

Morocco After the Arab Uprisings: Key Policy Recommendations

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On September 27, 2013, The Fund for Peace hosted a Roundtable meeting in Washington, D.C. on the future of Morocco in the context of the Arab Spring. The Roundtable discussion, which sought to elicit policy recommendations, was led by Dr. Ricardo René Larémont of SUNY Binghamton.

In leading the discussion, Dr. Larémont drew heavily upon his new book, *Revolution, Revolt and Reform in North Africa: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, that lends significant attention to Morocco. Participants were also provided Dr. Larémont's discussion paper, *Morocco After the Uprisings*, which is included at the end of this report.

Participants included a range of stakeholders with interest in Morocco including academics, think tank representatives, human rights and democracy NGOs, government

representatives, companies, and consultants. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the recent history of Morocco, findings from research done by Dr. Larémont, and consider how the U.S. could best support the evolution taking place in Morocco.

Background

The optimism that characterized the Arab Spring in 2011 has begun to sour as reality sets in. The legacy of the Arab Spring has now borne witness to more than 110,000 Syrian deaths, insecurity in Libya, military control in Egypt, and renewed instability in Algeria.

Morocco has not been immune from internal pressures. In 2011, significant sections of Morocco's youth population voiced their dissatisfaction with the political situation and structure, even despite the country boasting a persistent economic growth of 5% per year, thus fitting in with Robert K. Merton's theory of 'relative deprivation' as a facilitator of social deviance. In addition, the effect of technology, through cell phones and Facebook, rapidly increased communication and collectivism among youths, birthing revolutionary conditions. In short, conditions for potential instability in Morocco had begun to present themselves, but yet the serious consequences witnessed in other countries across the region were avoided.

The Evolution to Democracy

Dr. Larémont argues that the *modus operandi* of symbolic capital means that monarchs in coalition with political elites can engage in a gradual evolution towards democracy. However, the descendants of republican regimes, lacking such symbolic capital, ought to consider different and more volatile means of moving forward, in order for democratic transitions to occur.

He further discussed three ways in which King Mohammed VI has initiated a process of gradual opening, in contrast to Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Syria's Bashar al-Assad:

- There has been devolution of power from the center to periphery since 1997, two years before Mohammed VI succeeded his father as king.
- In 2004, the Equity and Reconciliation Committee was created to investigate human rights abuses by public security forces. The constitution was also amended to include human rights and compensation for individuals whose rights had been abused or otherwise compromised.
- On March 9, 2011, the King created an advisory committee for the Constitution, with involvement from all three arms of government. The main reforms allowed for parliament and political parties to play a stronger role in Moroccan politics, thus devolving monarchical power to a limited degree and allowing the new Prime Minister to appoint government officials directly, without the King's intervention.

Dr. Larémont referred to Spain as a historical model that Morocco is likely to be learning from, if not also following, in at least some ways. Empirically, there are similarities between both countries, coupled with the geographic closeness and relationship between the leaders of both countries (although North Africa generally lacks Spain's external contacts).

Compared to its North African neighbors, it is harder for an Islamist opposition groups to take an offensive stance on a religious monarch. Morocco also has the advantage of a commitment to democracy that Egypt has failed to demonstrate, as the Egyptian military has historically supported regimes that protect its interests and lacked the capacity to eliminate the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Role of the United States in Morocco's Democratic Evolution

At the close of the Cold War, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan notably encouraged political transitions in Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Czechoslovakia through policy interventions and injecting capital into their economies. These were factors lacking in 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring, reflecting a new diffidence in

America's role in the world, as a consequence of the 2008 implosion of capital markets and possible diminished political and financial leverage after the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

During interviews with Moroccan youths, Dr. Larémont discovered that their expectations for change were low and their views on their country's political parties are largely cynical. In contrast, however, their confidence in King Mohammed VI was very high. This is opposite to many of the other countries in the region where expectations for change were high and the individual at the top was the focus of much of the public outrage.

Given this situation it was discussed that, as the U.S. considers how to collaborate with Morocco, it is essential to understand what the leadership in Morocco has set as priorities as well as the rationale for those priorities. Balancing reform with economic expectations and government capacity development is critical. The U.S. could offer assistance in building technical capacity of local authorities, and to support increased democratization in a practical way. It was also suggested that in order to provide the best assistance, it is important not to push for elections pre-maturely.

Another issue discussed as extremely important in supporting the continued advancement of Morocco's evolution was the need for improvements in education, particularly for women. Furthermore, the need to create an environment more conducive to entrepreneurship was discussed as a means of addressing the concerns of unemployed youth and need for local economic development (not just foreign direct investment). Access to credit needs to be expanded, opportunities should be more available across class levels and gender, and bureaucratic delays need to be addressed.

Whether it is revolution or evolution, there is an expectation of change that includes greater economic opportunity. The U.S. can best support Morocco in its evolution by supporting needed economic and education reforms and supporting the development of greater technical capacity. As societies evolve to become more democratic, there are stresses that require a great deal of resiliency. This societal resiliency relies on systems being in place that can deal with some of the challenges of a democracy. The U.S. can best support Morocco by working with the leadership to understand what issues need to be supported to help build strong systems and societal resiliency.

Krista Hendry is the Executive Director of The Fund for Peace. In over a decade at FFP, Ms. Hendry has played a critical role in the organization's restructuring from a traditional think tank, to an organization focused on building local capacity, utilizing partnerships across sectors, and creating a working environment that enables FFP to have a major impact globally through constant innovation, multi-stakeholder collaboration and the use of information technology. Under Ms. Hendry's leadership, FFP's Sustainable Development and Sustainable Security program has become one of the most innovative of its kind, working with the private sector to support the development and implementation of human rights policies, procedures, trainings, and assessment frameworks primarily in the oil, gas and mining industries. Ms. Hendry currently serves as a Practitioner Affiliate at American University's School of International Service, a group of practicing social entrepreneurs who help guide the university's program on Social Enterprise and serve as a resource for its students. She received her MBA from the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University and is a graduate of the University of Virginia, where she concentrated on Foreign Affairs and German Literature.

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Morocco After the Arab Uprisings: Evolution Rather than Revolution

Dr. Ricardo René Larémont

Two years after the Arab Spring Revolts of 2011, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the successes and failures of the momentous events and processes that promised much hope that democracy would arrive in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet the 2013 outcomes reveal that Syria has descended into a horrific civil war that has claimed over 100,000 victims; that the army has reasserted itself in politics in Egypt; that Libya has been made systemically insecure by the rise of militias; that the military in collaboration with bureaucratic elites still determine political outcomes in Algeria; that Tunisia is riven by Islamist and secularist ideological differences; and that only a modicum of unstable social reconciliation has been attained in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. Our optimism of 2011, so fervently held, seems to have disintegrated, at least at this moment in time, into disillusion and frustration. These shortcomings, which hopefully are temporary and part of larger processes of either evolutionary or revolutionary change, ask us to pose the following question: Are either democracy or transitions to democracy in the Middle East and North Africa possible? And, viewed comparatively, does the Moroccan model provide for more stable evolutionary rather than less stable revolutionary change?

Evolutionary change takes place slowly. It may be barely perceptible at times and the pace of change is often unacceptable to those who demand rapid, substantive change. Evolutionary change requires extensive discussion, persistence, and consensus building among diverse elements of society. When evolutionary change is

successful, however, it is more likely to result in a permanent and substantial change of political or organizational cultures. Nevertheless, evolutionary change is very difficult both to initiate and to sustain. Leaders of evolutionary change must motivate diverse elements within their societies to mobilize for change despite the fact that entrenched economic, social, and political interests may incline citizens and residents to resist processes of evolutionary change. Last, there has always been the risk that because evolutionary change requires consensus building among a large number of people, change will occur either too slowly, or even worse, not at all.

Revolutionary change, by contrast, usually involves change by mandate rather than by consensus. In revolutions, consensus building, while still ultimately desirable, is put aside to satisfy demands for swift political change. Most often revolutions or attempted revolutions take place in the context of crisis, which frequently involves leadership change. The objective of revolution is to obtain change quickly. Revolutions can sometimes be successful in obtaining their objectives (the American, French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, for example) but, empirically and historically, revolutionary efforts fail more often than they succeed. Morocco's reform legacy

Viewed retrospectively, it becomes clear that King Mohamed VI of Morocco seems to have accelerated a program of evolutionary political change that began earlier when he first ascended to the throne in 1999. In that year King Mohammed accelerated the implementation of partial devolution of

political decision-making from the capital Rabat to provincial governors that had been announced in 1997. This was a tentative, initial attempt that began a process of partial decentralization of decision-making from the governmental center to the provincial level. At that moment in time in Morocco, the King's effort was considered innovative, especially given the centralization of power trends undertaken by his predecessor, King Hassan II. Although this effort only had partial success, the intent to change the modus operandi of Morocco's governance was clearly signaled by the new King, to be displayed in greater detail in subsequent changes.

The King's second effort to moderate political change in Morocco took place during 2004 and 2005 when he established an Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) charged with investigating the "Years of Lead," which was the period of his father's rule wherein Moroccan citizens claimed that they had been subjected to human rights abuses by either the police or the military. As a result of the work of this Commission, 9,280 Moroccans eventually received compensation for their suffering. Also, at the end of the Commission's work, the Moroccan constitution was amended to guarantee human rights as "universally defined." The 2005 constitution also assured the rights of freedom of expression, political association, political protest, the right to organize into labor unions, and the right to strike.

The third stage in the process of evolutionary change in the Moroccan polity took place in the context of demonstrations that began in February 2011 in which

thousands of Moroccans took to the streets to demand constitutional change and further restrictions of the power of the king. These protests were initially led by Moroccan youth who had formed a group called the February 20th Youth Movement that claimed that the time had come for constitutional change in Morocco. In their demands the February 20th Movement did not call for the deposition of the king but rather for constraints on his powers. The February 20th Movement subsequently joined forces with the Islamist-oriented Justice and Charity Association, labor unions, and leftist organizations to create a mass movement demanding political change.

On 9 March 2011, the King called for the convening of an Advisory Committee to revise the constitution. The new constitution proposed by the committee enlarged the power of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches while reserving considerable power for the king, especially as the religious head of the country (Commander of the Faithful) and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The proposed constitution provided for other changes including: (1) it gave the head of government/prime minister the power to appoint a larger number of officials within the government without direct monarchical intervention; (2) it designated that the future prime minister would be the leader of the party that obtained the greatest number of votes in an election rather than being appointed by the king, as had previously been the case; and (3) it provided for an independent judiciary. Additional reforms called for broad respect for human rights, decentralization of governance to locally elected officials, inclusiveness and recognition of the multicultural heritage of the kingdom, and a host of improvements to safeguard citizen rights. The constitution was approved in a referendum in July 2011.

As many analysts have concluded, it will take time to see whether the 2011 constitutional reforms will advance Morocco's transition to a fuller constitutional monarchy/democracy. This "leading from above" strategy for political

reform has its critics, yet there is the possibility that the processes taking place in Morocco may eventually emulate the leadership model undertaken by King Juan Carlos in Spain as Spain transitioned from the authoritarianism of the Franco regime to democracy. Like what transpired in Spain, there is at least the theoretical possibility in Morocco that a monarch can play an important leadership role in the transition to democracy. Because the king's family has led Morocco since the 1660s, he wields considerable symbolic capital, which he can use for the transformation of politics. King Mohamed VI has used that capital to enact key reforms including the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER); the adoption of broad changes to the family law, the *moudawana*, which significantly enhanced the rights of women; the proposal for autonomy in the Western Sahara; and the current efforts of the Economic, Social, and Environment Council (CESE) to develop recommendations for regionalization beginning in the southern provinces. If the 2011 constitutional reforms are meaningfully implemented, they will provide evidentiary support to the contention that King Mohamed VI has continued a program of evolutionary reform towards a constitutional monarchy, a process that he adopted shortly after his ascension to the throne in 1999.

An early glimpse of the potential impact of Morocco's emerging political transition involved the elections for a new parliament that were held on 25 November 2011, which resulted in the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) winning the largest bloc of votes and giving it the right to have its leader, Abdelillah Benkirane, appointed as Prime Minister. Benkirane formed a coalition government with secular parties on 7 February 2012, which signaled to the world that at least in Morocco that the Islamist-secularist ideological divide that had manifested itself in a schismatic way in Egypt may have been bridged. Although the current government has had its share of challenges in passing its program through Parliament, its success may demonstrate to the world that Islamist parties may be able to share governance with secular parties,

thereby disabusing the notion that Islamist parties are intent upon monopolizing the political space.

Where is Morocco Headed?

Moving forward, given the clear yet fragile progress towards the creation of a constitutional monarchy in Morocco, it is incumbent upon the United States administration to recognize the consistent progress that has taken place in that country and assist it. If Morocco were to be successful in the realization of democracy, it would demonstrate to the rest of the world that there is the possibility for real transition to democracy in the Muslim world.

In concrete terms, the United States can lend assistance in four areas. First, it can provide technical assistance and expertise to the Moroccan legislature so that legislation can be enacted to fulfill the reform aspects of the new constitution. This would involve providing programs that would help parliamentarians acquire the skills and resources needed to draft implementing legislation for the new constitution. Second, and related to the first objective, the United States should consider providing direct or indirect funding for capacity-building to local governments and civil society that would enable them to exercise greater roles in governance.

Third, the US can work with the EU and others to support the expansion of rule of law through programs that enhance the internal capabilities of police and security officials, judges, magistrates, and attorneys, and civil society so that the promotion of rule of law would be possible through the observance of civil rights and human rights protocols.

Fourth, beyond the realm of political improvements, the US may consider undertaking a meaningful cost-benefit analysis of whether investments in the areas of women's health and education may have a stabilizing multiplier effect not only in Morocco but also in the neighboring regions of north and west Africa.

Morocco has embarked upon an important, difficult, and challenging transition to democracy. The Moroccan transition to democracy can succeed but it will need some external support in order to thrive. A

small investment in the Moroccan transition process may lead to its eventual success. And, of course, Morocco's success in the realization of democracy would have a powerful demonstration effect upon other

countries in the region that are struggling with their own very difficult transitions to democracy.

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The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the views of The Fund for Peace.