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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ وَكَوَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلِيًّا سَيِّدَنَا مُحَمَّدًا وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

## Morocco

### Population Assessment

As of January 2008 the population of Morocco is estimated to be 33,800,000, whose growth rate based upon 2007 estimates is 1.528%. At least 31% of its overall population is under the age of 14, where about 5,340,000 of these are male and 5,150,000 are female. About 64% of its overall population fall between the working ages of 15 to 64 years of age; where about 10,800,000 are male and 10,900,000 are female. The remaining 5.1% of the population are 65 years and older; where 740,000 of these are male and an estimated 971,000 are elderly women.

### Religious, Ethnic and Linguistic Data in Morocco

Morocco is traditionally an Islamic country where 98.7% of its people are Muslims, 1.1% of their populations are Christians and 0.2% of them are Jews. The ethnic statistics in Morocco is divided where 99.1% of its population are Arab-Berber; 0.7% consist of Black Africans of Soninke', Fulbe', Wolof, Serer and Haratin groups who have been apart of Moroccan society as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The other remaining 0.2% consists of Sephardic Jewish ethnicities that have been apart of the Moroccan population as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The official language of Morocco is Arabic, which is far from classical Arabic, although classical Arabic is used in formal articulation. The majority of the Moroccan people speak a local dialect of Arabic distinct from standardized or classical Arabic. The lingua-franca of business, government and diplomacy, however is French. More than half of the people of Morocco speak several distinct Berber dialects, which impact heavily on their spoken Arabic.

### The Status of Islam in Morocco & the Government

Islam has been apart of the formation of the various dynasties of Morocco as far back as the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. when Arab Muslims conquered the region and ruled a great deal of the Iberian peninsular (Portugal and Spain) up until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1578 and 1603, Morocco, under the as-Sa`adi dynasty incorporated a large portion of West Africa under its political hegemony. In 1776, Morocco was the first nation to recognize the independence of the 13 colonies of the United States of America, and signed political and economic agreements, guaranteeing mutual protection and development. Apart of the agreement, was that no US national would be held as a captive, slave or prisoner by Morocco or any of its dependencies in West Africa; and likewise that the United States would not hold as prisoners, captives or

slaves any persons subject to Moroccan sovereignty or dependencies; and that any Muslim of a third party country held in captivity, slavery or imprisonment in the US would be turned over to the Moroccan authorities. However, for more than 200 years the US government violated this agreement through the capture and enslavement of more than 5 million African Muslims, many of whom were subject to, dependents of or under confederation with the Moroccan authorities.

In 1860, Spain occupied northern Morocco and for half a century other European powers eroded Moroccan's sovereignty, until the French eventually made it a protectorate in 1912. From that time until 1956, the people of Morocco fought a protracted struggle for independence, and regained its sovereignty under international recognition, and all former Spanish colonies were returned to Moroccan control the same year. In the 1970s Morocco annexed what was then called Spanish Sahara, which led to the emergence of an independence movement of the Western Saharan people against Moroccan control and which continues to this day. This conflict is not based upon religion, because both parties to the conflict share the same Islamic religion, and *sunni* sectarian beliefs. The conflict is based solely on political tensions of independence or sovereignty.

The Moroccan government is and has been since its inception an Islamic constitutional monarchy; whose leader (king) is a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad, and whose legitimacy as an *Amir'l-Mu'mineen* (supreme religious and secular authority) has been universally recognized by the general population as well as the Muslims internationally. The Moroccan government has 15 administrative regions, whose legal system is based in part on Maliki Islamic law, alongside French and Spanish civil law. The King is the chief of state and is the sole head of the executive branch of government. In 2007 the King appointed a prime minister who is elected by the Parliament. The Parliament in turn is elected every three years, with a Chamber of Representatives who are elected every five years. The King also presides over the Supreme Council of the Judiciary who in turn appoints the Supreme Court.

Morocco has about thirty-one political parties of which 6 of them are socialist parties. It also has about 12 labor unions and political pressure groups which call for social, economic and political reform through participatory politics. Morocco also maintains membership in, is signatory to, is partner with or has observer status on more than 55 international entities within the United Nations.

Besides the political tensions between Morocco and the people of Western Sahara, it also has international disputes with Spain regarding Ceuta, Melilla, and Penon de Velez de la Gomera, the islands of Penon de Alhucemas and Islas Chafarinas, and their surrounding waters.

## The Emergence of Radical Islamic Movements in Morocco

Because the monarch is a Muslim and has his legitimacy recognized since before the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; it was difficult for radical Muslim organizations prior to 2003 to emerge in Morocco. The legal foundation for the political legitimacy of the Moroccan authorities is based in classical Islamic constitutional theory, whose foundations are the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* (the sacred text of Muslims and the words of Prophet Muhammad). It says in the *Qur'an*:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

*"O you who believe, obey Allah, obey the Messenger and those who possess the authority from among you."*<sup>1</sup> This verse establishes the legitimacy of the authority of Muslim authorities over Muslim populations; and also recognizes the right of Muslim minorities to choose Muslim leaders to represent them in those states in which they constitute a minority under non-Muslim sovereign states.

It has been related by al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Miqdaad ibn al-Aswad that Prophet Muhammad said:

((أَطِيعُوا أَمْرَاتِكُمْ فَإِنْ أَمْرُكُمْ بِمَا جِئْتُمْ بِهِ فَإِنَّهُمْ يُوجِرُونَ عَلَيْهِ وَتُوجِرُونَ بِطَاعَتِهِمْ

وَإِنْ أَمْرُكُمْ بِمَا لَمْ آتِكُمْ بِهِ فَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتُمْ بَرَاءٌ مِنْ ذَلِكَ))

*"Obey your leaders. If they command you with what I came with, then they will be rewarded for that and you will be rewarded for your obedience. And if they command you with what I did not come with, then it will be against them, and you will be free of what they did."* The above *Qur'anic* verse and statement from Muhammad affectively rules out rebelling against the legitimate authorities, even if or when the authorities go against the ordinances of Islam. Other legal precedence which guarantee the legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy are the following words of early Muslim jurist. It has been related by al-Bayhaqi on the authority of Anas ibn Maalik who said, *"The prominent ones (kaabiruna) among the companions (ashaabi) of Muhammad, ordered us not to abuse our leaders, not to act dishonestly toward them, and do not disobey them. If we fear God and be patient, then the command of God will be near (qareeb)."* It has also been related by al-Bayhaqi on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abi Taalib who said, *"The people will not be put in order except by either an upright leader or a corrupt leader."* The Muslim jurists maintain that although there is much harm in the government of a corrupt leader, yet it is far worse for the people to remain leaderless, and lack legitimate government. Through the legislative process and political criticism a corrupt government can be transformed or changed and eventually benefit the people, but a people without a government, be it just or corrupt will have no recourse to maintain its social, civil, economic and political rights.

Therefore, classical Islamic legal opinion is opposed to the political and/or military overthrow of legitimate Muslim rulers, even when they are corrupt. This same ruling applies to those states that have a social contract with Muslim minorities in the form of autonomous regions or some form of internal self determination. Once the Muslims sign a social contract with a state then it is forbidden for any Muslim party to that contract to violate it by means of civil disobedience and violence.

It is for this reason that Moroccans had prided themselves on being part of the moderate Maliki school of Islam embodied in the figure of the King as "Commander of the Faithful". However, in May of 2003 Morocco experienced its first major

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<sup>1</sup> Surah an-Nisa': Verse 59.

terrorist attack in Casablanca by militant Muslim separatist who questioned the legitimacy of the Moroccan regime. It is important to give a time line of the emergence of these Muslim militant groups in Morocco, in order to analyze whether these groups are indigenous to Morocco or have been imported into the country from abroad.

The first militant Muslim organization to emerge in Morocco, was that of the Shabiba'l-Islamiyya (Islamic Youth), led by a former nationalist, Abdelkarim Moutia in 1972. This group was made up of middle class university teachers and students. These teachers and students had little or no training in classical Islamic teachings in the traditional centers of Islamic learning such as the Qarawayn in Fez. Their 'islamic' ideas were mainly imported from the ideas of 'modernist' from Egypt and Iran, such as Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shairati (who themselves had no formal training in classical Islamic teachings). Soon after its inception, the Shabiba established a military arm under the direction of Abdelaziz Noumani. Although the group was opposed to the monarch, they only directed their attacks against left wing socialist parties and labor unions, such as the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP).<sup>2</sup> The reason they avoided direct confrontation with the Moroccan monarch was because of the support it enjoyed from the Moroccan population, in spite of its alleged corruption. As mentioned earlier 'corruption' is not a sufficient legal ground to eradicate and overthrow a sovereign state. Consequently, Shabiba avoided any direct attacks against the Moroccan government fearing negative backlash from the ordinary Moroccan. In 1975 Shabiba was accused of assassinating one of the leaders of the USFP, Omar Benjelloun, resulting in the leader of Shabiba, Moutia fleeing to Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup> The Moroccan government subsequently cracked down on this organization, and they fell into disarray.

In the beginning of the 1980s, what was left of Shabiba transformed into a more moderate organization calling for social change through legitimate political participation, under the name of Ahl'l-Jama`a al-Islamiyya (The People of the Society of Islam) led by Abdelilah Benkirane. Later this group transformed into the Hizb al-Ahdala wa Tanmia (Justice and Development Party), which now has a number of government representative seats and have completely renounced violence as a means of social transformation.

Another group that broke away from the Shabiba al-Islamiyya was Harakat al-Mujahideen al-Maghrabia (the Moroccan Mujahideen Movement), led by the violent wing of the Shabiba, the above mentioned Abdelaziz Noumani. In the mid 1980s they were responsible for a series of violent protests in the country, and were also implicated in the smuggling of explosives and ammunitions. Due to the lack of support from the general population of Moroccans, who believed as classical Islamic jurisprudence condemned, the violent overthrow of legitimate governments, many of the members of the Harakat al-Mujahideen al-Maghrabia fled the country and went to Iran, and from their they ended up in Afghanistan, where they were trained by the United States CIA to fight against the Soviets and the socialist regime in that country.

Another direction from which Muslim militants emerged in Morocco was from the Sufi or mystical brotherhoods that proliferated in Morocco from since its inception in the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The Sufi brotherhoods who for the most have been trained thoroughly in classical Islamic sciences, beliefs and jurisprudence, have always supported the various monarchies that have ruled Morocco. In fact several of

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<sup>2</sup> . L'Islamism Marocain: Entre Révolution et Intégration. Abdessamad Dialmy. EHESS, Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions, 110. April-June 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Abdelkarim Mouti by Camal Tawile. Al Hayat, 20 July 2000.

these Moroccan dynasties were established by adherents to Sufi brotherhoods. It was not until 1974, that a Sufi leader by the name of Shaykh Yassine emerged who was arrested for allegedly composing an open letter to the King of Morocco that challenged his legitimacy as ruler and holder of the title *Amir'l-Mu'mineen* (Commander of the Faithful). As we mentioned earlier, legally there was no grounds to question the legitimacy of the monarchy according to classical Islamic text, thus Shaykh Yassine, committed what would be considered in Islam, an act of treason; in the same way if a person was to publicly question the legitimacy of the CCP in China. For this Shaykh Yassine was arrested and imprisoned until 1979. During his imprisonment Shaykh Yassine garnered much underground support from Moroccan supporters in Spain, France and the United Kingdom. On his release he broke from the official Sufi brotherhood he was a member of and established the al-`Adl wa'l-Ihsaan (Justice and Welfare), which has enjoyed strong support, internationally among expatriate Moroccans. This group has not been reported to have been involved in any violent attacks in Morocco, or outside, although it continues to question the legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy. In this regard, Shaykh Yassine, was not inspired from classical Islamic teachings but from the same modernist ideologies which influenced the previously mentioned radical Muslim organizations.

In order to ward off the influence of modernist ideologies espoused by Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati, as well as offset the growing influence of the Iranian Revolution, the Moroccan monarch opened its doors to more conservative influence from Saudi Arabia in the form of Wahhabism, which traced its ideological roots to Muhammad Abdalwahhab of the 18<sup>th</sup> century central Arabian peninsular. Subsequently, in the early 1980s the Saudi regime began to pump millions of dollars in order to establish *Qur'an* schools, charitable organizations and propaganda conduits, such as magazines and books, which espoused the Wahhabi ideology.<sup>4</sup> The Saudi's also gave scholarships to many Moroccans to travel and study in the Wahhabi centers in Riyadh, Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

The problem with this ideology was the erroneous concept of *wala wa bara* (solidarity and hostility), which condemned as none Muslim any ruler who refused to enact Shari`a rule; or any government which failed to govern according to Wahhabi strict interpolation of the *shari`a*. Some of these Moroccans joined the ranks of the *mujahidun* trained and deployed by the United States CIA to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Some of the ideologues who returned from Saudi Arabia with this new and virulent brand of Islam were men such as Omar al-Haddouci, Ahmed al-Raffiki, Mohamed Fizazi, Hassan Kettani and Abdelkarim Chadli. These men were appointed to official post as *Imams* in Morocco and some were sent to Europe and Asia by the Moroccan monarch to spread Islam.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, after the 1991 Persian Gulf war, these same preachers began to link themselves with other Wahhabi ideologues such as Osama bin Ladin, and Ayman Zawahiri, and some even trained with them in Afghanistan.

According to their view it was illegal for US military forces to be present in Saudi Arabia. As a result any treaty which the Moroccan monarch had with the US was made null and void. It was the relationship that Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt and other North African nations had with the United States which attracted the

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<sup>4</sup> El Sharq el Awsat., 11 March 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Abdelsalam Razzak. Min el-Salafia el Watania ila Salfia Jihadia. [From nationalist salafism to Jihadist Salafism]. Al-Jazeera.net 3 October 2004.

criticism from these Wahhabi ideologues in Morocco.<sup>6</sup> The Moroccan government responded by banning these *Imams* from teaching in the official mosques, and many of them were arrested. As a result many makeshift mosques began to emerge in the shantytowns in many Moroccan cities where the influence of these *Imams* began to be felt among the poor and disenfranchised.

Many of these Wahhabi ideologues joined the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group fighting to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi of Libya. However, in the mid 1990s the Moroccans broke away and set up their own militant training camp called the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group. They were led by Abdelkarim Mejatti, and comprised of small insignificant cells throughout Europe. It was this delinquent group that was responsible for the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks as well as that in Madrid in Spain.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, the militant Islamic movements in Morocco have recruited ill educated youth from the impoverished shantytowns of Casablanca, Fes, Meknes and Rabat. It has been reported that these newly emerging groups led by youth such as Zakaria Miloudi and Youssef Fikri, amount to nothing but delinquent gangs with little or no classical Islamic training, who subsequently impose their own archaic interpolations of the *shari`a* in their own communities. Both men, Miloudi and Fikri have been arrested and have been accused of being involved in the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

China is an import partner with Morocco which provides 6.9% of its imports. The growing demand for Chinese technological, and industrial goods in Morocco, will witness an ever increasing relationship between Morocco and China. Many of the causes for unrest now in Morocco has to do with the perception that the United States dictates policy in the country and that the King is simply a puppet to its interest in the region. This is the fundamental cause behind the emergence of radical Islamic movements in Morocco.

The Chinese people and the PRC are for the most part a very conservative society, whose values pose no threat to the values of the Moroccan people. The desire to maintain family, transmit positive values to children are a common goal of both the people of the PRC and the people of Morocco. The PRC also is not perceived as a threat to Islam because it has not been engaged in any fashion with foreign intervention in Muslim lands. Not only that the PRC maintains the existence of several internationally recognized autonomous Muslim regions. This is something that few non Muslim nations can boast of. It is important that the PRC preempt any criticism which may arise from militant Islamic circles as well as the western media regarding the treatment of its Muslim national minorities. The PRC should continue to cultivate positive ties with Muslim states such as Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Sudan, by offering scholarships to Islamic institutions which are classical centers for the study of Islam for member of the Muslim national minorities of China. In this way the more traditional and less subversive trends in Islam can be transmitted, while at the same time maintaining a positive cultural exchange between the PRC and

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<sup>6</sup> Mukahamat il irhab bil Maghreb al halaka thalith [Terrorism on trial in Morocco. Article three]. Idris Wilt al-Kabila 19 April 2004. Magazine of Palestinian Writers. [www.falasteen.com](http://www.falasteen.com).

<sup>7</sup> Abdelsalam Razzak. Mukahamat al-Salafia al-jihadia fi al-Maghreb. [Trials of the Salafist Jihadists in Morocco]. Al-Jazeera.net 3 October 2004

<sup>8</sup> Abdelsalam Razzak. Min el-Salafia el Watania ila Salfia Jihadia. [From nationalist salafism to Jihadist Salafism]. Al-Jazeera.net 3 October 2004

its North African Muslim friends. Also by inviting scholars from the same classical institutions such as al-Azhar in Egypt, the Zaytuna in Tunisia, the Qarawayn in Morocco, the Islamic University in Libya and the International African University in Sudan, to teach classical Arabic language as well as reinforce the ideas of national unity, loyalty and solidarity, while enhancing the unique Muslim culture of China, will go far in warding off the destructive terrorist trends emerging in North Africa. It will also offer an alternative to young disenfranchised Muslim youth who would otherwise go down the wrong path due to ill education, lack of upward mobility and perceived threats to the persistence of their Muslim culture.

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