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Summary

Successive U.S. Administrations have viewed Morocco as an important regional ally, a partner in counterterrorism, and 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 also benefits from U.S. security assistance and military cooperation, and is a purchaser of U.S. defense articles, including F-16 jets. Some observers have placed greater emphasis on the U.S.-Morocco relationship amid regional turmoil and terrorist threats emanating from neighboring states in North Africa and the nearby Sahel region of West Africa. The United States and Morocco initiated a Bilateral Strategic Dialogue in 2012, and King Mohammed VI undertook an official state visit to Washington, DC, in November 2013, his first since 2004.

King Mohammed VI, who inherited the throne in 1999, retains supreme political power in Morocco but has taken some liberalizing steps. In 2011, amid popular demonstrations that echoed unrest elsewhere in the region, the king backed a new constitution that was then adopted by referendum. Provisions in the new constitution could strengthen the legislature, judiciary, and local-level government, if fully implemented. It nonetheless preserves the king's role as the arbiter of political decision-making, head of the military, and the country's highest religious authority. Legislative elections held in 2011, the first 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. Public protests have dwindled since their peak in 2011, but sporadic demonstrations continue over economic and social grievances, while some Moroccans continue to call for deeper political changes.

With regard to the disputed territory of Western Sahara, which Morocco considers 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. U.S. policy over the past decade has been to support U.N.-facilitated negotiations over the territory's final status. Congressional views of the Western Sahara issue have been stated in foreign aid appropriations legislation. Most recently, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (P.L. 113-235, Division J, section 7041[g][1]) states that funds appropriated for foreign bilateral economic assistance "shall be made available for assistance for the Western Sahara." It has been the policy of successive Administrations that funds appropriated for bilateral aid for Morocco may not be programmed in Western Sahara, as doing so could represent a tacit acknowledgment of Moroccan sovereignty. The executive branch interpretation of the FY2015 provision, and its implications, remain to be seen.

Morocco's foreign policy focuses on its Western partners (especially France, Spain, the European Union, and the United States); the Middle East; and francophone Africa. The Moroccan military has reportedly participated in U.S.-led operations to counter the Islamic State organization in Syria. 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 the SADR), and regional economic and security cooperation. See also CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*.

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Overview

Obama Administration officials have expressed strong support for the Moroccan monarchy, while also encouraging political reforms and occasionally voicing human rights concerns. U.S. bilateral aid assists Morocco with economic growth, basic education, democratization, military and police professionalization, and counterterrorism. In addition, a five-year, $697.5 million U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact was completed in September 2013, and Morocco is eligible for a second compact. U.S.-Moroccan military cooperation includes sizable Moroccan purchases of U.S. defense materiel and a large annual bilateral exercise, African Lion.

Amid widespread political upheaval in the region since 2011, Moroccan officials have urged the United States to expand bilateral ties. A U.S.-Morocco Bilateral Strategic Dialogue was initiated in 2012, with working groups devoted to political, economic, security, and educational/cultural cooperation. (Strategic Dialogues were also initiated with Algeria and Tunisia.) High-level sessions of the Dialogue have been held in both countries, most recently in April 2014 in Morocco, with Secretary of State John Kerry leading the U.S. delegation. King Mohammed VI conducted an official state visit to Washington, DC, in November 2013, his first since 2004. The king met with President Obama at the White House, and a joint statement emphasized shared support for Morocco's "democratic and economic reforms" and for bilateral cooperation in a number of domains.[1] In November 2014, Vice President Joe Biden visited Morocco for the Global Entrepreneurship Summit and also met with the king.

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. At the same time—in the context of valued bilateral ties with Morocco—the Obama Administration, using phrasing similar to that employed by the George W. Bush Administration, refers to Morocco's proposal for regional autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty as a "serious, realistic, and credible" potential approach to the territory's final status. U.S. policy over the past decade has been to support United Nations (U.N.)-facilitated negotiations between Morocco and the independence-seeking Popular Front for the Liberation of Saqiat al Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario, which formed the SADR) toward a mutually accepted settlement.[2]

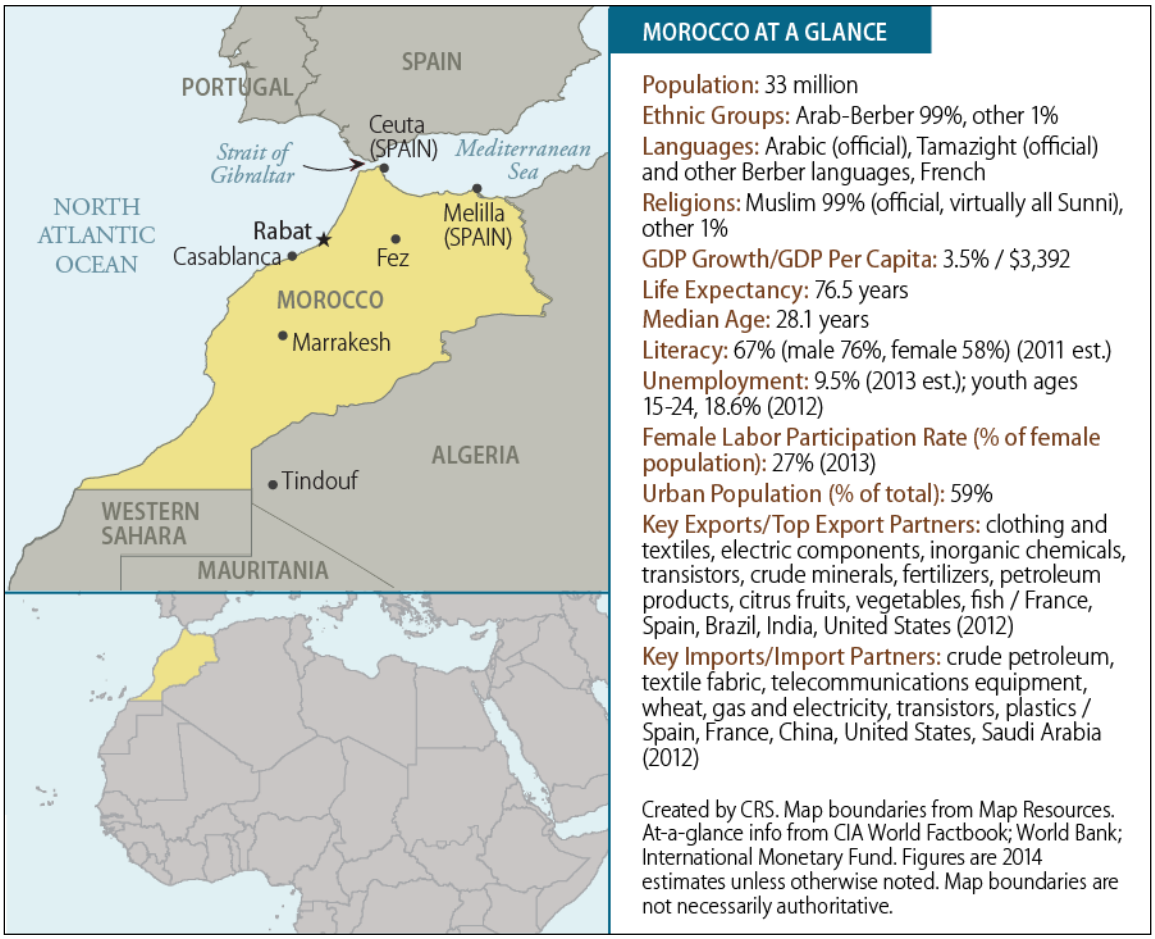
In April 2014, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, held a hearing on U.S. policy toward Morocco. Several other hearings during the 113th Congress also examined U.S. policy interests in Morocco and the wider North Africa

[1] White House, "Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Kingdom of Morocco," November 22, 2013.

[2] See, e.g., testimony of William V. Roebuck, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, April 9, 2014.

region.[3] Congressional views on Morocco and the Western Sahara issue have been expressed in foreign aid appropriations legislation (see "Recent Congressional Actions").

Figure 1. Morocco at a Glance



Note: Morocco considers Western Sahara to be part of its national territory, but U.S. government maps do not include it as such. See, e.g., U.S. Department of State, "Morocco," at http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/mo/index.htm.

Government and Politics

The Moroccan royal dynasty has ruled the country since the mid-17th century, remaining relatively intact under French and Spanish colonial protectorates.[4] King Mohammed VI, who inherited the Moroccan throne in 1999, is the preeminent state authority within a complex political system that also includes an elected parliament and local-level representatives. The king

[3] These included "The Middle East and North Africa FY2014 Budget: Priorities and Challenges," House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, May 2013; "Political, Economic, and Security Situation in North Africa," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, November 2013; and "Political Pluralism in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] Mediterranean Partners?," U.S. Helsinki Commission, July 2014. The U.S. Helsinki Commission, or Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, is an independent federal agency that consists of members from the U.S. Senate; the House of Representatives; and the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

[4] Morocco gained independence from France in 1956. Spain retained two coastal enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla.

has said that he is committed to building a democracy, and in 2011 he introduced a new constitution (later adopted in a popular referendum) that, if fully implemented, could strengthen the legislature, the judiciary, and local-level government. The constitution, however, preserves the king's role as the ultimate arbiter of state decision-making, head of the military, and Morocco's highest religious authority. Although the constitution grants some executive powers to a head of government (prime minister), the king approves and may dismiss cabinet ministers. He may also dissolve parliament, call elections, and exercise certain powers via decree. The king also has a "shadow government" of royal advisors and is tied to significant domestic economic enterprises.

The 2011 constitutional revision and other reforms initiated during the "Arab Spring" did not substantially alter the monarchy's political and economic prerogatives, but they demonstrated responsiveness to public pressures for greater political participation. Many observers argued that in introducing the reforms, the king retained his popular legitimacy and ensured Morocco's continued stability.[5] Ultimately, the degree to which the new constitution leads to significant political changes may depend on how it is interpreted and implemented and the extent to which political parties and other interest groups leverage the political space accorded to them. For example, planned justice sector reforms and decentralization, both nominal priorities of constitutional implementation, have made only halting progress. Constitutional provisions on gender equality and parity, along with civil liberty protections, have yet to be implemented.[6] Protests periodically occur, though they have dwindled in size since their peak in 2011. Some Moroccans continue to call for deeper political changes. Much of the public, however, may have lost any appetite for unrest, in part due to the example of turmoil elsewhere in the region.

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 seats are reserved for candidates under 40 years of age (candidates for these seats are elected from a separate national list). A law adopted in 2011 expanded previous quotas for women in local-level elected government positions.[7]

The Party for Justice and Democracy (PJD, also known as *Al Misbah*/The Beacon), an Islamist political party, won a plurality of seats (27%) in the most recent elections for the Chamber of Representatives, in 2011. That election was the country's first under the new constitution, which introduced a requirement for the king to appoint the head of government from the largest party in parliament. The PJD's Abdelilah Benkirane was named Prime Minister and leads an often fractious multiparty government coalition. In government, the PJD has focused on reforming fiscally burdensome state pension system and subsidy programs; it hopes to replace the latter with targeted aid for poor households. It has also weighed in on cultural, media, justice sector, and educational policies, sometimes with the apparent aim of introducing greater religiosity into the public sphere, although the party's leadership defines its stance as one of moderation.[8]

While the PJD has been legally recognized for two decades, it had not held cabinet positions prior to 2011. Some observers view the PJD as more driven by constituent concerns and more focused on countering corruption than other political parties, and therefore interested in devolving power

[5] See, e.g., Aidan Lewis, "Why Has Morocco's King Survived the Arab Spring?" BBC News, November 24, 2011.

[6] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, "Morocco," February 2014; Aida Alamijune, "Morocco's King Slow to Deliver on Pro-Democracy Vows," *New York Times*, June 11, 2014.

[7] The Quota Project (database), "Morocco," at http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=MA.

[8] Institute for Research and Debate on Governance, "Analyse et perspective d'un parti islamique au Maroc" [interview with Lahcen Daoudi], http://www.institut-gouvernance.org/en/entretien/fiche-entretien-55.html.

away from the monarchy and toward elected government. In turn, the PJD has reportedly faced opposition from pro-palace elites.[9] Public perceptions of these dynamics may underlie the personal popularity of Prime Minister Benkirane, despite regular policy setbacks.[10] Still, the PJD has not demanded deep political changes, preferring to reassure the monarchy in tacit exchange for greater acceptance into national politics.[11] The party's influence over policymaking is further constrained by its slim legislative plurality, the role of royal advisors who sit outside of elected government, and economic limitations. Mutual distrust between Moroccan Islamists and liberals has also inhibited political cooperation, despite a potential shared interest in democratization.[12]

In 2013, Prime Minister Benkirane was forced to reshuffle the cabinet after a key coalition member, the Istiqlal (Independence) party, withdrew, leaving the coalition without a majority. After months of stalemate, the National Rally of Independents (RNI), which many observers view as close to the palace, joined the government in its place. In exchange, the PJD relinquished several key portfolios, including the Foreign Ministry. Some observers viewed the PJD as weakened by these events, while others posited that it could capitalize on perceptions that it remains an underdog confronting a system of vested interests.[13]

Several other Islamist movements wield influence while operating outside of formal politics. Religiously conservative Salafist groups, for example, have been alternately targeted and courted by the authorities.[14] The Justice and Charity Organization (JCO or *Al Adl Wal Ihsan*), a domestic Sufi movement, is reportedly Morocco's largest grassroots organization. It opposes the monarchy as un-Islamic and undemocratic, and is therefore banned, but its activities are generally tolerated. The JCO eschews violence and often conveys its views in street demonstrations; it was reportedly a key force, in addition to leftist groups, behind Morocco's 2011 protest movement. Some

[9] See, e.g., *Africa Confidential*, "Headaches for Benkirane," January 24, 2014; Intissar Fakir and Maati Monjib, "Rabat's Undoing," *Foreign Affairs*, October 23, 2014.

[10] A public opinion poll found in January 2015 that 48% of Moroccans hoped Benkirane would remain the head of government, a significant decrease from 2014 but still 11 points higher than those who preferred he step down. *L'Economiste*, "Enquête L'Economiste-Sunergia: Benkirane... homme d'Etat," January 6, 2015.

[11] Anouar Boukhars, *Morocco's Islamists: Bucking the Trend?* FRIDE, June 6, 2014. For example, PJD Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane refers to the ruling family as "a referee" in Morocco's political system and defends laws banning criticism of the king. (Benkirane interview with Fareed Zakaria at the World Economic Forum, January 25, 2013.)

[12] 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; and Mohammed Masbah, "Islamist-Secularist Divisions in Morocco," *Sada*, May 29, 2014.

[13] *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.

[14] Mohammed Masbah, "Moving Towards Political Participation: The moderation of Moroccan Salafis since the beginning of the Arab Spring," *SWP Comments*, January 2013. "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 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.

analysts question whether the JCO might move toward more overt political participation in the wake of the death of its founding leader, Sheikh Abdessalem Yassine, in 2012.[15]

Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Moroccan nationals have been implicated in terrorism abroad, and Morocco has suffered from terrorism at home.[16] Within Morocco, numerous small and reportedly unconnected extremist cells adhering to the Salafiya Jihadiya (Reformist Holy War/"Jihadist") ideology are generally viewed as the top security threat.[17] The deadliest terrorist attack on Moroccan soil occurred in 2003, when 12 suicide bombers reportedly linked to Al Qaeda and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM, after its French acronym) attacked five Western and Jewish targets in Casablanca, killing themselves and 33 others, and injuring more than 100.[18] Several small-scale attacks have occurred more recently, including two suicide attacks near the U.S. consulate and the American Language Center in Casablanca in 2007, and a bombing at a Marrakesh café popular with tourists in 2011. Moroccan authorities regularly report that they have disrupted terrorist cells plotting attacks against Moroccan government, military institutions, foreigners, and tourist sites.

Recruitment of Moroccans by transnational terrorist organizations is a key government concern, as is the return of Moroccan nationals who have joined terrorist groups abroad. Some 1,500 Moroccan nationals have reportedly traveled to Syria and Iraq as "foreign fighters," making Morocco one of the largest sources of such combatants, according to statistics published in news reports.[19] Foreign fighters also reportedly include Europeans of Moroccan origin.[20] A Moroccan-led Islamist extremist group operating in Syria, *Harakat Sham al Islam* (Islamic Movement of the Levant), was reportedly founded by three Moroccans who had been detained at Guantánamo and were released to Moroccan custody between 2004 and 2006.[21] Moroccan authorities claim to have disrupted domestic plots by cells affiliated with the Islamic State and other terrorist groups; in

[15] Vish Sakhthivel, *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan: Inside Morocco's Islamist Challenge*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 2014.

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

[17] State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, "Morocco," April 2014.

[18] 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. The GICM was also linked to the 2004 Madrid train bombings, and in 2005 the State Department designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). However, the GICM has reportedly been inactive since a crackdown on its followers in Europe and elsewhere, and it was de-listed in 2013.

[19] See, e.g., *Washington Post*, "Foreign Fighters Flow to Syria [Info-Graphic]," October 11, 2014; and *The Economist*, "It Ain't Half Hot Here, Mum: Why and how Westerners go to fight in Syria and Iraq," August 30, 2014.

[20] Jeffrey D. Palmer, "The Death of Moroccan Exceptionalism: A Brief History of Moroccan Salafi Jihadism and Current Jihadist Trends," *Jihadology.net*, September 5, 2014.

[21] Two of the three have reportedly been killed in combat. See Maria Abi-Habib, "After Guantanamo, Freed Detainees Returned to Violence in Syria Battlefields," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2014. See also Mohammed Masbah, "Is Al-Qaeda a Threat to Moroccan Stability?" *Sada*, October 2013; and Vish Sakthivel, "Weathering Morocco's Syria Returnees," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2013. In 2014, another Moroccan ex-Guantánamo detainee, who had reportedly been transferred from U.S. to Spanish custody in 2005, was arrested in Spain on accusations of recruiting fighters for the Islamic State.

November 2014, a previously unknown Morocco-based group calling itself *Jund al Khilafah* (Soldiers of the Caliphate) posted an Internet video pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a regional network of Algerian origin and a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), has carried out attacks in neighboring countries—as have several of its splinter factions and affiliated groups—but not in Morocco to date. In 2014, a State Department official stated in congressional testimony that Morocco's "holistic counterterrorism strategy" had made it "difficult for AQIM to effectively establish a foothold in Morocco."[22] AQIM has nonetheless attempted to recruit Moroccans and has called for attacks in the country.[23] In 2013, the group released a 41-minute video assailing the Moroccan monarchy.

The State Department characterizes Morocco as "a long-standing and effective partner" in counterterrorism.[24] In addition to international cooperation, Morocco's counterterrorism efforts include vigilant security measures, law enforcement efforts, and counter-radicalization programs. Morocco exercises control over religious leaders and institutions and has created theological councils, supervised and trained imams, closed unregulated mosques, retrained some individuals convicted of terror-related crimes to correct their understanding of Islam, and used media efforts to transmit, as one analyst frames it, "a Moroccan Islam that can compete with political Islamists, salafists, and extremists."[25] Morocco has also sought to transmit these values to partner states in West Africa through religious education outreach and exchanges.

Morocco adopted a broad antiterrorism law after the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, and a new law in 2014 broadened the scope of terrorism offenses amid rising concerns over possible activities by Islamic State sympathizers. Human rights advocates argue that these laws define terrorism too broadly and contain insufficient civil liberties protections.[26] The State Department reports that Morocco's counterterrorism approach "has emphasized adherence to human rights standards and the increased transparency of law enforcement procedures."[27]

In 2011, three European aid workers were kidnapped from the Polisario-administered Western Sahara refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, an AQIM splinter faction.[28] In reports on the Western Sahara issue, the U.N. Secretary-General has cited concerns about rising insecurity on the eastern side of the berm that demarcates Moroccan-administered areas (to the west) from those controlled by the Polisario.[29] Moroccan

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[22] Statement of William V. Roebuck, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, April 9, 2014.

[23] State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, op. cit.

[24] State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, op. cit.

[25] Haim Malka, "The Struggle for Religious Identity in Tunisia and the Maghreb," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2014.

[26] Agence France Presse (AFP), "UN calls for an end to torture confessions in Morocco," December 18, 2013; Borzou Daragahi, "Spectre of Isis Used to Erode Rights in Morocco," January 4, 2015; Anna Jacobs, "Morocco's Crackdown on Human Rights Groups Divides the Government," *Muftah*, October 2, 2014. In 2010, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported a "pattern of abuse" under the 2003 law, including extrajudicial detentions; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; and coerced confessions. Moroccan authorities rejected the report's primary allegations and disputed the details of cases cited in it. HRW, "Morocco: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Arrests," October 25, 2010.

[27] State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, op. cit.

[28] The hostages were subsequently released, reportedly in exchange for European ransom payments and the release of militants from prison in Mauritania. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa later merged with another AQIM splinter group to form Al Murabitoun, which is a U.S.-designated FTO.

[29] *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara*, April 10, 2014, U.N. doc. S/2014/258.

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 terrorism. In April 2014, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William V. Roebuck testified before Congress that, "We are not aware of links between, for example, the Polisario, and terrorist organizations."[30]

Human Rights

The U.S.-based organization Freedom House rates Morocco's degree of political and civil liberties as "partly free." The State Department reports that "most significant" human rights problems in Morocco are "the lack of citizens' right to change the constitutional provisions establishing the country's monarchical form of government, corruption in all branches of government, and widespread disregard for the rule of law by security forces."[31] Laws barring acts deemed harmful to the monarchy or to Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara limit freedom of expression, assembly, and association.[32] U.N. experts have also expressed concern over the reported use of torture to obtain confessions in criminal cases, a lack of due process for those held in pretrial detention, and Morocco's sweeping anti-terrorism legislation.[33] Religious freedom is subject to a prohibition of proselytization to Muslims, and some Moroccan Christians report police harassment.[34] Moroccan officials often dispute critical reports by human rights activists, while noting a commitment to improving human rights conditions.[35]

Pro-independence and human rights activists operating in Moroccan-administered Western Sahara reportedly face particular state restrictions on their freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association; the use of arbitrary and prolonged detention to quell dissent; and detainee abuse.[36] After human rights groups, including the state-backed National Human Rights Council (CNDH), criticized the use of military tribunals to try civilian detainees accused of committing violence during protests in Western Sahara in 2010, the king promised to end the practice. However, the status of legal reforms introduced in 2014 remains uncertain, and the courts reportedly have not investigated detainee allegations of police torture and coerced confessions.[37]

Morocco is a transit point and destination for migrants seeking asylum, economic opportunities, or access to Europe via Spanish enclaves on Morocco's northern coast. Morocco's treatment of

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[30] Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, op. cit.

[31] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, "Morocco," February 2014. The report also described "the police use of excessive force to quell peaceful protests"; pretrial detention and poor prison conditions; the reported existence of "political prisoners"; a lack of judicial independence; and human trafficking.

[32] Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2014*, "Morocco/Western Sahara." Media advocates contend that, in addition, some prosecutions of critical journalists on charges ostensibly unrelated to their journalism are designed to inhibit independent coverage and commentary, and that financial pressures are employed to quiet some media outlets.

[33] AFP, "UN Calls for an End to Torture Confessions in Morocco," December 18, 2013; 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*, April 30, 2013.

[34] State Department, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, "Morocco," July 2014. In 2010, the government expelled foreign Christians, including Americans, on allegations of proselytizing.

[35] See, for example, U.N. Human Rights Council, U.N. doc. A/HRC/22/53/Add.5, *Report of the Special Rapporteur [...], Mission to Morocco: comments by the State on the report of the Special Rapporteur*, March 4, 2013.

[36] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, "Western Sahara," February 2014.

[37] HRW, "Morocco: Sahrawi Activist Facing Military Tribunal: Promised End to Such Trials for Civilians Not Yet a Reality," December 22, 2014; "Morocco/Western Sahara: Fair Trials Elusive: Court Ignores Torture Allegations," September 9, 2014; *"Just Sign Here": Unfair Trials Based on Confessions to the Police in Morocco*, June 21, 2013.

African migrants, which has reportedly included large-scale expulsions into desert areas, has been widely criticized. In September 2013, the government announced a new migration and asylum policy that promised an end of expulsions and potential legal status. In early 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that summary expulsions appeared to have ceased under the new policy, but that migrants were still subject to abuse by state security forces.[38]

King Mohammed VI has backed several major initiatives in select areas of human rights. In 2004, the king supported and parliament adopted significant changes to the Family Code, or *Moudawana*, that aimed to improve women's legal rights and socio-economic status. The king also created an Equity and Reconciliation Commission to provide an historical record of state abuses before King Mohammed VI ascended the throne in 1999, to account for the "disappeared," and to compensate victims. He has furthermore attempted to recognize and expand the cultural and linguistic rights of ethnic Berber communities, considered the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa. While recognizing these initiatives as important precedents, however, some human rights advocates have criticized them as insufficient or insufficiently implemented.[39]

The Economy

Morocco's economy is relatively diverse: key sectors include agriculture, tourism, mining, and textiles and apparel. Remittances from emigrant workers, mainly in Europe, provide another source of foreign exchange and a social safety net. Through internal and Western Saharan mines, Morocco controls some 75% of world reserves of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers—and of which the United States is a top global consumer.[40] Morocco is considered a lower middle income country; poverty and illiteracy remain widespread, especially in rural areas. The unemployment rate is officially 9% but is double that among youth under 24 years old.[41] Socioeconomic hardships drive emigration and occasional unrest. The state has attempted to address discontent through social programs, public sector hiring initiatives and wage increases, and subsidies. The economy grew by 3.5% in 2014 and is projected to grow 4.7% in 2015.[42]

Morocco actively encourages foreign investment and trade. It has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and bilateral investment treaty with the United States; an Association Agreement with the European Union; FTAs with several other countries in the Middle East and North Africa; and several free-trade zones. It has also recently positioned itself as a platform for global trade and investment in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, bureaucratic red tape, corruption, high labor costs, opaque regulation, and taxation policies are reportedly constraints on competitiveness.[43]

In 2012, Morocco and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to a $6.2 billion, two-year line of credit aimed at proactively reassuring investors. Morocco did not end up drawing on the

[38] HRW, *Abused and Expelled: Ill-Treatment of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Morocco*, February 10, 2014.

[39] For example, regarding women's rights, judges have not applied the 2004 law or new constitutional provisions on gender equality consistently, and women reportedly continue to experience discrimination, a lack of equal access to the justice system, and gender-based violence. Some advocates contend that some of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission's 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. (Amnesty International, *Broken Promises: The Equity and Reconciliation Commission and Its Follow-Up*, January 2010.)

[40] U.S. Geological Survey, "Phosphate Rock: Mineral Commodity Summary," 2014. Morocco's Royal Office of Phosphates, or OCP, has a monopoly on the mineral's extraction, processing, and commercialization.

[41] CIA World Factbook, updated June 2014.

[42] International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook database, October 2014.

[43] State Department, *2014 Investment Climate Statement – Morocco*, June 2014; and World Economic Forum, *Global*

"Precautionary and Liquidity Line," but the IMF concluded that it had "provided useful insurance against external risks while anchoring the authorities' reform agenda and sending positive signals to markets."[44] A two-year successor arrangement with a $5 billion line of credit was agreed to in July 2014. The IMF has praised efforts under the current PJD-led government to reduce Morocco's fiscal deficit, while continuing to call for further reforms "to stabilize the economy, strengthen competitiveness, and build the foundation for stronger and more inclusive growth."[45]

The royal family's role in the economy is reportedly extensive. The phosphate industry and much of the economy are dominated by the royal family and associated elites who control large, multi-sectoral holding companies. In 2009, King Mohammed VI was reported to be one of the world's 15 richest royal figures, even as Morocco is a relatively poor country; in 2014, *Forbes* estimated his net worth at $2 billion.[46] The royal family reportedly controls a majority stake in the National Investment Company (SNI), which has significant financial, insurance, construction, and commodity interests.[47] The king is also a major landowner.

Morocco meets most of its energy needs by importing oil and gas. It hopes to find offshore oil, which is currently under exploration, including off the coast of Western Sahara (see below). Morocco has also sought to develop domestic renewable energy sources, with a particular focus on solar energy, which it hopes to use domestically and export to Europe.

Western Sahara[48]

The dispute between Morocco and the independence-seeking Polisario over the former Spanish colony south of Morocco remains unresolved. Morocco occupies some 85% of the territory,[49] 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. 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. Morocco has authorized foreign 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.[50]

Talks between Morocco and the Polisario on the final status of the territory 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. In line with this initiative, the

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Competitiveness Report 2013-2014, "Morocco," at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GCR2013-14/Morocco.pdf.

[44] IMF, *Request for an Arrangement Under the Precautionary and Liquidity Line and Cancellation of the Current Arrangement*, July 11, 2014.

[45] IMF, "Morocco – IMF Staff Conduct 2014 Article IV Consultations, First Review of the Precautionary and Liquidity Line," November 17, 2014.

[46] *Forbes.com*, "King of Rock," June 17, 2009; and "The 5 Richest Kings in Africa," June 3, 2014.

[47] Souhail Karam, "Morocco Regulator in Pledge on Monarchy-Owned Firms," Reuters, September 30, 2011.

[48] See CRS Report RS20962, *Western Sahara*.

[49] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, "Western Sahara," April 2014.

[50] 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.

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. The stalemate appears likely to endure.

Foreign Policy

Morocco's foreign policy focuses on its Western partners, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa.[51] In addition to Morocco's Foreign Minister, Salaheddine Mezouar, who is from the RNI party, the king and his royal advisors play a key role in foreign policy; they have prioritized close ties with the West while Prime Minister Benkirane has occasionally publicly criticized Western policies.[52] The European Union (EU) is Morocco's top trading partner and provides considerable aid. European leaders appear to hope that Morocco's stability will be preserved amid regional upheaval. They also seek Moroccan cooperation to stem illegal immigration and drug trafficking via Morocco to Europe. Morocco's EU Association Agreement entered into force in 2000, and a 2012 trade agreement expanded the duty-free treatment of agricultural, food, and fisheries products on both sides. A new fishing agreement that includes European access to the coastline of disputed Western Sahara was ratified in 2014, after a hiatus; the previous agreement was discontinued in 2011 due to some EU parliamentarians' objections to conditions in Moroccan-administered Western Sahara, as well as environmental and economic concerns.

Diplomatic, commercial, and military ties with former colonial powers France and Spain are extensive, and both countries have large immigrant populations of Moroccan origin. Frictions with France nonetheless arose in 2014 over allegations by France-based Moroccan activists of torture in Morocco; statements critical of Morocco that were attributed in the press to a senior French diplomat; and, possibly, France's recent cultivation of closer ties with Algeria.[53] After the January 2015 terrorist attacks in France, Foreign Minister Mezouar declined to attend France's multinational rally against extremism due to the presence of "blasphemous caricatures of the Prophet."[54] Spain, for its part, possesses two territorial enclaves on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, Ceuta and Melilla, which Morocco claims, sometimes causing bilateral tensions. The neighbors also have an unresolved dispute concerning territorial waters between Morocco and the Spanish Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Still, territorial disputes and occasional criticism by Spanish politicians of Morocco's stance on Western Sahara appear secondary to economic, security, and law enforcement cooperation.

Morocco positions 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, which have offered aid, investment, and security cooperation. Morocco broke diplomatic relations with the Syrian government in 2012, and the Moroccan military has reportedly participated in U.S.-led military operations against the Islamic State.[55] The king supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and chairs the Al Quds (Jerusalem) Committee of

[51] In particular, King Mohammed VI has recently increased his outreach to francophone Africa, where Morocco has longstanding diplomatic, commercial, and security interests. See Haim Malka, "Morocco's Rediscovery of Africa," Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2013.

[52] In remarks at the U.N. General Assembly on September 25, 2014, Benkirane stated that "Western countries and their affiliated institutions, all they do is give lessons, and at best, a few pieces of advice. As for support, it is very limited and is always conditional." Transcript via *Congressional Quarterly*.

[53] Reuters, "Morocco Sues Activists in France over Torture Accusations," March 26, 2014; *Jeune Afrique*, "Salaheddine Mezouar: 'La France n'est pas engagée avec nous,'" January 9, 2015.

[54] *Le Monde*, "'Charlie Hebdo' absent des pays du Maghreb," January 14, 2015.

[55] Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Adds Planes to Bolster Drive to Wipe Out ISIS," *New York Times*, November 26, 2014.

the Organization of the Islamic Conference, 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. Still, links between the two countries remain, as some 600,000 Israelis are of Moroccan origin, and thousands travel to Morocco yearly.

Morocco and Algeria are regional rivals. The two countries fought a war over disputed border territories in 1963-1964, and 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. 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). The dispute over the territory of Western Sahara has stymied Moroccan-Algerian relations, Moroccan relations with the African Union (AU), and regional economic and security cooperation.[56]

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.[57] In 2004, then-President George W. Bush designated Morocco a Major Non-NATO ally. The U.S.-Morocco relationship focuses on promoting regional stability, supporting democratic reform efforts, countering violent extremism, and strengthening trade and cultural ties.[58] The Bilateral Strategic Dialogue initiated in 2012 has resulted in the enumeration of 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.

Bilateral ties have been enhanced by security cooperation and assistance. Over 1,000 U.S. personnel participate annually in a 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; 24 T-6 trainer aircraft; 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 medium-range missiles systems; and Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) missile guidance kits.[59] Sales agreements for U.S.-made military radar systems and Sidewinder missiles were announced in 2011. Morocco is also a top recipient of U.S. Excess Defense Articles (EDA) grants, and a U.S. National Guard State Partnership Program with Utah was established in 2003. Morocco is part of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, has hosted and

[56] Morocco is the only country in Africa not to be a member of the AU, having withdrawn in 1984 from the AU's predecessor organization over the latter's recognition of the SADR.

[57] Morocco and U.S. officials regularly state that Morocco was the first country to recognize the United States, in 1777. The State Department Office of the Historian dates 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." See also State Department, "U.S. Relations with Morocco," Fact Sheet, August 12, 2014, which cites recognition that year).

[58] Testimony of William V. Roebuck, House Foreign Affairs Committee, April 9, 2014, op. cit.; White House, "U.S.-Morocco Strong and Enduring Commitment," Fact Sheet, November 22, 2013.

[59] 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 that the sale would not alter the regional balance of 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.

participated in NATO military exercises, and cooperates with NATO's Operation Active Endeavor, monitoring the Mediterranean Sea for terrorists.

A U.S.-Morocco free trade agreement (FTA) came into effect on January 1, 2006 (P.L. 108-302), eliminating duties on over 95% of all goods and services.[60] Since then, U.S. exports to Morocco have nearly tripled in value, and U.S. imports from Morocco have nearly doubled.[61] However, the agreement has been controversial in Morocco, particularly among labor leaders, and Prime Minister Benkirane suggested in a 2012 address to parliament that Morocco was not sufficiently benefitting from it. Morocco was the United States' 69th-largest goods trading partner in 2013 (latest available): U.S. exports to Morocco in 2013 were valued at $2.48 billion, and U.S. imports from Morocco at $977 million.[62] The United States and Morocco signed new trade agreements under the FTA in December 2012 and November 2013, and a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement in November 2013.

As noted above ("Overview"), the United States has not recognized Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara, nor has it recognized the Polisario's self-proclaimed independent government-in-exile, the SADR. The Obama Administration refers to Morocco's proposal to grant Western Sahara autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty as "a serious, realistic, and credible proposal" and "a potential approach that could satisfy the aspirations of the people in the Western Sahara to run their own affairs in peace and dignity."[63] At the same time, it maintains that the parties "have to reach a mutually agreed upon solution" through negotiations and that the United States cannot "impose" a solution.[64] U.S.-Morocco relations were briefly troubled in April 2013 by U.S. support in the U.N. Security Council for adding human rights monitoring to [65]MINURSO's mandate. Morocco vehemently objects to a human rights monitoring role for the mission as an affront to its sovereignty. Ultimately, the proposal did not advance.

U.S. Assistance

The United States provides aid to Morocco to help advance democratization, alleviate poverty, increase military effectiveness, counter terrorism, and build trade capacity. The Obama Administration requested $30.9 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Morocco in FY2015 (see **Table 1**), stating that such aid would support Morocco's achievement of "critical" reforms.[66]

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) current five-year strategy for Morocco, which is designed to support Morocco's development and reform objectives, lists three core objectives: increasing youth employability, expanding civic participation in governance, and enhancing the quality of primary school education.[67] USAID activities in Morocco focus on improving agricultural growth and productivity; enhancing teacher training; building the capacity

[60] Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), "Morocco," May 1, 2014.

[61] U.S. International Trade Commission statistics on U.S.-Morocco trade between 2006 and 2013, consulted January 2015. On the FTA, see CRS Report RS21464, *Morocco-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*, by Raymond J. Ahearn.

[62] USTR, "Morocco," op. cit.; U.S. International Trade Commission statistics, consulted January 2015.

[63] See, e.g., State Department, "Joint Statement of the Second Session of the United States - Kingdom of Morocco Strategic Dialogue," April 4, 2014. Identical language was used by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011. State Department, Remarks by United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri, March 23, 2011, Washington, DC.

[64] Testimony of William V. Roebuck, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, April 9, 2014.

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[66] State Department, FY2015 *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*, March 2014.

[67] USAID, *USAID/Morocco Country Development Cooperation Strategy*, 2013-2017.

of local-level government to respond to citizen demands; addressing the needs of the most at-risk youth through engagement in productive social, economic, and civic activities; and assisting Moroccan businesses in meeting the requirements of the U.S.-Morocco FTA.[68]

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

Appropriations, current $ thousands (State Department and USAID)

	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014 (estimated)	FY2015 (requested)
ESF	3,000	2,281	0	1,929	20,896	20,000
FMF	9,000	8,982	8,000	7,595	7,000	5,000
IMET	1,789	1,989	1,898	1,677	1,710	1,650
INCLE	750	750	9,000 [of which 7,500 in OCO]	1,500	3,000	3,000
NADR	1,200	1,100	3,300	1,684	1,470	1,250
DA	19,546	19,039	19,039	16,720	0	0
Total	**35,396**	**34,141**	**41,237**	**31,105**	**34,076**	**30,900**

Source: State Department, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2012-FY2015.

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

In addition to the bilateral aid cited above, Morocco recently benefitted from a five-year, $697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, which was completed in 2013. It focused on alleviating poverty through targeted investments in fruit tree productivity, fisheries, artisan production, financial services, and private enterprises.[69] Morocco is eligible for a new compact, for which it is developing proposals. In November 2014, the MCC announced that it expected to invest $50 million to improve Morocco's technical and vocational education system as part of a compact agreement "to be signed in 2015," pending MCC Board approval and congressional notification.[70]

Morocco also participates in U.S. regional aid programs, including the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a State Department-led interagency initiative that includes 11 states in North and West Africa; the Administration's Middle East and North Africa Transition Fund, which has provided technical aid for good governance; and grants administered by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the State Department's regional democracy-promotion entity, for women's empowerment, civil society, job growth, and legal reforms.

[68] USAID, "Morocco," at http://www.usaid.gov/morocco.

[69] See MCC, "Morocco Compact," http://www.mcc.gov/pages/countries/program/morocco-compact.

[70] MCC, "MCC, Moroccan Government Announce Plans to Invest in Innovative Partnerships in Vocational Training," November 20, 2014. The announcement followed a similar statement by Vice President Joe Biden at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Morocco also receives assistance administered by the international financial institutions (such as the IMF and World Bank), which receive U.S. funding.

Morocco has committed resources of its own in support of several U.S.-Morocco cooperation initiatives, including the Peace Corps program in Morocco and a five-year "Virtual Exchange Initiative" named in honor of the late U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, which aims to connect youth in the Middle East/North Africa and the United States.

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. Other Members have expressed concern over Morocco's handling of the Western Sahara issue, and/or over human rights and religious freedom problems. Several hearings in the 113th Congress examined U.S. policy interests in Morocco and North Africa (see "Overview").

The explanatory statement accompanying the FY2015 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (Division J of P.L. 113-235, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015) provides $20 million in budget authority for Economic Support Fund (ESF) aid for Morocco (equal to the Administration's bilateral aid request) and $7 million for Foreign Military Financing (FMF) ($2 million more than requested). The explanatory statement "expects that no [FMF] funds will be used for internal security purposes," referring to a provision in the act that FMF funds for Morocco "may only be used for the purposes requested" in the Administration's FY2015 congressional budget justification (Division J, §7041[g][2]). Separately, the explanatory statement appears to endorse a requirement for the State Department to report on why it is not implementing a recommendation by its Office of the Inspector-General to close the U.S. Consulate in Casablanca.[71]

Morocco and the Polisario, and advocates on both sides, regularly appeal to Congress to support their respective positions on Western Sahara. Congressional views on the Western Sahara issue have been stated in official correspondence and in foreign aid appropriations legislation. The FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Division K of P.L. 113-76, §7041[h]) provided that bilateral economic assistance appropriated for Morocco "should also be available for assistance for the territory of the Western Sahara."[72] It has been the policy of successive Administrations that funds appropriated for bilateral aid for Morocco may not be programmed in Western Sahara, as doing so could represent a tacit acknowledgment of Moroccan sovereignty. The FY2014 provision did not appear to alter this policy in practice.

A modified provision contained in the FY2015 Act (Division J of P.L. 113-235, §7041[g][1]) states that funds appropriated for global bilateral economic assistance "shall be made available for assistance for the Western Sahara." It also requires the State Department to "consult with the Committees on Appropriations on the proposed uses of such funds." The executive branch interpretation of the FY2015 provision, and its implications, remain to be seen.

[71] The reporting requirement was in the Senate report (S.Rept. 113-195) accompanying S. 2499 (the Senate version of the bill). The explanatory statement accompanying Division J of P.L. 113-235 indicates that "Federal departments, agencies, commissions, and other entities shall comply with the directives, reporting requirements, instructions, and allocations contained in H.Rept. 113-499 [...] and S.Rept. 113-195 [...] unless specifically directed to the contrary."

[72] Previously, the conference report on the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 112-74, December 23, 2011) stated that, "The conferees note that funds provided in title III of this Act [bilateral economic assistance] for Morocco may be used in regions and territories administered by Morocco. The conferees remain concerned with resolving the dispute over the Western Sahara and urge the Department of State to prioritize a negotiated settlement."

The explanatory statement accompanying P.L. 113-235 endorses a requirement in S.Rept. 113-195 for the State Department to update its report to the appropriators 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."[73]

Outlook

The United States and Morocco continue to share an interest in promoting stability and pursuing economic and security cooperation amid ongoing regional tumult. 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. Congressional efforts to use foreign aid appropriations legislation to prompt the executive branch to change its policy toward the disputed territory of Western Sahara have gained in prominence in recent years. Some Members have also continued to focus on the degree to which U.S. policy toward Morocco includes the encouragement of human rights and democracy. The role of Moroccan Islamist political parties and movements may also be of congressional interest in the context of regional developments.

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[73] See footnote number 70. P.L. 112-74 (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012; Division I, §7041[g]) required such a report. That requirement was carried over into FY2014 via S.Rept. 113-81, accompanying S. 1372 (the Senate draft FY2014 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act).