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# Instrumentalizing Arabism: Morocco and the Inter-Arab System

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## ABSTRACT

The changing contours of Morocco's involvement in the inter-Arab system over nearly a century was largely instrumental. It was driven by both "realist" concerns and domestic political issues related to fundamental matters of regime legitimacy and societal cohesion, i.e. the very nature of Moroccan national identity. With the decline of Arabism's political salience, and a monarch who preferred to keep a low profile in Arab affairs, Morocco's relations with Arab Mashriq countries became increasingly devoid of traditional markers of Arab solidarity and brotherhood. Domestically, the emergence of the Amazigh factor led to Morocco's collective identity becoming a renewed subject of contention.

## KEYWORDS

Amazigh; Arabism; collective identity; inter-Arab system; Morocco

The Moroccan national football team's unprecedented run to the semifinals of the 2022 World Cup generated enormous interest throughout the Arab world. From Doha to Gaza to Tunis, Arab publics' vocal identification of the Atlas Lions as *their* team confirmed anew the existence of a broad pan-Arab sentiment that cuts across national boundaries, diverse historical experiences, and political and societal differences. At the same time, this embrace, articulated by Arab media outlets<sup>1</sup> and across social media, displayed considerable ignorance regarding Moroccan realities, which many Moroccans and others were quick to point out. Indeed, the very categorization of Morocco as an Arab country became a matter of debate. After all, a large majority of Moroccans are either ethnically Amazigh, or Arabized Amazigh. Could a team of predominantly European-born players, many of them children of Amazigh migrants from Morocco's northern Rif region, some of whom could not even understand questions posed *in* Arabic by Arab journalists, be considered Arab? Was it not

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<sup>1</sup>Mbarek Oukhoya and Tayeb Ghourdou, "Language of BeIN Sports Football Commentators: An Analysis of Live Arab Football Commentary," *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 11, no. 11 (Nov. 2023), 455–61.

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more appropriate to emphasize Morocco's African identity? Or a North African one? Or its ethnic Amazigh underpinnings? Or a uniquely Moroccan synthesis of all of Morocco's diverse societal elements and historical experiences?<sup>2</sup>

The search for a definitive formula that would define Morocco's national character and collective identity, while understandable, obfuscates more than clarifies. After all, social, ethnic and political identities are always constructed, fluid and subject to modification. Attaining a fuller understanding of Moroccan national identity requires a detailed examination and contextualization of the various components that have shaped the Moroccan polity and Moroccan society over both the *longue durée* and the country's modern history. This study concentrates on one of those aspects, heretofore underrepresented in the professional literature: the Moroccan kingdom's relations with fellow members of the League of Arab States, which Morocco joined in 1958, two years after regaining its independence from France. The analysis demonstrates how the ebbs and flows of Moroccan involvement in broader Arab affairs over the course of more than six decades was driven by a combination of "realist" factors (*raison d'état*/pursuit of national interest/power calculations), and domestic political considerations, centering on maintaining the legitimacy and hegemony of the monarchy and a sufficient degree of national cohesion.

### **Arabism and the Arab state system – Center and periphery**

Arabism (*'uruba*), the idea that speakers of the Arabic language constituted a distinct human collective whose cultural and ultimately political demands needed to be addressed, first emerged from the lands of Ottoman Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While a number of factors contributed to its rise, the central one was its connection to the promotion of Islamic reform (*islah*). Eventually, Arabism would be concretized as Arab nationalism. Following the defeat and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, intellectuals, publicists, and activists disseminated an overarching doctrine that promised dignity and power to the populations of the "Arab homeland" (*al-watan al-'Arabi*). As C. Ernest Dawn showed in his seminal article about Arab history textbooks in the inter-war years, the focus of writers, intellectuals, and activists was entirely on the Mashriq, the formerly Ottoman, predominantly Arabic-speaking lands east of Suez. In Egypt, opposition elements were the first to embrace Arab nationalism and include Egypt within the boundaries of the imagined Arab homeland.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, its geographical

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<sup>2</sup>Hisham Aïdi, "The (African) Arab Cup," Dec. 13, 2022, <https://africasacountry.com/2022/12/the-afro-arab-cup>; and Yael Warshel, "So-called firsts scored by the Moroccan 'Muslim, Arab, African, post-colonial and Amazigh' Atlas Lions at the 2022 World Cup football games," *The Journal of North African Studies* 28, no. 2 (March 2023), 219–29.

<sup>3</sup>C. Ernest Dawn, "The Formation of pan-Arab Ideology in the Inter-War Years," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 1 (Feb. 1988), 67–91.

definition would be expanded to Morocco and its Maghrib neighbors, and to the Persian (Arab) Gulf littorals (*min al-muhiit ila l-khalij*).<sup>4</sup> ‘Uruba would be a necessary component to local elites’ efforts to achieve independence from European domination, but also render them vulnerable to criticism by political opponents both within and beyond their borders, since it conditioned the legitimacy of these new entities on their fealty to its principles, and particularly its emphasis on a fuzzy but nonetheless powerful notion of “unity”.<sup>5</sup>

The Arab regional system that emerged during the mid-twentieth century was characterized by three complementary and overlapping variables: the multiple and ever-changing meanings of “being Arab,” the emergence of territorially demarcated entities and their resulting state and nation-building projects, and the perennial competition among them over both concrete and symbolic interests and resources within the overarching ideological framework of Arab nationalism. In line with the history of the idea, the system’s center of gravity, its core, was always in the Arabic-speaking lands of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Beginning with the June 1967 debacle and subsequent oil boom, wealth and power increasingly shifted toward the Arab Gulf monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia. Hence, Morocco was both geographically and substantively on the periphery of the Arab and Middle East sub-systems,<sup>6</sup> and is thus almost entirely absent from the scholarly literature on inter-Arab and Middle East regional politics.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, detailed treatments of Moroccan history and analyses of Moroccan foreign policy, particularly

<sup>4</sup>For a penetrating discussion of France’s contribution to the fashioning of the very notion of the “Maghrib,” see Abdelmajid Hannoum, *The Invention of the Maghreb: Between Africa and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). For a critique, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, in *Bustan, The Middle East Book Review* 13, no. 2 (2022), 180–85.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *A Century of Arab Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 3–45.

<sup>6</sup>For the classic discussion of regional systems and subsystems, see Louis J. Cantori and Steven L. Spiegel, *The International Politics of Regions: A Comparative Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

<sup>7</sup>Leonard Binder, “The Middle East as a Subordinate International System,” *World Politics* 10, no. 3 (April 1958), 408–429; Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998); Fred Lawson, *Constructing International Relations in the Arab World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Rashid Khalidi, et. al (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991); James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (eds.) (NY: Columbia University Press 1997); Yehoshua Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity 1930–1945* (London: Frank Cass, 1986); Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Crystallization of the Arab State System, 1945–1954*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *A Century of Arab Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria, 1945–1958*, new edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987); Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Elie Podeh, *The Decline of Arab Unity* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999); Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958–1970*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); Fouad Ajami, “The End of Pan-Arabism,” *Foreign Affairs* 52 (Winter 1978–79), 355–73; Aeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002). A 2008 edited volume, *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* (Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, eds. Cairo and NY: American University of Cairo Press, 2008), includes a chapter on Morocco by Jennifer Rosenblum and I. William Zartman (319–42) unlike earlier versions published in 1984 and 1991, but it feels almost like an afterthought, particularly since the same volume includes a one hundred page chapter on the Arab system in which Morocco warrants nary a mention, apart from a couple of tables (Paul Noble, “From Arab System to Middle Eastern System? Regional Pressures and Constraints,” 67–165). Moreover, the chapter on Morocco devotes scant attention to Morocco’s relations with other Arab countries, apart from Algeria, its geopolitical and ideological rival and immediate neighbor.

under King Mohammed VI, give short shrift to the “Arab” dimension of Moroccan foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

### The colonial era

Notwithstanding Morocco’s peripheral status in the Arab world, its history has been intertwined with the lands of the Mashriq since the Muslim armies’ conquests and Islamization of North Africa, beginning in the late seventh century A.D. Combatting French colonialism in the Maghrib was very much a part of the Muslim intellectual Shakib Arslan’s tireless promotion of Islamic nationalism during the 1920s and 30s.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1930s, the seeds of the Moroccan and Algerian nationalist movements had sprouted, and contained a substantial measure of modern Islamic reform ideas. As in the Mashriq, these became inseparable from ‘*uruba*. In Algeria, reformist ‘*ulama* articulated an Arab-Islamic identity that became a fundamental reference point for the national movement.<sup>10</sup> From a different, and less discussed angle, the influence of Egypt-centered Arab mass culture “forged a stronger link with the Arab east than the *Salafiyya* ever could.”<sup>11</sup>

Michael Stenner’s work further deepened our knowledge of the social networks of solidarity that young Moroccan nationalists fashioned with their counterparts in the Arab East. Some of them were disciples of Arslan, who “equipped the nationalists with legitimacy in the eyes of Middle Eastern Arabs they had lacked until then.”<sup>12</sup> A Moroccan delegation headed by two leading activists attended the 1931 General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem,<sup>13</sup> and another delegation attended the Arabic-Islamic Parliamentary Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo in 1938. Hundreds of Moroccan students

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<sup>8</sup>Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Michael Willis, *Power and Politics in the Maghreb* (London: Hurst, 2012); Daniel Zisenwine, “Mohammed VI and Moroccan Foreign Policy,” in *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI*, ed. Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (London and NY: Routledge, 2013), 70–81; Anouar Boukhars, *Politics in Morocco: Executive Monarchy and Enlightened Authoritarianism* (Abingdon, Oxon, and NY: Routledge, 2011); Irene Fernández-Molina, *Moroccan Foreign Policy Under Mohammed VI, 1999–2014* (Abingdon, Oxon, and NY: Routledge, 2016); and Tachfine Baida (ed.), *The Foundations of Moroccan Foreign Policy: An Anthology* (Wilsonville, OR: Sirius Academic Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup>William L. Cleveland, *Islam against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 90–114.

<sup>10</sup>James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97–143.

<sup>11</sup>C.R. Pennell, *Morocco Since 1830: A History* (NY: NYU Press, 2000), 237–8. This jibes with Peter Wein’s emphasis on modern cultural expressions of Arab nationalism, even though he does not offer any Moroccan examples. *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (Abingdon and NY: Routledge, 2017), *passim*. *Salafiyya*, in this context, refers to the movement for religious reform and renewal in the late 19th and early 20th centuries most associated with the teachings of the Egyptian scholar Mohamed Abduh and his disciple Rashid Rida. According to this view, the best way to combat European domination was to return to the Islam of the “virtuous forefathers”, namely, the Prophet Mohamed, his companions and disciples.

<sup>12</sup>Stenner, “Networking for independence: the Moroccan nationalist movement and its global campaign against French colonialism,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, 4 (2012), 577.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), 132.

attended Egyptian universities, where they became increasingly politicized. As early as 1929, the brothers Mehdi and Tayeb Bennouna, from Tetouan, were part of a student delegation that studied in Nablus, in British Mandated Palestine. Mehdi moved to Cairo in 1936, where he became a tireless publicist for the Moroccan cause. In 1947, the two leading Moroccan nationalist parties encouraged him to move to New York, where he spearheaded anti-colonial lobbying at the United Nations, and where his reputation among Arab diplomats “reached extraordinary heights.”<sup>14</sup> Overall, says, Stenner, the countries of the Arab East remained points of reference for many Moroccans, because they symbolized the possibility of an authentic Islamic anticolonial modernity that could counteract European hegemony.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the young Moroccan activists eventually coalesced under the banner of *Hizb al-Istiqlal* (The Independence Party), which embodied these ideas and would play a central role in the struggle for independence.<sup>16</sup> Allal el Fassi, the Muslim *‘alim*, writer, and activist politician most closely associated with the Istiqlal expressed succinctly the linkage between Islam, Arabism, and Moroccan nationalism. He posited a “historic struggle between the Latin West and the Arab East,” the latter’s heritage being the “Greek, Semitic and Maghrib civilizations.”<sup>17</sup> It was the spiritual elements of Islam that “created the Maghrib people’s profound affinity with the Arab world,” he noted. Moreover, “the Maghrib refuses to be relegated to the rear of the Arab convoy or far from the center of leadership.” Hence the Istiqlal’s 1944 platform called for “strong and intimate relations with Arab states, to which we are bound by innumerable historic, cultural and racial ties . . . ;” ties which should “eventually lead to a federation joining all the Arab states in one greater family which would participate in the establishment of world peace and bring into being a humane system for the benefit of the entire world.”<sup>18</sup> This pious wish for unity and harmony should not obscure the fact that, unlike in the Arab Levant, the legitimacy of Maghribi states has never been in doubt.

Discussions among Arab leaders about the coming postwar order began in 1943. Concurrently, eleven Moroccan activists in Cairo affiliated with the Istiqlal established the “League for the Defense of Morocco” (*Rabitat al-Difa’ ‘an al-Maghrib/Rabitat al-Difa’ ‘an Marakish*), to lobby for Arab support for Moroccan independence. The League coordinated its efforts with Tunisian and Algerian groups established in Cairo in 1945.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>David Stenner, “On the Margins of the Arab World?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 1 (Feb. 2020), 158.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 160.

<sup>16</sup>Daniel Zisenwine, *The Emergence of Nationalist Politics in Morocco: The Rise of the Independence Party and the Struggle Against Colonialism After World War II* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 31–128, 181–200.

<sup>17</sup>Allal el Fassi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa* (NY: Octagon Books, 1970), 8. (The Arabic language original was published in 1948).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>19</sup>Abd al-Karim Ghallab, *Tarikh al-Haraka al-Wataniya fil Maghrib*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Casablanca: Najah El Jadida, 2000), 437–40.

Arab diplomatic jockeying culminated in the establishment of the League of Arab States on March 22, 1945, as Arab leaders sought to reinforce their positions vis-a-vis the British and French imperial powers in the coming postwar period. The seven independent (or soon to be independent) signatories of the Arab League's Charter – Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen – pledged to develop closer political, economic, social and cultural ties, while emphasizing respect for the sovereignty and independence of each member state. In fact, the League would mostly be an arena in which inter-Arab rivalries would play out. For our purposes, it is worth noting that the League's Charter included an annex that acknowledged “the aspirations of the Arab countries not members of the [League] Council, and pledged to work toward their realization.”<sup>20</sup> Although the countries were not named (and the League now has no less than 22 members), the immediate reference was to Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, where nationalist opposition to continued French rule was gathering steam. The League's First Secretary-General, ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Azzam Pasha, would be a tireless advocate of independence for the Maghrib countries throughout his seven years in the position. So was the veteran Iraqi statesman Fadil al-Jamali. As a result, and to France's distinct irritation, attaining the independence of its North African colonies became an integral part of the Arab discourse.<sup>21</sup>

The League's de facto leader was Egypt: its headquarters were in Cairo, ‘Azzam Pasha was an Egyptian official, as were all subsequent secretary-generals, apart from one exception,<sup>22</sup> and Egypt headed a loose coalition of five states against the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan. It was only natural then, that Cairo became the headquarters of the “Arab Maghrib Office” (*Maktab al-Maghrib al-‘Arabi*), established in 1947 to promote and support the independence movements in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Just a few months later, the *Maktab* scored a major achievement: it persuaded the legendary Riffian exile warrior, ‘Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, to stealthily disembark from the French ship that was to carry him to France after a twenty-one year exile in Reunion, while the vessel was docked in Suez City. Making his way to Cairo, al-Khattabi received a royal welcome from Egypt's King Farouk, and the Moroccan nationalist cause was given an enormous public relations boost.<sup>23</sup> In December, the Committee for the Liberation of the Maghrib, grouping together nationalist activists from all three Maghrib countries, was established in Cairo, with ‘Abdelkrim al-Khattabi as its head. However, he quickly tired of it, finding it lacking a real program of action.

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<sup>20</sup>“Charter of Arab League,” [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/arableag.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp).

<sup>21</sup>David Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 71–2.

<sup>22</sup>Tunisia's Chedli Klibi held the post during the ten-year hiatus of Egypt's suspension from the League, between 1979–1989.

<sup>23</sup>Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco*, 60–67.

The quickening of Moroccan nationalist activities in Cairo didn't happen in isolation. The year 1947 was a pivotal year, for it marked the moment when Sultan Mohammed V came out from under the thumb of his French overlords, openly declaring his support for Moroccan nationalist aspirations. He did so during a historic visit to Tangier, which was still an International Zone, publicly proclaiming the importance of regaining Moroccan sovereignty throughout its entire territory. The Sultan's visit was greeted with wild enthusiasm, and it was decisive in the Moroccan nationalist movement's transformation into a mass movement.<sup>24</sup> It was also significant in firming up Morocco's connection with the broader current of Arabism. The sultan's discourse was laden with Islamic themes, as befit a monarch whose legitimacy was based on the Alaouite dynasty's claimed descent from the Prophet Mohamed. These themes were organically linked to Arab identity: Mohammed V specifically heralded the establishment of the "noble" Arab League, "which strengthened the bonds between Arabs wherever they are found, enabled their kings and leaders in the [Arab] East and [Arab] West to unite in action and in directing their forward march toward religious guidance, Islamic glory, and Arab honour."<sup>25</sup> Clearly, then, "being Arab" at this moment was important for fashioning a collective identity among his subjects, promoting the sultan's own legitimacy as both a religious and political leader, and reaching out for political support from Arab states and societies.

El Fassi wrote approvingly of the king's speech, and emphasized the importance of "achieving a unity of outlook" between Morocco and its Arab brethren, "to ensure that Morocco won't be outpaced and fall back, nor be molded in a non-Arab orientation and outlook."<sup>26</sup> It would only be after independence that the Istiqlal and the monarchy would part ways over where power should actually lie. Based in Cairo, el Fassi was peripatetic in his efforts to advance the Moroccan case within the framework of an overarching Arab-Islamic identity and commonness of purpose. However, the independence of North African countries was not an urgent issue for the Arab League in the 1940s, and it was only in the early 1950s that the League brought the issue to the UN.<sup>27</sup> The League's shortcomings as an organization, itself a function of the inter-Arab divisions that would play such an important role in the collective Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, were obvious to all. In his seminal 1948 book on the events of those years, el Fassi closed with a lengthy analysis of the League's deficiencies, expressions of disappointment that it had not done enough for

<sup>24</sup>E. G. H. Joffé, "The Moroccan Nationalist Movement: Istiqlal, the Sultan, and the Country," *The Journal of African History* 26, no. 4 (Oct. 1985), 289–307.

<sup>25</sup>For the text of the speech, see *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2, 3, 2011, 19–25, <https://chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC168757>.

<sup>26</sup>el Fassi, 277.

<sup>27</sup>Ghallab, *Tarikh al-Haraka al-Wataniya fil Maghrib*, 29–35.

the cause of the North African independence movements, and a proposal to revise the League's charter to make the organization more effective.<sup>28</sup>

The Egyptian Free Officers' coup d'état in July 1952 brought new disappointment to Moroccan nationalists. Moroccan networks in Cairo had recruited Egyptians across the political spectrum, from Hasan al-Banna of the Muslim Brotherhood, to liberal circles. These networks were now a liability, as Egypt's new rulers moved to silence all civil society voices. Egypt thus ceased to render support to the Moroccan nationalist movement, leaving a legacy of bitterness and suspicion that would carry into the post-independence era.

### **King Mohammed V – 1956–1961**

As violence in Algeria escalated during 1955, France's protectorate regimes in Morocco and Tunisia became a liability not worth maintaining. Hence both countries were granted independence in March 1956. France had laid down many of the institutional foundations for a territorially unified and centrally governed independent Moroccan state, with a monarchical form of government.<sup>29</sup> Exiling Mohammed V and his family in August 1953 had boomeranged badly, and hence his legitimacy at the dawn of independence was unchallenged. Still the tasks of state-building and nation building had only just begun. Consolidating control over Morocco's geographically, economically, and socially diverse regions, ameliorating the country's widespread poverty and illiteracy, building a national army, and achieving a consensus regarding the modus operandi of the political system, i.e. the division of power between the Palace and the political classes, constituted daunting tasks. Many of the leaders of the nationalist movement hoped to establish a constitutional monarchy in which the king would be primarily a symbol of national unity, with limited powers only. However, King Mohammed V, and his son Hassan II, who succeeded him in 1961, had no intention of subordinating themselves to the civilian politicians, and the post-independence monarchy was fashioned into the country's central ruling institution.

Already in 1955, Egypt's Abdel Nasser had begun changing the rules of the inter-Arab game, appealing over the heads of conservative, pro-Western regimes to their publics, in the name of anti-imperialism and restoring Arab dignity. By the end of 1956, he was the unchallenged all-Arab hero, having nationalized the Suez Canal and survived the British-French-Israeli attacks designed to bring him to heel. Abdel Nasser's mass appeal could hardly be ignored by Mohammed V, and the position of secular left-of-center politicians sympathetic to Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab message had to be taken into account

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<sup>28</sup>el Fassi, 402–14.

<sup>29</sup>Jonathan Wyrzten, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), particularly 62–92, 248–272.

as they assumed important roles in the first Moroccan governments. At the same time, Mohammed V had no interest in cutting Morocco's deep economic ties with France. Hence, the king's approach to wider Arab affairs was cautious. Morocco would wait two years before joining the Arab League, and the king did his best to remain above the fray of inter-Arab disputes. To that end, in early 1960 he made a lengthy trip to the Middle East, stopping in turn in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In the words of one American analyst, the king was "one of the rare Arab leaders neutral enough to do so [i.e. to be able to visit all four countries] without giving offense."<sup>30</sup> One concrete reason for the king's posture was the desire for Arab backing of Morocco's opposition to France's granting independence to Mauritania that same year. Foreshadowing Morocco's subsequent rejection of independence for Western Sahara, both the king and the nationalist parties insisted that a Mauritanian entity was simply a colonial creation, and that Morocco's influence over the area in centuries past should take precedence. Arab League resolutions supporting the Moroccan position and opposing Mauritania's admission to the UN were adopted without controversy, to Morocco's satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> It was not until 1970 that Morocco desisted from its claim and recognized Mauritanian independence. The Arab League would admit Mauritania as a member three years later.

The crisis in the Congo in 1961 momentarily placed Morocco alongside Abdel Nasser as part of a group of African nations supporting Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba against Western-backed secessionists. To that end, Morocco hosted the seven-nation Casablanca conference, on January 3–7, 1961. The king's initiative highlighted his anti-imperialist credentials, thus ensuring that the banner of anti-imperialism couldn't be monopolized by the leftist opposition. To his satisfaction, the conference endorsed Morocco's claim to Mauritania, which it stigmatized as a "puppet state" set up by France. For our purposes, the most important attendee was Abdel Nasser, who was greeted with reverence by the Moroccan public, and heralded by the leftist *Union Nationale des Forces Populaires* (UNFP) party led by Mehdi Ben Barka, and which had broken away from the Istiqlal party two years earlier. By contrast, Tunisia's Habib Bourguiba, one of Abdel Nasser's primary antagonists, was not invited to the Casablanca conference.<sup>32</sup> Abdel Nasser's demonstrated popularity undoubtedly gave pause in the Palace and among its supporters. Just over one month later, Mohammed V passed away suddenly, following minor surgery. His son, Hassan II ascended to the throne, and would both reign and rule with an iron hand for thirty-eight years.

<sup>30</sup>Charles F. Gallagher, *The United States and North Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 223.

<sup>31</sup>Yitzhak Oron (ed.), *Middle East Record*, Volume One (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 163–64; and Volume Two, 1961 (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Scientific Translation), 169–70.

<sup>32</sup>For details of the conference and its aftermath, see *ibid.*, 48–56.

## King Hassan II – 1961–1999

Over time, and especially after barely surviving two attempted coups d'état in the early 1970s, Hassan attained complete hegemony over Moroccan political and economic life.<sup>33</sup> He reinforced his position by assuming active roles in the inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli arenas, and gradually attained the stature of a worldly and pragmatic international statesman.

Hassan's ascent to power came at the peak of the era of radical pan-Arabism embodied by Abdel Nasser and the pan-Arab Ba'th party. Like his father, Hassan was concerned mainly with avoiding revolutionary anti-regime activities of the kind that had toppled or threatened to topple a string of Arab monarchies.<sup>34</sup> He therefore strove to maintain good terms with Arab states across the ideological spectrum, and thus avoided being dragged into the toxic dynamics that characterized the "Arab Cold War" between 1958–1970.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the remaining nine years of Abdel Nasser's life, Hassan preferred to avoid overt confrontation with him, notwithstanding their radically different ideological orientations. It wasn't always easy: for example, Morocco's slowness in recognizing the new Egyptian-backed republican government in Yemen in Fall 1962 resulted in sharp attacks against it by the Egyptian government-directed press.<sup>36</sup>

Morocco's geopolitical and ideological rivalry with Algeria added to its problems with Egypt. Both Morocco and Egypt had given aid and succor to the Algerian FLN in its war for independence. But ideologically, Abdel Nasser's Egypt strongly identified with the victorious revolutionary socialist regime in Algiers, and provided it with military and economic aid. During the three-week War of the Sands between Morocco and Algeria over their disputed frontier in September-October 1963, Egypt shipped tanks, half-tracks, and other armored vehicles and cannon, a battalion of troops, and six long-range Soviet planes to the outgunned Algerian army. On the political front, Abdel Nasser sent a letter to Hassan that urged him, in the name of the Arab national interest, to stop the fighting. He reiterated the gist of an Arab League proposal, formulated following two meetings on the subject, calling for a ceasefire and withdrawal of troops to their previous position. Abdel Nasser also suggested an emergency meeting of North African heads of state, including his bitter foe, Tunisia's Habib Bourguiba and Libya's King Idris, with his possible participation as well, to discuss the frontier question. The letter

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<sup>33</sup>The classic book on Moroccan politics, and the centrality of the monarchy, remains John Waterbury's, *The Commander of the Faithful* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970). For a more recent study of how the ruling dynasty has successfully made use of tradition, symbols, and ritual to maintain its hegemony over the country's political life, see Mohammed Daadaoui, *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge: Maintaining Makhzen Power* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>34</sup>Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Why Did Arab Monarchies Fall? An Analysis of Old and New Explanations," In *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Joseph Kostiner (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 37–52.

<sup>35</sup>Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup>Gallagher, *The United States and North Africa*, 223.

included references to Abdel Nasser's respect for Hassan's late father, as it clearly was designed to be non-confrontational.<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, the chances of Abdel Nasser's initiative succeeding were nil, given Egypt's pro-Algerian stance resulting in Morocco's branding the Arab League "Egypt's puppet."<sup>38</sup> A final fatal blow was delivered to Nasser when a Soviet-made helicopter carrying four Egyptian intelligence officers was captured in the border region, inside Moroccan territory. The officers were interrogated and held up as proof that Abdel Nasser was supporting Algeria's attempt to destroy the Moroccan regime.<sup>39</sup>

But no crisis in Egyptian-Moroccan relations ensued. Attending the first all-Arab summit conference in Cairo in January 1964, Hassan brought the prisoners with him and released them. In December 1965, Hassan characterized his relations with Abdel Nasser as "excellent." They had settled their differences, he told an interviewer, during their meeting at the Casablanca Arab summit conference in September 1965, with Abdel Nasser telling Hassan that he had "been misled by his intelligence services," and that having only viewed Morocco from afar, he "had not seen us for what we really are." In the same interview, Hassan tellingly distanced himself from the prevailing pan-Arab world view. When asked how he felt about "the Arab nation," he replied that, while respecting the Arab countries' commonalities of language and religion, "no man in his right mind could imagine that we could be a nation. We have neither the same frontiers, nor the same nationality, nor the same legislation, nor the same flag."<sup>40</sup>

The Moroccan-Algerian mini-war over their disputed common border was a harbinger of things to come. In the mid-1970s, Morocco moved forcefully to incorporate the Western (ex-Spanish) Sahara within its realm, sparking an armed conflict with the Algerian-backed Polisario movement for Western Saharan independence. Nearly fifty years hence, maintaining that control and winning international legitimacy for it remains Morocco's top priority.

The Arab League has always had a poor record of mediating conflicts between member states. This was true during the 1963 War of the Sands and again in 1976, when Moroccan and Algerian troops directly clashed at the Amalga oasis in Western Sahara following the withdrawal of Spanish forces from the territory.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the years, the League avoided taking a stand

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<sup>37</sup>*Al-Ahram*, Oct. 24, 1963.

<sup>38</sup>Sela, *The Decline*, 49.

<sup>39</sup>Ana Torres-Garcia, "US diplomacy and the North African 'War of the Sands' (1963)", *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, no. 2 (March 2013), 330–32, 337–38. One of the prisoners was apparently future Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco*, 202; "POW Mohamed Hosni Mubarak," <https://egyptianpows.net/2010/05/21/pow-mohamed-hosni-mubarak/>.

<sup>40</sup>"An Interview with King Hassan II," *Realités*, Dec. 1965 (CIA-RDP 75-00149R0000100350006-0 released2001/07/26).

<sup>41</sup>Egyptian vice president Hosni Mubarak tried to bring King Hassan and Algerian president Boumediene together with Anwar Sadat after the clashes, but without success. Saudi Crown Prince Fahd had similar results from efforts made later in the year. Tony Hodges, *Western Sahara The Roots of a Desert War* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1983), 335, n. 24.

on the conflict, limiting itself to unspecified support of “the integrity of the Moroccan territorial sovereignty.” This suited Morocco just fine, as it had the backing of a large bloc of Arab states (mostly the monarchies), led by Saudi Arabia. The Saudis even sent a delegation to participate in Morocco’s three hundred fifty thousand person “Green March” to reclaim the territory from Spain.<sup>42</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, Riyadh provided large sums to help finance the two thousand kilometer berm fortifications that decisively stabilized the conflict, to Morocco’s advantage. Among Arab League members, only Algeria, Syria and Libya have recognized the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), the Polisario’s official government-in-exile.<sup>43</sup> By the end of 2022, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Bahrain had all opened consulates in Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara, and ten League members were part of the UAE-lead thirty-five member international “Support Group for the Territorial Integrity of the Moroccan Kingdom.”<sup>44</sup>

### The road to the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war

Avoiding inter-Arab disputes was especially important for Morocco as the Arab-Israeli conflict escalated in the mid-1960s. The first all-Arab summit conference, held in Cairo in January 1964, was convened by Abdel Nasser to try and damp down criticism of his failure to bloc Israel’s National Water Carrier project, and reassert his leadership over a fractious Arab house. The summit conference would become de facto the supreme decision-making of the Arab League. King Hassan hosted the third of these summits, in Casablanca in 1965, and a number of subsequent ones many of which quite consequential. In doing so, the king accrued prestige and thus strengthened his standing domestically, regionally, and internationally. More generally, the first summit conferences were markers of a process reconciling the meaning of Arab nationalism with individual state sovereignty and the legitimacy of the territorial status quo.<sup>45</sup> For Arab monarchs being targeted by Arab radicals as “reactionaries” and tools of imperialism, and therefore destined for the dustbin of history, the summit conference institution was worth embracing. The Arab Solidarity Charter adopted at Casablanca in 1965 reasserted the principles of the League Charter promoting solidarity, mutual respect, and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, as opposed to the ideological wars promoted by the radicals.<sup>46</sup> For Hassan, this was pitch perfect.

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<sup>42</sup>Samir Bennis, “The Moroccan-Saudi Rift: The Shattering of a Privileged Political Alliance,” April 3, 2019. <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/node/1618>.

<sup>43</sup>These three, together with the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, made up the “Steadfastness and Confrontation Front” during the 1980s. The PDRY also recognized SADR. It went out of business in 1990, merging with the Yemen Arab Republic.

<sup>44</sup>Sara Zouiten, “UAE Leads 35 Countries in Renewing Support for Morocco’s Territorial Integrity,” Morocco World News, Sept. 13, 2022. <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/09/351336/uae-leads-35-countries-in-renewing-support-for-moroccos-territorial-integrity>.

<sup>45</sup>Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, 146–53.

<sup>46</sup>Sela, *The Decline*, 82–84.

Morocco's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict was complex and full of contradictions. Sympathy for the Palestinians was considerable, and dated back decades. According to Hassan, his father had asked Charles De Gaulle in 1945 to release the Palestinian leader Amin al-Husayni from custody.<sup>47</sup> Moroccan activists in Cairo greeted the Mufti warmly upon his arrival in June 1946, and he attended most of the events held by the *Maktab al-Maghrib al-'Arabi*. More than a decade later, Mohammed V spoke at length with US President Eisenhower about the plight of Palestinian refugees and their right of repatriation during the president's official visit to Morocco, and sought (unsuccessfully) to include mention of the subject in their joint statement.<sup>48</sup>

In that same vein, Morocco fully supported the 1964 Cairo Arab summit's initiative to establish the Palestine Liberation Organization, and later pledged to provide it with financial support. However, like a number of other Arab states, it did not do so at the 1965 Casablanca summit, resulting in sharp criticism by PLO head Ahmed Shukairy. As Arab-Israeli tensions increased, Hassan told an interviewer that another war "seems inevitable." But that Israel's subsequent disappearance was "not as inevitable." He also stated that Arab countries had been ruining themselves in armaments because of Israel for the past twenty years "instead of using that money to help raise their living standard." In any case, he said, Palestinians "must be given their rights," as per UN resolutions.<sup>49</sup>

To be sure, Morocco's anchoring itself within the Arab consensus on the Palestinian issue left plenty of room for nuance. While still Crown Prince, Hassan had shocked a group of Lebanese intellectuals when he said that the only solution to the conflict with Israel was to recognize it and integrate it into the Arab League. He also made it clear to Arab leaders attending the 1965 Casablanca summit that his preference, which he insisted be included in the official protocol of the gathering, was to reach a solution of peaceful coexistence.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, and unbeknownst to Arab leaders, Hassan provided Israel with recordings of the summit's discussions of Arab military preparations.<sup>51</sup> According to Shlomo Gazit, the former head of Israeli military intelligence, the discussions revealed the Egyptian army's lack of preparedness, contributing to the Israeli military's confidence in the run-up to the June 1967 war.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup>The Mufti had been captured in May 1945 and placed under house arrest. Hassan wrote that De Gaulle agreed to the request. However, another year would pass before the Mufti "escaped" to Egypt, at a time when De Gaulle was no longer in power. *Hassan II La Mémoire d'un Roi: Entretiens avec Eric Laurent* (Paris: Plon, 1993), 11.

<sup>48</sup>"Memorandum of a Conference With the President, Palais Royal, Casablanca, December 22, 1959," Document 362, *Foreign Relations of The United States, 1958-1960, Arab-Israeli Dispute; United Arab Republic; North Africa*, Vol XIII, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d362>.

<sup>49</sup>"An Interview with King Hassan II," *Realités*, Dec. 1965 (CIA-RDP 75-00149R000100350006-0 released 2001/07/26).

<sup>50</sup>*Hassan II La Mémoire d'un Roi*, 245-47.

<sup>51</sup>Elie Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner: Israel's Secret Relations with States and Minorities in the Middle East, 1948-2020* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2022) (in Hebrew), 495.

<sup>52</sup>Sue Surkes, "Morocco tipped off Israeli intelligence, 'helped Israel win Six Day War,'" *Times of Israel*, Oct. 16, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/morocco-tipped-off-israeli-intelligence-helped-israel-win-six-day-war/>.

The episode was part of a larger story of Moroccan-Israeli relations, one that combined elements of realpolitik and a less tangible intertwining of history, myth, sentiment, and personal connections involving the Moroccan monarchy, Moroccan Jewry, and the Israeli government. From Jerusalem's perspective, links with Rabat constituted an extension of its "periphery" policy, the cultivation of non-Arab actors on the Middle East periphery to counterbalance the pressure of radical, hostile Arab states.<sup>53</sup> Both Mohammed V and Hassan II believed that Israel was here to stay, and that the clock could not be rolled back to times before 1948. As already discussed, Morocco was keen on keeping the radical Arab nationalist current at bay, and a moderate approach to Arab-Israeli issues helped reinforce the kingdom's military and economic ties with Western countries against the radical states backed by the Soviet Union.

On the eve of Israel's independence, Morocco's Jewish community numbered two hundred seventy thousand. Growing uncertainty over their future in an independent Morocco resulted in one hundred thousand of them departing between 1948–1956, and thousands more in the following five years. The flow of Moroccan Jews, facilitated by Mossad networks in Morocco, was barely a secret and drew sharp criticism from left-wing politicians brandishing the claim of "aiding an enemy state." The turning point came following the drowning of forty-two Moroccan Jews when a boat ferrying them to Gibraltar sank in a storm off the Moroccan coast, causing an uproar internationally. Hassan's ascent to the throne took place six weeks later, and he quickly arranged an orderly departure process of another one hundred thousand Jews over the next five years, bolstering his image in the West (and probably benefitting himself financially from the arrangement).

With security considerations overlapping with understandings regarding Moroccan Jewry, Israeli and Moroccan interests now aligned more closely. To assist Morocco during the 1963 War of the Sands, Israel sent an intelligence officer to Morocco to report on Egyptian and Algerian activities, and a journalist to assist in the psychological/informational aspects of the war. Morocco, in turn, shared information about the Egyptian military that would later prove to be helpful to Israel, some of it gleaned from the interrogation of the captured Egyptian officers.<sup>54</sup>

Ties with the top echelons of the Moroccan security services quickly expanded, and the Mossad established a relatively large station in Rabat.<sup>55</sup> The regime's strongman and Hassan confidante, Gen. Mohammed Oufkir, was an ideal interlocutor for Israel, and contacts with him dated back to at least the beginning of 1960. An ethnic Amazigh from Morocco's southeast, Oufkir was utterly disdainful of the urban Arab political and cultural elites, and would have preferred that Morocco not be a member of the Arab

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<sup>53</sup>Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 25–28.

<sup>54</sup>Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner*, 488.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 486–87.

League.<sup>56</sup> As with Hassan, Oufkir had links with Morocco's Jews, going back to his childhood.<sup>57</sup> Israel provided Morocco with training for internal security and intelligence personnel, including the king's personal bodyguards.<sup>58</sup> Oufkir even secretly visited Israel in 1964 to observe first-hand the Israeli procedures for protecting VIPs, in this case Pope Paul VI. But the close relationship also entangled Israel in Oufkir's directed kidnapping and killing of UNFP head and Hassan II opponent Mehdi Ben Barka.<sup>59</sup>

### From June to October, and beyond

The June 1967 war was a tense time for Morocco's Jewish community. Expectations among Moroccan Muslims for a swift Arab victory were high among the urban educated class, while Morocco's Jews anxiously kept a low profile. The Moroccan authorities dispatched 2,000 troops eastward in a show support for Arab armies, but they didn't make it past Benghazi, Libya.<sup>60</sup> On June 12, with the scope of the Arab defeat now clear to everyone, the Istiqlal party newspapers called for a boycott of "all those who have distant ties with Israel and her sinister allies," and published a list of offending companies. Some took this to mean the ceasing of all business dealings with Jews, in the name of Muslim unity. But the government quickly made it clear, both verbally and by deploying boots on the ground, that Moroccan Jews were not to be harmed in any way, and that a boycott was "un-Islamic." The Istiqlal papers continued spewing anti-Jewish venom, and the head of Morocco's labor union charged that the Moroccan government had fallen into the hands of pro-Zionist forces. His resulting arrest indicated that a line had been crossed, and that it would not be tolerated. Moreover, in a televised speech on July 8, the king stated that it was hardly surprising that the Arabs were being viewed as aggressors in the war, since it was they who had sparked

<sup>56</sup>FRUS, 1969–76, Vol. E, Part 2, Documents on Africa, 1969–72, Rockwell to Secretary of State, Rabat Tel. # 4204, Aug. 19, 1971, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d121>.

<sup>57</sup>Oufkir was born in the country's southeastern Tafilalt region, not far from the Algerian border. One-quarter of the approximately 1,000 residents of the village of Boudnib were Jewish including the kabbalist Baba Sali, from whom Oufkir used to receive blessings. One of his friends from these years was Elie Tordjeman, with whom he boarded in Meknes during his years at the military school, and eventually became an important merchant dealing in tea and sugar, and thus a "man of affairs" with close links to the monarchy. Moreover, he was also involved in the Mossad-run network organizing the emigration operation in the 1950s. Another friend, Emile Ben Hamo, eventually emigrated to France and hosted meetings between Oufkir and Israeli officials at his Parisian residence. Shmuel Segev, *The Moroccan Connection: The secret ties between Israel and Morocco* (in Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Matar, 2008), 110–34; Stephen Smith, *Oufkir, Un destin marocain* (Paris: Hachette, 2002), 131. A very close Jewish friend of Oufkir's from later life was Henry Friedman, a Holocaust survivor who had succeeded in business in Casablanca. Malika Oufkir, *Stolen Lives* (NY: Hyperion, 2001), 74–5.

<sup>58</sup>Stewart Steven, *The Spymasters of Israel* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1982), 239–41; Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars* (NY: Grove Press, 1991), 203; and Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 157.

<sup>59</sup>Michael M. Laskier, *Israel and the Maghreb: From Statehood to Oslo* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 144–57, Podesh, *From Mistress to Known Partner*, 490–7.

<sup>60</sup>Daniel Dishon (ed.), *Middle East Record*, Volume Three, 1967 (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1971), 246.

it by closing the Gulf of Aqaba and calling for a general mobilization a week before the fighting began.<sup>61</sup>

The collective Arab defeat in 1967 was a Waterloo for Arab radical regimes that had staked their legitimacy on confronting Israel. Their defeat gave the Moroccan monarchy and other conservative monarchies essential room to breathe. It also reconfirmed to Hassan that a diplomatic resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that would address Palestinian grievances was the right path to follow. During the next six years, Morocco would continue to balance its commitment to Arab and Islamic sensibilities, while maintaining a pragmatic line in international and regional forums. It lined up with the Saudi-led conservative bloc at the Khartoum 1967 Arab summit, and hosted Islamic and Arab summits in 1969. Although Hassan disparaged Abdel Nasser and other Arab leaders in his conversations with foreign diplomats, he also spoke favorably to the US about Abdel Nasser's appeal for peace to the Americans in spring 1970, and at Abdel Nasser's request, no less.<sup>62</sup>

Abdel Nasser's passing on September 29, 1970 symbolized the definitive end of the era of radical pan-Arabism. Although Libya's Mu' ammar al-Qaddafi and Algeria subsequently sponsored a group of young leftist plotters against the Moroccan throne (the plot was broken up in early 1973), the main threat to Hassan's rule now came from the army, in the form of two consecutive attempted coups d'état in 1971 and 1972, the second one led by Oufkir himself. There is a broad consensus among scholars that the motivations behind the coups were not explicitly "Berber" in nature, but that there was nonetheless a "Berber coloring," namely a certain level of solidarity with the plotters' activities, characterized by common backgrounds, professional and social links and concern for both their personal and the country's future.<sup>63</sup> Discussions of the Berber dimension of the attempted coups angered Hassan who called references to the matter racist colonialist, accusations that falsely posited Morocco as a country divided between Arabs and non-Arabs. Morocco, he emphasized, was "a Muslim state, whose language is Arabic, and it is a member of the Arab League."<sup>64</sup>

As part of his reassertion of control over the military after the second coup attempt, King Hassan announced on February 22, 1973 that motorized

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<sup>61</sup>Lawrence Rosen, *Two Arabs, a Berber and a Jew: Entangled Lives in Morocco* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2016), 248–55. For a summary of developments related to Morocco's Jewish community during the year, see Dishon, *ibid.*, 308.

<sup>62</sup>Foreign Relations of The United States, 1958–1960, Arab-Israeli Dispute; United Arab Republic; North Africa, Vol XIII, "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Document 104, Washington, June 3, 1970, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v13/d362>; and "Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Morocco," Document No. 105, Washington, June 5, 1970, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve05p2/d105>.

<sup>63</sup>Frank H. Braun, "Morocco: Anatomy of a Palace Revolution that Failed," *IJMES*, 9 (1978), 63–72; John Waterbury, "The Coup Manqué"; and A. Coram, "The Berbers and the Coup," in Gellner and Micaud (eds.), 397–423, 425–30.

<sup>64</sup>US NA, RG59, Confidential Tel. 0831, Rabat to Secretary of State, (Priority 8263), Feb. 23, 1973; "Le Discours Royal," *Maroc Soir*, Feb. 23, 1973.

infantry units were being dispatched to Syria to help defend it against Israel. By doing so, he both displayed his commitment to the collective Arab cause and distanced the commanders and their units from home. Additional forces were deployed to the Golan Heights front following the outbreak of war on October 6, where they incurred casualties. Morocco had thus “proved” its commitment to collective Arab norms, paying in blood. Having done so, Morocco now stepped up its game, playing a more prominent diplomatic role at the intersection between the inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli arenas.

The seventeen years between the October 1973 war and the 1991 Gulf war were packed with inter-Arab crises. No less than thirteen Arab summit conferences were held during this eighteen-year period. Morocco hosted five of them – in 1974, 1981, 1982, 1985 and 1989. In doing so, Hassan sought to assist efforts to achieve a diplomatic resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He also undertook more direct initiatives, first in secret and then in public. Numerous behind the scenes contacts included a visit by Israel’s prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1976, and an important meeting between its foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, and Hassan al-Tohami, an adviser to Egypt’s president Anwar Sadat, in September 1977; the meetings helped pave the way for Sadat’s historic trip to Jerusalem. Morocco was publicly supportive of Sadat’s initiative and welcomed Sadat on his way home from signing the Camp David Accords in September 1978. But Morocco eventually toed the line along with other Arab monarchies, agreeing to the suspension of Egypt from the Arab League in March 1979.

The Fez II summit, convened in the wake of the 1982 Lebanon war, produced a collectively endorsed plan for a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. The plan itself was studiously ambiguous on a number of essential points, but it did mark a sea change from the previous “3 No’s” laid out by the 1967 Khartoum summit. The Fez summit also designated Hassan as head of a seven-member committee charged with explaining the Fez principles to the international community, and Hassan used his position to try to break the diplomatic deadlock. To that end, he sought Arab approval to meet with the Israeli leadership. Failing to attain it, he went ahead anyway, hosting Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres at his palace in Ifrane, in July 1986. Unlike previous meetings with Israeli leaders, this one was publicized, drawing angry responses from the Steadfastness Front countries. A joint communiqué issued by Syria’s President Hafiz al-Asad and Libya’s Qaddafi condemned the Ifrane meeting as a “treasonous action” and “a deviation from the pan-Arab commitment and Arab consensus.”<sup>65</sup> The meeting was cut short by a disappointed Hassan, who had expected Peres to offer major concessions in return for the meeting.<sup>66</sup> But Hassan also publicly defended himself

<sup>65</sup>Radio Damascus, August 26 – FBIS, Daily Report: Middle East and Africa, Aug. 28, 1986.

<sup>66</sup>Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partners* 509–510. According to the Mossad’s Efraim Halevy, the meeting ended in a “near fiasco,” and that Peres and his entourage “were more or less summarily expelled from the country.” Efraim Halevy, *Man in the Shadows* (NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 140.

against Arab criticism. In a televised address, Hassan declared that no one in the Arab Mashriq could give Morocco “lessons in patriotism,” for they had been “languid” (*khamilun*) for twenty years. By contrast, “the courageous Moroccan people,” he declared, “would have never abandoned their land to Israeli occupation for so long.”<sup>67</sup>

The Fez principles were a slightly altered version of an eight-point proposal originally put forth by Saudi Crown Prince Fahd in 1981. Throughout the decade and beyond, Rabat and Riyadh worked largely in tandem. Morocco was also supportive of the United Arab Emirates, stationing five thousand troops there in 1986, in response to heightened concern over Gulf security posed by the expansion of the Iran-Iraq war. As already noted, the Saudis provided crucial funding for Morocco’s berm in the Western Sahara. It was also thanks to Saudi Arabia that in 1975 King Hassan was named head of the “Al-Quds Committee” by the Organization of the Islamic Conference; the Committee was designed to preserve the Islamic character of Jerusalem.<sup>68</sup> Fahd helped engineer a border meeting between Hassan and Algerian president Chadli Bendjedid in February 1983, the first such meeting of the two heads of state since relations had been severed in 1976 following the armed clashes in the Western Sahara; likewise, Morocco joined Saudi Arabia (and Algeria), on a three-member committee designated by the Arab League, to curb Syrian hegemony in Lebanon in 1989 (the effort failed).<sup>69</sup>

Morocco’s special relationship with Saudi Arabia, and its singular approach to all-Arab affairs in general, was displayed during the 1990–91 Gulf crisis. Iraq’s August 2, 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Hassan told the Moroccan parliament, was likely to be a dividing line in Arab history whose impact would last for decades. Like Egypt, Syria and the smaller Gulf principalities, Morocco dispatched troops to Saudi Arabia – in this case, a symbolic contingent numbering 1,200 to bolster it against Iraq. At the same time, Hassan was among those who feared a regional conflagration and sought to advance a diplomatic solution. To that end, he even sent an envoy to “brother Saddam” Husayn.<sup>70</sup> Moroccan forces were kept separate from the others in the Western-Arab coalition that was assembled, and they played no role in the 1991 war that evicted Iraqi forces from Kuwait. A massive, albeit orderly anti-war demonstration in Rabat on February 3, 1991, showed where Moroccan public opinion lay, and helped explain why Hassan walked a tightrope on the issue of the war. Hassan made the point that the troops had been dispatched

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<sup>67</sup>*Al-Mithaq al-Watani*, July 25, 1986.

<sup>68</sup>Sarah Bennis “The Moroccan-Saudi Rift: The Shattering of a Privileged Political Alliance,” April 3, 2019, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/node/1618>. In response to a fire at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, Morocco and Saudi Arabia spearheaded the holding of a summit of Islamic states in Rabat, which sharply condemned Israel. The summit laid the groundwork for the ICO’s establishment.

<sup>69</sup>Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, “Inter-Arab Relations,” in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. XIII, 1989, Ami Ayalon (ed.) (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 138–43.

<sup>70</sup>Rabat RTM TV, October 12 – FBIS, Daily Report, Oct. 16, 1990.

for defensive purposes only, and that he had acted independent of, and prior to an Arab League resolution sanctioning collective action. It was good enough for Riyadh: the Saudis rewarded Morocco with a \$700 million grant at the end of 1990, and another one billion in April 1991.

### **Grand Maghrib or Grand Arab Maghrib?**

The two-year period between the 1988 ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had inaugurated a brief period of optimism in Arab affairs. Two sub-regional organizations were established in February 1989 to promote closer political and economic ties, joining the already extant six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council: the Arab Maghrib Union (*Ittihad al-Maghrib al-ʿArabi*; AMU, consisting of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania), and the Arab Cooperation Council (*majlis al-taʿawun al-ʿArabi*; ACC, consisting of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen). The AMU was the latest iteration of a long-cherished idea of Maghribi unity among the region's intellectuals. As it happened, the organization quickly foundered on the shoals of Algerian-Moroccan differences over the unresolved Western Sahara issue, as well as Libya being placed under an international sanctions regime following the Pan Am Lockerbie bombing.

For our purposes, it is worth noting that the preamble of Morocco's first constitution (1962) specified that Arabic was the official language of the kingdom, and that Morocco constituted part of the "Grand Maghrib" (*al-Maghrib al-Kabir*). Following the AMU's establishment, newer constitutions (1992 and 1996) referred to Morocco being part of the "Grand Arab Maghrib" ("al-Maghrib **al-ʿArabi** al-Kabir) [author's emphasis]. Concurrently, political Islam was making inroads into Moroccan society, to the alarm of the Palace, this at a time when Algeria was descending into horrific violent confrontation between an armed Islamist insurgency and the Algerian state authorities. Hence, during the middle of the 1990s, the Moroccan king also made the first tentative steps toward acknowledging the country's Amazigh component in an attempt to help counterbalance the Islamists. The budding Amazigh movement for its part rejected the very notion of Morocco being an Arab state belonging to an Arab region, and the issue would become contentious in the years ahead.<sup>71</sup>

### **Madrid, Oslo and Casablanca**

During the last decade of his life, Hassan sought to remake himself into a more benevolent, albeit still autocratic reformer, controlling the pace of change and

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<sup>71</sup>Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), *passim*.

thus maintaining societal and regime stability. Favorable regional and global developments reinforced Hassan's position. A UN-led ceasefire and political process for the Western Sahara was to his liking; the Gulf War had ended without touching off a larger regional explosion; and the breakup of the Soviet Union created a moment of unipolarity that promised a better future for countries allied with the victorious West, beginning with the jump-starting of an Arab-Israeli peace process via the Madrid Peace Conference in Fall 1991. Nearly all Arab countries were represented in one form or another (the secretary-generals of the GCC and AMU attended as observers).

The Israeli-PLO agreement in September 1993, brokered in Oslo and signed on the White House lawn, was a validation of Morocco's long held position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hassan received Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his entourage on their way back from Washington. An additional Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement and the conclusion of an Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty enabled Morocco to officially join the party, so to speak. On September 1, 1994, the two countries announced that they would open low-level diplomatic offices in Rabat and Tel Aviv. At the end of October, the first Middle East and North Africa Economic Conference was held in Casablanca, bringing together a large-scale conclave of senior officials from Israel, numerous Arab states, the US, Europe and Japan, and representatives from the private sector. For Hassan, the conference embodied his promotion of a more benign and cooperative future for the region, as well as allowing Morocco to bask in the international limelight.

### **Mohammed VI, 1999–**

Ascending to the throne in July 1999 following his father's passing, Mohammed VI sought almost immediately to heal long-standing societal wounds, allowing political exiles to return, releasing the leading Islamist figure from house arrest, and partially embracing the Amazigh current, whose voice was now being heard more loudly. A manifesto, drawn up in 2000 and signed by more than 250 intellectuals, rejected the notion that Morocco's identity was exclusively Arab identity: "We the Amazigh ... who are proud of our *Amazighité* ... are brothers to the Arabs ... we jointly form one body ... [with] our fellow citizens who are proud of their '*Arabité*.' We believe that diversity is an enrichment ... and a sharpener of human designs ... what causes separatism and group splitting is [not] multilingualism ... but a lack of civilizational maturity."<sup>72</sup> The following year, the king publicly embraced Amazigh culture as a constituent component of Moroccan identity.

Concurrently, the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in late September 2000 forced Morocco to recalibrate its relations with Israel and

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<sup>72</sup>"The Berber Manifesto," <https://www.culturaelibri.com/the-berber-manifesto/>.

toe the collective Arab line. An emergency Arab League summit in October 2000 called on all Arab countries that had not signed full peace treaties with Israel to sever relations with the Jewish state. Morocco (and Tunisia) quickly did so. Subsequently, there were those who felt that the young king had acted hastily. Over the next two decades, relations with Israel were maintained according to the previous iteration, including occasional high-level meetings between the two countries' officials, Israeli lobbying on behalf of Moroccan interests in Washington, security cooperation, and a partial open door to Israel in the realms of tourism and economic assistance. It was only in 2020 that Morocco officially restored its formal diplomatic links with Israel, as part of the Abraham Accords framework, and then qualitatively upgraded them to an unprecedented level.

The 2000 Moroccan decision to close down the legations in Rabat and Tel Aviv highlighted the king's preference to avoid controversy and remain within the Arab consensus at such a highly charged moment. Beyond that, Mohammed VI had no desire to play a similar role to his father's in Arab and regional affairs. His clear preference was to concentrate on internal matters. As for international affairs, much was dictated by the absolute priority of consolidating Morocco's control over the "Moroccan Sahara," in addition to managing its complex ties with the EU and the US, ensuring continued close ties with Gulf Arab monarchies, and developing deepening ties with sub-Saharan African states. Hence, Mohammed VI avoided personally attending Arab League summit conferences, and Morocco tried to keep a low profile on Middle East regional issues.

Nonetheless, concern in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf over Iran's growing power in the region, particularly following the 2003 Iraq war that brought a Shi'a-dominated government to power there, could not be ignored in Rabat. In 2009, Morocco severed relations with Iran, accusing Tehran of "intolerable interference" in the kingdom's internal affairs, a reference to supposed Shi'a proselytization. (Relations would be restored in 2014, and severed again in 2018, with Morocco accusing Iran of providing aid to Polisario through its Lebanese Hizballah client and the Iranian embassy in Algiers). Morocco also expressed strong support for Bahrain, after an Iranian official reiterated Iran's long-standing historical claim to the small Persian Gulf kingdom. In 2011, in the shadow of the "Arab Spring" protests that were roiling the region, Morocco received a surprise invitation to join the GCC, as did Jordan. For GCC heavyweight Saudi Arabia, the invitation was linked to efforts to stymie the protestors' calls for political liberalization. Morocco was reluctant to pursue the invitation, and it quickly dropped off the agenda.<sup>73</sup> However, a joint GCC-Moroccan summit was held in Riyadh in 2016, with Mohammed VI's participation.

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<sup>73</sup>Zisenwine, "Mohammed VI and Moroccan Foreign Policy," 75–76.

A year earlier, Morocco had joined seven other Arab states in supporting Saudi Arabia's military intervention in the Yemen civil war against the Houthis who, backed by Iran, had taken over large swaths of territory, including the capital San'a. As in the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, Morocco's contribution to the Saudi-led coalition was extremely modest – six warplanes, one of which was shot down, and 1500 troops. But unlike in 1991, this episode did not end well. Morocco withdrew its contingent in 2019, amidst increasing criticism of the civilian casualties resulting from the Saudi bombing campaign. In response, the Saudi-owned *al-'Arabiya* TV channel ran a program critical of Morocco's position on the Western Sahara, calling Polisario the legitimate representative of the Sahrawis. Morocco, in turn, recalled its ambassador for consultations, and did the same vis-a-vis the UAE after the latter had recalled its ambassador from Rabat.

Concurrent with the Yemen war, the Saudi-led campaign to isolate and punish Qatar in 2017 was no less problematic for Rabat. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were Morocco's long-time allies, and only France had a higher amount of direct investment in the country than them. But relations with Qatar had also flourished in recent years, and Doha too was a major investor in the country. Qatar's natural gas played an important role in Morocco's future energy plans. Moreover, the Islamist PJD party, which headed Morocco's coalition governments between 2011–2021, identified with Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist current in general, something that was one of the sources of Saudi Arabia and the UAE's anger with Qatar. Hence, Morocco declared itself neutral, refused to join the boycott and sanctions regime, and sent humanitarian aid to Qatar. Mohammed VI even traveled to Abu Dhabi and Doha in an effort to reconcile the opposing sides.<sup>74</sup> According to one knowledgeable analyst, thousands of Moroccans went to Qatar to contribute their expertise in food production, agriculture, and other blockaded sectors.<sup>75</sup> The resulting tension with Saudi Arabia was made apparent by Morocco's failure to host Saudi Crown Prince and regime strongman Mohammed Bin Salman during his tour of North African states, and by Moroccan anger over Saudi Arabia's failure to support Morocco's bid to host the 2026 World Cup.

To Morocco's satisfaction, the boycott and isolation campaign ended in early 2021, and Rabat's relations with the Gulf monarchies returned to normal. Moreover, Morocco was delighted that the GCC's reconciliation summit also emphasized the "special strategic partnership between the GCC and the Kingdom of Morocco," and its unwavering support for the sovereignty of Morocco and its territorial integrity," i.e. for the "Moroccan Sahara."<sup>76</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>74</sup>Haim Malka, "Maghreb Neutrality: Maghreb-Gulf Arab Ties Since the GCC Split," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 11, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/maghreb-neutrality-maghreb-gulf-arab-ties-gcc-split>.

<sup>75</sup>Abdulaziz Kilani and Giorgio Cafiero, "Morocco is a Winner of the Al-Ula Summit," *Al Sharq Strategic Research*, Feb. 25, 2021, <https://research.sharqforum.org/2021/02/25/morocco-is-a-winner/>.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

as noted above, the UAE and Bahrain were among those states that opened consulates in the territory.

In December 2020, Morocco followed in Bahrain's and the UAE's footsteps, joining the Abraham Accords framework for normalizing ties with Israel. The move dovetailed with the end of the crisis over Qatar, and Morocco's diplomatic successes on the Western Sahara issue. Indeed, Morocco agreed to reestablish formal diplomatic ties with Israel as a quid pro quo for US President Donald Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed territory. It was an offer that Morocco could hardly refuse. Moreover, the Palace compelled the governing Islamist PJD party to endorse the move, against its own previously strident opposition to normalization of relations with Israel. The PJD's image in the eyes of its supporters was badly damaged, and the party suffered a catastrophic defeat in the 2021 parliamentary elections, something which the Palace no doubt desired. From that point on, Israeli-Moroccan relations developed rapidly, in both the military and civilian realms. This was to Algeria's dismay. The silence from most other Arab countries spoke volumes on how a country's position on Israel was no longer a litmus test for its fidelity to collective Arab values.

Morocco's qualitative upgrading of the relationship with Israel suggested that the Palace and allied elites were less concerned with public reaction than in the past. An authoritative public opinion survey on the subject can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it showed that a large majority of Moroccans (67 percent) opposed diplomatic recognition of Israel, with only 20 percent in favor, and 58 percent agreed that the Palestinian issue concerned all Arabs, while 26 percent said that it only concerned the Palestinians themselves. On the other hand, more Moroccans favored diplomatic recognition, and less viewed the Palestinian issue as an all-Arab one, than in any of the other thirteen countries surveyed.<sup>77</sup> Given the United States' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, the tangible benefits that upgrading relations with Israel was bringing to various sectors, the long-term decline in the political salience of Arabism throughout the region, parallel actions by GCC states, and the shifting contours of Moroccan collective identity during Mohammed VI's two decade reign, the regime clearly felt that it had much greater freedom on the subject of Israel than in the past.

### **Morocco's "Democracy Spring" and the Amazigh factor**

The tsunami of popular protest that cascaded across North Africa and the Arab Middle East, beginning in December 2010, provided proof that common

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<sup>77</sup>"Arab Opinion Index 2022, Executive Summary," Arab Center Washington D.C., Jan. 19, 2023, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-opinion-index-2022-executive-summary/>. A slightly higher percentage of Lebanese viewed the Palestinian cause as being solely the concern of Palestinians, even though a slightly higher percentage viewed it as an all-Arab cause.

bonds of Arab identity continued to exist across national frontiers. At the same time, “being Arab” was now less of a tool in states’ foreign policies, and was folded into domestic debates about the role of Islam in political life and in the shaping of collective identity. Moreover, the Amazigh factor was very much a part of North Africa’s increasingly contested politics during the ensuing decade. Expressed in a variety of political and cultural ways, it became an integral part of the Maghrib’s increasingly contested public sphere. As surviving regimes struggled to recover their fraying legitimacy, and new ones sought to attain it, they could no longer ignore the Amazigh dimensions of their societies, even as their strategies ranged from partial acknowledgment and co-option to overt repression.<sup>78</sup>

This was certainly true in Morocco. The 2011 protests there were widespread, heterogeneous, and designed to achieve fundamental reform in the state’s governing institutions, but not to topple them. Morocco’s large and diverse Amazigh communities were integral participants in the country’s increasingly contested public sphere, in numerous ways.<sup>79</sup> Although the Palace’s adroit maneuverings and cosmetic reforms quickly took the wind out of the sails of the protests, the Moroccan Amazigh movement registered a major achievement – the constitutional recognition of Tamazight as an official language of the state, “being common patrimony of all Moroccans without exception.”<sup>80</sup> Morocco was thus only the second member of the Arab League to confer official recognition on an additional language alongside of Arabic (post-Saddam Iraq did so in 2005; Algeria belatedly followed the Moroccan example, in 2016). The Amazigh issue was also addressed more broadly in the constitution’s preamble. Emphasizing the theme of diversity within unity, Morocco’s national identity was declared to have been “forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamic, Amazigh and Saharo-hassanian components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean tributaries (*rawafid*).” In addition, the constitution no longer declared that Morocco was part of the “Grand Arab Maghrib” (author’s emphasis), instead reverting back to the 1962 formula that referred to the “Grand Maghrib.” The removal of “Arab” was a further nod to the Amazigh movement, which forcefully rejects the idea that Morocco is an “Arab” nation, or that the Maghrib as a whole is “Arab.”<sup>81</sup>

Translating Tamazight’s newly recognized status into a social and political reality was another matter. Neither the country’s political class, led by the

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<sup>78</sup>Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *Amazigh Politics in the Wake of the Arab Spring* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2022), *passim*.

<sup>79</sup>Angel Suarez Collado, “The Amazigh Movement in Morocco: New Generations, New References of Mobilization and New Forms of Opposition,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 6 (2013): 55–74.

<sup>80</sup>The official Arabic text of the constitution can be found at <https://learningpartnership.org/resource/constitution-morocco-document-arabic>. An English translation can be found at [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco\\_2011](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011).

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

governing Islamist PJD party nor the state bureaucracy, was keen on rushing matters. In the eyes of Islamist movements, the foregrounding of Amazigh identity bordered on heresy, as it threatened the sacredness and primacy of the Arabic language. Traditional Islam-oriented political parties such as Morocco's Istiqlal, as well as myriad economic and bureaucratic elements with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, also looked askance at Amazigh demands, and it was only in 2019 that a constitutionally mandated "Organic Law" laying out a (lengthy) implementation timetable was finally adopted.

## Conclusion

The changing contours of Morocco's involvement in the inter-Arab system over nearly a century was driven by a mix of factors. Like all states, Moroccan foreign policy is guided by "realist" concerns, namely protecting and advancing national interests in an anarchic world of competing states. But as with most, if not all states, Moroccan national interests cannot be defined solely in terms of "hard power." Rather, they are also bound up with domestic political issues that relate to fundamental matters of regime legitimacy and societal cohesion, i.e. the very nature of Moroccan national identity. As in other countries across North Africa and the Arab Middle East, the menu of choices of national identity in Morocco generally revolved around a particular mix of statism, Islam and Arabism. In turn, the relative weight of these different factors conditioned the range of actions that leaders could undertake and be considered legitimate by their populations.<sup>82</sup> And at some point, the Amazigh factor, which had been contained (in both senses of the word) in the "statist" and "Islamic" choices, intruded and compelled recalibration. With the decline of Arabism as a salient political doctrine, the concomitant shift in financial power to the Gulf Arab monarchies, the growing power of Iran, the emergence of jihadi Islamist groups, and a stalemated Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Morocco's foreign relations were adjusted accordingly.

The monarchical institution has been an integral part of Moroccan realities for more than a millennium. The current Alaouite dynasty's reign dates back to the mid-seventeenth century, and derives its legitimacy from sharifian status, i.e. descending from the Prophet Mohammad. As in early Islam, both religious and political leadership are in the hands of a single person, the "Amir al-Mu'minin" ("Commander of the Believers"). The sultan's embrace of the nationalist movement, beginning in the late 1940s, was decisive in turning it into a mass movement. The movement itself had emerged in the previous two decades, and was rooted in ideas of Islamic reform that brought Arabism with

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<sup>82</sup>Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, "Introduction: Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East," in *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, ed. Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 5, 13.

it. Activists identified with parallel nationalist movements in Cairo and the Arab East, and sought their support. The Arab League Charter's pledge to work toward the realization of aspirations of Arab countries that were not yet independent indicated which way the wind was blowing in France's North African possessions, and elsewhere.

Morocco attained its independence at a critical moment in the inter-Arab system. Gamal Abdel Nasser was emerging as the all-Arab hero, threatening to undermine the legitimacy of regimes that did not follow his revolutionary pan-Arab path. Next door in Algeria, the violent struggle between Algerian nationalists and France shifted into higher gear, becoming a touchstone for anti-colonial sentiment everywhere, and drawing Morocco, Tunisia and Cairo into the fray as supporters of Algerian independence. For Mohammed V, avoiding the Arab Cold War and maintaining proper relations with Arab radical and conservative regimes alike was the natural choice, as he sought to ensure his preeminence over the political echelons at home, some of whom identified viscerally with a more radical version of Arabism than had existed in previous decades. Good relations across the spectrum of Arab states were also instrumental for the king in asserting his nationalist credentials on the issue of Mauritania, whose territory was part of the Istiqlal's vision of a Greater Morocco.

Hassan II broadly followed the path laid out by his father. The 1960s were a momentous decade both domestically and regionally. Radical pan-Arabism, embodied by Abdel Nasser, the Ba'ath regimes in Syria and Iraq, and newly independent Algeria, placed conservative Arab regimes on the defensive. For the most part, Hassan dodged direct confrontation with Abdel Nasser, and officially adhered to the collective Arab position vis-à-vis Israel. But he also quietly developed a strategic relationship with Israel to help ensure his survival.

The collective Arab defeat in 1967, and Abdel Nasser's passing in 1970, was a fatal blow to the radical pan-Arab vision, and provided conservative Arab regimes with a new layer of security. For Hassan, the war's results confirmed the correctness of his pragmatic approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict and gave him the space and confidence to take an active diplomatic role within Arab summit conferences, particularly after the October 1973 war jump started Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Having achieved complete hegemony over all political opposition at home during the infamous "years of lead" (from the late 1960s to the late 1980s), Hassan successfully fashioned his own mix of Arabism, adherence to Islamic values, and pursuits of Moroccan state interests. Central to the latter was the incorporation of the Western Sahara into the kingdom. Saudi Arabia's financial support for Morocco's network of fortifications in the territory was an important marker of Morocco's deepening ties with Gulf Arab states. In 1989, a temporary thaw in Moroccan-Algerian relations enabled the establishment of the 5-nation Arab Maghrib Union, which offered the possibility of closer economic and political ties among the members within the larger framework of the Arab state system, alongside the GCC and newly established ACC. But this

vision of functioning regional groupings within a larger cooperative Arab framework proved to be a pipe dream.

Saddam Husayn's swallowing up of Kuwait in August 1990, and the resulting inter-Arab and international crisis and war, placed Hassan in a delicate position, between his alliance with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies, and Moroccan public opinion's opposition to the American-led war coalition that ousted Iraqi forces from Kuwait. But he succeeded in maintaining both social peace and the alliance with Saudi Arabia (and their Western allies). The Gulf War's end, the reenergizing of Arab-Israeli diplomacy via the Madrid conference, and the UN brokered ceasefire and initiation of a political process to resolve the Western Sahara question, all gave new impetus to Moroccan diplomacy during the last decade of Hassan's life.

In marked contrast to his father, Mohammed VI had little appetite for Arab affairs, and generally maintained a low profile in international affairs, preferring to concentrate on internal matters. Early on, Morocco quickly complied with the Arab summit conference's call to cut diplomatic ties with Israel, although the relationship itself was maintained, and was eventually upgraded into what can be called a *de facto* alliance. Relations with Gulf Arab states remained a priority, as did concern with radical jihadi movements at home and in the region. Differences with Mohammed Bin Salman's aggressive policies toward Qatar and Yemen created unprecedented tension with Saudi Arabia, but matters returned to normal in 2020–21. Concurrently, Morocco joined Bahrain and the UAE in the Abraham Accords, and participated with them in a new multilateral framework with Israel, the Negev Summit, along with Egypt and the US. Whether or not this would prove to be a durable framework, of course, remained to be seen. In any case, even as the Palestinian cause, a central marker of modern Arab identity, continued to win widespread sympathy, the old rules of the game that had guided inter-Arab affairs from the 1930s into the new century seemed no longer relevant.

From the angle of domestic politics and Morocco's national identity, the king's marked lower profile in Arab affairs, and the declining relevance of *'uruba*, jibed with his partial embrace of the Amazigh contribution to Moroccan national identity. It also had an instrumental purpose, to counter-balance Islamist political and social forces, thus enabling the monarchy to continue to reign supreme over Morocco's multi-layered society. The Palace's adroit managing of the 2011 "Democracy Spring" protests included constitutional change, recognized *Amazighité* as a central component of Moroccan national identity, and acknowledged Tamazight as an official language alongside of Arabic. What this meant in practice remained highly contested. In the eyes of Islamist movements, the foregrounding of Amazigh identity bordered on heresy, as it threatened the sacredness and primacy of the Arabic language. Traditional Islam-oriented political parties such as Morocco's

Istiqlal, as well as myriad economic and bureaucratic elements with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, also looked askance at Amazigh demands.

In any case, Morocco's relations with Arab Mashriq countries were now increasingly devoid of traditional markers of Arab solidarity and brotherhood. Instead, Morocco's ties with the Gulf countries were based on concrete economic and strategic interests, anchored by a common Sunni Islamic affiliation. The kingdom's close ties with the Gulf countries, combined with the hollowing out of the traditional core of the inter-Arab system, meant that notions of "center and periphery" in the Arab system had lost their meaning. Arabism was no longer an ideological construct that shaped Moroccan foreign policy, and the Amazigh factor was increasingly salient in the Moroccan collective discourse. In that light, the debates over Morocco's national identity occasioned by the national team's performance at the World Cup were hardly surprising.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Notes on contributor**

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