



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

E-NOTES

October 19, 2012

JORDAN, MOROCCO, AND THE FUTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

By Ahmed Charai

Ahmed Charai is publisher of the weekly Moroccan magazine L'Observateur, president of Morocco's national MED Radio network, chairman of the board of Al-Ahdath al-Maghrebiya daily newspaper, and Trustee of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Amman, Jordan, October 19, 2012 -- Jordan is a tiny, liberal monarchy in a tough neighborhood. To its West, is the West Bank and Israel and the longest running war of rocket attacks and bus bombings in the region. Its Northern neighbor, Syria, is the home of dictator who has killed more than 20,000 of his own people in desperate bid to hold onto power. Tens of thousands of hungry, wounded and war-weary Syrian refugees have poured across the border into Jordan. To the East, is Iraq and Iran, which is building a nuclear device and is the world's largest funder of international terrorists. If Jordan falters or falls, America will lose its strongest Arab ally in the Levant, civilian suffering from war and disease will multiply and Saudi Arabia and Gulf states will tremble as oil prices climb.

Into this cauldron of misery, this week, flew Morocco's young king, Muhammad VI. As I write, the king is visiting a military hospital in Jordan that he established to care for refugees from the Syrian regime's killing machine. He is talking to and consoling some of the tens of thousands of displaced Syrians that Jordan now shelters. But he is coming with more than just a message of charity and mercy, he has raised more than \$1 billion—from Saudi and Gulf leaders—to stabilize Jordan and care for Syrian refugees. While no U.S. money is involved in this monumental effort, the king's efforts have the support of the U.S. State Department.

Later this afternoon, he will meet with Jordan's leaders to build consensus on an Arab strategy to support Syria's rebels without enabling jihadists to hijack the revolution. Jordan, bordering Syria, will be the lynchpin in that effort -- but close coordination among the Arab world's remaining dynasties will be essential to implement and stabilize it and Morocco's role as a go-between and enabler will either make it or break it.

The king's initiatives reveal a new alliance that is emerging among the remaining Arab kingdoms and emirates that survived last year's revolutions -- that is, the six "Gulf Cooperation Council" member states (Saudi, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman) and the kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco. Their collective reach spans the Middle East flashpoints that are of greatest concern to Washington: To the east, the Gulf states are a bulwark against Iran. In the center, Jordan straddles Syria, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq. And far to the West, where revolutionary Libya and Tunisia struggle for democracy amid ascendant jihadism, Morocco stands strong, secure, and well on its way toward a European-style parliamentary monarchy. Last year Saudi Arabia invited Morocco and Jordan to join the Gulf Coordination Council as full members, offering a fairer distribution of wealth between the oil-poor and the oil-rich while asking all parties to join hands in holding the region together.

This initiative presented an important opportunity as well as a special responsibility to Morocco. Decades before Egypt established relations with Israel, Morocco under King Hasan II was the primary force pressing for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. When the Gulf emirates had just begun to establish their own modern states in the 1970s, centuries-old Morocco lent the expertise of its police and intelligence apparatus to build viable security structures for those young nations. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, King Hasan worked behind the scenes to help the U.S. and NATO ensure that Arab armies joined the coalition to oust the Iraqi dictator. And years ahead of the Arab spring, the new and current king, Muhammad VI, initiated his own approach toward democratization – holding regular local and parliamentary elections, combatting police corruption, securing the rights of women and religious minorities (especially Jews), fostering civil society,

supporting human rights and political reform, and ultimately rewriting the constitution to split power with an elected prime minister. These last positive steps are the envy of the neighborhood today, while Morocco's larger track record has created a region-wide footprint for the kingdom as well as a strategic alliance with the United States and Europe. Egypt, engulfed in its own internal challenges at this time, no longer plays the regional stabilizing role that it did for decades under Mubarak. Influential voices across the Arab world -- from the Gulf to the Levant to North Africa -- are calling for Morocco to fill this vacuum and reclaim its historic place as a broker of peace and security.

The king's visit this week to the Gulf and to Jordan epitomizes his embrace of GCC expansion. What's more, Morocco has a vision, warmly accepted by the other states, for how best to make use of the new alliance both throughout the region as well as inside the borders of the member states:

While a hardened Israel and a fractured Palestine remain resistant to peace efforts, Morocco wants to press the two parties to sit down and work out their two-state solution before it's too late. The new GCC alliance will equip Morocco with the powerful tools of statesmanship that are necessary to do so: It can leverage oil wealth and its own political development model to assist the Palestinians. It can offer Israel a gateway to the most powerful economies in the Arab world in exchange for Palestinian independence. And it has the credibility within the GCC alliance to make good on such commitments. Morocco is a Muslim country that supports the Palestinian cause, but also a friend to the Jewish people -- the birthplace of 265,000 Moroccan Jews who now reside primarily in Israel where their numbers have swelled beyond a million. The role Morocco can play will greatly facilitate America's own efforts toward peace -- and one day, God willing, relieve the next White House of this onerous responsibility.

During the current international standoff with Iran, Morocco stands firmly against Iranian ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons capability. The king agrees that all options should be on the table, and via his GCC, Jordanian, and Western partners, has been working to ensure the toughest application of sanctions. But Morocco also knows that the possibility of a military attack on Iran is real -- and believes that enhancing the military threat against Iran might be the last possible way to avoid war, by achieving peace through strength. To that end, Morocco is leveraging its security ties with the Gulf and warm relations with Israel and the West to create a highly intimidating military alliance. Iranians know this -- which is why they have singled out Morocco for acts of sabotage and destabilization. Those attempts have failed. Morocco has accordingly sent home Iran's ambassador, setting a trend that other Arab states have followed. As a result of Morocco's leadership, Iran is increasingly isolated in the Muslim world.

But King Muhammad is also aware that in the long run, regional stability depends on building a culture of tolerance, the rule of law, human rights and democratic reform. As an evolving constitutional monarchy, Morocco is in the unique position of offering political support to transitioning democracies as well as trust to its GCC partners who are at a more junior stage of reform. Thus the new GCC alliance, is not only a support base for the less stable countries outside it; it can also be an accelerator of reform inside its community of members. The path toward change will be difficult for some of the members, much as it was, and still is, for Morocco.

But there is a model for the future of the GCC—NATO. After the 1990 collapse of the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization expanded East of the Oder River to include new members in the former Soviet sphere. This fostered political transformations as well as even greater military unity, gradually establishing democratic institutions while providing the safety for those societies to experiment and grow. GCC expansion can follow the same path, offering security and freedom to the peoples of its member-states and the region as a whole.

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684

For more information, contact Eli Gilman at 215-732-3774, ext. 255, email fpri@fpri.org, or visit us at www.fpri.org.