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Morocco: Current Issues

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Summary

Successive U.S. Administrations have viewed Morocco as an important regional ally, as a partner in counterterrorism, and as a free trade counterpart. Morocco receives substantial U.S. development aid, and bilateral trade and investment have increased following a 2006 Free Trade Agreement. Morocco benefits from U.S. security assistance and military cooperation, and is a purchaser of U.S. defense articles, including F-16 jets. New emphasis may be placed on the U.S.-Morocco relationship amid regional turmoil and growing terrorist threats emanating from neighboring states in North Africa and the nearby Sahel region of West Africa.

King Mohammed VI, who inherited the Moroccan throne in 1999, retains supreme political power but has taken some liberalizing steps. In 2011, amid popular demonstrations that echoed unrest elsewhere in the region, the king proposed a new constitution that, if fully implemented, could strengthen the legislature, judiciary, and local-level government. It nonetheless preserves the king's role as an arbiter of political decision-making, head of the military, and the country's highest religious authority. The constitution was adopted in a public referendum in July 2011, but the implementation process has been slow and opaque. Legislative elections held in 2011, under the new constitution, brought an Islamist political party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), to power for the first time. The PJD has sought to bolster the power of elected officials and to institute economic and governance reforms. However, the party has faced challenges in transitioning from an outsider opposition role to the day-to-day responsibility of policymaking. It has also struggled to overcome tensions with pro-palace elites, as well as with nominal allies. Protests have dwindled since their apogee in 2011, but sporadic demonstrations continue over economic and social grievances, while some continue to call for deeper political changes.

Obama Administration officials have expressed strong support for the Moroccan monarchy, while also encouraging political reforms and occasionally voicing human rights concerns. Despite long-term, warm ties, the U.S.-Morocco relationship was briefly troubled in April 2013 by U.S. support at the U.N. Security Council for U.N. human rights monitoring in the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Morocco administers most of Western Sahara and considers it an integral part of its sovereign territory. The United States has recognized neither Morocco's claim to the region, nor the self-declared independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which is backed and hosted by Algeria. The region's status remains subject to U.N. mediation efforts. (See CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arieff.) Relevant draft legislation includes H.R. 2855 and S. 1372.

Morocco's foreign policy focuses on its Western partners (especially France, Spain, the European Union, and the United States); the Middle East; and, to some extent, francophone Africa. Morocco is also completing a two-year stint as a rotating member of the U.N. Security Council. Neighboring Algeria is a regional rival and supports independence for Western Sahara. Friction over the Western Sahara issue has stymied Moroccan-Algerian relations, Moroccan relations with the African Union (Morocco withdrew in 1984 over recognition of Western Sahara), and regional economic and security cooperation.

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Overview

Successive U.S. Administrations from both political parties have viewed Morocco as a steady and close ally and as a partner in addressing regional security threats. Amid widespread political upheaval in the region since 2011, Moroccan officials have sought to portray to U.S. policymakers their country's importance for furthering U.S. interests, and have urged the United States to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship. U.S. foreign aid assists Morocco with countering terrorism and narcotics trafficking, fighting poverty, building trade capacity, and democratization. Morocco recently completed a five-year, \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, and is eligible to compete for a second one. Morocco also benefits from U.S. military cooperation, including a large annual bilateral exercise called African Lion.

The United States' close relationship with Morocco and reliance on King Mohammed VI's support on regional security and counterterrorism issues underlie Administration statements expressing both strong support for the monarchy and encouragement of political reforms. For example, during a visit to Morocco in February 2012, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Morocco's "great political maturity" in adopting a new constitution and holding elections, adding, "We compare [Morocco] to what is happening elsewhere in the region and around the world, and it is quite admired in the United States."¹ In an earlier statement praising the conduct of the 2011 elections, Secretary Clinton called on the king, along with "the new parliament and civil society" to "implement the amended constitution as a step toward fulfilling the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans."² Similar support for the monarchy and its reform efforts is regularly expressed by other key Moroccan allies, such as France and the European Union.

With regard to the disputed territory of Western Sahara, the United States has recognized neither Morocco's claim of sovereignty nor the self-proclaimed independent government-in-exile, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which is hosted and supported by Algeria. The Obama Administration, like its predecessor, supports U.N. efforts to facilitate negotiations between Morocco and the independence-seeking Popular Front for the Liberation of Saqiat al Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario) on the future status of the region. At the same time—in the context of valued bilateral ties with Morocco—successive Administrations have regularly referred to Morocco's proposal for regional autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty as a "serious and credible" approach to the territory's final status. In April 2013, U.S. diplomats reportedly expressed support for adding human rights reporting to the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Western Sahara (known as MINURSO), which monitors a 1991 ceasefire. Morocco responded by suspending African Lion and initiating an international diplomatic campaign against the motion. Tensions de-escalated following a phone call between Obama and King Mohammed VI, and in the end, the human rights monitoring proposal did not advance.

In September 2012, the United States and Morocco initiated a Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, with working groups on political, economic, security, and educational/cultural cooperation. The State Department described the Dialogue as "an effort to broaden and deepen our relationship and the support that we're giving to Morocco as it continues its reform efforts."³ Morocco's Foreign Minister indicated that his country's key "portfolios" for the Dialogue would be North African

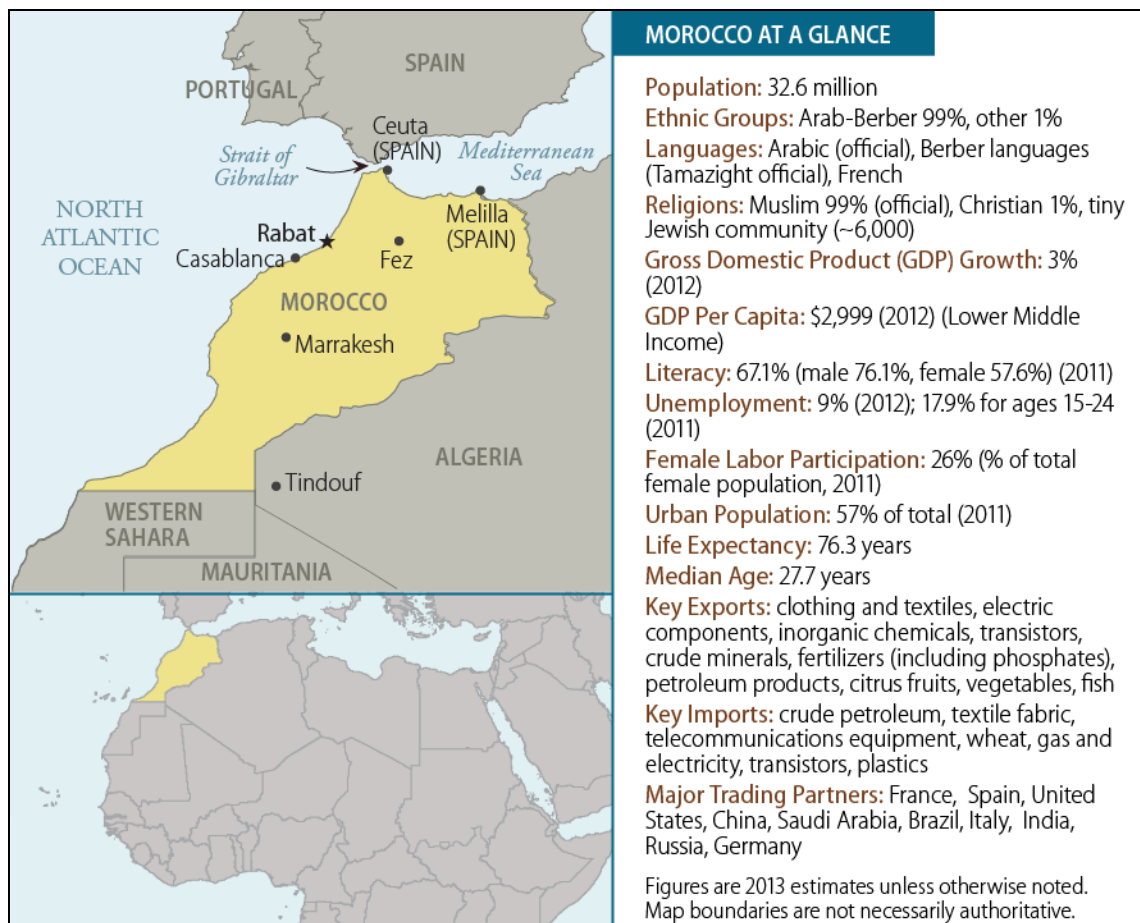
¹ State Department, "Secretary of State Clinton Interviewed on 2M [transcript]," February 26, 2012.

² Clinton, "Morocco's Parliamentary Elections," State Department press release, November 26, 2011.

³ State Department daily press briefing, September 11, 2012.

regional integration, security in the Sahel region, the Western Sahara issue, responses to the Syrian conflict, more “balanced” bilateral trade, and educational exchanges.⁴ A joint statement issued after the first session of the Dialogue enumerated shared commitments in a number of areas, such as implementation of Morocco’s new constitution, the promotion of economic growth in Morocco, and coordination on criminal justice, nonproliferation, and counterterrorism.⁵

Figure 1. Map and Key Figures



Source: CRS. At-a-glance information from CIA World Factbook; World Bank; International Monetary Fund. Map boundaries from Map Resources.

Note: Morocco considers Western Sahara part of its national territory, but U.S. government maps do not include it as such; see, e.g., State Department, “U.S. Relations With Morocco,” Fact Sheet, September 11, 2012.

⁴ Saad Eddine al Othmani, remarks to the U.S.-Morocco Strategic Dialogue, as released by the State Department, September 13, 2012.

⁵ State Department, Joint Statement of the First Session of the U.S.-Morocco Strategic Dialogue, October 12, 2012.

Government and Politics

The Moroccan royal dynasty has ruled the country since 1649.⁶ 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 he granted limited executive powers to the prime minister through a July 2011 constitutional revision (discussed below). The king chairs the Council of State that endorses all legislation before it goes to parliament, and he approves and may dismiss government ministers. He may dissolve parliament, call elections, and exercise certain powers via decree. The king also has a "shadow government" of royal advisors and is head of the military. Moreover, the king is tied to significant domestic economic enterprises. Reforms largely depend on the king's will, and he has undertaken several liberalizing initiatives.

The bicameral legislature consists of a 270-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, whose members are indirectly elected to nine-year terms, and a 395-seat lower house, the Chamber of Representatives, whose members are directly elected to five-year terms. Sixty seats (about 15%) in the lower house are reserved for women and 30 for candidates under 40 years of age (candidates for these seats are elected from a separate national list) and, under a rule that took effect in 2009, women are guaranteed 12% of the seats in local elections.

The king rolled out a number of reform proposals in 2011 (see below), including the constitutional revision. Legislative elections in November 2011 were perceived by many analysts as a critical test of public confidence in the king's reform agenda.⁷ The moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD, or Al Misbah/The Beacon) won a plurality of seats and is therefore leading the cabinet for the first time, under a new constitutional provision requiring the king to select a prime minister from the largest party in parliament. The PJD, which controls only 107 seats (27%), initially formed a coalition with the conservative Istiqlal (Independence) Party, the centrist Popular Movement (MP), and the small, leftist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS).⁸ In mid-2013, however, Istiqlal ceded from the government following a series of public disputes with the PJD over policy direction and cabinet appointments, leaving the ruling coalition short of a majority.⁹ The National Rally for Independents, a centrist party reputedly close to the palace, eventually agreed to join and complete the coalition, with the PJD giving up several key cabinet seats. The PJD may have been weakened by these events, although it may also capitalize on perceptions that it remains an underdog in a system of vested interests.

Some observers view the PJD as more driven by constituent concerns than other political parties, more focused on countering corruption, and therefore more interested in devolving power from the monarchy and its elite backers. Indeed, several of its policy initiatives, including changes to the state media, judiciary, and economic subsidy system, face opposition from traditional elites.

⁶ The monarchy remained intact under French and Spanish colonial protectorates (1912-1956).

⁷ U.S.-funded observers reported generally sound procedures, but noted poor civic education and outreach, and limited public enthusiasm overall. Analysts attributed lackluster turnout (45%, albeit higher than 37% in 2007) and a high rate of "spoiled" ballots to continued popular disaffection with the legislature, despite constitutional reforms that aim to strengthen it. See National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Final Report on the Moroccan Legislative Elections*, June 2012.

⁸ Some analysts perceived royal interference behind the appointments of several close palace allies to key positions. See, e.g., Driss Bennani and Fahd Iraqi, "Enquête. Et le roi créa le gouvernement!" *TelQuel*, January 7, 2012.

⁹ See *Financial Times*, "Morocco: Dance with the deep state," July 15, 2013; and Ursula Lindsey, "All the King's Men [op-ed]," *New York Times*, June 5, 2013.

Still, the PJD's appetite for deep political changes appears limited, as the party generally has sought acceptance from the monarchy in exchange for political integration. Indeed, PJD Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane has referred to the ruling family as "a referee" in Morocco's political system, and has defended laws banning criticism of the king.¹⁰ The PJD's influence over policymaking is, moreover, constrained by its weak legislative plurality, by the role of royal advisors who sit outside of elected government, and by fiscal constraints. Distrust of Islamists among Moroccan liberals, as elsewhere in the region, has also inhibited Islamist-liberal political cooperation, despite a potential shared interest in greater democratization.¹¹ The monarchy has long been able to leverage such social and ideological fault-lines, claiming legitimacy as a national religious authority—as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and "Commander of the Faithful" in Morocco—and, simultaneously, as a modernizer and bulwark against Islamism.

While the PJD has been legally recognized for two decades, its leaders continue to grapple with their transition from being outsider opposition leaders to running the government amid an economic downturn. The king, meanwhile, reasserted his influence over various key national policy arenas in 2013, for example spearheading diplomatic efforts over Western Sahara in April, publicly criticizing the slow pace of progress on education reform (nominally a PJD policy priority) in August, and issuing a new policy on protecting the human rights of migrants in September after a series of alleged state abuses against African immigrants. For its part, the PJD-led Justice Ministry in August blamed the palace for a royal pardon issued to a Spaniard convicted of pedophilia, which had sparked protests and was subsequently hastily rescinded.

The 2011 legislative elections demonstrated the waning electoral influence of the Party for Authenticity and Modernity, founded in 2008 by Fouad Ali Al Himma, a former classmate of King Mohammed VI and former deputy interior minister.¹² Some politicians had initially feared that PAM was a nascent state party, similar to those seen at the time in Egypt and Tunisia, which might be used to dominate politics. In December 2011, the king appointed Al Himma as a royal advisor, apparently signaling the latter's withdrawal from electoral politics.

The Islamist Justice and Charity Organization (Al Adl Wal Ihsan) is banned but is reportedly the country's largest grassroots organization. It opposes the monarchy as un-democratic and un-Islamic, and rejects formal political participation, while also eschewing violence. It often conveys its views in street demonstrations—for example, against the 2004 Family Code (see "Human Rights," below), in support of the Palestinians and against Israel, etc.—and was a key force, in addition to leftist groups, behind the 2011 protest movement (see text-box below). Founding leader Cheikh Abdessalem Yassine died in late 2012, leading some analysts to question the group's future cohesion and role. The JCO quickly elected senior activist Mohammed Abbad as its new secretary-general. Other potentially influential Islamist political actors include Salafists, who have regularly been targeted by the state but may move toward formal political participation, and Sufi organizations, which at times serve as a source of popular support for the monarchy.¹³

¹⁰ Interview by Fareed Zakaria at the World Economic Forum, January 25, 2013.

¹¹ Maâti Monjib, *The "Democratization" Process in Morocco: Progress, obstacles, and the impact of the Islamist-Secularist Divide*, Saban Center, Brookings Institution, Working Paper Number 5, August 2011.

¹² Al Himma was singled out by name as a target of the 2011 protests, and PAM lost seats in the 2011 vote. PAM had previously controlled a bloc in parliament, mostly through alliances with other parties, as well as municipal positions.

¹³ "Salafism" refers to a broad subset of Sunni Islamic reformist movements that seek to purify contemporary Islamic religious practices and societies by encouraging the application of practices and views associated with the earliest days of the Islamic faith. Salafist movements hold a range of positions on political, social, and theological questions. A (continued...)

Morocco and the “Arab Spring”

In early 2011, amid large public demonstrations, regional political unrest, and dramatic changes in neighboring states, King Mohammed VI initiated a series of reforms that he said would strengthen human rights, democracy, good governance, and economic transparency. The centerpiece was a revision of Morocco’s constitution. The new constitution was drafted by a commission appointed by the king (with some input from political parties, civil society groups, and others) and adopted in a popular referendum in July 2011.¹⁴ It broadly aims to strengthen the role of the prime minister (now referred to as “head of government”), legislature, and judiciary; to promote human rights, women’s equality, and Berber (Amazigh) cultural rights; and to encourage decentralization. The king nevertheless retains significant authorities, including the ability to dissolve parliament. He remains commander in chief of the armed forces and the country’s preeminent religious authority.¹⁵ Still, the constitution’s provisions suggesting greater power-sharing between the monarchy and elected government, along with the precedent of the protest movement, may grant political parties and democracy advocates greater leverage.

In addition to the new constitution, the king announced a new human rights council (with jurisdiction over the Western Sahara) and new regulatory bodies. The king also pardoned or commuted the sentences of a handful of human rights and Western Sahara independence activists, along with dozens of religiously conservative Salafist prisoners, many of whom were arrested in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca terrorist bombings.¹⁶

Like other instances of the king’s practice of initiating top-down reforms, the changes of 2011 did not significantly alter the monarchy’s political and economic prerogatives, but they did demonstrate responsiveness to public pressures for greater political participation. Moroccan officials portrayed the 2011 reform process as an example of “Moroccan exceptionalism” and a model for other countries in the region.¹⁷ Some observers agree with this view, and most contend that the king successfully retained his popular legitimacy and reclaimed the initiative from the street. At the same time, the degree to which the new constitution represents a significant change to the status quo will depend on the details of constitutional implementation, the degree to which political parties effectively leverage the political space accorded to them, and whether the monarchy takes additional steps toward genuine democracy. For example, progress on justice sector reforms and decentralization, early priorities of the implementation process, has been slow, although some steps have been taken in both areas. The Moroccan public may also gauge the success of reforms in terms of whether they lead to tangible socioeconomic advances. Sporadic protests have continued, largely over socioeconomic issues, but much of the public may have lost its appetite for unrest, in part due to the negative example of turmoil elsewhere in the region.

(...continued)

subset of Salafists advocate violence in pursuit of their aims, but many instead pursue nonviolent preaching, charity, and (for some) political activities. See CRS Report RS21745, *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

¹⁴ Over 98% of votes were in favor, and officials claimed over 70% turnout. (As most observers expected the constitution to be adopted, turnout was seen as a key element in determining the vote’s legitimacy; some critics questioned the official rate.) The short timeframe for the vote may have inhibited voter education on the content, particularly given high illiteracy rates. The government also used significant state resources to mobilize support.

¹⁵ CRS analysis of the constitution was aided by Issam M. Saliba, Foreign Law Specialist at the Library of Congress.

¹⁶ Human rights groups had been critical of the 2003 arrests, citing a lack of due process. Those released in 2011 included Mohamed Fizazi, convicted of preaching radical Islamist doctrine and meeting the perpetrators of the 2003 Casablanca attacks. He has since espoused more moderate rhetoric. Additional pardons were granted in February 2012.

¹⁷ *Le Monde*, “Maroc: Les Réformes Politiques du Roi Sont Plébiscitées,” July 3, 2011.

Morocco's 2011 Protest Movement

In February 2011, hundreds of thousands of Moroccans turned out in major cities for what organizers termed a "Movement for Change." The protests spawned the "February 20 Movement," a loosely organized, leaderless network that held subsequent large demonstrations criticizing Morocco's governance and advocating political change. Protesters espoused a wide range of grievances, including corruption, unemployment, and a perceived concentration of political and economic power among the tiny elite (known as the *makhzen*) close to the monarchy. Some called for Morocco to become a "parliamentary monarchy," in which the king's role in politics would be sharply curtailed. The movement appeared to arise from a loose alliance of convenience between liberal and leftist youth leaders and supporters of the Islamist grassroots Justice and Charity Organization (JCO). Authorities tolerated many of the protests, but in some cases security forces resorted to violence and arrests to disperse demonstrators.

The February 20 Movement rejected the 2011 constitutional revision process as insufficient in scope and overly controlled by the monarchy. However, protests dwindled in size after the new constitution was adopted in mid-2011. In early 2012, the pragmatic cooperation between liberals and the JCO fractured, and many Moroccans seemed to prefer to let the new, Islamist-led government prove itself over returning to the street. Some Moroccans also appeared frustrated with the protests, fearing unrest could lead to instability or have a negative economic impact.

Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Over the past decade, Moroccan nationals have been implicated in terrorism abroad and Morocco has suffered from terrorism at home.¹⁸ In May 2003, 12 suicide bombers identified as Salafiya Jihadiya adherents linked to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) attacked five Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca, killing themselves and 33 others, and injuring more than 100.¹⁹ The State Department designated the GICM, which was also linked to the 2004 Madrid train bombings, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 2005; however, the group has since been inactive following a crackdown on its followers in Europe and elsewhere, and it was de-listed in May 2013.²⁰ Five Moroccan detainees at Guantánamo were transferred to Morocco from 2004 to 2009.²¹ Two were subsequently sentenced to prison in Morocco for recruiting combatants for Al Qaeda in Iraq. One of them, Brahim Benchekroun, was reportedly later released from prison and now heads an Islamist militant group in Syria. Another Moroccan ex-Guantánamo detainee, Muhammad al Alami, was reportedly recently killed in Syria.²²

The government appears concerned that Moroccan extremists with experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya, or radicalized during their stays in Western Europe, might return to conduct terrorist attacks at home. To date, numerous small extremist cells that adhere to the

¹⁸ Noteworthy developments abroad include the trial of two Moroccans in German courts for aiding the 9/11 terrorists and the revelation that a Moroccan imam was "the spiritual father of the Hamburg cell" that helped execute the 9/11 attacks. A French-Moroccan, Zacarias Moussaoui, was tried in the United States as the 20th hijacker for 9/11. A Moroccan network was implicated in the March 2004 Madrid train bombings. A Moroccan national was arrested in Washington, DC, in February 2012 on accusations of plotting to bomb the U.S. Capitol building.

¹⁹ The attacks occurred after 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." *New York Times*, "Moroccans Say Al Qaeda Masterminded and Financed Casablanca Suicide Bombings," May 23, 2003.

²⁰ State Department, "In the Matter of the Designation of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group aka Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain (GICM) and All Associated Aliases as a Foreign Terrorist Organization Pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as Amended," Notice, May 28, 2013.

²¹ A House report was critical of the transfers of U.S. detainees; see *Leaving Guantánamo: Policies, Pressures, and Detainees Returning to the Fight*, House Armed Services Committee Print 112-4, February 17, 2011.

²² Mohammed Masbah, "Is Al-Qaeda a Threat to Moroccan Stability?" *Sada/Carnegie Endowment*, October 2013; Vish Sakthivel, "Weathering Morocco's Syria Returnees," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013.

Salafiya Jihadiya (Reformist Holy War/“Jihadist”) ideology have been viewed as the main threat to Morocco’s domestic security.²³ Several small-scale domestic attacks have occurred since 2003, including two suicide attacks near the U.S. consulate and American Language Center in Casablanca in 2007, and a bombing at a café popular with tourists in Marrakesh in 2011. Moroccan authorities regularly report that they have disrupted terrorist cells plotting attacks against Moroccan government and military institutions, foreigners, and tourist sites. For example, in October 2011, the police stated it had dismantled a five-person cell operating in Casablanca and near Rabat that reportedly had contacts with Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri. Dozens of Salafiya Jihadiya adherents imprisoned in 2003 have been granted pardons since 2011. Many have foresworn violence and pursued political participation, while some have turned up in Syria. Those who remain in prison continue to protest the conditions and reasons for their detention.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a U.S.-designated FTO, has carried out attacks in neighboring countries but not in Morocco to-date. AQIM has reportedly expanded efforts to recruit Moroccans to fight in other countries and has called for attacks on U.S. diplomats in Morocco and elsewhere.²⁴ In September 2013, the group released a 41-minute video attacking the Moroccan monarchy, including imagery of the king engulfed in flames.

The State Department characterizes Morocco as “a strong partner in counterterrorism efforts,” reporting that it “works closely with U.S. law enforcement to safeguard both countries’ national security interests.”²⁵ In addition to international cooperation, Morocco’s counterterrorism efforts include vigilant security measures and counter-radicalization programs. Morocco has exerted control over religious leaders and institutions, created theological councils, supervised and retrained imams, closed unregulated mosques, retrained and rehabilitated some individuals convicted of terror-related crimes to correct their understanding of Islam, and launched media efforts to transmit “Moroccan religious values” of tolerance.

In October 2011, three European aid workers were kidnapped from the Polisario-administered refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, an AQIM splinter faction.²⁶ Moroccan officials and some analysts regularly cite fears that an independent Western Sahara would be vulnerable to terrorist and criminal infiltration; some contend that the Polisario itself has links to AQIM. On the other hand, then-State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Daniel Benjamin testified before Congress in April 2012, in response to a question, that “I’ve seen reports of al-Qaeda involvement in Polisario camps and whenever we have dug deeper we have found that those reports were spurious.”²⁷

Like other countries in the region, Morocco is reportedly a transit zone for cocaine trafficking between South America and Europe, a trade that some analysts have linked to terrorist financing. Morocco is also a leading global source of cannabis, particularly for European markets. Morocco has domestic demand reduction and treatment programs, and engages in law enforcement efforts. Still, police corruption and tacit nonenforcement remain challenges.²⁸

²³ State Department, “Morocco,” *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, May 30, 2013.

²⁴ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, op. cit.

²⁵ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, op. cit.

²⁶ The hostages were subsequently released, reportedly in exchange for European ransom payments and the release of militants from prison in Mauritania.

²⁷ House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on Instability in Africa, April 25, 2012.

²⁸ State Department, *2013 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 5, 2013.

Human Rights

Morocco exhibits several human rights problems, including some limitations on political rights and civil liberties that are linked to its political system and to its territorial claims over Western Sahara. At the same time, it boasts a wide spectrum of political parties, media outlets, and civil society organizations. Societal-level human rights problems—such as discrimination against women—are generally shared by other states in the region.

According to the State Department, the “most significant” human rights problems are “the lack of citizens’ right to change... the country’s monarchical form of government, corruption in all branches of government, and widespread disregard for the rule of law by security forces.”²⁹ Other abuses documented by the State Department include violent repression of peaceful protests; torture and incommunicado detention by the security forces; poor prison conditions; politically motivated imprisonments; infringements on freedom of expression, assembly, and religion; lack of judicial independence; gender discrimination; trafficking in persons³⁰; and child labor. Pro-independence and human rights activists operating in Moroccan-administered Western Sahara face particular challenges, including limitations on freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association; the use of arbitrary and prolonged detention to quell dissent; and abuse of detainees.³¹ The State Department reported that as of late 2012, there had been “little or no progress... in passing the organic [fundamental] laws necessary to implement the advances, such as gender equality and parity, provided for in the [2011] constitution.”³²

Although Morocco has a large and diverse private press, direct criticism of the monarchy or the government’s stance on the Western Sahara is not tolerated. Media advocates contend that some prosecutions of critical journalists on charges ostensibly unrelated to their journalism are in fact designed to inhibit independent coverage and commentary, and that financial pressures are employed to quiet some media.³³ Some observers have accused the PJD-led government of censoring religiously sensitive materials as well as criticism of the king.³⁴ Religious freedom is generally respected, although state policies discourage conversion from Islam, and proselytization to Muslims is prohibited. In 2010, the government expelled foreign Christians, including Americans, whom it had accused of proselytizing, but such cases have not been reported since.³⁵

Broad antiterrorism laws were adopted after the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca. A 2010 Human Rights Watch report argued that a “pattern of abuse” under these laws included

²⁹ State Department, “Morocco,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*, April 19, 2013. See also U.N. doc. A/HRC/22/53/Add.2, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Mission to Morocco*, February 28, 2013; and Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Morocco/Western Sahara,” *World Report 2013*.

³⁰ The State Department has judged Morocco to be a Tier 2 “Watch List” country with regard to trafficking in persons, indicating that it “does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.” State Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2013*, June 19, 2013.

³¹ State Department, “Western Sahara,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*, April 19, 2013.

³² State Department, “Morocco,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, op. cit.

³³ Ahmed Benchensi, “Morocco and Press Freedom: A Complicated Relationship,” *Nieman Reports*, September 22, 2011; HRW, “Morocco: Leading Editor Arrested,” September 19, 2013.

³⁴ Karim Boukhari, “Courage, On Censure!” *TelQuel*, February 4, 2012. For example, in February 2012, a student was sentenced to prison for “violating the sacred values” after a video posted online showed him criticizing the king.

³⁵ State Department, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012*, released May 20, 2013.

extrajudicial detentions, allegedly by intelligence agents at 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.³⁶ Law enforcement authorities have since emphasized human-rights standards and increased transparency.³⁷

King Mohammed VI has undertaken several major initiatives in select areas of human rights. In March 2011, the king announced the creation of a new National Human Rights Council (CNDH). The CNDH has since investigated some human rights issues in Western Sahara, where advocacy groups and some foreign diplomats have called for international human rights monitoring. Some activists, however, while praising aspects of these investigations, have questioned the CNDH's independence.³⁸ In 2004, the parliament enacted significant changes to the Family Code, or *Moudawana*, making polygamy rare by requiring permission of a judge and the man's first wife; raising the legal age for marriage for girls from 15 to 18; and simplifying divorce procedures for women, among other changes aimed at improving women's socio-economic status. However, judges have not applied the law (or new constitutional provisions on gender equality) consistently and women continue to suffer from discrimination, a lack of access to the justice system, and violence.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ He has also sought to recognize and expand the cultural and linguistic rights of ethnic Berber communities, the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa prior to Arab incursions, and to recognize the cultural heritage of Moroccan Jews as well.

The Economy

Morocco's economy is relatively diverse. Key sectors include agriculture, tourism, mining, and textiles and apparel. Through internal and Western Saharan mines, Morocco controls over 75% of world reserves of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers—and of which the United States is the world's largest consumer.⁴¹ Remittances from emigrant workers, mainly in Europe, are another source of foreign exchange and a social safety net. Morocco actively encourages foreign investment and trade, including through a Free Trade Agreement with the United States and an Advanced Status agreement with the European Union. However, red tape, corruption, and opaque

³⁶ HRW, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

³⁷ State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*, op. cit.

³⁸ Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), *Rapport annuel sur la situation des droits humains au Maroc en 2012*, July 23, 2013. The CNDH's precursor was the Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH), created in 1990. Unlike the CCDH, the new Council does not include members of the cabinet—although 16 out of 27 members are appointed by either the king (8) or the parliament (8)—and its members appear to be pursuing a wider scope of action.

³⁹ Steven Erlanger and Souad Mekhennet, "Law Empowering Women Leaves Many Behind," *Herald Tribune*, August 20, 2009; Lucy Lamble, "UN Women Report: Access to Justice in Morocco," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2011.

⁴⁰ Rights advocates, while welcoming the Commission as an important precedent in the Arab world, contend that some of its recommendations have not been implemented, that senior officials accused of serious abuses should have been prosecuted, and that the Commission declined to focus sufficiently on abuses in Western Sahara. See, e.g., Amnesty International, *Broken Promises: The Equity and Reconciliation Commission and Its Follow-Up*, January 2010.

⁴¹ U.S. Geological Survey, "Phosphate Rock: Mineral Commodity Summary," 2013. Despite its overwhelming proportion of global phosphate reserves, Morocco is the third-largest producer, after the United States and China. The Royal Office of Phosphates, or OCP, has a monopoly on the mineral's extraction, processing, and commercialization. It reportedly employs 19,000 and contributes 2-3% of gross domestic product. (*Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, "Au royaume des phosphates," December 26, 2010-January 8, 2011.)

state procurement procedures are reportedly constraints on competitiveness.⁴² Unemployment (especially among young people), poverty, and illiteracy (especially in rural areas) remain high; according to the World Bank, 8 million Moroccans, or one in four, live in “absolute poverty or under its constant threat.” Socioeconomic hardships drive emigration and social unrest, and may be conducive to radicalization. The state has attempted to address discontent through social programs, public sector hiring initiatives and wage increases, and subsidies for basic goods.

Economic growth reached nearly 5% in 2011, but dipped to an estimated 3% in 2012 before recovering to a projected 4.5% in 2013, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The economy has been negatively affected by the downturn in the European Union—Morocco’s largest trading partner—and by a bad harvest in 2012, while fiscal stability is challenged by an expansion in state spending on social programs and subsidies since 2011. In 2012, Morocco and the IMF agreed to a \$6.2 billion, two-year line of credit aimed at proactively reassuring investors. The IMF subsequently warned that despite broad macroeconomic stability, Morocco’s economic outlook had been weakened by domestic economic “rigidities,” social pressures, and global economic conditions, and that future growth “hinges on the sustained delivery of reforms.”⁴³ The PJD has announced cuts to public spending and is attempting to reform the system of state subsidies for basic goods—whose cost was estimated at 6% of GDP in 2011—and pensions. However, such efforts are politically challenging. The subsidies benefit ordinary Moroccans as well as powerful economic actors, and efforts to curb them may spur public unrest.

The royal family’s role in the economy has been criticized by some analysts. In 2009, King Mohammed VI was reported to be one of the world’s 15 richest royal figures, although Morocco is a relatively poor country.⁴⁴ The phosphate industry and much of the economy are dominated by the royal family and associated elites who control large, multi-sectoral holding companies. The royal family reportedly controls a majority stake in the National Investment Company (SNI), which has significant domestic financial, insurance, construction, and commodity interests.⁴⁵ The king is also a major landowner. Some critics therefore view the monarchy’s authority to appoint the heads of certain parastatal and regulatory agencies as a potential conflict of interest.⁴⁶

Oil imports supply 97% of the country’s energy needs, and price increases have therefore had detrimental effects on the economy. Morocco has sought to develop renewable energy sources, with a particular focus on solar energy, which it hopes to use domestically and export to Europe.

Western Sahara

The dispute between Morocco and the independence-seeking Polisario over the former Spanish colony south of Morocco remains unresolved.⁴⁷ Morocco occupies 80% of the Western Sahara, which it considers its southern provinces. Morocco says it will only accept a solution that guarantees it sovereignty over “the whole of its territories,” and will only negotiate on that basis.

⁴² State Department, *2013 Investment Climate Statement—Morocco*, February 2013.

⁴³ IMF, “Morocco: 2012 Article IV Consultation [...]—Staff Report,” April 2013.

⁴⁴ David Pendleton, “King of Rock,” *Forbes*, June 17, 2009.

⁴⁵ Souhail Karam, “Morocco Regulator in Pledge on Monarchy-Owned Firms,” Reuters, September 30, 2011.

⁴⁶ CRS interviews with Moroccan democracy activists, Rabat, January 2012; Ahmed Benchemsi, “La grande corruption règne en maître au Maroc,” *Le Monde*, June 25, 2013.

⁴⁷ See CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*, by Alexis Arief.

A U.N. peacekeeping operation, MINURSO, originally conceived to oversee a referendum on the final status of the region, monitors a 1991 ceasefire between Morocco and the Polisario. In 2001, Morocco authorized French and U.S. oil companies to explore off the Saharan coast, and the prospect of discoveries, as yet unrealized, may have hardened its resolve to retain the region.⁴⁸

The United States supports unconditional negotiations between the parties on the future status of the region. Talks are ongoing under the auspices of the Personal Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General for the Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, a U.S. diplomat. In 2007, King Mohammed VI submitted an autonomy plan for Western Sahara, asserting Moroccan sovereignty, to the United Nations.⁴⁹ In line with this initiative, the king has pursued policies of decentralization that he says are intended to empower residents of his Saharan provinces. Neither Morocco nor the Polisario has shown interest in a compromise; Morocco contends that autonomy is itself a compromise.

Foreign Policy

Morocco's foreign policy focuses on its Western partners, a source of financial support and security cooperation; and the Middle East, where Morocco has supported efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, hosted international consultations on Syria, and pursued growing ties with the Arab Gulf monarchies. The king has also recently increased his outreach to francophone Africa, where Morocco has longstanding diplomatic, commercial, and security interests.⁵⁰ Prime Minister Benkirane has praised strong relations with the West, while also occasionally criticizing Western policies. Friction over Western Sahara has stymied Moroccan-Algerian relations, Moroccan relations with the African Union (Morocco is the only country in Africa not to be a member, having withdrawn in 1984 over recognition of Western Sahara), and regional economic and security cooperation. For example, the Arab Maghreb Union, which nominally comprises Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania, remains largely inactive. Morocco is completing a two-year rotation as a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council.

Algeria

Morocco and Algeria had different colonial experiences and emerged as rivals with distinctly different forms of government. Algeria achieved its independence via a bloody revolution and emerged as a republic with military or military-influenced governments. Morocco is a centuries-old monarchy that was more indirectly administered by France and made a relatively peaceful transition from French control. Shortly after Algeria's independence, the two countries fought a war over disputed border territories for about five months in 1963-1964. The border was not demarcated until 1972. It has been closed by Algeria since 1994, after Morocco imposed visa restrictions on Algerian nationals and blamed Algeria for a terrorist attack.

⁴⁸ In 2002, the U.N. Legal Counsel, in response to a query from the Security Council on the legality of contracts concluded by Morocco offshore Western Sahara, concluded that such activities are illegal "if conducted in disregard of the needs and interests of the people" of the "Non-Self-Governing Territory," that is, Western Sahara. This determination is not readily enforceable, but appears to have affected the calculations of private companies seeking to operate in the area. See U.N. doc. S/2002/161, *Letter dated 29 January 2002 from the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, addressed to the President of the Security Council*, February 12, 2002.

⁴⁹ See <http://autonomy-plan.org/>.

⁵⁰ See Haim Malka, "Morocco's Rediscovery of Africa," Center for Strategic & International Studies, July 2013.

The Western Sahara is a key element of bilateral tensions. Moroccan officials frequently indicate their belief that Algeria could solve the Western Sahara issue if it wanted, presumably by pressuring the Polisario, while Algeria argues it is not a party to a dispute that it characterizes as between two sovereign nations (Western Sahara and Morocco). Signs of a limited thaw between Morocco and Algeria emerged in 2011, as King Mohammed VI and Algeria's President Bouteflika stated a desire to improve relations and several economic agreements were signed. Some observers hope the two countries will work toward better economic and security relations while setting apart the Western Sahara issue. However, prospects for further concrete steps are uncertain, and rhetoric between the two capitals has returned to expressions of mutual distrust.

Europe

Morocco has close ties to the European Union (EU), although relations are occasionally troubled by issues of human rights and the Western Sahara. The EU provides considerable aid and has been strongly supportive of Morocco's political reforms; European leaders hope that Morocco's stability will be preserved amid regional upheaval. Morocco's Association Agreement with the EU came into force in 2000 and could lead to a free trade agreement. In February 2012, the EU parliament approved a new trade deal that expands the duty-free treatment of agricultural, food, and fisheries products on both sides. A lucrative fisheries agreement including the coastline of disputed Western Sahara was discontinued in 2011 due to some EU parliamentarians' objections to conditions in Western Sahara, as well as environmental and economic concerns. A new agreement was brokered in 2013 and awaits EU ratification. The EU also seeks Moroccan cooperation to stem illegal immigration and drug trafficking via Morocco to Europe.

Morocco traditionally has had close relations with France and Spain, its former colonizers and homes to sizable Moroccan immigrant populations. Relations with France—a major bilateral donor, trading partner, and source of foreign direct investment—are particularly close. Relations with Spain have been generally cooperative but occasionally discordant. Spain possesses two territorial enclaves on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, Ceuta and Melilla. These are vestiges of colonialism, are claimed by Morocco, and sometimes cause bilateral tensions—as do other territorial disputes and the Western Sahara issue. The neighbors also have an unresolved dispute concerning territorial waters between Morocco and the Spanish Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Still, territorial disputes, despite their drama, appear secondary to productive economic, security, and law enforcement cooperation.

Middle East

Morocco has positioned itself as a moderate Arab state, and has sought to play a role in addressing conflicts in the Middle East. In recent years, it has drawn closer to fellow Arab monarchies in the Gulf. In 2009, Morocco severed relations with Iran, accusing the Iranian embassy of seeking to spread Shi'a Islam in the 99% Sunni kingdom. In 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional grouping that includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, suggested 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. Analysts interpreted the GCC's offer, which was also extended to Jordan, as an effort (among several) to shore up the two poorer, non-Gulf monarchies amid political upheaval, shifting U.S. policy, and growing Iranian influence in the region. In December

2011, the GCC announced \$5 billion in aid funding for Morocco, in addition to investment projects funded by Gulf-based enterprises, although disbursements have reportedly been slow.⁵¹

The king supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He chairs the Al Quds (Jerusalem) Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which seeks to bolster Muslim claims to the city. The king recognized President Mahmoud Abbas as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people in Abbas's dispute with Hamas and has urged Palestinian national unity. Morocco closed Israel's liaison bureau in Morocco and Morocco's office in Tel Aviv during the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) in 2001. Morocco condemned Israel's treatment of Palestinian civilians during its December 2008/January 2009 military operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Moroccan political groups of all stripes held some of the largest rallies in the Arab world in protest. In November 2009, then-Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri said that normalization of relations with Israel was not on the table under current conditions and that Morocco continued to support the Arab Peace Initiative—which promised Israel full normalization of relations in exchange for its withdrawal from all Arab territories. Still, some 600,000 Israelis are of Moroccan origin, and thousands travel to Morocco yearly. While Morocco's domestic Jewish community has dwindled due to emigration, King Mohammed VI—unusually for the region—has sought to recognize the country's Jewish heritage.

U.S. Relations

The United States and Morocco have long-term, warm relations; Morocco's monarchy was one of the first governments to recognize the independence of the United States.⁵² Successive U.S. Administrations, of both political parties, have viewed Morocco as a steady and close ally and as a moderate Arab state that supports Arab-Israeli peace. Senior U.S. officials regularly emphasize close U.S.-Moroccan relations and characterize bilateral ties as a "strategic partnership." Amid widespread political upheaval in the region since early 2011, Moroccan officials have sought to portray the U.S. partnership with Morocco as a key tool for furthering U.S. policy interests, and have urged the United States to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship. One tool for doing so is the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue initiated in 2012.

Security ties have been strengthened by counterterrorism and military cooperation. In 2004, then-President George W. 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 in NATO's Operation Active Endeavor, monitoring the Mediterranean Sea for terrorists. Over 1,000 U.S. personnel participate annually in the flagship bilateral military exercise, African Lion, and smaller bilateral exercises are held regularly. Recent Moroccan purchases of U.S. defense materiel include 24 F-16 aircraft (which began delivery in 2011), 24 T-6 trainer aircraft (delivered in 2011-2012), 90 AGM-D Maverick air-to-ground missiles, refurbishment worth over \$1 billion for 200 Abrams M1A1 tanks acquired as a grant U.S. transfer, advanced AM 120-C7 air-to-air

⁵¹ Carolyn Barnett, "GCC-Maghreb Relations in a Changing Regional Order," CSIS, August 2013. King Mohammed VI has referred to "a strategic partnership" with the GCC, e.g., in his address to the nation on July 30, 2013.

⁵² Morocco and some U.S. officials state that Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States of America, in 1777. The State Department's Office of the Historian dates formal recognition to the two countries' treaty of peace and friendship in 1786 ("A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition [...] by Country, Since 1776: Morocco").

medium-range missiles systems, and M198 155 mm towed guns.⁵³ Sales of U.S.-made military radar systems and Sidewinder missiles were announced in 2011.

Trade ties are also a focus of bilateral relations. A free trade agreement (FTA) (P.L. 108-302, August 17, 2004) came into effect on January 1, 2006.⁵⁴ It has reportedly led to a quadrupling of bilateral trade and roughly a tripling of both the stock and annual flow of U.S. investment to Morocco.⁵⁵ However, the agreement has been controversial in Morocco, particularly among labor leaders, and Prime Minister Benkirane suggested in a 2012 address to the parliament that Morocco was not sufficiently benefitting from it. U.S. exports to Morocco in 2012 totaled over \$2.26 billion, while U.S. imports from Morocco totaled \$933 million.⁵⁶ In December 2012, the United States and Morocco signed new trade agreements under the FTA designed to stimulate additional commercial activity between the two countries and within North Africa.

U.S. Assistance

Table I. U.S. Bilateral Foreign Assistance to Morocco, Selected Accounts
Appropriations, current \$ thousands (State Department and USAID)

	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013 (requested)	FY2014 (requested)
ESF	0	3,000	2,281	0	0	20,896
FMF	3,655	9,000	8,982	8,000	8,000	7,000
IMET	1,916	1,789	1,989	1,898	1,710	1,710
INCLE	1,000	750	750	9,000 [of which 7,500 in OCO]	1,500	1,500
NADR	625	1,200	1,100	3,300	1,720	1,470
DA	18,000	19,546	19,039	19,039	19,676	0
Total	25,296	35,396	34,141	41,237	32,606	32,576

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

Notes: (1) FMF=Foreign Military Financing, ESF=Economic Support Funds, IMET=International Military Education and Training, INCLE=International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, NADR=Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Activities, DA=Development Assistance; OCO=Overseas Contingency Operations. (2) Table does not reflect assistance administered under regional programs, or by U.S. departments or agencies other than the State Department and USAID.

The United States provides aid to Morocco to help counter terrorism, advance democratization, alleviate poverty, and build trade capacity. The Obama Administration has requested \$32.6

⁵³ See Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), *Country Information Paper: Morocco*, July 2012. The sale of F-16s has drawn particular attention in the region, where Algeria—reportedly the biggest regional arms purchaser—reportedly maintains air superiority, although U.S. officials indicated the sale wouldn't alter the regional balance of military power. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Algeria and Morocco were the world's 6th and 12th largest arms importers, respectively, between 2008 and 2012.

⁵⁴ See CRS Report RS21464, *Morocco-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*, by Raymond J. Ahearn.

⁵⁵ State Department, *2013 Investment Climate Statement—Morocco*, February 2013.

⁵⁶ U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted September 2013.

million in bilateral State Department and USAID-administered foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2014, down from \$41.2 million provided in FY2012. The Administration requested \$32.6 million for FY2013; actual funding levels are not yet available. Aid proposed for FY2014 would focus on countering violent extremism; supporting political reform efforts; providing basic education; expanding employment opportunities; modernizing law enforcement; and enhancing military effectiveness, interoperability with the United States, and counterterrorism capabilities.⁵⁷

In addition to the funds cited above, Morocco has benefitted from regional aid programs, and from a recently completed five-year, \$697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact. It focused on fruit tree productivity, fisheries, artisan production, financial services, and private enterprises. The MCC board has designated Morocco as eligible to compete for a second compact. These include the U.S. Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an interagency regional initiative that works with ten states in North and West Africa. Morocco has also received technical aid for good governance through the Administration's Middle East and North Africa Transition Fund. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the State Department's regional democracy-promotion entity, administers some additional U.S. funds for women's empowerment, civil society, job growth, and legal reforms. The U.S. Department of Commerce has also organized trade missions to Morocco for U.S. companies. Morocco also benefits from assistance and concessional loans administered by international financial institutions (such as the IMF and World Bank) that receive significant U.S. funding support.

Morocco is one of the top five recipients of Excess Defense Articles (EDA) grants, and relies heavily on EDA for the procurement of trucks, tanks, and associated equipment. Morocco additionally benefits from a U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program with Utah, established in 2003. The State Department intends to provide training for Moroccan troops participating in peacekeeping missions through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI).⁵⁸

Recent Congressional Actions

Many Members of Congress are strongly supportive of the Moroccan government and its stance on Western Sahara, and many have expressed appreciation for King Mohammed VI's reform initiatives. At the same time, some Members have expressed concern over Morocco's handling of the Western Sahara issue, and/or over human rights and religious freedom problems.⁵⁹

Congressional concerns over these issues have sometimes been stated in foreign aid appropriations legislation. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74, Division I, Section 7041[g]), states that prior to the obligation of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funds for Morocco, "the Secretary of State shall submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations on steps being taken by the Government of Morocco to (1) respect the right of individuals to peacefully express their opinions regarding the status and future of the Western Sahara and to document violations of human rights; and (2) provide unimpeded access to human rights

⁵⁷ State Department, FY2014 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*.

⁵⁸ DSCA, *Morocco*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ In 2010, the congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held hearings on Morocco's expulsion of American Christians earlier that year. Representative Frank Wolf urged suspension of MCC funding "to a nation which blatantly disregards the rights of American citizens residing in Morocco and forcibly expels American citizens without due process of law." Hannah Armstrong, "Christians Expelled, Morocco and US Spar over Religious Freedom," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2010.

organizations, journalists, and representatives of foreign governments to the Western Sahara.” The State Department submitted such a report in September 2012. The committee report (S.Rept. 113-81) accompanying the Senate draft FY2014 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (S. 1372) directs the Secretary of State to update this report, “including on steps taken during the previous 12 months by the Government of Morocco to release political prisoners and support a human rights monitoring and reporting role for the U.N. Mission in Western Sahara.” It also “notes that Morocco is a strategic ally in North Africa where the United States has an interest in preventing terrorism and promoting democracy.”

Some Members have, conversely, recently sought to use foreign aid legislation to express support for Morocco’s position on Western Sahara. The conference report (H.Rept. 112-331) accompanying P.L. 112-74 stated that “funds provided in title III of this Act [Bilateral Economic Assistance] for Morocco may be used in regions and territories administered by Morocco.” It has been executive branch policy under successive Administrations that bilateral assistance for Morocco may not be implemented in Western Sahara because doing so could be interpreted as an acknowledgement of Moroccan sovereignty. This does not appear to have shifted in practice. H.R. 2855, the House draft foreign operations appropriations measure for FY2014, states that bilateral economic assistance funds appropriated for Morocco “shall be made available for any region or territory administered by Morocco, including the Western Sahara.” The bill would require the State Department to report on implementation of this provision; the committee report (H.Rept. 113-185) further instructs the Department to address “steps taken to resolve the longstanding dispute over the Western Sahara, based on autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, including efforts to address durable humanitarian solutions to the protracted refugee crisis in the camps near Tindouf, Algeria.”

Outlook

U.S.-Morocco relations are likely to remain strong, despite recent tensions over U.N. human rights monitoring in Western Sahara. This is particularly the case as Morocco and the United States share an interest in promoting stability and economic development amid ongoing regional tumult. At the same time, various other actors—domestic, regional, and international—will continue to compete with the United States for influence and leverage. Morocco’s role in counterterrorism and regional security is likely to remain of interest to Members of Congress, as is the bilateral trade and investment relationship. Some may focus on the degree to which U.S. policy toward Morocco includes the encouragement of human rights and greater democracy—and some may seek to identify benchmarks by which to judge the process of implementing Morocco’s 2011 constitutional revisions. The role and influence of Moroccan Islamist political parties and movements may also be of interest in the context of regional developments. Congress remains an arena of differing views and approaches regarding U.S. policy toward the Western Sahara.

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