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# Conflict analysis of Morocco

January 2014

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## About this report

This report provides a short synthesis of some of the most recent, high quality literature on the topic of conflict in Morocco. It aims to orient policymakers to the key debates and emerging issues. It was prepared (in December 2013) for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2014. The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID.

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## Suggested citation

Strachan, A.L. (2014). *Conflict analysis of Morocco*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

This paper is one of a series of four conflict analyses on north-west Africa. The others are:

Hinds, R. (2014). *Conflict analysis of Tunisia*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Rao, S. (2014). *Conflict analysis of Mauritania*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Strachan, A.L. (2014). *Conflict analysis of Algeria*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

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## 1. Overview

Since the onset of the Arab Spring, Morocco has experienced protests about a diverse range of economic, political, and social issues. King Mohammed VI responded rapidly to the early protests, implementing a new constitution in 2011. However much of the literature suggests that, to date, these reforms have had a limited impact. Moreover, there have been rising levels of unrest in Western Sahara, which is increasingly being seen as a potential threat to regional security.

There is a moderate amount of **literature** dealing with most drivers of conflict in Morocco since the onset of the Arab Spring. The majority of this literature is qualitative, and there is a heavy emphasis on constitutional reform and on conflict in Western Sahara. There is relatively little literature looking at Salafism in Morocco in the aftermath of the 2011 protests. The literature largely consists of policy papers produced by US-based and European think tanks, and academic journal articles. This is relatively consistent, although there is some divergence with regard to how the Western Sahara conflict should be addressed.

Morocco faces a diverse range of interrelated security threats. Key drivers of conflict and potential drivers of conflict highlighted in the literature are:

- **Political system:** Despite constitutional reforms in 2011, the King retains a significant amount of power. This has led to calls for further-reaching political reforms.
- **Economic challenges and corruption:** Inequality and youth unemployment are seen as significant problems. Moreover, corruption is considered widespread. The government has launched programmes and initiatives in order to address these issues, including a number of infrastructure projects. However, these have had a limited impact, and analysts argue that they do not appear to be benefiting those who are in most need of assistance.
- **Salafism<sup>1</sup>:** Evidence indicates that Salafists are becoming increasingly involved in Moroccan politics. However, there continues to be a threat from Salafi-Jihadists in the region. AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) have called for Moroccans to carry out terrorist attacks. Domestic Salafiya-Jihadiya cells also pose a security threat.
- **Western Sahara conflict:** There have been increasing levels of ethnic unrest in Western Sahara. Pro-independence protests have also been on the rise. New approaches to the conflict are being trialled in a bid to end the stalemate, but some argue a rapid resolution of the conflict is unlikely.
- **Organised crime:** Research suggests that Morocco is a significant producer of cannabis resin, even though its production is declining.

International and local responses to conflict in Morocco include:

- **Political reform:** While the 2011 constitutional reforms address a broad range of issues, a number of analysts argue that these reforms do not go far enough. Moreover, implementation of the reforms laid out in the new constitution has been slow.
- **Economic development programmes:** The government is undertaking a range of programmes to improve socio-economic conditions in Morocco, and in Western Sahara.
- **Efforts to resolve the Western Sahara conflict:** These have been unsuccessful to date. This is largely due to the entrenched positions of the parties to the conflict. The UN has tried a

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<sup>1</sup> Salafist groups are strongly influenced by Wahhabism, an ultra-conservative branch within Sunni thinking that is predominately found in Saudi Arabia, and can be broadly divided into two camps: 'Scientific (or Scripturalist) Salafists' who reject the use of violence and preach a 'pure version of Islam' (Wolf, 2013, p. 569) and Jihadi Salafists who advocate the use of violence in the pursuit of their ultra-conservative goals (Ibid.).

number of new approaches to resolving the conflict in recent years, but they have had limited success.

- **Counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation activities:** The Moroccan government has launched a number of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation policies and initiatives. These have been relatively successful, and there have been very few terrorist incidents in Morocco since the 2003 bombings in Casablanca.

There are a number of **practical recommendations** from the literature. These include calls for local and international actors to focus on political reform. The literature also calls for support to be provided for development programmes and economic initiatives. In addition, it recommends that preparations be made for Western Sahara's autonomy, although opinion is divided on whether political change or economic development should take precedence. The literature also calls for steps to be taken to increase moderate Salafi involvement in political life.

## 2. Conflict dynamics

### 2.1 Historic conflict dynamics

Western Sahara was a Spanish colony between 1884 and 1975. Spain prepared to decolonise the territory in the mid-1970s, with the aim of turning it into an independent state (Arieff, 2013b). Although both Morocco and Mauritania claimed the territory, the ICJ (International Court of Justice) declared that Morocco had no legitimate claim over it. In response to this decision, Morocco's King Hassan II launched a 'Green March' of 350,000 unarmed civilians into Western Sahara in 1975 (ibid).

The Moroccan annexation of Western Sahara in 1975 led to protracted conflict that continued until 1991 when a ceasefire was agreed. According to Boukhars (2013), this conflict between Morocco and the Polisario (The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia al-Hamra and Rio de Oro) – the Sahrawi independence movement established in 1973 that fought against the annexation – displaced an estimated 100,000 – 150,000 people.

The newly founded Polisario immediately began to undertake guerrilla attacks against Mauritanian and Moroccan targets.<sup>2</sup> After Mauritania signed a peace treaty with the Polisario in 1979, Morocco occupied the part of Western Sahara that had previously been in Mauritanian hands (Arieff, 2013b). As a result of the conflict, Western Sahara was divided into a 'heavily-fortified' Moroccan zone, surrounded by defensive walls constituting 85 per cent of the territory, and the remaining area which is controlled by the Polisario (Boukhars, 2013a).

A UN brokered ceasefire was implemented in 1991. This UN Settlement Plan established MINURSO (UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), and paved the way for a **referendum** to determine the territory's fate (Theofilopoulou, 2012). However, there was dispute over referendum voting lists. Morocco wanted to expand the existing voting list, based on a 1974 Spanish census, to include 100,000 people living in Morocco. The Polisario submitted 39,000 names (ibid) to MINURSO's Identification Commission. Theofilopoulou (2012) argues that despite Moroccan attempts to influence the identification process, the results of the Identification Commission released in 1999, showed that the process had been fair. However, the referendum never happened.

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<sup>2</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Program - [http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=110&regionSelect=1-Northern\\_Africa#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=110&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#)

According to Theofilipoulou (2012), Morocco pursued a policy of **divide-and-rule** in Western Sahara, giving privileged positions to some elements on the basis of their tribal affiliations, while opting not to engage the majority of the local population, and repressing anybody who challenged the Moroccan presence in the territory. Morocco also lobbied the UN Security Council to support its control of the territory (Ibid).

**Figure 1. Map of Morocco**



Source: <http://geology.com/world/morocco-map.gif>

## 2.2 Current conflict dynamics

Conflict in Morocco largely takes the form of **riots or protests** (Ferguson, 2013). Violence against civilians by the security forces, was reported in 2013 (Ibid). Demonstrations take place across the country, but levels of violence against civilians have been higher in response to demonstrations held in Laayoune, the capital of Western Sahara. There has been less violence against civilians in response to demonstrations in Rabat, despite the significantly higher number of demonstrations being held there (Ferguson, 2013). In 2011, there was a suspected terrorist attack in Marrakech. This appears to have been the only incident of this type in recent years (Arieff, 2013a; Expert comment).

The **2011 protests** in Morocco called for economic, political and social change. Demands included increased freedoms, equality, democracy, an end to corruption and police oppression. They also included more 'pragmatic' changes, such as improvements in health care and education, and dealing with housing shortages, unemployment, and price inflation (Alsaden, 2012). According to Alsaden (2012), the February 20 Movement<sup>3</sup> had a 'massive following.' However, Ottaway (2011) notes that

<sup>3</sup> So called because large-scale protests in Morocco began on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

protests in Morocco were fairly small in comparison to those that occurred in the rest of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Ottaway (2011: 2) describes the February 20 Movement, as a “leaderless and structureless amalgam of young people.” She describes the support council,<sup>4</sup> although itself divided, as more structured than the movement itself.

Less than three weeks after the 2011 protests began, the King announced substantial **constitutional reforms** (Alsaden, 2012; Bank, 2012). Alsaden (2012: 1) states that “this move is often thought to represent the cunning ingenuity of Morocco’s monarch and *Makhzen*.”<sup>5</sup> While some note people lost interest in demonstrating as a result (Alsaden, 2012) others note that protest continued (Bank, 2012). According to data from the International Crisis Group, protests have continued throughout 2013, including large anti-government protests held in March of that year.<sup>6</sup>

Alsaden (2012) argues that Morocco did not experience levels of unrest similar to elsewhere in the MENA region because many Moroccans witnessed this turmoil and were keen to avoid a similar fate. The result has been a reduction in domestic pressure on the monarchy, relating to the promises that it has made. Alsaden (2012), does however note that there have been increasing levels of “popular defiance.”

The literature notes that protests in Morocco did not start with the Arab Spring. Bank (2012) states that in the 2000s Morocco had a “lively protest culture” led by the “diplomes chomeurs.”<sup>7</sup> While their demands were traditionally related to their career prospects, they incorporated broader socio-economic demands following the mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 (Bank, 2012).

An estimated 10,000-15,000 sub-Saharan Africans are living in Morocco (Cherti & Grant, 2013). Cherti & Grant (2013: 35) state that sub-Saharan **migrants** living in Morocco are the victims of “deep-rooted prejudice and stigma.” They note that migrants are at risk of violence, ranging from “low-level violence and intimidation to physical injury, sexual assault, and even murder” (Ibid, 2013: 47). Most of this violence is perpetrated by the Moroccan population (Cherti & Grant, 2013). According to Arieff (2013a: 4), the King launched a new policy to protect the human rights of migrants following “a series of alleged state abuses against African immigrants” in September 2013.

### 3. Drivers of conflict

#### 3.1 Political system

The head of state is King Mohammad VI, who has ruled since the death of his father, King Hassan II, in 1999. Alsaden (2012) argues that the **monarchy** is very much “off-limits” in Morocco. He states that this is due to its role in Morocco’s pre-colonial history, and the fact that it is viewed as a key component of Morocco’s independence movement. Bank (2012) notes that, in contrast to other countries in the region, the February 20 movement did not call for the abolition of the monarchy, or

<sup>4</sup> Established by leftist political parties, independent labour unions, human rights organisations and Islamist movements

<sup>5</sup> The royal shadow government.

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group (2013). *Crisis Watch – Morocco*. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs={C83DAB35-84E4-439F-BAC2-C92740315ABC}>

<sup>7</sup> Educated unemployed.

for the King to be deposed. Arieff (2013a) states that direct criticism of the monarchy is not permitted in Morocco.

Discussing the 2011 **constitution**, Alsaden (2012: 2) argues that “the new constitution ensures that actual power ultimately remains in the hands of the monarch, while the elected government is expected to negotiate the political process and deliver on the public’s expectations and demands.” He describes the new constitution as “ambiguous” arguing that while it is very aspirational, the mechanisms and institutions that would turn these aspirations into reality do not currently exist (Ibid).

Ottaway (2011: 4) notes that **Morocco’s political parties** are “top-heavy, internally undemocratic, with little renewal of leadership.” One expert comments that since 9/11, there has been a shift from using the French language to Arabic among the political elite. She argues that all Moroccan parties are populist, although the Justice and Development Party (PJD), which leads the coalition government, is arguably the least so (Expert comment).

In July 2013, Morocco’s ruling coalition government collapsed after the Independence Party withdrew from government on the grounds that Prime Minister Benkirane had failed to deal with the “socio-economic crisis.”<sup>8</sup> The party was replaced by the centrist RNI (Rally for National Independence).

### 3.2 Socio-economic challenges and corruption

Arieff (2013a) describes Morocco’s economy as “relatively diverse.” However, Morocco, faces a number of **economic challenges**. Inequality in Morocco has been rising in recent years (Alsaden, 2012). Moreover, in 2011, Morocco ranked 130th, out of 187, in the Human Development Index (Alsaden, 2012). Hink & Hussmann (2013) note that a dependence on agricultural activities, combined with differences between urban and rural living conditions, have exacerbated the problems caused by rapid population growth. One in four Moroccans lives in “absolute poverty or under its constant threat” (World Bank, cited in Arieff, 2013a: 10). Morocco is dependent on oil imports for its energy supply, and price increases have had a detrimental effect on the economy (Arieff, 2013a). The Moroccan economy has also been negatively affected by the economic downturn in the EU (Arieff, 2013a).

Morocco reportedly suffers from both petty and grand **corruption**, with the judiciary and public officials being identified as the most corrupt institutions in the country (Hink & Hussmann, 2013). The lack of a formal election monitoring mechanism, and the lack of transparency in both the financing of political parties, and in the budget process, have been highlighted by a 2010 Global Integrity report (Hink & Hussmann, 2013). The National Integrity Study notes that the absence of a right to information in Morocco is a key factor underlying corruption (Hink & Hussmann, 2013). Moreover, Arieff (2013a) notes that the royal family dominates the phosphate industry in Morocco, and “much of the economy.” He adds that the king is also a major landowner (Ibid).

According to Boukhars (2013), Morocco has invested almost US\$3 billion in basic infrastructure in Western Sahara. However, the result has not been sustainable development. Rather, local tribal leaders, notables, influential Sahrawi refugees who deserted the Polisario, and elected officials have been the principal beneficiaries of economic and political opportunities. Western Sahara is dependent on state welfare and social assistance and the territory receives US\$535 million annually

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<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group (2013). *Crisis Watch – Morocco*. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs={C83DAB35-84E4-439F-BAC2-C92740315ABC}>

from the Moroccan state to combat poverty. Boukhars (2013) argues that a lack of resources is not the problem, but rather the extent of “opacity, waste, and inequitable distribution.”

### 3.3 The Western Sahara conflict

According to Boukhars (2013), Western Sahara is increasingly viewed as a security risk by the international community. Boukhars (2012: 4) argues that, “the hostility and distrust between Morocco and Algeria have been so destructive that the whole region has been dragged into a vicious circle of collective suspicion, counterproductive rivalries, and self-defeating policies.”

In 2010, **violent riots** broke out in Laayoune, the capital of Western Sahara, in which Sahrawis burned properties owned by Moroccans from the north, prompting brutal retaliation (Boukhars, 2012). Wilson (2013) argues that while many observers have argued that the motivations behind this unrest were economic, the region’s unresolved status was also an important factor. Ethnic unrest also broke out in Dakhla in the south of the Moroccan-administered territory in 2011 (Boukhars, 2012; Boukhars, 2013). According to Boukhars (2012), this involved both the indigenous Sahrawi population and Sahrawis who were brought in from outside to vote in the proposed referendum (which never took place).

According to Human Rights Watch (2010 cited in Arieff, 2013b: 8), Moroccan security forces allegedly detained hundreds of Sahrawis during the 2010 unrest in Laayoune, and reportedly engaged in ‘retaliatory’ attacks on Sahrawi civilians. The Moroccan authorities reject these allegations (Arieff, 2013b).

Following the renewal of MINURSO’s mandate in April 2013, daily **pro-independence protests** took place in the Western Saharan cities of Laayoune, Smara, and Boujdour throughout May 2013.<sup>9</sup> These separatist tendencies have been attributed to frustration and disappointment with state policies, to demographic changes resulting from migration into the territory,<sup>10</sup> and the particular susceptibility of young people to separatist ideas (Boukhars, 2012; Wilson, 2012). In particular, Boukhars (2013) argues that the Sahrawi diaspora and refugees living in the Polisario camps in Tindouf fuel dissent in Moroccan-administered Western Sahara. He describes the new generation of Sahrawi protestors as “unpredictable,” arguing that rather than being ideological, they are “more individualistic and violent,” than their predecessors (Ibid: 3).

Boukhars (2013) states that institutions set up to represent Sahrawi interests are “poorly-led” and “badly-organised.” For example, CORCAS (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs) has never met, and almost half of its 144 members do not live in Western Sahara.

### 3.4 Salafism

Salafis actively participated in the February 20 Movement. As a result a significant number of Salafi political prisoners were pardoned by the King (Masbah, 2013). According to Masbah (2013), Moroccan Salafis have become increasingly moderate since the onset of the Arab Spring (a continuation of signs of a shift away from extremism beginning in 2007). This **moderation** has entailed:

- Greater acceptance of democracy and the monarchy.

<sup>9</sup> International Crisis Group (2013). *Crisis Watch – Western Sahara*. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs={4D61D111-7D9E-4E25-97C5-2C30AB64AC3B}>

<sup>10</sup> Both by northern Moroccans and by Sahrawis originating from outside Western Sahara.

- Softening their position on women in public life.
- Expressing support for the PJD.
- Expressing a willingness to form political parties and/or religion-based NGOs.
- Endorsing the 2011 constitution.
- Participating in public dates with seculars.

There is some debate about the degree of moderation of the Salafis, however. Whilst Masbah (2013) argues their current position is in stark contrast to their position prior to the Arab Spring, which centred on the idea that politics is un-Islamic and incompatible with Sharia Law, another expert commented that Islamists in Morocco have not moderated (Expert comment). She argues that they only appear more moderate now when set in the context of less moderate groups elsewhere in the region (Expert comment).

Masbah (2013) notes that Salafis in Morocco can be divided in four broad groups:

- **Quietists (also traditionalists or scientific Salafiyya):** Their focus is on teaching and studying religion and they tend to be scholars and ideologues.
- **Politicians and pragmatics:** This is a new trend driven by a group of former Salafi-Jihadis. A key figure is Sheikh Mohamed Fizazi, whose aim is to create a political party or a religion-based NGO. To date, he has been unsuccessful in achieving this goal.
- **Haraki (Movement):** These are civil society activists, and the members are mainly former prisoners. Their aim is to establish structures of social support.
- **Jihadi prisoners and their support groups:** These are informal networks of former Salafi-Jihadi prisoners and their families. They have very little ideological flexibility. One of the most active groups is the Joint Committee for the Defense of Islamist Detainees, and their current priority is securing the release of hundreds of Salafi prisoners.

Masbah (2013) argues that marginal **ultra-conservative Salafi elements** are increasingly alienating themselves from the Moroccan public. He suggests that there are a number of reasons for this, including the monarchy's prominent role in religious affairs, and the use of a carrot-and-stick approach in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca bombings, which involved punishing radical elements, while tolerating the *quietists*. He also notes that the PJD's role in Morocco has shown the Salafis the benefits of political participation. Finally, he argues that the success of the 'largely peaceful' revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt was also a factor behind Moroccan Salafis' shift towards moderation, as it showed them that peaceful mass protest movements could overthrow oppressive leaders. This view is supported by Malka and Lawrence (2013: 4), who argue:

*"The Arab uprisings sent a clear message to young people that there were other ways to transform society than simply armed revolt, among them nonviolent protest by populations against entrenched regimes. Amidst these protests and the changing political contexts they ushered in, Salafism did not evaporate; it adapted."*

Masbah (2013: 6) cautions that while the Arab Spring has resulted in increasing moderation on the part of Morocco's Salafis, this is not a 'linear or irreversible process.' Thus, he argues that the danger of re-radicalisation remains, if they are not accepted as 'legitimate societal and political players' by the monarchy (Masbah, 2013: 6).

In terms of **Salafi-Jihadi groups**, the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM), which is believed to have been responsible for the 2003 Casablanca bombings, is no longer active (Expert comment). However, AQIM are active in Morocco. Arieff (2013a) states that AQIM have not been responsible for any terrorist attacks in Morocco, however one expert states that the group was "almost certainly

responsible for the 2011 Marrakesh bombing” (Expert comment). According to Arieff (2013a), AQIM have called for attacks on US diplomats in Morocco and in other countries. Moreover, in September 2013, AQIM released a video attacking the Moroccan monarchy. However, he states that the principal threat to Morocco’s domestic security takes the form of “numerous small extremist cells that adhere to the Salafiya Jihadiya ideology” (Ibid: 6-7).

### 3.5 Drugs and other organised crime

According to the UNODC (2012), Morocco has traditionally been the principal source of **cannabis resin** consumed in Europe, but its importance as a supplier appears to be reducing. The Mauritanian intelligence services estimate that one third of all cannabis produced in Morocco transits the Sahel states (Lacher, 2012). Lacher (2012), states that the cannabis resin trade is dominated by networks of Mauritians, Moroccans, and Sahrawis until it reaches Mali. He notes that there have also been allegations of Algerian army officer involvement. He argues that there is little evidence to support the theory that AQIM is directly involved in drug smuggling, however he states that the group does charge drug smugglers a transit fee (Ibid).

According to Lacher (2012), Saharawi networks trade humanitarian aid and subsidised Algerian goods southwards, and cigarettes to Morocco and Algeria. Boukhars (2012: 5) argues that, “AQIM and its offshoots in the Sahel work relentlessly to expand their partnership with smugglers from the camps<sup>11</sup> and enlist recruits among disenchanting Sahrawis.” Boukhars (2012: 6) states that, “the partnerships between AQIM and elements of the Polisario may not be based on ideological affinity and are not as widespread as is feared, but they do exist and constitute a major security threat to the Maghreb and the Sahel”. He adds that members of the Polisario have been involved in kidnapping incidents. He also argues that Sahrawi youths in the camps in Tindouf are increasingly turning to drug trafficking. Morocco is believed to be a transit zone for **cocaine trafficking** between South America and Europe (Arieff, 2013a). According to Lacher (2012), there have been reports of Sahrawi cannabis resin smugglers, with links to the Polisario, taking cocaine into Morocco on their way back from Mali.

## 4. International and local responses to conflict

### 4.1 Political reform

#### *Local responses*

As a result of the 2011 protests in Morocco, the King announced substantial changes to the country’s constitution. Key changes were:

- The Prime Minister is elected, rather than appointed by the King, and he has the power to appoint members of the government (Alsaden, 2012). The Prime Minister also presides over cabinet meetings (Ottaway, 2011).
- Freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate are recognised (Alsaden, 2012).
- There is a commitment to universal human rights, and gender equality (Alsaden, 2012).
- There is a commitment to free and fair elections (Alsaden, 2012).
- The constitution promotes transparent and accountable governance (Alsaden, 2012).

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<sup>11</sup> Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf Province, Algeria.

- A promise that the state will endeavour to provide decent housing, social security, modern education, access to health care, and employment opportunities for its citizens is included (Alsaden, 2012).
- Tamazight is now an official language (Bank, 2012).<sup>12</sup>
- The Consultative Council on Youth and Associative Action was established (Bank, 2012).

However, it is worth noting that according to the new constitution:

- The King remains the Commander of the Faithful, thereby retaining decision-making powers over religious matters and control over Friday sermons at mosques throughout the country (Alsaden, 2012).
- The King is the head of the Higher Council of the Ulemas (religious scholars), which “has the monopoly on issuing *fatwas*” (Masbah, 2013: 5)
- The King retains control over the Supreme Judicial Authority (Alsaden, 2012).
- The King chairs the Supreme Security Council, a newly established body, which provides him with control over the military, the security apparatus, and the intelligence services (Alsaden, 2012).
- The King presides over the cabinet on issues related to security or strategic policy, and the decision as to what constitutes a strategic issue, lies with the King (Ottaway, 2011).

## 4.2 Furthering economic development and combatting corruption

### *Local responses*

Morocco has launched a number of **social programmes** in a bid to address discontent. These include public sector hiring initiatives, wage increases, and subsidies for basic goods (Arieff, 2013a). However, Arieff (2013a) notes that the PJD has announced cuts to public spending, and that it is trying to reform the system of state subsidies for basic goods and pensions. He warns that this move may lead to public unrest (Arieff, 2013a). Alsaden (2012) states that there is a burgeoning civil society in Morocco, which has gradually been increasing public pressure on a broad range of socio-economic issues.

The government has invested in a number of controversial **infrastructure projects**, which include a high-speed rail link based on the French TGV, which is being built by French companies. A new inter-city road network is also being constructed. Both of these projects are seen to be benefiting the wealthy, and not the wider population, due to the costs involved in using them (Alsaden, 2012). Alsaden (2012) argues that the King is a key beneficiary of these infrastructure projects, as his private investment firm controls a significant share of the country’s cement industry.

### *International responses*

The **Deauville Partnership** with Arab Countries in Transition involves a range of actors, including the G8 member states, the EU, regional actors, international financial institutions, and a number of international organisations.<sup>13</sup> Its purpose is to provide support for the economic and political

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<sup>12</sup> This is important as Tamazight becoming an official language was one of demands of the Berberist movement, which participated in the February 20 movement protests (Expert Comment).

<sup>13</sup> UK Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/working-for-peace-and-long-term-stability-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/supporting-pages/deauville-partnership>

transitions taking place in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen.<sup>14</sup> In 2013, the Deauville Partnership is focusing on open economies and inclusive growth, with particular emphasis on:

- Investment.
- Trade.
- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs).
- Women's economic participation.
- European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) mandate expansion.
- Access to capital markets.
- Asset recovery.
- MENA transition fund for demand-driven technical assistance.<sup>15</sup>

In 2000, Morocco's Association Agreement with the EU came into force (Arieff, 2013a). According to Arieff (2013a), this could lead to a **Free Trade Agreement** (FTA). The EU and Morocco have also drawn up an Action Plan under the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. This addresses a broad range of economic, political and social areas for cooperation.<sup>16</sup> The US and Morocco signed an FTA in 2004, which came into force in 2006 (Arieff, 2013a). Morocco also received US\$41.2 million in aid from the US in 2012 (Arieff, 2013a).

### 4.3 Resolving the Western Sahara conflict and addressing human rights abuses in the territory

#### *Local responses*

The King established an Equity and Reconciliation Commission in 2004, in order to address human rights abuses that occurred in Western Sahara during his father's reign, and to compensate victims (Arieff, 2013b). Moreover, in 2011 the King pardoned a number of Western Sahara independence activists (Arieff, 2013a). A National Human Rights Council (CNDH) was also established in 2011 (Arieff, 2013a). The CNDH has investigated a number of human rights issues in Western Sahara (Arieff, 2013a).

Prior to his meeting with President Obama in November 2013, the King announced plans to invest in jobs, to ensure equal access to resources, and to improve infrastructure in Western Sahara, in a bid to improve human rights via socio-economic means (Spencer, 2013). Spencer (2013) states that these proposals are in keeping with regional autonomy plans for the whole of Morocco, which were announced in 2011. Moreover, she adds that these plans acknowledge the socio-economic causes of recent unrest in Western Sahara, rather than focusing on the region's political status alone (Ibid).

#### *International responses*

At the end of 2012, the UNSG's (UN Secretary General) Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, announced a **new approach to the peace process** (Arieff, 2013b). This involved:

<sup>14</sup> UK Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/working-for-peace-and-long-term-stability-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/supporting-pages/deauville-partnership>

<sup>15</sup> UK Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/working-for-peace-and-long-term-stability-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/supporting-pages/deauville-partnership>

<sup>16</sup> European External Action Service – EU/Morocco Action Plan  
[http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action\\_plans/morocco\\_enp\\_ap\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/action_plans/morocco_enp_ap_final_en.pdf)

- Broadening the UNSG's Personal Envoy's network to include civil society members, political party leaders, and dissidents.
- Addressing Morocco-Algeria relations, during meetings in the two countries.
- Initiating 'shuttle diplomacy' between Morocco and the Polisario.
- Recommending the expansion of the UNHCR supported CBMs (confidence-building measures), which include family visits and telephone communications between residents of Western Sahara and refugees in Tindouf (Arieff, 2013b).

In April 2013, the US tried to broaden MINURSO's mandate to include human rights monitoring (Boukhars, 2013a). The move was unsuccessful as Morocco, backed by France, strongly opposed the idea of MINURSO fulfilling such a role (Arieff, 2013b).

In October 2013, Christopher Ross announced another new phase in the negotiations to resolve the conflict, following bilateral exchanges with both Morocco and the Polisario.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4.4 Counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation**

##### ***Local responses***

Morocco is very active in the fields of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation. According to Arieff (2013a), key initiatives and approaches include:

- The creation of theological councils.
- The supervision and retraining of imams.
- The exertion of control over religious leaders and institutions.
- The closure of unregulated mosques.
- Retraining and rehabilitating individuals convicted of terror-related crimes, with the aim of correcting their understanding of Islam.
- Media efforts to transmit tolerant 'Moroccan religious values' (Arieff, 2013a).

##### ***International responses***

Morocco is a member of NATO's Mediterranean dialogue, and has participated in NATO military exercises, as well as participating in NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, which monitors the Mediterranean for terrorists (Arieff, 2013a). The US and Morocco are parties to the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue,<sup>18</sup> which began in 2012 (Ibid).

## **5. Practical recommendations**

### **5.1 Emphasise political reform**

- Alsaden (2012) argues that policy makers should exert political pressure in order to make sure that the monarchy fulfils the promises made in the 2011 constitution. Bank (2012) concurs with this advice, stating that European countries should insist on "earnest and rapid

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<sup>17</sup> UN News. (2013) *UN envoy for Western Sahara dispute launches 'new phase' in negotiations*. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46381&Cr=western+sahara&Cr1#.UpNy6eKON8E>

<sup>18</sup> A formal framework for cooperation on a range of strategic issues.

implementation of the constitutional reforms.” He adds that they should also support further-reaching reform.

## 5.2 Support development programmes and economic initiatives

- Alsaden (2012) suggests that European governments should encourage and support the Moroccan government in implementing public works programmes, despite the fact that the 2011 constitution emphasises the fact that the government is not a direct provider. He adds that emphasis should be placed on education and vocational training, with the aim of creating a self-sufficient labour force (Alsaden, 2012).
- Bank (2012) advocates increased conditionality for the G8 assistance package for the countries in the MENA region. He also suggests that addressing the underlying causes of the protests in Morocco should be a priority for external support.
- Witney & Dworkin (2012) state that measures are required to free up the business environment and bring about genuine competition in public procurement.
- Alsaden (2012) argues that increasing freedom of movement between Morocco and Europe would provide Moroccans with greater access to high quality education.

## 5.3 Prepare for Western Sahara’s autonomy

- Boukhars (2013) states that Western countries should encourage Morocco to start devolving political power to Western Sahara. He adds that they should also encourage Morocco to ensure the protection of civil liberties and to show that the exploitation of natural resources in the territory is actually benefiting the local population (Ibid). Khakee (2011) highlights that there are risks associated with autonomy arrangements within undemocratic states.
- Boukhars (2013) argues that support should be provided for confidence-building programmes, targeting the police and the security forces, which aim to end the culture of impunity within these institutions. He adds that there should also be support for the National Council for Human Rights’ (CNDH) regional commissions’ (HDRC) complaints system, which is tasked with dealing with allegations of police abuse (Boukhars, 2013). He also states that there should be increased efforts to protect freedom of speech (Ibid).
- Taking a slightly different approach to Boukhars, Spencer (2013) argues that “If Morocco’s leaders were encouraged to address the economic and social needs of the Saharan population prior to moving towards a more balanced political process, then this could provide the US and Europe with a new set of incentives to break out of current UN deadlocks over Western Sahara’s legal status.”<sup>19</sup> She adds that accompanying the proposed socio-economic improvements with improvements in policing and local judicial processes, could prevent the Sahrawi youth from becoming involved in new regional security threats (Ibid).

## 5.4 Increase moderate Salafi involvement in political life.

- Masbah (2013) suggests that the Moroccan authorities should be encouraged to allow the creation of Salafi political parties and NGOs. He also advocates the involvement of moderate Salafis in official religious bodies. He adds that the repression of non-violent Salafis should be discouraged in order to prevent re-radicalisation. He also suggests that a new Equity and

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/195677>

Reconciliation Commission should be established to deal with the legacy of the 2003 attacks and that the authorities should recognise past human rights abuses. Masbah (2013) also advocates European engagement with moderate Salafis.

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## Key websites

- UK Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies>  
 UN Peacekeeping - <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions>  
 Uppsala Conflict Data Program – <http://www.ucdp.uu.se>

## **Appendix: Key actors**

### **Kings**

#### ***Mohammed VI***

King of Morocco since his father's death in 1999. Arieff (2013a: 3) states that the King "remains the pre-eminent state authority in Morocco's political system, though he has said he is committed to building a democracy."

#### ***Hassan II***

King of Morocco from 1961 until his death in 1999.

### **Political parties**

#### ***Justice and Development Party (PJD)***

The PJD is a moderate Islamist party, which has been leading the government since 2011. The party has defended the Salafis' right to exist (Masbah, 2013). However, it does not seek to establish an Islamic state (Expert comment). One expert describes the party as "full of seasoned politicians with political ambition" (Expert comment).

#### ***The Independence Party (Istiqlal)***

A nationalist party, which was a member of the Koutla group during the 2011 parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012). Istiqlal left the ruling coalition in July 2013.

#### ***Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)***

The party was a member of the Koutla group during the 2011 parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012), and is a member of the ruling coalition government (Arieff, 2013a).

#### ***Popular Movement (MP)***

A centrist party, which is a member of the ruling coalition government (Arieff, 2013a).

#### ***Rally of National Independence (RNI)***

A centrist party, which is believed to be close to the monarchy, and which agreed to join the ruling coalition government following Istiqlal's decision to leave the coalition in July, 2013 (Arieff, 2013a). The RNI led the monarchist Coalition for Democracy (or G8), at the time of the 2011 parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012).

#### ***Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)***

A member of the Koutla group during the parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012). The party was offered the opportunity to join the coalition government but it declined (Expert comment).

### ***Islamist Party of Renaissance (or Renewal) and Virtue***

A moderate Islamist party, which split away from the PJD. The party formed an alliance with the Party of Authenticity and Modernity in the 2011 elections (Masbah, 2013). The party was a member of the monarchist Coalition for Democracy (or G8) during the 2011 parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012).

### ***Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM)***

This party was created by a friend of the King in 2009 (Ottaway, 2011). Ottaway (2011) states that as members of other parties moved over to join the PAM, it was able to establish a strong presence in parliament, even before it had actually participated in a parliamentary election. It was a member of the monarchist Coalition for Democracy (or G8) during the 2011 parliamentary elections (Theofilopoulou, 2012).

### ***Other parties in the Coalition for Democracy (or G8)***

The Constitutional Union (UC), the Socialist Party, the Left Wing Green Party (also Green Left Party), and the Labour Party.

### ***Adl wal-Ihsan***

The Economist describes *Adl wal-Ihsan* as a radical Islamist party, which is opposed to the monarchy.<sup>20</sup> However, according to one expert, *Adl wal-Ihsan* no longer wishes to be a political party, as it benefits from its status as a movement, which allows it to be unaccountable, while retaining popular support and political influence (Expert comment). Arieff (2013a) describes *Adl wal-Ihsan* as Morocco's 'largest grassroots organisation.' He notes that the organisation, which is non-violent, is banned (Arieff, 2013a).

## **Security forces**

The Moroccan army is about 185,000 strong, with an additional 150,000 reservists (Arieff, 2013b) Morocco is believed to have over 100,000 troops based in Western Sahara (Arieff, 2013b). The Moroccan security forces have been accused of a range of human rights abuses, especially in Western Sahara. However the authorities have denied these allegations.

## **Salafi-jihadist groups**

### ***Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM)***

The group was responsible for the 2003 Casablanca bombings, and it is also believed to have been responsible for the 2004 Madrid train bombing (Expert comment). The group was de-listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US in 2013 (Expert comment).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/21550294>

### ***Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb/ Al-Qaeda in the lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM/AQLIM)***

This group, which originates from Algeria, was known as GSPC (Groupe Salafite pour la prédication et le combat/ Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) and it was a splinter group of the GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé/ Armed Islamic Group), which had been fighting the Algerian government since 1993.<sup>21</sup> The group's main areas of activity are Algeria and the Sahel, but they are also active in Morocco. Arieff (2013a) states that AQIM have not carried out any attacks in Morocco, however one expert states that the group was 'almost certainly responsible for the 2011 Marrakesh bombing (Expert comment).

### **Key actors in the Western Sahara**

#### ***The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia al-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario)***

A Sahrawi independence movement, established in 1973. The group's headquarters are in Algeria's Tindouf province. The group heads the government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Arieff (2013b) notes that the Polisario occasionally threatens to recommence its "armed struggle." However, he argues that they would probably require both Algerian aid and permission for such a move, and notes that these are unlikely to be forthcoming (Arieff, 2013b).

#### ***United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)***

The mission, which was established in 1991, is headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Western Sahara, Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber. The mission's mandate was renewed in April, 2013. MINURSO is fairly small, consisting of 228 uniformed personnel, 95 international civilian personnel, 167 local civilian staff, and 13 UN Volunteers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data Programme -

[http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern\\_Africa#](http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=3&regionSelect=1-Northern_Africa#)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minurso/facts.shtml>