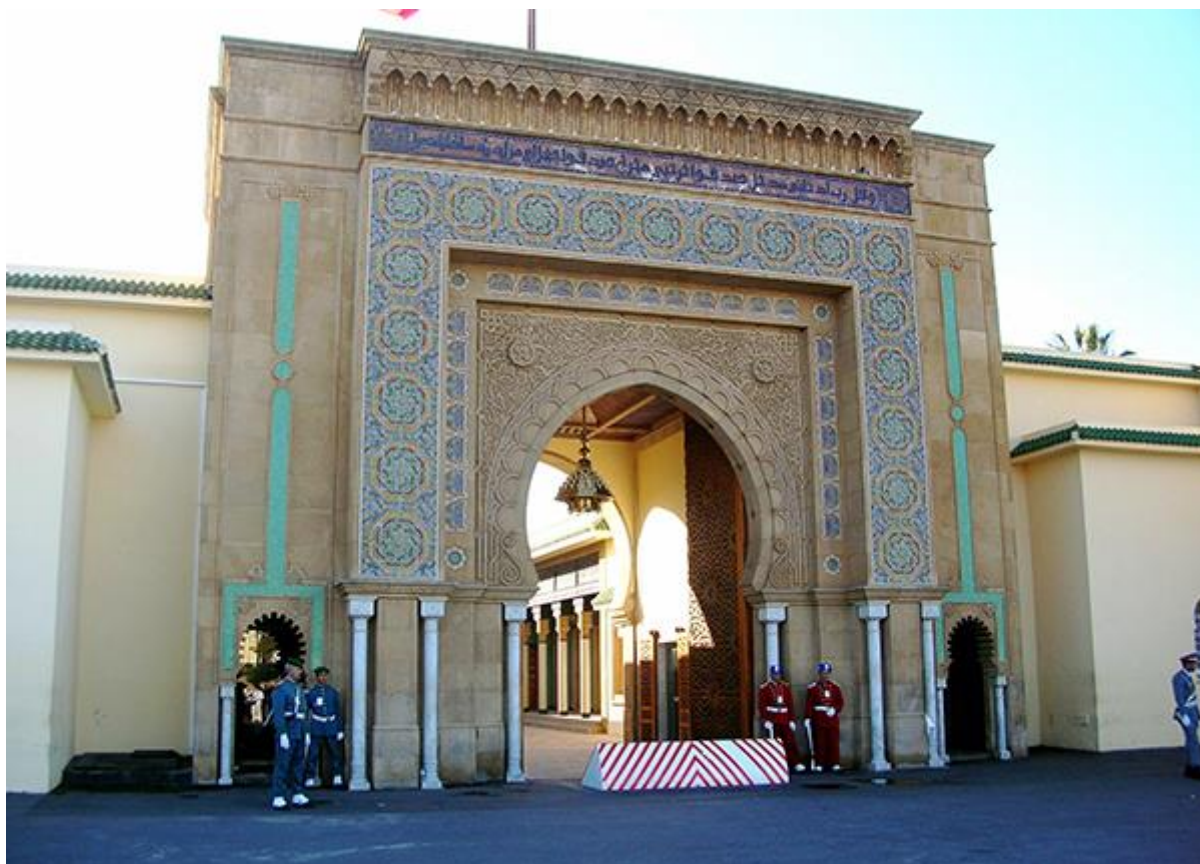


Morocco: a singular path in a troubled region

Youssef Amrani, 3/3/2016



Royal Palace, Rabat, Morocco. Photo: Bernard Gagnon (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Since 2011 the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been grappling with many hotbeds of instability, internal strife and an existential struggle against extremist terrorism.

The region has transitioned from the great hopes for change towards a spiral of fragmentation, insecurity and fragility and continues to face complex emergency situations on an unprecedented scale. The conflicts caused untold damage to human lives and physical infrastructures, as 15 million people have fled their countries. **Syria** today is an increasingly fragmented nation and the humanitarian situation remains extremely challenging.

The picture is no brighter in **Iraq**, where the deteriorating security situation and armed conflict in the country have caused new waves of internal displacement. In **Libya**, only a political solution, inclusive dialogue and democratic and representative institutions, within the framework of Libyan national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty can help resolve the serious crisis gripping the country. It was with this in mind that all warring Libyan parties agreed at the end of December 2015, in Skhirat (Morocco), on the formation of the Government of National Unity, which is an important step on the path to peace and stability.

Power vacuums across the region, porous borders and fragile states have enabled new players to gain momentum and territory: the terrorist groups, which control large swathes of land and significant segments of the population. **The proliferation of such non-democratic and violent**

forces in the region is a serious threat to the idea of a nation state. They are intent on constructing alternate political realities.

All this geopolitical mess confirms that no state or multilateral actor, however powerful it may be, can impose on its own solutions to overcome the crisis. It also confirms that military interventions, when not backed by post-conflict political support, have led to major crises not only in the countries concerned but also in their respective neighborhoods.

Within this particular regional geopolitical context, **Morocco**, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI, chose its own path and resolved to work towards consolidating its democracy. Indeed, at a time when political transitions evolve in extremely tense conflict situations, Morocco has confidently pressed ahead with its political agenda, endeavouring since the country's independence to foster a liberal, multiparty environment conducive to strengthening the Rule of law while displaying a firm commitment to international democratic principles, in full harmony with the country's traditions of tolerance and openness.

The Moroccan global approach is different, unique, in that it capitalises on four elements: stability, vision, effective transformation and internationally-gained trust. These make Morocco's democratic path unique and successful.

Stability

There are a number of key factors which make Morocco's democratic path unique and successful, including its longstanding commitment to building democracy and its enduring option for modernity, political pluralism and economic liberalism.

The new Constitution adopted in July 2011 enshrined this continuous reform process and gave it a strong impetus, confirming its irreversible nature. This has resulted in a purely homegrown reform process, built on a specific approach with a special emphasis on inclusiveness, participation and ownership, which ensure its long-term sustainability.

Morocco has always considered change an opportunity for improvement, rather than wasting time and effort resisting it. In this respect, the advanced regionalisation plan to promote integrated, sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural development reflects Morocco's commitment to building a strong and diversified national economy which can generate wealth, create jobs and achieve social justice for all.

The country has reached such a level of institutional consolidation that the vast majority of its citizens and political, social and civil society actors are willingly engaged in contributing to the country's development through its institutions, which is a major step in its democratic transition process.

Morocco has also made significant progress in **economic development and environmental protection**. Despite the challenges posed by the international economic crisis, over the last decade there have been creditable results in terms of GDP growth and the development of the people's well-being through enhanced access to basic services, education, healthcare and wealth-generating activities.

The vision for the nation's future

This global vision for the nation's future is based on the firm commitment to build a social, participatory and inclusive democracy. Such a vision stems from a specific Moroccan model that accommodates its own needs and reflects its unique identity. King Mohammed VI's clear vision seeks to cover all aspects of human development by promoting, side by side, the two essential pillars that are economic and political development. Efforts to build a modern society include the adoption of several major sectoral strategies such as the **Green Plan**, which aims to create 1.5 million additional jobs in the agricultural -sector within 10 to 15 years, the **Emergence Plan**, which established a roadmap for 2020 for potential high-growth sectors like offshoring and aerospace, the **tourism 2020 plan** and many others.

To promote these industries, Morocco has major assets, including its strategic geographical position and world-class infrastructure, besides a skilled and cost-competitive workforce. The country offers strong incentive packages and financial support to attract international investors and business people. **It has chosen to be closely connected to Europe**, hence the Advanced Status it enjoys with the EU. Thus, beyond the strategic dimension and the mere logic of free trade between the two parties, Morocco seeks to achieve a stronger integration of its political, economic and social structures with the EU's.

Effective transformation

Morocco is keen to upgrade its inherent capabilities, as well as its infrastructures, through structuring projects, including the 'Tanger-Med' and 'Nador Ouest' ports, highways, express LGV trains, logistics and energy, with a view to enhancing its competitiveness. The Emergence Industry Plan has made it possible to create automotive and aeronautics sectors that are contributing to creating jobs and resources.

The country has managed to emerge as a major player in **global energy transition** with its Nor Solar Project, which aims to make 42% of its electricity capacity production derive from renewable sources by 2020 and to develop local industries, which offer great opportunities for domestic labour and exports. With a clean energy future, Morocco is pioneering a greener development and developing a cutting-edge solar technology. The King's inauguration of the Nor Plant is an example of this commitment to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Internationally-gained trust

Morocco's Foreign policy is based on the same guiding principles as those that have inspired its internal process: openness to the outside world, an attachment to moderation and tolerance, and a commitment to human development through solidarity-based policies and efficient cooperation.

Today, Morocco's voice of reason is more than ever necessary in an unstable regional environment, threatened by looming prospects of even greater danger for all. The country is deeply aware of these threats because its strategic location places it at the forefront of many interconnected challenges –from trans-border criminality to terrorism or, more worryingly, the collusion of both these worlds as becoming increasingly evident in the Sahel–.

In all its external policies, Morocco is a firm believer in the importance of **cooperation**. In terms of interaction with the Western world, not only is it the EU's leading partner within the Southern

neighborhood but it also holds firm to its deep and long-lasting bilateral alliances, for instance with the US. Morocco was the first country to recognise the US as an independent nation; in turn, the latter has designated Morocco as a major non-Nato ally and signed an FTA with it in 2004.

Morocco's African policy stems from the deep conviction that the continent needs more mutually beneficial partnerships, as well as human development programmes. King Mohammed VI believes that adapted and relevant models of cooperation, which rest on a win-win vision –such as **South-South cooperation**–, will enable Africa to stand on its own two feet.

Last but not least, the element that also characterises the Moroccan model is the trust placed by the international community in the country's stability to push forward its development model. In evidence, foreign investments directed to the country reached a record level in 2013. Additionally, the financial markets allowed the country to raise financing at very attractive rates, confirming the positive appreciation of the IMF and the support of the World Bank, which raised its loans to the country for the next four years from US\$750 million annually to US\$1 billion.

Stability, vision and effective transformation have been decisive factors in shaping the unique Moroccan democratic experience. As an alternative method, this third way of peaceful and evolutionary reform has allowed the country to embrace proactive change as the guarantee of its long-term stability while others in the region continue to fear change and to seek stability by maintaining the status quo.

For these reasons, and despite all the difficulties it may encounter, Morocco keeps moving forward. No matter the challenges, the essence is to keep moving in the right direction.

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