

ISRAEL AND MOROCCO: A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

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On 1 September, 1994, the State of Israel and the Kingdom of Morocco opened, without fanfare, low-level diplomatic 'liaison offices' in Rabat and Tel Aviv. Morocco, a member in good standing of the League of Arab States, host of numerous Arab and Islamic summit conferences and active participant in the Arab war coalition against Israel in October 1973, thus became the third Arab state to establish some level of formal diplomatic relations with Israel. For Israel, it was another milestone in the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process. Tunisia, Oman, Qatar and Mauritania would all take steps in the same direction during 1995-96.

As is so often the case in international relations, the modest official status of the Moroccan-Israeli relationship is deceiving, and reveals little of its complex, even deep-rooted nature. Whether one refers to the geo-political, ideological, socio-cultural, or personal/individual realms, the 40-year relationship between Israel and Morocco constitutes a unique case in the annals of Arab-Israeli affairs. This article intends to analyze the various aspects of the Moroccan-Israeli dyad against the background of regional and domestic developments over the last five decades, with a concluding eye towards possible future patterns.

BASIC UNDERPINNINGS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

One of the traditional guiding concepts of Israeli foreign policy during the long years of Arab-Israeli hostilities was the 'periphery doctrine,' which stipulated that Israel should seek to neutralize the wall of hostility erected by surrounding Arab neighbours through the forging of ties with the non-Arab states on the Middle East periphery – Iran, Ethiopia and Turkey. A related, if distinct aspect of this policy was support for non-Arab ethnic minorities in some Arab states.¹ Less familiar is the undeclared aspect of the 'periphery' doctrine – Israel's search for connections with Arab states on the margins of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Links with Morocco, which geographically is the most remote Arab country from Israel, came to embody this feature of Israel's foreign policy. The same was true, beginning in the 1970s, albeit in a more limited fashion, with Oman.

The factors underpinning the relationship between this seemingly odd couple derived both from the calculations of *realpolitik* and a less tangible intertwining of history, myth, sentiment and personal connections involving the Moroccan monarchy, Moroccan Jewry, and the Israeli government. From the outset of Moroccan independence in 1956 and through subsequent decades, Israel and Morocco identified a number of vital interests common to both sides: their perception of a

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common threat posed by radical pan-Arabism, epitomized by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir in Egypt, the Ba'th in Syria and Iraq, and the FLN in Algeria; their unabashedly pro-Western orientation in global affairs; and their need for Western economic and military assistance to cope with both regional and domestic challenges, in order to maintain stability and avoid upheaval. From the mid-1970s onward, Morocco's struggle to extend its control over the Western Sahara necessitated a redoubling of its efforts to ingratiate itself with the US and France: like so many other countries, Morocco concluded that one important road to Washington passed via Jerusalem.

Fortuitously, the circumstances were just becoming ripe for Arab-Israeli diplomatic efforts, and the Moroccan monarch was thus able to translate his own idiosyncratic predilections on Arab-Israeli matters into a respected place for himself as a trusted facilitator. The outside world first became cognizant of the relationship when Morocco played an important role in hosting secret Egyptian-Israeli talks in September 1977 which paved the way for Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat's trip to Jerusalem two months afterwards. From that point on, King Hassan II maintained a visible profile in Arab-Israeli affairs, including the hosting of Israeli prime ministers and Arab summit conferences, and chairing the Islamic Conference Organization's Jerusalem Committee. As the peace process produced breakthroughs in the 1990s, Morocco sought to position itself so as to reap some of the hoped-for regional economic benefits being so assiduously promoted by the West.

Whether or not these 'conventional' factors would have been sufficient for Moroccan-Israeli relations to develop is a moot point. The fact is that the Moroccan Jewish 'connection' gave the relationship some of its most unique features. Morocco, on the eve of achieving independence, contained the largest Jewish community in the Arab world (c. 270,000 persons). The semi-clandestine large-scale emigration of large segments of that community to Israel, beginning in the mid-1950s on the eve of Moroccan independence, eventually resulted in the establishment of important personal ties between Israeli and Moroccan officials. Ironically, the emptying of Morocco of its once vibrant Jewish community did not end its importance in the Arab-Israeli nexus. Of the tiny number which would remain (c. 5–8,000 in 1995), a few would serve as the King's financial advisers as well as facilitating contacts with Israel and the Moroccan-Israeli immigrant community.

Accompanying King Hassan's diplomatic initiatives and conciliatory policies was his formulation of a particular vision of renewed Semitic brotherhood, based on an idyllic Jewish-Arab past in Morocco and Muslim Spain, which could contribute to an economic and human renaissance in the contemporary Middle East. One must always maintain a degree of cynicism towards the dabbling of politicians in history and myth-making. Nonetheless, Hassan's musings and predilections appear to have a genuineness about them. Although his oft-expressed hopes to influence the Israeli domestic political arena through the 500,000-plus (including second and third generations) Moroccan-Israeli community ('my Moroccans') have not been realized, the opening up of Morocco to large-scale Israeli tourism, first for

Israelis of Moroccan origin and then to the public at large, has provided tangible, positive evidence for Israel of changing Middle East realities.

Nonetheless, there remain a number of limitations on the Moroccan-Israeli relationship. Societal forces within Morocco, whether the opposition political parties, traditional pro-Palestinian sentiment, or concern for Islamic sensibilities, particularly on the Jerusalem question, act as a brake. So does the continued unfinished business on the Arab-Israeli agenda: a measure of linkage, however attenuated, still exists between the different spheres of Arab-Israeli relations. As for the economic sphere, some degree of interchange has already emerged, and considerable potential for its expansion does exist. Here too, however, there is linkage with developments in the wider Arab-Israeli arena. Moreover, neither market has the potential of serving as a major export outlet for the other.

REGIME CONSOLIDATION AND THE FORGING OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Both Israel and Morocco faced enormous tasks of nation-building and state-building in the years following the achievement of independence. The challenges facing Israel between 1948 and the early 1960s were myriad, deriving both from the realities of continued Arab-Israeli enmity and hostilities, and from the enormous pressures which mass immigration placed on its infant institutional capacities. Successful consolidation of the Israeli body politic would depend heavily on the way these challenges were addressed.

For Morocco, the challenges were of a different nature. Unlike Israel, its very existence as an entity was not at stake. At the same time, the consolidation of the central government's authority over Morocco's disparate regions and communities, including the remaining colonial enclaves, and the accompanying articulation and dissemination of a modern Moroccan national identity, would be an enormous task. Complicating matters further was the need to determine the very nature of the regime, namely the exact relationship between the Moroccan monarchy and the civilian political parties and forces which had led the struggle for independence. Foreign policy orientation, toward the Western powers on the one hand, and Arab nationalist currents on the other, not only remained to be determined but also impacted on outstanding domestic matters as well.

The convergence of many of these outstanding issues was catalyzed by the uncertain future of Moroccan Jewry in an independent Morocco. Already between 1948 and 1956, approximately 110,000 Moroccan Jews had immigrated to Israel from Morocco, including 61,000 in the last eighteen months prior to Morocco's attaining of independence.² They were motivated by a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors: the former being concern over their future in the context of the quickening struggle for independence, the latter involving the inspiration of Israel's birth and the quasi-Messianic longings for Zion among considerable segments of the population. On the eve of independence, Isser Harel, the head of Israel's Mossad, established the 'Framework,' a network of Mossad-directed groups among Moroccan Jewry. Initially designed to provide self-defence in the event of mob violence against the Jewish community, it quickly became the main conduit for

the post-independence, now clandestine flow of emigration out of Morocco to Israel, via Gibraltar, Spain and France. Despite the periodic harsh criticism in the nationalist press for allowing the enemy state of Israel to be strengthened, and occasional crackdowns by the authorities, particularly during the government of the Istiqlal's 'Abdallah Ibrahim between December 1958 and May 1960, approximately 18,000 persons left Morocco for Israel between 1956–1960, with the path being smoothed by the distribution of c. \$500,000 to various Moroccan officials.³

The turning point in history of Moroccan Jewry's immigration to Israel, and in the relationship between the Moroccan and Israeli authorities, was the 11 January 1961 drowning of forty-two Moroccan Jews, a crewman and a Mossad operative off the Moroccan coast when the ship ferrying them to Gibraltar sank in a storm. The incident was followed by an act of open defiance of the Moroccan authorities by the 'Framework' group. In return, the authorities cracked down harshly.

Ironically, the ship's sinking and subsequent crackdown had a beneficial outcome for Israel, as it successfully mobilized Western governments and public opinion to pressure Morocco to liberalize its immigration policies. These efforts were already having an effect on King Muhammad V, when he died suddenly during surgery on 25 February 1961.⁴

The new King, his son Moulay Hassan, now crowned Hassan II, was an unknown quantity to the Israelis. But it quickly became clear that he favoured close ties with the West as part of his efforts to achieve hegemony over the Moroccan political system. Removing the issue of Moroccan Jewry's freedom to emigrate from the agenda, he concluded, would clearly make his task easier. Consequently, another 100,000 persons were able to leave Morocco for Israel, this time in a more orderly fashion, during the next five years.

What insured that the large scale movement of Moroccan Jewry to Israel would not just be a one-time episode of cooperation between Israel and an Arab state was the concurrent convergence of Israel's strategic interests with the Moroccan monarchy's own regional and domestic political needs. The outpouring of public support for Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir during his visit to Casablanca to attend an Arab-African summit in January 1961 had given pause to King Muhammad V and the soon-to-be king Moulay Hassan. Radical, populist Arab nationalism was the antithesis of their own preferred formula for governing, namely 'Allah, al-Watan, al-Malik' (God, Homeland, King). Nasir's popularity threatened to undermine the monarchy's own authority in favour of Morocco's nationalist and left-wing parties. Next door, in Algeria, the Nasir-backed revolutionary FLN would achieve independence from France within a year, and pose a more immediate geo-political and ideological challenge. Indeed, their two armies would clash sharply in the fall of 1963. With anti-Western, revolutionary Arab nationalism still in its heyday, it was not difficult for Israel and the Moroccan regime to identify common interests and quietly pursue them.

Three different histories of the Israeli intelligence services have identified the close links which the Mossad established with the head of Morocco's security services, Gen. Muhammad Oufkir.⁵ These links reportedly included the training of Moroccan internal-security and intelligence personnel and, according to one of the

studies, the provision of personal bodyguards for the King.⁶ Throughout the 1960s, the King engaged in a bitter struggle with Morocco's political parties for hegemony. Israel clearly believed that its interests would be served by the monarchy's triumph.

At one point, however, the Mossad-Palace connection caused Israel considerable damage, both with its ally France and domestically. Oufkir's request for Mossad and French secret service assistance in the 1965 capture and assassination (carried out on French soil) of exiled Moroccan opposition leader Mehdi Ben Barka was deemed an offer which Israel could not refuse, if the relationship was to be maintained (whether or not Mossad head Meir Amit received approval from Prime Minister Levi Eshkol remains a subject of controversy). The affair became known to French President Charles De Gaulle, who viewed the Mossad as being complicit in an effort by elements in the French security services to undermine his rule, and thus closed the Mossad office in Paris. De Gaulle's tilt toward the Arab states and away from Israel on the eve of the June 1967 war had its own logic, but the Ben Barka affair could not but have made a contribution to the shift. Within Israel, the affair caused a severe crisis and scorching recriminations within the top political and security echelons, but was kept completely out of the public eye.⁷ The Moroccan authorities, by contrast, were undoubtedly satisfied.

By the second half of the 1960s, King Hassan had decisively gained the upper hand against his civilian political rivals, but lasting regime consolidation was still a long way off. The 1970s would bring new challenges, in the form of two attempted military coups (the latter emanating from Gen. Oufkir himself), followed by the renewal of the Moroccan-Algerian competition for regional primacy, expressed via the struggle over the Western Sahara. The latter provided not only a challenge to Hassan, but also a golden opportunity, which he exploited to the fullest. The incorporation of the 'Moroccan Sahara' into the kingdom as part of its historical patrimony became the central task for which Hassan mobilized nearly the entire Moroccan society under his leadership. It was not until the early 1980s that Morocco attained a decisive advantage on the ground, if not in international political forums, thanks to French, American and Saudi aid.⁸ One can assume that Israel provided some type of military assistance as well, although there is no hard evidence to attest to it, apart from an occasional foreign news report.

MOROCCO AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Morocco's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict has been shaped by a number of factors: its need to adhere to collective Arab norms; its belief in the need for a diplomatic solution; Hassan's desire to play a facilitating role in achieving such an outcome, in line with his studiously cultivated image as a leading Arab statesman; and Hassan's view of Jewish-Arab relations through the idealized prism of relations between Muslims and Jews in Morocco.

As early as the late 1950s, Hassan attests, he had shocked a group of Lebanese intellectuals during his visit to Beirut by telling them that the only way to end the conflict with Israel was to make peace with it and then absorb it into the Arab League.⁹ But up until the Sadat initiative in 1977, Hassan's public remarks and

policies were well within the Arab consensus. In 1967, Morocco sent a symbolic military contingent to side with Egypt (although they made it only as far as Libya); in 1973, Moroccan battalions stationed in Syria earlier that year (primarily for domestic political reasons, following the two failed military coups in 1971 and 1972) participated in the October 1973 war; one year later, Hassan played host in Rabat to the Arab summit conference which conferred recognition on the Palestine Liberation Organization. Hassan also has headed the Islamic Conference Organization's Jerusalem Committee since its inception in the late 1970s.

From the mid-1970s onward, however, Hassan engaged ever increasingly in the search for an Arab-Israeli political settlement, first behind the scenes and then, as time went on and the peace process itself became institutionalized, in public. The king's first foray was his secret hosting of Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, in October 1976, who wanted to see if Morocco's ongoing efforts at quiet diplomacy could assist in advancing a process which had stalled after the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement one year earlier. Nothing tangible came from the visit, but less than one year later, Morocco hosted the crucial preparatory meeting on 16 September between Israel's foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Sadat's adviser Hassan al-Tuhami. The meeting itself was preceded by a number of preparatory secret contacts, including a Dayan-King Hassan meeting in Marrakesh on 5 September; it paved the way for Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem two months hence.¹⁰

Morocco's more active role was accompanied by periodic public statements during 1976-77 laying out its 'concept' of Arab-Israeli affairs. Its main points were as follows:

- a. the historical affinity between Arabs and Jews as 'sons of Abraham' and 'grandsons of Ishmael and Isaac,' an affinity which could form the basis for the tapping of both sides' capabilities in order to modernize and develop the Middle East;
- b. Israel's capability for contributing to the modernization and development of the Arab world;
- c. the dangers to the Arab world inherent in prolonged conflict;
- d. the need for coexistence and integration, which required Israel's withdrawal to the June 1967 boundaries, creation of a Palestinian state, and full peace, recognition and integration between Israel and the Arab states; and
- e. the need for dialogue to solve all problems, including dialogue between the PLO and Israel.

These principles would guide Moroccan policy for the next two decades.

Morocco's public support for Sadat in the aftermath of the Jerusalem visit was unwavering during the subsequent months, and included a visit by Sadat in February 1978 on his way to Washington. Sadat stopped again in Rabat on his way back from signing the Camp David Accords in September 1978. At that point, however, Morocco's support for Egypt cooled, and it toed the all-Arab line in breaking diplomatic relations with Cairo. It remained convinced, however, of the need for a political solution to the conflict, and in 1981 and 1982 hosted the Fez

summit (two sessions) which ultimately produced an 'Arab peace plan' according guarded recognition of Israel's existence in the context of a full Israeli withdrawal to the June 1967 boundaries and the establishment of a Palestinian state by the PLO, with Jerusalem as its capital.¹²

For Hassan, his status as head of a seven-member committee delegated to explain and advocate the Fez principles to the international community would form the legitimizing basis of his subsequent diplomatic efforts. In August 1985, Morocco hosted an Arab summit conference in Casablanca designed to begin healing inter-Arab rifts and nudge Arab-Israeli diplomacy forward.¹³ Near the end of 1985, Hassan openly voiced his willingness to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in order to further the cause,¹⁴ and his comments were not idle musings. In April 1986, he suggested that 'the broadest possible Arab summit' should delegate an Arab Head of State to open 'exploratory talks with the highest Israeli authorities;' his job would be to present them with the Fez principles, and thus force Israel to negotiate seriously.¹⁵ To Hassan's disappointment, his concurrent efforts to convene an emergency Arab summit conference to again address inter-Arab divisions at the beginning of May came to naught.¹⁶ But it didn't prevent him from taking the initiative on his own. On 22–23 July he hosted Israeli Prime Minister Peres in an above-board meeting at his palace in Ifrane. (Peres subsequently revealed that he had previously visited Morocco in 1978 and 1981, when he was out of power.)¹⁷ Nothing concrete came from the Ifrane discussions and Hassan himself appears to have been disappointed that Peres had not been more forthcoming towards the Fez principles. Still, the meeting's very occurrence was another milestone in Arab-Israeli and Moroccan-Israeli relations, and consecrated Hassan's unique approach to Arab-Israeli affairs. It also afforded him the opportunity to emphasize Morocco's particularity within the wider Arab firmament. In defending his act to the Moroccan public in a televised address, Hassan stressed both the continued need for dialogue with Israel and Morocco's firmness in adhering to collective Arab principles. But no one in the Arab Mashriq, he continued, could give Morocco 'lessons in patriotism,' for they had been 'languid' (*khamilun*) for 20 years; the 'courageous' Moroccan people would never, by contrast, have 'abandoned' their land for so long to Israeli occupation.¹⁸

MOROCCAN JEWRY AS A BRIDGE

The Peres-Hassan meeting had been prepared with the help of a number of Moroccan-born Israelis, in particular Labour Party Knesset member Rafi Edri, whose marriage to the daughter of David Amar, a wealthy Moroccan Jewish businessman and serving at that time as personal financial adviser to King Hassan, guaranteed him access to the Palace. In fact, the degree of regular interaction between Moroccan Israelis and their former country, which allows them to retain their citizenship, had been developing steadily, on both the official and unofficial levels, during the preceding decade. The most visible of these was Morocco's hosting a conference in Rabat of Jews originating from Morocco, including thirty-five prominent Israelis, among them Knesset members, businessmen and communal

leaders, in May 1984. It was organized by Robert Assaraf, another of Moroccan Jewry's leading remaining figures and intimate of King Hassan since their youth.¹⁹ Befitting the high profile status which the authorities wished to accord the gathering, Morocco's crown prince, the prime minister and other senior officials attended a reception in honour of the attenders.²⁰ The event outraged Syria, which withdrew its ambassador and suspended its membership in the Jerusalem Committee, but the Palace remained determined to pursue its own course.

The latter half of the 1980s witnessed a steady expansion in the number of visits of Moroccan Israelis to Morocco, and by the early 1990s, thousands had made the journey. For them, the chance to visit the 'old country' – to see the place of their childhood memories and family stories, and visit the graves of venerated rabbis and their own families – was part of a concurrent, ongoing psychological and social process of affirmation and legitimation of their own identity within the Israeli context, after years of second class status and acute feelings of inferiority.²¹ For the Moroccan authorities, such visits certainly had an important instrumental value, by bolstering the country's image in the West and bringing in foreign currency. But it is clear that the regime genuinely believed that such contacts would further the cause of peace, sending a clear message to both Arabs and Israelis that dialogue and mutual respect was the preferred road to resolving the conflict and improving the lot of their societies. Hassan spoke to this effect on any number of occasions, including in his conversations with Eric Laurent, where he referred to Jews who spoke Arabic (including those who did not originate in Arab countries such as Abba Eban and Moshe Dayan) as having a crucial role in furthering Jewish-Arab coexistence.²² In addition, some portions of the Moroccan elite had come to view the exodus of Moroccan Jewry as constituting a historical loss for their newly emerging state, and believed that the renewal of ties with the expatriate Moroccan Jewish community would perhaps repair at least some of the damage.²³ The appointment of Serge Berdugo, head of the Casablanca Jewish community, to the post of Minister of Tourism in 1994, was a further sign of the importance Hassan placed on the Moroccan Jewish connection, and a signal to his Muslim subjects as well. Berdugo was the first Jewish member of a Moroccan cabinet since Leon Benzaquen had headed the Ministry of Posts for a brief time in the first post-independence cabinet.²⁴ Even more important, symbolically and emotionally, was Morocco's assent to the transference and reinterment in Israel of the remains of the victims of the February 1961 ship sinking, which had significantly altered the history of Moroccan-Israeli relations.

AFTER OSLO: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Morocco's special place in the Arab-Israeli firmament was confirmed anew following the breakthrough signing in September 1993 of the Israel-PLO 'Declaration of Principles' (DoP), the so-called Oslo agreement. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres stopped in Casablanca on their way back from the signing ceremony in Washington, where they received Hassan's endorsement of the agreement. The Israeli leadership hoped for a Moroccan commitment to establish

high-level diplomatic relations which would serve as a tangible sign to the Israeli public of the new era which the DoP had inaugurated. Hassan preferred to move more slowly, however. It was only one year later that the two countries opened lower level liaison offices. Two other Maghrib states, Tunisia and Mauritania, eventually followed Morocco's lead in establishing some type of official relations with Israel. Algeria has refrained from doing so, although contacts have taken place.

Morocco's continuing interest in Arab-Israeli affairs was also exemplified in its hosting of a number of high-level multi-national conclaves. Morocco was particularly active in the multilateral working groups, using them to further both bilateral ties with Israel and its involvement in regional planning. The first annual Middle East and North Africa Economic Conference, involving senior officials from Israel, numerous Arab states, the US, Europe and Japan, as well as representatives from the private sector, was held at the very end of October in Casablanca. The event was long on spectacle but short on substance, and Israeli officials subsequently spoke of the damage caused to Arab sensitivities by Israel's having sent an overly large and overly active delegation. For Morocco, however, the conference fitted in perfectly with the regime's view of the preferred future course of Arab-Israeli and Western-Arab relations, and strengthened Morocco's own efforts to integrally link itself to the developed economic world.

Hassan's touch of iconoclasm on Arab-Israeli issues was demonstrated again toward the end of 1994 when he declared that the status of the Arab portion of Jerusalem would not be returned to what it was prior to 1967 (when it was controlled by Jordan). 'It would be clutching at rainbows to expect that we can restore the whole of Jerusalem and control it politically and within a framework of sovereignty. That is the reality. I implore God that I am wrong. However, it is better to be armed with reality.' At the most, he said, one-third to one-half of the territory was likely to be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty.²⁵ This statement notwithstanding, Hassan tried to mediate a dispute between the PLO and Jordan on the responsibility for Jerusalem at the December 1994 Casablanca summit of the Islamic Conference Organization. In the end, Morocco tilted towards the PLO's position which insisted on the restoration of all pre-1967 Arab Jerusalem to PLO control. Nonetheless, regarding the ultimate determination of the responsibility for Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites, Hassan's preference is to distinguish between their religious and political aspects, and to be involved in some kind of international Islamic trusteeship over them.

In addition to backing the PA in international forums, Hassan's support was exemplified by the opening of a liaison office in Gaza parallel to its bureau in Tel Aviv. In 1995, the Moroccan civil aviation authority signed three contracts with the Palestinian Authority to oversee the planning, building and operation of an airport in the Gaza Strip and to train Palestinian pilots at its regional training center.²⁶ In February 1996, Morocco joined the Palestinian Authority, Israel and Luxembourg in signing an agreement for the establishment of an international agricultural centre for salt water agriculture in Gaza. The agreement was the product of the water issues group in the multilateral negotiations track.

The aftermath of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin confirmed again the

special relationship between Morocco and Jerusalem. Morocco was represented at the funeral in Jerusalem by Prime Minister Fillali, despite the fact that relations were officially on a low level. One month later, Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, again visited Morocco on the way back from Washington. His discussions with King Hassan centred on efforts to revive the Syrian-Israeli negotiating track. Indeed, Hassan was diplomatically active throughout the post-Oslo period on both the Syrian-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli tracks. At one point, in early May 1994, he publicly pressured Israel to cancel land expropriations in eastern Jerusalem; three weeks later, following the Rabin government's eventual backtracking on the issue, Hassan hosted an important meeting between PLO leader Yasir 'Arafat and Peres at a time of Israeli-Palestinian tension.

BILATERAL ECONOMIC TIES IN THE POST-OSLO PERIOD

The most tangible aspect of Moroccan-Israeli economic links following the signing of the DoP was the large increase in Israeli tourists visiting Morocco, an estimated 15–20,000 persons annually. Behind the increase was Morocco's opening of its gates to all Israeli visitors, and not just those of Moroccan origin, combined with the new, more conciliatory and hopeful post-Oslo atmosphere among Israelis and Moroccans alike. The inauguration of regular direct flights between Morocco and Israel by their respective national airlines was frequently said to be imminent, a move which would further boost the tourist flow. A sprinkling of Moroccan officials, delegations and businessmen also began appearing in Israel.

The Israeli Export Institute estimated in October 1994 that Israel's export potential to Morocco during the coming three years amounted to \$220 million dollars annually, in areas such as agricultural products, irrigation equipment, the building trades, hi-tech electronics, processed foods, and professional services for infrastructure development. In addition, the potential for Morocco serving as a centre for the re-export of Israeli goods to other North African countries was estimated in the tens of millions of dollars.²⁷ Estimates of the value of Israeli goods reaching to Morocco via third parties and subsidiary companies ranged from \$30–100 million annually.²⁸

Cooperation in the field of agriculture had begun in previous decades, with a Moroccan delegation having visited Israel as early as 1977, and Israel's Deputy Agricultural Minister Avraham Katz-Oz leading a group to Morocco in May 1985, just two months before Peres' Ifrane visit.²⁹ A number of experimental agricultural farms and projects were set up in Morocco during the first half of the 1990s, with the assistance of the US Agency for International Development, to promote higher yields in Moroccan agriculture and cope with the problem of salinization of aquifers. Another area of considerable potential was in the energy sector: in 1995, the first shipment of Moroccan oil shale deposits was shipped to an Israeli power station to test an Israeli method for generating electricity, which if successful would then be transferred to Morocco.³⁰

To be sure, Israeli hopes for immediate and flourishing economic interchange proved to be premature. Official, direct trade between the two countries amounted to

less than \$2 million annually. Israeli products remained officially banned from Moroccan markets, with Israel reciprocating. Discussions between their respective leading industrial conglomerates, Koor and Omnium Nord Afrique, and a Spanish counterpart regarding joint development projects in Palestinian autonomous areas came to nought, thanks mainly to the brakes applied on ONA's head, Fouad al-Fillali, by his father, Prime Minister 'Abd al-Latif al-Fillali. The most visible irritating event was the refusal of Moroccan customs officials to release Israeli products which were to be displayed by an Israeli delegation at an international trade fair in Casablanca in 1995, causing Israel to cancel its participation. The fact that Israeli products had been openly displayed at a medical supplies fair the previous year added to the Israel Export Institute's frustration.³¹ The Moroccan behaviour was ascribed to bureaucratic obtuseness, but the episode demonstrated that the two countries differed on the desired pace and quality of economic interchange.

An indication of continued links between the two countries in the defence sphere was provided by a report on 12 February 1996 in Israel's mass circulation daily, *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, quoting American sources that Morocco was investigating the possibility of seeking Israeli assistance in upgrading 20 of its F-5 combat jets. Jordan was examining a similar possibility.

THE MOROCCAN MEDIA

The Moroccan media, although prohibited from voicing any criticism of the King, does have a considerable degree of freedom of expression. As such, it reflects the various currents of thinking regarding Arab-Israeli issues. The Istiqlal party's daily *al-'Alam*, for example, has occasionally published political cartoons replete with anti-Semitic themes and anti-Israeli themes, presenting Israel's efforts to normalize relations with Israel as a plot (sometimes by long-cloaked, black-hatted Jews with side curls and long noses) to get rich and dominate the Arab world.³² On the other hand, the liberal economic weeklies, *La Vie Economique* and *L'Economiste*, reflect a more pragmatic, matter-of-fact attitude toward Israel characteristic of at least a portion of the younger, educated elite.³³ For its part, the regime's French-language mouthpiece, the daily *Le Matin du Sahara*, faithfully reflects the Palace's view on Jewish-Arab relations, and also gives considerable prominence to the activities of Hassan's Jewish economic adviser, Andre Azoulay.

CONCLUSIONS

Israeli-Moroccan relations have evolved considerably since the first clandestine contacts in the mid-1950s. But the common interests and sentiments which underpinned them remain in force, despite the far-reaching changes which both countries, and the region as a whole, have undergone. The fact that they are now 'out of the closet' promises to solidify them further. At the same time, their quality is likely to be dependent on at least two factors. The first is the future course of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Linkage between progress toward a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, especially in the Israeli-Palestinian track, and the continued expansion of Israel's

relations with Arab states of the periphery, including Morocco, will continue to exist. Conversely, a significant deterioration in the still-fragile fabric of Arab-Israeli relations will undoubtedly take its toll. The second factor likely to shape Moroccan-Israeli relations is located in the domestic Moroccan sphere. Continued political stability, involving the gradual, guarded evolution toward a more pluralist order and a smooth succession from Hassan to either of his sons when the inevitable time comes will have a corresponding stabilizing effect on Moroccan-Israeli relations. Conversely, a significant alteration in the Moroccan political order through sudden violent change, along the Algerian model, or even a serious weakening in the current order owing to a worsening of Morocco's already difficult socio-economic straits, might have significant repercussions on the relationship. Nonetheless, as long as Morocco does not completely 'reinvent' itself, an unlikely possibility, the special nature of the Moroccan-Israeli relationship seems likely to prove enduring.

NOTES

1. For a succinct summary of this thinking and Israeli back channel diplomacy, see Aharon Klieman, *Statecraft in the Dark: Israeli Practice of Quiet Diplomacy*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Study #10, pp. 75-77.
2. Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia and NY: 1991), p. 171; Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars* (NY, 1991), p. 176.
3. Stillman, p. 174; Black and Morris, p. 177.
4. Black and Morris, pp. 178-79; Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince* (Boston: 1990), pp. 108-10; Agnes Ben-Simon, *Hassan II and the Jews* (Tel Aviv, 1994) (Hebrew), pp. 9-15, 129-39.
5. Black and Morris, p. 203; Raviv and Melman, p. 157; Stuart Steven, *The Spymasters of Israel* (NY: 1980), pp. 239-41.
6. Steven, p. 239.
7. Steven, pp. 241-52; Black and Morris, pp. 202-5; Raviv and Melman, pp. 157-60.
8. For background studies on the Western Sahara conflict, see Tony Hodges, *Western Sahara, The roots of a Desert War* (Westport, CT, 1983), John Damis, *Conflict in Northwest Africa: The Western Sahara Dispute* (Palo Alto, CA, 1983), and I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, 2nd edition (NY, 1987), pp. 19-81. For the evolution of the conflict and UN efforts to broker a solution, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, 'Conflict Resolution in Northwest Africa? The UN and the Western Sahara,' *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (July 1992), pp. 133-51; *idem*, 'Conflict and Conflict-Management in the Western Sahara: Is the Endgame Near?' *Middle East Journal* 45/4 (Autumn 1991), pp. 594-607; and William Durch, 'Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara,' *International Security*, 17, 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 171-71.
9. Hassan II, *Dhakhirat Malik* (London, 1994), p. 151.
10. For Dayan's account of these meetings, and a subsequent one with Tuhami in Morocco in December, see Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough* (NY: 1981), pp. 38-54, 91-7. For references to Egyptian accounts of the contacts, see Klieman, p. 149, note 37.
11. Moshe Ganner, 'The Negotiating Process: Interested Parties,' in *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)*, Vol. II, 1977-78, Colin Legum, Ed. (NY: 1978), pp. 167-70.
12. For detailed analyses of the 'Fez I' and 'Fez II' conferences, see Daniel Dishon and Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, 'Inter-Arab Relations,' in *(MECS)*, 1981-82, in Legum, et al. (eds.) (NY: 1983), pp. 221-29, 253-58.
13. Five states boycotted the summit, and a number of other countries were not repre-

- sented by their heads of state. For a detailed treatment of the summit, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, 'Inter-Arab Relations,' in *MECS*, 1984-85, pp. 111-16.
14. Interview with Hassan, R. Paris International, November 26 – Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS), November 27, 1985.
 15. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 4-10 – FBIS, April 22 1986.
 16. Maddy-Weitzman, 'Inter-Arab Relations,' in *MECS*, 1986 (Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked (eds.) (Boulder and London: 1988), pp. 96-8.
 17. Klieman, p. 92.
 18. *Al-Mithaq al-Watani*, July 25, 1986.
 19. Assaraf has been active for many years in promoting Jewish-Arab and Israeli-Arab dialogue. He heads the newly established 'World Center for the Study of Moroccan Jewry,' with branches in Rabat, Paris, Montreal and Jerusalem. See his interview in *Ha'aretz*, October 21 1995, in which he criticizes right-of-centre Moroccan Israelis for having been critical in the past of these dialogue efforts, only to jump on the bandwagon after the 1993 Oslo agreement.
 20. Mark Tessler, 'Moroccan-Israeli Relations and the Reasons for Moroccan Receptivity to Contact with Israel,' *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1988, pp. 78-9.
 21. For a discussion of the current debate in Israel regarding Moroccan Jewry's past, and its contemporary socio-political context, see David Shalit, 'It Was Paradise,' *Ha'aretz*, Friday magazine, October 6, 1995, and Shlomo Ben-Ami, 'Two Way Nostalgia,' *Ha'aretz*, Friday magazine, October 20, 1995. Hassan's father, Sultan Muhammad V, is venerated for having protected his Jewish subjects from the Vichy French anti-Semitic decrees. A statue in his honor was erected in the Israeli city of Ashkelon. For references to the historical debate on Sultan Muhammad's actual behaviour, see Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, pp. 128-9, note 36.
 22. *Dhakirat Malik*, p. 152.
 23. Shlomo Ben-Ami, 'Two-Way Nostalgia.'
 24. Berdugo was dropped from the Cabinet in a reshuffle in 1995.
 25. Middle East Broadcasting TV, November 8 – FBIS (Near East and South Asia), November 9, 1994.
 26. *Ha'aretz*, July 20, 1995.
 27. Israel Export Institute, 'Morocco: Evaluation of the Israeli Export Potential and Survey of Economic Trends and Developments,' October 1994.
 28. Yossi Bar-Moha, 'The Israelis Storm Morocco,' *Ha'aretz*, Friday magazine, May 5, 1995.
 29. Tessler, p. 79.
 30. *Financial Times*, June 27, 1995.
 31. Yossi Bar-Moha, 'The Israelis Storm Morocco.'
 32. E.g., *al-Atam*, 12 December 1995.
 33. For example, on April 3, 1995, *L'Economiste* carried an extensive interview with Israel's Minister of Economic Planning and Religious Affairs, Shimon Shetreet.