



Western Window in the Arab World

Leon Borden Blair

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Since November 8, 1942, when American troops in Operation Torch first landed on the beaches of North Africa, almost a million Americans—military personnel and their dependents—have lived in Morocco. Their impact on the political and social evolution of Morocco has been significant, but historians and political scientists before this book had made little effort to chart its course or to assess its outcome.

The naval base at Port Lyautey in Morocco was the first foreign base captured by American troops in World War II, and United States objectives in Morocco continued to be primarily military. In 1942, as the price for French support against the Axis, the United States pledged its support for the restoration of the prewar French colonial empire. In 1950, faced with the threat of Soviet aggression, the United States negotiated an agreement with France and built four United States Air Force bases in Morocco without consultation with or notification of the Moroccan government.

In spite of its sterile diplomatic policy and both Communist and Moroccan nationalist demands for evacuation of United States military bases, the United States retained essential military facilities in Morocco for many years. Leon Blair concludes that American military personnel and their dependents favorably conditioned Moroccan public opinion. By their egalitarianism, humanitarianism, and evident interest, they reinforced the idealistic image of the United States that was held by the majority of Moroccans.

These Americans were neither individually nor collectively conscious agents in a campaign to modify Moroccan public opinion; they were simply a Western window in the Arab world, through which two civilizations might view one another. In the long run, they made a greater contribution in peace than in war.

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