

COUNTRY PROFILE: MOROCCO

May 2006

COUNTRY

Formal Name: Kingdom of Morocco (Al Mamlakah al Maghribiyah).

Short Form: Morocco.

Term for Citizen(s): Moroccan(s).

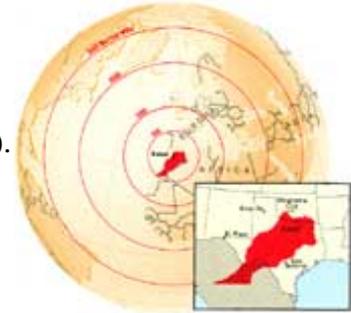
Capital: Rabat.

Major Cities: Morocco's most populous cities, in order of their population as of 2002, are Casablanca (3,454,000), Salé (849,000), Rabat (668,000), Marrakech (653,000), Fès (643,000), Kenitra (581,000), and Tangier (509,000).

Independence: Morocco achieved independence from France on March 2, 1956.

Public Holidays: New Year's Day (January 1), Independence Manifesto (January 11), Labor Day (May 1), Throne Day (July 30), Allegiance of Wadi-Eddahab (August 14), Anniversary of the King's and People's Revolution (August 20), Young People's Day (August 21), Anniversary of the Green March (November 6), Independence Day (November 18), and Muslim holidays, the dates of which vary from year to year according to the Islamic calendar.

Flag: Morocco's flag consists of a red field centered by a five-pointed green star.



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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pre-History and Early History: The coastal regions of present-day Morocco shared in an early Neolithic culture that was common to the whole Mediterranean littoral. Archaeological remains point to the domestication of cattle and the cultivation of crops in the region during that period. Eight thousand years ago, south of the great mountain ranges in what is now the Sahara Desert, a vast savanna supported Neolithic hunters and herders whose culture flourished until the region began to desiccate as a result of climatic changes after 4000 B.C. The Berbers entered Moroccan history toward the end of the second millennium B.C., when they made initial contact with oasis dwellers on the steppe who may have been the remnants of the earlier savanna people.

Phoenician traders, who had penetrated the western Mediterranean before the twelfth century B.C., set up depots for salt and ore along the coast and up the rivers of the territory that is now Morocco. Later, Carthage developed commercial relations with the Berber tribes of the interior and paid them an annual tribute to ensure their cooperation in the exploitation of raw materials.



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By the fifth century B.C., Carthage had extended its hegemony across much of North Africa. By the second century B.C., several large, although loosely administered, Berber kingdoms had emerged. The Berber kings ruled in the shadow of Carthage and Rome, often as satellites. After the fall of Carthage, the area was annexed to the Roman Empire in A.D. 40. Rome controlled the vast, ill-defined territory through alliances with the tribes rather than through military occupation, expanding its authority only to those areas that were economically useful or that could be defended without additional manpower. Hence, Roman administration never extended outside the restricted area of the coastal plain and valleys.

Christianity was introduced in the second century and gained converts in the towns and among slaves and Berber farmers. By the end of the fourth century, the Romanized areas had been Christianized, and inroads had been made as well among the Berber tribes, who sometimes converted en masse. But schismatic and heretical movements also developed, usually as forms of political protest. The area had a substantial Jewish population as well.

The Spread of Islam: Islamic influence began in Morocco in the seventh century A.D. Arab conquerors converted the indigenous Berber population to Islam, but Berber tribes retained their customary laws. The Arabs abhorred the Berbers as barbarians, while the Berbers often saw the Arabs as only an arrogant and brutal soldiery bent on collecting taxes. Once established as Muslims, the Berbers shaped Islam in their own image and embraced schismatic Muslim sects, which, in many cases, were simply folk religion barely disguised as Islam, as their way of breaking from Arab control.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the founding of several great Berber dynasties led by religious reformers and each based on a tribal confederation that dominated the Maghrib (also seen as Maghreb; refers to North Africa west of Egypt) and Spain for more than 200 years. The Berber dynasties (Almoravids, Almohads, and Merinids) gave the Berber people some measure of collective identity and political unity under a native regime for the first time in their history, and they created the idea of an “imperial Maghrib” under Berber aegis that survived in some form from dynasty to dynasty. But ultimately each of the Berber dynasties proved to be a political failure because none managed to create an integrated society out of a social landscape dominated by tribes that prized their autonomy and individual identity.

In 1559 the region fell to successive Arab tribes claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad: first the Saads, who ruled for about 100 years, and then the Alawis, who founded a dynasty that has remained in power since the seventeenth century. Despite the weakness of its authority, the Alawite dynasty distinguished itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by maintaining Morocco’s independence while other states in the region succumbed to Turkish, French, or British domination. However, in the latter part of the nineteenth century Morocco’s weakness and instability invited European intervention to protect threatened investments and to demand economic concessions. The first years of the twentieth century witnessed a rush of diplomatic maneuvering through which the European powers and France in particular furthered their interests in North Africa. Disputes over Moroccan sovereignty were links in the chain of events that led to World War I.

French Influence: At a conference held in Algeciras, Spain, in 1906, 12 European nations and the United States reaffirmed their respect for Moroccan independence. The protocols of the Algeciras Conference provided that every nation would have equal access to Morocco, but they could not alter the reality that the international community had sanctioned the preeminence of French influence there. In the first decade of the twentieth century, French forces progressively occupied Morocco, and the 1912 Treaty of Fès turned most of Morocco into a French protectorate. Spain was given control of pieces of Morocco in the far north and south and of the Spanish Sahara (now Western Sahara). Tangier received special international status. From a strictly legal point of view, the treaty did not deprive Morocco of its status as a sovereign state. Theoretically, the sultan remained the sole source of sovereignty. He reigned, but he did not rule.

Under the protectorate, French civil servants allied themselves with the French settlers (*colons*) and with their supporters in France to prevent any moves in the direction of Moroccan autonomy. As pacification proceeded, the French government promoted economic development, particularly the exploitation of Morocco's mineral wealth, the creation of a modern transportation system, and the development of a modern agriculture sector geared to the French market. Tens of thousands of *colons* entered Morocco and bought up large amounts of the rich agricultural land. Interest groups that formed among these elements continually pressured France to increase its control over Morocco.

The Rise of Nationalism: Moroccan nationalism first arose in the 1920s. In December 1934, a small group of nationalists—members of the newly formed Moroccan Action Committee (Comité d'Action Marocaine—CAM)—proposed a Plan of Reforms that called for a return to indirect rule as envisaged by the Treaty of Fès, admission of Moroccans to government positions, and establishment of representative councils. The moderate tactics used by the CAM to obtain consideration of reform—petitions, newspaper editorials, and personal appeals to French officials—proved inadequate, and the tensions created in the CAM by the failure of the plan caused it to split. The rump CAM was reconstituted as a nationalist political party to gain mass support for more radical demands, but the French suppressed the party in 1937.

During World War II, the badly divided nationalist movement became more cohesive, and informed Moroccans dared to consider the real possibility of political change in the postwar era. However, the nationalists were disappointed in their belief that the Allied victory in Morocco would pave the way for independence. In January 1944, the Moroccan Istiqlal (Independence) Party released a manifesto demanding full independence, national reunification, and a democratic constitution. The sultan had approved the manifesto before its submission to the French resident general, who answered that no basic change in the protectorate status was being considered. The general sympathy of the sultan for the nationalists had become evident by the end of the war, although he still hoped to see complete independence achieved gradually. By contrast, the residency, supported by French economic interests and vigorously backed by most of the *colons*, adamantly refused to consider even reforms short of independence. Official intransigence contributed to increased animosity between the nationalists and the *colons* and gradually widened the split between the sultan and the resident general.

In December 1952, a riot broke out in Casablanca over the murder of a Tunisian labor leader; this event marked a watershed in relations between Moroccan political parties and French

authorities. In the aftermath of the rioting, the residency outlawed the new Moroccan Communist Party and the Istiqlal. In 1953 France exiled the popular Sultan Mohammed V to Madagascar. Mohammed V's deposition enraged not only the nationalists but also all those who recognized the sultan as the religious leader of the country. Two years later, faced with a united Moroccan demand for the sultan's return, rising violence in Morocco, and the deteriorating situation in Algeria, the French government brought Mohammed V back to Morocco.

Moroccan Independence: In late 1955, Mohammed V successfully negotiated the gradual restoration of Moroccan independence within a framework of French-Moroccan interdependence. The sultan agreed to institute reforms that would transform Morocco into a constitutional monarchy with a democratic form of government. In February 1956, Morocco acquired limited home rule. Further negotiations for full independence culminated in the French-Moroccan Agreement signed in Paris on March 2, 1956. The abolition of the Spanish protectorate and the recognition of Moroccan independence by Spain were negotiated separately and made final in the Joint Declaration of April 1956. Later that year, Morocco regained control over Tangier.

In the months that followed independence, Mohammed V proceeded to build a modern governmental structure under a constitutional monarchy in which the sultan would exercise an active political role. He acted cautiously, having no intention of permitting more radical elements in the nationalist movement to overthrow the established order. He was also intent on preventing the Istiqlal from consolidating its control and establishing a single-party state. In August 1957, Mohammed V assumed the title of king.

Reign of Hassan II: Following Mohammed V's sudden death in 1961 from complications after surgery, his 31-year-old son Mulay Hassan assumed power as King Hassan II. The new king took personal control of the government as prime minister and named a new cabinet. Aided by an advisory council, he drew up a new constitution, which was approved overwhelmingly in a December 1962 referendum. Under its provisions, the king remained the central figure in the executive branch of the government, but legislative power was vested in a bicameral parliament, and an independent judiciary was guaranteed. In May 1963, legislative elections took place for the first time, and the royalist coalition secured a small plurality of seats. However, following a period of political upheaval, in June 1965 Hassan II assumed full legislative and executive powers under a "state of exception," which remained in effect until 1970. Subsequently, a reform constitution was approved, restoring limited parliamentary government, and new elections were held. However, dissent remained, revolving around complaints of widespread corruption and malfeasance in government. In July 1971 and again in August 1972, the regime was challenged by two attempted military coups. The atmosphere in the country remained tense.

Despite serious domestic turmoil, the patriotism engendered by Morocco's participation in the Middle East conflict and by the events in Western Sahara contributed to Hassan's popularity and strengthened his hand politically. The king had dispatched Moroccan troops to the Sinai front after the outbreak of Arab-Israeli War in October 1973. Although they arrived too late to engage in hostilities, the action won Morocco goodwill among other Arab states. Shortly thereafter, the attention of the government turned to the acquisition of Western Sahara from Spain, an issue on which all major parties agreed.

Moroccan claims to Western Sahara date to the eleventh century. However, in August 1974 Spain formally acknowledged the 1966 United Nations (UN) resolution calling for a referendum on the future status of Western Sahara and requested that a plebiscite be conducted under UN supervision. A UN commission reported in early 1975 that a majority of the Saharan people desired independence. Morocco protested the proposed referendum and took its case to the international Court of Justice at The Hague, which ruled that despite historical “ties of allegiance” between Morocco and the tribes of Western Sahara, there was no legal justification for departing from the UN position on self-determination. Spain, meanwhile, had declared that even in the absence of a referendum, it intended to surrender political control of Western Sahara, and Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania convened a tripartite conference to resolve the territory’s future. But Madrid also announced that it was opening independence talks with the Algerian-backed Saharan independence movement known as the Polisario Front.

In early 1976, Spain ceded Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania. Morocco assumed control over the northern two-thirds of the territory and conceded the remaining portion in the south to Mauritania. An assembly of Saharan tribal leaders duly acknowledged Moroccan sovereignty. However, buoyed by the increasing defection of the chiefs to its cause, the Polisario drew up a constitution and announced the formation of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). A new dimension was thereby added to the dispute because the liberation movement could now present its claims as a government-in-exile.

Morocco eventually sent a large portion of its combat forces into Western Sahara to confront the Polisario’s forces, which were relatively small but well-equipped, highly mobile, and resourceful, using Algerian bases for quick strikes against targets deep inside Morocco and Mauritania as well as for operations in Western Sahara. In August 1979, after suffering military losses, Mauritania renounced its claim to Western Sahara and signed a peace treaty with the Polisario. Morocco then annexed the entire territory and in 1985 built a 2,500-kilometer sand berm around three-quarters of it. In 1988 Morocco and the Polisario Front finally agreed on a United Nations (UN) peace plan, and a cease-fire and settlement plan went into effect in 1991. Even though the UN Security Council created a peacekeeping force to implement a referendum on self-determination for Western Sahara, it has yet to be held, periodic negotiations have failed, and the status of the territory remains unresolved.

More than any other issue since independence, the objective of securing Western Sahara had unified the Moroccan nation. Because of the firm stand the king had taken, it also enhanced his popularity in the country. But the war against the Polisario guerrillas put severe strains on the economy, and Morocco found itself increasingly isolated diplomatically. Successive governments showed little inclination to move seriously against pressing economic and social issues. As a result, popular discontent with social and economic conditions persisted. Political parties continued to proliferate but produced only a divided and weakly organized opposition or were suppressed. Through the force of his strong personality, the legacy of the monarchy, and the application of political repression, the king succeeded in asserting his authority and controlling the forces threatening the existing social order. Gradual political reforms in the 1990s culminated in the constitutional reform of 1996, which created a new bicameral legislature with expanded, although still limited, powers. Although reportedly marred by irregularities, elections for the Chamber of Representatives were held in 1997.

Reign of Muhammad VI: In July 1999, King Hassan died and was succeeded by his son Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed, who assumed the title of Mohammed VI. One of the new king's first acts was to free some 8,000 political prisoners and reduce the sentences of another 30,000. He also established a commission to compensate families of missing political activists and others subjected to arbitrary detention. In September 2002, new legislative elections were held, and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires—USFP) led all other parties in the voting. International observers regarded the elections as free and fair, noting the lack of irregularities that had plagued the 1997 elections. Under Muhammad VI, Morocco has continued down a path toward economic, political, and social reform and modernization. In May 2003, in honor of the birth of a son and heir to the throne, the king ordered the release of 9,000 prisoners and the reduction of 38,000 sentences. Also in 2003, Berber-language instruction was introduced in primary schools, prior to introducing it at all educational levels. In 2004 the government implemented reforms of the family code improving the status of women—first proposed in 2000—despite the objections of traditionalists.

Internationally, Morocco has maintained a moderate stance, with strong ties to the West. It was one of the first Arab and Islamic states to denounce the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. In May 2003, Morocco itself was subjected to the more radical forces at work in the Arab world when Islamist suicide bombers simultaneously struck a series of sites in Casablanca, killing 45 and injuring more than 100 others. The Moroccan government responded with a crackdown against Islamist extremists, ultimately arresting several thousand, prosecuting 1,200, and sentencing about 900. Additional arrests followed in June 2004. That same month, the United States designated Morocco a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally in recognition of its efforts to thwart international terrorism. On January 1, 2006, a comprehensive bilateral free-trade agreement between the United States and Morocco took effect.

GEOGRAPHY

Location: Morocco is located in the northwestern corner of Africa across the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain.

Size: Morocco has an area of 446,300 square kilometers, not including 250 square kilometers of coastal waters, which makes it slightly larger than California. Western Sahara, claimed by Morocco, has an area of about 266,000 square kilometers.



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Land Boundaries: Morocco's land boundaries measure 2,017.9 kilometers, including a 1,559-kilometer border with Algeria and a 443-kilometer border with Western Sahara. Morocco also shares a border with Spain around that nation's two African enclaves at Ceuta (6.3 kilometers) and Melilla (9.6 kilometers).

Disputed Territory: Morocco does not recognize Spain's claim to several Spanish enclaves on the Mediterranean coast of Africa, principally Ceuta and Melilla. Morocco claims Western Sahara and, since 1979, has administered the territory as its own, although the International Court of Justice ruled in 1975 that Morocco has no legitimate claim to Western Sahara. A cease-

fire between Morocco and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front independence movement in Western Sahara has been in effect since September 1991, but the United Nations-sponsored referendum on self-determination has never been held, and periodic negotiations designed to resolve the status of Western Sahara have failed.

Length of Coastline: Morocco's coastline along the Northern Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea measures 1,835 kilometers.

Maritime Claims: Morocco claims a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles, a contiguous zone of 24 nautical miles, and an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles, as well as a continental shelf to a depth of 200 meters or to the depth of exploitation.

Topography: Four rugged mountain chains dominate Morocco's topography and divide the country into three geographic regions: the mountainous interior, including plateaus and fertile valleys; the Atlantic coastal lowlands; and the semiarid and arid area of eastern and southern Morocco where the mountains descend gradually into the Sahara Desert. In the north, the Rif mountain range runs parallel to the Mediterranean. South of the Rif range, a series of three Atlas Mountain ranges somewhat overlap one another as they slant across the country on a generally northeast-southwest axis. The most northerly of the three, the Middle Atlas range, is separated from the Rif by only a narrow corridor. The lofty High Atlas range is situated immediately to the south of the Middle Atlas range and is parallel to it. Farther south and to the west lies the Anti-Atlas range.

Principal Rivers: Morocco has the most extensive river system in North Africa. Its two most important rivers are the Moulouya, which flows into the Mediterranean Sea, and the Sebou, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean.

Climate: The Rif and Atlas mountain ranges divide Morocco into two climatic zones: one that receives the westerly winds from the Atlantic and one that is influenced by the proximity of the Sahara Desert. Western and northern Morocco have a Mediterranean (subtropical) climate, with mild winters and hot, dry summers. On the Atlantic Coast, the mean temperature is 16.4° C to 23° C. By contrast, the climate is more extreme in the interior, where it is subject to wide seasonal variation, with temperatures ranging from 10° C to 27° C. The pre-Saharan south has a semiarid climate. Rainfall varies from moderate in the northwest to scanty in the south and east. The rainy seasons are April–May and October–November. Only the mountains receive rain in the summer. Because of its inconsistent rainfall, Morocco is subject to periodic droughts, which take a considerable toll on agriculture.

Natural Resources: Morocco's store of natural resources is relatively modest, with one notable exception. Morocco is home to two-thirds of the world's reserves of phosphates, which are used to produce fertilizers. Other resources include copper, iron ore, lead, manganese, salt, silver, and zinc.

Land Use: In 2005 Morocco's land use was distributed as follows: arable land, 19 percent; permanent crops, 2 percent; and other, 79 percent.

Environmental Factors: The Moroccan Ministry of Territorial Development, Water, and Environment is responsible for environmental protection. In July 2003, the ministry announced an action program to improve Morocco's environment. The most serious environmental challenge is water quality. A 2003 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ranked Morocco in next-to-last place among 122 countries in water quality. Morocco's poor standing was attributable to erosion, salinization, and urbanization. Land degradation and desertification as well as oil pollution of coastal waters also are problems. In June 2004, the United States and Morocco signed an agreement to cooperate on environmental protection.

Time Zone: Greenwich Mean Time.

SOCIETY

Population: As of mid-2006, Morocco had an estimated total population of 33.2 million. During 1998–2006, the population grew at an average 1.6 percent annual rate. The population is concentrated in the northwestern part of the country, west of the Atlas Mountains. Some 58 percent of the population lives in cities. The net migration rate was estimated to be –0.87 migrants per 1,000 in 2005. About 100,000 foreign nationals reportedly reside in Morocco.

Demography: According to 2006 estimates by the U.S. government, the age structure of Morocco's population was as follows: 0–14, 31.6 percent; 15–64, 63.4 percent; and 65 and older, 5 percent. The median age was 23.9 years. The birthrate in 2006 was estimated to be almost 22 per 1,000; the sex ratio, 1.05 males per female at birth; and the total fertility rate, almost 2.7 children born per woman. The death rate in 2006 was estimated at about 5.6 per 1,000 people. The infant mortality rate was estimated at 40.2 per 1,000 live births, although other estimates range from 36 to nearly 50 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy was estimated to be 70.9 years for the population as a whole, or 68.6 years for men and 73.4 years for women, about average internationally.

Ethnic Groups: The population is 99 percent Arab-Berber (an indigenous North African group that has adopted Arab customs).

Languages: Arabic is the official language. Berber dialects also are spoken and increasingly used as a language of instruction in schools. French is often the language of business, government, and diplomacy and is taught in the schools. Spanish is spoken in the northern part of the country.

Religion: Islam is the official religion of Morocco. Muslims constitute 99 percent of the population; about 90 percent of Muslims adhere to Sunni Islam. The population also includes very small numbers of Christians and Jews, who are able to worship without restriction.

Education and Literacy: Morocco's adult literacy rate was estimated at nearly 52 percent in 2003, 64.1 percent for males and 39.4 percent for females. Between 75 and 83 percent of women in rural areas are considered to be illiterate. However, the government has set up literacy centers

where more than 80 percent of the attendees are women. The education system includes nine years of free and compulsory education, but attendance rates are low, especially among girls. The World Bank estimates that 2.5 million children, mostly rural girls, do not attend school. Moroccan schools also have very poor retention rates. Higher education is offered in 14 public universities, which had 290,000 enrolled students in 2002–3, and one private university, an American-style, English-language institution with about 1,000 students. Moroccan university graduates reportedly often find themselves ill prepared for the workforce.

Health: According to the latest available information, Morocco has inadequate numbers of physicians (0.5 per 1,000 people) and hospital beds (1.0 per 1,000 people) and poor access to water (82 percent of the population) and sanitation (75 percent of the population). The health care system includes 122 hospitals, 2,400 health centers, and 4 university clinics, but they are poorly maintained and lack adequate capacity to meet the demand for medical care. Only 24,000 beds are available for 6 million patients seeking care each year, including 3 million emergency cases. The health budget corresponds to 1.1 percent of gross domestic product and 5.5 percent of the central government budget.

In 2001 the principal causes of mortality in the urban population were circulatory system diseases (20.4 percent); perinatal diseases (9.3 percent); cancer (8.5 percent); endocrinological, nutritional, and metabolic diseases (7.6 percent); respiratory system diseases (6.9 percent); and infectious and parasitic diseases (4.7 percent). In 2004 the minister of health announced that the country had eradicated a variety of childhood diseases, specifically diphtheria, polio, tetanus, and malaria, but other diseases continue to pose challenges. Although still high at more than 40 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006, the infant mortality rate shows considerable improvement since 1981, when it was estimated at 91 deaths per 1,000 live births. According to estimates for 2001, approximately 0.1 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 49 was infected with human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

Welfare: The National Fund for Social Security (La Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale—CNSS) has managed Morocco's social security program for wage earners since April 1961. This public agency is responsible for collecting contributions from companies and also paying out benefits to workers employed in the principal sectors of the economy: industry and commerce, agriculture and fishing, and the trades. Benefit payments protect workers (and their families) against the loss of wages as a result of illness, pregnancy, disability, or old age. With a staff of about 5,000, the agency maintains 50 offices throughout the country.

ECONOMY

Overview: Morocco has a developing economy, and its citizens are poorer than their neighbors in Algeria and, especially, Tunisia. From 1999 to 2004, poverty declined from 19 percent to 15 percent of the population, according to World Bank estimates, but poverty remains a serious challenge, particularly in rural areas, where the rate exceeds 25 percent. Unemployment, which averaged 10.8 percent in 2004, is particularly acute for young people living in urban areas (as high as 26 percent). In order to keep unemployment under control and prevent related social instability, the government is seeking to achieve an economic growth rate of 6 percent. To

promote this goal, the government is pursuing a program of economic reform and liberalization, including private-sector development. However, reform efforts have lagged, and in 2004 real economic growth was only 3.7 percent. Among other factors, analysts believe that economic growth has been hampered by the economy's over-reliance on agriculture and would benefit from greater diversification. Morocco's hydrocarbons industry is smaller and less dynamic than that of neighboring Algeria, but the sector may benefit from recent efforts to liberalize rules for oil and gas exploration in Morocco.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In 2004 Morocco's GDP was US\$50.1 billion and per capita income was US\$1,677. Real GDP growth of 3.7 percent reflected strength in energy and mining and, to a lesser extent, tourism. Estimates for 2005 placed GDP at US\$52.7 billion with a growth rate of about 1.8 percent. Morocco's relatively slow growth compared with the rest of North Africa resulted from the sub-par performance of the agricultural and textile sectors. Economic output in 2004 was divided among sectors as follows: agriculture, 16.7 percent; industry, 29.7 percent; and services, 53.6 percent.

Government Budget: Government revenues for 2005 were estimated at US\$12.94 billion and expenditures at US\$16.77 billion. The resulting deficit would constitute about 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Inflation: In 2004 Morocco's consumer price inflation was 4.1 percent.

Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: Morocco's agricultural sector, including forestry and fishing, constituted 16.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) but employed 40 percent of the workforce in 2004. The agricultural sector is regarded as volatile, because of its vulnerability to inconsistent rainfall among other factors, and has been contracting in recent years. Morocco's principal crops, in order of yield, are rice, sugar beets, barley, potatoes, tomatoes, and sugarcane. Other agricultural products include wheat, citrus fruits, olives, other vegetables, wine, and livestock. In 2002 Morocco's forestry production consisted of 926 cubic meters of roundwood and about 83 cubic meters of sawnwood.

Morocco has substantial fishing resources. In 2002 the total catch, mostly sardines, weighed 896,600 metric tons. In July 2005, Morocco signed a fishing agreement with the European Union (EU) that gives the EU limited fishing rights within Moroccan territorial waters for the first time since 1999. Under the agreement, the EU is restricted to catching a maximum of 60,000 metric tons of small, open-water fish using 119 fishing boats per year. In exchange, the EU will pay Morocco US\$43 million per year. This accord is much more modest than its predecessor, which expired in 1999.

Mining and Minerals: Morocco has two-thirds of the world's phosphate reserves and is the world's top exporter of phosphate rock. In 2003 Morocco mined nearly 22 million metric tons of phosphate rock. Morocco is a minor producer of oil and natural gas. In fact, it is the largest energy importer in North Africa. Crude petroleum production totaled only about 300 barrels per day in 2005. Natural gas production was estimated at 5 million cubic meters in all of 2003.

Industry and Manufacturing: Industry constituted 29.7 percent of Morocco's gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 15 percent of the workforce in 2004. Manufacturing, a subset of industry, accounted for 18 percent of GDP. In 2004 manufacturing output was 41.6 percent higher than in 1992, indicating a relatively slow rate of growth, attributable to low levels of investment and productivity in combination with relatively high wages—higher than in China or India, for example. The worst performing manufacturing segment was textiles, which has experienced no growth since 1994, reflecting competition from Asian countries and a relatively strong domestic currency. By contrast, the top-performing segments—paper and metallurgical products—have grown by 90.9 percent and 86.4 percent, respectively, during this period. Morocco is the world's leading exporter of phosphoric acid, which along with fertilizers is the most important product of the chemicals industry. The food-processing industry exports canned fruit, vegetables, and fish; the European Union is a major customer.

Energy: According to a January 2006 estimate by *Oil and Gas Journal*, Morocco's proven oil reserves total 1.07 million barrels, while its proven gas reserves total 60 billion cubic feet, although additional reserves may lie offshore. Both figures fall substantially short of the corresponding amounts in neighboring Algeria. In fact, Morocco is a net importer of energy, including coal, which is needed to fire the country's two main electric power stations. In 2003 Morocco produced an estimated 17.35 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity but consumed 17.58 kilowatt-hours.

Some 17 foreign energy companies are exploring for energy in Morocco. In 2000 Morocco began to provide tax incentives for offshore oil production and capped the share of foreign oil concessions reserved to the government at 25 percent. Comprehensive liberalization of the energy sector is expected in 2007. The disputed status of Western Sahara places in doubt the legality of oil and gas contracts in that country.

Services: Services accounted for 53.6 percent of the economy and employed 45 percent of the workforce in 2004. Financial services liberalization has been underway since the early 1990s, but it has fallen short of expectations, according to the World Bank. Despite efforts at privatization, many financial institutions continue to be owned by the government. The latest thrust in this campaign involves boosting the independence of the central bank and improving bank supervision and regulation. The latter is urgently needed because many banks suffer from extremely high levels of non-performing loans and inadequate reserves. The insurance sector has been streamlined with the closure of several poorly performing companies. Morocco has modernized the Casablanca stock exchange by introducing an electronic quotation system, centralized settlement, and brokerage rules.

Tourism is Morocco's leading source of foreign exchange. In 2003 Morocco received 2.2 million foreign tourists, with the largest contingents coming from France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy, in that order. If Morocco is to achieve its goal of boosting tourist visits to 10 million by 2010, it will need to address the shortage of suitable hotel accommodations.

Labor: The labor force was estimated to exceed 11 million in 2005. The distribution of the workforce in 2004 was as follows: 45 percent in services, 40 percent in agriculture, and 15 percent in industry. In 2004 Morocco's unemployment rate was 10.8 percent, representing a

gradual but steady improvement over a five-year period. The urban unemployment rate (18.4 percent) was much higher than the rural rate (3.1 percent). In addition, the unemployment rate was much higher for young people living in urban areas than for any other group. In 2002 the unemployment rate among city dwellers between the ages of 15 and 24 was 34.2 percent and 26.2 percent for those between the ages of 25 and 34. As of 2004, Moroccan law mandated a 44-hour workweek and a minimum wage of about US\$223.30 per month for industrial workers. In the view of the U.S. Department of State, the minimum wage is inadequate to support a “decent standard of living” for a worker and his or her family.

Foreign Economic Relations: Morocco’s economy is gradually becoming more integrated into the international economic system. On January 1, 2006, a comprehensive bilateral free-trade agreement between Morocco and the United States went into effect. Morocco is only the second Arab nation to have such an agreement with the United States. In December 1999, Morocco entered into a free-trade agreement for industrial goods with the European Union (EU) and expects to participate in a free-trade zone with the EU by 2012. In February 1989, the leaders of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia established the Union of the Arab Maghreb (UMA) to promote a North African free-trade area. However, Algeria’s support for Western Saharan self-determination, Morocco’s condemnation of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and mutual visa restrictions by Algeria and Morocco motivated by security concerns rendered the UMA ineffective. Morocco has been a member of the World Trade Organization since January 1995.

Imports: In 2005 Morocco’s imports totaled US\$18.2 billion. Principal imports were semifinished products; consumer goods; capital goods; fuel and lubricants; and food, beverages, and tobacco, in order of U.S. dollar value. The top import partners in 2004 were France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, and the United States, in order of the value traded.

Exports: In 2005 Morocco’s exports totaled US\$9.5 billion. Principal exports were manufactured goods; semifinished products; food, beverages, and tobacco; and raw materials, in order of U.S. dollar value. Morocco leads the world in the export of phosphates. The top export partners in 2004 were France, Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States, in order of the value traded. The European Union accounted for 71 percent of exports.

Trade Balance: In 2005 Morocco posted a merchandise trade deficit of nearly US\$9 billion.

Balance of Payments: In 2005 Morocco’s balance of payments swung from a slight surplus to a deficit of US\$607.5 million. The current account surplus had been declining gradually since 2001.

External Debt: In 2004 Morocco’s external debt totaled US\$18.7 billion. The estimated figure for 2005 was US\$15.6 billion.

Foreign Investment: In 2003 Morocco experienced a net inflow of foreign direct investment of US\$2.3 billion. Of this amount, the United States accounted for only US\$307 million. However, direct investment from the United States may receive a boost from the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement, which went into effect on January 1, 2006. The agreement removes barriers to

investment and provides for the protection of intellectual property. Another catalyst for increased foreign direct investment is Morocco's decision to liberalize the rules for oil and gas exploration.

Foreign Aid: The World Bank's total historical involvement in Morocco through July 2005 consisted of 135 operations, representing a commitment of nearly US\$9 billion. As of July 2005, the World Bank was pursuing 13 investment projects in Morocco. On December 15, 2005, the World Bank approved loans for financial-sector development, rural water supply, and sanitation investment. Each loan was denominated in the amount of US\$200 million. Morocco has special drawing rights with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) but receives no aid from that organization. Since 1953, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided Morocco with more than US\$2 billion of aid. In fiscal year 2005, USAID assistance to Morocco totaled US\$28.2 million. In 2005 the United States designated Morocco for the first time as a beneficiary of the U.S. Millennium Account program. Morocco was selected in recognition of its progress in achieving political, economic, and educational reform. Morocco is the top beneficiary among Mediterranean nations of community assistance from the European Union, with commitments totaling more than US\$1.4 billion during 1995–2003.

Currency and Exchange Rate: Morocco's currency is the Moroccan dirham (MAD). In early May 2006, the exchange rate was approximately US\$1=MAD8.7.

Fiscal Year: Calendar year.

TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Overview: Morocco's transportation system is in need of renewal. Accordingly, in December 2005 Morocco obtained a loan of US\$286 million from the African Development Bank to finance wide-ranging institutional reforms of the transport sector. The reforms, which entail physical improvements to the nation's roads, ports, airports, and railroads, are designed to increase safety and reduce costs across the entire transport system. Reforms are being carried out in the spirit of market liberalization, implying a diminished state role and a larger role for the private sector.

Roads: Morocco's road network needs improvement. Congestion is a concern, as is accessibility in rural areas. The system encompasses 57,694 kilometers of roads, 32,551 kilometers of which are paved. Between 1995 and 2005, the World Bank partially funded the paving or upgrading from dirt to gravel of 10,000 kilometers of roads. By 2015 it plans to do the same for an additional 15,000 kilometers. By 2009 Morocco hopes to complete construction of a highway linking the cities of Marrakesh and Agadir. As of the end of 2001, Morocco had 1.25 million passenger cars, 431,000 trucks, and slightly more than 20,000 motorcycles and scooters.

Railroads: The National Railroad Office manages Morocco's 1,907-kilometer rail network, generally regarded as substantially below Western standards. Some 1,003 kilometers of track are electrified. Rolling stock includes 213 locomotives. In 2003 Morocco's railroads carried approximately 16.5 million passengers.

Ports: Casablanca is Morocco's principal port, but by international standards it handles relatively modest volumes of container traffic. In 2003 Casablanca ranked 127th in the world in container throughput. Other major ports are Mohammedia, Jorf Lasfar, Agadir, and Nador. Morocco is pursuing a ports reform and modernization program to make the port system internationally competitive. In addition, Morocco plans to build a new super-port of Tangier-Mediterranean by 2007. This new facility, located on the southern side of the Strait of Gibraltar, is already under construction. It is designed to accommodate tankers, container ships, passenger ferries, and high-speed craft.

Inland Waterways: Morocco has no navigable inland waterways. Its rivers are primarily used for irrigation.

Civil Aviation and Airports: Morocco has 60 airports, 25 of which have paved runways. The main international airports are located in Casablanca, Tangier, and Agadir. Royal Air Maroc, the national airline, has a fleet of 37 aircraft, mostly manufactured by Boeing. During fiscal year 2004, the airline carried 3.7 million passengers.

Pipelines: Morocco has 695 kilometers of natural gas pipelines and 285 kilometers of oil pipelines. A pipeline carrying natural gas from Algeria to Spain and Portugal traverses Morocco and the Strait of Gibraltar.

Telecommunications: Morocco is in the midst of a campaign to deregulate and liberalize the telecommunications industry. In 2001 the country's national telecommunications operator, Maroc Télécom (MT), was privatized. A Paris-based international media and telecommunications company owns a majority stake in MT. Following its privatization, MT was deprived of its monopoly control over fixed-line and mobile telecommunications services. A Spanish-Portuguese joint-venture company competes with MT for both types of service. Although Morocco's telephone system uses modern technology, fixed-line service is relatively underdeveloped; in 2004 only 1.3 million inhabitants used fixed-line telephone service, about 4 percent of the population. By contrast, Morocco had more than 9.3 million mobile phone users the same year, representing about 30 percent of the population. Morocco had 3.5 million Internet users in 2005, but the Internet is expensive to access and lags well behind the telephone in popularity. Moroccans own 3.1 million television sets and 6.6 million radios.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Political Overview: Morocco is a constitutional monarchy led by King Mohammad VI, who succeeded his father, King Hassan II, in 1999. Despite the creation of an elected bicameral parliament with somewhat expanded powers in the constitution of 1996, the king continues to hold the ultimate authority.

Constitution: Morocco's first constitution was adopted in March 1962. It has been revised in 1970, 1972, 1992, and, most recently, in September 1996. The latest version established a bicameral legislature.

Branches of Government: The government has three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch comprises the king, a hereditary monarch who serves as head of state, and the prime minister, who is appointed by the king following elections to serve as head of government. The king appoints the cabinet ministers on the recommendation of the prime minister and presides over the Council of Ministers. He has the power to dismiss the ministers, dissolve parliament, call for new elections, and issue decrees. The king also serves as head of the armed forces, head of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, which appoints Supreme Court judges, and chief religious leader.

The king's authority exceeds that of the legislative and judicial branches, although the 1996 constitution included measures to increase the legislative branch's influence. Reflecting the impact of that document, the legislative branch now has a bicameral parliament, consisting of the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) and the Chamber of Counselors (upper house). The 325 members of the Chamber of Representatives are elected to six-year terms by direct, universal suffrage. The 270 members of the House of Counselors are elected indirectly by local councils, professional organizations, and labor syndicates, whose members are popularly elected. Counselors serve nine-year terms; one-third of the counselors stand for election every three years. Parliament's still rather limited powers include responsibility for budgetary matters and the right to approve bills, question government ministers, and establish commissions of inquiry to investigate government actions. Parliament holds the government accountable through the ability of the Chamber of Representatives to force it to resign through a vote of no confidence and through the ability of the Chamber of Counselors to adopt a motion of censure.

According to the constitution, Morocco has an independent judiciary headed by the Supreme Court, but in practice the judiciary is subject to executive influence and corruption. Morocco's common law court system has four levels: communal and district courts, courts of first instance, appeals courts, and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has five chambers: constitutional, penal, administrative, social, and civil. The constitutional chamber is authorized to review legislative measures. The Supreme Council of the Judiciary, headed by the king, appoints Supreme Court judges. Other courts include administrative courts, commercial courts, and a military tribunal.

Administrative Divisions: Morocco is divided administratively into 16 regions, three of which lie entirely or partially within the disputed Western Sahara. The 16 regions are subdivided into 41 provinces and 25 prefectures.

Provincial and Local Government: Walis, or governors, appointed by the king and regional councils are responsible for managing the country's 16 regions. Each province has a local government consisting of a centrally appointed governor and an assembly elected by municipal councils. These provincial governments handle local responsibilities delegated to them by the central government such as rural investment and some social services. Each municipality has a mayor and an elected municipal council, which are responsible for basic services involving public health and safety. Local governments lack autonomy from the central government, which is responsible for taxation and budgeting at all levels of public administration. However, in recent years the central government has been trying to boost the authority of local governments.

Judicial and Legal System: Morocco's legal system combines Islamic law, or sharia, with French and Spanish civil law. Morocco nominally maintains an independent judiciary, but in the view of independent observers, the autonomy of the judicial branch is impaired by corruption and executive influence. By law Moroccans are entitled to a fair public trial, but actual practice sometimes falls short in terms of representation, pre-trial detention, and the admissibility of evidence, particularly in terrorism-related cases. Since 2003 family courts apply Islamic law in cases involving Muslims.

Electoral System: Morocco has universal suffrage beginning at age 18. Parliamentary and municipal elections were last held in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

Politics and Political Parties: A large number of political parties are active in Morocco. After the latest parliamentary elections held on September 27, 2002, the five most successful parties, in order of the number of seats won, were the following: the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires—USFP), Istiqlal (Independence) Party (Parti d'Indépendance—PI), Justice and Development Party (Parti de la Justice et du Développement—PJD), National Rally of Independents (Rassemblement National des Indépendants—RNI), and Popular Movement (Mouvement Populaire—MP).

Mass Media: The government owns many key media outlets, including Moroccan radio and television. Moroccans have access to approximately 2,000 domestic and foreign publications. The Moroccan press agency, Maghreb Arab Press, and one Arabic daily newspaper, *Al-Anbaa*, are official organs of the government. One additional Arabic daily newspaper, *Assahra Al Maghribia*, and one French-language daily newspaper, *Le Matin*, are semi-official organs of the government. Although journalists continue to practice self-censorship, opposition dailies have begun to explore social and political issues that would have been considered out of bounds until recently. However, the media continue to exercise caution when discussing government corruption, human rights, and Morocco's policy toward Western Sahara. Radio Méditerranée Internationale (Medi-1), a joint French/Moroccan broadcaster, also practices self-censorship. According to the most recent available information, Morocco has 27 AM radio stations, 25 FM radio stations, 6 shortwave stations, and 35 television stations.

Foreign Relations: Morocco pursues a moderate foreign policy without notable controversy, except for its claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara. This claim is not recognized internationally, although Morocco continues to administer Western Sahara and has built a protective berm around three-quarters of its territory. Morocco's stance on Western Sahara is an irritant in its relations with Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front, a Western Sahara independence group. Morocco enjoys friendly relations with the United States, the European Union (EU), and the Persian Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia.

The United States has maintained relations with Morocco since 1787; a friendship treaty was renegotiated in 1836. No bilateral relationship between the United States and another nation has lasted longer. In recognition of Morocco's efforts to thwart international terrorism, the United States designated Morocco a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally in June 2004. Although Morocco has cracked down on domestic terrorism, it opposed United States-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. A comprehensive bilateral free-trade agreement

between the United States and Morocco went into effect on January 1, 2006. The EU's predecessor organization, the European Community, established relations with Morocco in 1960. Current relations between Europe and Morocco are based on the comprehensive EU-Morocco Association Agreement, which entered into force on March 1, 2000.

Moroccan foreign policy is primarily oriented toward the Maghreb region—consisting of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia—through Morocco's membership in the Arab Maghreb Union. Morocco is linked to the Arab world through membership in the Arab League and also to Africa, although Morocco is no longer a member of the African Union. Morocco left the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union's predecessor organization, in 1984 following a dispute over the status of Western Sahara. In October 2000, Morocco severed all diplomatic ties with Israel out of protest over Israel's settlement policy. Prior to the rupture, Morocco and Israel had maintained bilateral liaison offices since September 1994. Morocco is a long-standing advocate of a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Membership in International Organizations: Morocco is a member of the following international organizations: African Development Bank (AfDB), Agency for the French-Speaking Community (ACCT), Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA), Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Group of 77, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank (IBRD), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), International Criminal Court (ICCt, signatory), International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRM), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Islamic Development Bank (IDB), League of Arab States (LAS), Nonaligned Movement (NAM), Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), United Nations (UN), Universal Postal Union (UPU), World Confederation of Labor (WCL), World Customs Organization (WCO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Tourism Organization (WtoO), and World Trade Organization (WTO).

Major International Treaties: Morocco is a signatory to international agreements on the non-proliferation of biological weapons, chemical weapons, and nuclear weapons as well as various international agreements on civil aviation, customs cooperation, human rights, and intellectual property. Notable agreements on the environment include the following: biodiversity, climate change (including the Kyoto Protocol), desertification, endangered species, hazardous wastes, marine dumping, ozone layer protection, ship pollution, wetlands, and whaling.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Armed Forces Overview: Morocco's military consists of 196,300 active-duty personnel and 150,000 reserves. The active-duty troops are assigned to the various services: army, 175,000; navy, 7,800; and air force, 13,500. In addition, Morocco has 50,000 active-duty paramilitary personnel.

Foreign Military Relations: In June 2004, the United States designated Morocco a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally in recognition of Morocco's efforts to combat international terrorism. As a result of the designation, the U.S. military gained access to Moroccan military ports and bases in exchange for U.S. financial assistance to the Moroccan military. Such assistance under the U.S. Financial Military Financing program totaled US\$10 million in fiscal year 2004 and was expected to reach US\$15.1 million in fiscal year 2005.

External Threat: Morocco faces an external threat from the Polisario Front (PF), which opposes Morocco's administration of Western Sahara. The PF, whose membership is estimated at 3,000–6,000, enjoys the support of neighboring Algeria.

Defense Budget: In 2003 Morocco's defense budget was US\$2.3 billion, about 5 percent of gross domestic product.

Major Military Units: The Moroccan army has two commands: one responsible for the northern zone, or Morocco proper, and the other for the southern zone, or Western Sahara. These commands control three mechanized infantry brigades, one light security brigade, two paratroop brigades, and eight mechanized or motorized infantry regiments. Independent units include one armored battalion, two cavalry battalions, 39 infantry battalions, one mountain infantry battalion, two paratroop battalions, three motorized (camel corps) battalions, nine artillery battalions, seven engineering battalions, one air defense group, and seven commando units. The 1,500-member Royal Guard has one battalion and one cavalry squadron. The navy, including a marine force, is deployed from five bases at Casablanca, Agadir, Al Hoceima, Dakhla, and Tangier. The air force has operational bases in Rabat-Salé, Meknès, Kenitra, and Sidi Slimane and a training base in Marrakech.

Major Military Equipment: The army is equipped with 744 main battle tanks, 100 light tanks, 324 reconnaissance vehicles, 115 armored infantry fighter vehicles, 740 armored personnel carriers, 185 towed artillery, 227 self-propelled artillery, 40 multiple rocket launchers, 1,470 mortars, 720 antitank guided weapons, an unspecified number of rocket launchers, 350 recoilless launchers, 36 antitank guns, 477 air defense guns, 107 surface-to-air missiles, and unspecified numbers of surveillance and unmanned aerial vehicles. The navy inventory includes two frigates, four missile craft, 23 patrol craft, four amphibious vehicles, and four support craft. Naval aviation has two helicopters. The Moroccan air force has 95 combat aircraft and 24 armed helicopters.

Military Service: Most enlisted personnel serve voluntarily, although conscription is authorized for up to 18 months beginning at age 18. Army reserves are required to serve until age 50.

Paramilitary Forces: Morocco's 50,000 paramilitary personnel serve in the Royal Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Royale—GR), Auxiliary Forces, Customs, and Coast Guard.

Foreign Military Forces: Since 1991 a small United Nations (UN) mission, called the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), has monitored a cease-fire between Morocco and the Polisario Liberation Front in Western Sahara but has failed to hold a referendum on self-determination. Currently, 27 troops and 203 military observers staff MINURSO.

Military Forces Abroad: Morocco currently participates in United Nations peacekeeping missions in the following locations: Bosnia (about 800 personnel), Democratic Republic of Congo (805), Ivory Coast (734), and Serbia/Montenegro (279).

Police: The General Office of National Security (Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale—DGSN) is a national civilian police force divided into 37 local districts, subordinate to the Ministry of Interior. The Royal Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Royale—GR), a paramilitary force that is formally part of the armed forces, augments the DGSN, serving as the country's main rural police unit while the DGSN concentrates primarily on urban areas. The DGSN, Royal Gendarmerie, and other Moroccan security organizations face allegations of human rights abuses.

Internal Threat: The Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain—GICM), which is affiliated with al Qaeda, poses a threat to domestic security, according to the U.S. Department of State. The GICM was implicated in the bombing of commuter trains in Madrid, Spain, in March 2004. Islamist militants responsible for a terrorist attack in Casablanca in May 2003 belonged to another group called Salafiya Jihadiya. Following the incident, Morocco arrested several thousand Islamist militants and sentenced nearly 1,000 for terrorism-related activities. The government also took a variety of measures to tighten security and crack down on potential terrorists.

Terrorism: On May 16, 2003, a cell of Islamist terrorists belonging to a group calling itself Salafiya Jihadiya bombed a series of Jewish targets in Casablanca; 45 people, including 12 suicide bombers, died in the incidents. Indicating that terrorism is a continuing threat, in June 2002 the press reported that Morocco had foiled an al Qaeda conspiracy to attack British and U.S. Navy vessels in the Strait of Gibraltar with explosives-laden dinghies. Morocco arrested three Saudi Arabian nationals in connection with the planned terrorist strike, which appears to have been modeled after al Qaeda's raid on a U.S. Navy ship off Yemen in 2000. Following the Casablanca bombings in 2003, Morocco began to crack down on Islamist militants, including both Salafiya Jihadiya and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain—GICM). In late 2005, Morocco dismantled several al Qaeda-affiliated cells that had been plotting attacks in the country. Altogether, Morocco has arrested 3,000 suspects, about 1,000 of whom were jailed on terrorism charges, since the Casablanca bombings. The United States has recognized Morocco's support for the war on terrorism by designating Morocco as a non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally.

Human Rights: Morocco's human rights record is mixed. On the positive side of the ledger, Morocco's most recent elections—for the lower chamber of parliament in September 2002 and for local government councils in September 2003—were widely regarded as free and fair. Freedom of the press is considerable, although many journalists practice self-censorship and discussion of the monarchy is not permitted. Freedom of religion is generally observed, with some limitations. Although Islam is the official state religion, Moroccans are permitted to practice other faiths. However, restrictions apply to Christian proselytizing and political activities under the rubric of Islam. On the negative side, in view of the dominant role of the king in politics, Moroccans lack the ability to change their government. Following the Islamist terrorist attack in Casablanca in May 2003, human rights groups alleged that Morocco mistreated and even tortured detainees. Other human rights issues include violence and discrimination against women, child labor, and human trafficking. In 2005 the Moroccan parliament took steps to improve the status of women and children.