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During its first year in office the Bush administration continued its predecessor's policy toward Morocco, in which strategic considerations were paramount and public expressions of concern about human rights violations were limited. Rather than commenting on abuses in Morocco, U.S. officials tended to emphasize the two countries' special relationship, Morocco's strategic importance to the United States, and King Hassan's pro-Western stance and moderate voice for Arab-Israeli peace. U.S. officials pointed to Morocco's strategic location facing the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at the Strait of Gibraltar; the King's support of joint military exercises and his signing of the 1982 base-access agreement which grants U.S. forces access and transit during emergencies; his willingness to host Voice of America facilities; and his offer to make Morocco an alternative landing site for the space shuttle in the event of an emergency. While the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 1988*, produced by the Reagan administration and issued in February 1989, provided a remarkably candid appraisal of Moroccan rights practices, the Bush administration has not repeated these observations in the form of public criticism of Moroccan abuses. According to the U.S. embassy in Rabat, "[s]pecific human rights cases are discussed in high level private meetings," but these discussions have not taken public form.

Despite Morocco's strategic value to the United States, U.S. economic aid to Morocco provides the opportunity for administration influence on human rights issues. In fiscal year 1989, the U.S. gave an estimated \$120 million in foreign assistance to Morocco. Approximately \$41 million was military aid (mainly under the Foreign Military Sales Financing Program, with a small amount under the International Military Education Training Program) and \$27.5 million was economic assistance (development aid and economic support funds). For fiscal year 1990 the administration has requested roughly the same amounts. But the Bush administration has made no move publicly to use this aid as a tool to end abuses in Morocco.

In connection with the 1990 Foreign Assistance Bill, by contrast, the Senate Appropriations Committee suggested that "decisions concerning U.S. foreign assistance levels and programs must take into account the human rights record of recipient governments." With regard to Morocco, the committee expressed concern about "reports of severe human rights abuses in Morocco and the lax enforcement of existing statutes protecting the civil and human rights of citizens."

It is not as if the Bush administration is unaware of Moroccan abuses. The discrepancy between King Hassan's often-expressed support for democratic reforms and Morocco's actual human rights practices was made apparent in the State Department's *Country Reports*, which noted that "constitutional freedoms are frequently ignored in practice" and that "the human rights situation did not improve significantly in 1988 and may have deteriorated." Among the numerous violations cited in the *Country Reports* was the continued incommunicado detention of suspects for purposes of interrogation beyond the limit established by Moroccan law. The State Department commented: "These legal requirements are widely ignored, and detainees are often held for up to several weeks or longer before being brought before a judge, frequently without notice or access to their families or attorneys." While the King himself has consistently denied that Morocco holds any prisoners on political grounds, Amnesty International and the Moroccan Human Rights Organization (which received official permission to function in December 1988) have identified hundreds of prisoners held for political offenses, some since as far back as the early 1970s. Among their

"crimes" were belonging to illegal organizations and propagating material and opinions hostile to the government. The *Country Reports* similarly reported that "some Moroccans were in prison and in exile solely because of their political beliefs."

The *Country Reports* further noted that "other reliable reports have confirmed the use of torture and other forms of cruel treatment by police authorities to extract confessions from detainees and punish prisoners accused of both ordinary and political claims." Recent reports of incidents of torture also disturbed the Senate Appropriations Committee, which formally noted that "the number of incidents of torture is high and increasing and most frequently involved detainees accused of politically related offenses."

The *Country Reports* went on to explain that "prisoners are held in degrading conditions." Inmates are held in overcrowded, poorly ventilated cells, with appalling hygienic conditions and inadequate medical care. These conditions have propelled several groups of prisoners to start indefinite hunger strikes, the earliest of which was begun in 1985. The three remaining hunger strikers from that era have been force-fed for the past four years. In the summer of 1989, all three fell into a coma. While two of the hunger strikers regained consciousness after a few days, the third took several weeks to do so. More recently, a group of four men, in protest against grossly inadequate medical conditions, launched a hunger strike which, after 64 days, led to the death of one, Abdelhaq Chbada, on August 19. Thus far prison authorities have consistently broken their promises to improve prison conditions. Instead, in October 1989, one month after two Moroccan human rights groups raised the issue of prison conditions with officials from the Interior, Justice and Health Ministries, the government warned the groups that they had violated the law.

Another major area of concern is the continued disappearances of Saharans and other detainees. According to Amnesty International, some 80 Saharans "allegedly `disappeared'" after having been arrested by Moroccan security forces in 1976. An investigation into these disappearances requested from and allegedly carried out by the Moroccan Justice Ministry has not produced any further information. Amnesty International also mentioned several hundred people arrested in November 1987 whose whereabouts and legal status remain unclear.

The *Country Reports* also referred to the increasingly frequent seizing and banning of publications critical of the country's political and socioeconomic conditions. Article 9 of the Moroccan Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, and the Moroccan government has declared its respect for the similar guarantee contained in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But as the *Country Reports* aptly noted, this freedom is limited in reality: "Criticism of the monarchy and Islam is not tolerated, and, in the opinion of most observers, foreign policy is also not fully open to free discussion. King Hassan has made clear that any challenge to Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara is not to be the subject of public debate." Government actions such as placing journals under prepublication censorship and threatening publishers with defamation suits or the suspension of the right to publish have succeeded in intimidating the press and discouraging investigative reporting. These government pressures have led to several publications disappearing from the market. For example, on April 25, 1989, the French-language women's magazine *Kalima*, known for reporting on such controversial subjects as male prostitution, abortion and the absence of a free press in Morocco, announced that it was shutting down operations because yet another of its issues had been seized. Similarly, *Al Massar*, an opposition weekly, was ordered to suspend operations on December 9, 1988, five months

after its owner was slapped with an \$18,500 fine and a two-month suspended prison term for defamation in connection with an article published in 1985 on abuses by a local official.

The Bush administration's silence in the face of these well-documented abuses seems to reflect a decision to downplay human rights in relations with Morocco. We urge the Bush administration to reverse that decision. Limited public comment, quiet diplomacy and closed-door meetings are clearly not enough to ensure that the Moroccan leadership supplements its pro-Western foreign policy with a domestic policy of respect for human rights. The use of U.S. economic influence, coupled with public expressions of concern over Moroccan abuses, are also needed.