

THE PASSING OF MOROCCO'S KING HASSAN II
by John Duke Anthony

The King of Morocco, America's oldest ally and the first country to recognize the fledgling U.S. republic during the Administration of President George Washington, has died. As anticipated, accession to the kingship of King Hassan II's eldest son and Heir Apparent, the 35-year old Moulay, now King, Mohammad VI, proceeded smoothly and effectively. Also as expected, no significant changes in Morocco's domestic and foreign policies are envisioned at this time.

What, if anything, are the implications for American and other international interests in the passing of Africa's and one of the Arab and Islamic world's longest-serving heads of state? At first glance, the most important certainty is certainty itself.

In this, for the many who have applauded some of the routes less traveled that Morocco chose to traverse for the past decade - in the areas of constitutional reform, economic liberalization, political pluralism, advancement of human rights, the pursuit of a just and durable peace between Arabs and Israelis -- there is comfort.

For those who pray and plot for the quicker rather than later passing of hereditary systems of governance -- for the demise of the Arab and Islamic world's emirs, shaikhs, sultans, and monarchs -- their day, certainly with regard to Morocco, appears to be no nearer to hand than before. Indeed, a case can be made that, in large measure because of the timeliness, relevance, and overall popularity of the late King's reforms, the eminence of the Moroccan monarchy's political demise is even more distant than it was when Hassan II succeeded his father as King of Morocco in 1960.

To say this is but to underscore the extent to which the Middle East has become so topsy-turvy within the adult lifetime of a single person: the late King of Morocco. Had he lived and chosen to speak his mind on the subject, it's likely that he would have agreed with Diogenes, who is alleged to have requested that he be "buried with my face to the ground, for in no time at all the world will likely be upside down."

There are ironies here. For one, search any library on the Middle East from the mid-1950s onward, and the work of one political science author to the next will be shown as having predicted with a certainty bordering on arrogance that, in short order, all the Arab world's dynasts would be overthrown, blown away as so many will-o'-the-wisp dandelions into the dust.

Conventional wisdom of the day postulated that the wave of the future belonged to the Nasirists and their camp followers from Morocco to Muscat, from Baghdad to Berbera, from Aden to Algiers and Aleppo in between.

Pundits prognosticated that the coming generation, nowadays' nineteen nineties -- yesterday's tomorrow -- would be led not by Hassan II and his dynastic counterparts, or anyone else whose lot was hereditary, but, rather, by the proverbial middle class military officer, the khaki-clad knight on horseback.

But, in Morocco, as elsewhere - read the six GCC countries and Jordan - this was not to be. That this proved not to be the case was in large measure because Hassan II was not bereft of equestrian political skills of his own. With his own innate leadership traits and penchant for cunning and daring, combined with the resources that accrue to and remain at the disposal of any incumbent, he managed to outwit and outlast those who would have relegated his and his heirs' dynastic genre to the dust heaps of history.

That those who sought to precipitate the late King's political demise failed in the end was not, however, for lack of trying. Twice, in 1970 and again in 1971, they came close to succeeding. Nor, for that matter, can it be said that they truly failed in the end. For, indeed, the King's opponents can claim credit for having quickened his conscience and common sense to realize that the national interest dictated that he institute sweeping constitutional, political, economic, and human rights reforms.

For many, to be sure, the issue all along was not so much politics but jobs, material well-being, an improved standard of living. But here, too, the Morocco of Hassan II's twilight years, if not exactly re-born, was far from stagnant.

Indeed, if the time frame is the 1990s, and the focus is on contemporary Africa's 55 independent nations, one would be hard-pressed to find another country, save the possibility of Egypt, Tunisia, or South Africa, that would rival Morocco as the regional Olympic Champion of economic reform. Few developing countries have traveled as far and as fast in reforming the underpinnings and trappings of its economy and socio-political system as Morocco in the last decade of the late King's reign.

One would have to search still farther to find any other country where, until this past weekend, a prime minister - Moroccan Prime Minister Yousefi, who had once been condemned to death by King Hassan -- serves to this day, as Yousefi does, as his country's first minister.

Participants in the Moroccan programs and activities of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations have been eyewitnesses to the ongoing implementation of a range of economic and political reforms launched during the era of Hassan II.

In tandem with comparable changes afoot in Egypt and Tunisia, among Morocco's fellow Arab North African countries, King Hassan's and the Moroccan Parliament's reform-minded policies and actions have consistently received high marks from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Together with Tunisia, Morocco has been a pacesetter in embracing the economic precepts of globalization and in forging a multi-faceted trade and investment relationship with the member-states of the European Union.

As yet, the number of American firms that are aware of and appreciate the implications for their bottom line business objectives of establishing joint commercial ventures in Morocco remains very few. However, among those who have seized such opportunities, including those that have invested in Morocco for its own economic potential, are U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee members AT&T, Boeing Corporation, CMS Energy, and Mobil Oil Corporation.

Altogether, a pioneering two dozen or so U.S. companies have thus far "seen the light" and taken advantage of Morocco's low labor costs, favorable regulatory environment, and array of foreign investment incentives to establish export-oriented businesses in Morocco for the precise purpose of being able to sell to the 330 million-plus European Union consumer market duty-free.

In heightening their awareness of the opportunities for American businesses in the "new Morocco," U.S. Congressional Representatives and staff have not been far behind. In March 1999, 112 Members of Congress signed a "Congressional Friends of Morocco" letter to President Bill Clinton. Shortly afterwards, First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Morocco along with visits to Egypt and Tunisia.

In keeping with this momentum, Under-Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Stuart Eizenstadt visited the region and articulated a vision of enhanced foreign investment, liberalized trade arrangements, and regional economic cooperation between the U.S. and all five Maghreb nations - Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Alongside these developments, the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations briefed the press corps accompanying Mrs. Clinton's visit to Morocco; organized and escorted to Morocco over the past twelve months six separate Congressional staff delegations; facilitated the establishment last week of a Committee for Morocco-American Affairs (with the National Council as its Secretariat); and welcomed the return this past weekend of a National Council and Virginia Military Institute (VMI) delegation of America's leaders of tomorrow who have just completed the Council's and VMI's annual six-week Arabic Language and Islamic Studies "Passage to Morocco" Program, complete with home stays in Moroccan families in the city of Fes.

It is too soon to gauge the full measure of the legacy that Hassan II bequeathed to his son and the Moroccan people. However, beyond the fact that the baton of national leadership has been passed to the new king, Mohammad VI, and with it the task of governing one of the world's most interesting and important countries, there is much else of interest and value for Americans and others to ponder.

Consider it for a moment. Morocco is a country that is at once African, Arab, Maghrebian, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Islamic. It is a land that is blessed with coastal frontage and twenty ports on two seas. It has a geography and natural resource base - with its mountains, valleys, rivers, trees, and verdant fields - that is as variegated as any in the developing world. Its people are the heirs of an extraordinarily rich culture and heritage. And within its archives, and down to this day in the country's dealings with the world beyond its shores, is abundant and ongoing evidence of a record of friendship with the United States and the American people that, among the world's polities, is second to none.

* * * * *
John Duke Anthony, Publisher and Senior Analyst of Gulf Wire, is President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and Secretary-Treasurer of the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee.

LAST LINES

Independent commentary provided in 'GulfWire' and materials contained in the linked Internet sites do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations or the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. News extracts and links contained in GulfWire have been reported in various media. GulfWire and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations/U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee have not independently verified the accounts referred to and do not vouch for their accuracy or the reliability of Internet links.

Internet links were active the day of publication in GulfWire. Some hyperlinks are longer than one line of text and may not properly 'wrap around' in your email. You may need to cut and paste these links to your Web browser.

The 'GulfWire' is an information service of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee Secretariat. Please feel free to forward this edition of the 'GulfWire' to your friends and colleagues, and suggest additions to our mailing list.
[CLICK HERE](#)

For more information on the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee visit the web sites of the [National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations](#) and the [U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee](#) or call (202)293-0801.

National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations
President and CEO: Dr. John Duke Anthony

PATRICK W. RYAN
Editor-in-Chief, GulfWire
<mailto:gulfwire@ArabiaLink.com>
C. R. TRISDALE
Deputy Editor, GulfWire
<mailto:CRTrisdale@ArabiaLink.com>

The GulfWire e-newsletter and Web site are developed, produced and maintained by [Ryan & Associates](#).



Copyright © 2001, GulfWire
All rights reserved.