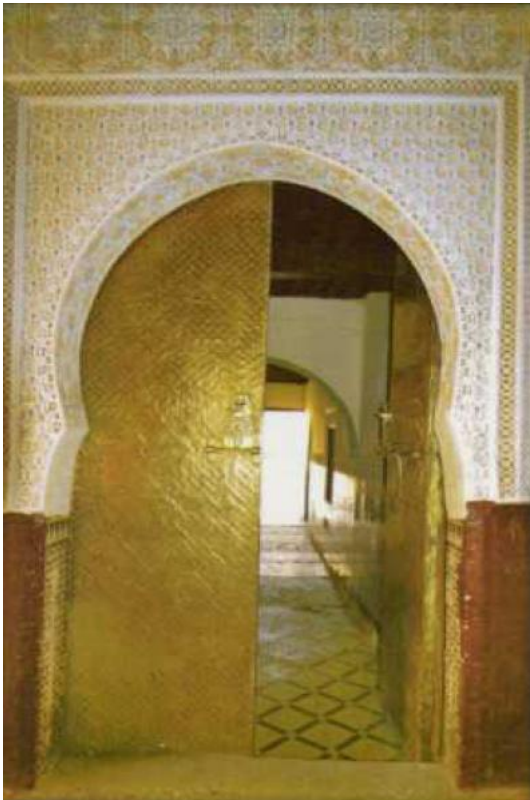


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***Maghreb Facing  
New Global Challenges***

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**U.S.-Moroccan Relations  
How Special?**



**Carol Migdalovitz**

*October 2011*

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## Overview

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U.S.-Moroccan ties have sometimes been described as a “special relationship.” This paper explores the bilateral relationship to investigate how special it really is. How did the two countries first establish what became a long-lasting association and how was it made stronger during World War II? What difficulties did the presumed friends experience in the early days of Morocco’s independence, and what caused those strains?

What mechanisms has the United States used to shape the relationship? How and why has assistance become increasingly generous in recent years? How did U.S. military assistance aid King Hassan II’s efforts to gain control of the disputed Western Sahara region and thereby shore up his regime after two failed coup attempts? How did Hassan II set the pattern for Morocco’s successful political maneuvers in Washington, where other governments sometimes find the separation of powers difficult to fathom?

What initiatives has the United States undertaken since King Mohammed VI took power to strengthen the “special relationship”? Is there any balance in the U.S. approach to Morocco? What are the implications of the mild “Arab Spring” in Morocco for the United States and what policy options, if any, might Washington consider in dealing with it? Should the need to preserve a special relationship translate into a more active U.S. approach to developments? The challenges are great and how the United States addresses them may contribute to determining the bilateral relationship of the future.

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# Strong Historical Foundations

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## *Establishing the Friendship*

In 1777, Morocco was the first country to recognize the independence of the United States. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of maritime piracy made Washington begin to pay attention to Morocco.<sup>1</sup> In 1784, Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Abdellah's forces seized a U.S. merchant ship after the United States had ignored his diplomatic overtures. However, the "Emperor" of Morocco (as he was to be described in the text) subsequently switched to a policy of trade and sealed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the United States in June 1786.<sup>2</sup> The following month, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, then ambassadors to Paris and London respectively and both later presidents of the United States, witnessed the Treaty, and the United States Congress ratified it in July 1787. It is believed to be the oldest unbroken treaty relationship still in force in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the following centuries, both governments frequently referred to this 18<sup>th</sup> century landmark as the foundation for what they sometimes call a special relationship. At the time, the Treaty was not special. It was only the first of a series of agreements intended to thwart piracy against U.S. ships on the high seas emanating from the North African Barbary States and, by the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Before the United States gained its independence, Great Britain's naval and diplomatic power had protected merchant ships and crews of its American colonies from North African pirates. Then, France's alliance with the United States during the Revolution required it to protect "American vessels and effects against all violence, insults, attacks, or depredations, on the part of the said Princes and States of Barbary or their subjects." After the United States won its independence, however, the new government had to protect its own commerce against dangers such as the Barbary pirates. Gerard W. Gewalt, *America and the Barbary Pirates: An International Battle Against an Unconventional Foe*, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, The Library of Congress American Memory Project, [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/jefferson\\_papers/mtjprece.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/jefferson_papers/mtjprece.html).

<sup>2</sup> For text of the treaty, see [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/bar1786t.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1786t.asp).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, *Morocco: Background Note*, April 20, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm#relations>.

another decade, the United States had concluded similar treaties with Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis. Even so, Morocco was the only one of these states to cease the practice of piracy, and the Treaty serves to underscore the early and continuous strategic importance of Morocco to the United States. The United States' agreement in the Treaty to pay \$10,000 in tribute annually may be viewed as the first U.S. foreign assistance to Morocco.

In 1836, the 1787 Treaty was reaffirmed and the renewal accorded extraterritorial privileges (capitulations) to American citizens, including the right to be tried only by courts established at U.S. consulates in Morocco. These rights were held until after Morocco gained independence in 1956, long after other governments had relinquished theirs.

The United States appears to have been a passive observer to developments in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when France and Spain endeavored to gain control over Morocco and, subsequently, when the 1912 Treaty of Fez transformed much of central Morocco into a French protectorate, while granting Spain similar rights over the northern and southern regions of the country.<sup>4</sup>

## ***World War II: Promises and Strategic Value***

World War II produced pivotal events that spurred greater American activity in North Africa and that would draw the United States and Morocco closer. The U.S.-British Atlantic Charter of August 1941, the precursor of their anti-Nazi alliance, held out a promise of self-determination that titillated colonies of all imperial powers, including those of France. It declared, *inter alia*, that the powers “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”<sup>5</sup> After the United States entered World War II five months later and at Churchill's insistence, however, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was said to have assured his European allies with empires that he agreed that the Charter applied only to territories occupied by Germany.<sup>6</sup> In 1942, Vichy French forces allied with Germany occupied French Morocco, yet Roosevelt is not known to have altered his stance toward the protectorate. *Casablanca*, one of the most popular American films of all times and one from which many Americans gain their first, romanticized knowledge of Morocco, was

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<sup>4</sup> See C.R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History*, New York University Press, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> For text of the Atlantic Charter, see <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>.

<sup>6</sup> Churchill's concern was that the Atlantic Charter's promise would apply to India and other British possessions, not about French Morocco.

set and filmed in this period, although it did not portray Moroccans prominently.

On November 8, 1942, allied Anglo-U.S. forces under the overall command of Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower launched Operation Torch against Germany with simultaneous landings across North Africa.<sup>7</sup> As part of the operation, some 35,000 U.S. troops under Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. made three coordinated, concurrent landings in Morocco. Vichy resistance was short-lived due to an order to cease hostilities issued by captured Vichy French Admiral Jean-Francois Darlan, commander of the Armed Forces, reportedly under considerable U.S. duress.<sup>8</sup> In Morocco, the allies first took the Port Lyautey fighter base and they would retain control of that facility until it reverted to France in 1947. Mohammed V gave his personal loyalty to the allies, and Moroccan soldiers affiliated with Free French forces aided the allied effort, nurturing personal ties.

In January 1943, President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Free French Forces leader General Charles de Gaulle conferred in Casablanca to map out strategy for a European invasion. During the conference, President Roosevelt met Sultan Mohammed V without French authorities in attendance and held a dinner to honor him as the leader of the host country, although Morocco was then still a French (and Spanish) protectorate. The Sultan used the opportunity to seek U.S. support for Moroccan independence, and the President was reported to have assured him of America's interest in seeing Morocco's freedom restored after the war. According to U.S. author Charles Gallagher, Roosevelt's exact words have been disputed, but what mattered was the widespread belief (held not only by Moroccans but by then bitter French officials as well) that a U.S. commitment was made. For some time afterward, "American prestige in the country coasted on the grounds of this story which was said to be known, often with embellishments, to nearly every Moroccan."<sup>9</sup> The President also suggested that the Sultan consider student exchanges between Morocco and United States, another sign of extended friendship. President Roosevelt's dealings with the Sultan were viewed as anti-colonial and said to displease De Gaulle as leader in waiting of the French empire.

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<sup>7</sup> For more on Operation Torch, see several publications of the U.S. Army Center of Military History, including Charles R. Anderson, *Algeria-French Morocco, 8 November 1942-11 November 1942*, 1993, CMH-Pub-71-11, George F. Howe, *North West Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, CMH-Pub-6-1, 1957, and Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: the War in North Africa, 1942-1942*, New York: Henry Holt, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> In return, Gen. Eisenhower controversially allowed Adm. Darlan to be appointed High Commissioner for French North and West Africa or civil and military chief of the regions, an action that the Free French did not appreciate -- to put it mildly. Darlan's tenure in the post was brief as he was assassinated in Algiers in December 1942.

<sup>9</sup> Charles F. Gallagher, *United States and North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

## ***Post War Period: U.S. Military Presence***

After the war, in 1950, the United States successfully negotiated with France for the construction of five air bases (reduced to four when implemented) in French Morocco that would be considered French but be used by the United States Air Force. Moroccans were not included in the negotiations. In addition, U.S. forces had a number of other military and communications facilities in the country. More than 100,000 members of the U.S. armed forces and their families along with civilian employees of the military services plus construction workers served in Morocco during the following 13 years. They developed long lasting ties and memories and even eventually established a Moroccan Reunion Association that published a history of the time.<sup>10</sup>

During the Cold War, the United States viewed the air bases and air and communications facilities in Morocco as essential for projecting U.S. military strength.<sup>11</sup> Access to the air bases was deemed indispensable to the mission and operations of the Strategic Air Command – whose long-range B-47 bombers were a major component in the strategy of deterrence against the Soviet bloc and could reach their potential targets from the bases in Morocco without refueling. The bases also had nuclear weapons storage sites.<sup>12</sup>

## ***Independence: National Sovereignty and Cold War Unease***

After independence in 1956, (now) King Mohammed V chose to make his first foreign visit to the United States in 1957. At the same time, he put a high priority on restoring Morocco's national sovereignty and removing foreign forces from its soil. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (military commanders) viewed the fate of the bases through a narrow Cold War prism and with concern that the Soviet Union and/or Chinese Communists might take advantage of the changing situation and supplant Morocco's ties with the West.<sup>13</sup> Some in Washington also were worried that the King might veer toward the then emerging Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). U.S. policymakers may have hoped

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<sup>10</sup> Colonel Gerald M. Adams, *A History of U.S. Strategic Air Bases in Morocco, 1951-63*, Published by The Moroccan Reunion Association, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, Volume XIII, accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

<sup>12</sup> See

[http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/facility/sidi\\_slidane.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/facility/sidi_slidane.htm), also John K. Cooley, "Morocco's Uneasy Cold War Nuclear Years," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), November 2, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States*, op.cit.



NAM countries would align with the West and been irked by the pronounced neutral (and, in some cases, Eastern bloc-leaning) stance that the group adopted. They seemed to view the NAM as a surrogate for the Soviets in the “if you’re not with us, you’re against us” mentality of the day.

Morocco’s insistence on the U.S. troop withdrawal intensified with the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon in July 1958 (even though the action was in response to President Camille Chamoun’s call for assistance to counter Syrian and Egyptian subversion). The United States finally accepted the principle of withdrawal, and an agreement for U.S. forces to depart from Morocco in four years was reached in 1959. Withdrawal was completed as scheduled in 1963, by which time new bases constructed in Spain and long-range B-52 bombers had rendered those in Morocco less critical to the U.S. military mission. The nuclear bombs that the United States had quietly positioned at the Moroccan bases also were withdrawn in 1963, when control of the sites ended.

In a related development, the United States reached an informal agreement with Morocco in 1963 to provide training for the Moroccan air force at the “Moroccanized” facility at Kenitra (formerly Port Lyautey), and to retain full control over two naval communications stations, which still were considered essential to the U.S. Sixth Fleet’s naval communications network in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic. All of these facilities would be closed in 1978, when they were judged obsolete. Nonetheless, Morocco continues to be important for U.S. commercial and naval ships’ access between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic and the United States wants it to remain friendly in part for that reason.

In 1960-1962, Mohammed V accepted fighter planes, jet trainers, and technicians from the Soviet Union, feeding American Cold War anxieties. Moscow soon seemed to prefer to conduct more of its arms trade in the region with the newly independent, more leftist, and richer Moroccan rival, Algeria, instead. Yet, when Morocco’s relations with France cooled as a result of prominent left-wing Moroccan politician Mehdi Ben Barka’s disappearance in Paris in 1965 and King Hassan II’s refusal to extradite his then Interior Minister Mohammed Oufkir, who was implicated in the affair, to France, Morocco acquired Soviet tanks from Czechoslovakia (then part of the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact). With these purchases outside of the Western arms market, some Washington circles believed that Hassan II was courting the Non-Aligned Movement in the same way they maintained his father allegedly had done.

In 1967, the Joint Chiefs of Staff still assessed a Moroccan request to purchase U.S. arms through the Cold War dialectic. Declassified documents indicate that they wanted to maintain U.S. influence in a moderate Arab country and avoid its alignment with the Soviet Union. In addition, they wanted to balance Arab perceptions of exclusive U.S. support for Israel and protect continued use of naval

communications and Voice of America (VOA) facilities in Morocco. (A large VOA transmitter in Morocco did not close until 2008.) The Chiefs stated that possible “(l)oss of the cooperation of Morocco will have an adverse effect on the U.S. strategic position on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean.”<sup>14</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson’s soon approved a \$14 million credit that Morocco would use to purchase U.S. F-5 fighter planes.

The U.S. military drawdown in Morocco coincided unintentionally with the beginning of an active U.S. Peace Corps presence there. Morocco was among the first countries to extend an invitation to the nascent Peace Corps that Congress authorized in September 1961. In 1963, a group of 53 arrived in Morocco at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then, about 4,000 volunteers have served in the country. Today, Peace Corps volunteers in Morocco are involved environmental, health, small business, and education projects, and some consider them to be a benign projection of what is now called “soft power.” Former volunteers and others transformed their affection for Morocco into concrete action in 1988, when they established Friends of Morocco (FOM), a non-governmental organization to promote educational, cultural, charitable, and other exchanges between the United States and Morocco.

## **Coup Attempts and U.S. Policy**

The U.S. viewed the 1971 and 1972 attempts to overthrow King Hassan II with concern, but also with the belief that the King’s malgovernance and “dissolute life style” had provoked the actions.<sup>15</sup> For his part, the King briefly believed that the United States was implicated in the second coup attempt led by his erstwhile loyalist, General Mohammed Oufkir, then having risen to become Minister of Defense and Commander of the Royal Armed Forces. This was because the F-5 planes used in the unsuccessful attempt to shoot down the King’s aircraft had been U.S.-supplied and took off from the airbase at Kenitra, where U.S. military trainers were present. The U.S. Embassy rushed to reassure the Moroccan foreign minister that there was absolutely no U.S. involvement.<sup>16</sup> At the time, U.S. officials incorrectly assumed that additional attempts to remove the King were

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<sup>14</sup> For text of Memorandum for Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, see <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v24/d137>.

<sup>15</sup> For an assessment of the King’s prospects after the second attempted coup, see declassified “Special National Intelligence Estimate 61-1-72,” September 14, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 2, Documents on North Africa, 1969–1972, Document 131*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d13>.

<sup>16</sup> Declassified telegram 3761 from the Embassy in Morocco to the Department of State, August 17, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, ibid.*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d126>.

possible in the near term, but saw few or no alternative leaders who would not nationalistically oppose a continued if limited U.S. presence in the country and close relations with the United States.<sup>17</sup> These assumptions were not expressed publicly.

Throughout the remaining years of Hassan II's reign and afterwards, both sides nurtured their strategic partnership. For example, in 1982, the United States and Morocco signed a military cooperation agreement governing U.S. forces' use of Moroccan airports for transit and established a joint military commission. In return, the United States provided funds to upgrade the airfields.

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<sup>17</sup> Declassified Special National Intelligence Estimate 61-1-72, September 14, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, op.cit.

## Western Sahara: Impediment to U.S. Regional Goals<sup>18</sup>

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In U.S. official circles, the Western Sahara issue is seen now not just as a conflict over territory or for national self-determination, but as a major impediment to regional cooperation in trade and, more importantly, to countering terrorism. In the beginning, however, it sparked congressional debate over King Hassan II's use of U.S. arms in the region and restrictions on the supply of some weapons.

In the Spanish (later Western) Sahara, the colonial region to Morocco's south, beleaguered Hassan II found a means to stabilize his regime with a new, powerful national objective around which to rally his people. In November 1975, the King launched a Green March of unarmed civilians who crossed a few kilometers into the Western Sahara. Spain soon relinquished control of the territory to Morocco and Mauritania, which rapidly sent their troops to claim the territory in December. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saqiat al Hamra and Rio de Oro or Polisario, a national liberation movement seeking the Western Sahara's self-determination, had other ideas. In January 1976, the first armed battles occurred between Morocco and the Polisario and, in February, the Polisario declared the Sahara Arab Democratic Republic (SADR).

Due to the Polisario's resistance, the King needed increased military assistance to assert Moroccan sovereignty over the territory. Such aid had been a major element in his bilateral relationship with the United States. In the 1970's, however, congressional restrictions on U.S. arms supplies required Morocco (and other countries) to use them only for internal security and legitimate self defense. The conditions would be violated if Morocco used the weapons beyond its internationally recognized borders, i.e., in the Western Sahara. Morocco violated the U.S. restrictions on use of arms in the Western Sahara, prompting Washington to reject a Moroccan request for fixed-wing counterinsurgency aircraft and attack helicopters in 1977. Other U.S. arms classified as defensive continued to be supplied on a grant basis, including air defense weapons and communications equip-

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<sup>18</sup> For background, see John Damis, *Conflict in Northwest Africa: the Western Sahara Dispute*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983. For a recent critical overview, see Jacob Mundy and Stephen Zunes, *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010.

ment.<sup>19</sup> Then, after the Polisario launched attacks within Morocco, President Jimmy Carter approved a major \$235 million sale of armed reconnaissance aircraft, jet fighters, and helicopters. Polisario military successes also prompted the United States to provide Morocco with tanks and to refit U.S.-supplied fighters with electronic equipment for countermeasures.<sup>20</sup> In the early 1980s, U.S. electronic equipment affixed to the defensive barrier (berm) that Morocco constructed in the Western Sahara enabled it to successfully counter Polisario guerrillas and prevent their incursion into both the Western Sahara and Morocco. The berm helped Morocco secure control over more than 80% of the territory of the Western Sahara, which continues to this day.

Some analysts suggest that it was not just the Polisario successes that led the United States to increase arms sales. The United States also appreciated King Hassan II's willingness to supply troops to back Western interests in Zaire in 1977 and 1978; was grateful to him for briefly offering asylum to the Shah of Iran, an American ally; and Saudi Arabia, an influential U.S. partner and oil supplier that also was a key Moroccan benefactor, supported the sale.<sup>21</sup> Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance to Morocco that compensated for its inability to pay for U.S. arms as these were sales not grants. It would do so again in later years, notably for Morocco's first purchase of U.S. F-16 fighter planes in 1994.

Arms sales to Morocco notwithstanding, the United States, regardless of the political party in power, has followed an official policy of neutrality on the Western Sahara issue, recognizing neither the Polisario-declared Sahara Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) nor Moroccan sovereignty over what Rabat views as its "southern provinces." Administrations have encouraged U.N. efforts to resolve the dispute, including the appointment of two senior American diplomats, former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III (1997 to 2004) and Ambassador Christopher Ross (2009 to present), as the Secretary General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara. However, the parties' lack of will to compromise supported by their patrons has stymied all envoys regardless of nationality.<sup>22</sup>

The United States, less openly, also has not wanted a settlement that might destabilize the kingdom, which, as noted above, has

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen J. Solarz, "Arms for Morocco?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Winter 1979. Former Congressman Solarz wrote about the arms debate while still in office and as it was happening.

<sup>20</sup> Morris Draper, "Arms Sales to Morocco: Western Sahara Conflict," *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 2051, June 1981.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Morocco: A Country Study*, edited by Harold D. Nelson, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> For an examination of the problems with the settlement process, see Anna Theofilopoulou, "The Failure of 'Negotiations Without Preconditions,'" United States Institute of Peace, *Peace Brief* 22, April 23, 2010, <http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PB%2022%20Western%20Sahara%20the%20Failure%20of%20Negotiations%20w-out%20Preconditions.pdf>.

defined the Western Sahara as its “national issue.” Critics maintain that the United States is not neutral, but supports the Moroccan stance. They note that the U.S. State Department, like France, rapidly praised King Mohammed VI’s 2007 autonomy plan, which is based on the premise that the Western Sahara is and will remain Moroccan.<sup>23</sup> Soon after it was proposed, then Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns described the plan as “a serious and credible proposal to provide real autonomy for the Western Sahara.”<sup>24</sup> On several occasions, current U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has echoed that phrase.<sup>25</sup>

The U.S. legislature has more varied views.<sup>26</sup> Every Congress has some Members who want the United States to put a higher priority on the Sahraouis’ right to self-determination, which they contend is more in line with core U.S. values. They continue to favor the U.N. referendum process that offers the right as an option, but that appears to have reached a dead-end.<sup>27</sup> The Polisario, which is active on Capitol Hill, has successfully courted some Congressional Black Caucus members, who view the Western Sahara as the last colony in Africa, and some Hispanic Members with whom it shares Spanish language ties. Other Hispanics, notably Cuban-American representatives, support Morocco because of the Polisario’s ties to the Castro regime, which has provided it with military training and educational scholarships and recognized the SADR. During visits to Morocco, U.S. legislative delegations find that counterparts emphasize the Polisario-Cuban connection as they try to win over their interlocutors. More recently, Moroccan officials also have attempted to cultivate Americans with claims that Polisario-administered areas are vulnerable to terrorist infiltration or that the Polisario sent mercenaries to support Libyan leader Muammar al Qaddafi against the rebels during the current conflict.

Even before Congress’s current preoccupation with the national debt and budget deficits, some Members and other prominent Americans questioned U.S. contributions to funding the United Nations Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in the Western Sahara (MINURSO) with arguments that seem unrelated to the merits of the Western Sahara issue. They maintain it is a costly operation

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<sup>23</sup> For two views of autonomy plan, see William I. Zartman, “Time for a Solution in the Western Sahara Conflict,” and Yahia H. Zoubir, “Stalemate in Western Sahara: Ending International Illegality, both in *Middle East Policy*, December 1, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> “‘Serious and Credible,’ in Washington’s Own Words,”

<http://www.autonomyplan.org> – which appears to be an official Moroccan government website – and U.S. Department of State, response to taken question, May 2, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taeib Fassi Fihri, March 23, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/03/158895.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Impressions of Congress are based on the author’s more than 20 years of working for the Congressional Research Service, a legislative support agency.

<sup>27</sup> For more background on the stalemate, see Erik Jensen (a former MINURSO official), *Anatomy of a Stalemate*, International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series, December 1, 2004.

that has an unachievable mandate and only served to help perpetuate the status quo or stalemate. They advocate shifting to voluntary funding in order support higher priority U.N. needs.<sup>28</sup> U.S. official defenders of MINURSO advance the traditional line that it is indispensable because it has kept the cease-fire for two decades and that the United States has no interest in a resumed armed conflict.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Other Issues: Temporary Strains, Lasting Appreciation***

Bilateral relations between the United States and Morocco have infrequently experienced strains. One instance occurred when King Hassan II signed a Treaty of Unification with Libya in August 1984. The King had not given Washington notice of his intention to sign the document. When U.S. officials expressed disappointment, he reportedly explained that the Treaty would provide him an opportunity to influence Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi positively, although this was not Morocco's sole or even main reason for the accord.<sup>30</sup> The Treaty proved short-lived because, in 1986, Hassan II withdrew after the mercurial Libyan leader accused him of "treason" for meeting Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. It had no lasting impact on Morocco's ties with the United States.

The United States greatly appreciated the King's participation in the first Gulf War coalition in 1991. King Hassan II contributed 6,000 troops to defend his ally and patron, Saudi Arabia, despite popular demonstrations opposed to the war. In exchange, the George H.W. Bush Administration awarded Morocco increased U.S. military and economic aid. In 1999, out of respect for two centuries of friendship with Morocco and the close bilateral relations that King Hassan II had nourished, a large official U.S. delegation attended his funeral. President Bill Clinton headed an unusually prestigious group of mourners, including two former presidents, two former secretaries of state, and many former ambassadors.

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<sup>28</sup> Brett Schaefer, "Urgent Problems that Need Congressional Action," Heritage Foundation Lecture #1177, February 3, 2011, [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org).

<sup>29</sup> See statements of U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in various U.N. Security Council debates on extending the MINURSO mandate.

<sup>30</sup> Moroccan officials also hoped that it would produce economic benefits, such as trade and remittances earned from supplying Libya with needed labor, and would neutralize Libya regarding the Western Sahara conflict. *Morocco: A Country Study*, op.cit.

## ***A New King: Enhanced U.S. Outreach***

Under Mohammed VI, Morocco refused to send forces to Iraq for a second war in 2003, but expressed willingness to host training for its security forces. Bilateral relations continued to flourish, particularly as the terrorist attacks of September 2001 spurred the George W. Bush Administration to seek to isolate hostile regimes in the Middle East and cultivate closer ties with those it perceived as friendly and moderate. The bombings in Casablanca in 2003 seemed to show that terrorism was as much a threat to Morocco as to the United States and countering it became a common interest. In June 2004, the President granted Morocco non-NATO ally status, which provides many benefits, the most valuable of which for Morocco is priority access to surplus U.S. defense materiel. That December in Rabat, Morocco co-chaired, with the United States, the first "Forum for the Future," a meeting of 30 regional countries and the G-8 group of industrial powers for the U.S.-proposed Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA) intended to forge a "partnership to advance political, economic, and social reform and progress...." BMENA was briefly the centerpiece of U.S. policy toward the region and Morocco was thought of as a model of friendship and moderation.



Prior to 2006, bilateral U.S.-Moroccan trade was unremarkable. It grew slowly, and only seemed to spike somewhat in years when Rabat made military purchases. That situation changed with the 2004 U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA) -- the first such U.S. agreement with a country on the African continent and now a pillar of the bilateral relationship. In the formal notification to Congress in 2002 of his intent to begin FTA talks with Morocco, then U.S. Trade Representative (and current president of the World Bank) Robert Zoellick's Office explained that the United States had chosen Morocco as an FTA partner for multiple reasons. First, a trade agreement with Morocco would further the goal of promoting openness, tolerance, and economic growth across the Muslim world. Second, Morocco was a strong ally in the war against terrorism, a rationale that policymakers had begun to rely upon routinely after Al Qaeda's attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Third, the FTA would ensure stronger Moroccan support for U.S. positions in World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. Fourth, an FTA would help Morocco strengthen its economic and political reforms. Fifth, the agreement was expected to provide U.S. exporters and investors with increased market access.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the Bush Administration's enthusiasm, the selection of Morocco was greeted initially with skepticism in some U.S. business circles. While philosophically supportive of free trade agreements, business leaders would have preferred other candidates. For example, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce noted that the United States did not do a lot of business with Morocco and argued that Egypt and Turkey would be more suitable for such an initiative.<sup>33</sup> Egypt and Turkey also are viewed as of greater strategic importance to the United States. However, the Bush Administration probably would not have considered agreements with those countries to be achievable

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<sup>31</sup> Much of the contemporaneous information in this section is derived from Raymond J. Ahearn's U.S. Congressional Research Service Report RS21464, *Morocco-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*, May 26, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the U.S. Trade Representative Home Page. [http://www.ustr.gov/Document\\_Library/Letters\\_to\\_Congress/2002/Morocco\\_FTA\\_Senate\\_Notification\\_Letter.html](http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Letters_to_Congress/2002/Morocco_FTA_Senate_Notification_Letter.html) and [http://www.ustr.gov/Document\\_Library/Letters\\_to\\_Congress/2002/Morocco\\_FTA\\_House\\_Notification\\_Letter.html](http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Letters_to_Congress/2002/Morocco_FTA_House_Notification_Letter.html).

<sup>33</sup> "Chamber Official Says USTR Understaffed, Criticizes U.S. Choice of FTA Partners," *Inside U.S. Trade*, February 7, 2003.

alternatives due to possible opposition from pro-Israel, Greek, or Armenian (i.e., anti-Turkish) lobbies with considerable clout on Capitol Hill. Another coalition of U.S. companies championed the negotiations with Morocco, arguing that an FTA would support U.S. interests and expand trade flows as well as offset tariff preferences embodied in the European Union (EU)-Moroccan Association Agreement that had entered into force in 2000. They noted that while the Association Agreement excluded agriculture, the FTA would include it.

Since the FTA came into force in January 2006, bilateral trade between Morocco and the United States has grown an estimated 112%, according to the U.S. State Department. As the table below shows, the balance of trade has favored the United States every year.

#### U.S. Trade with Morocco\*

	U.S. Exports to Morocco	U.S. Imports from Morocco**
<b>2006</b>	875,552	546,434
<b>2007</b>	1,343,011	625,888
<b>2008</b>	1,518,769	880,299
<b>2009</b>	1,606,101	466,754
<b>2010</b>	1,947,233	685,407

\*In thousands of U.S. dollars

\*\* For consumption

Source: U.S. International Trade Commission, <http://dataweb.usitc.gov>.

It uses only U.S. trade data. Figures from the International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbooks* differ as they rely on member countries for data.

Despite the Free Trade Agreement and the attendant growth in trade, Morocco still is not a consequential U.S. trade partner.<sup>34</sup> It is, after all, a country of 32 million people with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2010 of only \$4,800, according to the CIA *World Factbook*. It ranks 69<sup>th</sup> among all U.S. trade partners, is the 58<sup>th</sup> largest export market for U.S. goods, and the 81<sup>st</sup> ranking source of imports. If Morocco is not an important trade partner, then the FTA may serve mainly as a symbol of America's continuing view of its relationship with Morocco as "special."

Since the 1990's, the United States also has tried unsuccessfully, and unrealistically, to foster greater intra-regional economic cooperation that would benefit both the United States and Morocco. The first major effort in the Clinton era was called the Eisenstadt Initiative

<sup>34</sup> Some analysts attribute this party to shortcomings in implementation of the FTA and suggest areas for renegotiation that they say would benefit Morocco and perhaps improve the trade balance. See Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Claire Brunel, *Capitalizing on the Morocco-US Free Trade Agreement*, Policy Analysis in International Economics, Peterson Institute for International Economics, September 2009.

that sought to create economies of scale to attract American investors to a larger multi-country market. The Bush Administration renamed it the U.S.-North Africa Economic Partnership. Both efforts foundered due to the unresolved Western Sahara dispute between Morocco and Algeria. Morocco, however, continues to support the idea and repeatedly calls for the border with Algeria to be opened, as it would gain more than its neighbor from increased regional trade and other economic cooperation.<sup>35</sup> The border has been closed since 1994.

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<sup>35</sup> "Morocco Renews Call to Mend Ties with Algeria," *Al Jazeera*, July 30, 2011.

# Aid

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## *A Basic State Department Tool*

Since 1953, the United States has provided Morocco with more than \$2 billion in economic assistance. The U.S. Agency for International Development's current objectives include creating more opportunities for trade and investment, basic education and workforce training, and improving government responsiveness to citizen needs. The following table shows the major categories of U.S. aid to Morocco since 2006.

**U.S. Aid to Morocco\***

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011**
<b>ESF</b>	0.890 <sup>1</sup>	8.000 <sup>1</sup>	5.374 <sup>1</sup>	---	.000 <sup>3</sup>	.000 <sup>3</sup>
<b>FMF</b>	2.375 <sup>1</sup>	2.500 <sup>1</sup>	.635 <sup>3</sup>	.655 <sup>3</sup>	.000 <sup>9</sup>	.000 <sup>9</sup>
<b>NADR</b>	.775 <sup>.</sup>	1.295	1.317	.625	1.200	1.100
<b>INCLE</b>	.990 <sup>.</sup>	1.000	.496	1.000	.750	3.000
<b>DA</b>	.284 <sup>8</sup>	.400 <sup>5</sup>	.136 <sup>4</sup>	8.000 <sup>1</sup>	9.546 <sup>1</sup>	4.500 <sup>2</sup>
<b>IMET</b>	.884 <sup>1</sup>	.975 <sup>1</sup>	.713 <sup>1</sup>	.916 <sup>1</sup>	.800 <sup>1</sup>	.900 <sup>1</sup>

\* In millions of U.S. dollars.

\*\*Requested.

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development.

ESF = Economic Support Funds or assistance provided to countries based on considerations of special economic, political, or security needs and U.S. interests

FMF = Foreign Military Financing which is a major U.S. military aid program extending credits on a grant basis to finance U.S. overseas arms transfers, i.e., to enable countries to purchase U.S. arms

NADR = Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs

INCLE = International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, a funding stream that provides assistance to foreign police forces and justice sector officials

DA = Development Assistance

IMET = International Military Education and Training, a program that provides training to individual members of foreign armed forces

In addition to aid to the Moroccan government, the U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) provides small grants to support Moroccan non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With modest funding of approximately \$1 million, MEPI oversees

programs in Morocco to help empower women, create jobs, improve education, build trade union capacity, enhance fiscal and trade policies, and further judicial and legal reform. Programs directed at youth are intended to prevent radicalization.

## **Arms Sales and TSCTP: Facing a Common Threat?**

Today, the United States and Morocco share a robust military relationship. From Morocco's perspective, it appears to be largely about the acquisition of arms and about competition with Algeria. Morocco is among the largest Third World purchasers of U.S. military equipment, recently acquiring 24 advanced F-16 fighter planes for about \$2.4 billion, including training and services. Algeria's purchase of Russian MiG-29 fighters probably spurred Morocco's desire for advanced U.S. fighters as the regional rivals have engaged in an arms race for years.<sup>36</sup> Some U.S. officials reportedly have expressed doubts about Morocco's ability to absorb the arms it is acquiring, but their opinions have not impeded the continuing flow of weapons to a "special" partner.

From the U.S. perspective, military relations are now more about combating terror.<sup>37</sup> Morocco participates in the U.S. Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a State Department-led program specifically developed to address the potential expansion of operations by Islamist terrorist and extremist organizations across the Sahel, North, and West Africa. Its main concern is Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has safe havens and support networks in the remote expanses of the Sahel. U.S. officials increasingly describe the group as a threat to the U.S. homeland, although it has not been one to date. Nor has it been able to perpetrate major attacks in Morocco as elsewhere in North Africa and the Sahel. The partnership comprises the United States, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Senegal and is a five-year program that aims to strengthen regional counter-terrorism

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<sup>36</sup> For more on the arms race between Morocco and Algeria, see Anthony H. Cordesman and Aram Nerguizian, *The North African Military Balance: Force Developments & Regional Challenges*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 8, 2010, <http://csis.org/publication/north-african-military-balance>.

<sup>37</sup> The much-reported CIA secret practice during the Bush Administration of engaging in "extraordinary rendition" of foreign terrorist suspects to friendly countries whose security services were known for their "enhanced interrogation techniques," i.e., torture, was not a U.S. military policy. Morocco was one of those countries. Former prisoners leveled the charge in suits filed in U.S. and British courts, and documents disclosed in a recent U.S. court case confirm that Morocco was among the countries in which the planes landed. Stephen Braun, "In Records of Court Case Lie Details of Secret Airlifts of Terror Suspects to CIA-Run Prisons," *Associated Press*, September 1, 2011.

capabilities, enhance and institutionalize cooperation among the region's security forces, promote democratic governance, discredit terrorist ideology, and reinforce U.S. bilateral ties with partners. While seeking to increase the indigenous capacities of Sahelian and West African countries, it also strives to facilitate their cooperation with the Maghreb partners in combating terrorism. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) provides military support for the TSCTP, especially U.S. special operations forces' training of counterparts from participating countries.<sup>38</sup>

However, the U.S. State Department's *Country Report's on Terrorism 2010*, issued on August 18, 2011,<sup>39</sup> bemoans,

*(W)hile Morocco and Algeria are members of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, the level of bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism between the two countries did not improve. Morocco was specifically excluded from the Algerian-led Combined Operational Committee (CEMOC), formed at Tamanrasset, Algeria. Algeria and Morocco's political disagreement over the Western Sahara territory remained an impediment to deeper counterterrorism cooperation.*

TSCTP funding is taken from State Department, Defense Department, and USAID appropriations and is not a separate congressional appropriation. Between 2006 and 2009 (the last year for which figures are available), with regard to Morocco, TSCTP expended approximately \$3.6 million for military-to-military exchanges, including conferences, exercises, and training, law enforcement and counter-terrorism measures, including workshops on responding to suicide bombers, explosive detector dogs and related training, as well as communications equipment.

## ***MCC: Solidifying the Relationship***

Morocco also receives an extremely generous Millennium Challenge grant, which is funded separately from State Department-administered appropriations. Congress created the Millennium Challenge Corporation in January 2004 to try to deliver U.S. foreign assistance more smartly. The idea was to form partnerships with countries "committed to good governance, economic freedom, and investments in their citizens" as measured by different selection criteria. Chosen countries receive much larger scale U.S. grants than previously and are expected to continue their reform processes and to improve overall performance on the criteria.

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<sup>38</sup> See *Fact Sheet* at

<http://www.africom.mil/fetchBinary.asp?pdfID=20100526131154>.

<sup>39</sup> Report available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170257.htm>.

Morocco was named eligible in November 2005. In 2007, the United States and Morocco signed a Millennium Challenge Compact totaling \$697.5 million to be disbursed over five years. At the time, it was the largest grant that the Millennium Challenge Corporation had awarded. The compact provides grants to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth through strategic investments to increase productivity and improve employment in high potential sectors. It also targets small business creation and economic growth. The five approved Millennium projects in Morocco involve increasing fruit tree productivity (\$300.9 million), modernizing small-scale fisheries (\$116.2 million), funding financial services for micro-enterprises (\$46.2 million), enterprise support in the form of business training and technical assistance aimed at young, unemployed graduates (\$33.9 million), and support for artisan crafts (\$111.9 million). The compact entered into force in September 2008, formally beginning the five-year timeline for project implementation.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after the MCC deemed Morocco eligible for a compact, a staff delegation from the U.S. House of Representatives Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC) visited Rabat in March 2006 for a needs assessment of the Moroccan Chamber of Representatives, the elected lower house of parliament. The House had established the Commission in 2005 to work with emerging democracies in order to promote responsive, effective government and strengthen democratic institutions by assisting legislatures in emerging democracies. The delegation found disturbing that members of the Chamber “conducted themselves with reflexive deference to the monarch and not independently” and concluded that an HDAC program in Morocco in 2007 would be “premature.”<sup>41</sup>

HDAC’s conclusions support charges that some MCC grants are intended to prop up countries that the United States favors politically, such as Morocco, Jordan, Georgia, and Armenia, and that critics believe are not sincere about reform or democratization. However, favoritism is proof of the abiding specialness of the U.S-Moroccan relationship. The new Moroccan constitution and forthcoming elections in November, however, could mute criticism and produce an assessment that credits Morocco with reforms -- depending upon their results

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<sup>40</sup> For more, see Millennium Challenge Corporation website, <http://www.mcc.gov>.

<sup>41</sup> Full report available at [http://hdac.house.gov/docs/HDAC\\_2006\\_annual\\_report.doc](http://hdac.house.gov/docs/HDAC_2006_annual_report.doc).

## Morocco Plays Washington

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During his reign, King Hassan II looked to the United States for cooperation in defense and economic matters partly in order to balance his dependence on Europe. As some in Europe appeared to adopt what were seen as anti-Muslim positions, Moroccans viewed the United States more favorably, seeing it as tolerant of religious diversity and without a colonial history. The perceived Islamophobia of some American individuals and groups since 9/11 may have tarnished that U.S. halo.

Hassan II shrewdly navigated Washington politics. He began the still continuing practice of hiring former U.S. ambassadors to Morocco and former Members of Congress to represent his country's interests in the halls of Congress. His agents often emphasized Morocco's bona fide record of religious tolerance as it applied to Moroccan Jews, which plays well on Capitol Hill. The government often selects prominent Moroccan Jewish businessmen to host receptions for visiting U.S. delegations.

Also well-received in Congress were King Hassan II's meetings with Israeli leaders Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, and Ehud Barak, and his support for the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>42</sup> After Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat signed their Declaration of Principles in 1993, Morocco's economic and political relations with Israel improved significantly. In 1994, the two governments opened liaison offices in each other's countries. They remained open until Israel strove to suppress the second *intifadah*, or Palestinian uprising against the occupation, that began in September 2000, and Rabat deemed Israel's use of force excessive. However, official Israeli-Moroccan contacts continued. Members of Congress repeatedly ask Moroccan officials when the offices will reopen and relations with Israel will improve. Morocco has given no sign that will happen soon. To the contrary, King Mohammed VI would not grant Israeli President Peres an audience when he planned to attend the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa in Marrakesh in October 2010 and Peres then cancelled his visit to Morocco. The King reportedly made his decision because of "ongoing political situation with the Palestinians."<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup> See Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, Morocco and Israel: A Special Relationship, *The Maghreb Review*, Vol. 21, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> "Israel's Peres Cancels Morocco Visit after Royal Snub," *Agence France Presse*, October 18, 2010.



liaison offices and royal audiences are unlikely to resume as long as the peace process remains stalemated.

In the wake of the May 2003 bombings in Casablanca that included Jewish targets, King Mohammed VI reaffirmed the traditional royal protection for Morocco's Jews. The U.S. Administration and Congress conveyed their sympathies to Morocco and welcomed the King's statement. Despite the closure of the liaison office and the controversy over Peres's aborted visit, Members of Congress and the executive branch generally appreciate Morocco's record of tolerance, benign relationship with Jews, and constructive approach to the peace process. In July 2009, to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King's ascension to the throne, President Obama sent a congratulatory letter in which he, *inter alia*, saluted Mohammed VI's "efforts to promote dialogue between religions and culture."<sup>44</sup>

In recent years, Morocco under Mohammed VI has found additional vehicles for influencing Congress. In 2004, the Moroccan-American Center for Policy registered as an agent for the Moroccan government in order to obtain support for Morocco and influence U.S. policy in favor of its position concerning the Western Sahara. The Center's employees hold meetings with congressional offices and donate to selected congressional campaigns. The Moroccan Embassy in Washington also began to sponsor congressional staff delegation visits to Morocco authorized by the State Department under ethics guidelines as educational and cultural programs. The U.S. visitors meet with government officials and non-governmental organizations' leaders and travel to several Moroccan cities, sometimes including El Ayoun in the Western Sahara depending on the state of unrest there. Morocco is a relative latecomer to this type of maneuver. Other Arab countries that are recipients of major U.S. foreign aid, e.g., Jordan and Egypt, have staked trips for a long time. Although not U.S. aid recipients, the Polisario has sponsored congressional travel programs since the 1990's and Algeria began to run trips after Morocco entered the game.

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<sup>44</sup> "President Obama's Letter to King Mohammed VI Commends 'Commitment to Peace, Tolerance & Justice,' as Moroccan's Commemorate Decade of Progress and Leadership," PR Newswire, July 28, 2009.

# Annual State Department Reports: A Balancing Act

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Despite contrary impressions, the official U.S. policy toward Morocco does not completely lack balance. Annual reports issued by the U.S. State Department can be a means for providing relatively dispassionate appraisals of a foreign government's progress in key policy areas; this has been true of its assessments concerning Morocco. The most notable or publicized are the reports on human rights practices, trafficking in persons, religious freedom, and counter-terrorism. They contain details revealing aspects of the situation in Morocco as seen by Americans based in the country that are sometimes missed in the media. These reports, however, lack the same impact on bilateral relations as arms sales, counter-terrorism cooperation, or policy toward the Western Sahara.

## *Human Rights*

The Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor issues the annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.<sup>45</sup> Under King Hassan II, the report on Morocco determined in some years that the situation had regressed and in others that it had improved. In 2010, under Mohammed VI, the report concluded that, in Morocco

*(c)itizens 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.*

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<sup>45</sup> Reports are available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010>.

Thus, while the United States still values its special relationship with Morocco, that preference has not prevented Foreign Service officers and their Washington-based superiors from assessing the domestic situation objectively.<sup>46</sup>

## Religious Freedom

There is some overlap between the reports on human rights and those on international religious freedom, and the U.S. government issues two of the latter. The State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report 2010* generally compliments Morocco, especially compared to other Muslim-majority countries.<sup>47</sup> However, it noted a decline in respect for the right of some Christians to practice their religion, i.e., the right to proselytize, which Morocco limits to Sunni Muslims practicing the Maliki right. In 2010, Morocco expelled approximately 150 Christian foreign residents from 19 countries, including 45 Americans, without due process for violating legal prohibitions on proselytizing. The report also noted "some Moroccan Christians reported increased government harassment." (The just issued report on the July-December 2010 period notes that expulsions and harassment are continuing.<sup>48</sup>) On the other hand, the report praised King Mohammed VI for formally acknowledging the Holocaust and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs for taking a public stand for tolerance.

Due to what some consider a growing influence of religious groups in American politics, there is more U.S. attention to the issue of religious freedom in the world and in Morocco in particular. Congress created the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), whose members are appointed by the President, Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate, and the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, and it issues a second report on the subject. The report is less comprehensive than that of the State Department, but its 2011 Annual Report lists Morocco as a "closely monitored" country.<sup>49</sup> This status resulted from the expulsion of the expatriate Christians noted above. The Report stated that the expulsions had "deeply concerned" several Members of Congress, who asked the USCIRF to engage the

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<sup>46</sup> For very similar reporting, see Amnesty International, *Annual Report: Morocco/Western Sahara*, May 28, 2011,

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports?country=321>.

<sup>47</sup> Report available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010>.

<sup>48</sup> Report available at

[http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010\\_5/168272.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168272.htm).

<sup>49</sup> Report available at

<http://www.uscifr.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf>

Moroccan government on the issue.<sup>50</sup> A Commission delegation traveled to Morocco and met with government ministers, religious leaders, civil society activists, as well as the U.S. ambassador and embassy staff. The Moroccan officials promised to improve deportation procedures. The delegation said that it had informed Moroccan government officials that their law against proselytism contravenes international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Morocco is a party, as missionary activity is accepted as a legitimate expression of religious belief. The report did not relate the Moroccan interlocutors' response to this information or indicate that they intend to change their view of proselytism as a result meeting the Commission's representatives.

## **Human Trafficking**

The State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons report on trafficking in persons has become better known as the issue of human trafficking has gained increased international attention. The *2011 Trafficking in Persons* report ranks Morocco as a Tier 2 country, or one whose government does not fully comply with minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (U.S. Public Law 106-386, October 28, 2000), but is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with those standards.<sup>51</sup> Morocco's rank has been unchanged since the first report was issued in 2001, prompting questions about its efforts to bring itself into compliance over the past decade. The report raises those questions, noting lack of progress in convicting and punishing trafficking offenders; proactively identifying trafficking victims among vulnerable groups; and ensuring that foreign trafficking victims are not subject to arrest and deportation. It also states that the Moroccan government is not addressing forced prostitution and forced labor of undocumented migrants, and continues to conflate migrant smuggling with human trafficking. The report notes, *inter alia*, that Morocco lacks a comprehensive anti-trafficking law and has made few efforts to prevent trafficking.

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<sup>50</sup> In June 2010, the congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings solely on the expulsion issue. Hannah Armstrong, "Christians Expelled, US Morocco Spar over Religious Freedom," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Reports are available at <http://www.state.gov/tip/rls/tiprpt/2011>.

## Terrorism

Finally, the State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism produces the well-known *Country Reports on Terrorism*. Its 2010 report, issued on August 18, 2011, stated,

*“Moroccan-U.S. cooperation was particularly strong. 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 counter-terrorism efforts at the tactical level and made plans to begin joint counter-radicalization programs.”*<sup>52</sup>

Although full of praise, the report also notes the impediment that the Western Sahara poses for regional counter-terrorism cooperation. The report does not mention the Polisario, which the State Department does not consider a terrorist group. Some in the Moroccan government have attempted to link the Polisario to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which is listed in report, but their contention has gained little traction in Washington and is roundly denied by the Polisario leadership.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the Department fails to look at the group as does Morocco despite Morocco's efforts at influence,

## Arab Spring: A Challenge for U.S. Policymakers

The United States has cause for relief in the mild “Arab Spring” of 2011 in Morocco compared to other countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Demonstrations on and off since February 20 have not mobilized the same numbers as elsewhere, although turnouts of 10,000 to 20,000 were respectable.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, demonstrators have been non-violent and have not questioned the legitimacy of the monarchy or called for its overthrow.<sup>55</sup> Instead, they sought a constitutional monarchy similar to those in Europe, where rulers are titular heads of state, but do not govern. King Mohammed VI rapidly took the initiative away from the embryonic opposition movement, and his security forces did not use brutal measures against it – in contrast to Libya, Syria, Yemen, or Bahrain. (Their use of violence in late May appears to have been the exception, not the rule.)

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<sup>52</sup> Report available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170257.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> SADR Foreign Minister Mohammed Salem Ould Salek, “Let it be clear, the Polisario rejects terrorism and heinous crimes,” quoted in “Polisario Rejects Al Qaeda, Organized Crime,” *Maghrarebia*, December 23, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> “Thousands Rally in Morocco over Reform Plan,” Reuters, July 17, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Amine Boukhriiss, “Without Fear, Without Truce, Without a Leader,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 12, 2011.

In March, the King proposed a new constitution and appointed an advisory commission solely of his choosing to draft the document in secret.<sup>56</sup> It did not concede a European-style constitutional monarchy and allowed the King to retain power as head of state, the army, and the faith. It did change aspects of the government in officially allowing the head of the party winning the most seats in parliament to become head of government and to appoint his own cabinet, albeit with the King's approval. However, the current prime minister already is head of the largest legislative party, so this may not be much of a change. King Mohammed VI previously had reserved the right to appoint several key members of the cabinet and so this may mean an improvement in practice. The new constitution was approved in a national referendum on July 1. The King's pre-emptive actions have had his presumably desired effect.<sup>57</sup> By September, Islamists withdrew from their vaunted alliance with leftists that had been evident in some demonstrations and the number of people attending demonstrations diminished.

The U.S. government has tried to thread a path between the King and the demonstrators. Washington does not want to choose between the two because the monarchy has been a mainstay of the bilateral relationship with the United States and the demonstrators appear to embody U.S. values. Washington welcomed the King's March announcement as a first step and did not emphasize the limitations of his constitution, while reaching out to the demonstrators as representatives of their countrymen. The State Department declared, "We fully support the aspirations of the Moroccan people in their efforts to further consolidate the rule of law, raise human rights standards, promote good governance, and work toward long-term constitutional reform." It added, "the United States values Morocco as a key strategic partner and we stand ready to work with the government and people of Morocco to realize their democratic aspirations."<sup>58</sup> The Department hailed the July 1 constitutional referendum as "an important step in Morocco's ongoing democratic development." On July 2, Secretary of State Clinton herself almost repeated the March statement, and expressed hope for "long-term democratic reform that incorporates checks and balances." She added, "We look forward to the full implementation of the new constitution as a step toward the fulfillment of the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans."<sup>59</sup> In the end,

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<sup>56</sup> For an overview of the constitutional process and prospects, see Marina Ottaway, "The New Moroccan Constitution: Real Change or More of the Same?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 20, 2011, [http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=44731&solr\\_hilite=](http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=44731&solr_hilite=).

<sup>57</sup> Nadim Audi, "Offering Slow, Small Changes, Morocco's King Stays in Power," *New York Times*, July 11, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> U.S. State Department, Office of the Spokesman, Press Statement, March 10, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/03/158038.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. State Department, Constitutional Referendum in Morocco, July 2, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/07/167528.htm>.

U.S. officials were probably just thankful that they did not have to worry about the stability of yet another friendly regime.

Some accurately note that only time and implementation will tell whether the new Constitution will be a step in toward greater democratization or an obstacle to achieving more reform. The challenges along the way are great, as real change would require Moroccan political parties to revitalize programs and personalities in order to move beyond what the U.S. House Democracy Assistance Commission found to be their reflexive deference to the monarch and lack of independence. It is not clear that they can or want to do so before the November elections. Furthermore, a true democratization process would require the King and his palace coterie (the *makhzen*) to ease their tight control of the political system. If the King and legislators change their behavior, the new government and the palace will have to grapple with new power balances after the elections. Even more importantly, they will have to address the chronic problems that gave rise to much of the political discontent reflected in the February 20 movement -- high youth unemployment, educational deficiencies, corruption, and other persistent ills.

As a result of the long-term bilateral relationship and aid commitments, Morocco will find the United States willing to work with it to make progress and address socioeconomic problems and the United States could find ways to exert influence on developments if it so chooses. Aspects of U.S. assistance programs already are oriented toward supporting reform. While encouraging the monarch and legislature to undertake reforms, Washington has to find more avenues for outreach to the people whose discontent the demonstrators expressed. The demonstrations did not convey anti-Americanism, but it is unclear how open the participants would be to an open U.S. approach. Given national or nationalist sensitivities and suspicions, Washington must avoid the perception that it is interfering in Morocco's domestic affairs. Behind the scenes advice and leverage might be the wisest course – if both sides are open to it.

In reality, if Morocco remains peaceful, it is unlikely that Washington will seek to engage more proactively than it has so far and it may not seek additional policy options. In the reactive world of foreign policymaking, it is preoccupied with what it views as higher priority concerns in strategically more important countries as well as with potential critical crises with Iran and beyond. In addition, the American public and Congress appear to favor less active engagement with “democratization” because of disillusionment after a decade of wars waged in its name and fear of becoming embroiled in yet another adventure – even if no one is calling for U.S. military intervention in Morocco and it is not needed.<sup>60</sup> Put in perspective, Morocco is a special friend, but others require U.S. policymakers’

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<sup>60</sup> See German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2011*, [http://www.gmfus.org/publications\\_/TT/TT2011\\_final.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/publications_/TT/TT2011_final.pdf).

attention far more urgently and they are stressed to justify even those involvements – see strains of domestic opposition to Libyan enterprise.



## Conclusion

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The United States and Morocco truly have a very special relationship. Established centuries ago, the tie was cemented during World War II and has withstood transitory strains. The United States has come to view Morocco as a model of moderation -- compared to other Muslim-majority countries -- partly as a result of Morocco's own successful operations in Washington politics. The United States has supported its friend with increasingly generous foreign assistance and sales of sophisticated arms. In the past decade, the two partners have found a new common interest in combating the threat of terrorism. Thus far, the Arab Spring in Morocco has not impinged on the relationship or been translated into proactive U.S. engagement. The United States has chosen a prudent course, intending not to disturb the monarchy while suggesting outreach to the opposition that has been evident in the demonstrations. In the end, it appears to favor the status quo of a beneficial special relationship with the King and paying greater attention to concerns and interests elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa.