

The Sultan's Declaration of Independence

April 2014 blog article by Gerald Loftus, former Resident Director of TALIM (Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies)

<https://legation.org/the-sultans-declaration-of-independence/>



*Sultan Mohammed V with members of
Tangier Committee of Control, International Zone*

April 9th is not a Moroccan national holiday, but it is nevertheless remembered in Tangier and beyond, marking that day in 1947 when Sultan Mohammed V traveled to the International Zone and made a speech which was an important milestone in Morocco's road to regaining its independence. So it was fitting that Dr. Bernabé López Garcia of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, eminent scholar of modern Morocco, chose April 9th to present his research into the context and the impact of the Sultan's speech.

And the venue of the Legation was highly appropriate, as the United States had already, in the early 1940s, made clear its support for the Sultan. Roosevelt's dinner invitation to Mohammed V during the January 1943 Anfa or Casablanca Conference brought the Sultan to the table with the US President and Prime Minister Churchill, and American diplomats at the Legation incurred the wrath of French officials for opening their door to Moroccan nationalists.

Roosevelt's memory remained dear to Moroccans after the President died in 1945, and the aircraft carrier bearing his name visited Tangier to great fanfare (there was even the creation, in several Moroccan cities, of the "Club Roosevelt al-Moghreb" in honor of the late President). The Sultan also paid his respects at the second anniversary commemoration of Roosevelt's death. López Garcia spoke of the largely hostile Spanish reception given to the Sultan's plans to travel to Tangier. Some imagined a nefarious French hand trying to undermine the Spanish position, and others suspected the U.S. of wanting to extend its influence.

Spanish authorities came up with various plans to delay the trip, citing security and logistical concerns ("where will they all stay?"). Morocco's multiple borders (French Protectorate to Spanish Protectorate to Tangier International Zone) created multiple roadblocks to restrict mass movement on the international city, and Spanish authorities also feared that the event might be exploited by Spanish Republican dissidents who had escaped to Morocco from mainland Spain after their defeat in the Spanish Civil War. Dr. López Garcia's anniversary presentation revealed a few nuggets about the Legation as well, including Chargé d'Affaires John Goodyear's successful insistence on U.S. precedence in the diplomatic lineup, a not inconsiderable advantage when symbolism meant everything.

According to a contemporary Spanish diplomatic source, Sultan Mohammed V paid an incognito visit to the American Legation after his historic speech to thank the US for its crucial support. Note to researchers: it would be interesting to check American sources (U.S. National Archives) for confirmation of this historical footnote of interest to scholars of Moroccan–American relations.

We had a capacity audience for Dr. López Garcia's excellent presentation, and are happy that history can be recounted with such verve in the very building where a part of it took place.