

# Has Mohammed VI Succeeded in Reining in the Islamists?

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Brief Analysis

**M**ay 25th, 2017

On his return from an extended African trip in March, Mohammed VI removed and replaced Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane with Saadeddine Othmani as head of government-designate. The Islamist party, realizing the seriousness of the situation, reviewed their political position and instructed Othmani to opt for malleability and open dialogue.

Thus, one week after his designation as would-be head of government by the monarch, Othmani declared to the press that the PJD (Parti de la Justice et du Développement), RNI (Rassemblement National des Indépendants), USFP (Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires), UC (Union Constitutionnelle), MP (Mouvement Populaire) and PPS (Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme) had officially agreed upon a coalition government. It seems that under duress, the quiet and composed psychiatrist succeeded, at least for now, where his predecessor failed miserably, apparently out of stubbornness.

Like most of the Moroccan political parties, the PJD has been hijacked. It has accepted the unacceptable, which is to be in the same government as the socialists. What matters for the PJD now is power and the accompanying financial advantages, since they have openly abandoned their principles and tenets.

Akhir Sa'a, the daily newspaper of the Liberal and Secular Opposition (PAM), noted in one issue the strange nature of a coalition of liberals, Islamists, socialists, and communists. On the same day, al-'Alam, the mouthpiece of the Istiqlal, said that the Islamists have thrown their principles in the trash can.

To accept the diktat of a minor party, particularly the RNI, into the new government reflects the PJD's main concern: gaining ministerial power. A principled political institution, in such a situation, would have declined the monarch's offer and would have rejected the pre-formed coalition that will undoubtedly harm their image and reputation in the long run.

Moreover, this coalition is not exclusively led by the Islamist party that came first in the democratic elections of October 7, 2016. The RNI now shares the leadership as well. So it is a government with two heads, a rebuttal of the

Islamists by the establishment.

More importantly, political Islam came to prominence with the Arab Spring. The youth pushed the aging dictators out of power, but because they lacked political organization and discipline, the regimented Islamists came to power through votes or force. Either way, they failed dramatically.

Now that the Arab Spring is officially dead, with the release of Hosni Mubarak and Seif al-Islam from prison and the arrival of the populist Donald Trump to power in the United States, there is no letup for Islamists. This zero-tolerance is the reason why the PJD, in spite of electoral victory in the general elections, has begged obsequiously to stay in power.

Five out of the six parties currently leading the coalition comprise of ethnic Berbers, and four come from Sous in the south. These groups are well-known for their traditional allegiance with the establishment and their knowledge of business practices, as they run most street corner shops in the kingdom.

Will the Berbers of the government do anything for the Berber public? Alas, the answer is no. Fearing the loss of their position and influence, they have labeled that to be the exclusive domain of the monarch and would not want to be on the wrong side of the establishment on this.

The other party of the opposition is the Istiqlal, a traditional party of the Fes bourgeoisie. But this bourgeoisie has forsaken politics for decades for the more lucrative areas of finance and business, and today they are the true masters of the Moroccan economy. Nobody will dare stand in their way or contest their leadership. In a way, they are the real power behind the scenes and will remain as such for a long time to come.

In many ways, the coalition government led by the Islamists and composed of parties under the command of Berbers will be a paper government, no more: little power, little influence and little impact on the Moroccan political scene. It will be a make-believe government only displayed in the exhibition window. Its members will surely enjoy many privileges but will have no power.

King Mohammed VI, thanks to his incredible dynamism and savoir-faire in diplomacy and economy, as well as his wisdom and qualities of tolerance, is more popular than ever both in Morocco and in the world. The incoming coalition government, weak as it is, will only play second fiddle in Moroccan politics and, after all, that is all they want. ❖

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