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Tunisia: EU incentives contributing to new repression

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Tunisia is easily the most overlooked dictatorship in the Arab World. President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali's regime competes with its homologues in Libya and Syria for the doubtful honor of being the most repressive authoritarian incumbency in the Mediterranean. However, unlike its neighbors, Tunisia has also been commended as a rare island of stability, economic dynamism and social modernity, qualities appreciated by Western policy-makers and investors alike.

Despite this, and in stark contrast to its economic success, Tunisia's political outlook is anything but rosy. Tunisian human rights activists are routinely harassed by secret service agents, using methods that range from grotesque to violent. Prominent rights activists, politicians from the opposition and their families are being openly followed and threatened by secret service agents on a daily

basis. Opposition websites, blogs and even social network sites like facebook are systematically blocked. Phone lines are being tapped, and individual email accounts monitored by a multitude of state servants. Tunisia, a modern Orwellian surveillance state par excellence, is now seeking closer ties with Europe.

The European Union has been struggling to find a suitable formula for dealing with this Janus-headed partner. Since the adoption of a EU-Tunisian Action Plan that outlined a catalogue for reforms in 2005, Tunisia's record in the economic sphere has been outstanding: it has become the first Arab southern Mediterranean country to establish a Free Trade Zone for industrial products with the EU in 2008. When it comes to economic policy, European diplomats are quick to say Tunisia "acts rationally". This is not the case in the area of political reform, in which Tunisia's record has not improved but worsened in recent years. In an attempt to find new and attractive incentives for reforming its southern neighbors, the EU has been negotiating with Tunisia the possibility of granting the country an upgrade of relations – a so-called 'advanced status'. Such a status, which was first granted to Morocco in 2008, would not only entail substantial additional aid, further trade liberalization and integration with the EU in several policy areas, but it would

also symbolically signal the country as being an 'advanced' EU partner in the Mediterranean.

In the midst of negotiations for this upgrade, Tunisian lawmakers have approved a controversial amendment to the Criminal Code that effectively forbids systematic contacts between Tunisian human rights activists and European institutions. The amendment, which entered into force on July 1st 2010, criminalizes "any persons who shall, directly or indirectly, have contacts with agents of a foreign country, foreign institution or organization in order to encourage them to affect the vital interests of Tunisia and its economic security". In other words, this piece of legislation allows the prosecution of anybody with international links, including human rights activists liaising with foreign governments, multilateral bodies and international NGOs. The proliferation beyond the country's borders of reports on human rights violations in Tunisia would also be inhibited if Tunisian authorities considered these to negatively affect its image. While local activists have been forcefully demanding that the EU impose stricter conditions relating to democracy before granting Tunisia advanced status, there can be no doubt that this amendment is a deliberate and very targeted measure by the regime to shut off any criticism coming from within the country that might spoil its



chances of being granted such an upgrade.

Recent statements from the Tunisian government have reinforced such fears: unconcerned with revealing the regime's true intentions, Minister of Justice and Human Rights Lashar Bououni explained in a recent parliamentary intervention that the term *affecting the vital interests of Tunisia* used in the amendment also included "inciting foreign parties not to extend credit to Tunisia, not to invest in the country, to boycott tourism or to sabotage the efforts of Tunisia to obtain advanced partner status with the European Union".

Lately, Tunisian activists have been under severe attack. In fact, those groups that are able to legally operate in Tunisia have been allowed to do so because of their international connections and networking capacity. It is the Tunisian regime's concern for its image abroad that has shielded these groups from a stronger control. Tunisian rights advocates now fear that by restricting international networking and advocacy, the new amended Criminal Code will break their last bastion of protection.

As things are, the desire to obtain new economic and political privileges from the EU emboldened the Tunisian regime to apply further measures of repression. In this sense, the EU's strategy of inducing political liberalization through incentives and integration has (at least temporarily) backfired. The EU must now react immediately, leaving no doubt that no further privileges or upgrades will be awarded as long as Tunisian human rights activists are kept from freely contacting international bodies. If the EU carries on with negotiations as usual, it becomes a *de facto* accomplice to the unacceptable dealings of the Tunisian regime, effectively ridiculing the rationale of democratic conditionality that is at the heart of the European Neighborhood Policy.

Algeria's economic nationalism: Vintage 2010

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Spring 2010 marked yet another chapter of the odd stop-and-start game that Algerian authorities have been playing over the last ten years: using (external) economic liberalization measures on the one hand and applying the principle of economic sovereignty on the other. The measures taken under the Complementary Finance Law adopted in July 2009 left many analysts quite puzzled and uncertain as to whether they represented a return to old protectionist leanings. These doubts were confirmed once it became clear that the two main policy-makers advocating economic liberalization over the last ten years had been fired. In a cabinet reshuffle announced on May 27th, President Bouteflika sacked Minister of Energy and Mines Chabib Khelil, a man who for many years was a regime strongman. Khelil had already been struck hard by a political setback in July 2006, when the then more liberalist Hydrocarbon Law, adopted just a year prior, was amended in a more interventionist sense. This was in the wake of a deal that was struck between the President and the formerly single trade union, the UGTA. A major corruption scandal uncovered earlier this year within the state hydrocarbon company Sonatrach added to the growing resentment towards Khelil and left his political reputation heavily damaged. Abdelhamid Temmar, the mastermind behind Algeria's economic liberalization, was the second person to fall victim to Bouteflika's cabinet reshuffle. Hav-

ing been in charge of the Ministry for Industry and Investment Promotion since 2008, he was moved to the Ministry of Forward-Looking Analysis and Statistics – a clear demotion which signals his waning influence in the overall power structure.

This cabinet reshuffle must be considered as yet another step in the strategy that Bouteflika has so consistently pursued since coming to power in 1999. This plan is designed to ensure and cement his own power base by gradually removing potential opponents, irrespective of whether these are senior army or secret services officers, party leaders, or the leaders of influential employers' organizations. Concerning the latter, the Forum des Chefs d'Entreprise chaired by Rida Hamdiani, for example, is currently confronted with the sudden emergence of a rival organization which can count on the support of a number of influential actors from within state companies.

One cannot ignore the economic policy implications of this reshuffle. The move was demanded by the Algerian government in the framework of the fifth session of the EU-Algeria Association Council, in order to renegotiate the tariff dismantling schedule set by the Association Agreement of September 2005. This agreement provides for the establishment of a Free Trade Area for industrial products between the EU and Algeria by 2017. According to the Algerian authorities, the first stage of implementation of the agreement has generated a cost in bygone state revenues of more than €2 billion since 2005. This was aggravated by the fact that imports from the EU have increased significantly (although not as much as those from the rest of the world) and European foreign investments only rose very modestly.

This move was compounded by Algeria's refusal to join the European Neighborhood Policy and consequently to agree on an Action Plan for aligning the partners' economic system with the EU's. Also, Algeria decided to delay ongoing negotia-

tions to join the World Trade Organization. These moves practically de-linked the Algerian economy from the EU single market and reflect the regime's growing focus on bilateral relations, on security issues (including migration), and on energy supply. This may have a negative impact on the already dim prospects of trade integration with neighboring Tunisia and Morocco.

The nature of Algeria's economic model, which revolves mainly around the optimization and management of oil rents, was further reinforced by the third National Investment Plan announced on May 24th 2010, following the adoption of two other plans in 2002 and 2004. This plan foresees investments of up to €230.8 billion in the country's transportation sector and in social infrastructures over the next five years (including the creation of 1,2 million housing units, 35 new dams, 80 football stadiums and 400 public swimming pools). This plan is likely to sustain nominal growth rates during the next years, although to a very modest extent. Since 2006 for instance, and in spite of several rounds of investments into the public sector, the economic growth rate was below 3%, and therefore only slightly above the demographic growth rate.

However, the true problems of the Algerian economic model are not addressed by any of these measures. A major question that must still be answered is how competitiveness can be boosted in an economy that continues to be dominated by a strong reliance on hydrocarbon rents, which provide for 75% of state revenue, 45% of the GDP, and which amount to more than 98% of exports despite the very low value of the Algerian dinar. At the same time, imports grew from US\$10 billion in 2000 to US\$40 billion in 2008 and have only marginally decreased after the oil price crisis and the anti-import measures that were introduced in 2009. Related to this is the question of how employment and job creation can be encouraged, considering that only 9 out of 34 million Algerians have a job and that the av-

erage wage stands at an embarrassingly low €200 per month.

Despite some recent successes regarding the promotion of agricultural production, current micro- and macro-economic developments have not fundamentally altered the prospects of the Algerian economy: although in 2010, for the first time in forty years, Algeria began exporting barley again, the country still imports more than 50% of its cereal consumption. Instead, the two key variables that determine the economic development of the country in the short to medium-term continue to be unrelated to sound macro-economic management: the regime's preoccupation with international price-setting for hydrocarbon goods remains strong, and perhaps more importantly, President Bouteflika's ulcer problem – for which he was operated some years ago – has become a non-negligible variable in the overall inner-Algerian power struggle.

Stalemate in the Western Sahara: The blocking trilogy

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The Western Sahara is one of the last remaining non self-governed territories, a 'state-in-waiting' that challenges our traditional understanding of territorially bound nation-states. A closer examination of this singular case would shed light on the emergence and perpetuation of transnational conflicts during the post-colonial period and beyond. Indeed, this far-reaching Western Saharan deadlock is an evocative example of the most conflict-ridden continent in the world and is the result and legacy of post-colonialism.

The failure to apply the principle of self-determination to the Western Sahara represented in the past a dramatic departure from a pattern of orderly decolonization advocated in Africa and other regions of the world. Furthermore, the longstanding inability to settle the Western Sahara dispute is a serious blow to international law regarding national identity and to global conflict resolution. In fact, it is a trilogy of factors – a negative assertion of the right to self-determination, a conditional interpretation of sovereignty, and a non-compliance with international law concerning territorial expansion by the use of force under both the *uti possidetis juris* and the 'extancy' principles – that has made holding a referendum on the Western Saharan deadlock in the territory impossible. Despite this, ascertaining the will of the Sahrawi people could be a significant step in ultimately resolving this conflict.

Originally conceived to deal with the problems of decolonization, the idea of the territorial integrity of states became, over time, a universal and indispensable norm meant to promote peace and international stability. This concept would go on to be converted or translated into the well-established principle of international law, i.e. the *uti possidetis juris*, which posited that the right to self-determination must not involve changes to existing frontiers at the time of independence, except upon the agreement of all the states concerned. Accordingly, the promotion of self-determination for colonial peoples gained prominence and was dominated by the principle of 'extancy', which encourages acceptance of the status quo or, to put it differently, the continuity of colonial boundaries under African control, regardless of territorial realities. Territorial acquisition by the use of force, on the contrary, was prohibited by international law.

While it is true that post-colonial Africa has experienced many clashes, few of those intra- or interstate con-



flicts having emerged from the decolonization process, or lack thereof, have resulted in the creation of a state-in-waiting. However, this was the case for the Sahrawi conflict which began in the 1970s.

As a result, the Western Sahara has only partial domestic sovereignty and limited international legal sovereignty (mutual recognition of states). This is because on the one hand, it does not exercise full jurisdiction over its boundaries, although this is not unprecedented as Cyprus, for instance, also deals with a de facto partition of its territory.

On the other hand, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) took on the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a full member, it also implicitly declared Moroccan control over the territory to be illegal, consequently allowing the Polisario government to legitimately maintain and strengthen its stance for more than 30 years. Notwithstanding recognition by its African peers and others like India and South Africa – respectively in 2000 and 2004 – vital international support by the UN and major Western states is still lacking. Without it, achieving the necessary boundary rectifications and confirmation of independent statehood remains impossible.

For the moment, the Western Sahara is still among the organization's non-self-governing territories, having Spain as the administering power and its decolonization process is still an open file converting it into the last African colony. As a result, the Western Sahara lies in a sort of limbo as a 'quasi-sovereign' state. While it has not succeeded in actually becoming a state because it lacks the external dimension of its right to self-determination, it has been able to exhibit reasons of state. Namely, it has until now retained its international personality, notably inside the African Union (AU), and was rather successful in implementing state-related practices in its refugee camps, as well as performing acts of stateness such as holding press conferences and producing a flag.

A possible explanation for such unrelenting continuity may be that differences in national power and interests, more than international legal norms, are strong motivators for state behavior. This definitively seems to be the case for the Western Sahara, since no 'coalition of the willing' has yet stepped up to bring an end to the conflict and occupation by a foreign power. Major international actors, perhaps over-identified with Morocco, appear to lack the political will to act decisively, choosing instead to continue delaying the resolution of this protracted conflict.

In reality, and despite being a straightforward case in terms of international legality, the Western Sahara state-to-be has been 'let down' by the incapacity or unwillingness of the global community to find an acceptable formula which puts in place the Sahrawi right to self-determination. That is the case of both the UN and the major Western powers. In short, the lack of vital support by the UN and major Western states also accounts for the failure of many attempts to find a resolution for this stalemate. Far from dissolving the conflict, these previous and currently missed opportunities have done nothing but perpetuate the status quo in the former Spanish colony.

The limits and potentials of Israel-Maghreb relations

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Israel's relations with Maghreb states have been shaped by a combination of factors: the region's French colonial legacy and distance from the historical cross-currents of Arab nationalism and from the Arab-Israeli conflict, geopolitical exigencies, North African state-building projects, intra-Maghreb rivalries, and the particular status of their respective Jewish communities. The Madrid-Oslo years were marked by major breakthroughs on the formal, aboveboard level of relations with Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania, witnessed tentative positive developments in the Algerian realm, and even included an admittedly odd episode of a visiting Libyan delegation to Jerusalem. The process went into reverse in fall 2000, with the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada. Subsequent conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza, and most recently the Turkish flotilla episode, have further inflamed public opinion in North Africa against Israel. However, the existence of continued parallel interests, and the emergence of new ones in recent years – the common need to combat radical Islamist movements and the expansion of Iranian influence, and to maintain and further develop close economic and political ties with the West – have ensured that Maghreb doors have not been entirely shut to Israel. In addition, the growing visibility of the Amazigh movement in North Africa has added a new dimension to the picture. Ultimately, the degree to which Israel-Maghreb relations will develop in a positive direction depends primarily on developments in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere, as well as the evolution of

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political and social currents within the Maghreb states. Both Morocco and Tunisia were firmly ensconced in the Western and Arab conservative camps during the Cold War, placing them on the defensive against the radical pan-Arabist current embodied by Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, the pan-Arab Ba'ath Party and opposite revolutionary socialist Algeria. Hence, both Rabat and Tunis had numerous parallel interests with Israel and pursued varying degrees of quiet cooperation. From Jerusalem's perspective, its links with Rabat constituted an Arab extension of its "periphery" policy, the cultivation of non-Arab actors on the Middle East periphery to counterbalance the pressure of radical, hostile Arab states. For Morocco, ensuring its positive image in the West necessitated cooperation with Israel in the early 1960s to allow for the orderly flow of Moroccan Jews out of the country and to Israel (in the early 1950s, on the eve of independence, they numbered close to 300,000); on the level of internal and regional security, Israel played an important supportive role for the regime of King Hassan II. Beginning in the mid-1970s, Morocco performed a facilitating role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, which often involved leading members of the Moroccan Jewish community, both in-country and in the Israeli and French Moroccan Jewish Diaspora. Morocco's more active role in Arab-Israeli affairs during these years was highlighted when the country hosted the secret Dayan-Tuhami talks in 1977 that paved the way for Sadat's visit to Jerusalem two months later, Hassan's hosting of a number of Arab conferences – one of which produced the 1982 Fez Arab



Peace Plan – and the resulting 1986 visit by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to promote the diplomatic process.

Under President Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia was openly combative towards Nasser. Its Jewish community, which numbered just over 100,000 at the dawn of independence in 1956, was able to leave the country more easily than Morocco's, and in 1965 Bourguiba even had the audacity to suggest – to a Palestinian refugee audience, no less – that the Arab world accept the UN's 1947 plan for the partition of Palestine. By the 1980s however, with Bourguiba's fading and ultimate removal from power in 1987 by Prime Minister and regime strongman Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia had tacked more strongly towards involvement in Arab affairs (e.g., hosting the PLO after its expulsion from Beirut in 1982, and Arab League headquarters following Egypt's suspension from the organization in 1979), thus bringing its position on Israel more into line with the Arab consensus articulated at the Fez Arab summit conference in 1982. In addition, nothing much would be left of the Jewish community after 1967, and unlike Morocco, the Tunisian authorities would not nurture a favorable image/myth of Jewish-Arab comity in the past, although some Tunisians would remain nostalgic for their Jewish neighbors.

Algeria, on the other hand, wholeheartedly embraced the "Palestine Revolution" after 1967, viewing the Fatah-led PLO as being kindred spirits to their own "war of liberation" against French colonialism from 1954 to 1962. The Algerian Jewish community on the other hand, numbering 140,000 persons on the eve of France's withdrawal, were viewed as having been inalterably on the side of the French during the war for independence, a fact "confirmed" by their mass departure in 1961-1962 along with the bulk of the European settler community. Algiers in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a preferred destination for hijackers of Western and Israeli airlines and supporters of Palestinian guerrilla organizations. The regime's legitimating formula and its bitter struggle with Morocco over the Western Sahara ensured that Algeria would be firmly located in the radical Arab camp, and in opposition to the Sadat initiative.

The regional and international sea changes at the end of

the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s opened the door to a renewed Arab-Israeli peace process in which Maghreb states participated. The five countries of the recently established Arab Maghreb Union (encompassing Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania) were symbolically represented at the 1991 Madrid peace conference by the AMU's Secretary-General. Morocco and Tunisia established formal low-level diplomatic ties with Israel in 1994-1995, following the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO. Indeed, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stopped over in Morocco on the way back from the PLO-Israeli signing ceremony in Washington to brief King Hassan II, indicating the degree to which Israeli-Moroccan relations had now been legitimized. Consequently, Morocco hosted with great fanfare the first MENA economic summit in Casablanca in October 1994. Unlike the Moroccans, the Tunisians were quite reluctant to establish formal diplomatic links and did so only at the prodding of the Americans. Tunisia refused to host the 5th MENA economic summit in 1999, further indicating its desire to downplay formal links with Israel and maintain an extremely low profile on the entire matter.

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Concurrently, an officially sanctioned delegation of Algerian journalists even visited Israel, causing considerable controversy at home. The Algerian position on the Arab-Israeli conflict was now essentially in line with the Arab consensus favoring a diplomatic solution. Still, a broad portion of both the Algerian elite and Algeria's surviving Islamist current remained strongly identified with the Palestinian cause and hostile to Israel.

Mauritania, for its part, established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999, with strong US encouragement. Indeed, the joint announcement was made in Washington by the three countries' foreign ministers. The extension of Israeli-Maghrebi links during the Oslo years was also expressed in a number of multilateral frameworks. In 1994, NATO launched the "Mediterranean

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Dialogue” to promote better relations and regional security between NATO and the pro-Western countries of the southern Mediterranean littoral: these included Israel, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania (by virtue of its AMU membership), Egypt, Jordan (technically not a Mediterranean country but an important actor in the Arab-Israeli peace process); Algeria formally joined the framework in 2000. Concurrently, in 1995, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Israel were included in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process), geared towards enhancing regional and bilateral cooperation in the economic, political and cultural fields.

Following the outbreak of the second intifada in late September 2000, Morocco and Tunisia adhered to an Arab League summit resolution mandating that formal diplomatic ties be cut with Israel. Since then, neither country has felt motivated to restore relations, notwithstanding Israel’s periodic entreaties, occasional high-level meetings between officials from both countries, and Israel’s lobbying on behalf of Moroccan interests in Washington, particularly on the issue of the Western Sahara and on development aid. Morocco has been comfortable enough with maintaining the status quo, i.e. a partially open door to Israel in the realms of tourism, diplomacy, and presumably security cooperation. In general, King Muhammad VI has shown far less inclination than his father to engage in inter-Arab affairs, thus distancing himself from Arab-Israeli diplomacy as well. In addition, the combination of the country’s ongoing political liberalization, which has made space for an Islamist political current, and the extension of the pan-Arab media to Morocco and Tunisia (whose effect was particularly noticeable during the Gaza War), has brought anti-Israel sentiment into the public sphere to a greater degree than before. The king’s official status as chairman of the Islamic Conference Organization’s “Jerusalem Committee”, which is charged

with safeguarding the Islamic character of the city, also makes him potentially vulnerable to Israeli unilateral actions in Jerusalem.

The current state of Tunisian-Israeli relations is roughly similar: occasional high-level diplomatic meetings and the beginning of organized Israeli tourism to Tunisia, which has already drawn criticism from what little political opposition is allowed.

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Mauritania, for its part, froze ties with Israel following the December 2008 Gaza war, which generated protest demonstrations among the public, and completely cut its links to Israel at the beginning of 2010. This shift was mainly an outgrowth of the political changes in that country during the last decade which have resulted in a widening of political space and, not coincidentally, a strengthened Islamist current. Iranian officials quickly sought to step into the breach: Iran’s foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, in the first such visit to Nouakchott in 27 years, promised to provide the necessary funding and expertise to operate the Israeli-established hospital there. Similarly, Qaddafi had offered aid in the past as an incentive to break off relations.

Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia all worry about radical Islamist activity among their citizens at home and those living in Europe. Morocco’s sensitivity regarding Iran’s expanding reach was manifested by its decision in March 2009 to break off diplomatic ties with Tehran, following Iranian statements deemed threatening to a fellow monarchy, Bahrain, coming against the background of Moroccan concern about Shi’i

proselytizing efforts in the kingdom.

Maghreb states’ overlapping interests with Israel were publicly manifested in the 2006 decision by Algeria, Morocco, and Israel to join NATO counterterrorism patrols in the Mediterranean, dubbed “Operation Active Endeavor”. The agreement was announced in Rabat at the end of the first NATO meeting ever held in an Arab country, a meeting in which Israeli, Tunisian, Moroccan, Alge-

rian, Mauritanian, Egyptian, and Jordanian representatives also took part. The renewal of Islamist violence in Algeria under the rebranded “al-Qa’ida of the Islamic Maghreb” further deepens the overlapping of Algerian, Western, and Israeli interests in the security field and the possibilities for cooperation. Progress on solving the long-running Algerian-Moroccan dispute over the Western Sahara (in which Israel is identified by Algiers as supportive of Morocco) would make it easier to advance Algerian-Israeli ties.

Economically, direct bilateral trade has been limited. Israel has provided some agricultural development assistance to Morocco, and the potential in this area, as well as in fields such as water management, solar technology and IT is considerable. Israeli tourism to Morocco has been quite consistent and lucrative for Morocco.

The Barcelona Process is generally viewed as not having produced significant progress, although it was relaunched at the 2008 Paris summit for the Mediterranean. Maghreb and other Arab states have been quick to blame setbacks in the Arab-Israeli peace process for their failure to consummate the Euromed space envisaged under the Barcelona Process.

The active Islamist currents in Morocco and Algeria, as well as those with a more secular Arab nationalist orientation, are vocally supportive of the Palestinian cause and hostile to Israel. Morocco is currently witnessing an initiative by these groups to legally ban all forms of “normalization” with Israel. Moroccan Islamists in particular have been vocally critical of the Berber/Amazigh ethno-cultural identity movement on many grounds, including its failure to show sufficient “solidarity” with the Palestinians. More recently, there has been considerable furor over the reported remarks by a Rabat imam that the Amazigh movement was essentially a wedge by which Zionism was seeking to penetrate the Maghreb.

Indeed, the Amazigh movement has long been a target for Arab nationalist and Islamist accusations of serving

Western imperialism, thanks to its rejection of the Arab-Islamic historical and civilizational narrative and its affinity to the universalist paradigm espoused in Western intellectual circles. The movement’s general discourse is critical of Arab nationalist and Islamist groups for not concentrating on the Maghreb’s “real problems”, and some members of the movement have also developed a quietly amenable view towards Jews and Judaism, an unwillingness to line up reflexively alongside the Arab world in its struggles against the State of Israel, and

even a measure of admiration for the Zionist movement’s successful revival of a national language and assertion of ethno-national rights in the face of an antagonistic Arab world. Some of its militants openly empathize with Israel. In earlier decades, Amazigh movement circles were extremely reticent to even mention anything to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict or their belief in their Jewish “roots”. But in recent years, they have begun to be blunder. This was starkly manifested in November 2009 with the participation of a Moroccan Amazigh delegation in a weeklong seminar in Jerusalem at Israel’s Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and Museum, and ongoing efforts by small groups of militants to establish Jewish-Amazigh friendship associations. These initiatives draw on a particular reading of North African history that includes deeply rooted origin myths regarding Jewish-Berber ties and are intimately connected to the contemporary Amazigh movement’s political agenda.

The mostly verbal confrontations between Amazigh and Arab nationalist and Islamist activists are part of the larger developments in Algeria and Morocco in which competing Amazigh and Islamist discourses entered into the public sphere, an outgrowth of the newly liberalizing policies of North African states seeking to better manage and re-legitimize their rule. Overall, any improvement to the current status quo of Israel’s relations with Maghreb states will depend on significant progress in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

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Timeline of Events

Algeria

4 July 2010 (Algiers):

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Accompanying him was Egyptian Foreign Minister About Gheit, who met with his Algerian counterpart Mourad Medelci. This visit was considered to be a sign of improving ties between both countries.

6 July 2010 (Algiers):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika received General Mustafa Kharroubi, a special envoy of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

7 July 2010 (Algiers):

The new Director General of National Police (DGSN), Major General Abdelghani Hamel, was officially installed in his post.

11 July 2010 (Algiers):

Algeria announced several initiatives that will give preferential treatment to domestic firms over foreign competitors, strengthening the country's stance as an energy-exporting country.

14 July 2010 (Algiers):

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini met Prime Minister Ahmed Ouhyaia and Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci.

14 July 2010 (Algiers):

According to Farouk Ksentini, chairman of the National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Algeria is willing to open its prisons to international inspections in order to counter allegations of inmate abuse.

14-16 July 2010 (Algiers):

The President of the Cuban Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, held talks with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, with Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, and with Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci. This visit followed a statement dating back from February 2009 in

which Fidel Castro and Abdelaziz Bouteflika pledged to strengthen bilateral relations.

17 July 2010 (Dar es Salaam):

At the end of the 4th session of the Algerian-Tanzanian Committee, both countries voiced their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties. The Committee was chaired by Secretary of State for the Foreign Ministry Abdelkader Messahel and Tanzanian Foreign Minister Bernard Membe.

19 July 2010 (Brasília):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci met with his Brazilian counterpart Celso Amorim to discuss bilateral relations.

21 July 2010 (Algiers):

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika met with Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo to discuss ways of consolidating and deepening Sino-Algerian strategic and cooperative ties.

25 July 2010 (Kampala):

On the sidelines of the 15th African Union (AU) Summit, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika met with Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos to discuss the state of relations between the two countries. President Bouteflika also met his South African counterpart Jacob Zuma. Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci also attended the AU Summit.

26 July 2010 (Algiers):

The Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the US State Department, Daniel Benjamin, considered Algeria "a leading country" and an "unavoidable" partner in the fight against terrorism.

29 July 2010 (Cairo):

Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci attended the extraordinary meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee.

31 July 2010 (Algiers):

The Secretary General of the Movement for National Reform (El-Islah), Djamel Ben Abdesslem, said that the Taliban have "a legal Jihad and resistance project".

Libya

1 July 2010 (Khartoum):

Sudan closed its borders with Libya. The decision is the consequence of mounting tension between both countries because of Libya's decision to harbor a rebel wanted in Sudan.

6 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Libya and Chad signed a cooperation agreement on education and the promotion of the Arabic language in Chadian schools.

7 July 2010 (Washington):

Several US senators called on the British government to conduct an investigation into whether Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Al-Megrahi was released from prison on "fraudulent medical evidence".

7 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Muammar Gaddafi said that a referendum on the self-determination of Western Sahara is the "only solution".

8 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Libya denied allegations that it was mistreating a group of Eritrean migrants who had been turned back at sea by Italian patrols and handed over to Tripoli.

8 June 2010 (Tripoli):

Two newspapers linked to Saif al-Islam Gaddafi went back on sale after a six-month absence.

9 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Libya awarded the modernization of its military battle tanks (T-72 MBT) to Russia. The deal is worth nearly US\$2 billion.

**10 July 2010 (Tripoli):**

The Gaddafi International Charity and Development Association, headed by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, sponsored a Moldovan-flagged aid vessel that departed from Greece and was headed to Gaza.

10 July 2010 (Belgrade):

A delegation from Libya's Armed Forces met Serbian Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac. The agenda focused on education, as well as on economic and medical cooperation.

13 July 2010 (El-Arish):

Following Israeli diplomatic pressure, the aid vessel heading to Gaza that was sponsored by the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Association docked in Egypt.

15 July 2010 (Washington):

The Scottish and British governments were accused by the US Senate of easing talks with Libya concerning a BP oil exploration contract by releasing prisoners, including the so-called Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset Al-Megrahi. The British Prime Minister's office said there was no link between the two issues. However, BP itself acknowledged that in 2007 it urged the British government to speed up a prisoner release because it was worried that a stalemate would undercut an oil exploration deal with Libya.

19 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Muammar Gaddafi told Khalil Ibrahim, a Sudanese rebel leader staying in Libya, that he must do nothing to jeopardize peace talks in Sudan.

19 July 2010 (Tripoli):

South African President Jacob Zuma visited Muammar Gaddafi in an attempt to garner continent-wide support in strengthening multilateral institutions such as the African Union.

21 July 2010 (Athens):

Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Spyros Kouvelis said that Greece is inviting Libya's sovereign wealth funds to help rescue the Greek economy by investing in energy, real estate and the privatization of state firms.

24 July 2010 (London):

BP stated it will begin drilling off the Libyan coast shortly. The deepwater drilling will take place in the Gulf of Sirte following a deal signed in 2007 with Libya on oil and gas development.

24 July 2010 (Seoul):

According to a Korean diplomatic source, two Koreans were detained last month in Libya for proselytization.

26 July 2010 (Tripoli):

Libya closed its embassy and its economic cooperation office in South Korea, stressing that Korean businessmen must now travel to other countries in order to obtain visas.

27 July 2010 (Seoul):

According to a Korean diplomatic source, Libya deported a South Korean intelligence agent working at the Korean embassy in Tripoli last month for allegedly gathering information related to North Korea's activities in Libya.

27 July 2010 (Washington):

Due to lack of witnesses, the US Senate postponed the BP-Lockerbie hearings.

8 July 2010 (Nouakchott):

The Coordination of the Democratic Opposition, which is composed of a dozen Mauritanian political parties, denounced France's "interference" in the country's affairs and demanded an investigation into the French role in the attempted coup of August 2009.

11 July 2010 (Nouakchott):

President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz met with Assistant Secretary General of the Syrian Baath Party Abdullah al-Ahmar to discuss the state of bilateral relations and ways of improving them in different areas.

15 July 2010 (Baku):

President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz signed cooperation agreements on culture, tourism, trade, and energy with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

26 July 2010 (Nouakchott):

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner met with President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to discuss anti-terrorism cooperation. The visit followed the assassination of a French hostage held by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Morocco

2 July 2010 (Rabat):

Mauritania's Army Chief, General Mohamed Ould Cheikh Mohamed Ahmed, visited Morocco in order to discuss bilateral military cooperation between both countries.

2 July 2010 (Paris):

On the occasion of the 10th Franco-Moroccan ministerial high-level meeting, French Prime Minister François Fillon said that an agreement was "absolutely indispensable" to end the conflict in the Western Sahara. Fillon reiterated France's support for the Moroccan autonomy proposal. Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi accused Algeria of being "in a position of status quo". France also signed a cooperation agreement with Morocco to build a nuclear power plant, and it was also announced that the French Development Agency will increase its 2010-2012 financial aid to Morocco to €600 million.

5 July 2010 (Rabat):

In a message addressed to Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, King Mohamed VI called for an improvement of bilateral relations between both countries.

10 July 2010 (Asilah):

Energy Minister Amina Benkhadra said that Morocco considers greater integration into the Euro-Mediterranean energy system a main component of its energy plan.

22-23 July 2010 (N'Djamena):

On the sidelines of the 12th session of the Presidential Council of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Moroccan Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi and his Nigerian counterpart Mahamadou Danda stated their will to promote bilateral ties in different fields.

**24 July 2010 (Rabat):**

The Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica Roosevelt Skerrit, and Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri, signed two agreements on the establishment of political consultation, and economic, technical, scientific and cultural cooperation.

27 July 2010 (Rabat):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri met with the chair of the delegation for relations with Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union (DMAG) of the European Parliament, Pier Antonio Panzeri. Morocco's advanced status was on the agenda.

27-29 July 2010 (Rabat):

Morocco hosted an expert meeting on the migration of vulnerable groups as part of the preparatory process for the third Euro-African Conference on Migration and Development, scheduled for 2011 in Dakar. The event gathered close to sixty delegates from 27 African and European countries and eight international organizations.

29 July 2010 (Rabat):

In order to mark his 11th anniversary as king of Morocco, Mohamed VI pardoned or reduced the sentences of close to 900 prisoners.

29 July 2010 (Cairo):

Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri attended the extraordinary meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee.

Tunisia

3 July 2010 (Tunis):

Interior and Local Development Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem discussed with Éric Besson, French Minister of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Mutually-Supportive Development, ways of strengthening bilateral ties, particularly concerning immigration issues.

5-6 July 2010 (Beijing):

The 8th session of the Tunisian-Chinese joint committee was co-chaired by the Secretary of State in charge of Asian and American Affairs Saida Chtioui, and Chinese Deputy Minister for Trade Fu Zining. This session comes at a point when the relationship between both

countries experiences a new dynamic, as is reflected by the increase of mutual visits.

7 July 2010 (Tunis):

The secretary-general of the Democratic Constitutional Rally Mohamed Ghariani conferred with Adrianus Koetsenruijter, Head of the European Union Delegation in Tunis, over political and economic issues.

8 July 2010 (Tunis):

Tunisian-Canadian cooperation in trade, investment, tourism and higher education was reviewed during a meeting of the Tunisian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce. The Secretary of State for Foreign Trade Chokri Mamoghli stressed the importance of the legal framework governing economic relations between both countries and the prospects of setting up a preferential bilateral trade agreement.

8 July 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi met with Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim Bin Abdulaziz Al-Assaf. The agenda focused on the global economic situation and its impact on the economies of Arab countries.

9 July 2010 (Washington):

US State Department spokesman Mark Toner said that the US is "deeply concerned" over a decline in political freedom in Tunisia, after a court sentenced a journalist to four years in prison.

10 July 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi met with the Prime Minister of the Ivory Coast Guillaume Kigbafori Soro. The meeting focused on ways to promote bilateral cooperation.

12 July 2010 (Tunis):

President Ben Ali met with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. They reasserted the good relations between both countries and expressed their intent to deepen bilateral cooperation. Other issues regarding the Arab world were also discussed.

12 July 2010 (London):

In a report entitled "Independent Voices Stifled in Tunisia", Amnesty International stated that the government of President Ben Ali infiltrates or takes over human rights groups and

other independent organizations, in order to effectively control them and silence dissent.

12 July 2010 (Bardo):

The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Foued Mebazaa met Slimane Sassi Chehoumi, Foreign Affairs Secretary to the Libyan People's General Congress and Chairman of Libyan group in Maghreb Shura Council.

12 July 2010 (Tunis):

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Margaret Chan. The enhancement of various health and education indicators was at the top of the agenda.

16 July 2010 (Tunis):

The IMF released the preliminary conclusions of the 2000 Article IV mission, elaborated by a delegation that visited Tunisia from the 2nd to 15th of June. According to these preliminary conclusions, the country's economy performed well in 2009 despite the challenging international context.

16-17 July 2010 (Bamako):

The 9th session of the Tunisian-Malian high joint committee was chaired by Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane and by Malian Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister Moctar Ouané.

20 July 2010 (Tunis):

Relations between the United Nations and Tunisia were the focus of Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane's meeting with Ali Abdessalam Triki, President of UN General Assembly's current session.

25-27 July 2010 (Kampala):

During the African Union's 15th Summit, Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane met with Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmed Nadhif and Mauritanian Prime Minister Moulaye Ould Mohamed Lagdhaf, among others. Foreign Minister Morjane stated that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali reiterated "Tunisia's commitment to promote joint African action", thus aiming at enhancing solidarity among African countries.



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