

Morocco after Hassan II:

Domestic Challenges and Regional Implications

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Brief Analysis

The late King Hassan II leaves behind an important legacy in Morocco and the Middle East. He was a courageous peacemaker; a voice of reconciliation between Muslims, Jews, and Christians; and a vital link between Shii and Sunni Muslims.

After Hassan's death, it is now up to his son and heir, King Mohammed VI, either to keep the system in place or to reform it. Mohammed had much time to observe his father's actions and take careful note of what Morocco's future should look like. His father made sure to involve him in many meetings with foreign statesmen, although Mohammed's role was one of an invisible observer out of the limelight. Nevertheless, his inclusion in many of the country's affairs helped him to develop skills that will serve him well in the next few months.

Mohammed has assembled around him a talented cadre of younger leaders, most important among them his classmates and his chef de cabinet. The composition of this team indicates where the country is headed in the next weeks and months. The new generation of Moroccan think-tankers assembled by King Hassan, the so-called "Group of Sixteen," probably constitutes the next generation of important leaders in the country. Royal counselor Andre Azoulay—a crucial transition figure—is very close to the new king and is expected to help Mohammed develop the right instincts as he moves forward. There are many young Moroccan businessmen close to the Group of Sixteen who are eager to assume power in the country.

While succession followed constitutional edict, behind-the-scenes maneuvering for influence and control has begun. Some of those who had been with Hassan for many years now fear that they will lose influence and power during the transitional period.

Hassan died leaving a significant amount of unfinished business for Morocco and the region. Morocco's international claim to Western Sahara is not resolved. The social challenges that the country faces remain significant, and include medical care, education, salaries, civil service reforms, and budgetary constraints that are inhibiting economic development. Ties with Algeria remain the foremost foreign policy challenge for the country. In trying to overcome these challenges, the new king shares many aspirations with the opposition government that came to power a year ago. Both wish to make significant social progress, and both want to assert a less intrusive role for the monarchy in the country's day-to-day administration.

Implications on a Regional Basis: The greatest test for King Mohammed will be Morocco's relations with Algeria. Fortunately, a new Algerian government has come to power under President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The establishment of a framework for dialogue between these two adversaries could have profound implications for both countries' internal stability, including the future resolution of the Western Sahara dispute.

Morocco's economy depends less on the Middle East than on Europe. Therefore, the king's relations with the European Union, and in particular with Spain, deserve watching. The United States also has a crucial role to play in Morocco in the next few months. Washington can do much to help Mohammed consolidate his authority and ensure

the stability of the monarchy by helping to renegotiate the ceilings for debt equity swaps in the Paris Club; encouraging additional high-tech investments in the development of Morocco as a regional platform for internet, commercial, and educational development; accelerating trade and investment opportunities; and promoting educational assistance.

Hassan left an important legacy as a regional peacemaker and as an international statesman. Once his power is consolidated, Mohammed will confirm Morocco's role as an important regional player and an important force for social and economic development. He will, in his own right, earn respect and admiration from his people by bringing greater social justice, accountability, and economic progress. His father was known as a great survivor, and Mohammed could soon come to be known as the great reformer. Mohammed can be expected to exceed everyone's expectations.

Western Sahara: The new king should understand that there cannot be a zero-sum-game on the issue of Western Sahara. Algerian equities need to be addressed. There should be no illusions that Western Sahara is not Moroccan. The Polisario front is a spent force and the Algerians have no real desire to prolong the conflict. If Algeria and Morocco will address the broader issues that divide them, the Western Sahara issue will ultimately resolve itself.

Arab-Israeli Peace Process: Mohammed does not have the luxury to play the peacemaker role regionally, at least for the initial period of his rule. His first order of priority is consolidation of his internal authority. Although King Hassan saw the value of reconciliation and fulfilled a unique role as a protector of the Jewish community in Morocco, many young Moroccans were opposed to the peace process. During the Israeli premiership of Yitzhak Rabin, however, there was a profound, across-the-board mood swing in Morocco in favor of peace. Regrettably, the election of Binyamin Netanyahu in Israel torpedoed many of the new initiatives that were beginning to be felt at the grassroots level between Israelis and Moroccans. The election of Ehud Barak will once again give rise to a period of greater hope and expectation among Moroccans to support the peace process.

Domestic Challenges for the New King: The attitude of the Moroccan military toward the new king should be watched carefully. Below the generation of the elder generals are many Western-oriented colonels and majors who are eager to modernize the military and move it forward. The transition of the military is an important indicator of stability and loyalty in the country. How the new king handles the very delicate issue of Western Sahara will speak volumes about the military's attitude toward him.

The king is most concerned about the tenure and stability of the opposition government. The new government has been unable to deliver on some of its most basic promises for social and economic reform. Mohammed can be expected to consult with the prime minister on how best to send signals that the new king is ready to move quickly on these issues. He is interested in reversing the perception that this government has not achieved the expectations that many Moroccans had for it. Furthermore, Mohammed will be concerned about his father's loyalists in the royal court, who fear that their authority and influence could be undermined by the new king's associates. To find an appropriate role for them without encouraging that fear will prove to be a major challenge. Mohammed will have to find a way to handle the internal court intrigue and the seniority system. As he manages this cadre of advisers around him, he will turn to them increasingly for operational responsibility. The new king is aware that there is a vacuum and he knows he has to fill it quickly.

Fundamentalism: University students are the hotbed of fundamentalism in Morocco, with unemployed university graduates being the most challenging social group to the new king. Mohammed is part of their generation, and it will be interesting to see how he reaches out to the students. Some elements of Islamic fundamentalism have taken root in the military, but these should not be overestimated. Fundamentalism is not an immediate challenge to the king, but it will accumulate if social and economic changes are not forthcoming.

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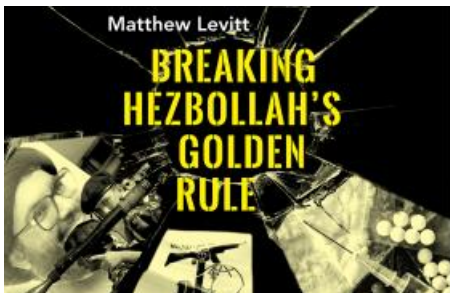
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