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An appetite for arms? Libya's re-emergence on the international arms market

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Once considered a 'pariah state' and shunned for its support of terrorist activities, Libya has in recent years undergone a remarkable transformation, at least at the international level. One particularly notable aspect of Libya's reintegration into the 'international community' has been the efforts of several states to secure large-scale arms contracts with the Gaddafi regime. Indeed, since the lifting of the UN and EU arms embargoes in 2003/2004, Libya is commonly considered one of the most promising arms export markets in the world. Not only are its weapons holdings,

after almost two decades of sanctions, largely obsolete or in a state of disrepair, but prior to the arms embargoes, the country was one of the most outlandish weapons buyers globally. During the 1970s and 1980s, Libya topped the list of all arms importing countries on a per capita basis, and even in absolute terms, it was one of the most important purchasers of weapons in the world. As a result of its huge arms acquisitions, by the early 1980s, Libya was estimated to have the highest ratio of military equipment to manpower globally. Its most important supplier by far was the USSR, accounting for around 75% of all of Libya's military imports, followed by France with some 10%.

While defense analysts estimate Libya's military requirements over the coming years at anywhere between \$5 and \$10 billion, it remains unclear what the main driving factors behind future Libyan arms acquisitions might be, and whether Libya will resume its position as one of the most prolific weapons purchasers in the world. Predictions in the case of Libya are all the more difficult as during the pre-embargo period, Libya's military purchases seemed driven less by specific external threats, and more by Colonel Gaddafi's international ambitions, in particular his pan-Arab leadership aspirations, as well as his fierce anti-Zionism. One factor which currently might work against Libya engaging

in a massive military build-up is its improved relationship not only with neighboring countries but also with Israel and the West. On the other hand, Libya has been confronted with new challenges, such as Islamist terrorism and irregular migration, which might provide a rationale for certain arms purchases. Moreover, other Maghreb countries such as Algeria and Morocco, have engaged in relatively large-scale weapons acquisitions in recent years, in particular of advanced fighter aircraft, which might fuel Libya's military procurement.

With respect to the arms deals which the Libyan leadership has negotiated or concluded in recent years, there is at least one clear continuity with the past in that its traditionally most important suppliers, Russia and France, have been at the forefront in securing arms deals with the Gaddafi regime. In mid-2007, France concluded the first major arms deal with Libya since the lifting of the embargoes: the sale of Milan-type anti-tank missiles worth around €300 million. A potentially much more spectacular arms deal was announced a few months later when Colonel Gaddafi paid a state visit to France. During the visit, the two countries agreed to hold 'exclusive negotiations' over the following six months over major weapons systems, including 14 Rafale fighter jets, 35 military helicopters, and a radar defense system, worth an estimated

€4.5 billion. The Rafale deal has, however, still not been concluded.

France's main competitor thus far has been Russia. Similarly to its relationship with Algeria, Russia has been using the instrument of Soviet-era debt cancellation in order to secure arms deals with Libya. In April 2008, Vladimir Putin became the first Russian leader to visit Tripoli, and offered to cancel Libya's Soviet era debt, estimated at some \$4.5 billion in return for major weapons and infrastructure contracts. While at the time, the two countries failed to reach an agreement on arms sales, in early 2010 the Russian media reported that Russia and Libya were close to concluding a \$2 billion arms deal over 16-19 Su-35 and Su-30 combat aircraft, an advanced air defense system, as well as a range of other military equipment.

Italy as well has been active on the Libyan arms market, although in this case arms exports have been driven first and foremost by the growing concern with irregular migration through Libya towards Italy. In 2006, Italy agreed to provide Libya with ten military helicopters for border control purposes, and two years later the two countries signed a contract on the sale to Libya of a maritime patrol airplane.

The growing number of arms deals which have been concluded or discussed with the Libyan regime are, of course, a telling sign that the former pariah state has, in a rather short period of time, come to be viewed as a respectable partner. However, this rehabilitation has occurred despite Libya's still poor human rights record and oppressive political regime. Even though in European countries, there has been some limited criticism of the military rapprochement with Libya, in particular of the (potential) Rafale sales, the huge commercial interests which are at stake seem to trump any human rights concerns. Human rights considerations seem to be further sidelined by the increasingly shared security concerns between Western countries and Libya,

in particular in the areas of immigration control and counter-terrorism.

Algeria's Islamists between inclusion and exclusion

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The rise of the Islamist movement in Algeria and its evolution as a political and social force to be reckoned with must be ascribed to the failure of a developmental strategy based on the ongoing flow of oil rents.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Algeria witnessed the emergence of a broad middle class due to Algeria's then developmental path. The enormous public sector was a springboard of upward mobility, with the added possibility of being directly co-opted into the ranks of the state-class. Henceforth, it was possible to gain access to the state apparatus by participating in mass organizations, the party or bureaucracy. With the help of the oil rent, Algeria's state achieved considerable social progress: the creation of jobs, the increase of purchasing power, low prices for consumer goods through government subsidies, universal health care, and an education system ensuring the schooling and training of many young Algerians. All this boosted living standards and the prosperity of the population.

Yet, following the oil crisis of the mid-1980s, Algeria, like many rentier states, fell into debt and consequently faced the difficulty of upholding its system of co-optation. The crisis of

the rentier state put an end to the distribution of wealth strategy upon which Algeria had heavily relied on to maintain loyalty amongst its citizens. The share of socially marginalized youth was growing rapidly, and demands of the middle class for more economic freedom became more insistent.

The Algerian state-class eventually responded to the civil disturbances of October 1988 with a reform of the Party Law. As a consequence, over 60 parties were founded, including some Islamist parties like the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP). The first local elections in June 1990 resulted in a FIS victory, and in the first ballot of the first free parliamentary elections just one year later, the FIS even managed to win approx. three million votes, i.e. 47% of the total vote.

The FIS was home to two social forces with different and, to some extent, competing interests – on the one hand, it brought together members of the blocked middle class, and on the other it was comprised of the marginalized urban lower class. Both groups were attracted by the FIS radical discourse, and at the same time the movement also advocated economic programs gearing towards the social advancement of the middle class. While the middle classes hoped to wrench reforms from the government by integrating themselves into the movement, members of the lower class deemed the state-class to be hopelessly corrupt and thus insisted on their elimination – by force, if necessary. However, due to the political and social heterogeneity of their supporters and the diametrically opposite expectations of these two groups, it was extremely difficult for a movement such as the FIS to organize and structure itself like a modern political party. In view of this, as a consequence of the abortion of the elections and the outbreak of the subsequent civil war, it was doomed to fail and was finally banned.

It was only after the economic recov-

ery of the Algerian government, which was due to credits from the West and the increase of oil prices, that the army gained a military victory over the Islamists. The state offered the middle class remunerative economic options and at the same time co-opted moderate Islamists - first and foremost the MSP - into rent distribution channels. In the 1997 parliamentary elections, the MSP, which had already been involved in the government since 1996 as a junior partner, won 69 seats in the National Assembly and, thus, became the third force in Parliament. In the 2002 elections, the MSP won only 38 parliamentary seats, as opposed to the 51 seats it obtained in the last elections, held on May 19, 2007.

Whereas the FIS was a very heterogeneous party, the MSP is characterized by a relative homogeneity and is dominated by a rising middle class. Therefore it is comparatively easier for it to operate within the political center and work towards more moderate positions. Its members belong to the generation that witnessed the crisis of the rentier state and as a result have no interest in conflict with the state and its security apparatus, but rather hope for better upward mobility opportunities. Therefore, they are much more willing to forego radical action and would prefer to align themselves with the ruling elite. Undoubtedly, the MSP members' capital is their good education, as they strive – *grosso modo* – for prestige and high incomes. Several examples from Asia have shown that the role of this class as agents of a political democratic culture is however seen as controversial. In other words: this new middle class has little interest in a democratic development, but rather in a state-run capitalization, as its members see their status and upward mobility as being intrinsically linked to the fortification of government functions.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the MSP's commitment to more democracy in Algeria has been rather limited. Its policy posi-

tion during the riots in the Kabilye region in 2001 and its active support for a third term of President Bouteflika are indicators that the new Algerian middle class is prepared to work for participation in rent distribution rather than engage itself in the quest for democracy and political liberalization. Under the conditions of rent abundance, it is thus almost natural that these groups are being co-opted into the central state authority. This is all the more so in a system where the state-class is economically and politically sufficiently strong to co-opt a weak(er) junior partner, thereby aiming at generating greater legitimacy to itself.

Morocco's advanced status or "the spirits that I called..."

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At a time when the media is preoccupied with the analysis of the global financial crisis and the rescue of the Euro, it is often overlooked that the EU conducts business as usual in many other policy areas. This applies to EU external relations and, thus, the EU's Mediterranean policy vis-à-vis its Arab Mediterranean partners, the bilateral dimension of which has remained largely unaffected by the current dynamics. Undoubtedly, the most prominent example in this regard are EU-Morocco relations, which are the most advanced in the framework of the EU's bilateral relations with Arab partners. This is reflected not only by the fact that Morocco was among the

first countries with which the then European Economic Community entered into contractual relations in the late sixties, but, more importantly, by the advanced status the country was granted by the EU in late 2008. Of all the EU's Arab Mediterranean partner countries, Morocco is the first to have been awarded such an upgrade which, according to Moroccan Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri, is "proof of confidence [...] in Morocco's efforts in terms of political reforms, consolidation of the rule of law, a better justice system, economic reforms, social cohesion and the fight against poverty". The decision to deepen political and economic relations even further, and the recent EU-Morocco summit held in early March in Granada, are an indication of the general perception institutions and policy-makers in Brussels seem to have of the latest developments in Morocco. But are these perceptions really justified? What is the impact of political and economic reform, as hinted at so emphatically by Fassi Fihri in October 2008?

First things first: Eleven years into Mohammed VI reign, Morocco's political system, formally a constitutional monarchy, is still authoritarian in nature. Although the country already witnessed three major elections since 2002, electoral processes still do not provide elected officials with effective power to rule, nor do they enable anti-regime parties to win and translate a potential victory into government formation. Apart from regular recourse to sophisticated measures that range from vote buying and gerrymandering to direct state intervention, all of which are destined to ensure the "appropriate" outcome of elections, the *makhzen* – the royal establishment – still permeates all layers of political and economic life. The King himself interferes regularly in the work of both the executive and the legislature and has succeeded in establishing a façade behind which all members of government, as well as the entire state bureaucracy, depend



on him. So-called royal commissions, equipped with more prerogatives than individual ministries, are flourishing, and in the economic sector, the King remains the most important player, effectively controlling the oil, milk and sugar markets, as well as 25% of the Casablanca stock market capitalization.

Although Moroccan civil society is comparatively well developed in regional terms, King Muhammed VI has throughout the last eleven years created a system in which non-governmental organizations had to subscribe to the Royal Palace's views in exchange for its support. This has limited civil society's room for maneuver considerably, and the King increased his grip on civil society even further by creating "royal NGOs" and establishing the Muhammed V Foundation (M5) as well as the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), both of which serve not only to impose royal positions, but also to marginalize other NGOs completely.

This practice goes hand in hand with ongoing constraints to freedom of expression, as is reflected in the Worldwide Freedom Index of Reporters

Without Borders, which ranks Morocco in 127th place, down from the 89th position in 2002. The latest example of censorship came in the form of the closure of the weekly journal *Hebdomadaire*, one of the pioneers of independent media in Morocco, on the grounds of allegedly unpaid taxes and social contributions. Interestingly, this closure occurred shortly before a meeting of journalists organized under the Union for the Mediterranean was to be held. This meeting was suddenly put on hold at the last minute due to the intervention of Moroccan authorities.

Also, the reference to the consolidation of the rule of law and the supposedly greater social cohesion does, in fact, reflect Fassi Fihri's wishful thinking rather than reality: the judiciary is still subordinate to the Royal Palace and is regularly being used by the latter as one of the most important means of repression and intimidation. As demands for constitutional reform are frequently nipped in the bud, inequality is increasing, with the gap between the haves and the have-nots widening. The United Nations' latest Human Development

Index ranks Morocco in 130th place and points particularly to the growing disparity between urban and rural areas, and inequality between men and women – a situation that is aggravated by the ongoing, though gradually decreasing dependence of GDP growth on rainfalls.

In view of these developments, two observations stand out: first, Morocco's true status, after all, certainly cannot be seen as advanced; second, given that the actual political and economic situation in Morocco obviously did not preclude the EU from granting the country an advanced status, it is almost certain that other regimes in the region will demand and surely obtain the same treatment in the near future. What this means with respect to the advanced status as an EU foreign policy tool itself, the prospects for democracy, good governance and the rule of law in Europe's southern neighborhood and the persistence of authoritarianism, is however beyond doubt. Or, to put it in the words of Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice: "the spirits that I called..."

The unresolved Western Sahara conflict and its repercussions¹

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The second round of informal talks between the Moroccan government and the Polisario Front, the Sahrawi nationalist representative, conducted under United Nations (UN) auspices and in the presence of Algeria and Mauritania as observer countries, was held on February 10th and 11th 2010. Announced as a preliminary informal meeting to the fifth round of direct negotiations between the Western Saharan independence movement and Morocco, these discussions succeeded four sessions of direct talks, which began in June 2007, without producing any tangible results. At least for the informed analyst, the latest meeting would likely hold few differences from the previous ones – which was indeed the case – even if the international context has changed somewhat since the arrival of Barack Obama to the White House. The Western Sahara conflict, defined as “forgotten conflict” or “frozen conflict,” is approaching its 35th year, and it has had significant damaging effects.

A proposed regional trading bloc, *L'Union du Maghreb Arabe* (UMA, Arab Maghreb Union), inaugurated with great fanfare in February 1989, has been in hibernation since 1996,

precisely because of this conflict. The issue has poisoned relations between Algeria, the main sponsor of Sahrawi self-determination, and Morocco, which claims the territory it has illegally occupied since 1975. Even if it very rarely

Even if it very rarely makes the headlines, the Saharawi conflict has a significant impact on the development of the region. Indeed, the lack of regional integration weighs heavily: trade between the Maghreb states represents only 1.3% of their global trade, the lowest regional trade in the world. Economists in the United States have shown that an integrated Maghreb market and a free trade area would have highly beneficial results for the populations of this region.

makes the headlines, the Saharawi conflict has a significant impact on the development of the region. Indeed, the lack of regional integration weighs heavily: trade between the Maghreb states represents only 1.3% of their global trade, the lowest regional trade in the world. Economists in the United States have shown that an integrated Maghreb market and a free trade area would have highly beneficial results for the populations of this region. In addition, the land border between Algeria and Morocco has been closed since August 1994, seriously affecting the economic life of the city of Oujda,

which depended heavily on trade with and tourism from Algeria. Morocco has repeatedly called on the Algerian authorities to reopen the border, but Algiers has decided

¹ This article is an updated version of an earlier article. See Yahia Zoubir, “The Western Sahara conflict: regional and international repercussions” (*Concerned African Scholars Bulletin*, No. 85, Spring 2010).

that reopening the border without a comprehensive agreement, which would include the settlement of the conflict in Western Sahara, would be useless, no matter the cost of a non-integrated Maghreb. Furthermore, not surprisingly, tension between Algeria and Morocco has led to a rather costly and dangerous arms race.

In addition the conflict has generated other tensions. Besides tense relations between Algeria and Morocco, it has affected relations between France (which defends the Moroccan monarchy's irredentist claims) and Algeria, as well as relations between Spain (the former colonial power in Western Sahara) and Morocco, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, between Spain and Algeria. The United States,

which during the Cold War allowed the occupation of the former Spanish colony by Morocco, has also suffered some of the consequences in its policy in the Maghreb: Its repeated calls for Maghreb integration and improvement in Algerian-Moroccan relations have proven fruitless, especially at a time when it is consolidating its security arrangements in the Maghreb-Sahel region.

Only a geopolitical analysis can explain the deadlock that has persisted in Western Sahara conflict. The alleged technical difficulties to ensure a referendum have been mere pretext to allow Morocco to continue its colonization of the territory. If today powers like the United States, France

and Spain, support, albeit to different degrees, the concept of "autonomy for the Sahrawi people", they have failed to impose it because international law is unequivocally on the side of the Sahrawi people.

The conflict has increased even more in intensity as younger generations of Sahrawis have resorted to active, continued peaceful resistance which has succeeded in alerting the international community on human rights issues. The case of the militant Amenatou Haidar is a perfect illustration. In fact, the hunger strike she undertook in November-December 2009 and the diplomatic implications that ensued have had such reverberations that the Personal Envoy of the Secretary General of the UN, Christopher Ross, asked the UN Security Council (UNSC) on January 28, 2010, dur-

ing a closed-door meeting, to include human rights monitoring in the prerogatives of the UN Mission for Western Sahara (MINURSO) – the only United Nations peacekeeping force that does not have as part of its mandate the protection of human rights. The same request had been made in 2009 but France opposed it in April 2009. On April 30, 2010, France once again, opposed the inclusion of the protection of human rights in MINURSO's mandate. Therefore, UNSC Resolution 1920, which has extended MINURSO's mandate for another year, does not contain any mention of human rights. In the meantime, the violations of human rights in the occupied Western Sahara have in fact amplified despite their denunciations by respectable human rights organi-

zations, such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch.

The lack of resolution of the Saharawi conflict boils down to two main points: the conflicting positions of Moroccans and Sahrawis, on the one hand and geopolitical considerations on the other hand. These geopolitical interests have been the main impediment to the resolution of the conflict because they strengthened the obstinate position of the Moroccans who argue that due to external support they will only negotiate the "autonomy" proposal which enjoys the implicit consent of France, the United States, and Spain, regardless of UN resolutions that refute any preconditions for the negotiations.

Despite the acceptance of the peace plan by Morocco

and the Polisario Front in 1991, all attempts to organize the referendum on self-determination of the last colony in Africa have failed. Since 2001, Morocco has continuously opposed the inclusion of the option of independence to any referendum process based on self-determination. Today, Moroccans consider the referendum process altogether as an "obsolete practice". They are comforted in their position owing to the backing they receive from France and the United States in the Security Council. The UNSC refused to impose a solution that includes the option of independence, as inscribed in UN resolutions. In 2003, the UNSC failed to impose the Baker Plan II, owing to US *volte-face* but also because France made clear it would veto such imposition. Recently, France, the US (under Bush) and then

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Spain made no doubt as to their support for the proposal Morocco made in 2007 of supposedly granting Sahrawis “autonomy” within the Moroccan Kingdom. Implicitly, these countries have recognized Morocco’s occupation over Western Sahara, although adopting an official position that indicates that they do not recognize Morocco’s sovereignty. Thus, since the adoption on April 30, 2007, of UN resolution 1754, Moroccans have reiterated their position that they would not negotiate anything other than their own proposal, insisting that they have garnered support from France and the United States under the administration of George W. Bush, as well as under the current Barack Obama administration, following Hillary Clinton’s declarations in Morocco in November 2009. During all the meetings they held with Polisario representatives, Moroccan officials refused to discuss the Sahrawis’ counter-proposal, thus bypassing UN resolutions which insist on “negotiations without preconditions and in good faith... with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara...” The Sahrawis’ counterproposal submitted to the UN in 2007, which is more in line with international law, does not reject outright the Moroccan option, but insists that the autonomy proposal be considered only as a third option (independence and integration being the others) as part of talks between the two parties. The Polisario has

also committed itself to accepting the results of the referendum whatever they are and to negotiate with the Kingdom of Morocco, under the auspices of the United Nations, the guarantees that it is prepared to grant to the Moroccan population residing in Western Sahara, as well as to the Kingdom of Morocco, in terms of Morocco’s political, economic and security interests in Western Sahara, in the event that the referendum on self-determination would lead to independence.

The perpetuation of this impasse is inevitable despite the optimism of US diplomat, Christopher Ross, appointed in January 2009 to serve as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s Personal Envoy. Prudent, Ross had first arranged for an informal meeting between the two parties in Dürn-

stein, Austria, on August 10th and 11th 2009. Unsurprisingly, no progress was made despite a fairly positive statement issued at the end of the meeting. The two parties however agreed to pursue yet another informal round of discussions in Armonk, near New York. According to Ban Ki-moon, the meeting would be “based on guidelines provided by resolution 1871 (2009) and other previous resolutions of the Security Council”. But the reality on the ground was and still is favorable to Morocco, not only because it has consolidated its colonization of the territory, but it also exploits illegally with no fear of punishment the natural resources of Western Sahara, primarily phosphates and fisheries. The

European Union is complicit in this exploitation through the fisheries agreement with Morocco, which includes Western Sahara, notwithstanding the opinion that the European Parliament has expressed on the reasonableness of EU policy; in fact, it deemed EU fishing in Western Saharan waters to be illegal. In view of Morocco’s intransigence and the support it receives from external actors, it is thus not surprising that the second informal meeting held in New York to prepare for the 5th round failed, like the previous ones, to produce any tangible results. Given that neither side has accepted the proposal of the other as the sole basis for future negotiations, it is obvious that short of unforeseen developments, the status quo will undoubtedly persist.

The UN is responsible for the decolonization of Western Sahara, but the key to breaking the stalemate and implement-

ing the legal solution lies in the hands of France and the United States which, even if they do not recognize Morocco’s sovereignty over the territory, allowed the latter to consolidate its control over it. The ingredients that have led to the status quo are in fact contained in UN resolutions, which while reaffirming the right to self-determination for the Saharawi people encourage the latter to seek with Moroccans, the colonizers, a “mutually acceptable” political solution. In other words, each party has a veto, even if Morocco has the advantage.

France, regardless of its official position, considers Western Sahara as an integral part of Morocco. Since 1975, successive governments have never hidden their opposition to an independent Sahrawi state that would purportedly fall

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under Algeria's influence. In addition, the emergence of an independent Sahrawi state is seen as a destabilizing factor for the Moroccan Kingdom, in which France has considerable political, economic, military and cultural interests. With nearly 70% of total Foreign Direct Investments in Morocco, France is the largest trading partner and major investor. France's steadfast support of Morocco's irredentist claims has inevitably complicated further Algerian-French relations. The French government is of the conviction that the resolution of the conflict is between Algiers and Rabat, an attitude that irritates Algiers, which considers the conflict to be a question of decolonization and self-determination.

The United States, too, supports the position of Morocco, a reliable ally in the Arab world. A priori, the US does not oppose the right to self-determination of peoples, but in the case of Western Sahara, geopolitical considerations determine US attitudes toward the question. There were times, as under the administration of George Bush senior, in the late 1980s, when the US was open to the idea of an independent Sahrawi state. Then, in 2003, the US supported the second Baker Plan, under which the Saharawi were to have autonomy for a period of five years before the holding a referendum on self-determination that would include the three options, of which independence was one, inscribed in UN resolutions. Moroccans have objected to such a referendum in spite of the numerical advantage of Moroccan settlers in the territory. At the time, the Bush administration had promised Algerians that if they and the Saharawis accepted the plan, the United States would impose that solution in the Security Council. However, perhaps not wishing to aggravate the rift with the French over the issue of Iraq, coupled with the threat of veto from France, pushed the United States to renege on its promise. The Bush administration supported the Moroccan autonomy proposal despite its illegality – for what gives Moroccans the right to offer autonomy to Saharawis – and its utter ambiguity.

It would be naive to believe a reversal of the US position in this conflict under the current Obama administration despite the seeming shift in attitude towards the autonomy proposal. There have been some signs indicating that the Obama administration may not be decidedly biased in favor of Morocco. Indeed, in June 2009, it appeared that the US no longer supported unequivocally the Moroccan autonomy plan; Obama's evading the mention of the autonomy plan in his letter to King Mohamed VI was interpreted as a reversal in US policy on the question. A passage in the letter was particularly revealing: "I share your commitment to the UN-led negotiations as the appropriate forum to achieve a mutually agreed solution... My government will work with yours and others in the region to achieve an outcome that meets the people's need for transparent governance, confidence in the rule of law, and equal administration of justice". Citing diplomatic sources, the report in which the letter was quoted suggested that "the United States no lon-

ger supports or endorses the Moroccan autonomy plan ... Instead, the administration has returned to the pre-Bush position that there could be an independent Polisario state in Western Sahara". US officials refused to confirm or deny such reports, stating only that the US encourages the parties to engage in discussions under the UN auspices. Undoubtedly, by referring to international law, which in the case of Western Sahara would include the option of independence, Obama seemed to abide by the values he promised to uphold. However, as UNSC Resolution 1920 makes clear, the United States does not seem to have undertaken any shift in policy toward Western Sahara. What is certain is that the administration is torn between continuing to support a traditional ally and setting a new course that would contradict the interests of that ally. The conflicting pronouncements in Obama's letter and those issued by Hillary Clinton during her visit to Morocco in November 2009 highlight the policy constraints of the Obama administration. During her visit to Marrakesh in November 2009 to attend the Forum for the Future, Hillary Clinton responded to the question as to whether the Obama administration had changed its position on the autonomy plan by saying that, "our policy has not changed, and I thank you for asking the question because I think it's important for me to reaffirm here in Morocco that there has been no change in policy". In another interview, she was asked, what she meant by her affirmation that there was "no change in the Obama administration's position as far as the Moroccan autonomy plan in the Sahara is concerned". Her response was: "Well, this is a plan, as you know, that originated in the Clinton administration. It was reaffirmed in the Bush administration and it remains the policy of the United States in the Obama administration. Now, we are supporting the United Nations process because we think that if there can be a peaceful resolution to the difficulties that exist with your neighbors, both to the east and to the south and the west that is in everyone's interest. But because of our long relationship, we are very aware of how challenging the circumstances are. And I don't want anyone in the region or elsewhere to have any doubt about our policy, which remains the same". This being said, the US displayed a tougher stand toward Morocco during the hunger strike of Haidar. The US was instrumental in resolving the case, thus making it possible for Haidar to return to Western Sahara. However, powerful lobbies, including the American Jewish Committee in Washington have urged the US Senate to support Morocco; numerous Senators, in turn, pushed the White House resolve the conflict along the Moroccan proposal. With this in view, one of the major questions to be asked is whether the White House, despite the seemingly even-handed approach, will succumb to the Senate's pressure to endorse Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara, at the risk of alienating Algeria, a major US partner in the war against terrorism in the region, and an important oil producer.

Timeline of Events

Algeria

3 May 2010 (Algiers):

Nourredine Cherouati was named as head of Algeria's state energy firm Sonatrach, an appointment aimed at restoring stability to the company after a serious corruption probe.

6 May 2010 (Algiers):

Finance Minister Karim Djoudi said Algeria is prepared to buy 100% of Orascom Telecom Algeria (OTA).

15 May 2010 (Jijel):

Security forces killed three suspected Islamic militants and captured another during an operation in a forest in eastern Algeria. Authorities believe the men belonged to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

17 May 2010 (Tehran):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika participated in the 14th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Group of 15 (G-15).

17-19 May 2010 (Algiers):

A cooperation program between Algeria and the World Tourism Organization for 2010-2015 was signed on the sidelines of the 50th meeting of the WTO Commission for Africa.

18 May 2010 (Algiers):

The 8th session of the Algeria-United Arab Emirates joint committee of cooperation was held under the chairmanship of Finance Minister Karim Djoudi and the UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri.

18 May 2010 (Geneva):

The Minister of Health, Population and Hospitals Reform, Said Barkat, and the Regional Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Africa, Louis Gomez Sambo, agreed on the need to elevate the level of WHO representation in Algeria.

23 May 2010 (Algiers):

UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, who led the UAE delegation to the eighth Joint UAE-Algerian Committee meeting, held talks with Algerian ministers and senior officials on ways to further promote cooperation on tourism, banking, finance, investment and industry.

25 May 2010 (Algiers):

New fatwas should follow the spirit of established religious laws, said Maghreb religious scholars and authorities who met to discuss religion and security. Participants voiced support for freedom of thought, but said the issue of renegade imams issuing extremist fatwas needed to be addressed.

25-28 May 2010 (Algiers):

South-African President Jacob Zuma visited Algeria to attend the 5th session of the South Africa-Algeria Presidential Binational Commission. The Nuclear Cooperation Agreement on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy was signed, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding between the Petroleum Oil and Gas Corporation of South Africa (PetroSA) and Sonatrach.

28 May 2010 (Algiers):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika made changes to his government, with Chakib Khelil losing the post as energy minister to diplomat and former minister Youcef Yousni.

31 May-1 June 2010 (Nice):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika attended the 25th Africa-France Summit. Several incidents have raised tensions between France and Algeria lately, such as the French probes into the assassination of Algerian opposition figure Ali Mecili at his home in Paris in 1987 and the murder of seven French monks in Algeria in 1996.

Libya

3 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Muammar Gaddafi accused Switzerland of being a criminal-like organization involved in

money laundering, assassinations and terrorism. Gaddafi also reiterated his suggestion of dividing Switzerland among France, Italy and Germany

5 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of Muammar Gaddafi, said Libya plans to erase visa restrictions for many countries, to advance tourism, and to diversify the economy. He added that a constitution is vital to Libya's prosperity.

6 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The head of Libya's National Oil Corporation said that Libya is eager to invest in a new oil refinery in Indonesia and is ready to supply crude oil.

6 May 2010 (Tripoli):

At the 9th session of the joint Libyan-Ghanaian committee, the Secretary of the Libyan General People's Committee for External Relations and International Cooperation, Moussa Koussa, and Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni, signed an agreement that covers the consolidation of bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the fields of energy, agriculture, animal and sea resources and joint investment.

6-7 May 2010 (Ljubljana):

During an official visit to Slovenia, Prime Minister al-Baghdadi Ali al-Mahmudi, accompanied by the Minister of Economy and a business delegation, met with local authorities to discuss economic cooperation.

8 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The Ambassador of the European Union to Libya, Adrianus Koetsenruijter, said that a 7th round of talks between the EU and Libya has been scheduled for June 8 and 9 in Tripoli and will lead to the signing of a framework agreement for cooperation and partnership by late 2010. The EU will soon open an embassy in Tripoli.

8-9 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Participants from France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Norway, Italy, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Belgium, Bulgaria and Turkey attended a meeting to review the conditions of migrant Afri-



can communities in Europe and ways to promote their contribution to the building of African unity.

10 May 2010 (Geneva):

A coalition of 30 non-governmental organizations, including many from Africa and from Libyan victim groups, appealed to US and EU representatives at the UN to block Libya from winning a seat on the UN Human Rights Council.

12 May 2010 (Geneva):

Libya was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

17–19 May 2010 (Tripoli):

A Vietnamese delegation from the National Assembly's Committee for External Relation Affairs, led by its chairman Nguyen Van Son, paid a visit to Libya with the purpose of strengthening ties between both parliaments.

19 May 2010 (Ankara):

The Libyan General Office for Sanitation and Investment and the Turkish Agency for Support and Promotion of Investment hosted their first economic forum.

19 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The Leader of the Revolution Muammar Gaddafi was named African Leader of the Year 2009 by the Africa Renaissance Coalition.

20 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The US and Libya signed a pact to facilitate trade and investment between the two nations, marking the latest step in the thaw of past hostilities. The US-Libya Business Association, which is led by oil companies such as Chevron Corp. and BP, called the pact a "milestone" in the relationship that would help strengthen economic and diplomatic ties.

23 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The Secretary of the Libyan General People's Congress (GPC) for Foreign Affairs, Chehoumi Suleiman, met with an Italian parliamentary delegation. The two parties discussed ways of developing relations.

24 May 2010 (Misurata):

The director of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), Mohamed Atta Al-Moula Abbas, met with Muammar Gaddafi to convey a verbal message from President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir stressing the need for more support and

solidarity on the Darfur crisis. The request has to do with the presence of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel group's members in Libya.

24 May 2010 (Tripoli):

The 13th session of the Libya-Burundi Joint Commission opened under the co-chairmanship of the secretary of the Libyan General People's Committee for Social Affairs Ibrahim Cherif, and the Burundian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Augustine Nzanza.

26 May 2010 (London):

New sanctions on Iran will create difficulties but the Islamic Republic will be able to live with them, said Shokri Ghanem, the chairman of Libya's National Oil Corporation.

28 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Gabonese leader Ali Bongo Ondimba visited Libya and was received on arrival by Muammar Gaddafi. The two leaders discussed strategies to strengthen the African Union and projects for creating the United States of Africa.

29 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Some members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group released from prison last March denounced violence and are now committed to discrediting al-Qaeda. Muammar Gaddafi's younger son, Said al-Islam, is an important player in this process.

Mauritania

10 May 2010 (Nouakchott):

The Coordination of the Democratic Opposition (COD), which groups a dozen political parties, called for a massive demonstration to hasten the departure of President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. The opposition accused the President of disregarding institutions and ruining the economy.

10 May 2010 (USA):

The Mauritanian diaspora in the United States organized a demonstration to protest against the statement whereby Prime Minister Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf announced his intention to generalize the use of Arabic at all levels of the administration and educational system. They argue that this will be "cultural genocide" against African Mauritians.

12 May 2010 (Geneva):

Mauritania was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

14 May 2010 (Nouakchott):

Former President Ely Ould Mohamed Vall was chosen to lead a new political party, the Alternative Forces Party for Democracy and Liberty (PFADL).

16 May 2010 (Nouakchott):

A Mauritanian court began with the trials of 19 suspected members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, including three men suspected of killing four French tourists in 2007.

23 May 2010 (Tripoli):

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Naha Mint Hamdi Ould Mouknass expressed her country's willingness to promote relations with Libya during a visit with the purpose of discussing the implementation of recommendations of their joint commission.

31 May-1 June 2010 (Nice):

Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz attended the 25th Africa-France Summit. Topics such as the institutional crisis in Africa, and security, particularly the fight against terrorism and drug, arms and human trafficking, were addressed.

Morocco

3 May 2010 (New York):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met several foreign ministers participating in the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

6-7 May 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi led his country's delegation through the 16th Tunisian-Moroccan High Joint Committee, where a set of agreements were signed, namely on trade, environment, technology and water resources.

11-12 May 2010 (Rabat):

Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevsky visited Morocco for the first time. He met his counterpart Abbas El Fassi, the Speaker of the House

of Representatives, Abdelwahed Radi, and the President of the Assembly of Councilors, Mohamed Seik Bijadila. Several agreements were signed with the purpose of strengthening economic cooperation

17 May 2010 (Rabat):

Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi claimed, in a mid-term report to parliament, that advances in employment, education and maternal health had been made. Opposition politicians allege that the report fails to acknowledge government failures, particularly in housing and unemployment.

18 May 2010 (Riyadh):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Taib Fassi Fihri delivered a written message from King Mohammed VI, which is part of the constructive consultations between the two kingdoms regarding current international and regional issues and the broader interests of the Islamic and Arabic worlds.

18 May 2010 (Rabat):

Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi called on Spain to reopen dialogue in order to "end the occupation" of Ceuta and Melilla. The minister also asked Madrid to commit itself to a "futuristic vision" for the "common interest" and "good neighborliness" between the two countries.

19 May 2010 (Dubai):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum. Taib Fassi Fihri delivered a written message from King Mohammed VI which is part of the constructive consultations between the two countries regarding current international and regional issues and the supreme interests of the Islamic and Arabic worlds.

25 May 2010 (Rabat):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri urged the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to check up on Western Saharans living in refugee camps in neighboring Algeria under the control of the Polisario Front.

31 May-1 June 2010 (Nice):

Prince Moulay Rachid represented King Mohammed VI in the 25th Africa-France Summit.

Tunisia

1 May 2010 (Ottawa):

During an official visit to Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamel Morjane, met with his Canadian counterpart Lawrence Cannon. Both stressed the political will to promote partnership opportunities. Kamel Morjane also met with the Canadian International Trade Minister Peter Van Loan, with the Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken, and with Tunisian expatriates in Canada.

5 May 2010 (Cairo):

The Secretary of State in charge of Maghreb, Arab and African Affairs, Abdelhafidh Harguem, led a Tunisian delegation to the ministerial meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee. Abdelhafidh Harguem emphasized Tunisia's position towards the Palestinian cause and its support to all initiatives and efforts designed to reach a just and comprehensive settlement, in accordance with international law.

5 May 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received Pakistan's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan, who said that the meeting represented an opportunity to discuss the development of the excellent relations between Tunisia and Pakistan and to boost them.

5 May 2010 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane received Latifa Akharbach, the Moroccan Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation. Akharbach, who visited Tunisia as part of the meeting of the 12th session of the Tunisian-Moroccan Follow-up and Co-ordination Committee, expressed Morocco's will to strengthen Tunisian-Moroccan relations with a view to serve the two peoples' interests.

7 May 2010 (Tunis):

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali met with Moroccan Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi, who pointed out that the meeting had allowed a review of the progress of bilateral co-operation and joint reflections on the outcome of the Tunisian-Moroccan 16th session of the High Joint Commission, as well as on several regional, Arab and international issues.

9 May 2010 (Tunis):

The party of President Ben Ali won 90.67% of the seats in local government elections across the country.

10-11 May 2010 (Tunis):

The 2nd Maghreb Businessmen's Forum, held in collaboration with the Maghreb Employers' Union (UME) and the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), said regional integration could be improved.

11 May 2010 (Brussels):

The 8th session of the Tunisia-European Union Association Council convened under the co-chairmanship of Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane and his Spanish counterpart Miguel Moratinos. The Council decided to strengthen EU-Tunisian relations through an advanced statute.

12-14 May 2010 (Tunis):

Syria's Prime Minister Mohamed Néji el Otri led his country's delegation through the Tunisian-Syrian 11th session of the High Joint Commission.

13-14 May 2010 (Tianjin):

Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane headed the Tunisian delegation in the 4th ministerial meeting of the Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum, whose opening session was chaired by the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Wen Jiabao. Morjane pointed at the progress of Arab-Chinese relations and the need to further elevate them to the level of a strategic partnership.

15 May 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received Shamshad Akhtar, the World Bank Vice-President for the Middle East and North Africa. Akhtar said that talks provided an opportunity to review the existing cooperation program and the World Bank's commitments in Tunisia.

18 May 2010 (Tunis):

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to discuss Tunisian-Chinese relations and current international issues. The Chinese official emphasized both countries' similar views on major regional and international issues.

18 May 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received Japanese Deputy-Foreign Minister Kenichiro



Sasae. According to the Japanese dignitary, the meeting focused on economic relations and other topics of common interest such as climate change.

20 May 2010 (Tunis):

Religious Affairs Minister Boubaker El Akhzouri received Sheikh Ravil Gainoutdine, the Chairman of the Russian Shura Council of Muftis. A memorandum of understanding was signed providing the exchange of legislative and legal texts ruling Islamic affairs and of expertise and experiences in matters of training imams and preachers.

21-22 May 2010 (Tunis):

Shamshad Akhtar, World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa region, vis-

ited Tunisia, where she was received by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Minister of Development and International Cooperation Mohamed Nouri Jouini, Governor of the Central Bank Taoufik Baccar, and several other members of government. The visit was part of ongoing consultations.

24 May 2010 (Tunis):

Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane received Nadejda Guerassimova, the Deputy Speaker of the Duma, Russia's lower representative house. Guerassimova expressed Russia's attachment to strengthening cooperation relations with Tunisia in several sectors, notably investment, energy, environment, tourism, youth and sports.

25 May 2010 (Tunis):

Minister of Trade and Handicrafts Ridha Ben Mosbah announced that Tunisia's foreign trade has posted an upward trend in the first four months of 2010 in "almost all sectors".

26 May 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received Adoum Gargoum, Deputy Minister of Cameroon's Foreign Relations Ministry in charge of relations with the Islamic World. The meeting focused on economic relations.

Reading List

Rabah Aissaoui, "Algerian Nationalists in the French Political Arena and Beyond: The Etoile Nord-Africaine and the Parti du Peuple Algérien in Interwar France" (*The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2010): 1-12.

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Andrea Liverani, *Civil Society in Algeria: The Political Functions of Associational Life* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (eds.), *The Maghrib in the New Century: Identity, Religion, and Politics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007).

Yahia Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernández (eds.), *North Africa: Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

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