NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

Questions of Identity: Politics in France, Morocco and Algeria

Mr. BENJAMIN G. ZIFF, DEPARTMENT OF STATE

COURSE 5604
THE GLOBAL SECURITY ARENA

PROFESSOR
COL. SCOTT LLOYD

ADVISOR
ROBERT CALLAHAN

Questions of Identity: Politics in France, Morocco and Algeria

Plus ca change, plus c-est la chose différent – France

France finds itself in difficult straits: an economic downturn, serious corruption scandals involving even President Jacques Chirac, and the prospect of a reduced role for France in the European Union. The anticipated admission of ten new states into the EU in May 2004 – countries with unhappy memories of France's lack of enthusiasm for eastward enlargement and Chirac's unfortunate comments about that enlargement in early 2003 – will not benefit France. The challenges of reforming an expensive and inefficient healthcare system, ongoing privatization of state-owned industries, and countering increasing public cynicism are problems which also find an echo in France's former colonies.

France and her Maghrebi ex-colonies are worlds apart in economic development yet inextricably linked by the political challenges inherent in the definition and redefinition of national identity. As the hegemonic power for decades in both Algeria and Morocco, France's influence is still felt on every level, from the institutional to the social to the linguistic. Given this history, the Maghrebis are both attracted and repelled to and by France – a country to be emulated or maligned, but never ignored.

France, too, has a schizophrenic relationship with its former clients. France's 44-year occupation of Morocco and, to an even greater extent, the actual incorporation of

Algeria into metropolitan France for over a century, engendered a powerful web of personal, social, political and commercial links. These links survived France's (and Spain's) negotiated exit from Morocco in 1956 intact, as well as France's defeat by Algerian nationalists in 1962. France regards these nations as markets, as sources of raw materials, as a zone of hegemony, and, more problematically, as the font of illegal immigrants and Islamic fundamentalism which threaten France's security and challenge its national identity.[1] The recent decision by French authorities to ban the use of headscarves by Muslim women in public schools is but the latest controversy in the battle to define who and what is French.

Islamic influence is not only of concern within France, but fundamentalist movements in the region – particularly the stunning Islamic showing in Algeria's 1991 elections – have drawn increasing U.S. attention to France's back yard. The Eizenstadt Initiative for the creation of a common Maghreb market and negotiations for a bilateral U.S. – Morocco free trade agreement are pre-September 11 expressions of U.S. interest in the region. In the wake of the Trade Center attacks, the need to combat terror has stimulated increased U.S. military aid and cooperation with both Algeria and Morocco, discomfiting France's hegemonic pretensions.

Among the questions that emerge from this all-too-brief examination of French-Maghrebian relations are:

Given that Algerian and Moroccan Muslims make up approximately 5 percent of France's population, and are among the most economically disadvantaged, how does

[1] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, France, March 2004, <www.eiu.com>, p. 1-2.

France plan to integrate these immigrants more effectively? What is the vision of "Frenchness" held by the government for these immigrants?

What effect are these new immigrants having on France's politics? For whom are they voting and what issues are of most interest to them? How else are these groups a factor on the French domestic and international political scene? What effect, if any, does the presence of migrants from Algeria and Morocco have on the fortunes of France's right wing parties?

The Algerian Islamic militant group AIS took part in terrorist acts inside France during Algeria's wave of terror. How concerned are French authorities about future terrorist acts by Moroccan or Algerian immigrants?

What kind of political relations does France seek with Algeria and Morocco? What role does France see for the European Union in the Maghreb? Should Morocco's associate status be upgraded? What of Algeria's relationship to the EU?

How does France regard the increasing activity and influence of the United States in the Maghreb? Are these activities challenging or complementary to French interests in the region?

What steps is France taking to control the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean onto French soil? Are Morocco and Algeria cooperating?

Le Roi Est Mort, Vive Le Roi! - Morocco

The death of King Hassan II in 1999 after a 38-year reign closed the first chapter of Morocco's post-colonial history. Hassan II's supporters credit him with consolidating Moroccan independence and ably shepherding Morocco through the Cold War shoals by keeping the country politically non-aligned but tilting toward the West. The king's critics, in turn, contend that stability's price tag was too high: economic and political stagnation, corruption, and serious repression and widespread violations of human rights. Economically, the country did not develop: more than fifty percent of the workforce was

employed in agriculture, a sector which made up almost twenty percent of the GDP.[2] As poverty grew, political and economic elites fed at the government trough while ranks of the poor and unemployed swelled.

Upon assuming the throne in 1999, Hassan IV's primary challenges were social and economic. Algeria's population tripled in 50 years, from 10 million in the mid 1950's to 31 million in 2003. More than 40 percent of the population is under age 20 – a group suffering almost a 40 percent unemployment rate, a rate that is increasing by 7 percent annually.[3] The deteriorating economic prospects for young Moroccans and the stultified political atmosphere provide fertile ground for the recruitment of Islamic radicals who sensed that the new king was of a more liberal bent than was his father. Indeed, Hassan IV's government's decision to liberalize the *Mudawwana,* the Code of Personal Status, expanding the divorce and property rights of women, provoked an Islamic backlash. In March of 2000, several hundred thousand Moroccans demonstrated in Casablanca to denounce the proposed reforms.[4] The eventual passage of the reformed *Moudawwana* in early 2004 makes Morocco, on paper, one of the most liberal of Middle East regimes. However, the new king's more liberal tendencies make him a ripe target for Islamic anger, and future changes will probably challenge the more conservative elements of Moroccan society. This challenge was underscored on May 16, 2003, when several suicide bombings rocked Casablanca, killing 29 Moroccans and Europeans. The attacks

---

[2] Azzedine Layachi, "Morocco: Will Tradition Protect the Monarchy?", in The Middle East in 2015: The Impact of Regional Trends on U.S. Strategic Planning. ed. Judith Yaphe (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2002), 45.

[3] "Morocco: USAID 2000," <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp2000/ane/morocco.html>

[4] Michael M. Laskier, "A Difficult Inheritance: Moroccan Society under King Muhammad VI," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Volume 7, No. 3 (September 2003): 6.

shocked Moroccans who believed their country to be secure from such violence, and rallied popular support around the King. The more radical Islamists toned down their rhetoric, but the attacks dampened calls for the king to give up his extensive powers, ending calls for a more liberal political climate.[5]

Moroccan politics remains centered around the king. He presides over the cabinet, can hire or fire any minister at will, and appoints key members of the government. Despite freedom of the press guarantees inscribed in the 1996 constitution, some journalists have faced fines and prison time for publishing details about government corruption and malfeasance.[6]

Morocco's regional situation is complicated as well by its annexation of Spanish Sahara, which it did in the aftermath of the Spanish departure from the territory in 1974. The Spanish Sahara issue is a major problem in Moroccan – Algerian relations, for the Sahrawais who live in the territory, and for the hundreds of thousands of Sahrawi refugees living in camps in southern Algeria. Although Algeria has ceased materially supporting the Sahrawi insurgent Polisario since a ceasefire was declared in 1991, Morocco continues to postpone a proposed United Nations referendum determining the future of the territory.

Immigration northward remains a thorny subject between Morocco and both France and Spain. As the closest African point to Europe, Morocco is the transshipment locale of choice for sub-Saharan Africans seeking to smuggle themselves across the

---

[5] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, Morocco, February 2004, <www.eiu.com>, p. 7.

[6] Michael M. Laskier, "A Difficult Inheritance: Moroccan Society under King Muhammad VI," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Volume 7, No. 3 (September 2003): 63.

Mediterranean. No small number of Moroccans, seeking a better life, also attempt the trip, and France plays host to a large expatriate Moroccan community. While the Moroccan government is engaged with both Spain and France on the issue, it argues that Morocco lacks the resources to police its own borders and claims that the northern tier Mediterranean nations are not doing enough to assist the southern Med nations in improving economic conditions. A more cynical view is that Morocco is loathe to reduce the massive remittances it receives from its expatriates – approximately $3.78 billion in 2003 – and is therefore slow-rolling any initiatives to stem that tide.[7]

A final political challenge for Morocco echoes that of France: how to incorporate the demands of the ethnic minorities – in this case the between 30 and 40 percent of the total population of Morocco which is Berber – and who demand greater cultural recognition, including the teaching of the Berber language and an end to restrictions on registering Berber names for children. Hassan II was keen to reinforce the Islamic legitimacy of his monarchy and the Arab character of Morocco by repressing expressions of the large Berber minority. It remains to be seen how Hassan IV will deal with renewed and more vigorous calls to allow the Berber's broader expressions of their cultural identity.

A few questions which arise from Morocco's political climate include:

Analysts argue that Morocco's economic progress is slowed by a lack of political liberalization. Given the challenges faced by the government from both the Islamic right and the Berber left, what course will Morocco take to guide the democratic development of the nation?

---

[7] "Moroccan expats remittances rise by 7.4% in 2003,"<http://www.arabicnews.com>, (Feb. 6, 2004).

How is the government dealing with the Islamic threat demonstrated by the Casablanca bombings? How do human rights considerations factor into that equation?

Why is Morocco keen on preventing the holding of a referendum for the Sahrawis to determine their own fate? Is Morocco not doing to Western Sahara what the French and Spanish did to Morocco?

The reforms of the Moudawwana were passed in the face of strong Islamic opposition. How will the government ensure that these reforms are actually carried out in practice?

How is Morocco dealing with calls for cultural recognition from its significant Berber minority? Is this considered a threat to Morocco's "Arab" nature?

France, one of Morocco's key patrons, is unlikely to be pleased with improved U.S. – Moroccan relations. How does Morocco view the warming relations with the United States and where does Morocco see its relationship with the United States?

King Hassan II was a key player in the Middle East Peace Process, a role Hassan IV has seemed reluctant to fill. Given Morocco's traditional openness to Israel and ability to mediate between the Israelis and Arabs, does King Hassan IV see himself following in his father's footsteps in the Middle East conflict?

Le Pouvoir et Nous – Algeria

Algeria emerged from over 130 years of French dominance in 1962, scarred from seven years of bloody war that left over a million people dead. As part of incorporating Algeria into metropolitan France as a true department, the long French occupation erased native institutions of governance and replaced them with French counterparts. With the French gone and Algerian national identity forged solely around the independences struggle, political legitimacy became equated exclusively with revolutionary participation. As the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) led the armed struggle for independence, FLN representatives or associated military officers – collectively known as "le pouvoir" or "the power" -- have wielded political power in Algeria ever since. The dissonance between the legitimacy of this ever-smaller elite which fought the French, and

the demands for political and economic openness by the successor generations, forms the crux of Algeria's political dilemma.

As in the case of Morocco, Algeria's political predicament is fundamentally economic. In the years since independence, Algeria's population has tripled and stands now at around 31 million. Unemployment is over 30 percent, and is particularly severe for the younger cohorts. Over 250,000 new job seekers enter the job market annually. The problem is made more acute by rampant urbanization: years of brutal rural Islamic terror have accelerated mass migration to the cities, whose urban infrastructures were built by the French for a colonial elite numbering well below a million – the population of greater Algiers now hovers close to five million souls.[8] The housing crunch, with an average of 7.15 persons per household, is one of Algeria's fundamental infrastructure (and therefore political) problems.[9]

Public dissatisfaction with the government's performance, coupled with low hydrocarbon income, drought, and empty socialist promises, spilled over into street protests in the late 1980's. The FLN decided the time was ripe for some democratic opening, and the country's first multiparty elections were held in June of 1990. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), riding a wave of public protest, did remarkably well. Fearing a massive Islamic majority in the assembly, the army stepped in to depose sitting

---

[8] Hugh Roberts, "Algeria: Can National Order be Restored," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Volume 7, No. 3 (September 2003): 17.

[9] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile, Algeria, 2003, <www.eiu.com>, p. 25.

president Bendjedid, canceled the election, banned the FIS and imposed a state of emergency not yet lifted.[10]

The frustration of the Islamist victory has led to a decade of bloody insurgency as Islamic militant groups targeted both civilians and government institutions – and detonated bombs in France. The violence engendered a proliferation of government security forces, leading to significant human rights abuses which in turn prompted U.S. distance from the Algerian regime.[11] France, however, made sure the Algerian regime was spared any severe consequences or significant international sanctions.[12]

Current president (and former Minister of Foreign Affairs) Abdelaziz Bouteflika, (FLN) backed by the military and their allies, was elected to office in April of 1999 – but only after all the other candidates pulled out the day before the vote. In a bid to put an end to the bloody civil war, Bouteflika put forward his 1999 Civil Concorde offering amnesty to Islamic militants willing to lay down their arms. While this did decrease some of the violence (particularly as the armed wing of the FIS did abandon the fight), other Islamist militants continue to terrorize Algeria and the security situation remains perilous outside of Algiers.

The events of September 11 muted Western criticism of Algerian human rights, and U.S. security cooperation with Algeria is on the rise. This has strengthened the hand of "le pouvoir" – particularly its military elements. Elections are scheduled for April, 2004, and Bouteflika is running for reelection, presumably with at least some backing from the

---

[10] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile, Algeria, 2003, <www.eiu.com> , p. 9.

[11] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War," Arab Studies Quarterly, (Summer 2001): p. 72.

military. But Bouteflika's primary rival, Ali Benflis, is prospering politically. Some analysts contend that the military is hedging its bets, allowing Benflis to "wait in the wings" to keep Bouteflika from truly reforming Algerian politics in any meaningful way.[13] Irrespective of the outcome of the April elections, significant questions remain as to how Algeria will deal with its tensions and contradictions:

Many critics argue that with the banning of overtly Islamic or ethnic political parties, and with the military being the ultimate arbiter of politics, there is no true democracy in Algeria. Is this a problem for Algeria's future?

What should be the appropriate role of the Algerian president in the political process? Is he the arbiter of political disputes, or merely the executive branch of "le pouvoir?"

How does the Algerian government plan to cultivate a successor generation of leadership to follow the independence generation? From what institutions of civil society will these leaders come?

Is the government of Algeria concerned that the militarization and fragmentation of politics, coupled with poverty and unemployment, will fragment the Algerian state?

The Islamist insurgency is a significant problem for the Algerian government. Are there political means to deal with the conditions that breed Islamic fundamentalists? What are they? What role should Islam play in public life in Algeria? In other countries? In France?

How does Algeria plan to balance its increasingly warm relationship with the United States with its traditional tilt toward France? In what directions does Algeria plan to leverage this newfound friendship?

Does Algeria see any resolution of the Western Sahara dispute with Morocco? Why does Algeria oppose the Moroccan position on that area? What role does the UN or the international community have in resolving the dispute?

What relationship does Algeria seek with its expatriate communities in Europe?

---

[12] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile, Algeria, 2003, <www.eiu.com>, p. 22.

[13] The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile, Algeria, 2003, <www.eiu.com>, p. 15.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile, Algeria, 2003, <www.eiu.com>, p. 15.

The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, Algeria, February 2004, <www.eiu.com>, p 1-15.

The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report, France, March 2004, <www.eiu.com>, p. 1-2.

The Economist Intelligence Country Report, Morocco, February 2004, <www.eiu.com>, p. 7.

Enhaili, Aziz and Oumelkheir Adda. "State and Islamism in the Maghreb," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol, 7, No. 1 (March, 2003).

Faria, Fernando. "Security in Northern Africa: Ambiguity and Reality," The European Union: Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper Series No. 25, (September 1996).

Goldschmidt, Arthur. A Concise History of the Middle East. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 2002.

Laskier, Michael M. "A Difficult Inheritance: Moroccan Society under King Muhammad VI" Middle East Review of International Affairs, Volume 7, No. 3 (September 2003): p. 6.

Layachi, Azzedine. "Morocco: Will Tradition Protect the Monarchy?", in The Middle East in 2015: The Impact of Regional Trends on U.S. Strategic Planning. ed. Judith Yaphe (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2002): p. 45.

Maddy-Waitzman, Bruce. "The Islamic Challenge in North Africa," Middle East Review of International Affairs, Issue 2, (July 1997).

"Morocco: USAID 2000," <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp2000/ane/morocco.html>

"Moroccan expats remittances rise by 7.4% in 2003,"<http://www.arabicnews.com>, (Feb. 6, 2004).

Roberts, Hugh. "Algeria: Can National Order be Restored," in The Middle East in 2015: The Impact of Regional Trends on U.S. Strategic Planning. ed. Judith Yaphe (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2002): p. 17.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War," Arab Studies Quarterly, (Summer 2001): p. 72.

White, Gregory. "A Political Economy of North African Immigration to Europe" Center for International Studies, University of Southern California, (November 20, 1997): p. 1-15.

Youngs, Richard. "The European Union and Democracy in the Arab-Muslim World," Centre for European Policy Studies, Working Paper No. 2, (November 2002): p. 1-10.

Zoubir, Yahia H. ed. North Africa in Transition: State, Society and Economic Transformation in the 1990s. Florida: University Press of Florida, (1999).