Moving toward Democracy in Morocco?

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The Arabs, according to international surveys, have the greatest thirst for freedom and are the most appreciative of democracy out of all people in the world.

—Dr. Rima Khalaf
United Nations Assistant Secretary-General
Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States

[Arab] regimes have been too resistant to political change and [Arab] democracy movements too feeble to force it.

—Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*

Morocco's advantageous geographical location in large part defines its historical importance in world affairs.[1] Bordering the North Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, it has long been an important site for trade and commerce. Historically, commentators have regarded Morocco as the link between Africa and Europe, Islam and Christianity. Although such a simplistic dichotomy is no longer accurate—and, indeed, probably never was—Morocco remains a country of great cultural, social, and religious complexity, a fact that raises important questions regarding its future identity. Prof. Bradford Dillman asks,

> As Morocco redefines its place in the world in the new millennium, will it lean more toward Europe, weakening its roots in the Arab world and disassociating itself from the troubles of sub-Saharan Africa? Globalization will pull the country toward its liberal, industrialized neighbors across the Strait of Gibraltar. Nevertheless, this kingdom at the crossroads of many civilizations will continue to orient itself in many directions at the same time. Its future identity will depend on how politicians and citizens respond to global pressures for democratization, economic reform, and human resource development.[2]

As Dillman suggests, Morocco remains at the crossroads of European, Arab, and African policies, traditions, and thought. Given its almost entirely Muslim population, the country has a strongly Islamic identity.[3] Still, European colonialism and a distinct North African culture exert a strong and diverse cultural and social influence on that identity. The influence of the Berbers remains particularly strong, insofar as they account for about 35 percent of the Moroccan population.[4] In addition, the linguistic and cultural influence of the Berbers on Moroccan society—especially through music and dance—is well known.[5]

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Morocco serves not only as an important cultural link but also as a significant political and economic link between Africa and Europe. In addition to its role as an African-European crossroad, Morocco enjoys a reputation as a moderate Islamic state. Perhaps as a result, it also has a close relationship with the United States, both as a political ally and as a trading partner. Politically, Morocco was the first Arab and Islamic state to condemn the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States.[6] As trading partners, Morocco and the United States exchanged approximately $860 million worth of goods and services in 2003, before the countries signed a free trade agreement on 15 June 2004.[7] In a press release pertaining to this agreement, US congressional representative Bill Thomas stated that "Morocco is an important U.S. ally, and this agreement will enhance the economic component of that relationship and support Moroccan economic reforms."[8]

This article assesses the likelihood of Morocco's transition from a monarchy to a democratic state. Toward that end, it discusses recent liberal reforms and the threat of terrorism within Morocco as well as political and social changes that resulted from actions of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) and from reforms to the Moudawana (Code of Personal Status). Moreover, the article examines the historical context of the Algerian scenario, inquiring whether Morocco might experience its own version of this scenario and whether the results of the 2007 Moroccan parliamentary elections demonstrate a deepening rift between the monarchy and the Moroccan people. Finally, it addresses the mixed results that King Mohammed VI's liberal reforms have had on Morocco's political and social discourse, as well as the importance of internally rather than externally imposed reform.

Moving toward Democracy?

> Yet it is already clear that governments in the Middle East will have to cultivate compromise—now, or very soon—to survive in any form. Initiating action on three controversial issues—political prisoners, women's rights, and political Islam—can start the process. Cooperation will signal intent to change. It will require ceding some political power. And it will redefine the social contract between ruler and ruled. . . .
>
> Morocco is the only country that has attempted action on all three.[9]

Liberalizing Morocco's Government

Currently, Morocco is a constitutional monarchy, but it could realistically change to a democratic government and society. The timeframe for such a transition remains less clear.[10] King Mohammed VI, who assumed the Moroccan throne in 1999, wasted little time launching a "relatively ambitious program of political and social reforms," including the establishment of the IER.[11]

Since assuming the throne, King Mohammed VI has made several important reforms designed to liberalize Morocco, the two most important institutional actions being creation of the IER and changes to the Moudawana. Mohammed VI created the IER to investigate and research violations of human rights in Morocco from 1956, when the country gained independence from France and Spain, until 1999, when King Hassan II died and Mohammed VI assumed power.[12] The IER primarily addressed violations that occurred within the *Zaman al-Rusas* (Years of Lead), a period of civil unrest, political violence, and severe government repression beginning in the 1960s and

ending in the 1980s.[13] Any attempt to improve women's rights in Morocco would necessarily require a change to the Moudawana, the set of laws that deal with personal status, family, and inheritance.[14] These two institutional reforms are essential to Morocco's potential transition to a democratic state because they address past abuses of human rights and matters of state repression, thus allowing for reconciliation and the establishment of trust in state authorities. Moreover, they lend legitimacy to women's participation in the country's social, civil, and political life.

In Morocco, recent interaction between the state and society has led to improved human rights and fewer restrictions on women. No assessment of these improvements should underestimate the actions of Mohammed VI, who, after gaining the throne, made bold moves to improve human rights, such as asking longtime political dissident Driss Benzekri to lead the IER.[15] Although creation of the IER largely moved from the state to society, changes to the Moudawana moved largely from society to the state. Grassroots women's rights organizations and social activists successfully brought women's rights to mainstream social and political thought by deftly maneuvering around religious obstacles, arguing that increased women's rights accord with Islamic principles.

Currently, Morocco's potential transition to democracy depends almost entirely on King Mohammed VI since no political opposition can significantly challenge the monarchy's authority or threaten its power. Democratic transition will take place on the king's terms. If the monarchy continues, a ruler less inclined to Mohammed VI's liberal reforms could obviously undo these changes although he would likely encounter strong opposition. In addition, commentators criticize the IER and Moudawana reforms for failing to push far or hard enough for change. Perhaps more importantly, some commentators argue that these are reforms in name only, alleging that political and social conditions within Morocco have not changed appreciably and that the rhetoric of reform takes precedence over the substance of reform.

The Threat of Terrorism

Many observers have stressed the challenge that terrorism presents to democracy, particularly within the Middle East.[16] Arguably, Nafia Noureddine, founder of *Jamaa Islamiya Moukatila Maghrebia* (the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group, or GICM), represents one unlikely example of Morocco's successful reform.[17] GICM has a strong affiliation with al-Qaeda, having received both military training and financial support from Osama bin Laden.[18] The United Nations (UN), United States, and United Kingdom consider GICM a dangerous terrorist organization. On 10 October 2002, the UN issued a worldwide ban on the group pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1267.[19] That same year, the US Department of State designated GICM a foreign terrorist organization.[20] Similarly, under the United Kingdom's Terrorism Act of 2000, GICM membership may result in a 10-year prison sentence.[21]

Authorities blamed GICM for bombings in Casablanca in 2003 that targeted a Jewish community center, a Spanish restaurant and social club, a hotel, and the Belgian consulate, killing at least 41 people and injuring about 100 more, and for railway bombings in Madrid on 11 March 2004 that killed 191 people and wounded another 1,841.[22] The events that occurred after these tragic reminders of the destructive power of terrorism illus-

trate several encouraging aspects of Moroccan society. First, the fact that Noureddine stood trial, was convicted, and is serving a 20-year prison sentence in Morocco for his involvement in the Casablanca bombings shows that Morocco is a secure state with a working judiciary.[23] Working with Moroccan officials, the Algerian authorities did not simply capture and kill Noureddine. Likewise, Tamara Wittes characterizes Morocco's domestic security services as "efficient," perhaps because they are "flush with U.S. funding and training."[24] Importantly, Morocco's security does not come at such a high price that it threatens civil society. Despite the devastation of the Casablanca bombings, Moroccan citizens resumed normal life relatively soon.

Second, immediately following the Casablanca bombings, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said that Morocco "stands out in the Arab world as a country that is making significant strides towards democracy and I think the terrorists are opposed to progress."[25] Even though his statement is somewhat self-serving, given the Bush administration's reliance on Morocco in its "war on terror," it demonstrates a different expectation for Morocco than for other Arab states. As Wolfowitz suggests, Morocco "stands out" as an exception to the norm in the Middle East. The United States, or at least the Bush administration, expected a democratic transition to occur in Morocco. Terrorists, Wolfowitz asserts, also perceive this possibility and understand the threat that it poses to their organizations, both in Morocco and, perhaps, regionally. If other Arab states follow Morocco's lead, the terrorists may react accordingly.

Third, when Noureddine could not develop his terrorist organization in Morocco, he had to travel to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in 2001 and appeal to bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri for military and material support.[26] Although Noureddine succeeded in bringing substantial violence to Morocco and Spain, the fact that he could not plan and finance these attacks within Morocco is significant. The execution of terrorist attacks, prepared for and financed far from their target, is and will continue to be a threat to democracy and state security in the twenty-first century. Well-coordinated and mobilized terrorist networks and activities are highly problematic to democracy and state security. This is true, however, for all governments and all states, not just Morocco. More importantly, Noureddine's inability to find support within Morocco suggests both a rejection of GICM's philosophy and of terrorism as means of undermining civil society and political participation.

Equity and Reconciliation Commission

In contrast to combating the violence that GICM, a nonstate actor, unleashed on Casablanca and Madrid, the IER sought to reconcile the Moroccan people with the violence that their government brought upon them between independence in 1956 and the end of King Hassan II's rule in 1999: "What is needed to turn states of a despotic whim into genuine nations of law? In Morocco, many reformers believe, an essential first step is an open reckoning with the abuses that this system spawned in the past. That effort shows the profound limits that real change faces even among Arab nations that have taken tangible steps toward political openness."[27] When the IER attempted to answer this profound political question, its members directly (and Moroccan citizens indirectly) experienced successes, set-

backs, and limitations as the commission moved from an ambitious beginning to a qualified, if not disappointing, conclusion.

Perhaps the most important step in establishing the rule of law and a democratic government within a formerly nondemocratic state is the recognition of past injustices. Without such recognition, finding reconciliation and establishing social trust between the state and its citizens become highly unlikely. The acknowledgment of past injustices—in this case, those perpetrated by his father and grandfather—motivated King Mohammed VI to create the IER. During a speech to commemorate the commission's opening in January 2004, he declared, "Our objective is to ensure that Moroccans reconcile themselves with their history."[28]

Mohammed VI modeled the IER after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which addressed atrocities that occurred during apartheid.[29] Headed by former political prisoner Benzekri and 16 other such former prisoners or human rights activists, the IER investigated over 20,000 cases of human rights abuses.[30] Benzekri, whose appointment gave the commission credibility, clearly supported King Mohammed VI's objective of reconciliation: "To create a democratic society, people have to know the truth and their history. . . . The report marked a fundamental rupture with Morocco's past."[31] The benefits of the IER remain contested, but nearly all commentators agree on its importance as the first truth commission in North Africa or the Middle East: "No Arab government had ever confessed to widespread abuses, much less tried to investigate the past or reconcile with its victims."[32]

Interestingly, King Mohammed VI's support was perhaps both the greatest advantage and disadvantage to the IER. The commission would not exist without the king's approval and support since his royal mandate allows it to act effectively: "Royal support means that public institutions and security forces are obliged to comply with all requests for information and assistance."[33] Accordingly, the commission received many, though presumably not all, of the answers to its questions: "To date, there has not been a single occasion when the IER has asked for information, that it has not received. The military and the police have been totally cooperative."[34]

Total cooperation seems unlikely, given the numerous criticisms of the commission, including its limited dissemination of state knowledge—probably the most damaging criticism. Without a complete commitment to establishing and telling the historical truth, it is very unlikely that reconciliation will occur. Indeed, as the commission's work progressed, Moroccans appeared to resign themselves to focusing on future prevention rather than past reconciliation: "Moroccans recognize that the past will not get a full airing. . . . 'Instead, we need guarantees that it won't happen in the future.' "[35] Attorney Mohammed Sebbar, who now heads the Forum for Justice and Truth, is less optimistic: "What we got is the truth decided and provided by the state."[36]

Even though a full disclosure of past wrongs almost certainly did not occur, the commission had its beneficial aspects, social catharsis perhaps the most significant of them. Indeed some commentators argue that the state broadcast of the initial IER hearings on national television created a historical moment in which Moroccans attempted to move forward, letting go of the past.[37] Still, "despite its difficult nature, few doubt the cathartic benefits of airing grievances in such a public manner. However, some human rights organizations accuse the IER of stopping short of justice for its victims."[38] Certainly, hu-

man rights organizations should criticize the IER, but one could argue that, despite the failure to bring justice to each victim, the larger social cathartic function of these public hearings somewhat mitigates the shortcomings of individual justice. It is also important to note that in any post-conflict state or democratic transition that involved large-scale human rights abuses, some victims never receive the justice they seek. Although unfortunate, this reality suggests that some justice is better than none.

In any case, the IER suffers from additional shortcomings. For example, not only were former detainees unable to state the names of those responsible for their torture but also the commission lacked the power to prosecute the perpetrators.[39] However, it did not grant amnesty to them, unlike the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Thus, in theory at least, victims or their families could prosecute the perpetrators in court.[40]

The much more damaging criticism occurred after the IER made its final report to King Mohammed VI. Following the bombings in Casablanca, human rights activists alleged that unlawful detention and torture continued: "The IER is looking at violations up until 1999 but violations are still continuing; the security forces have been taking Islamists to the detention center in Temara and torturing them. It is all continuing."[41] There is perhaps no better way to invalidate a reconciliation commission than to resume the illegal practices and human rights abuses that prompted its creation in the first place. Unfortunately, according to various human rights organizations and social activists, this is exactly what happened.

Reparations also presented mixed results. Unlike the IER, financial reparations mark a carryover from King Hassan II's rule. In 1990 Hassan II created the Consultative Council on Human Rights to resolve human rights abuses.[42] After his predecessor's death, King Mohammed VI created an arbitration board through the consultative council that distributed more than $100 million for nearly 4,000 cases of such abuses.[43] Even though this substantial financial compensation seemed a sincere commitment to improving human rights, "the Independent Arbitration Panel in particular set an extremely short deadline for applications, cutting off thousands of people, and paid monetary damages to victims or their families without any concern for reconciliation."[44] In comparison, about 13,000 victims were to receive financial reparations through the IER, which also used a relatively short deadline but did emphasize reconciliation.[45]

Perhaps more than anything, the commission reflects a missed or half-grasped opportunity for Morocco. Certainly, it improved human rights as well as political and social discourse within Morocco: "Activists describe the gradual evaporation of the climate of fear as perhaps the biggest shift in Morocco."[46] Despite these changes for the better, reforms could have pushed further and involved less compromise had the Moroccan government been more forthcoming with state knowledge and more resistant to returning to repressive measures following the Casablanca bombings.

In 2005 Charles Kenney and Dean Spears found a significant statistical relationship between truth commissions and lasting democracy: "This study finds that there is evidence for lasting positive effects of truth commissions on [all] levels of democracy."[47] Despite the fact that the study applies only to South America and that the statistical significance, though valid, is small, its findings are encouraging for Morocco. In fact, the authors conclude with a note of careful optimism: "If the statistical effects of truth commissions

are positive but fragile it is perhaps because the real effects of truth commissions on democracy are positive but fragile—significant but operating among many other factors mediated by variable contexts. This would encourage optimistic but realistic hopes for the impact of truth commissions on democracy."[48]

Given Morocco's compromised truth and reconciliation commission and the resumption of human rights abuses as soon as the state faced a security crisis, the first Arab truth and reconciliation commission did not completely meet the initially optimistic expectations. Still, simply having a legitimate, if not ideal, reconciliation commission represents a significant step toward liberal reform and possible democratic transition within Morocco and perhaps the region.

Reforming the Moudawana

The IER received substantial international attention, but "of the changes carried out by Mohammed, perhaps the most significant is the family law code [Moudawana]."[49] King Mohammed VI did not make these changes by himself. As Robin Wright points out, numerous women and some men of diverse backgrounds campaigned, protested, and lobbied for generations to change the Moudawana.[50] Women had a greater stake in this issue, as illustrated by the social and political movements: "Women's organizations in particular played a key role not only in generating support for the reformed *Mudawwana*, but also in lobbying for changes in the nationality law (so that women could transmit citizenship to their children) and a gender quota for women in parliament."[51] Wittes recognizes the significance of reforming the Moudawana, stating that the recent changes have "vastly improved the legal status of women."[52]

Before the Moudawana underwent reform, women remained minors throughout their entire lifetimes. This code of laws effectively classified women as second-class citizens—always subject to the control of men. Even a woman's son was her legal guardian.[53] Wright argues that the Moudawana "relegated females to haremlike status" and that it has been the "biggest legal impediment to empowering women."[54]

Significant changes to the Moudawana include increased women's rights in marriage, divorce, and citizenship, as well as in child custody and inheritance.[55] Political parties also agreed to reserve spots on a special national parliamentary ballot for women.[56] The reforms allow women both greater personal and political rights. Problems remain, but the improvement is quite significant: "Despite continuing problems of implementation—such as untrained judges and a lack of information among women about their rights—the scope of the reform is considerable and puts Morocco well ahead of other countries in the region on the issue of women's rights."[57]

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Moudawana reform involved political Islamic groups' promotion of democratic change and the near-universal approval they received for doing so—particularly from the United States and Europe. US and European leaders and policy makers would do well to remember the ability of these groups to promote liberal reform and democratic change. Unfortunately, as the next part of this article demonstrates, these leaders and policy makers seldom do.

The Algerian Scenario

The "Algerian scenario" refers to Algeria's failed attempt to democratize its government in the early 1990s. Fearing a

democratically elected Islamist government, Algerian authorities halted the country's democratic transition, resulting in a brutal civil conflict that claimed more than 150,000 lives. Autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa consistently return to this scenario and remind oil-hungry industrialized countries of this possible outcome, lest these states push too hard for meaningful democratic reform. Although a true Algerian scenario has never occurred, and the logic of this scenario remains dubious, the scenario has nonetheless prevailed as an effective tool for autocratic regimes to retain power.

Historical Context

In 1989 Algeria suffered from an unprecedented economic crisis, which, combined with basic shortcomings in governance, threatened the ruling regime's existence.[58] Seeking to regain political legitimacy, the Algerian government opened the political system to virtually unhampered democratic reform.[59] The result confounded the expectations of Algeria's ruling elite. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) utilized the democratic process to win broad support from the largely dissatisfied Algerian population.[60] In 1991, after a successful first round of legislative elections, the FIS stood ready to claim a landslide victory of the state's electorate.[61] The second election never took place due to the Algerian Army's intervention.[62]

Following that intervention, the besieged Algerian government reinstalled authoritarian rule, banning FIS and imprisoning many of its members.[63] Rather than accept this defeat, the remaining members of FIS took arms against the Algerian government. The war that followed claimed more than 150,000 casualties and "was characterized by unspeakable brutality."[64] From this conflict, autocratic Arab states and oil-conscious Western states learned that unleashing democracy within the Middle East and North Africa would not produce desirable political results: "The Algerian failure at democratization and its descent into civil war provided a number of lessons for political actors outside the country and later came to be known as the 'Algerian scenario'—a scenario which was to be avoided at all costs."[65]

Ruling autocratic regimes now argue that allowing truly open political systems will backfire and that unfettered democracy will allow fundamentalists with no real interest in democracy to seize power, doing so, ironically, by winning an election. As a result, typically repressive states that oppose Islamist groups—those endorsing political Islam—simply eliminate or marginalize them within political discourse. Thus, the proclaimed fear of another Algerian scenario allows autocratic states to repress Islamist groups. Numerous contemporary scholars, such as Francesco Cavatorta, have strongly criticized this scenario:

> Twenty years ago, Algeria attempted to democratise and it failed to consolidate its progress because an Islamist party was going to be the main beneficiary of regime change. Secular sectors of the domestic polity and the international community sanctioned a "democracy-saving" military coup. The outcome of the Army's intervention has been a brutal civil war and a legacy of authoritarian rule where the socio-economic and cultural situation that gave rise to the FIS is still very much alive.[66]

Strikingly, the Algerian scenario remains a powerful political lesson to many Arabs and Westerners even though the scenario has *never* occurred. Further, despite the numerous theoretical flaws and questionable assumptions inherent in this political conceptualization, autocratic Arab governments continue to justify their rule

and nondemocratic policies by appealing to the Algerian scenario.

The uncritical acceptance of this scenario hinders true democratic reform. First, accepting it allows for simple dismissal of all Islamist groups, including those with liberal and democratic beliefs, thus collapsing the ideologies of violent militants with the peaceful ideologies of democratically minded reformists. Second, Islamist groups will not simply disappear; eventually, they must be included in political discourse and policy discussions. It is a mistake to marginalize these groups now.

Wittes argues forcefully that the Bush administration made this very mistake: "The Bush administration's failure to overcome the legacy of Algeria and to develop a more sophisticated relationship with the region's varied Islamist movements severely hampered the effectiveness and indeed the basic credibility of its democracy push."[67] This article returns to this point during its discussion of the necessity of internal liberal reform versus externally imposed reform in "The Importance of Internal Reform," below. It is reasonable, however, to assume that the Bush administration applied a version of the Algerian scenario when it decided to invade Iraq in 2003. Many commentators argue that, despite initially displaying signs of avoiding this scenario, the Obama administration is currently repeating this mistake. Tariq Ali is particularly critical, characterizing Obama's foreign policy as "imperialism with a human face."[68]

Will Morocco Experience an Algerian Scenario?

Despite King Mohammed VI's liberal reforms, recent developments suggest that the Moroccan people are ready for democracy. Political participation in Morocco is declining, largely due to the perception that politics are ultimately what the king wishes, thus making participation a meaningless gesture. In this sense, liberal reform within a constitutional monarchy may have reached its limit. Whether this impasse means that Morocco will endure its own Algerian scenario remains to be seen.

After assuming the throne, Mohammed VI significantly increased the avenues of political participation, including loosening the state's control of the press and opening registration for political parties.[69] Recent restrictions on the press and the intimidation of journalists suggest that these actions might not be permanent. Moreover, such restrictions and intimidation undermine the already limited ability of Moroccan citizens to voice meaningful political and social criticism, inviting comparisons to the Algerian scenario.

Wittes argues that within Arab states, political debate often dissolves into polarized rhetoric between autocratic governments and political Islamist groups because of the built-in advantage that the latter enjoy.[70] The fact that Islamist groups can voice political dissent within the mosque affords them both a guaranteed audience and a relatively secure venue to speak. Secular groups, who do not enjoy these advantages, can be more closely monitored and more easily restricted. For example, autocratic states may successfully restrict secular political dissent by closing the organization's press or simply by banning the organization or its activities. In contrast, autocratic governments have only limited ability to control dissent within the mosque, thereby allowing Islamist groups to occupy a "privileged position" within political and social discourse.[71] Furthermore, the monopolization of political dissent allows Islamism to stand as a "catchall category for political dissent."[72] Islamist groups do not need to create a meaningful political message.

Instead, Islamism becomes an undifferentiated resistance to often unpopular autocratic governments.

Although it is not possible to disregard King Mohammed VI's recent restrictions on the press, some social factors suggest that Morocco might avoid the Algerian problem. *Al-'Adl wa al-Ihsan* (Justice and Benevolence), the leading Islamist social movement in Morocco, refuses to participate in elections but maintains a large popular following.[73] In contrast to the leaders of Islamist organizations in other Arab states, those of *Al-'Adl wa al-Ihsan* advocate a very moderate version of Islam, as well as inclusive democratic participation: "Leaders of the current Moroccan religious movement, *al-'Adl wa al-Ihsan* . . . discard an exclusive understanding of Islam, rely on interpretation and historicizing, and acknowledge flexibility and ambiguity; they reject imposing Shari'a laws or the wearing of the *hijab* and endorse human rights, pluralism, democracy, and separation of powers" (italics in original).[74] The liberal views of the most popular Islamist group within Morocco suggest that the usual polarization between autocratic state and political Islamist organization will not occur in that country. Granted, the motivations and goals of both states and social organizations change—sometimes rapidly—and the unlikelihood of a confrontation between the monarchy and Islamist organizations does not mean that one will not occur.

Further complicating the predication of a Moroccan version of the Algerian scenario is Morocco's contradictory and volatile past. During King Hassan II's rule from 1961 to 1999, the country experienced severe repression and political violence, including political killings, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture, the operation of secret prisons, the shutdown of newspapers, and the banning of books.[75] During the 1980s, labor movements experienced numerous political successes in Morocco despite severe state repression.[76] For instance, Moroccan labor unions successfully delayed implementation of the International Monetary Fund's recommended structural adjustment programs by creating widespread popular resistance to them.[77] Finally, due to its complex social, cultural, and political past, Morocco defies expectations of conflict: "Morocco also has a history of peaceful pluralism so firm that the population still includes several thousand Jews, who enjoy genuine freedom of worship and close ties to Israel."[78]

The 2007 Moroccan Parliamentary Elections

In large part, the restrictions on the press and intimidation of journalists discussed above occurred leading up to and during the 2007 Moroccan parliamentary elections.[79] The political protest and dissent surrounding those elections suggest not only a growing rift between the government and the Moroccan people but also a strong link between restricting free speech and a general decline in political participation.

This link might be symptomatic of a larger underlying problem within Moroccan society. One of the most troubling aspects of Morocco's current political situation is that the monarchy overshadows Parliament to the point that political participation becomes a substantially marginalized activity. Regardless of Parliament's actions or the people's will expressed through parliamentary voting, the king still makes the final decision.[80]

The fact that only 37 percent of registered voters took part in the 2007 parliamentary elections suggests that Moroccans are growing tired of this political situation.[81] Further, of those voters, nearly one-fifth intentionally invalidated their ballots

in political protest, including writing anti-monarchy statements on the ballots.[82]

Wittes is especially critical of King Mohammed VI's government regarding the parliamentary elections, suggesting that the political protest indicates the monarchy's limited ability both to retain social and political control and to liberalize Moroccan society: "This act of political protest suggests that limited liberalization, even in the best of circumstances, has a limited life span with frustrated citizens."[83] Moreover, she links the failure of free speech to the failure of meaningful political debate: "If the king is ever to be expected to acknowledge the need for reforms meaningful enough to engage citizen participation in politics, the quality of public discussion must improve—and press freedom will be essential to that process."[84] Wittes's analysis suggests that the Moroccan people may be closer to demanding democracy than many commentators think. Whether such a demand for democracy would cause King Mohammed VI to invoke the Algerian scenario remains unknown.

Mixed Results

Assessing King Mohammed's liberal reforms provides both cause for concern and cause for optimism. Of course, Morocco remains a monarchy and likely will remain as such for some time. Although he does not provide his citizens with democracy, King Mohammed has a commitment to civil and social reform that remains noteworthy and important. Moreover, the relative success of these liberal reforms affirms the necessity of internal reform, as opposed to externally imposed reform. Indeed, Moroccans enjoy expanded civil and social rights due to top-down and bottom-up reform from within Morocco, not externally imposed reform from beyond its borders.

Taking the Good with the Bad

Despite the encouraging actions that Mohammed VI has taken in moving Morocco toward becoming a liberal state, it remains a constitutional monarchy and in all likelihood will remain one in the future—an unsurprising conclusion, given Morocco's long history as a monarchy.[85] Moreover, the king shows no signs of relinquishing power: "King Mohammed, who is 42 [now 47], is seen as far more concerned with humanitarian issues [than King Hassan II], yet not once since assuming the throne in 1999 has he ever suggested diluting his role."[86] Even though Morocco's transition to a democratic state remains unlikely in the short term, the reforms made by King Mohammed VI should not be overlooked. Morocco remains a relatively free and secure society, if not a democratic one.

The importance of Mohammed VI's civil and political reforms perhaps becomes more evident when one examines the civil and political societies of Morocco's Arab neighbors—Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.[87] In 2007 the US Department of State concluded that

> Morocco implemented significant measures during the year which resulted in the advancement of human rights, including the government's revision of the Nationality Code to permit Muslim women to transmit citizenship to children and its publishing of domestic violence statistics. In September an overall civic commitment to developing a culture of human rights was reflected in parliamentary elections which were monitored by domestic and international groups.[88]

Interestingly, the Department of State's characterization of the 2007 parliamentary elections differs strikingly from Wittes's stinging critique. Perhaps the key point is that Morocco likely will remain a monarchy for at least the near future, but King Mohammed VI's commitment to human rights is laudable, if not ideal. Criti-

cism is certainly appropriate, but it is too early to label King Mohammed VI's Morocco either a success or a failure.

The Importance of Internal Reform

Although the limitations to implementing democracy in Morocco's constitutional monarchy are readily apparent, one must remember that the successful civil and political reforms of King Mohammed VI and his government came from within Morocco. Top-down institutional changes implemented by the king—combined with bottom-up calls for reform by various Moroccan social and political activists, intellectuals, and commentators, as well as a diverse network of nongovernmental organizations—created meaningful liberal reform.

Morocco provides an important, if sometimes ignored, lesson for implementing such reform in the Middle East and North Africa. Meaningful reform must come from within the state. Externally imposed reforms, democratic or otherwise, that lack legitimacy fail to garner the support of the people that the reforms intend to help. Even the best-intentioned externally imposed reforms cannot offset this lack of legitimacy and public credibility.

Contemporary Iraq represents perhaps the starkest reminder of the failure to implement external democratic reform on an Arab state. Tom Hayden terms this failed policy "democracy at gunpoint."[89] Similarly, Asef Bayat refers to the external imposition of democracy on Iraq as "democracy by conquest."[90] Bayat notes that foreign intervention in the name of democratic change not only has failed as an effective policy but also has often proved counterproductive: "If anything, foreign intervention in the Middle East has historically worked against, and not for, democratic governance."[91] He also observes that this phenomenon is not limited to the Middle East—that imposed democracies also have failed in the Philippines and Korea.[92]

Among the numerous ways to demonstrate the failure of the Bush administration's plan to democratize Iraq following the removal of Saddam Hussein, the most obvious is the number of civilian casualties resulting from that effort—currently (as of June 2010) between 96,813 and 105,563.[93] Moreover, many people doubt that a secure, democratic Iraq will arise or endure in the future. Instead, Wright argues that since the beginning of the war there in 2003, terrorism has become a greater threat, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has increased, Iraq has become less stable, the war appears unwinnable, and regional sectarian violence threatens to undermine the stability of other Middle Eastern states.[94] In addition, she maintains that US influence is at its lowest point in the region since immediately following World War II.[95] Finally, she declares that the Bush administration's failed attempt to implement democracy in Iraq has greatly reduced legitimate grassroots democracy's chance to take root: "The complete failure in Iraq . . . will only keep other regimes in power longer."[96] Obviously, some of Wright's criticisms seem tempered by recent developments in Iraq, especially after President Bush's largely successful troop surge in 2007 and the still inconclusive national elections of 2010. Moreover, the Obama administration's decision to shift the focus of US foreign policy to Afghanistan also complicates this assessment. The situation in Iraq is not nearly as stark as it was in 2007, but no one can say whether democracy will take root and flourish.

Conclusion

True to its history, Morocco continues to present complex social and political questions that evade simple resolution. Morocco is and likely will remain a constitutional monarchy. Still, significant areas of social and political freedom exist within the monarchy. Islamism, a social and political force often criticized for supposedly working against liberal reform and the implementation of democratic government, is moderate and encouraging of recent liberal reforms in Morocco. Indeed, according to Wittes, "If Islamism and democracy can ever be proved compatible, it might well be in Morocco."[97] Morocco does seem to rest at a crossroads, poised to transition into a democratic state or to backslide into a repressive autocratic state. Perhaps because of its improved record in human rights and relatively successful civil and political reforms, Morocco stands out from other Arab states in another respect. Specifically, Moroccans generally approve of their government, albeit with some severe reservations—as the political dissent over the 2007 parliamentary elections demonstrated. Accordingly, they face a difficult decision.

A strong and immediate push toward full-fledged democracy may not be likely, but maintaining the status quo also seems unlikely. Of course, this situation might change rapidly. King Mohammed VI is a respected leader working to reform Morocco's civil and political societies and expand human rights, but he will not always be king. Obviously, this is the fundamental problem of any monarchical system of governance—no matter the popularity, success, or political acumen of the current ruler, a less popular, less successful, or less gifted leader may always follow. Thus, King Mohammed VI would be well advised to institutionalize the positive reforms that he has made.

Other commentators take a more critical position: "Ultimately, despite its progress, Moroccan democracy remains a shadow game: democratic institutions have little substantive authority, and citizens' preferences, as expressed at the ballot box, rarely have much effect on government policy."[98] In this sense, Morocco remains a government of the king's sovereign voice rather than a government of "We the People." ❑

Notes

1. "Morocco's strategic location has shaped its history." See "Background Note: Morocco," US Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 26 January 2010, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm.

2. Bradford Dillman, "Morocco's Future: Arab, African, or European?" *Friends of Morocco Newsletter*, July 2001, http://friendsofmorocco.org/2001News/July01/MoroccoFuture.htm.

3. "Background Note: Morocco."

4. James Stuart Olson, *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 90–91.

5. See Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Contested Identities: Berbers, 'Berberism,' and the State in North Africa," in *Middle Eastern Minorities and Diasporas*, ed. Moshe Ma'oz and Gabriel Sheffer (Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 153; and "The Berbers," *An Open Door to the Arab World*, 12 January 2010, http://www.al-bab.com/arab/background/berber.htm.

6. "Background Note: Morocco."

7. House, *Implementation of the United States–Morocco Free Trade Agreement, Hearing before the Committee on Ways and Means*, 108th Cong., 2d sess., 7 July 2004, http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS64776.

8. "[Cong. Bill] Thomas Announces Hearing on Implementation of the United States–Morocco Free Trade Agreement," press release, US House Committee

on Ways and Means, 25 June 2004, http://ftp.resource.org/gpo.gov/hearings/108h/99669.txt.

9. Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 341.

10. Statement of Driss Benzekri, former Moroccan political prisoner and president of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission: " 'There is a decision in Morocco to go ahead with democratization and reform, including separation of powers, but we are still debating a time frame and how to go about it.' " Ibid., 350.

11. Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 72–73; and Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 343.

12. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 343.

13. Ibid., 342.

14. Ibid., 366–67.

15. Ibid., 344.

16. See Gérard Soulier, "Terrorism*," in *The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights: International Protection versus National Restrictions*, ed. Mireille Delmas-Marty, trans. and ed. Christine Chodkiewicz (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1992), 15.

17. Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 279.

18. Ibid.

19. Security Council Resolution 1267, UN Doc. S/RES/1267 (15 October 1999); and Security Council Committee Established pursuant to Resolution 1267 (1999) Concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and Associated Individuals and Entities, *The Consolidated List Established and Maintained by the 1267 Committee with Respect to Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban and Other Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Associated with Them*, 4 June 2010, http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/consolist.shtml.

20. US Department of State, "Determination Pursuant to Section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224 Relating to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM)," *Federal Register* 67, no. 242 (12 December 2002): 77, 311, http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2002/12/fr121702.html; and US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rpt/fto/ (accessed 14 June 2010).

21. "The traditional primary objective of the GICM has been the installation of a governing system of the caliphate to replace the governing Moroccan monarchy. The group also has an Al Qai'da–inspired global extremist agenda." See "Proscribed Terrorist Groups," *Home Office*, http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/proscribed-terror-groups/proscribed-groups?view=Binary. See also Terrorism Act, 2000, chap. 3, sec. 11 (United Kingdom), http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000011_en_2#pt2-pb2-l1g11.

22. "Terror Blasts Rock Casablanca," *BBC News*, 17 May 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3035803.stm; and "Spain Names 'Bomb Suspect' Group," *BBC News*, 30 March 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3583113.stm. According to Angel Acebes, Spanish interior minster, "Our investigation is focusing on two strands: determining the leaders of the organisation and links to terrorist and fundamentalist groups, particularly the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group." "Spain Names 'Bomb Suspect' Group." See also "Madrid Train Attacks," *BBC News*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/guides/457000/457031/html/default.stm.

23. "French Court Convicts 8 of Helping 2003 Casablanca Suicide Bombers," *International Herald Tribune*, 11 July 2007.

24. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 73.

25. "Terror Blasts Rock Casablanca."

26. Bergen, *Osama bin Laden I Know*, 279.

27. Neil MacFarquhar, "In Morocco, a Rights Movement, at the King's Pace," *New York Times*, 1 October 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/01/international/africa/01morocco.html?pagewanted=print.

28. Maryam Montague, "Morocco's Truth Revealed, and the Possibility of Reconciliation," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 59, 60.

29. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 343.

30. Ibid., 344.

31. Ibid., 346.

32. Ibid., 344. See also MacFarquhar, "In Morocco": "The commission's public hearings . . . are without precedent in the Middle East"; and Montague, "Morocco's Truth Revealed," 59.

33. Montague, "Morocco's Truth Revealed," 61.

34. Ibid. See statement of IER commissioner Abdelhay Moudden.

35. MacFarquhar, "In Morocco." See statement of Prof. Muhammad Sassi, University of Rabat.

36. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 348.

37. Montague, "Morocco's Truth Revealed," 62.

38. Ibid.

39. MacFarquhar, "In Morocco."

40. Montague, "Morocco's Truth Revealed," 63.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 61.

44. Marina Ottaway and Meredith Riley, *Morocco: From Top-Down Reform to Democratic Transition?* Carnegie Papers, Middle East Series, no. 71 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2006), 7–8, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp71_ottaway_final.pdf.

45. MacFarquhar, "In Morocco."

46. Ibid.

47. Charles D. Kenney and Dean E. Spears, *Truth and Consequences: Do Truth Commissions Promote Democratization?* (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, 1–4 September 2005), 1, http://www.allacademic.com/one/apsa/apsa05/index.php?cmd=Download+Document&key=unpublished_manuscript&file_index=2&pop_up=true&no_click_key=true&attachment_style=attachment&PHPSESSID=da9387ac0151ea4082be5a9cd6cf7981.

48. Ibid., 25.

49. MacFarquhar, "In Morocco."

50. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 352–67.

51. Ottaway and Riley, *Morocco*, 20.

52. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 11.

53. Ibid.

54. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 360, 361.

55. Ibid., 73; and Laura A. Weingartner, "Comment: Family Law and Reform in Morocco—The *Mudawana*: Modernist Islam and Women's Rights in the Code of Personal Status," *University of Detroit Mercy Law Review* 82, no. 4 (2004–5): 687, 702–4, http://www.law.udmercy.edu/lawreview/recentissues/v82/issue4/82%20U.%20Det.%20Mercy%20L.%20Rev.%20687.pdf.

56. Weingartner, "Comment: Family Law and Reform in Morocco."

57. Ottaway and Riley, *Morocco*, 8.

58. Francesco Cavatorta, "Alternative Lessons from the 'Algerian Scenario,' "*Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 7, http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/articles/issues/PTv2i1.pdf.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 11.

67. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 24.

68. Derrick O'Keefe, "Tariq Ali on Obama: Imperialism with a Human Face," *rabble.ca*, 16 February 2009, http://rabble.ca/news/interview-tariq.

69. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 72–73.

70. Ibid., 105.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Nathan J. Brown et al., "Islamist Political Parties in Kuwait and Morocco," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 February 2007, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=967.

74. Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 189.

75. Marina Ottaway and Julia Choucair-Vizoso, eds., *Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 164.

76. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 197.

77. Ibid.

78. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 73.

79. Ibid., 107.

80. "Yet the entire system of law rests not on a framework of checks and balances, but on the whim of the king. Morocco's Constitution declares the king both sacred and the 'prince of the faithful.' " MacFarquhar, "In Morocco."

81. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 73.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 73–74.

84. Ibid., 107.

85. "Monarchy dates back 1200 years in Morocco. The current Alouite dynasty dates back to the seventeenth century." Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 348.

86. MacFarquhar, "In Morocco."

87. "Morocco has moved further along the reform road than any of its Arab neighbors. Its press is vibrant and outspoken. A family law no longer treats women as chattel. Civic organizations can be formed with relative ease, and scores of them work on everything from improving prison conditions to lowering the country's abysmal illiteracy rate." Ibid.

88. US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Morocco," 11 March 2008, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100602.htm.

89. Tom Hayden, *Ending the War in Iraq* (New York: Akashic Books, 2007), 214.

90. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 199.

91. Ibid.

92. "'Imposed democracies,' such as the Philippines and Korea, had plunged into dictatorship by the 1970s." Ibid., 198.

93. "Documented Civilian Deaths from Violence," *Iraq Body Count*, http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/.

94. Wright, *Dreams and Shadows*, 416.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., 417. See statement of Syrian political analyst Sami Moubeyed.

97. Wittes, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, 73.

98. Ibid.

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