

'Bitterness towards Egypt' – the Moroccan nationalist movement, revolutionary Cairo and the limits of anti-colonial solidarity

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the campaign conducted by the Moroccan nationalist movement in Cairo after World War II aiming to enlist the Arab League in its anti-colonial struggle. Although the Maghribi activists initially celebrated several successes, they ultimately failed to obtain any diplomatic support, especially following the Egyptian revolution of 1952. Drawing on Moroccan as well as French, Spanish, and US sources, this article argues that Nasser and his colleagues refused to support the Moroccans due to irreconcilable ideological differences, thus laying the foundation for the scepticism towards the Arab world that characterised Morocco's foreign policy during the Cold War.

On 7 February 1946, three Moroccans disembarked at Port Said where they were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of politicians, diplomats, and the local Maghribi community.¹ Within days of their arrival in Egypt, King Faruq granted the delegates a private audience and invited them to an official ceremony celebrating the first anniversary of the Arab League.² A few weeks later, at a meeting of the League's cultural committee, M'hamed ben Ahmed Benaboud, the head of the delegation, declared passionately that 'Morocco has great hope ... in solving its [colonial] problems and it relies upon itself and the Arab League [regarding this].'³ The local press celebrated the North African nationalists, public figures spoke out on their behalf, and the governments of Egypt and Iraq expressed their willingness to present the case of Morocco before the United Nations (UN).

Following this initial success, the Moroccans established themselves in Cairo, co-founding *Maktab al-Maghrib al-'Arabi* (Office of the Arab Maghrib) in February 1947, which served

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¹Ahmed Benaboud (Cairo) to Ahmed Benaboud (Tetuan), 16 February 1946 & The Delegation of Morocco to the Arab League, 8 February 1946, *al-Hadaf* (Beirut), 15 (13.01), Box 81/2173, Archivo General de la Administración, Alcalá de Henares (AGA).

²Commemorative Celebration of the Arab League in Cairo, 24 March 1946, M'hamed Benaboud File, Bennouna Family Archive, Tetuan (BFA).

³Kilmat Ra'is al-Wafd al-Murrakishi Amhammad Ibn 'Abud fi Ihtifal al-Jama'at al-'Arabiyya, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, 26 March 1946, 8. Reproduced in M'hamed Benaboud, *Al-Nidal Al-Watani li-l-Shahid Amhammad Ibn 'Abud fi-l-Mashriq: Shahadat wa Watha'iq* (Tetuan, Morocco: Manshurat Jama'iyyat Titwan Asmir, 1997), 46.

as the local headquarters for nationalist parties from across North Africa.⁴ Its Moroccan staff consisted of activists from both the Spanish and the French zone: ‘Abdelmajid Benjelloun, Ahmed ben el-Melih, ‘Abdelkarim Ghallab and several others had decided to remain in Cairo and join their compatriots after completing their university studies. They occupied themselves with organising a library covering the region’s history, politics and society, holding press conferences whenever the need arose, and publishing bulletins and booklets for public circulation.⁵ Prominent guests such as the Syrian prime minister Jamil Mardam Bey, the Lebanese prime minister Riyad al-Sulh Bey, and Egyptian legal scholar Sanhuri Pasha all but guaranteed favourable media coverage of the numerous events organised by Maktab al-Maghrib.⁶ This flurry of activities did not go unnoticed; in the spring of 1948, the French embassy displayed alarm at ‘the intensive press campaign, which the Maghribis work hard to maintain against us.’⁷

Just a few years later, however, the general enthusiasm for the political aspirations of the Maghribi ‘brothers’ had all but evaporated; when the nationalist leader ‘Allal al-Fassi arrived in Cairo in January 1953, the Egyptian media and politicians displayed little interest in his presence. Back home in Rabat, a surprised French protectorate official remarked on the Moroccans’ increasing ‘bitterness towards Egypt,’ because of its refusal to adequately support their struggle.⁸ Having once put their hopes in the diplomatic aid they might receive from the Arab League in general, and the Egyptian government in particular, the nationalists now had to realise the futility of their efforts. But what had caused this drastic change of mind in Cairo vis-à-vis the anti-colonial campaign of the Moroccan nationalist movement?

Part of the answer can be found in the Egyptian revolution of 23 July 1952, which overthrew King Faruq and brought the Free Officers to power. By late 1954, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), led by the charismatic army officer Gamal ‘Abdel Nasser, adopted an assertive Pan-Arab stance that sought to free the entire region from the remnants of European colonial influence.⁹ Egypt’s radical opposition to the Baghdad Pact signed in February 1955 under US-British auspices, its efforts on behalf of the liberation of Palestine, and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in July 1956 eventually made Nasser ‘a folk hero’ in the Arab world.¹⁰ Moreover, during the Bandung conference in April 1955, Nasser emerged as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, thus further strengthening his anti-imperialist credentials.¹¹

Scholars of the Cold War have dealt much with this ‘global offensive’ against (neo-) colonial forms of Western domination, beginning in the 1950s and reaching its climax with the

⁴Abd al-Karim Ghallab, *Tarikh Al-Harakat Al-Wataniyya bi-l-Maghrib* (Casablanca, Morocco: Matba’a al-Najah al-Jadida, 2000), Vol. I, 440-442.

⁵Allal al-Fassi, *Al-Harakat Al-Istiqlaliyya fi-l-Maghrib Al-‘Arabi* (Cairo: Maktab al-Maghrib al-‘Arabi, 1948), 380.

⁶Takrim al-Wufud al-‘Arabiyya – al-Nashra 66 min Maktab al-Maghrib al-‘Arabi, 16 February 1948, M’hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

⁷Ambassadeur Arvengas au Ministre des Affaires étrangères Bidault, 16 April 1948, 1MA/200/338, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).

⁸Les relations franco-égyptiennes et leurs incidences sur le problème marocain, 18 May 1955, Série M/24QO/71, Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve (AMAE).

⁹Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 31-2; Joel Gordon, *Nasser’s Blessed Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196; Avraham Sela, ‘Abd Al-Nasser’s Regional Politics – a Reassessment’, in *Rethinking Nasserism – Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*, ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 184; Peter Mansfield, *Nasser* (London: Methuen, 1969), 97.

¹⁰Wilton Wynn, *Nasser of Egypt: The Search for Dignity* (Cambridge: Arlington Books, 1956), 140; Aaded Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 9-20.

¹¹Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 390-1.

Palestinian struggle for independence two decades later.¹² Moving their research focus from Western capitals and Moscow towards alternative sites, such as Cairo, they have emphasised the importance of ‘transnational postcolonial visions in the global South that imagined a world apart ... from the imperial order’ and thus repeatedly challenged the bipolar international system of the post-World War II period.¹³ Yet the Moroccan nationalists evidently did not benefit from this trend despite their presence in Cairo, which – in the words of Vijay Prashad – ‘in the 1950s had the feeling of a defiant city ... ready to take on the First World with rhetoric and guns.’¹⁴ One might simply point out the inopportune timing of the Moroccan struggle for independence, which came to a successful conclusion by March 1956 and thus partially preceded this new revolutionary era. But the problem reaches even deeper and reveals the contradictions inherent in the process of decolonisation: the rivalry between moderate, generally pro-Western anti-colonial nationalists, on the one hand, and those advocating for radical change through revolutionary struggle and neutrality in the conflict between Washington and Moscow, on the other hand.¹⁵ It is within this constant tension that we must position the history of the Moroccan activists seeking to obtain support for their cause in the Middle East.

Contrary to the Third-Worldist vanguard, the Moroccan nationalists espoused a much less radical interpretation of this historical juncture; instead of challenging the ‘contradiction between domination and self-determination in the relations of the superpowers with their junior partners,’ they sought to benefit from the opportunities made available by the Cold War.¹⁶ This meant obtaining support at the UN, which both represented the hierarchical nature of international relations and a means to challenge it.¹⁷ For this reason, the Moroccans conducted an anti-colonial propaganda campaign in New York parallel to their efforts in Cairo, achieving numerous astonishing publicity successes that brought their case to the attention of the American public. Yet notwithstanding their best efforts, the United States government preferred to maintain stability in this strategically important region. Fearing that chaos might lead to increased Communist activity and thus Soviet influence, Washington refrained from challenging its NATO partner France regarding its colonial policies.¹⁸ Within this global context, it was especially important for the Moroccans to get diplomatic support from the Arab League so as to obtain the official (though legally non-binding) backing of the UN’s General Assembly, and an active presence in Cairo appeared a necessary step towards achieving this goal.

¹²One good example is Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹³Mark Philip Bradley, ‘Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 465. For two important works indicating this trend, see Odd A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Tony Smith, ‘New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000).

¹⁴Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 51.

¹⁵For an analysis of intra-Arab politics since the 1950s, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁶Prasenjit Duara, ‘The Cold War as a Historical Period: An Interpretive Essay’, *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011), 476.

¹⁷Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 14-17 & 188.

¹⁸Yahia H. Zoubir, ‘The United States, the Soviet Union and Decolonization of the Maghreb, 1945-62’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995); Samya El Machat, *Les Etats-Unis Et Le Maroc: Le Choix Stratégique, 1945-1959* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996); Martin Thomas, ‘Defending a Lost Cause? France and the United States Vision of Imperial Rule in French North Africa’, *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 2 (2002); David Stenner, ‘Did Amrika Promise Morocco’s Independence? The Nationalist Movement, the Sultan, and the Making of the “Roosevelt Myth”’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 4 (2014); Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

This article delineates the relationship between the Moroccan nationalist movement and the Egyptian government, from its beginnings in early 1946 until the North African kingdom's independence in March 1956. It demonstrates that the Moroccans commenced an array of propaganda activities in Cairo in order to attract the attention of the Egyptian public and thereby convince the Egyptian government, and by extension the Arab League, to provide diplomatic support for their independence struggle. However, following the 23 July Revolution, their efforts came to a complete halt. Although the RCC transformed the country from a British quasi-protectorate into a sovereign state, the regime change actually proved detrimental to the Moroccan nationalist parties and undermined their diplomatic campaign to abolish the French and Spanish protectorates established in 1912. Instead, the Egyptian government began to aid the small *Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Maghribi* (Moroccan Liberation Army), an alliance of military groups that had emerged out of the anti-French opposition in 1952, but eventually went its own separate way.

My approach situates the relationship between the Moroccan nationalists and the Egyptian government within the overlapping spheres of domestic policies, regional geopolitics, and international diplomacy during the early Cold War era.¹⁹ On the domestic level, the new regime distrusted the Moroccans' close contacts with the old elites of pre-revolutionary Egypt, which it had begun to eliminate following the 1952 coup d'état.²⁰ On the regional level, the RCC decided that it could ill afford to alienate both Paris and London at the same time, and it thus balanced its anti-British attitude with a basic understanding with the French government. On the global level, the new Egyptian leaders felt that the ongoing process of decolonisation required radical actions; the Moroccans' focus on diplomacy constituted an anachronism in their eyes. As a result, the nature of Egyptian aid for the Moroccan cause shifted with the 1952 revolution, from support for a negotiated form of decolonisation to an emphasis on horizontal connections with other militant anti-colonial movements, in which moderate and pro-monarchical activists were viewed with great suspicion.

The two opposing viewpoints on the appropriate path for national liberation created a conflict between the new Egyptian regime and the Moroccan activists, which could not be reconciled, even after Morocco's independence. Despite the explosion of Pan-Arab sentiment in the wake of the Suez Crisis in 1956, which had a considerable impact on the public mood across North Africa, the new leaders in Rabat, consisting mainly of former nationalists, refused to join the Arab League for several years. In order to understand this development, though, we must begin by looking back at the emergence of intra-Arab politics following the end of World War II.

The office of the Arab Maghrib in Cairo

On 22 March 1945, seven states founded the Arab League, whose headquarters in Cairo underlined the regional preeminence of Egypt.²¹ It constituted a loose confederation with

¹⁹This approach is inspired by: Cyrus Schayegh, '1958 Reconsidered: State Formation and the Cold War in the Early Postcolonial Arab Middle East', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013). Also, Raymond Baker has pointed out that the 'Nasserist vision of Egypt's destiny was a grasp of the necessary linkage between domestic and international politics.' Raymond William Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 44.

²⁰James P. Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 54; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 108-161.

²¹The original founding members of the Arab League were Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, and (Trans-) Jordan.

the vague goal of drawing ‘the relations between member States closer and co-ordinat[ing] their political activities [...], to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries.’²² The governments of the founding states chose the Egyptian diplomat ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Azzam Pasha as the first secretary general, who immediately dedicated himself to the liberation of the non-independent Arab territories.²³ At his insistence, the gathered representatives expanded the foundational document to include a section promising that it would ‘deal with questions affecting the entire Arab world’ including ‘the Arab countries not currently members of the council’ in order to work for their ‘aspirations’ and ‘future.’²⁴ Due to these nebulous pledges, the Arab League immediately became an important point of reference for anti-colonial activists across North Africa, and especially in Morocco.²⁵

By the end of World War II, *Hizb al-Istiqlal* (Independence Party) had established itself as a mass movement under the leadership of Ahmed Balafrej and ‘Allal al-Fassi in French Morocco, while maintaining close contact with *Hizb al-Islah al-Watani* (Party of National Reform, or PNR) presided over by ‘Abdelkhaleq Torres in the northern Spanish zone. Having developed personal ties to the Middle East since the 1920s, the Moroccan nationalists once again looked eastward. In the fall of 1945, the PNR convinced the high commissioner, José Enrique Varela to send a delegation representing Spanish Morocco to the cultural committee of the Arab League. Hoping to improve the reputation of the Franco regime in the Arab world, Varela ordered the local representative of the sultan, the *khalifa*, to nominate two Moroccans for this task: M’hamed ben Ahmed Benaboud (also named ‘al-Ingiliz’ since he came from a family of British *protégés*), and Mohamed ben ‘Abdelsalam al-Fassi al-Halfaoui both of whom had studied in Cairo.²⁶ At the insistence of the Spaniards, the delegation also included Mohamed ben ‘Abdelsalam Benaboud, an education inspector known for his loyalty to the high commissioner.²⁷

In March 1946, the three Moroccan delegates attended the meeting of the Arab League’s cultural committee in Cairo, but the affair did not work out according to the Varela’s plan. While Mohamed ben ‘Abdelsalam Benaboud praised the generosity of Spain, M’hamed Benaboud al-Ingiliz publicly denounced his companion as a traitor and al-Halfaoui proclaimed with lofty rhetoric that ‘if Morocco were a truly independent state, the [subsequent] strengthening of Arab unity would be the key in the hands of the Arabs to the gate of the western Mediterranean.’²⁸ Furious about the two delegates’ perceived betrayal, Varela ordered their immediate return to Morocco, but to no avail; Benaboud al-Ingiliz and al-Halfaoui announced that they would remain in Cairo and continue propagating the Moroccan demands for independence.²⁹

²²Pact of the League of Arab States, 22 March 1945, reproduced in Anita L. P. Burdett, *The Arab League: British Documentary Sources, 1943-1963* (London: Archive Editions, 1995), Vol. IV, 203.

²³Ahmed M. Gomaa, *The Foundation of the League of Arab States: Wartime Diplomacy and Inter-Arab Politics, 1941 to 1945* (London: Longman, 1977), 261. For a discussion of ‘Azzam Pasha’s embrace of Pan-Arabism, see: Ralph Coury, *The Making of an Egyptian Arab Nationalist – the Early Years of Azzam Pasha, 1893-1936* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998), 407-412.

²⁴Pact of the League of Arab States, 22 March 1945, reproduced in Burdett, *The Arab League: British Documentary Sources, 1943-1963*. IV, 206.

²⁵Robert Rézette, *Les Partis Politiques Marocains* (Paris: A. Colin, 1955), 151.

²⁶Khalifian Dahir appointing Benaboud and al-Fassi to represent Morocco in Cairo, 30 November 1945, M’hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

²⁷The Delegation of Morocco to the Arab League, 8 February 1946, *al-Hadaf* (Beirut), 15 (13.01), Box 81/2173, AGA.

²⁸Bulletin No 5 of the Central Committee of Hizb al-Islah, 7 April 1946, M’hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

²⁹Carta del Alto Comisario de España en Marruecos Varela al Ministro de España en el Cairo Don Carlos de Miranda, 3 July 1946, 15 (13.01), Box 81/2173, Expediente 75381/3, AGA.

In coordination with activists from Tunisia and Algeria already present in the Egyptian capital, they lobbied the Arab League to present their respective cases before the UN.³⁰ Full of enthusiasm about the attention their campaign had attracted in the Mashriq, Benaboud wrote back home: 'The propaganda abroad develops quickly and is propelling our case from the weak position in which colonialism has put it, to a broad international sphere ... 'Azzam Pasha has become completely convinced that the northern zone must get out from underneath the hand of Spain and obtain its independence.'³¹ In a pamphlet distributed in the northern city of Tetuan, the PNR informed its members that 'our Moroccan delegation to the Arab League continues ... to propagate the Moroccan case in Arabic political circles [where] it has encountered great sympathy.'³² Encouraged by the warm reception they had received in Cairo, the nationalists now took their campaign to the next level.

On 15 February 1947, the Moroccans co-organised a week-long 'Conference of the Arab Maghrib' together with nationalists from the French zone, Algeria and Tunisia.³³ The participants declared the protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia 'void' and the colonisation of Algeria 'illegal', and requested the Arab League to 'present the North African case before the international organisations and do everything possible to help the Maghrib obtain its complete independence.'³⁴ In a keynote speech, 'Azzam Pasha reminded his audience that the League served the interests of all Arab peoples living under the yoke of colonialism.'³⁵ Important figures of Egyptian public life, such as intellectuals Ahmad Amin and Sayyid Qutb, also attended the meeting, adding their lustre to the proceedings.³⁶

The main reason for the conference, however, was to announce the opening of Maktab al-Maghrib al-'Arabi, which came to serve as the Cairo headquarters for nationalist movements from across North Africa.³⁷ Receptions constituted the easiest way to attract the attention of local politicians and the media, and Maktab al-Maghrib organised them on a regular basis. Whether it was the annual celebration of Mohamed ben Youssef's ascension to the throne or the anniversary of the Arab League, the activists always found a reason to make the public aware of their agenda. To introduce their country to the Egyptian public, the staff members wrote *Huna Murrakish* (Here is Morocco), a detailed critique of French colonialism with the telling title *Widyan al-Damm* (Rivers of Blood), and thematic booklets such as *Huquq al-Dawla al-Murrakishiyya* (The Rights of the Moroccan State) or *'Arsh Murrakish* (The Throne of Morocco). Consisting of 30-40 pages of text, these publications dealt with the political situation in North Africa and contained photos depicting the royal family or the life of the native population under colonial rule.³⁸ As historian Toumader Khatib has pointed out, these were 'in no way hastily written works [...], but the fruit of

³⁰Al-Akhbar al-Wataniyya published by Hizb al-Islah, 5 August 1946, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

³¹Benaboud to Tayeb Bennouna, 9 October 1946, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

³²La delegación marroquí en Egipto - Boletín clandestino de noticias de PRN, 5 August 1946, 15 (13.01), Box 81/2173, Expediente 75381/3, AGA.

³³al-Fassi, *Al-Harakat Al-Istiqlaliyya fi-l-Maghrib Al-'Arabi*, 375-378.

³⁴Report of the first Conference of the Arab Maghrib held in Cairo, 15-22 February 1947, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

³⁵Idris al-Rashid, *Dhikriyat 'an Maktab Al-Maghrib Al-'Arabi fi-l-Qahira* (Tunis, Tunisia: Al-Dar al-'Arabiyya li-l-kitab, 1981), 65-6.

³⁶Toumader Khatib, *Culture Et Politique Dans Le Mouvement Nationaliste Marocain Au Machreq* (Tetuan, Morocco: Association Tetouan-Asmir, 1996), 72-7.

³⁷Ghallab, *Tarikh Al-Harakat Al-Wataniyya bi-l-Maghrib*. Vol. I, 440-442.

³⁸By referring to 'the Arab Maghrib', the nationalists associated their struggle directly with the larger Arab world but also submerged the considerable Berber and Jewish minorities to their own definition of North Africa as characterised by an Arab-Islamic civilisation, thus adopting a European model of modern historiography 'in which diversity ... is denounced as deviance' and the native population is fixed 'into a closed homogenous destiny'. See: James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 234-5.

documentation, research and analysis' constituting a 'profound reflection on Moroccan society [and] the colonial system.'³⁹

In the spring of 1947, the two nationalist leaders 'Abdelkhalik Torres and 'Allal al-Fassi came to Cairo to support the campaign in the Middle East. Both were well known across the Arab world and their appearance immediately drew attention to Maktab al-Maghrib. They gave speeches and interviews, wrote newspaper articles, and met Arab diplomats; their very presence proved beneficial at a time when most Egyptians paid little attention to North Africa. In a letter to the *Istiqlal* in Rabat, 'Allal al-Fassi reported that 'upon my arrival in Egypt, I realised that the climate was not favorable to great propaganda for our case – the questions of Palestine and Egypt dominated all others.'⁴⁰

One of the organisations openly embracing the two Moroccan nationalist leaders was the Muslim Brotherhood. Upon Torres's arrival at Port Said on 16 May 1947, a huge crowd welcomed him with cries of 'We will give our lives for the Maghrib' and 'Long live Arabism,' and at a tea reception given in his honour, he received a pin with the insignia of the Brotherhood and gave a long interview to its newspaper.⁴¹ When 'Allal al-Fassi reached Cairo one week later, the Muslim Brothers provided him with an equally enthusiastic welcome. The organisation's publications sometimes featured articles about, or written by, al-Fassi, thus exposing its significant membership to the situation in Morocco.⁴² General Guide Hassan al-Banna also regularly attended events organised by Maktab al-Maghrib.⁴³ On 24 July 1947, the anniversary of the 1830 occupation of Algeria by France, the Muslim Brothers organised a rally during which al-Banna and Torres called for a boycott of French products.⁴⁴ Full of concern, French intelligence reported that the Brotherhood supported the Maghribis both logistically and financially, because 'Allal al-Fassi had become a 'friend' of its leader.⁴⁵

The Moroccans also established close links to the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Hussayni, who attended many of the receptions held by Maktab al-Maghrib.⁴⁶ The nationalists proudly associated themselves with such a prominent public figure, and the *Istiqlal*'s official newspaper *al-'Alam* sometimes printed articles about the Mufti to demonstrate to its readership that this famous Arab leader supported their struggle.⁴⁷ Although he belonged to the old Palestinian elite that had lost much of its prestige in the aftermath of the *nakba*, he still had good connections among Arab diplomats and politicians, which he put at the disposal of the Moroccans. 'Allal al-Fassi praised the assistance provided by Hajj Amin, explaining that 'the Mufti of Palestine helps us to be accepted in official circles.'⁴⁸

An even more important supporter was Egyptian senator Mahmud Abu al-Fath, a prominent member of the *Wafd* party whose influential newspaper *al-Misri* became a strong advocate for North African independence. In Egypt, he made sure that his journalists kept in close contact with Maktab al-Maghrib and regularly covered stories pertaining to the

³⁹Khatib, *Culture Et Politique Dans Le Mouvement Nationaliste Marocain Au Machreq*, 91.

⁴⁰Lettre d'Allal al-Fassi à Mohamed Lyazidi, 4 June 1947, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁴¹Entretien avec Abdelkhalek Torres, 18 May 1947, *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* & Ambassade au Caire au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, 16 June 1947, Série M/24QO/65, AMAE.

⁴²Note de Renseignements No 39, 5 February 1948 & Ambassadeur de France en Egypte Gilbert Arvengas au M. Schuman, 6 August 1948, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁴³Photographie prise en 1947 au Caire à l'occasion de la Fête du Trône, 25 January 1949, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁴⁴Organisations d'Action de Propagande et d'Information Arabes, [undated], 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁴⁵Note de renseignements: Moghreb Office au Caire, 20 March 1948, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁴⁶Publication No 66 by *Maktab al-Maghrib al-'Arabi*, 16 February 1948, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

⁴⁷His Highness the Mufti, 15 June 1947, *al-'Alam*, 1.

⁴⁸Lettre d'Allal al-Fassi (Le Caire) à Mohamed Lyazidi (Rabat), 4 June 1947, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

region.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the newspaper's New York correspondent, Tunisian journalist 'Abed Bouhafa, provided news from the UN regarding the situation in North Africa.⁵⁰ In his position as a politician from a UN member state, Abu al-Fath also submitted to the international organisation official notes of protest against French violations of human rights.⁵¹ In May 1951, the French ambassador in Cairo noted bitterly that Abu al-Fath 'seems passionate about his new role as the defender of North African independence.'⁵²

Due to their relentless and skilful efforts, the Moroccan nationalists had become firmly established within the political and cultural circles of Egypt. What had begun as a two-man mission quickly evolved into a sophisticated outreach campaign that persuaded numerous influential Egyptians to publicly support Moroccan independence. Egyptian elites demonstrated their interest in the fate of the North African 'brothers,' using these opportunities to criticise the French government, which, unlike Great Britain, had no real influence in their country. Meanwhile, the Moroccans demonstrated their impressive ability to network among individuals from across the political spectrum.⁵³ However, they knew that in order to maintain pressure on the Arab League to provide diplomatic support, they had to keep their case in public awareness.

In the summer of 1947, just a few months after its founding, the members of Maktab al-Maghrib celebrated their biggest achievement: the escape of Mohamed ibn 'Abdelkarim al-Khattabi, the legendary Berber warrior who had led a large-scale revolt against the Spanish and French armies in the Rif mountains of northern Morocco from 1920 until 1926 and was exiled to the Pacific island of Réunion after his capture.⁵⁴ Since the end of World War II, the Moroccans had repeatedly petitioned for the release of the amir, as everyone respectfully called the former resistance fighter.⁵⁵ The memory of 'Abdelkarim's heroic struggle against the colonisers was still very much alive, and for the nationalists it was an obligation to help liberate their revered compatriot.⁵⁶

On 27 May 1947, the prominent Palestinian journalist Mohamed 'Ali al-Tahir informed his Moroccan friends that the French had decided to relocate 'Abdelkarim to the metropole, and that he was currently embarking on a ship that would take him through the Suez Canal to France.⁵⁷ During an urgently convened meeting, the activists agreed to send Ahmed ben el-Melih and M'hamed Benaboud to welcome him to Egypt and convince him to stay. The two nationalists drove to the city of Suez, where they boarded the ship by hiding themselves among other visitors when it briefly anchored at the southern entrance to the Canal.⁵⁸ After

⁴⁹Ambassadeur Arvengas au M. Schuman, 11 January 1949 & Chargé d'Affaires de France au Ministre des Affaires étrangères Schuman, 4 September 1948, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁵⁰Chargé d'Affaires de France au M. Schuman, 18 September 1948, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁵¹Chargé d'Affaires de France au M. Schuman, 4 September 1948, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁵²Ambassadeur Couve de Murville au M. Schuman, 21 May 1951, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁵³For a discussion of the influence of salafism on the emergence of Moroccan nationalism, see: John P. Halstead, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Origins and Rise of Moroccan Nationalism, 1912-1944* (Cambridge: Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, 1967), 119-134.

⁵⁴Although this name actually refers to his father, the Hero of the Rif came to be universally known as 'Abdelkarim. For reasons of simplicity and in order to avoid confusion, I decided to use this incorrect patronym as well.

⁵⁵Abdelkarim et la Ligue Arabe, 3 June 1946, 1MA/282/10, CADN.

⁵⁶For detailed studies of the life of 'Abdelkarim, see: María Rosa de Madariaga, *Abd-El-Krim El Jatabi: La Lucha Por La Independencia* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2009), & C. Richard Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco, 1921-1926* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986),

⁵⁷M'hamed Benaboud, *Maktab Al-Maghrib Al-'Arabi fi-l-Qahira. Dirasat wa Watha'iq* (Rabat, Morocco, 1991), 48. & al-Fassi, *Al-Harakat Al-Istiqlaliyya fi-l-Maghrib Al-'Arabi*. 398-401.

⁵⁸Abd al-Karim Ghallab, *Abd Al-Karim Ghallab fi Mudhakirat Siyasiyya wa Sahafiyya* (Rabat, Morocco: Manshurat al-Ma'arif, 2010), I, 455-457.

many hours of persuasion, 'Abdelkarim disembarked in the early hours of 31 May, unnoticed by his French keepers, and was then transported to the Egyptian capital.⁵⁹

The arrival of 'Abdelkarim in Cairo constituted a stunning success for Maktab al-Maghrib; according to the *New York Times*, he was given a 'hero's welcome' and interviewing him had proven impossible since 'he was interrupted so frequently by Arabs rushing in to shake his hand and congratulate him.'⁶⁰ King Faruq welcomed the amir and his family as his official guests, and the entire political elite of the country and representatives of the Arab League came to visit the former Moroccan warrior in order to listen to anecdotes from the Rif War and be seen with him in public. Moreover, hundreds of diplomats and prominent citizens contacted Maktab al-Maghrib to submit their regards and countless congratulatory telegrams from around the Muslim world poured into the Istiqlal headquarters in Rabat.⁶¹ According to a French diplomat, 'the arrival in Cairo ... of several Moroccan leaders, followed after a few days by [...] the escape of 'Abdelkarim, have brusquely placed the North African question at the first level of world events.'⁶²

Despite their impressive achievements in establishing the nationalist movement in the heart of the Middle East, the Moroccans in Cairo faced serious problems. The greatest setback occurred on 12 December 1949, when M'hamed Benaboud, the Tunisian Habib Thameur, and the Algerian 'Ali al-Hamami died in a tragic accident in Pakistan. The three North Africans had been on their way to attend the Islamic Congress when their plane crashed near Karachi and killed all passengers aboard, thus decapitating the campaign in Egypt and putting the very existence of Maktab al-Maghrib into question.⁶³ The interest of the Egyptian media in the activities of the North African nationalists in Cairo steadily decreased.⁶⁴ Alarmed by the desperate state of Maghribi propaganda in Cairo, 'Azzam Pasha recommended a total reorganisation of a campaign described by French observers as 'struck by paralysis.'⁶⁵

The Moroccan nationalists also suffered from chronic financial problems, although the Arab League and the Egyptian king subsidised their activities.⁶⁶ Another source of income was funds sent by the khalifa in Tetuan, whose close link to the royal palace in Rabat indicates that the sultan himself (indirectly) supported Maktab al-Maghrib. Yet by the fall of 1948, the executive committee of the Istiqlal sent letters to Cairo instructing its members to reduce their activities, because the party was facing an acute financial crisis; by the end of the same year, 'Allal al-Fassi and several other nationalists returned to Morocco, drastically reducing the staff of Maktab al-Maghrib.⁶⁷ In October 1952, the secretary general of the PNR, Tayeb Bennouna, travelled to Cairo to request more financial and political support

⁵⁹Report of the Central Committee of Hizb al-Islah, 4 June 1947, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

⁶⁰'Abd el Krim jumps ships in Egypt – Farouk gives Riff Chief a Haven,' 1 June 1947, *New York Times*, 1.

⁶¹al-Fassi, *Al-Harakat Al-Istiqlaliyya fi-l-Maghrib Al-'Arabi*. 401.

⁶²Ambassadeur Arvengas au Ministre des Affaires étrangères Bidault, 30 June 1947, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁶³Shuhada al-Maghrib al-'Arabi, 21 December 1949. *al-'Alam*, 1 & Maktab al-Maghrib al-'Arabi, Bulletin No. 238, 7 January 1950, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

⁶⁴Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Schuman, 5 December 1951, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁶⁵Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Schuman, 21 May 1951, 1MA/200/338, CADN. For a comment by US diplomats on the decline of Maktab al-Maghrib see: The Chargé in Morocco (More) to the Secretary of State, 13 June 1949, Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS] (1949) VI: 1783-4.

⁶⁶Ambassadeur Arvengas au M. Bidault, 1 December 1947 & Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Schuman, 8 January 1951, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁶⁷Mohamed Lyazidi to Ahmad ben Thabet, 5 October 1948; Mohamed Lyazidi to Abdelkarim Ghallab, 30 September 1948 & Allal al-Fassi to Mohamed Lyazidi, 10 October 1948, 1MA/200/217, CADN.

from the League 'so that the Arab nations are not humiliated before the universe', but his passionate appeal did not yield any tangible results.⁶⁸

Since the beginning of their campaign in Egypt, the goal of the nationalists had been to have the Arab governments present the Moroccan case before the UN. 'Azzam Pasha always had an open ear for their concerns, proclaiming that 'in accordance with the goals of the Arab League, [we] work for their freedom and independence, because the League is against all forms of colonialism in any Arabic territory.'⁶⁹ In the face of wide-spread indifference among politicians across the Arab world, he was the one who pressured the League's member states to stand up for the peoples of North Africa.⁷⁰ A letter sent by el-Melih to the Istiqlal leadership in Rabat in 1951 acknowledged 'Azzam Pasha's relentless efforts, proclaiming that during a recent visit to the United States, 'he missed no opportunity to talk about the Arab Maghrib.'⁷¹ Having been an advocate of including North Africa into the League since its inception, his repeated contacts with the members of Maktab al-Maghrib further cemented his pro-Maghribi views.⁷²

The second passionate champion of Moroccan independence was the Iraqi Mohamed Fadil al-Jamali, who served as both foreign minister and prime minister following World War II. He supported 'Azzam Pasha's efforts and even spoke before the General Assembly in order to denounce the ongoing colonisation of the Maghrib. According to a journalist reporting from the UN in 1952, 'the efforts of the Iraqi delegate [...] to get the Moroccan question put on the agenda [...] were most impressive.'⁷³ In an internal memorandum, a French official explained that the Iraqi politician 'is our fiercest enemy', due to his relentless work on behalf of the Moroccan nationalist movement.⁷⁴

Despite the Moroccans' close relationship to the League's secretary general and regular statements of support from various Arab governments, these activities rarely led to any concrete results, thus highlighting the discrepancy between the public appeals for Pan-Arab solidarity and the harsh reality of national interests.⁷⁵ In addition to the inherent ambiguity of the Maghrib's "Arabness" in the view of many Mashriqis, most Arab politicians believed that the Moroccan case would only divert attention away from the struggle over Palestine, which caused a relieved French official to conclude that 'the Moroccans ... seem to expect a lot from the meeting of the UN ... but they are aware that they can no longer count on the Arab League.'⁷⁶ Already in 1948, Benaboud had complained that 'if the Arab League provided us with the same political efforts and money as the Palestinians, the Maghrib could perform miracles.'⁷⁷ Suddenly, however, a regime change in Cairo gave the Moroccans new hope.

⁶⁸Letter Tayeb to Mehdi Bennouna, 23 October 1952, 1MA/200/56, CADN.

⁶⁹Letter 'Azzam Pasha to Benaboud, 18 August 1948, cited in Benaboud, *Al-Nidal Al-Watani li-l-Shahid Amhammad Ibn 'Abud fi-l-Mashriq: Shahadat wa Watha'iq*, 64.

⁷⁰Les pays arabes et l'Afrique du Nord (Mai 1951-Mai 1952), 20 May 1952, 372QO/544, AMAE.

⁷¹Letter Ahmed el-Melih to Mohamed Lyazidi, 25 January 1951, 1MA/200/338, CADN.

⁷²Issam Gharib, *'Abd Al-Rahman 'Azzam: Al-Islam - Al-'Uruba - Al-Wataniyya* (Cairo: Matba'at Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Wathaiq al-Qawmiyya bi-l-Qahirah, 2011), 212-216; Michel Laissy, *Du Panarabisme À La Ligue Arabe* (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve, 1948), 118.

⁷³G.H. Neville-Bagot, 'Muslim Solidarity at the United Nations Organization in Support of Moroccan Independence', *The Islamic Review* (February 1952), 14.

⁷⁴Représentation de la France aux Nations-Unies à la Résidence Générale à Rabat, 26 November 1952, 10POI/1/41, CADN.

⁷⁵Mohammad Iqbal Ansari, *The Arab League, 1945-1955* (Aligarh, India: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1968), 80-86. For an overview of the Arab League's reluctance to support North Africa before the UN, see Samya el-Mechat, 'L'improbable 'Nation Arabe'. La Ligue Des États Arabes Et L'indépendance Du Maghreb (1945- 1956)', *Vingtième Siècle* 82(2004), 57-68.

⁷⁶Les activités nationalistes nordafricaines, 19 February 1949, 1MA/200/388, CADN.

⁷⁷Letter Benaboud to Mehdi Bennouna, 11 May 1948, M'hamed Benaboud File, BFA.

Revolutionary Egypt

On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers overthrew King Faruq and subsequently began to dismantle the pillars of the old regime. The new leaders constituted a closely-knit brotherhood, led by Colonel Gamal 'Abdel Nasser, who was both 'the uncontested leader' and 'first among equals' according to historian Joel Gordon.⁷⁸ He primarily aimed to restore the nation by abolishing the 'corrupt political order' and reducing British imperialist influence, but eventually also became famous for his passionate anti-imperialist stance.⁷⁹ In order to consolidate Egypt's regional preeminence, the RCC inaugurated *Sawt al-'Arab* on 4 July 1953, a new programme on Radio Cairo that broadcasted Pan-Arab news across the region and served as an Egyptian propaganda tool.⁸⁰ By the time Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal Company and weathered the tripartite invasion of his country in 1956, he had come to be seen as an iconic figure in the Arab world.⁸¹ Of course, the Moroccans placed their hopes on the revolutionary regime to favourably change the attitude of the Arab League toward the Maghrib. But despite its claims to lead the struggle for Arab liberation, the Free Officers did very little to support the Moroccans' diplomatic campaign for independence.

In the meantime, the nationalists' alliance of supporters quickly disintegrated as the new regime replaced the old political elites with its own people. 'Azzam Pasha immediately lost his position as the chief Arab diplomat to 'Abdelkhaliq Hassuna, whom cheerful French observers described as willing to 'spare us many difficulties' and lacking the 'inopportune zeal' of his predecessor.⁸² On 13 January 1954, the new regime dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood, after it had already forbidden all other political parties one year earlier.⁸³ A few months later, a court sentenced media mogul Mahmud Abu al-Fath to 10 years imprisonment in absentia for allegedly having disseminated anti-government propaganda in *al-Misri*; by May 1955, the new regime had brought the entire Egyptian press under government control.⁸⁴ Hajj Amin al-Hussayni's standing also eroded following the Free Officers' coup, and he eventually moved to Lebanon after refusing to join the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) when it was founded with the active support of Nasser on 2 June 1964.⁸⁵

For the Moroccans the situation quickly turned from bad to worse as well, as the new regime dismantled their local network of prominent supporters; when 'Allal al-Fassi returned to Cairo in January 1953, he quickly realised that the local media displayed no interest in his

⁷⁸Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*, 55.

⁷⁹Ahmad Abu al-Fath, *L'affaire Nasser* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 237; Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*. 41; R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1971), 111-113; Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 6.

⁸⁰Peter Woodward, *Nasser* (New York: Longman, 1992), 43; Jean Lacouture, *Gamal Abdel Nasser* (Paris: Bayard, 2005), 187; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (London: Constable, 1972), 76.; Frantz Fanon, *L'an V De La Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: François Maspero, 1966), 57-88.

⁸¹For other examples of Egyptian support for the North African liberation movements: Tawfig Y. Hasou, *The Struggle for the Arab World: Egypt's Nasser and the Arab League* (London: KPI Ltd., 1985), 51; Nejla M Abu Izzeddin, *Nasser of the Arabs*. 203; Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 239; Klaus D. Eberlein, *Die Arabische Liga Vol. 2* (Frankfurt a.M.: R.G. Fischer, 1994), 145-150; Saïd K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).

⁸²Les pays arabes et l'Afrique du Nord, 12 May 1953, 214QONT/647, AMAE.

⁸³Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. 109, 127; Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*. 98-108.

⁸⁴Sonia Dabous, 'Nasser and the Egyptian Press,' in *Contemporary Egypt: Through Egyptian Eyes*, ed. Charles Tripp (New York: Routledge, 1993), 104-5 & Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement*, 140; Abu al-Fath, *L'affaire Nasser*. 239-240.

⁸⁵Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 346. On Nasser's contribution to the founding of the PLO, see: Laurie Brand, 'Nasser's Egypt and the Reemergence of the Palestinian National Movement,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1988), 41-43.

activities and that he had lost his standing among Egyptian politicians. A major problem was his close personal connection to the Muslim Brotherhood that tarnished his image in the eyes of the new ruling class, and the Egyptian authorities even began ‘harassing’ those North Africans they suspected of having close contacts to the organisation.⁸⁶ A French observer gloated that ‘al-Fassi’s position in Cairo seems to worsen ... he is under constant surveillance and ... it is possible that the government will ask him to leave Egyptian territory.’⁸⁷ Another French diplomat noted that ‘the Maghribi nationalists are now totally discredited in Egyptian political circles.’⁸⁸

At the same time, however, Nasser granted the Moroccans access to Radio Cairo.⁸⁹ On 20 September 1953, just hours after the French resident general in Rabat had deposed and exiled Sultan Mohamed ben Youssef, Si ‘Allal made his first appearance on Sawt al-‘Arab, calling for violent resistance and inciting his countrymen to ‘continue the struggle for [their] existence.’⁹⁰ From this moment on, Radio Cairo became the voice of the nationalist movement abroad, broadcasting messages to the people of Morocco on an almost daily basis. In a speech disseminated on the first anniversary of the sultan’s forced exile, ‘Abdelmajid Benjelloun called for an ‘armed struggle’ and declared that ‘the triumph of Mohamed ben Youssef [...] [is] the triumph of the people who will only accept complete independence.’⁹¹ A combination of news, political statements, appeals to the resistance fighters, and nationalist music completed the regular broadcasts organised by the few Moroccans remaining in Cairo.

The entire Maghrib followed Sawt al-‘Arab closely on the abundantly available transistor radios, and even the sultan was rumoured to have said that he ‘felt like living in Egypt among my Egyptian brothers’ while listening to Radio Cairo during his exile.⁹² At the height of the Franco-Moroccan crisis, a high-ranking Istiqlali declared that ‘there is only one voice remaining which the Moroccans receive ... and that is the Voice of the Arabs from Radio Cairo.’⁹³ The *New York Times* also commented on the ‘effectiveness’ of the ‘this new voice,’ which was inciting ‘the peoples of the Middle East and Africa ... to cast off the yoke of imperialism.’⁹⁴ Ironically, in the popular imagination, and despite his extreme reluctance vis-à-vis the Moroccan nationalists, Nasser had become the Arab leader most identified with the struggle against Western imperialism.

The RCC’s other means of support for the North African independence struggle was the provision of arms and military training: in March 1953, the regime established a training centre to instruct Maghribi commando units in guerrilla tactics.⁹⁵ Following the breakout of an armed liberation struggle after Sidi Mohamed’s forced abdication, Egypt received the leaders of the resistance groups with open arms. On 3 April 1954, Nasser organised a meeting of all North African nationalist parties: in return for the promise of weapons and money, the gathered delegates signed a treaty that established a liaison office in Cairo

⁸⁶Direction générale: les relations franco-égyptiennes et leurs incidences sur le problème marocain, 18 May 1955, Série M/24QO/71, AMAE.

⁸⁷New York au Résident général à Rabat, 17 December 1954, 372QO/580, AMAE.

⁸⁸Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Bidault, 5 September 1953, 214QONT/647, AMAE.

⁸⁹Fathi Dib, *Abdel Nasser Et La Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1985), 12.

⁹⁰Campagne de la Radio du Caire contre la politique française en Afrique du Nord, 16 October 1953, 213QONT/484/AMAE.

⁹¹Traduction d’une Emission Radiophonique de Langue Arabe No. 260 – Voix des Arabes, 21 August 1954, 1MA/282/50, CADN.

⁹²Les voyages africains du Cheikh Bakoury – futures relations de l’Égypte avec les pays d’Afrique du Nord, 10 January 1956, 213QONT/484, AMAE.

⁹³Letter ‘Abdelkabir al-Fassi to ‘Allal al-Fassi, 24 September 1954, reproduced in: ‘Allal al-Fassi, *Nida Al-Qahira* (Morocco, 1959), p. ‘nūn’.

⁹⁴Voice of Arabs Stirs Mideast: Broadcasts are now most potent, 15 January 1956, *New York Times*, E5.

⁹⁵Note sur les ingérences égyptiennes en Afrique du Nord, 20 October 1956, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

consolidating their respective military efforts with the goal of ‘the complete independence of the three territories.’⁹⁶ The Egyptian support proved pivotal to the creation of the Moroccan Liberation Army, a small but well-organised force that sought the return of the sultan as well as immediate independence. Although the Istiqlal tried to bring the Liberation Army under its control, the resistance fighters refused to submit to the political leadership in exile and challenged the supposed unity of the nationalist movement.⁹⁷

The financial aid allotted to the various North African organisations active in Cairo further underlined the preferences of the new Egyptian regime. Whereas Maktab al-Maghrib received an annual allowance of 15,000 EGP from the Arab League, the Egyptian government had spent more than 100,000 EGP on military equipment and training of North African commandos by early 1956. Moreover, whenever a conflict arose between the Maghribi politicians and military leaders living in Cairo, the Egyptian government intervened and settled the dispute in favour of the latter.⁹⁸

Of course, the French authorities repeatedly protested to the Egyptians against both the military aid and its decision to grant the Moroccan ‘extremists’ a platform on Radio Cairo, but overall they remained surprisingly unconcerned about these two forms of support.⁹⁹ ‘What does the aid of Cairo to the revolt in the Maghrib consist of right now? – All together, not very much,’ noted the French ambassador in Cairo in the fall of 1955, one year after the outbreak of the Algerian revolution, adding that he saw no reason to discontinue French military cooperation with Egypt.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the French government decided that, at least for the moment, it could live with the limited support granted by Egypt to the anti-colonial movements across North Africa.

In the sphere of international diplomacy, the regime change in Cairo also did not improve the situation for the Moroccan nationalists. Whether pressure from France, or other short-term interests that directed the attention of the Arab and Asian governments to – at least in their eyes – more urgent issues, the Moroccan question usually had to take a back seat in the General Assembly.¹⁰¹ Among the Arab countries, only Iraq actively aided its coreligionists under French colonial rule. At a press conference in January 1954, Fadil al-Jamali emphasised that ‘the Iraqi government supports the Moroccan people and will not hesitate to help them morally and materially.’¹⁰² The US embassy in Baghdad confirmed that the prime minister seemed ‘always interested in North African problems’ and had become a big supporter of the Moroccan struggle for independence.¹⁰³

Within the Arab League, however, Egypt regularly thwarted Iraq’s calls for a cultural or economic boycott of France, advocating instead for a mild condemnation of the actions of the resident general in Rabat.¹⁰⁴ French officials regularly lamented al-Jamali’s ‘zeal’ and ‘aggressiveness’ regarding North Africa, and contrasted it negatively with the careful attitude

⁹⁶Dib, *Abdel Nasser Et La Révolution Algérienne*, 17.

⁹⁷Zaki Mbarek, *Résistance Et Armée De Libération : Portée Politique, Liquidation, 1953-1958* (Casablanca, Morocco: MBC, 1987), 18, 53.

⁹⁸Note sur les ingérences égyptiennes en Afrique du Nord, 20 October 1956, p.3 & 8, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

⁹⁹Émission du Caire, 12 April 1954, 213QONT/484, AMAE.

¹⁰⁰L’Égypte et l’Afrique du Nord, 2 September 1955, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

¹⁰¹Martin Thomas, ‘France Accused: French North Africa before the United Nations, 1952-1962’, *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 01 (2001), 102.

¹⁰²Embassy Baghdad to Department of State, 2 February 1954, RG59/771.00/2-254, United States National Archives, College Park, MD (USNA).

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ambassadeur de France au Liban Georges Balajé au M. Bidault, 15 September 1953, 214QONT/647, AMAE.

displayed by the Egyptian government.¹⁰⁵ Analysing Cairo's efforts on behalf of the North Africans since the ascent of the RCC, a French report concluded that 'Egypt, despite being the instigator behind the Arab League, does not always lead this offensive that is often surpassed in violence by other Arab states, in particular Iraq.'¹⁰⁶

The new Egyptian secretary general of the Arab League, Abdelkhalik Hassuna, also failed to distinguish himself as a fervent supporter of the Moroccan case and tried to persuade Fadil al-Jamali to drop the issue as well.¹⁰⁷ In October 1954, the Arab delegates held an informal meeting in New York to find a solution to their diverging attitudes concerning French North Africa. Despite a Pakistani reconciliation attempt, Egypt continued to reject Iraq's aggressive anti-French stance and even accused al-Jamali of putting domestic Iraqi politics before the interests of the League.¹⁰⁸ The French delegation had long been aware of this schism within the Arab-Asian bloc.¹⁰⁹ According to a telegram sent to the Quai d'Orsay, the diplomats in New York differentiated between the countries 'tending towards moderation', such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, and those 'tending towards extremism' like Iraq and Pakistan.¹¹⁰

The revolutionary Egyptian government, on the other hand, needed to consolidate its rule both at home and abroad, without expending time and energy on a diplomatic row with France. Its ongoing struggle against Great Britain's continuing role in the region made it seem even less appropriate to simultaneously pick a fight with another powerful European country. In 1955, Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Khayrat Sa'id explained to his French counterpart that his government only came to the defence of North Africa to keep Baghdad from becoming the sole champion of anti-imperialism and Pan-Arabism in the region.¹¹¹

The UN resolutions reflected the reluctance of the Arab League, which was dominated – though certainly not controlled – by Egypt, to support the Moroccan case actively. Until the country's independence in 1956, the General Assembly discussed the status of Morocco only three times, two of them ending with a decision to postpone further deliberations.¹¹² Only in 1952 did the international organisation pass a mild resolution that 'express[ed] [its] confidence that ... the Government of France will endeavour to further the fundamental liberties of the people of Morocco, in conformity with the Purposes and Principles of the [UN] Charter.'¹¹³ One cannot, of course, place the entire blame for the UN's failure to discuss the status of Morocco on the Arab League. After all, the six Arab states only constituted 10 per cent of the entire UN membership, and they could thus not set the agenda of the General Assembly by themselves. Nonetheless, the archival record clearly demonstrates their lack of motivation and unwillingness to lobby other countries to support their half-hearted attempts on behalf of Moroccan independence.

¹⁰⁵Ambassade au Baghdad au Ministère des Affaires étrangères, 20 October 1952, 372QO/576, AMAE.

¹⁰⁶Note sur les ingérences égyptiennes en Afrique du Nord, 20 October 1956, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

¹⁰⁷Télégramme de New York à Paris No. 2569, 22 October 1954, 10POI/1/41, CADN.

¹⁰⁸Télégramme de New York à Paris No. 2434, 14 October 1954, 10POI/1/41, CADN. For analyses of the relationship between Iraq's domestic and foreign policies, see Michael Eppel, 'The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998), 245-7 & Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 134.

¹⁰⁹On Egyptian-Iraqi rivalry during the 1950s, see Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986), 186-237; Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *Arab Regional Politics in the Middle East* (New York: St Martin's Press 1984), 83; Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 243 & Muhammad Fadil al-Jamali, *Inside the Arab Nationalist Struggle: Memoirs of an Iraqi Statesman* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 253-260.

¹¹⁰Télégramme de New York à Rabat No. 149-154, 24 November 1952, 10POI/1/41, CADN.

¹¹¹Ambassadeur de France en Egypte Armand du Chayla au Ministre des Affaires étrangères Antoine Pinay, 29 August 1955, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

¹¹²UNGA Resolutions 812 (IX) in 1954 and 911 (X) in 1955.

¹¹³UNGA Resolution 612 (VII), in 1952.

The 23 July Revolution thus signalled a shift in Egypt's foreign policy, away from the moderate criticism of French colonialism in combination with limited political aid for the Moroccans, towards a more radical rhetoric, arms supplies, and radio propaganda, but no diplomatic support. The reasons for this change can be found in the backgrounds of the Free Officers. Influenced by their training as soldiers as well as the evident failure of the multi-party system under King Faruq, the members of the RCC were men of action rather than words and remained deeply distrustful of political parties in general.¹¹⁴ Moreover, their links to the Muslim Brotherhood discredited the Moroccans at a time when the secular-minded Egyptian government was engaged in a ruthless power struggle with the local Islamists.¹¹⁵ Finally, Nasser preferred supporting anti-colonial movements much more in line with his ideals of armed struggle and socialism, such as the Algerian "Front de Libération Nationale" (FLN) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Unsurprisingly, the aged warrior 'Abdelkarim fared well during his remaining years in Cairo as the Egyptian government held him in high-esteem.¹¹⁶

Another reason for the RCC's critical stance towards the Moroccan nationalists was their close relationship to the Egyptian monarchy and its clientele, as well as their strong attachment to Sultan Mohamed ben Youssef. Having themselves overthrown King Faruq, the Egyptian leaders had little sympathy for the 'neo-feudal' regimes in Iraq and Saudi-Arabia or the Alaoui dynasty in Morocco.¹¹⁷ When the French residency in Rabat exiled Sidi Mohamed in September 1953, the Moroccans asked the Egyptian government to intervene on his behalf, but President Mohamed Naguib refused to submit a formal protest to the French government.¹¹⁸ Although Sawt al-'Arab condemned the dethronement, the Egyptian government did nothing concrete to express its opposition.¹¹⁹ This policy evidently pleased French officials, who correctly concluded that 'the North African problems seemed of secondary importance in the eyes of Egypt.'¹²⁰

The leaders of both the Istiqlal and the PNR had, of course, understood the handwriting on the wall, therefore shifting their focus and adopting a bold new strategy: to lobby the world political leaders directly. On 9 November 1952, they opened the Moroccan Office of Information and Documentation (MOID) in New York, just a few blocks from the UN building, which would remain the most active hub for the dissemination of nationalist propaganda until Morocco's independence.¹²¹ When the FLN commenced its own 'diplomatic revolution' beginning in early 1955, the first Algerian representatives operated out of the MOID until setting up their own office later that year.¹²²

Following independence, the failure of the nationalists to obtain diplomatic support from the Arab states during their anti-colonial struggle influenced the foreign policy adopted

¹¹⁴Adeed Dawisha, 'Egypt', in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh & Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 29.

¹¹⁵James P. Jankowski, 'Arab Nationalism in 'Nasserism and Egyptian State Policy, 1952-1958', in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 156-157.

¹¹⁶Dib, *Abdel Nasser Et La Révolution Algérienne*. 12-13.

¹¹⁷Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Bidault, 4 December 1953, 213QONT/485, AMAE.

¹¹⁸Télégramme de New York à Rabat No. 2838, 5 October 1954, 10POI/1/41, CADN.

¹¹⁹Laura M. James, 'Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and 'Sawt Al-Arab' Radio', *Transnational Broadcasting Journal* 16(2006), 3.

¹²⁰Ambassadeur de Murville au M. Bidault, 14 May 1953, 214QONT/647, AMAE.

¹²¹David Stenner, 'Networking for Independence: The Moroccan Nationalist Movement and Its Global Campaign against French Colonialism', *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 4 (2012), 1-22.

¹²²One example of the services provided by the Moroccans to the Algerians was the printing and distribution of the first publication of the FLN: *Jabhat al-Tahrir al-Qawmi, The Peaceful Settlement of the Algerian Question (75-18 Woodside Ave, Elmhurst 73, New York, USA.: The Algerian Delegation c/o Moroccan Office of Information and Documentation, 1955)*. For the history of the Algerian diplomatic campaign, see Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution - Algeria's Fight and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

by Morocco's new political elites.¹²³ Contrary to all expectations, the government in Rabat, staffed by both former nationalists and acolytes of the monarch, but no members of the Liberation Army, refused to join the Arab League, thereby expressing its disapproval of this organisation viewed as Nasser's extended arm. While attending the Egyptian independence day celebrations in Cairo in June 1957, less than a year after the Suez War, Crown Prince Hassan did not hesitate to further provoke his hosts by coldly remarking that his country would 'naturally' remain a close ally of France.¹²⁴ Only by October 1958 did Morocco finally join the League, but it would take the now-King Mohamed V until January 1960 to finally accept Nasser's invitation to join him in Cairo on an official state visit.¹²⁵ Yet when a border dispute between Algiers and Rabat escalated into the War of Sands in 1963, Moroccan troops captured several Egyptian soldiers that had been sent by Nasser to support the Algerians, among them a certain Lieutenant Hosni Mubarak, the future fourth president of Egypt.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Despite these evident failures of the revolutionary Egyptian regime to support the aspirations of the Moroccan nationalist movement in the field of diplomacy, the erroneous image of unwavering Pan-Arab solidarity at the height of the anti-colonial struggle persists until today.¹²⁷ The Moroccan nationalists themselves contributed to the longevity of this inaccurate historical narrative. A few years after independence, 'Allal al-Fassi published a book about his time in Cairo in which he explicitly praised 'the help which [he] received from ... Nasser and various [other] Arab governments.'¹²⁸

In reality, however, the claim that the Egyptian government unconditionally supported the Moroccan nationalists does not convince. Instead, a more nuanced picture of both cooperation and conflict comes closer to reality, because of the RCC's preference for radical and revolutionary forms of decolonisation as opposed to the gradual and conciliatory approach of the Moroccan nationalists. 'Allal al-Fassi's testimony was probably inspired by his need to emphasise his successes during his many years in exile and therefore ignored his ambiguous relationship to the Egyptian authorities during this period.

This article has shown how the relationship between the Egyptian government in its role as the most important member state of the Arab League and the Moroccan nationalist movement evolved from the end of World War II until the mid-1950s, the height of the global process of decolonisation. Despite an impressive lobbying campaign to win Arab support for their struggle, the Moroccans failed to obtain any substantial help on the diplomatic stage. Contrary to commonly held assumptions, the revolution of 1952 and the ascendance of Nasser did not improve their situation, but rather diminished the level of support they received. Given this disappointing experience, it does not surprise that

¹²³Another important reason was Nasser's continuing opposition to the Moroccan monarchy even after independence: The Secretary of State to the President, 25 July 1958, FRUS (1958-60), XIII, 464.

¹²⁴Note sur les relations entre le Maroc et l'Égypte de Nasser, 27 July 1957, 130SUP/239, AMAE.

¹²⁵Philippe Herreman, 'Mohammed V au Moyen-Orient - Une mission de bonne volonté', February 1960, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 5. Mohamed V combined his trip to Cairo with visits to several other Arab states in order to downplay its significance: Embassy Rabat to Department of State, 7 December 1959, RG 59/771.11/12-759, USNA.

¹²⁶Ambassadeur Pierre de Leusse à Rabat au Ministre des affaires étrangères, 13 April 1964, 130SUP/240, AMAE. & Salih Hishad ... Muhawalat inqilab Ufqir wa sijn tazmamart, 6 May 2009, *al-Jazeera*.

¹²⁷See for example: Maroc-Égypte: Nuage d'été, 25-31 January 2015, *Jeune Afrique*, 42-43.

¹²⁸al-Fassi, *Nida Al-Qahira*. Foreword.

the leaders of post-colonial Morocco never developed particularly strong relations to the countries of the Middle East, and would instead seek an alliance with the United States at the height of the Cold War.

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