



# Morocco: Current Issues

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## Summary

The United States government views Morocco as an important ally against terrorism and a free trade partner. Congress is particularly interested in Morocco because it is a recipient of considerable U.S. foreign assistance for counterterrorism and socioeconomic development, including a five-year, \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aid program agreed to in 2007. Morocco is also a significant purchaser of U.S. defense articles.

King Mohammed VI retains supreme political power in Morocco, but has taken some liberalizing steps with uncertain effects. In early March 2011, amid a series of ongoing political protests that have coincided with demonstrations across the region, the king announced a broad reform plan, including constitutional changes to strengthen the legislature and judiciary, and the creation of an independent National Council Human Rights. The constitutional reforms are expected to be drafted by a commission selected by the king, then voted on by citizens in a referendum. The protests, which have been largely peaceful, have continued, however, with some activists criticizing the king's control over the reform process and calling for more radical changes to the political system. Authorities have tolerated many of the protests, but in some cases security forces have used violence to disperse demonstrators and have beaten prominent activists. Senior U.S. officials have expressed strong support for the government's reform efforts.

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

Morocco's human rights record is uneven. A number of abuses have been documented along with constraints on freedom of expression. At the same time, the 2004 Family Code is a landmark 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. Morocco's relations with its neighbor Algeria are troubled by the unresolved dispute over the Western Sahara, a territory south of Morocco 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. Recent signals, however, indicate that Moroccan-Algerian relations may be warming. Relations between Morocco and Israel are strained, though at the same time, 600,000 Moroccan Jews are citizens of Israel. Morocco severed diplomatic relations with Iran in 2009.

See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff; and CRS Report RS21464, *Morocco-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*, by Raymond J. Ahearn

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## Recent Developments

### Morocco's Protest Movement

A series of large political demonstrations have taken place in Moroccan cities since early February, amid a regional surge in popular unrest that has been dubbed the “Arab Spring.” Demonstrations have continued, and may have increased in size, since the king’s announcement of broad reform plans in early March (see “Promises of Reform,” below) and subsequent pledges in May to raise public sector salaries and the minimum wage. Analysts have debated whether the protests represent an existential threat for the Moroccan monarchy, with most concluding that the government’s relative respect for civil liberties and the general public’s esteem for the institutions of the monarchy provide significant protection for the regime.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, small numbers of people have simultaneously demonstrated in support of the king. Labor strikes, protests over socioeconomic grievances, and localized unrest are relatively common occurrences in Morocco, and are usually tolerated by the authorities. At the same time, the demonstrations have revealed significant public discontent over central aspects of the regime, as well as the monarchy’s apparent inability, to date, to stem the unrest through political and economic concessions.<sup>2</sup> Some analysts have viewed recent police crackdowns on protesters as indicating a hardening in authorities’ stance toward critics who decline to participate in regime-directed reform efforts.<sup>3</sup>

On February 20, tens of thousands of Moroccans turned out in the capital, Rabat, and other cities in what organizers termed a “Movement for Change.” Protesters called for democratic reforms—such as a new constitution with greater checks on the power of King Mohammed VI—but stopped short of advocating an end to the monarchy. Some also reportedly chanted slogans against “autocracy,” corruption, and state-owned television, which is widely viewed as biased. Few uniformed security forces were present, according to press reports. Although the protests were not met with the violent retribution that has been seen elsewhere in the region, limited clashes between demonstrators and police occurred in several cities, along with looting and other localized violence, and five people were reportedly killed in the northern town of Al Hoceima when they were trapped in a bank that was set on fire by rioters. The government stated that 120 people were arrested and a number of public and commercial buildings destroyed.

Protests have since continued to convene at least once a week, including several large demonstrations organized by the “February 20 Movement,” a loosely organized, youth-led coalition that has used Facebook and other social media as organizing tools. Protests held on May 20, April 24, May 1, May 8, May 15, and May 22 have drawn thousands, and in some cases tens of thousands, of participants. Protesters have espoused a wide range of grievances, including a lack of balance of powers in Morocco’s political system and perceived corruption, “clientelism,” social injustice, abuse of authority by senior government officials, control by the king over

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Brian T. Edwards, “The Next To Tumble?” *The Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The protest movement has generally refrained from direct criticism of the king, but it has called for the resignations of several powerful figures. These include Prime Minister Fassi; Mohamed Mounir Majidi, secretary to the king; and PAM founder Fouad Ali al Himma. Souhail Karam, “Thousands in Morocco March for Rights, End to Graft,” Reuters, March 20, 2011; Kristen McTighe, “Moroccan Youth Demands Action, Not Words,” *The New York Times*, May 11, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Los Angeles Times* blog, “MOROCCO: Protest Violence Could Escalate, Intelligence Analyst Says,” Babylon and Beyond, May 23, 2011.

powerful business interests, and concentration of political and economic power among the elite (known as the *makhzen*) that surrounds the monarchy. Some activists have called for changes to the royal protocol (such as prostrating before the king), previously a taboo topic, though the level of public support for such changes is unclear.<sup>4</sup> Others have focused on socioeconomic issues, such as high youth unemployment and complaints over wages. On March 22, employees of the state-owned media agency demonstrated in favor of greater editorial independence.<sup>5</sup> Small protests and vandalism have also reportedly occurred in the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

While February 20 Movement activists have largely focused on secular political issues, their protest calls have been backed by the Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), a nationwide grassroots Islamist movement that is banned but generally tolerated by the authorities.<sup>6</sup> (The JCO is stringently critical of the institutions of the monarchy.) On March 20, they were also joined by the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, a political party that is part of the ruling coalition. Trade unions formally lent their support to demonstrations for the first time on May 1 (international labor day). The leadership of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), a moderate Islamist opposition political party, has indicated it will not participate in the organization of protests, though PJD members have reportedly joined some demonstrations.

Government officials initially signaled that the protests did not pose a threat to domestic stability, and that demonstrators would be allowed to peacefully express their views. Security forces have not opened fire on demonstrators or engaged in mass arrests (as elsewhere in the region), and many protests have been carried out without incident. However, some gatherings have been subject to violent police reprisals.<sup>7</sup> Several prominent organizers and civil society activists have reportedly been seriously wounded in these crackdowns, including February 20 Movement leader Oussama El Khlifi, who was beaten on May 15 and may have suffered head injuries, according to news reports.<sup>8</sup> Police again reportedly assaulted demonstrators on May 22, and the government accused Islamists and leftist radicals of being behind the protest movement.<sup>9</sup> In February, officials reportedly smeared organizers as foreign agents or other undesirables in public comments, and state radio reportedly announced that the February 20 rallies had been canceled, in what some interpreted as a tactic to suppress turnout.<sup>10</sup> On February 21, King Mohammed VI expressed his commitment to reforms while warning that he would not “cede to demagoguery.”<sup>11</sup> The king did not overtly reference the protest movement during his speech in March announcing broad

<sup>4</sup> Mustapha Ajbaili, “Moroccans Call for Reform of ‘Demeaning’ Royal Protocol,” *Al Arabiya*, April 14, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Agence France Presse (AFP), “Morocco Official Agency Reporters Seek Independence,” March 22, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> In early February, the Justice and Charity organization reportedly called for “radical democratic change” in Morocco, after expressing support for protests in other Middle East and North African countries. Its youth wing, in particular, has reportedly participated in organizing demonstrations. *Akhbar al-Youm al-Maghrebiya* online, “Politicians, Analysts Disagree Over Likelihood of Protests Reaching Morocco,” February 7, 2011, via U.S. government Open Source Center (OSC).

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch stated after the March 20 rally that “the decision on whether to allow or repress the demonstrators seems to rest more with political decisions by authorities than with the behavior of the demonstrators” (“Morocco: Thousands Demonstrate Peacefully,” March 21, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Adam Tanner and Souhail Karam, “Many Wounded as Moroccan Police Beat Protesters,” May 22, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, “Morocco Says Islamists, Leftists Stirring Protests,” May 23, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Champion, “Turmoil in the Middle East: Morocco Joins In, Defying Predictions,” *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, February 21, 2011; Steven Erlanger, “In Morocco, Fears of Chaos Temper Calls for Change,” *The New York Times*, February 21, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Monde*, “Au Maroc, le Roi Mohamed VI Affiche sa Fermeté Après les Manifestations en Faveur de Réformes Politiques,” February 23, 2011; CRS translation from French.

reforms, and has striven to appear as though reforms are being initiated organically and not in response to pressure from the public.

Protesters, including Islamists, have also called for the release of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of individuals who were jailed in security sweeps that followed the 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca. Human rights advocates contend that many of the arrests and subsequent convictions were carried out without due process. Protesters have simultaneously decried terrorism, particularly in the aftermath of the April 14, 2011, bombing in Marrakesh (see below).

On April 14, the king ordered the release of over 90 detainees, mostly hard-line Islamists, many of whom were held on terrorism-related accusations. Nearly 100 more detainees had their sentences reduced. Those released include Cheikh Mohamed Fizazi, a Salafist leader who was convicted of preaching radical Islamist doctrine and meeting the perpetrators of the 2003 Casablanca bomb attacks (he has since espoused a more moderate rhetoric); Moustapha Moatassim, leader of an Islamist movement that was banned by the government in 2008; and Abdelhafiz Esriti, a correspondent of Hezbollah's TV station, Al Manar. They also included a handful of human rights activists, along with three prominent Western Sahara independence activists who were arrested in 2009.

Protest leaders, rights activists, and figures in Morocco's Salafist community continue to call for further releases or reviews of cases. On May 15, security forces violently dispersed a protest gathering in Rabat in front of a site that activists allege is a secret government detention center where terrorist suspects have been held incommunicado and sometimes tortured.<sup>12</sup> Several demonstrators were badly injured. The next day, hundreds of Salafist inmates at a formal prison near Rabat launched a two-day violent uprising, citing alleged torture, unfair trials, and arbitrary treatment as grievances.<sup>13</sup> Security forces put down the unrest, but at least 50 officers were injured along with dozens of detainees, according to news reports. The rioting followed a Salafist Jihadist media message released in late April that expressed solidarity with Islamist prisoners in Morocco and called for their release.<sup>14</sup>

## Reform Pledges

On March 9, King Mohammed VI gave a nationally televised speech in which he outlined a series of broad reforms to Morocco's political system. The central focus is a proposed revision of the 1996 constitution along seven, at times vaguely worded, principles:<sup>15</sup>

1. To enshrine Berber (Amazigh) rights in the constitution;
2. To guarantee the rule of law, human rights, and political freedoms by codifying the recommendations of Morocco's 2006 Equity and Reconciliation Commission;
3. To increase judicial independence and promote equality before the law;

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<sup>12</sup> The location is in Témara, a Rabat suburb that is reportedly home to the headquarters of Morocco's domestic intelligence agency. See Human Rights Watch, *Morocco: "Stop Looking for Your Son,"* October 25, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Souhail Karam, "Five Guards Taken Hostage in Morocco Jail Unrest," Reuters, May 17, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> OSC Report GMP20110424113009, "Jihadist Establishment Sends Message: 'To Our Brothers in the Moroccan Prisons,'" April 24, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> OSC Report GMP20110309950058, "Moroccan King Announces Constitutional Reforms in National Address," Al-Aoula Television in Arabic, March 9, 2011.

4. To expand the legislature's authority and "scope of action," with a Prime Minister chosen from the party that wins the most seats in parliament and confirmed by legislators (instead of selected by the king);
5. To strengthen the role of political parties, including opposition parties in parliament, and civil society;
6. To strengthen "mechanisms for encouraging morality in public life" (a presumed reference to anti-corruption efforts); and
7. To codify institutions concerned with good governance, human rights, and the protection of individual freedoms.

Several of these elements are already ostensibly in the constitution, including equality of citizens before the law (Art. 5), freedom of opinion and association (Art. 9), and judicial independence from the executive and legislative branches (Art. 80), suggesting that the challenge may center more around implementation than codification.

The king appointed a commission to draft proposals for constitutional revisions, which are expected to be submitted by June and then to be voted on by citizens in a referendum. The king, in his speech, also proposed steps to ensure greater decentralization of power and to promote women's participation in politics. Subsequent additional reform pledges have centered around improving economic regulations and the public procurement process for greater transparency, and expanding press freedom through changes to the press law.

The March 9 speech was heralded by the major political parties, international observers, and some Moroccan democracy advocates as a first step toward key internal reforms. The leader of the opposition PJD, for example, welcomed the speech as a "powerful" sign that the king had "reacted positively to the demands made by the parties and young people."<sup>16</sup> At the same time, some domestic critics contend that the proposals are too little, too late, and have rejected the composition of the constitutional commission, which was selected by the king and includes several figures reputed to be close to the monarchy.<sup>17</sup> Chaired by Abdelatif Menouni, a jurist, the commission is supposed to work with political parties, trade unions, and civil society groups to draw up proposals. The February 20 Movement has declined to provide input, contending that the monarchy retains too much control over the process, and has called for further protests.

Several days before the March 9 speech, the king announced the creation of a National Human Rights Council, which authorities said would be more independent than previous government-backed human rights bodies. Officials have indicated that it will also have a mandate to investigate human rights issues in the Western Sahara, where advocacy groups and some diplomats have long called for independent (international) human rights monitoring. The Council's membership nevertheless appears to reflect strong government influence, though its choice of activities has yet to be seen. Members include the Ministers of Justice, the Interior, and Foreign Affairs, along with two trade unionists, a human rights-focused legal scholar, a political scientist who serves as director of Morocco's National Observatory for the Rights of the Child, a professor of trade and finance, a magistrate and former Justice Ministry official, and a historian

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<sup>16</sup> AFP, "Morocco King Vows Sweeping Reforms," March 9, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Monde*, "Au Maroc, les Promesses de Réformes du Roi n'Ont Pas Désamorcé la Contestation," March 15, 2011; Karim Boukhari, "Between Hope and Doubt," *Telquel*, May 16, 2011, via OSC Doc. GMP20110516291001.

who is an official at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.<sup>18</sup> The king appointed Driss al Yazami, a human rights scholar who has been based in France and previously served as an official envoy to the Moroccan diaspora, as president.

## U.S. Reactions to Moroccan Reform Proposals

The United States' close bilateral relationship with Morocco and reliance on King Mohammed VI's support on regional security and counterterrorism issues underlie U.S. statements expressing both strong support for the monarchy and encouragement of significant political reforms. In late February, amid the start of Morocco's protest movement, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, William J. Burns, visited Morocco, where he stated that "the partnership between the United States, Morocco and the Moroccan people is a very high priority for President Obama and Secretary Clinton," and that "it's never been more important than at this moment." The Under Secretary further praised Morocco's "strong record of efforts under the leadership of King Mohammed" and stated that "the United States will continue to do everything that we can to support that effort."<sup>19</sup>

The Obama Administration has been strongly supportive of the king's reform proposals, characterizing them as serious and significant and calling for their speedy implementation. In a statement welcoming the king's March 9 speech, the State Department referred to Morocco as "a key strategic partner" and stated that "we stand ready to work with the government and the people of Morocco to realize their democratic aspirations."<sup>20</sup> In subsequent testimony to Congress, Under Secretary Burns cited Morocco (along with Jordan) as "countries working to stay ahead of the wave of popular protests" by announcing "significant reform initiatives."<sup>21</sup> In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri on March 23, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stated that "Morocco is well-positioned to lead in this area [democratic reforms in the Middle East] because it is on the road to achieving democratic change." She added that the king's reform plans "hold great promise" as "a comprehensive approach." With regard to the newly created human rights council, Clinton described it as "an excellent idea," adding, "We obviously want to see it come into effect, we want to see it in action... we think it will serve a very important purpose."<sup>22</sup> In May, the State Department released a written statement that "we urge continuing and rapid implementation of these crucial reforms" and reiterated the characterization of Morocco as "a strategic partner."<sup>23</sup>

## Marrakesh Bombing

On April 28, 2011, a bomb exploded at a popular tourist café in Marrakesh, killing 17 people, most of them European nationals, and wounding two dozen others. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on Moroccan soil since the 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca, which killed 45. On

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<sup>18</sup> Website of the National Human Rights Council, at <http://www.ccdh.org.ma/spip.php?rubrique20&lang=en>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Embassy in Morocco, "Under Secretary Burns' Statement at the Moroccan MFA," February 27, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> State Department, "State Department on Announcement by King Mohammed VI of Morocco," March 10, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, U.S. Policy and Uprisings in the Middle East, March 17, 2011, transcript via *Congressional Quarterly* (CQ).

<sup>22</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri," March 23, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> State Department, Office of the Spokesman, "Transition and Reform in Morocco," May 19, 2011.



May 17, seven suspects were charged with carrying out the attack and belonging to an unspecified “banned religious group.” The primary suspect, Adil al Othmani, is accused of placing explosives in the cafe to be detonated by remote trigger. Authorities have described the suspects as Salafist ideologues and Al Qaeda sympathizers, and allege that Othmani (whose nationality is unclear) was previously expelled from Libya and Portugal, without indicating evidence of current operational contacts or coordination with Al Qaeda leaders.<sup>24</sup> Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, a regional Al Qaeda affiliate, released a rare statement denying responsibility for the attack. According to Morocco’s Interior Ministry, U.S. and European experts provided assistance with investigations.<sup>25</sup>

Moroccan citizens have organized demonstrations near the site of the attack to condemn terrorism as well as previous government counterterrorism actions that, they contend, were repressive. Some Muslim leaders and human rights advocates have praised the government for its handling of the aftermath of the attack, noting that unlike in 2003, when security forces carried out mass arrests and detentions, at times allegedly without due process, this time authorities have shown relative restraint by leading a targeted probe focused on the suspected perpetrators.<sup>26</sup>

## Emerging Questions

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

- What will promised legal and constitutional reforms look like, and what concrete steps will be taken to implement them? What is the timeline and process for implementation? Will reforms radically change Morocco’s system of government, the balance of power between branches of government, or the government’s role in the domestic economy?
- To what extent do protest groups such as the February 20 Movement represent public opinion in Morocco? To what extent are they politically organized and united around a political platform that extends beyond criticism of the status quo? Which of the many grievances expressed by protesters are most important to the population at large? Are large demonstrations likely to continue, and under what circumstances? Will protest leaders engage in the government-led reform process, and what steps might the government take to encourage them to do so? If not, will protest leaders’ refusal to participate undermine the legitimacy of the reforms, and potentially lead to greater unrest or violence?
- What issues will the newly created National Human Rights Council focus on? How critical will it be vis-à-vis government policies, and will it investigate sensitive topics such as detention practices? Is it a credible substitute for international human rights monitoring in the Western Sahara, which has not been permitted by Moroccan authorities?

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<sup>24</sup> AFP, “Marrakesh Bomb Suspect was Expelled from Libya: Minister,” May 6, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> The State Department released a statement offering “our full assistance to the Moroccan government as it works to investigate this attack and bring those accountable to justice” (“Secretary Clinton: Terrorist Attack in Marrakesh, Morocco,” April 28, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Taix, “Maroc: Pas d’Arrestations ‘Aveugles’ Après l’Attentat, Se Félicitent des Islamistes,” AFP, May 4, 2011.

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

## Government and Politics

Figure 1. Map of Morocco



Source: Map resources, adapted by CRS.

The Moroccan royal dynasty has ruled the country since 1649. Morocco's monarchy was one of the first governments to recognize the independence of the United States of America. The reigning king, Mohammed VI, ascended to the throne in 1999, following his father, King Hassan II, who died at age 70. King Mohammed VI remains the pre-eminent state authority in Morocco's political system, though he has said he is committed to building a democracy, and in March 2011 announced a broad reform program (see "Recent Developments," above). The king chairs the Council of State that endorses all legislation before it goes to parliament, appoints the prime minister and ministers of foreign affairs, interior, defense, and Islamic affairs, and approves other ministers. He sets the agenda of parliament in an annual Speech from the Throne, dissolves parliament, calls elections, and rules by decree. The king also has a "shadow government" of royal advisors and is head of the military. Reforms depend on the king's will, and he has

undertaken several major liberalizing initiatives. The king also is said to be tied to significant economic enterprises in the country.

The bicameral legislature consists of a 270-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, whose members are indirectly elected to nine-year terms, and a 325-seat lower house, the Chamber of Representatives, whose members are directly elected to five-year terms. Thirty seats (about 10%) in the lower house are reserved for women (candidates for these seats are elected from a separate women's list) and, under a rule that took effect in 2009, women are guaranteed 12% of the seats in local elections.

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

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

In August 2008, Fouad Ali al Himma established the Party for Authenticity and Modernity (PAM). Al Himma is a former classmate of King Mohammed VI and former deputy interior minister. He was elected to parliament as an independent in 2007 and became chairman of its Committee on Foreign, Defense, and Islamic Affairs. Al Himma has not assumed the leadership of PAM; he is deputy leader, but is considered the party's de facto head. PAM has sought alliances with parties known to be recipients of royal patronage and won over many deputies who defected from other parties. Thus, although the party only ostensibly holds three seats in parliament (the three deputies, formerly independent, formed the PAM after their election in 2007), it controls a large bloc in parliament. PAM's ideology is incoherent, but its goals reportedly are to "rationalize" the political landscape by diminishing the number of parties, encourage more participation in politics, and challenge or marginalize the PJD.<sup>27</sup> In May 2009, PAM pulled out of the coalition government. The MP joined the government and provided some stability as did some new appointments.

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<sup>27</sup> James Liddell, "Morocco: Modern Politics or Politics of Modernity?" *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2008.

Some politicians initially feared that PAM was a nascent state party similar to those in Egypt and Tunisia that might be used to dominate politics.<sup>28</sup> Few were surprised by PAM's first place finish with 21.6% of the vote in elections for seats on municipal councils on June 12, 2009, when PJD took sixth place. PAM also placed first in the October 2, 2009 elections for one-third of the 270 seats in the Chamber of Counselors, the upper house. PAM offered a sharp contrast to other parties, which are led by much older men who view women with suspicion and probably put them on electoral lists mainly to meet official quotas, and reach out to voters only before elections. In reaction to the PAM's momentum, the PJD and the USFP formed an unusual alliance to run some local councils. However, PAM's influence has since appeared to subside amid reports of internal divisions and strong opposition voiced by protesters since February 2011. Al Himma offered to resign on May 17, but his resignation was reportedly rejected by PAM's national bureau.<sup>29</sup>

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

## Terrorism

The monarchy long asserted that its claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed was a shield against Islamist militancy. This belief was shattered after September 11, 2001, as expatriate Moroccans have been implicated in terrorism abroad, and Morocco has suffered from terrorism at home. Morocco has tried to distance itself from its expatriates, blaming their experiences in exile for their radicalization.<sup>30</sup> Numerous small, isolated, tactically limited, extremist cells, which adhere to the Salafiya Jihadiya (Reformist Holy War/"Jihadist") ideology, are viewed as the main threat to Morocco's domestic security.<sup>31</sup>

In February 2003, Osama Bin Laden listed Morocco among the "oppressive, unjust, apostate ruling governments," which he characterized as "enslaved by America" and, therefore, "most eligible for liberation."<sup>32</sup> To some observers, this *fatwa* or religious edict appeared to trigger

<sup>28</sup> Socialist Union of Popular Forces politician Idriss Lashgar, quoted in *Africa Research Bulletin*, October 1-21, 2008, p. 17714.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Nouvel Observateur*, "Maroc: Le PAM Rejette la Demande de Démission d'El Himma," May 17, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Noteworthy developments abroad include the trial of two Moroccans in German courts for aiding the 9/11 terrorists and the revelation that a Moroccan imam was "the spiritual father of the Hamburg cell" that helped execute the 9/11 attacks. A French-Moroccan, Zacarias Moussaoui, was tried in the United States as the 20<sup>th</sup> hijacker for 9/11. In addition, 18 Moroccans allegedly linked to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan were detained at the U.S. Naval Station in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; several reportedly remain there. Returnees have been convicted in Moroccan courts.

<sup>31</sup> Such cells perpetrated their major attacks in 2002, with the murders of locals who had committed "impure acts" such as drinking alcohol. In 2003, Moroccan courts convicted a jihadist spiritual leader, who had fought in Afghanistan and praised the 9/11 attacks and Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, of inciting violence against Westerners.

<sup>32</sup> "Moroccans Say Al Qaeda Masterminded and Financed Casablanca Suicide Bombings," *New York Times*, May 23, 2003.

attacks in Morocco on May 16, 2003, in which 12 suicide bombers identified as Salafiya Jihadiya adherents linked to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) and Al Qaeda attacked five Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca, killing themselves and 33 others and injuring more than 100. A large GICM network was implicated in the March 2004 Madrid train bombings, for which two Moroccans were convicted in Spain. (A Moroccan court convicted one of their accomplices.) Moroccans suspected of GICM affiliation were arrested in several European countries. In 2005, the U.S. State Department designated GICM as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), but the Department stated as of mid-2010 that “much of the GICM’s leadership in Morocco and Europe has been killed, imprisoned, or are awaiting trial.”<sup>33</sup> The Moroccan government convicted the group’s alleged leader in absentia for his role in the Casablanca attacks, but he remains free in exile in the United Kingdom, which found insufficient evidence against him.<sup>34</sup>

Moroccan and European authorities continue to disrupt cells that they say are linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, also known as Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb or AQLIM), formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a group originating in Algeria with regional ambitions.<sup>35</sup> AQIM has not perpetrated a successful terrorist attack in Morocco, where its threat has stemmed mainly from the potential transfer of operational capabilities to inexperienced radicals and from its active efforts to recruit and incite Moroccans. In November 2010, however, Moroccan authorities seized 34 Moroccans and hundreds of pounds of cocaine that they allegedly were transporting from Algeria and Mauritania through Morocco. Those apprehended were linked to AQIM, which, analysts contend, benefits financially from trans-Saharan cocaine trafficking and other regional criminal activities. In addition, Moroccans reportedly have joined AQIM at camps in Algeria and elsewhere outside of the country.

In April 2007, two suicide attacks occurred near the U.S. Consulate and the American Language Center in Casablanca; the bombers killed only themselves. In September 2009, Moroccan security services arrested 24 suspects who allegedly were linked to a terrorist network linked to Al Qaeda that specialized in recruiting volunteers for Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Moroccans have fought alongside insurgents in Iraq.

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

The Moroccan government pursued a comprehensive counterterrorism approach that, building on popular rejection of terrorism, emphasized neutralizing existing terrorist cells through traditional intelligence work and preemptive security measures. Morocco aggressively targeted and dismantled terrorist cells within the Kingdom by leveraging intelligence collection, police work, and collaboration with regional and other international partners. These efforts resulted in the disruption of several terrorist groups.<sup>36</sup>

To counter radical Islamism, Morocco also has exerted greater control over religious leaders and councils, created new theological councils, retrained imams, deployed supervisors to oversee their

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2009*, released on August 5, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/cret/2009/index.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Olivier Guitta, “Alive and Well and Living in London,” *Weekly Standard*, May 7, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> See CRS Report R41070, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, coordinated by John Rollins.

<sup>36</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism*, op. cit.

sermons, closed unregulated mosques, retrained and rehabilitated some individuals convicted of terror-related crimes to correct their understanding of Islam, and launched radio and television stations and a website to transmit “Moroccan religious values” of tolerance. In 2005, the king launched a \$1.2 billion National Initiative for Human Development to redress socioeconomic conditions that extremists exploit for recruitment. Observers have questioned its effectiveness.

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

## Human Rights

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

Citizens did not have the right to change the constitutional provisions establishing the country's monarchical form of government or those designating Islam the state religion. There were reports of torture and other abuses by various branches of the security forces. Prison conditions remained below international standards. Reports of arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, and police and security force impunity continued. Politics, as well as corruption and inefficiency, influenced the judiciary, which was not fully independent. The government restricted press freedoms. Corruption was a serious problem in all branches of government. Child labor, particularly in the unregulated informal sector, and trafficking in persons remained problems.<sup>37</sup>

Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World 2010* survey concludes that Morocco is a “partly free” country, and also noted a downward trend owing to “increased concentration of power in the hands of political elites aligned with the monarchy.”<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, the king has undertaken several initiatives that are marked advances in selected areas of human rights practices. Most notably, the parliament enacted revolutionary changes to the Family Code, or *Moudawana*, in January 2004, making polygamy rare by requiring permission of a judge and the man’s first wife, raising the legal age for marriage for girls to 18, and simplifying divorce procedures for women, among other changes to improve the status of women. However, family court judges have not applied the law strictly and women continue to suffer from inequality and violence.<sup>39</sup> The king also created an Equity and Reconciliation Commission to provide an historical record of abuses before 1999, to account for the “disappeared,” and to compensate victims. In 2001, he launched a dialogue on Berber culture, and

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<sup>37</sup> State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2010, Morocco*, April 8, 2011, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154468.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

<sup>39</sup> “Morocco: New Law, Same Old Men,” Inter Press News Service, July 31, 2009, see also Steven Erlanger and Souad Mekhennet, “Law Empowering Women Leaves Many Behind,” *International Herald Tribune*, August 20, 2009.

the government has since authorized the teaching of Berber dialects, issued a textbook in Berber, and launched a state-funded Tamazigh (Berber dialect) TV channel.<sup>40</sup>

Rights advocates have criticized restrictions on freedom of expression, as has the European Union. Although press freedom is more widely upheld than in some countries in the region, direct criticism of the monarchy or the government's stance on the Western Sahara is not tolerated, and self-censorship is reportedly widespread. The Committee to Protect Journalists, which has criticized what it views as Moroccan backsliding on press freedom in recent years, has documented a number of criminal prosecutions of critical journalists on charges ostensibly unrelated to journalism, but which, the organization contends, are "meant to silence a critical voice."<sup>41</sup> In 2010, two prominent private newspapers were forced to close following years of court battles and an alleged government campaign to enforce an advertising boycott.<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch has reported that critical coverage of the Western Sahara issue, including by foreign correspondents, frequently leads to the revocation or denial of press credentials.<sup>43</sup>

After the May 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, parliament passed broad antiterrorism laws to define terrorist crimes and establish procedures for tracking terrorist finances. Human rights activists expressed concern about their legislative restrictions on the press, detention without charge, and reduced requirements for the death penalty. Other observers questioned whether elements in the regime were using the threat of Islamist terror to roll back reforms. Some worried that detentions could create radicals who would eventually be released into society.<sup>44</sup> A 2010 Human Rights Watch report contended that a "pattern of abuse" under counterterrorism laws included extrajudicial detentions, allegedly by intelligence agents in unacknowledged detention facilities; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; and coerced confessions. Moroccan authorities rejected the report's primary allegations and refuted the details of cases cited in it.<sup>45</sup>

The Moroccan Penal Code prohibits proselytizing to Muslims and the government expels foreign Christians or declares them *persona non grata* for violation of the law, without prosecuting them or affording them due process. Some U.S. Christian groups have criticized enforcement of the law, such as in March 2010, when the government expelled 16 foreign Christian volunteers, including some Americans, who had run a charity center/orphanage in Ifrane, in the Atlas Mountains, for some 10 years. Other similar expulsions also have taken place, and some of those targeted have alleged that an unprecedented number of deportations have been occurring in recent years.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. State Department reports that approximately 150 Christian foreign residents from 19 countries were expelled in 2009.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Berbers inhabited much of North Africa before Arab Muslims invaded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>41</sup> Rima Marrouch, "Morocco Pardons Journalist to Create Smokescreen," Committee to Protect Journalists, June 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2010: Morocco," at <http://www.cpj.org/2011/02/attacks-on-the-press-2010-morocco.php>.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: Restore Accreditation to Al Jazeera; Sahara Conflict Coverage Key Factor in Effort to Silence Selected Media," April 5, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Jill Carroll, "Morocco's Harder Line on Security Challenges Reforms," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 9, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> "Morocco Expels Christian Missionaries," *Global Post*, March 12, 2010.

<sup>47</sup> See U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, Released November 17, 2010, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148834.htm>.

Problems with human rights practices in Morocco also are linked to the Western Sahara issue, as seen in the case of Aminatou Haidar, an advocate for Sahraoui self-determination.<sup>48</sup> When she returned from receiving a human rights prize in the United States in November 2009, Haidar wrote “Western Sahara” as her address on customs forms to re-enter the Moroccan-administered Western Sahara city of Laayoune (alt: El Ayoun or Al Ayun), but the authorities rejected the forms, claimed that she had thereby renounced her citizenship, confiscated her passport, and expelled her to the Spanish Canary Islands. Haidar then went on a highly publicized 32-day hunger strike. After reported pressure from the United States, Haidar was allowed into Laayoune in what Moroccan authorities described as “a humanitarian gesture.”<sup>49</sup> Over the years, Morocco has imprisoned other Sahraoui activists for alleged association with the POLISARIO Front actions which have attracted criticism from international human rights groups that has been less sensational than the Haidar case. The Moroccan’s government sensitivity concerning the Western Sahara issue also has prompted it to treat journalists reporting or commenting on the issue harshly and to suspend the activities of domestic and foreign media outlets accused of “irresponsible” conduct. The government terms their offenses threats to the country’s territorial integrity. Finally, there has been international condemnation of the excessively forceful way in which Moroccan security forces dismantled a Sahraoui protest camp near Laayoune in November 2010, resulting in deaths, injuries, and arrests. The exact number of casualties is unknown due to Morocco’s control of information from the region.

The U.S. State Department judges Morocco to be a Tier 2 country with regard to trafficking in persons as it is “a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children who are subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor and forced prostitution.” The government “does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See “Western Sahara” below and CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.

<sup>49</sup> “Saharan Activist’s Return to Morocco “Humanitarian” – Spokesman,” MAP News Agency (Rabat) December 19, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2010*, released June 14, 2010, accessible at <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/142760.htm>.



## Economy

Large portions of Morocco's gross domestic product (19.2%) and labor force (44.6%) continue to depend on agriculture and are vulnerable to rainfall fluctuations.<sup>51</sup> Through internal and Western Saharan mines, Morocco controls 75% of the world phosphate market and is the world's leading exporter of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers. The phosphate industry and much of the economy are dominated by the royal family and the so-called "500 families" who control large, multi-sectoral holding companies and are close to the monarchy.

Services and tourism are considered growth sectors, with tourism and remittances from abroad providing foreign exchange. Remittances from an estimated 3 million expatriates, mainly in France, Spain, Italy, and Belgium, account for about 9% of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>52</sup> The public sector remains large, although there is a successful, if erratic, privatization program. Foreign direct investment has grown despite the impediments of excessive red tape and corruption.<sup>53</sup> Still, the royal family's intervention in the economy has been criticized by some analysts. The royal investment fund, known as SNI, for example, reportedly controls significant domestic financial, insurance, construction, and commodity interests.<sup>54</sup>

Economic growth and reforms have been insufficient to reduce unemployment, especially for the young, and poverty. These factors drive Moroccans abroad and may provide a breeding ground for radicalization. The current government's goals include achieving 6% GDP growth rate, creating 250,000 new jobs, and building 150,000 housing units a year until 2013. While perhaps overambitious, these targets reflect the government's intent to combat poverty, unemployment, and terrorism. The government's plans have been affected by the global financial crisis/recession, which has resulted in thousands of job losses in textiles and automotives, as well as in decreases in tourist spending, expatriate remittances, and exports, especially phosphates.

Although the global financial crisis had a limited impact on Morocco, as its financial system has limited exposure to international markets, the resulting global recession had a negative impact on

### Morocco's Economy: Basic Facts

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

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

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

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

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

**Exports:** clothing, electronic components, inorganic chemicals, transistors, crude minerals, fertilizers (including phosphates), petroleum products, fruit, and vegetables

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

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

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

<sup>51</sup> CIA, *The World Factbook*, November 24, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> World Bank, "Migration and Remittances in Morocco," at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1181678518183/Morocco.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> The U.S. State Department reported that in 2010 "corruption was a serious problem in all branches of government." U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2010, Morocco*, April 8, 2011. Morocco is ranked 85 out of 178 countries on the Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010*, available at [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010).

<sup>54</sup> *The National*, "Moroccans March for Freedom, and Against the Royal Grip on the Country's Economy," March 28, 2011.

Moroccan exports, tourism receipts, remittances, and foreign direct investment. Still, a surge in cereal crop yields in 2009 helped produce economic growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) praised the government's response to the crisis, while calling for further reforms to improve the business environment and increase productivity.<sup>55</sup>

In February 2010, the government unveiled a \$206 million state-guaranteed public-private sector fund to increase the competitiveness of key industrial sectors by financing credits, banking services, and real estate costs. Targeted sectors include automobiles, technologies, aeronautics, services, and telecommunications. The fund hopes to create up to 220,000 jobs and boost overall development.

Oil imports (largely from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Nigeria) supply 97% of the country's energy needs, and price increases have therefore had detrimental effects on the economy. Morocco has adopted a proactive approach to finding renewable energy sources with the goal of producing 42% of the country's electrical capacity from them by 2020. In November 2009, the government announced plans to invest more than \$9 billion to install 2,000 megawatts of solar power. It also expressed interest in an ambitious European plan, called Desertec, to draw solar power from the Sahara. In June 2010, the king inaugurated a \$300 million wind/165 turbine farm off Tangiers to generate 140 megawatts of energy when completed. Morocco's reported plans to pursue a domestic nuclear energy program have not advanced beyond the consideration and planning phase.

## Western Sahara<sup>56</sup>

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

The king submitted an autonomy plan for the region to the U.N. in April 2007, which asserts Moroccan sovereignty, and Moroccan and POLISARIO negotiators continue to meet for informal talks under U.N. auspices.<sup>57</sup> In line with his autonomy initiative, King Mohammed VI has pursued policies of decentralization or regionalization that he says are intended to empower residents of his Saharan provinces. On April 10, 2007, then-Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns stated that the United States considers the Moroccan autonomy plan for the Western Sahara "serious and credible." Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton indicated in 2009 that U.S. policy on the issue was unchanged, and the United States continues to call on Morocco and Algeria to engage in unconditional negotiations. In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri in March 2011, Clinton stated that the United States views the Moroccan

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<sup>55</sup> IMF, *Morocco: 2009 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report*, March 2010.

<sup>56</sup> See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arief.

<sup>57</sup> For text of plan, see [http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara\\_issue\\_\\_full\\_t/view](http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/politics/sahara_issue__full_t/view).

autonomy plan as “serious, realistic, and credible—a potential approach to satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity.” She also reiterated U.S. support for the U.N.-backed talks aimed at “resolving this issue.”<sup>58</sup>

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

As noted above, Morocco’s policy on the Western Sahara issue has been accompanied by or enforced with human rights abuses both in Morocco and in the Western Sahara. (See “Human Rights,” above.) Rights advocates and some diplomats have long called for the inclusion of an independent international human rights monitoring element in MINURSO’s mandate. Such efforts have not gained traction at the U.N. Security Council, where France (a veto-capable permanent member) has supported Moroccan objections. Still, MINURSO’s latest mandate renewal by the Security Council, in April 2011, included 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 establishment of a National Council on Human Rights in Morocco and the proposed component regarding Western Sahara.”<sup>59</sup>

## Foreign Policy

### Algeria

Morocco and Algeria are the largest countries in North Africa and are neighbors, but they had different colonial experiences and emerged as rivals with distinctly different forms of government. Algeria achieved its independence via a bloody revolution and emerged as a republic with military or military-influenced governments. Morocco is a centuries-old monarchy that made a more peaceful transition from French control. Shortly after Algeria became independent, Morocco laid claim to some Algerian territory, and they went to war for about five months in 1963-1964. The border was not demarcated until 1972.

The Western Sahara is now the main impediment to improving their bilateral relations and to reviving the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), a loose organization of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, and Libya. Morocco refuses to compromise on the Western Sahara issue for the sake of bilateral relations or the UMA. Algeria hosts and backs the POLISARIO. In July 2004, the king abolished visa requirements for Algerians entering Morocco; in April 2006, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika reciprocated the gesture. Since 2008, Morocco has repeatedly

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<sup>58</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> U.N. Security Council Resolution 1979 (2011), April 27, 2011.

requested that Algeria reopen their land border, which has been closed since 1994, but Algeria refuses to do so on the grounds that it would be detrimental to its national security and benefit Morocco more than Algeria.

In April 2011, signs of a thaw between the two countries briefly emerged. Algeria's President Bouteflika stated in a public address on April 17 that "there is no problem between Morocco and Algeria," adding that "the problem of the Western Sahara is a U.N. problem. Morocco is a neighbor and friend." In a media interview the same month, Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci suggested that Algeria would consider opening the border.<sup>60</sup> However, prospects for concrete steps toward improved bilateral relations are unclear. In May, the Algerian embassy in Washington accused Moroccan authorities of paying lobbyists to plant stories of Algerian and POLISARIO mercenaries lending support to Libya's Muammar Qadhafi, rumors of which have circulated in the international press.<sup>61</sup> Algeria and the POLISARIO deny the allegations.

## Europe

Morocco's Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) came into force on March 1, 2000, and is supposed to lead to a free trade agreement by 2012. In October 2008, Morocco became the first southern Mediterranean country to be granted "advanced status relations" by the EU, which further opened EU markets for Moroccan products. Morocco participates in the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and its Neighborhood Policy Plan and receives considerable EU aid—€190 million (\$265 million ) annually. The EU and Morocco also have bilateral economic accords, such as a lucrative fisheries agreement that includes the coastline of disputed Western Sahara. In March 2010, Morocco and the EU held their first summit, which Prime Minister Abbas al Fassi, EU President Herman Van Rompuy, and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, among others, attended. Illegal immigration of Moroccans and of Sub-Saharan Africans transiting Morocco to Europe and drug (cannabis and, more recently, cocaine) trafficking have caused friction in Moroccan-European relations. High unemployment drives Moroccan youths to Europe and EU-funded programs to shift farmers in the underdeveloped Rif Mountains from cannabis cultivation to alternative crops have not been successful.

Morocco traditionally has had good relations with France and Spain, its former colonizers. Relations with France, Morocco's largest trading partner, are particularly close. Paris officially supports U.N. efforts to resolve the Western Sahara dispute and Morocco's autonomy proposal for the region, and blocks Security Council initiatives on the matter that Morocco rejects. In turn, Morocco has been a strong supporter of the EU's Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) that Paris initiated, but that has faced obstacles due to Arab objections to Israel's participation.

Morocco's relations with Spain have been intermittently discordant. Spain possesses two territorial enclaves on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, Ceuta and Melilla, that are vestiges of

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<sup>60</sup> *El Watan*, "La Politique des Petits Pas [CRS translation of quote]," April 28, 2011; and "Mourad Medelci Evoque la Reprise des Relations avec le Maroc : 'Il n'Est Pas Logique que les Frontières Restent Fermées,'" April 26, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Embassy of Algeria to the United States, "Is Morocco Seeking Regional Unity or Hegemony Over Its Neighbors?" May 2011. Allegations of POLISARIO mercenaries fighting for Qadhafi first circulated in a *Daily Telegraph* (London) report in April 2011, but were picked up in subsequent commentary by a former U.S. ambassador to Morocco who now serves as an advisor to the Moroccan monarchy. See Con Coughlin, "Libya: Col Gaddafi 'Has Spent £2.1m on Mercenaries,'" *Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 2011; Edward M. Gabriel, "Mercenaries in Libya: Gadhafi's Hired Terrorists," *The Hill*, May 16, 2011.

colonialism, are claimed by Morocco, and sometimes cause bilateral tensions, as do other territorial disputes and the Western Sahara issue. In October 2001, Morocco recalled its ambassador from Madrid after pro-Saharan groups in Spain conducted a mock referendum on the fate of the region. In July 2002, Spanish troops ejected Moroccan soldiers from the uninhabited Perejel/Parsley or Leila Island off the Moroccan coast that Spain says it has controlled for centuries. Diplomatic ties were not restored until January 2003. That July, Morocco complained that Spain lacked neutrality on the Sahara issue when it chaired the Security Council and, in October, Spain suspended arms sales to Morocco due to the Perejel crisis. Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero visited Morocco in April 2004, and King Juan Carlos I visited in January 2005; on both occasions, joint statements called for a negotiated settlement to the Sahara issue—the Moroccan position. However, visits to Ceuta and Melilla by the Spanish prime minister in January 2006 and monarchs in November 2007 again set back relations. The two neighbors also have an unresolved dispute concerning territorial waters between Morocco and the Spanish Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Morocco's "super port" at Tangiers will pose competition that concerns Spanish ports. Financed by Gulf countries, its construction began in June 2009 and it is expected to achieve full capacity in 2014.

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

## Middle East

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

Morocco closed Israel's liaison bureau in Morocco and Morocco's office in Tel Aviv in reaction to Israel's conduct during the Palestinian *intifadah* (uprising) in 2001. The offices have not reopened. Morocco condemned Israel's conduct against Palestinian civilians during its December 2008/January 2009 military operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Moroccan political groups of all stripes held some of the largest rallies in the Arab world in protest. In October 2009, Mohammed VI called on "the international community ... to exert pressure on Israel to make it cease its oppressive practices directed against the helpless Palestinian people, and to compel it to return forthwith to the negotiating table, comply with UN resolutions."<sup>62</sup> In November, Foreign

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<sup>62</sup> "King Calls for Pressure on Israel to Comply with UN Resolutions," *Maghreb Arabe Presse*, October 28, 2009, Open Source Center Document GMP20091028950071,

Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said that normalization of relations with Israel was not on the table under current conditions and that Morocco continued to support that Arab Peace Initiative—which promised Israel full normalization of relations in exchange for its withdrawal from all Arab territories. The foreign ministry has denounced Israel’s settlement activity in east Jerusalem and its attack on a flotilla attempting to deliver aid to the Gaza Strip in May 2010. In October 2010, Israeli President Shimon Peres cancelled a visit to Morocco for the World Economic Forum because he could not get a guaranteed meeting with the king. In May 2011, Morocco welcomed President Obama’s efforts to achieve a negotiated agreement on Palestinian statehood.<sup>63</sup>

However, the king and others had maintained contacts with Israeli officials until the current government took power in Jerusalem. In August 2005, he personally congratulated Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The bilateral link may be unbreakable because some 600,000 Israelis are of Moroccan origin, and about 25,000 of them travel to Morocco yearly. (There are about 5,000 Moroccan Jews still in Morocco.)

In March 2009, Morocco severed diplomatic relations with Iran, blaming it for “intolerable interference in the internal affairs of the Kingdom.” The Foreign Ministry accused the Iranian Embassy in Rabat of seeking to spread Shi’a Islam in the 99% Sunni kingdom. It also charged Iranian officials with making unacceptable remarks following Morocco’s expression of solidarity with Bahrain in the face of Iran’s claim to Bahrain.<sup>64</sup> The situation rapidly deteriorated. Tehran charged that Morocco’s decision harmed “the unity of the Islamic world” and the solidarity needed to support the Palestinian people. Rabat rejected the allegation and argued that, “Iran is not qualified to speak for the Islamic world... Morocco does not need lessons from Iran or anybody else to show solidarity with the Palestinian people.”<sup>65</sup> Shortly after the dispute began, King Mohammed VI acknowledged the Holocaust in a speech read in his name at a ceremony in Paris, thereby indirectly answering Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust denials. It was said that the speech was the first time an Arab leader took such a stand on the Holocaust.<sup>66</sup>

## Relations with the United States

The United States and Morocco have long-term, good relations; Morocco was among the first countries to recognize U.S. independence. Successive U.S. Administrations, of both political parties, have viewed Morocco as a steady and close ally and as a moderate Arab state that supports the Arab-Israeli peace process. In January 2009, King Mohammed VI congratulated President Obama on his election and seized the opportunity “to say how satisfied I am with the special strategic partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States of America.”<sup>67</sup> On April 8, 2009, after meeting Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri, Secretary of State Clinton said, “We are so committed to our relationship and have a very high regard for the extraordinary progress that has taken place in Morocco ... and we look forward to deepening and

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<sup>63</sup> Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse, “Morocco Welcomes US Vision for a Sovereign Palestinian State,” May 24, 2011.

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

<sup>65</sup> “Moroccan Government Spokesman on Reasons Behind Severing Ties with Iran,” *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, March 9, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

<sup>66</sup> Alfred de Montesquiou, “Morocco Challenges Middle East’s Holocaust Mindset,” Associated Press, July 27, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> “King Congratulates Barack Obama on Investiture,” MAP news Agency, January 20, 2009, BBC Monitoring Middle East.

strengthening our relationship.”<sup>68</sup> Senior U.S. officials continue to emphasize warm U.S.-Moroccan relations and to characterize bilateral ties as a “strategic partnership.” Amid the widespread political upheaval that has accompanied the 2011 “Arab Spring,” Moroccan officials have sought to portray the United States partnership with Morocco as a key tool for furthering U.S. policy interests in the region, and have urged the United States to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship.

Recently, U.S. officials have praised Morocco’s stance on NATO-led military intervention in Libya. Morocco backs international intervention to implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 and has provided humanitarian aid, though it has not participated militarily.<sup>69</sup> In a joint appearance with Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi Fihri in March 2011, Secretary of State Clinton thanked Fihri “for Morocco’s leadership at the summit in Paris [an emergency meeting of allied and Arab leaders on March 19 which endorsed military action and the establishment of a no-fly zone]... and for Morocco’s important role in the Arab League’s decision to call for the protection of Libyan civilians.”<sup>70</sup> Morocco has also reportedly tried (to date, unsuccessfully), to initiate and mediate negotiations between rebels and the Libyan government.

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

Morocco is seeking to diversify its arms sources, a program that is benefitting U.S. companies. Foreign military sales totaled \$91.8 million in FY2010 and direct commercial sales totaled \$86.0 million in FY2008 (latest figures available).<sup>71</sup> Recent purchases have included 24 F-16 aircraft, 2 T-6 training aircraft, 90 AGM-D Maverick air-to-ground missiles, 200 Abrams M1A1 tanks, and AN/AVS 9 night vision goggles. Advanced AM 120-C7 air-to-air medium-range missiles systems and 26 advanced M198 155 mm towed guns are on order, with delivery expected in 2011. Morocco also acquired a Gulfstream G550 aircraft for secure royal flights.

Bilateral relations have also focused on improving trade ties. A free trade agreement (FTA) with Morocco (P.L. 108-302, August 17, 2004) came into effect on January 1, 2006. U.S. exports to Morocco totaled over \$1.5 billion in 2008, over \$1.6 billion in 2009, and over \$1.9 billion in 2010. Imports from Morocco were valued at \$878.7 million in 2008, fell to \$468 million in 2009 (in part due to the economic recession), and rose again to \$685.4 million in 2010.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Dr. Taieb Fassi Fihri before their Meeting, April 8, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/04/121509.htm>.

<sup>69</sup> See CRS Report R41725, *Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress*, coordinated by Jeremiah Gertler.

<sup>70</sup> State Department, Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks with Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri,” March 23, 2011.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted May 27, 2011.

## U.S. Assistance

Morocco receives significant levels of U.S. development aid and benefits from security assistance and cooperation programs. The United States has increased aid to Morocco to assist with countering terrorism, democratization, fighting poverty, and the Free Trade Agreement. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a regional democracy-promotion program, administers some U.S. assistance funds, including programs to empower women, create jobs, improve education, build trade union capacity, enhance fiscal and trade policies, and further judicial and legal reform. Those directed at youth are intended to help prevent radicalization. In FY2009, \$5.1 in “Section 1207” funds were allocated for a program in Morocco to teach life skills to at-risk youth viewed as susceptible to terrorist messages.<sup>73</sup> Morocco also benefits from assistance administered through the U.S. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an interagency program (State Department, Defense Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development) aimed at increasing North and West African states’ capacity to counter terrorism.

The Obama Administration has requested \$43.7 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2012. Proposed aid will focus on education, economic growth, countering violent extremism; strengthening civil society, local government, political parties, and justice sector; improving human rights and anticorruption efforts in the criminal justice system; enhancing counterterrorism capacities and cooperation; providing training for police and border security agents; and military training and professionalization.<sup>74</sup>

Security assistance includes Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to maintain aging U.S.-origin equipment, including aircrafts and transportation vehicles; boost maritime surveillance to address illegal immigration, smuggling, drug trafficking, and illicit fishing; procure transport and logistics equipment; and upgrade aerial surveillance. Morocco is one of the top twenty recipients worldwide of International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance, through which senior military officers have received training in the United States. Morocco is one of the top five recipients of Excess Defense Articles grants, and relies heavily on the program for the procurement of trucks, tracked vehicles (tanks) and associated equipment. Morocco also benefits from a U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program with Utah, which was established in 2003. The State Department intends to provide training for Moroccan troops participating in multilateral peacekeeping missions through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI).<sup>75</sup> In May 2010, nearly 1,000 U.S. military personnel from across the services and 1,000 members of the Moroccan military participated in the latest iteration of an annual military exercise known as African Lion. The exercise is designed to promote interoperability and mutual understanding of military tactics, techniques and procedures.<sup>76</sup>

Morocco further benefits from assistance and grants administered by international financial institutions that receive significant U.S. support. The World Bank, for example, has provided an

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<sup>73</sup> Until the end of FY2011, when this authority expired, Section 1207 funds were appropriated for the Department of Defense and transferred to the State Department for “Stabilization and Security.” For more on this program, see CRS Report RS22871, *Department of Defense “Section 1207” Security and Stabilization Assistance: Background and Congressional Concerns, FY2006-FY2010*, by Nina M. Serafino

<sup>74</sup> State Department, FY2012 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

<sup>75</sup> DSCA, “Morocco,” Country Information Paper, updated March 16, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), “U.S. Service Members Arrive in Morocco for African Lion,” May 17, 2010.



average of \$700 million in assistance for Morocco (including aid programs focusing on education, water, agriculture, environmental, and transportation) since 2008.<sup>77</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

## Millennium Challenge Grant

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>77</sup> World Bank, "Robert B. Zoellick, President, World Bank Group Speech to Morocco Industry Summit, Casablanca, Morocco," May 5, 2011.

## Recent Congressional Actions

Some Members of Congress have, at times, sought to restrict U.S. assistance to Morocco in connection with the Western Sahara issue, related human rights concerns, or concerns over religious freedoms. Others are strongly supportive of the Moroccan government and its autonomy proposal for the Western Sahara. Several Members of Congress expressed strong support for King Mohammed VI's announcement of reforms in March 2011.

In June 2010, the Congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Morocco's expulsion of American Christians in March 2010. Representative Frank Wolf urged suspension of Millennium funding "to a nation which blatantly disregards the rights of American citizens residing in Morocco and forcibly expels American citizens without due process of law."<sup>78</sup> In an explanatory statement accompanying the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-8, March 11, 2009), appropriators directed the Secretary of State to report on "steps taken by the Government of Morocco to protect human rights, and whether it is allowing all persons to: (1) freely advocate their views regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara through the exercise of their rights to peaceful expression and association; and (2) document violations of human rights in the territory without harassment."<sup>79</sup> A similar reporting requirement was included in the conference report accompanying the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 111-117, December 16, 2009).<sup>80</sup> In January 2011, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen temporarily placed a hold on the U.S. grant transfer to Morocco of trucks valued at about \$1.34 million, citing concerns over human rights in the Western Sahara.

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

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<sup>78</sup> Hannah Armstrong, "Christians Expelled, Morocco and US Spar over Religious Freedom," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2010. The Senate expressed its concerns on the issue in S.Rept. 111-237, July 29, 2010, to accompany S. 3676, State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, 2011. "The Committee on Appropriations directs the Secretary of State to submit a report not later than 45 days after enactment of this act, detailing steps taken by the Government of Morocco in the previous 12 months on human rights, including deportation of U.S. citizens in Morocco without due process of law, and whether it is allowing all persons to advocate freely their views regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara through the exercise of their rights to peaceful expression and association, and to document violations of human rights in the territory without harassment."

<sup>79</sup> Explanatory statement submitted by the Chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations "as if it were a joint explanatory statement of a committee of conference," February 23, 2009; Congressional Record, p. H2417.

<sup>80</sup> H.Rept. 111-366, Congressional Record p. H14356.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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