

Rationale for a US-Morocco Strategic Partnership

Moroccan American Center for Policy

Introduction – Why a Strategic Dialogue Makes Sense

In March 2011, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns called Morocco, “a model of economic, social, and political reform.”¹ He also noted, “...the partnership between the United States, Morocco and the Moroccan people is a very high priority for President Obama and Secretary Clinton.” His statement reflected recognition by the US government of all that Morocco had achieved under the leadership of King Mohammed VI over the past decade in terms of political and economic reform. It likewise offered recognition of the importance of a strong Morocco-US relationship in which the two countries cooperate on a broad range of issues from counterterrorism and economic liberalization to policy towards Iran and Syria.

Morocco has received many of the key elements of a strategic partnership with the United States - a free trade agreement (FTA), designation as a major non-NATO ally, a Defense Consultative Committee, and a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, as well as other military aid and development assistance. These elements offer recognition of the significant reforms initiated in Morocco since King Mohammed VI ascended to the throne, and his close collaboration with three US presidents. As Secretary Clinton recently said, “...everywhere I go in the region and beyond, people ask me if they could have a free trade agreement like Morocco and if they can have a Millennium Challenge grant like Morocco. And I tell everyone, we did not give that to Morocco; Morocco earned it.”² Ties between the US and Morocco are firmly in place as the two countries begin a Strategic Dialogue to identify issues and define modalities for greater collaboration.

The Strategic Dialogue takes on even greater importance and urgency given the significant changes in the MENA region over the past nineteen months and the challenges these pose to US interests, from terrorism and instability in the Sahel and West and Central Africa, to the need to promote economic growth and jobs that contribute to regional stability and security.

Shared Interests and Values: How Morocco and the US Act as Strategic Partners

The growing importance of Morocco’s partnership to the United States is in part due to its performance in reform and development - as its progress grows and expands, the partnership with the US has been strengthened. As noted, Morocco has many of the

elements of a strategic ally, as have a small number of other countries. What makes the Strategic Dialogue so important, especially at this time, is that it reflects the recognition of Morocco's importance as a pillar of shared interests and values in a very challenging region.

US-Morocco Relations

Morocco's historical relations with the US are well known. Morocco was the first country to seek diplomatic relations with the Government of the United States in 1777, and the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two countries, which dates to 1787, is the longest unbroken treaty relationship in US history.³ During World Wars I and II, Morocco was aligned with the allied forces and provided support to both American and British troops. During WWII, Morocco hosted one of the most pivotal meetings of allied leaders in Casablanca, during which President Roosevelt offered support for Morocco's fight for independence against France.⁴ Following Morocco's independence in 1956, the US and Morocco worked to improve bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Morocco was a staunch ally in the fight against the proliferation of Communism in the region and the two countries cultivated their partnership during the Cold War through a series of visits by high-level government officials.

After the end of the Cold War, US military and economic assistance remained at a relatively low level. However, since the 1980s, Morocco has grown as a major US ally in the Maghreb. Yahia Zoubir, Professor of International Relations and International Management at the Marseille School of Management notes several reasons for this: Morocco's support for the 1991 Gulf War; instability in Algeria, which placed Morocco, "once again in the role of bulwark against extremist, anti-Western forces;" Morocco's role in US-led peace initiatives in the Palestinian-Israel conflict; and Morocco's free market reforms that coincide with American ideological goals.⁵ Furthermore, in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, Morocco showed solidarity and renewed its commitment as a strong ally of the US. The US initiated a dialogue with Morocco regarding its role in the war on terror and since then security cooperation has greatly increased.

Today, the US-Morocco relationship has never been stronger and the countries cooperate in many fields, highlighted by their common commitment to combat terrorism, promote free trade and economic development, and support democratic reforms and human rights. Morocco's regional importance to the US is highlighted in the State Department's 2012 background note; "As a stable, comparatively moderate Arab Muslim nation, Morocco is important to U.S. interests in the Middle East as well. Accordingly, US policy toward Morocco seeks sustained and strong engagement and identifies priorities of economic, social, and political reform; conflict resolution; counterterrorism/security cooperation; and public outreach."⁶ Congress' annual report on Morocco supports this assessment, noting, "...the U.S. government views Morocco as an important ally against terrorism and as a free trade partner."⁷

Most importantly, since ascending the throne King Mohammed VI has accelerated democratic and economic reforms in close collaboration with three US presidents, making Morocco an even more important ally, as well as a model for modernity in the region.

US-Morocco Security Cooperation

The United States has defined international terrorism as the “greatest security threat to the United States.”⁸ At present, the group that presents the greatest terrorism threat is al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and therefore, in the 2010 National Security Strategy released by the White House, the United States defined defeating al-Qaeda and its affiliate groups as a top priority.⁹ In order to combat the terrorist threat and ensure international cooperation, the US works to deny safe havens for terrorists and strengthen at-risk states. It does so by working with its allies to strengthen national military and security capacity, working to disrupt terrorist operations through financial and legal means, and promoting programs to reduce the appeal of violent extremism.

Morocco has demonstrated its leadership on security issues by undertaking important measures to combat domestic terrorism and cooperating with the United States and other regional allies. Morocco has taken a variety of approaches to combating terrorism, including establishing specially trained counterterrorism military units, blocking terrorist access to financial resources, restricting illegal immigration, controlling Islamic extremists, promoting religious and ethnic tolerance, and accelerating greater economic growth and inclusion. According to Matthew Chebatoris of the Jamestown Foundation, “the strategy is comprehensive in nature and sets out multiple objectives which illuminate Morocco’s position as a beacon of hope in the often tumultuous North African political environment.”¹⁰

Morocco maintains intelligence relationships with the FBI and CIA, and the Directors of both organizations have visited Morocco in the past for consultations. Morocco is part of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, has hosted and participated in NATO military exercises, and has joined NATO’s Operation Active Endeavor, monitoring the Mediterranean Sea for terrorists. Through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative, launched in 2005, Morocco is part of US training and support to partner countries to prevent terrorism by enhancing border and aviation security, promoting democratic governance, and building public support against extremism.¹¹

Morocco, as a result of its major non-NATO ally status, is eligible for priority delivery of defense material, participation in defense research and development programs, and a beneficiary of US government loan guarantee programs for the purchase of military materiel.¹² Morocco has purchased \$3 billion of US defense equipment, which has greatly benefitted US companies and promoted US jobs. Recent purchases have included 24 F-16 aircraft, 2T-6 training aircraft, 90 AGM-D Maverick air-to-ground missiles, 200 Abrams M1A1 tanks, night vision goggles, advanced AM 120-C7 air-to-air

medium-range missiles systems, and 26 M198 155 mm towed guns. The sale of F-16s was of particular importance since, as noted by the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, it contributed to the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States, "by enhancing Morocco's capability to support US efforts in the global war on terrorism."¹³

Just as key Moroccan military personnel are trained in the US, as the 2012 Congressional Budget Justification notes, "...the Moroccan military offers a significant force multiplier for US initiatives to promote regional stability on the African continent through military education. The Moroccan military trains several other African and European militaries in their schools and training facilities," thus contributing to peace and security in all of North Africa.¹⁴

US-Economic Cooperation

The United States' economic agenda promotes economic growth through reforms and market-based trade liberalizing policies. The US uses two primary tools to accomplish these goals: free trade agreements and development assistance.

US-Morocco Free Trade Agreement

As Gregory White, Associate Professor of Government at Smith College argues, the FTA is itself an example of Morocco's strategic importance to the US; "the crucial thing to stress with a free trade agreement - both in terms of its economic and strategic dimension - is that it constitutes a *policy choice* on the part of a government. This is especially important to bear in mind with respect to a low middle-income country like Morocco, which is sometimes cast as powerless in the international arena."¹⁵ It is also an acknowledgement of Morocco's efforts at economic reform. Speaking in 2012 Secretary Clinton noted, "...everywhere I go in the region and beyond, people ask me if they could have a free trade agreement like Morocco and if they can have a Millennium Challenge grant like Morocco. And I tell everyone, we did not give that to Morocco; Morocco earned it. Morocco demonstrated what it takes to be in a free trade agreement and to meet the very high standards of the Millennium Challenge Corporation."¹⁶

The FTA has opened up the Moroccan market for a number of US exporters and also increased US competitiveness vis-à-vis Europe. Since the US-Morocco entered into force in January 2006, bilateral trade has tripled and the value of US exports has risen from \$481 million in 2005 to \$2.86 billion in 2011.¹⁷ This translated into a trade surplus with Morocco of \$1.26 billion in 2010, a 3,505% increase over the \$35 million trade surplus of 2005.¹⁸ The agreement has benefitted multiple economic sectors in the US; for example, it facilitates access of Virginia and Iowa-produced soybean, corn, and beef in the rapidly-expanding Moroccan market for these products. Thus, although Morocco is not one of the US' biggest trading partners, the trade relationship has been valuable to the United States and Morocco.

US-Morocco Economic Development

The United States has increased aid to Morocco in recent years to assist with countering terrorism, democratization, fighting poverty, and building trade capacity. For Fiscal Year 2012, the US government requested \$43.6 million in development assistance for Morocco. As noted in the Congressional Budget Justification, US objectives in providing development assistance to Morocco include promoting political reform and addressing the challenges of the youth in order to maintain government stability. USAID works to promote sustained economic growth, invest in people through improvements the educational system, and promote democracy and good governance. Each of these areas offers opportunities to engage youth, as well as other segments of society, in order to bring a broader array of groups into public life. Morocco also receives development assistance through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), a regional democracy-promotion program. MEPI provides small grants to Moroccan NGOs working to advance peace, participatory democracy, and prosperity for Moroccan citizens. Approximately \$1 million per year is awarded to Moroccan NGOs for civil society capacity building projects, public awareness campaigns, civic responsibility outreach efforts, and other key factors in democratic development, including programs to empower women, create jobs, improve education, and further judicial and legal reform.¹⁹

The US also works to promote development through the MCC, created by Congress in 2004 to supplement other US foreign assistance programs for countries committed to good governance and economic freedom. The goal of the \$697.5 million 2007 MCC compact with Morocco is to reduce poverty through sustainable economic growth by increasing productivity and improving employment in high potential sectors.²⁰ In a 2007 speech, CEO of the MCC Ambassador John Danilovich noted that the compact is “a clear indication of Morocco’s ongoing commitment to reform, liberalization, and modernization,” as good governance and economic freedom are the foundation of all MCC compacts.²¹ The MCC compact is likewise designed to complement and further the reform agenda already underway in Morocco. Like the FTA, the MCC compact is a testament to Morocco’s progress on political and economic reform and a symbol of the US-Morocco partnership.

US-Morocco Cooperation on Issues of Regional and Global Importance

Religious Freedom

Morocco is an example of religious tolerance in the Arab world. King Mohammed VI has been outspoken about the importance of Holocaust remembrance and for his efforts has been praised as a leader by the Conference of Jewish Presidents. In a 2009 press release, the Conference noted, “this is the first time an Arab head of state has taken such a clear stand on the Shoah...This courageous act by His Majesty King Mohammed VI to recognize the historical truth and universal significance of the Holocaust and the need to educate the Arab and Moslem world about its impact on mankind is especially remarkable.”²² The Jewish leaders added that this same advocacy of tolerance has been

in evidence in His Majesty's treatment of the Jewish community of Morocco, which boasts a 2,000-year history in the country. Although Morocco is not widely recognized as a current leader in the Middle East peace process, it is widely acknowledged as a tolerant nation and is looked to as an example of moderation in an increasingly extremist world.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Morocco is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has cooperated with the United States on non-proliferation issues since 1994. Ken Baker of the US National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) noted, "From the beginning, Morocco embarked on a transparent nuclear energy program and strived to meet and exceed all international nonproliferation obligations. With technical assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United States, France and other partners, Morocco continues to be a model for establishing a responsible nuclear energy program."²³ Morocco has also worked with NNSA on the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism to build and enhance global capacity to prevent and respond to nuclear and radiological emergencies. Furthermore, it has been supportive of international efforts undertaken by the United States to confront the threat of non-peaceful nuclear weapons developments. Morocco has been supportive of the sanctions regime against Iran, both during its present time on the Security Council and before.

Energy Security

Although the proliferation of alternative forms of energy and alternative sources of oil and natural gas has decreased US dependence on oil from the Middle East, the region still remains vitally important to US energy security, both as a source of energy and as vital transport link. Morocco is actively engaged in oil and gas exploration and has developed the infrastructure to act as a key energy transit location. Part of the Maghreb-Europe Natural Gas Pipeline, which brings natural gas from Algeria to Spain, Portugal, and the rest of Western Europe, passes through Morocco.²⁴ Morocco thus contributes to the EU's energy security as a strategic transit country for Algerian gas and as an exporter of electricity to Spain.

Morocco also has a potentially important role to play in the alternative energy market – one that could ultimately be vital for the energy needs of Western Europe. Morocco is currently undertaking the most ambitious renewable energy program in North Africa.²⁵ The country aims to develop enough solar, wind, and hydroelectric power to meet 42% of electricity demand by 2020.²⁶ The objective of Morocco's \$9 billion solar power plan is to increase Morocco's energy independence and eventually develop enough energy to export to Europe. If successful, Morocco will become an important player in energy security in the Mediterranean and a potential model for the development of renewable energies in North Africa.

Support of other US Foreign Policy Initiatives

Morocco has been very supportive of important US foreign policy initiatives. Morocco was the first Arab state to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and sent troops to help defend Saudi Arabia; ended diplomatic relations with Iran in 2009; voiced support for the international community's efforts in Libya in 2011; and has participated in the "Friends of Syria" group, hosting its upcoming meeting.²⁷ Since taking its seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Morocco has further demonstrated its leadership. Morocco authored the draft resolution on Syria, which called for a ceasefire, expressed grave concerns at the deteriorating situation, and condemned gross violations of human rights. In a 2012 press point, Secretary Clinton praised Morocco's leadership on important international issues; "On Syria, I thank the foreign minister for the important role that Morocco has played, first within the Arab League and second within the Security Council. Morocco is in a unique position to help shape the international community's efforts, and it is imperative that we continue working today."²⁸ Lastly, the United States has recognized Morocco's important support for US military operations in the Middle East and North Africa. The 2012 Congressional Budget Justification defines Morocco as a key partner nation in supporting the US strategic goal of enhancing US interoperability throughout the African continent.

Relations with the International Community

Morocco's geostrategic location at the crossroads of the Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, and its close ties to its neighbors throughout the Mediterranean are also an important part of its relationship with the United States. Morocco shares the EU objective of promoting security and stability in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Toward this end, Morocco cooperates with the EU on counterterrorism and is an important player in the fight against drug trafficking and illegal migration to Europe.²⁹ The EU works with Morocco to confront both drug trafficking and migration through programs to: improve intelligence sharing; strengthen the capacity of Morocco's border control and surveillance; provide specialized training for judges, police, and border officials; and strengthen legislation on drugs, trafficking, and terrorist financing.³⁰

Morocco is also committed to building stability in the Middle East and Africa. In the past decade, Morocco has contributed to peacekeeping efforts throughout the continent. As of June 2012, Morocco had over 1,600 troops, military observers, and police serving in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, ranking 17th in terms of worldwide contributions.³¹ Moroccan security forces are currently contributing to the maintenance of African peace and security with the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the UN Operation in the Côte d'Ivoire. Moroccan personnel also served with the UN Supervision Mission in Syria.

Morocco has likewise worked in sub-Saharan Africa to foster economic and social development, thus promoting a US strategic goal of trade liberalization and economic development. It has concluded commercial and tariff agreements with fifteen countries

in Africa and is a leading investor in the emerging markets there – markets Morocco sees as serious, credible, and solvent. In a 2009 report for the UN Conference on Trade and Development, Morocco was named as one of the top 20 investors in Africa from 2003-2007, one of only two African countries listed.³² Morocco also plays a key role in fostering educational development in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 10,000 students from that area are enrolled in Moroccan universities; many Central and West African countries look to Morocco for management training that contributes to the formation of a viable civil service capable of promoting real socio-economic development.³³ These types of programs and relationships promote development and security through the region.

Other Issues of Potential Strategic Importance

Global Food Security and the Role of Phosphates

Another issue that has the potential to become strategically important is global food security and the role of phosphates in ensuring it. It is widely acknowledged that ensuring global food security is one of the challenges of the 21st century; both the United States and the United Nations have dedicated Offices of Global Food Security and remain engaged to find solutions to feed an ever-growing population. The United States defined the importance of food security in its 2010 National Security Strategy, noting, “The United States is working with partners around the world to advance a food security initiative that combats hunger and builds the capacity of countries to feed their people. Instead of simply providing aid for developing countries, we are focusing on new methods and technologies for agricultural development.”³⁴ What is less widely-acknowledged is the importance of phosphates, a key component in fertilizers, in confronting food insecurity, despite the reality that fertilizer is an essential element in modern agricultural production and was a key driver of the agricultural productivity gains made during the “Green Revolution.”

Phosphorus must become an important part of the debate on how to confront global food insecurity. This is all the more important because the supply of phosphorus is finite and there are no substitutes for it in agricultural use.³⁵ As Morocco is the largest reliable supplier of phosphorus, it has an extremely important global role to play in enhancing the longevity of this critical commodity.

Morocco is home to the largest phosphate reserves in the world and is the biggest exporter of phosphate rock and phosphoric acid in the world. It is also a major exporter of phosphate fertilizers.³⁶ It has made a commitment to ensuring stable production while promoting world food security and sustainable development. Given its market share, Morocco is well-placed to become not only the largest supplier of phosphates, but also a key part of the solution to addressing food insecurity given ever-present resource realities.

Values: The Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights Abroad

Democracy and respect for human rights have long been central components of US foreign policy; the United States was founded on the principles representative government and individual freedoms, and these values continue to define US policies at home and abroad. The US acknowledges that Morocco shares these values. After the King's March 2011 speech on constitutional reform, the State Department noted, "...we fully support the aspirations of the Moroccan people in their efforts to further consolidate the rule of law, raise human rights standards, promote good governance and work toward long-term constitutional reform. The United States values Morocco as a key strategic partner and we stand ready to work with the government and the people of Morocco to realize their democratic aspirations."³⁷

The US has likewise acknowledged Morocco's efforts to promote equality and address abuses of the past. In 2012, Secretary Clinton noted, "Morocco stands as an example, as a model of what can be achieved. Moroccans are strengthening their own democracy. Young people are having a say in their own future. His Majesty King Mohammed VI has begun the process of reform. We see women's rights protected and expanded, a more transparent and accountable government, establishing the Arab world's very first truth commission on human rights."³⁸

It is evident that the US sees Morocco's potential in guaranteeing representative government and human rights protections for its citizens; Morocco has been praised as a model in joint meetings with the US, and the Strategic Dialogue provides yet another forum in which Morocco and the US can collaborate on human rights.

Summary

The US-Morocco Strategic Dialogue provides both parties with opportunities for greater cooperation and collaboration on issues ranging from economic growth and jobs promotion to promoting resolution of the Western Sahara conflict and achieving the full benefits of the Morocco-US Free Trade Agreement. This meeting, coming at a time of many transitions and challenges in the region, indicates the pivotal role that Morocco does and can play as a leader in the region for reform and development, as well as a recognition of the importance of the work of King Mohammed VI during the past decade.



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¹⁵ White, p. 607.

¹⁶ "Secretary Clinton's Remarks with Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Saad-Eddine Al-Othmani After Their Meeting."

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¹⁸ "The U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement," *United States Department of Commerce*, October 12, 2011, <<http://export.gov/FTA/morocco/index.asp>>.

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²⁰ "Millennium Challenge Compact with the Kingdom of Morocco." *Millennium Challenge Corporation*, <<http://www.mcc.gov/documents/agreements/compact-summary-executive-morocco.pdf>>.

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