BLANCA CAMPS-FEBRER
Politics, Policies and International Relations, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Layers of Security
The Security Sector and Power Struggle in Morocco

ABSTRACT  Morocco’s security sector is a fundamental component of the regime of power in the country. The legitimacy and structure of the security forces has evolved over time, reflecting changing balances within the power struggle among competing elites, but also to a certain degree the international political and normative context. Controlling the meanings of “security,” as well as the coercive resources the security sector provides, has been paramount in the consolidation of the current regime. This article shows the importance of official narratives on security and their evolution over the course of Morocco’s history after its independence.

KEYWORDS: Morocco, security sector reform, army, securitization, terrorism, power struggle

INTRODUCTION: THE TROUBLESOME UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY

It takes some expertise and up-to-date knowledge to grasp the structure of security institutions in Morocco. The local press routinely publishes tentative flow charts of the roles and functions of the different bodies in the army, the intelligence services, and other security structures, some of which are based on internal sources or in-depth investigation. There is no official website in which to find these details, and the sector remains the “royal quarter,” protected from the eyes of public opinion and government institutions (ARI 2009). Lack of transparency makes it difficult for researchers and citizens in general to be able to access the appropriate information on their actual influence and importance within the regime.

What we do know is that the security sector constitutes one of the most important components of the Moroccan regime, and indeed of many other authoritarian regimes. Like in most countries in the region, the security sector
has traditionally been structured to protect the regime, the leaders, their property and privileges (Owen 1992; Saaf 2012). In fact, analysts agree that the nature of the political system is an obstacle to the reform of the Moroccan security sector (Kodmani and Chartouni-Dubarry 2009; Mattes 2009). The current representation of security institutions in Morocco is in turn the result of a historical overlap of security and state models, and it can tell the story of the power struggles that have shaped the power of the current regime and its elites.

Notwithstanding the debate as to what the real meaning of “security” is, or should be, this article deals primarily with “security” understood as a contested concept that defines legitimized violence and control over other actors and resources. As such, the “security dimension,” which could be understood in broader terms, is here limited to the narratives and practices of those who control the politically sanctioned meaning of “security” and its violent resources. The article focuses on the evolution of the influence and role of the security sector and its elites in Morocco, and on the incentives for transformation and reform.

The article differs from the traditional approach to the study of the security sector in two crucial elements. First, the approach is not narrowly focused on security institutions and does not try to limit who or what falls inside or outside the “security sector.” The “security sector” is here rather an “analytical prism” (Albert and Buzan 2011) through which the political nature of the world is approached. The article focuses on the power regime in place in Morocco and at how the “security dimension” and the historical processes of securitization have intervened in preserving or challenging a certain status quo over time. Simultaneously, in focusing on the power regime and the strategies of the elite in safeguarding their own survival, the evolution and dynamics of the “security sector” can be better understood (Feliu and Parejo 2012; Izquierdo Brichs 2008). Elite networks are not static, and global and domestic socioeconomic transformations, but also changes in normative assumptions, have an impact on the nature and role of traditional elites (Cammett 2004; Ruiz de Elvira, Schwartz and Weipert-Fenner 2019). As such, the analysis includes not only the actors within the security sector but also mechanisms, practices, and narratives that might act as resources of power for other actors within other dimensions.

1. My approach stands within critical security studies at the crossroads between the Securitization Theory of the Copenhagen School (see especially Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998), International Political Sociology as developed mainly by Didier Bigo (Bigo and McCluskey 2018), and other conceptual tools developed by Jeff Huysmans (Huysmans 2006).
Hence, this article is not about the classical approach of counting the troops, budgets, and missions of every security institution. Although this information is a fundamental basis for analyses, the resources of power embedded in the security sector go far beyond the human capacities of the institutions. Elements such as individual profiles and trajectories, or securitization narratives are also included in order to understand the dynamics and changes of power relations within the security sector and in relation to the political and economic networks of the country.

In this research four distinctive periods are identified in which the functions of the security sector are distinctively framed by a securitization narrative that reflects a global and internal power struggle:

- The consolidation of the monarchy after independence (1950s–60s).
- The political and economic transformation within a neoliberal framework (1970s–80s).
- The human rights narrative (1990s).

These periods are described separately below. As will be shown, the historical evolution has engendered different structures and practices, most of which have persisted and remain part of a complex map of the security sector, its functions, narratives, and elites.

NATION, STATE, AND KING: THE MEANINGS OF SECURITY FROM INDEPENDENCE TO HASSENI

From the Struggle for Independence to the Consolidation of the Monarchy (1950s–60s)

The traditional structures and power relations existing in Morocco before the nineteenth century were superseded by Western institutions and dynamics brought in by the French and, to a minor degree, the Spanish colonizations. Both structures evolved but persisted throughout colonization and thereafter. Nazih Ayubi describes Morocco’s pre-colonization as a “strong nation” with a “weak apparatus” (Ayubi 1995, 121). The colonial period alternatively developed a “strong apparatus,” whereas legitimacy as an occupying power was weak. The regime emerging in post-colonial Morocco ably managed to keep

2. An essential tool for this task is Military Balance and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearly reports.
the “strong apparatus,” especially at the bureaucratic and military levels, while regaining “strong nation” legitimacy.

The first decade and a half after independence was determined by the power struggle between the nationalist movement and the monarchy (Zartman 1987). The creation of the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces in May 1956 was one of the first steps towards the enforcement of the monarchy. The sultan had a strong power base and was religiously and socially legitimized, but the different state projects of the liberation army and the different branches and armed groups were a threat to the monarchical project. King Mohamed V saw the immediate necessity to create a national army, as well as a national police force that would fall under the monarchy’s authority (Abitbol 2009). Those who refused the Aix-les-Bains agreements of 1955 with France suffered persecution, torture, enforced disappearances, and other violations of human rights at the hands of the newly born security services.

The elite of the newly created Royal Armed Forces had been trained and had already been part of the colonial armies (Abitbol 2009; Gallissot 1989; Leveau 1985; Saaf 2012). Most of its forces were also largely drawn from rural Amazigh areas, creating a useful counterbalance to the urban and nationalist forces and the Istiqlal Party. The cultural background of army officials preserved a linkage with France’s interests and with the West, in accordance with the “interdependence” formula of Morocco’s independence from France. The origin, military culture, and even ideological stance of the post-independence army leaders determined the initial monarchical form of Morocco. The Arab and North African armies were at the forefront of the leading national and independence movements. In Morocco, however, the use and role of the Army was quickly turned into a power resource by the monarchy, which used it internally and externally.

The Charifian dynasty of the Alawites traces its origins to the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, the Sultans have married Amazigh women as a way of also enforcing the “blood and racial bonds” of their authority (Ayubi 1995, 121).

The final report of the Instance Equité et Réconciliation (IER) (2009) documents the violations of human rights against members of the Liberation Army and of the Resistance such as the Secret Organization of the Black Crescent, some currents within the Istiqlal or the Democratic Party for Independence (PDI): “These violations took various forms, from abduction and incarceration in secret detention centers, to physical liquidation on the streets with firearms or in detention centers following torture and ill-treatment” (IER 2009, 40; translated from the French by the author).

Benhamou Kattani, Mohamed Ameziane, Driss Ben Omar, and Mohamed Oufkir are among those high-ranking officers coming from the colonial armies (Abitbol 2009).

According to Susan Miller, 90 percent of the Moroccan Army was of rural and Berber origin (Miller 2013, 157).
The resource was useful since recently gained independence and the popular struggle had empowered populations towards political mobilization and contestation. The Rif revolt of 1957, which opposed different ideas of the state and of identity, was the baptism of the Moroccan Army and indeed of the soon-to-be King Hassan II (Aziza 2019). Over the following decades it was largely the army but also the police, under the Ministry of Interior, that repressed opposition and dissent through high levels of coercive violence.

Political and Economic Transformation within a Neoliberal Framework (1970s–80s)

First, the coercive power acquired by internal repression and the legitimacy gained through the 1963 war against Algeria increased the ability of the elite in the army to contest the primary position of a king tainted by its corruption and authoritarianism. The strong dependence of the king on coercive force, as Zartman (1987, 1) argues, caused Hassan II to end up “alone and vulnerable to the last direct challenge, coming from his security forces.” The 1971 and 1972 failed military coups showed how the army had become a coercive resource not only for the monarchy but also for those officers who controlled it (Saaf 2012; Tobji 2006).

The contentious position of military elites towards the monarchy led to an in-depth reorganization of the army. Hassan II used different strategies to reduce its power. First, the basis of the military was “arabized” in order to counter the traditionally Amazig composite (Zartman 1987). The promotion of Islamism within its ranks was also meant to counter secularist, and class consciousness, partly responsible for the involvement of some officials in the coups (Saaf 2012; Tobji 2006).

Second, the armed forces were divided internally. The Ministry of Defense disappeared and the army was placed under the official supervision of the Interior Ministry, while the king directly supervised all military affairs. 7 Ahmed Dlimi became the army’s new strongman; 8 Housni Benslimane, trusted for his support to the king during the 1971 coup, was put in charge

7. This restructuring had a strategic cost in the war in Western Sahara, as most decisions had to wait for Rabat’s approval (Wright 1983; Zartman 1987).
8. Mahjoub Tobji, exiled RAF officer and Dlimi’s former aid-de-camp, argues that from 1973 on it was Dlimi who effectively controlled the regime, including the king (Tobji 2006). Zartman, on the contrary, argues that it was not until 1980 that Dlimi gained control of the “newly centralized and autonomous militarized structure” (Zartman 1987, 24). After his death in 1983, his many roles were divided among other officers, especially Housni Benslimane, the new strongman, but also Moulay Hafid Alaoui, Abdelazziz Bennani, and Mohamed Kabbaj.
of the Royal Gendarmerie (Transparency International 2013). The modernization and newly acquired status of the Royal Gendarmerie was an important element in the creation of new elites and diversified resources that the actors had to compete for. The king also tried to atomize possible challenges to its status by creating different units, such as the Direction Générale des Études et de la Documentation (DGED), in order to disperse the accumulation of power by a few military officers. Given that the DGED fell into the hands of Dlimi, the real effect of atomization is debatable.

Third, the war in Western Sahara (1975–89) provided the perfect opportunity to isolate the army in the so-called southern provinces, while increasing its legitimacy (Saaf 2012).

Fourth, Hassan II favored the creation of a clientelist network of economic interests, especially in business opportunities in Western Sahara (Claisse 1987; Denoeux 2007; Tobji 2006; US Embassy Rabat 2008; Veguilla 2009). The military occupation and control of Western Sahara and the law of imperative Moroccanization of 1973 helped promote a crony capitalist project for many officers within the security forces, who usually involved their inferiors in illegal businesses, nepotism or embezzlement (Bordes and Labrousse 2004; Cammett 2007; Hachemaoui 2012; Tobji 2006).

At an international level, Hassan II’s strong anti-communist narrative reinforced a strategic relationship with the West, not only with France but also, and especially, with the United States. Morocco became a pundit in the war against communism in Africa during the Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter administrations, intervening in Zaire and Congo, and becoming a base for Western operations in Africa (Wright 1983). The uncontestable anchoring in the Western Bloc meant a political and diplomatic support that often overlooked internal repression and human rights violations—often framed as part of the anti-communist struggle—as well as an important flow of military assistance to the regime, which could readily be used to keep the army and the police well equipped and well trained, in tune with the operationality of its Western allies.

9. The DGED was directed by military personnel and in charge of collecting foreign information abroad, well known by the surveillance of the Moroccan diaspora and its activities. The first head of the DGED was Ahmed Dlimi (1973–83). It was not until 2005 that the first civilian, Mohamed Yassine Mansouri, was appointed head of the DGED. With Mohammed VI, new actors were allowed to enter the competition with traditional military elites.

10. On the “Moroccanization” laws passed during the 1970s and their effects on economic elites, see Berrada (1988) and Cammett (2004).
Co-optation of the Human Rights Narrative at the End of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War came at the height of the negative impact of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and early 1990s and the Moroccan regime’s huge debt with global financial institutions. In this new scenario, Hassan II was forced to soften practices and discourses towards opposition forces (Saidy 2007). At the same time, the discourse of liberal peace and human rights had an internal impact on the weight of ongoing demands by opposition movements and activists, while external pressure to address human rights violations that had been secondary during the period of the fight against communism became an important factor in Hassan II’s international support.

The process continued in a coalition government in 1998, the creation of the Consultative Council of Human Rights, and a progressive emergence of a conversation on the repression perpetrated by the regime and its security forces (Saidy 2007; Slyomovics 2001). Again, after the double layer of pre-colonial power and the Western colonial bureaucratic apparatus, a third layer, that of liberal mechanisms, was added to securing the regime. These new practices did not substitute the former but were localized and Moroccanized through a “permanent transition” that henceforth could not completely hide the bad practices of the security forces. The normative narrative of an effort towards conforming with the standards of a liberal state was at odds with habitual abuses, and thus, it made the language and practices of the regime more complex, especially with the ascension of the young Mohamed VI to the throne in 1999 (Feliu 1995, 2013; Vairel 2007).

SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND COUNTER-TERRORISM (2000s–PRESENT)

Mohammed VI: A King’s “Political Will”

The removal of Driss Basri, Hassan II’s Minister of Interior and the darkest most notorious face of the regime’s repression, was an important starting point of the new reign. The opening up to liberal practices, or at least a liberal narrative, took shape with the initiative of a process branded as transitional

11. Laura Feliu has analyzed the French and North American policies of promotion of human rights in the context of the coups’ repression, suspects’ disappearances and human rights’ violations after the coups. She has pointed at the importance of including France’s and the United States’ political systems in order to understand how their policies affected and intervened in the process (Feliu 2013).

12. Less spectacular, but probably more relevant, was the retirement in 2017 of General Hosni Benslimane.
justice, initiated in 2004 by Mohammed VI. The former promised to address the crimes and violations of human rights perpetrated by the regime up to 1999. The Instance of Equity and Reconciliation (IER) investigated the forced disappearance of military men in the secret detention center of Tazmamart, tortures and deaths of dissidents and activists perpetrated by the police in police stations and other crimes, but it frustrated the hopes of enforcing any kind of accountability, or of developing effective civilian mechanisms (Benavides, Mateos and Camps-Febrer 2018; Feliu and Parejo 2012, Laouina 2016; Slyomovics 2008). Although the names of the perpetrators were excluded from the process, the IER can also be regarded, however, as a means by the monarchy to downgrade the legitimacy of certain security units, charged with internal repression. Most importantly, the king showed his commitment and endeavor towards the goals of liberal and human rights standards.

It is the king’s political will that has indeed been seen alternatively as the driving force set against an entrenched security apparatus. Parallel to the narrative of reform, however, Morocco has also been inscribed within the macro-securitization narrative of the Global War on Terror (GWoT), which has managed to securitize ever-growing areas of people’s lives in many countries. The primary security threat of terrorism requires or normalizes extended executive powers, secrecy, and exceptional measures that modulate policy areas that were traditionally not managed in a security rationale (Huysmans 2006).

In Morocco, the GWoT became especially relevant after the 2003 attacks in Casablanca. The safe haven that Morocco had been representing as a stable and terrorist-free country in North Africa, especially compared with Algeria, was broken on the 16 May 2003. Previously contentious anti-terrorist legislation was passed unanimously ten days after the deadly attacks.

The strategic and intelligence importance of Morocco for the US and European fight against terrorism is not only due to Morocco’s proximity to Europe or its nationals’ involvement in the Middle East, but also, with special effort from the regime to highlight it, in the Sahelo-Saharan region. The anti-terrorist practices of Morocco’s security forces have involved mass detentions and criminalization of activists, limitation of media freedom on security grounds, etc. There have been allegations of torture of Salafist activists. The involvement in the “rendition network” of secret detention centers developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) under the George W. Bush administration has been revealed (Priest 2005). Although some of these practices are internationally criticized, the importance of Morocco in the fight against terrorism ensures political and financial support to the regime.
The security sector is expanding (Saaf 2012) and, while not a local phenomenon, this expansion entails both equipping urban forces with more lethal and high-tech means, or redeploying military personnel in urban areas within the counter-terrorist framework. The militarization of the police force and of urban surveillance with the Hadar Operation that involves joint patrolling of the Royal Armed Forces, the Royal Gendarmerie, the police and the Auxiliary Forces, are but two cases of a changing dynamic that has also been seen around the world (Kraska 2007).

The Bureau Central d’Investigations Judiciaires (BCIJ), a specialized police body created in 2015, has been at the forefront of the fight against terrorism and criminal networks. The very public image of the modern BCIJ is enhanced by its director, Abdelhak Khiame, regularly appearing on local and international media to promote this so-called “Moroccan Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).” Modern and salient bodies such as the BCIJ, however, do not imply an end to older practices. The figure of the moqaddem, an appointed local liaison of the Interior Ministry, proves the existence of these different layers of “security.” The old-fashioned moqaddem that controls what goes on in the neighborhood has not been substituted by a more professional police and will not be replaced by surveillance cameras. New structures of surveillance and intelligence-gathering are being added and will coexist with the traditional ones, since moqaddimin (pl. moqaddem) account for an enhanced gathering of information that is, in fact, branded as one of the main fringe benefits of Moroccan intelligence (El Ouardighi 2015).

As a result, the official political will to reform is balanced with global security concerns. The development of mechanisms that are labeled under the “security governance” agenda provides the official evidence of a political commitment to liberal reforms. Security governance revolves around the idea of

13. This includes drones, demining robots, and, especially, the most advanced equipment for surveillance technology (Telquel 2017).
14. Militarization can be seen as a four-dimensional process that affects material, cultural, operational, and organizational dynamics (Kraska 2007).
15. Hadar (“surveillance”) was established in 2014 as a means to protect and control high-security spots in Morocco, especially regarding tourism. It was initially deployed in Casablanca and other international airports.
16. Rural areas and entire regions such as the Rif or the Western Sahara have been subject to intermittent or permanent military control.
17. Before its creation the same tasks were assumed by other units of the DGED or the police or even the military intelligence.
18. There have been, however, attempts at modernizing and training the moqqademin in order to make them more technologically competent.
security as a “human right,” as expressed in the 2011 Constitution, and as the “foundation of development” (Aboudahab 2013; Bensalah Alaoui 2017; El Maslouhi 2013). This “human security” discourse is in tune with the new conceptualizations of “security” at the United Nations level.

The need to balance the reformist liberal approach with the security approach accounts for sometimes-ambiguous regime behavior. The specific tensions between these narratives can then be explained not so much as part of threat-level assessments but more as the evolving power struggle of elites within the regime. The ability of the regime to navigate and balance an enhanced structure of repression and social control while maintaining a “reformist layer” allows room for a stick-and-carrot approach to the security sector institutions and their elites. The goal to keep the security sector “busy, dependent, and divided” still applies thirty years after Zartman’s (1987, 23) formulation.

In this sense, a range of internal reforms, from penitentiary to conscription, is officially explained in the light of security governance, but other reasons could be the internal elite struggles. A case in point is the changes within the national security police force. The overarching modernization plan of the police, dubbed Plan Hammouchi,¹⁹ is set to situate the police in a stronger, more legitimized position whether internally among other state institutions or externally towards society and the international community. The “Citizen Police” (MAP Express 2018) for instance, is a program intended to gain citizens’ trust.²⁰ Other reforms have entailed internal sanctions, feminizing all ranks of the police, reforming the training process and accession measures, etc. (Barlamane.com 2018).²¹ These measures might be due to a conscious struggle to conform to international “liberal” norms, to build a new face for the security forces— and maybe settle a few old scores— but the normative aspect of fighting the former sense of impunity that security forces enjoyed should not be underestimated. It is a non-participatory approach to cleaning up the house, although anonymous denunciations such as that of the so-called

¹⁹. Abdellatif Hammouchi is the director of both the National Police (DGSN) and the Intelligence Unit of the General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DGST), as well as royal advisor in issues of counter-terrorism.

²⁰. Since 2017, the Moroccan police offer an annual Open Doors Day with more than eighty thousand visits on its first celebration, according to official sources. This day is in line with the modernization of the police forces and its very strong media component (Telquel 2017; Tiamaz 2018).

²¹. See also interview with Boubakr Sabik, DGSN spokesperson, in Zainabi (2018).

Targuist Sniper, or international scandals like the “Adib Affair,” might also have played a role in including generalized corruption within the political agenda.

The modernization plan, however, stands at odds with the accusations of torture Hammouchi received in French courts, and especially at odds with the regime’s attitude of closing ranks around him. While the police forces are being modernized, the main issue remains the lack of civilian and parliamentary control (Mattes 2009) and, thus, all gestures remain dependent on the king’s political will.

As for the armed forces, the need to enhance legitimacy for the institution can be seen in the reintroduction in 2019 of compulsory military service for men and women. Alternatively, the use of the Royal Gendarmerie as a represor of social and political unrest could be regarded as a way to delegitimize this paramilitary body.

Who Needs Reform? Internal and External Incentives

In the Moroccan current context, there are no pressing incentives to develop real structural reform within the security sector. Internally, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements might be able to push and keep human rights on the agenda. Mass contestation such as the 20 February movement did achieve some constitutional reforms (Benchems 2012; Madani, Maghraoui and Zerhouni 2013). Another internal incentive for a transformation of the security force would be the emergence or evolution of elites in need of new frameworks in which to act. This seems to be the case in the evolution of the official conceptualization of “security.” Saidy (2007) points at the possibility of new emerging military officers with democratizing and modernizing drives. However, no evidence of a true commitment to democratization from the security elites is visible. Although anti-corruption campaigns abound

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23. The “sniper de Targuist” was an anonymous YouTube account that uploaded videos of police officers engaging in bribery and corruption (JeuneAfrique 2013).

24. In 2014, however, the Interior Ministry issued a lawsuit in a French court against three people and the French NGO Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), which had sued in its turn the DGST and its director Abdellatif Hammouchi for torture (RFI 2014).

25. On 20 August 2018, the Minister Cabinet adopted a draft bill for the conscription of young Moroccan men aged between nineteen and twenty-five years for twelve months of military service to enter into force in 2019. The military service will “enhance the sense of belonging to the homeland” (King’s Opening of the 3rd Legislature October 2018) and “to inculcate the spirit of patriotism in young people as part of a correlation between the rights and duties of citizenship” (spokesperson for the royal palace, Abdelhak Lamrini; Lamrini 2018).
within state institutions and in media reports, indicators show that corruption is still generalized and pervasive.  

The most evident internal drive so far is that of a Moroccan transnational economic elite in need of a stable, modern, and secure context. This new elite, surrounding the king and embedded in the royal family’s business interests, would be more akin to “security” perched to provide financial and economic stability through the appearance of a liberal state. The declarations articulated between the neoliberal economic world and the security sector indicates increasing abandonment of the military professional global domain in favor of a more global economic professional domain. In this sense, the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES), the most prominent public think tank, identifies its main global issues as being terrorism, migration, environment, economy and stability, technology, and investment.  

The security dimension is omnipresent in these global issues. Stability plays a key role in the development of most state plans with an emphasis placed on public order that can guarantee a safe investment and development of policies, with the “social touch” of human development added to the picture (Catusse 2011).

In security sector reform the evolution of public provision of technology to the security institutions and the economic elites involved with it remains unexplored, along with transparency of public procurement—an obviously even more difficult goal. Private security actors and companies providing technology for surveillance and control are also fundamental actors that, although with difficulty, must in the future be included in the analysis of the security sector.

Externally, the regime has even fewer incentives to reform its security sector. The mechanisms developed in the framework of counter-terrorism are an especially hard obstacle to the reform of the security sector in Morocco (Mattes 2009). The Moroccan security sector is well anchored and connected within the Western and European security complex.  

The fight against clandestine migrations from Africa and against terrorism are two key elements that make Morocco an indispensable partner for those countries more...
willingly promoting security sector reform and rule of law. The need to count on the alignment of Morocco for European Union and US security policies (Thompson and McCants 2013) reinforces the acceptance of exceptionality measures and relaxes the pressure on ending impunity, and the lack of transparency and accountability.

As Mattes (2009) argues, any reforms involving the security sector might be oriented towards improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the services, but they will not jeopardize or alter the position of the king within the political system. A need to put an end to illiberal practices is constantly acknowledged through grand operations or modernization plans that more often than not involve an approach that includes technology-enhanced mechanisms (the classic train-and-equip approach) and a superficial fight against corruption and crime within state structures.

CONCLUSIONS

The centrality of the king has overshadowed many of the analyses on Morocco’s democratization process. The emphasis on his political will to reform, topped with the excessive focus on “constitutional reform” and formal structures, obscures the current picture of a coercive provision of security that is ever more pervasive in society, and ever more entrenched in international and regional security networks. Additionally, changes in the security sector landscape must also be read in terms of a power struggle among old and new elites (see, for example, the Benslimane descent and the emergence of Hammouchi).

Along with a new narrative of security focusing on development and citizens’ rights, old conceptions of security still govern the main grand political strategy of the security sector. The timid reforms and changes that one can identify within the security sector have so far been superficial and respond more to regime power struggles and to a need to reaffirm publicly and internationally a permanent “political will” than to a real transformative goal. The increased securitization of life, not least with the anti-terrorist narrative, helps obscure and “slow down” real changes and civilian accountability.

A look at the map of current security sector bodies shows a confusing picture and overlap of functions and roles. Shared control of the different units, where the institutions fall under the authority of the king, and the Ministry of Justice or the Interior Ministry, is evidence of the delicate balance the regime has placed upon the institutions. As we have seen, this confusion is not a random accident of bureaucratic incompetence but rather a complex strategy of
power struggles and balances between competitor actors and units. It reflects also the rewards and punishments of the king and his entourage.

The elites acting within the security dimension do control a parcel of information and coercive resources but they nevertheless are forced to compete against each other and are at present incapable of building or unwilling to build a coherent project against the king. In this circular competition among elites, the client–patronage relation with the political and economic elites puts them in a permanent need to reinforce the favor of the primary actor within the system in a network of mutual and asymmetrical dependency.

Normative assumptions and a changing socioeconomic environment might bring incentives to a superficial and top-down reform of security practices. The grand structure, its obscure mechanisms and decision-making processes remain so far untouched.

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BLANCA CAMPS-FEBRER is Ph.D. Scholar for Politics, Policies and International Relations, Autonomous University of Barcelona. Spain. This research is part of the author’s Ph.D. dissertation. Email: blanca.camps@uab.cat

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