Qaeda Masterminded and Financed Casablanca Suicide Bombings,” May 23, 2003.

²¹ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*.

²² Some Muslim leaders and human rights advocates 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.

²³ See CRS Report R41070, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, coordinated by John Rollins.

refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, reportedly by an AQIM splinter faction calling itself the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA or MUJAO after its French acronym).²⁴

U.S.-Moroccan counterterrorism cooperation is extensive. The State Department reported in 2011:

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.²⁵

To counter radical Islamism, Morocco also has exerted control over religious leaders and institutions, created theological councils, supervised and retrained imams, 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 may exploit for recruitment. Some 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, to improve coordination on that issue as well as to combat drug smuggling and illegal immigration, and also has reached out to other nearby countries such as Senegal.

Human Rights

With regard to the human rights situation in Morocco in 2011, the State Department reported that “The most significant, continuing human rights problems were the lack of citizens’ right to change the constitutional provisions establishing the country’s monarchical form of government, arbitrary arrests, and corruption in all branches of government.” The report added:

Other human rights problems reported during the year included police use of excessive force to quell peaceful protests, resulting in dozens of injuries and at least four deaths; torture and other abuses by the security forces; incommunicado detention; poor prison and detention conditions; political prisoners and detainees; infringement of freedom of the press; lack of freedom of assembly; lack of independence of the judiciary; discrimination against women and girls; trafficking in persons; and child labor, particularly in the informal sector. There

²⁴ The facts behind the kidnapping remain opaque, and Morocco and the POLISARIO have traded allegations of involvement.

²⁵ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, op. cit.

was a problem of police and security force impunity, but the government took steps to address the issue.²⁶

The 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” but is “making significant efforts to do so.”²⁷

Despite these problems, King Mohammed VI has undertaken several initiatives that are marked advances in selected areas of human rights practices. In March 2011, the king announced the creation of a new National Human Rights Council (CNDH). Officials have indicated that the CNDH will investigate human rights issues in the Western Sahara, where advocacy groups and some diplomats have called for independent (international) human rights monitoring.²⁸ Most notably, the parliament enacted significant 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

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. Media advocates contend that some criminal prosecutions of critical journalists on charges ostensibly unrelated to their journalism are in fact designed to inhibit independent coverage and commentary.³² The monarchy has also been accused of using financial pressures to quiet critical media.³³ Human Rights Watch contends that critical coverage

²⁶ State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2011, Morocco*, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/index.htm>.

²⁷ State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2011*, June 2011.

²⁸ The CNDH’s precursor was the 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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.

³¹ The Berbers inhabited much of North Africa before Arab Muslims invaded in the 8th century CE.

³² Rima Marrouch, “Morocco Pardons Journalist to Create Smokescreen,” Committee to Protect Journalists, June 2010.

³³ Ahmed Benchemsi, “Morocco and Press Freedom: A Complicated Relationship,” *Nieman Reports*, September 22, 2011.

of the Western Sahara issue, including by foreign correspondents, frequently leads to the revocation or denial of press credentials.³⁴ Human rights groups have also criticized Morocco's prosecution of activists who campaigned for a boycott of the November 2011 elections and of a rap musician who was an icon of the 2011 protest movement; some have accused the PJD-led government of censoring religiously sensitive materials as well as criticism of the king.³⁵

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 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, while some worried that detentions could create radicals who would eventually be released into society.³⁶ A 2010 Human Rights Watch report contended that a "pattern of abuse" under counterterrorism laws included extrajudicial detentions, allegedly by intelligence agents in unacknowledged detention facilities; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; and coerced confessions. Moroccan authorities rejected the report's primary allegations and refuted the details of cases cited in it.³⁷ 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."³⁸

The Moroccan Penal Code prohibits proselytizing to Muslims and the government has expelled foreign Christians or declared them *persona non grata* for violation of that law, reportedly without affording them due process. Some U.S. Christian groups have criticized enforcement of the law, such as in March 2010, when the government expelled at least 33 Christian foreign residents and declared *persona non grata* at least 81 individuals for alleged proselytizing. Six of those expelled and 28 of those declared *persona non grata* were U.S. citizens.³⁹ In May the government expelled or declared *persona non grata* an additional 19 Christian foreign residents, none of whom were U.S. citizens. The State Department reported that approximately 150 Christian foreign residents from 19 countries were expelled in 2009.

Problems with human rights practices in Morocco also are linked to the Western Sahara issue (see below), as seen in the 2009 case of Aminatou Haidar, an advocate for Sahraoui self-determination.⁴⁰ Over the years, Morocco has imprisoned 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

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: Restore Accreditation to Al Jazeera; Sahara Conflict Coverage Key Factor in Effort to Silence Selected Media," April 5, 2011.

³⁵ Karim Boukhari, "Courage, On Censure!" *TelQuel*, February 4, 2012; In February 2012, a student was sentenced to prison for "violating the sacred values" after a video posted online showed him criticizing the king.

³⁶ Jill Carroll, "Morocco's Harder Line on Security Challenges Reforms," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 9, 2007.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

³⁸ *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, op. cit.

³⁹ State Department, *July-December 2010 International Religious Freedom Report*, Released September 13, 2011, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148834.htm>.

⁴⁰ When Haider returned from receiving a human rights prize in the United States in November 2009, she wrote "Western Sahara" as her address on customs forms to re-enter Moroccan-administered Western Sahara. The authorities rejected the forms, claimed that she had thereby renounced her citizenship, confiscated her passport, and expelled her to the Spanish Canary Islands. Haider then went on a highly publicized 32-day hunger strike. After reported pressure from the United States, Moroccan authorities allowed Haider in under what they described as "a humanitarian gesture."

Moroccan security forces dismantled a Sahraoui protest camp near the Western Sahara city of Laayoune (alt: El Ayoun or Al Ayun) by force, 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.

The Economy

Economic growth has been strong in recent years, reaching an estimated 4.5%-5% in 2011, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet rising import commodity prices, an anticipated shortfall in this year's grain harvest, a decrease in tourism due to regional turmoil, and fallout from the economic crisis in Europe pose significant challenges. Moreover, growth and reforms have not significantly reduced poverty, inequality, and unemployment, especially for the young.⁴¹ These factors drive emigration 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, which accelerated in 2011 and early 2012 following political unrest, have sparked concerns among independent analysts for fiscal sustainability.⁴² The PJD has struggled to reconcile its campaign promises to deliver jobs and more programs for the poor with its efforts to reform Morocco's bloated price subsidies.

Through internal and Western Saharan mines, Morocco controls over 75% of world reserves of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers (and of which the United States is the world's largest consumer).⁴³ 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 2010.⁴⁴ Large portions of Morocco's gross domestic product (16.6%) and labor force (44.6%) continue to depend on agriculture and are vulnerable to rainfall fluctuations.⁴⁵ Analysts warned in early 2012 that an ongoing regional drought could cause grain shortages and food price spikes in Morocco.

The State Department's 2012 *Investment Climate Statement* reported that Morocco "actively encourages foreign investment and has sought to facilitate it through macro-economic policies, trade liberalization, and structural reforms," but noted that "the country's excessive bureaucratic red tape continues to be a major constraint on the competitiveness of the economy and deters investors." The statement added Moroccan regulation "is opaque and difficult to navigate."⁴⁶ Foreign investment-associated technology transfers and worker training have enabled relatively strong productivity growth in recent years in the telecommunications, transport, financial

⁴¹ Unemployment among young college graduates is officially estimated at 17.7%, about twice the national average.

⁴² Lahcen Achy, "Morocco Needs a New Social Contract to Promote Stability," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 3, 2011.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ World Bank, "Monthly Remittance Flows to Selected Countries," 2011, at <http://www.worldbank.org>.

⁴⁵ CIA, *The World Factbook*; estimated figures dated 2011 and 2006, respectively.

⁴⁶ State Department, *2012 Investment Climate Statement*, June 2012.

services, and real estate sectors.⁴⁷ The public sector remains large, despite an ongoing, if erratic, privatization program. In 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.

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."⁴⁸ It remains to be seen whether the country's weak anti-corruption and anti-trust bodies will be invigorated by the king's 2011 reforms platform and campaign promises made by the PJD.

The royal family's intervention in the economy has been criticized by some analysts. King Mohammed VI is reportedly one of the world's 15 richest royal figures, in a relatively poor country.⁴⁹ The phosphate industry and much of the economy are dominated by the royal family and elites 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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ The king is also a major landholder. Some critics view the monarchy's authority to appoint the heads of certain parastatal and regulatory agencies as a potential conflict of interest.⁵²

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 a particular focus on solar energy—with the goal of producing 42% of the country's electrical capacity from them by 2020.

Western Sahara⁵³

The dispute between Morocco and the independence-seeking Popular Front for the Liberation of Saqiat al-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) over the former Spanish colony south of Morocco remains unresolved. Morocco occupies 80% of the Western Sahara, considers the region its three southern provinces, will only accept a solution that guarantees it sovereignty over "the whole of its territories," and will only negotiate on that basis. A U.N. peacekeeping mission, MINURSO, originally designed to oversee a referendum on independence, has monitored a ceasefire between

⁴⁷ Ghazi Ben Jaballah, *Graduate Unemployment in the Maghreb*, German Marshall Fund, November 2011.

⁴⁸ OECD, *Morocco: Business Climate Development Strategy*, June 8, 2011.

⁴⁹ David Pendleton, "King of Rock," *Forbes*, June 17, 2009.

⁵⁰ *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, "Au Royaume des Phosphates," December 26, 2010-January 8, 2011.

⁵¹ *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.

⁵² CRS interviews with Moroccan democracy activists, Rabat, January 2012.

⁵³ See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

Morocco and the POLISARIO since 1991. In 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.⁵⁴

The king submitted an autonomy plan for the region to the U.N. in April 2007, which asserts Moroccan sovereignty.⁵⁵ 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. U.S. officials have depicted the autonomy proposal as "serious and credible," but the United States does not recognize either Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara or the POLISARIO's government in exile. The United States supports unconditional negotiations between the parties under the auspices of the Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General for the Western Sahara, former U.S. Ambassador Christopher Ross.⁵⁶ However, neither Morocco nor the POLISARIO has shown interest in a compromise; Morocco believes that its autonomy proposal is itself a compromise. In May 2012, Morocco announced it was withdrawing confidence in Ross, accusing him of giving "biased and unbalanced guidance" and criticizing a MINURSO report that suggested Morocco may have spied on the peacekeeping mission. The implications for MINURSO and the future of U.N.-mediated talks are uncertain.

As noted above ("Human Rights"), 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. 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 2012, 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 encouraging "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 opening of National Council on Human Rights Commissions operating in Dakhla and Laayoune, and the steps taken by Morocco in order to fulfill its commitment to ensure unqualified and unimpeded access to all Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council."⁵⁷

Foreign Policy

Morocco's foreign policy focuses largely on France, Spain, and the United States. The PJD-led government has called for a reinforcement of ties to traditional Western partners, while also

⁵⁴ In 2002, the U.N. Legal Counsel, in response to a query from the Security Council on the legality of contracts concluded by Morocco offshore Western Sahara, concluded that such activities are illegal "if conducted in disregard of the needs and interests of the people" of the "Non-Self-Governing Territory," i.e. Western Sahara. This determination is not readily enforceable, but has affected the calculations of private companies seeking to operate in the area. See *Letter dated 29 January 2002 from the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, addressed to the President of the Security Council*, U.N. doc. S/2002/161, February 12, 2002.

⁵⁵ For text of plan, see http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara_issue__full_t/view.

⁵⁶ State Department, "Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri," March 23, 2011.

⁵⁷ U.N. Security Council Resolution 2044 (2012), adopted on April 24, 2012.

engaging in increased outreach to the Arab Gulf states and Sub-Saharan Africa. Morocco is currently serving a two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council.

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 was more indirectly administered by France and made a relatively peaceful transition from French control. Shortly after Algeria's independence, 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 would benefit Morocco more than Algeria.

Signs of a limited thaw between the two countries emerged in 2011, as senior leaders on both sides—including King Mohammed VI and Algeria's President Bouteflika—repeatedly stated a desire to improve bilateral relations. During that year, government ministers met for talks in both countries, and signed several economic agreements, including for Morocco to import Algerian natural gas. However, prospects for further concrete steps are uncertain.

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 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. The status of a lucrative fisheries agreement that included the coastline of disputed Western Sahara has been troubled since EU parliamentarians voted to sever the accord in mid-December 2011.⁵⁸ Morocco participates in the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and its Neighborhood Policy Plan and receives considerable EU aid. 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.

⁵⁸ Parliamentarians were split on the decision. Those who voted against the agreement cited concerns over its impact on Western Sahara's Saharoui population, as well as economic and environmental objections.

The EU has been strongly supportive of Morocco's political reforms, and European 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."⁵⁹ 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."⁶⁰ Morocco is likely to benefit from the "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. In February 2012, the EU parliament approved a new trade deal that significantly expands the duty-free treatment of agricultural, food, and fisheries products on both sides. Debt relief has also been discussed.⁶¹

Morocco traditionally has had close relations with France and Spain, its former colonizers, both of which host sizable Moroccan immigrant populations. Relations with France—Morocco's largest bilateral donor, trading partner, and source of foreign direct investment—are particularly close. Paris supports 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), which Paris initiated, but which has faced obstacles due to Arab objections to Israel's participation.

Relations with Spain have been generally cooperative but 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. The 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.

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

⁵⁹ Council of Europe, "Parliament of Morocco Joins Council of Europe's 'Common Home,'" June 21, 2011.

⁶⁰ *Europolitique*, "Maroc/Constitution: L'UE Salue la Résultat de Référendum," July 5, 2011.

⁶¹ AFP, "EU Opens Door to 'Debt Relief' for North African States," February 22, 2012.

Jordan, as part of ongoing efforts to shore up the two poorer, non-Gulf monarchies amid protests, shifting U.S. policy, and growing Iranian influence in the region.⁶² 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 treatment of 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 November 2009, then-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 the 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 and its attack on a flotilla attempting to deliver aid to the Gaza Strip in May 2010. 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.⁶³ The king and others had maintained contacts with Israeli officials until the current government took power in Jerusalem. The bilateral link may be unbreakable; some 600,000 Israelis are of Moroccan origin, and about 25,000 of them travel to Morocco yearly.

In March 2009, Morocco severed diplomatic relations with Iran, blaming it for “intolerable interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom” and accusing 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 regarding Morocco's expression of solidarity with Bahrain.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ Morocco has participated in the “Friends of Syria” grouping, and recalled its ambassador to Syria in November 2011.

⁶² For further background, see Samia Errazzouki, “A Monarchical Affair: From Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula,” *Jadaliyya*, April 10, 2012.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ Statement of Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, MAP News Agency, March 6, 2009, BBC Monitoring Newsfile.

⁶⁵ Alfred de Montesquiou, “Morocco Challenges Middle East's Holocaust Mindset,” Associated Press, July 27, 2009.

⁶⁶ State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 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. 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 Arab-Israeli peace. In January 2009, King Mohammed VI congratulated President Obama on his election and seized the opportunity "to say how satisfied I am with the special strategic partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States of America."⁶⁷ 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."⁶⁸ 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 in the region since early 2011, Moroccan officials have sought to portray the United States partnership with Morocco as a key tool for furthering U.S. policy interests, 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).⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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; it has led to more than a tripling of bilateral trade and roughly a tripling of both the stock and annual flow of U.S.

⁶⁷ "King Congratulates Barack Obama on Investiture," MAP news Agency, January 20, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

⁶⁸ 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>.

⁶⁹ U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), "Morocco," Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

⁷⁰ Al Arabiya, "Algeria, Polisario 'Concerned' Over Morocco's Purchase of US F-16 Fighters," August 6, 2011.

investment to Morocco.⁷¹ In 2011, U.S. exports to Morocco totaled over \$2.86 billion, and U.S. imports from Morocco totaled \$995 million.⁷²

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. 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 \$32.6 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2013, roughly stable from \$31.1 million provided in FY2012 (estimated). This figure does not include MCC funds or funding administered by U.S. agencies other than the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Proposed aid will focus on supporting civil society, local governance, and political party programming; helping to improve the justice system; raising literacy rates; encouraging economic growth; and enhancing military modernization, counterterrorism, and efforts to counter violent extremism.⁷³ Morocco also benefits from assistance and grants administered by international financial institutions that receive significant U.S. funding support.

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).⁷⁴ 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

⁷¹ State Department, *2012 Investment Climate Statement—Morocco*, June 2012.

⁷² U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted June 2012.

⁷³ State Department, FY2013 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

⁷⁴ DSCA, "Morocco," Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

African Lion. The exercise is designed to promote interoperability and mutual understanding of military tactics, techniques and procedures.⁷⁵

The State Department allocated \$5.1 million in FY2009 “Section 1207” funds for counter-radicalization programs in Morocco.⁷⁶ Morocco also benefits from assistance administered through the U.S. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an interagency regional program (State Department, Defense Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development) aimed at increasing North and West African states’ capacity to counter terrorism.

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco, Selected Accounts

Appropriations, \$ Thousands, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development Accounts

	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012 (est)	FY2013 (req)
ESF	15,374	0	3,000	2,281	0	0
FMF	3,625	3,655	9,000	8,982	8,000	8,000
IMET	1,713	1,916	1,789	1,989	1,805	1,710
INCLE	496	1,000	750	750	1,500	1,500
NADR	1,119	625	1,200	1,100	3,300	1,720
DA	4,136	18,000	19,546	19,039	16,539	19,676
Total	26,463	25,296	35,396	34,141	31,144	32,606

Source: State Department, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2010-FY2013.

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 2011 reform initiatives. At the same time, some Members have expressed concern over Morocco’s handling of the Western Sahara issue, and/or over human rights and religious freedom issues. In June 2010, the congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Morocco’s expulsion of American Christians earlier that year.⁷⁷ Provisions

⁷⁵ U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), “U.S. Service Members Arrive in Morocco for African Lion,” May 17, 2010.

⁷⁶ 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.

⁷⁷ 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.

relevant to Morocco are included in S. 3241, the Senate version of the draft FY2013 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act; and in the committee report on H.R. 5857, the House version of the bill.

Congressional concerns over human rights and the Western Sahara issue have sometimes been stated in foreign aid legislation. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74, 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 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 accompanying conference report (H.Rept. 112-331) stated that: “The conferees note that funds provided in title III of this Act for Morocco may be used in regions and territories administered by Morocco. The conferees remain concerned with resolving the dispute over the Western Sahara and urge the Department of State to prioritize a negotiated settlement.” It has been U.S. policy that bilateral assistance funds for Morocco may not be used for programming in Western Sahara because doing so would tacitly acknowledge Moroccan sovereignty. According to State Department officials, the conference report provision is unlikely to lead to a change in the allocation of bilateral assistance funds.

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