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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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North Africa: The Power Equation

Summary

The two major alliances of North Africa are undergoing internal strains which could lead to a shift in the balance of power in the Maghreb. Morocco's King Hassan and Libyan leader Qadhafi are increasingly dissatisfied with the implementation of their union; longstanding differences among Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania have prevented their loose pact from taking root. We do not anticipate a dissolution of the current groupings in the near term, but friction, if unchecked, could lead the countries to realign their foreign policies. Tentative signs are that change in the alliances would involve rapprochement between Algeria and Libya and possibly expanded ties between Morocco and Tunisia. We believe Algeria and Libya are the most likely countries to benefit from any major changes, while Morocco and Tunisia would be more isolated and vulnerable. Overall, the balance of power in the Maghreb would not change appreciably, unless in the unlikely event that Algeria and Libya form some sort of an alliance. Such shifts in the region would provide opportunities for Moscow to expand its influence and produce mixed results for Washington.

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Since late 1984, the two North African groupings -- the Arab-African Union of Morocco and Libya and the loose coalition of Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania--have sparred for advantages. Both

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Maghreb Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 10 January 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division [redacted]

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alliances are built on the sand of profound differences and old rivalries between partners. Historically, Morocco's King Hassan and Tunisia's President Bourguiba have been strongly oriented toward the West, Algeria has been among the foremost proponents of radical socialism, and Qadhafi has peddled his Green Book and brazenly meddled in other countries affairs. [redacted]

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Fissures in the Alliances

During recent months there have been indications of tensions within these two alliances. Libyan leader Qadhafi is disappointed with his union with Morocco, even though it is a gambit that so far has entailed few costs for him. Qadhafi is particularly frustrated with Morocco's reluctance to cooperate on defense as called for in the treaty establishing the union, and by Rabat's refusal to provide embargoed spare parts for Libya's inventory of US-manufactured aircraft. He is also angered by Hassan's refusal to come to Tripoli for a state visit and by the King's inability to use his influence with Washington or Paris to lessen Western hostility toward Tripoli. [redacted]

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Morocco, which has more to lose in the relationship, also is dissatisfied with the union. Hassan realizes that the union has damaged Morocco's ties with Washington and jeopardized the acquisition of much-needed weapons. He also is concerned that the union has accelerated the warming of ties between Algeria and the US and probably believes the Algerians will try to convince Washington to support the Polisario on the Western Sahara dispute. Moreover, Hassan almost certainly is aware that the union has resulted in a sizable influx of Libyans into Morocco, which increases the potential for Qadhafi to create trouble for Hassan, especially if the union fails. [redacted]

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Libya's military threats against Tunisia during the past six months have given impetus to cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia. Even so, Tunisian leaders are uncomfortable with the newfound relationship. They worry about becoming militarily dependent on Algiers and have longstanding suspicions that Algiers sees Tunisia as part of Algeria's sphere of influence, according to Embassy Tunis. Unlike the other countries, Algerian leaders have less scruples about their alliances and the effects on the country's overall foreign policy, but they fear that these commitments risk war with Libya and Morocco. [redacted]

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Shifting Coalitions

The members of these alliances have begun to take steps to compensate for recent strains with their partners. Since November, Libya has undertaken a diplomatic offensive to improve relations with Algiers. Qadhafi has sent senior envoys to Algiers and used

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[redacted]

other intermediaries, such as the Iranian foreign minister, to arrange a summit with President Benjedid. Qadhafi probably wants to break up nascent Algerian-Egyptian military collaboration against his regime and to lessen tension on his border with Algeria to better allow him to meddle in Chad. We believe a report from a reliable source of Embassy Algiers that Qadhafi may renew military support to the Polisario is, if verified, a step to help repair relations with Algeria. [redacted]

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Algeria is skeptical of Qadhafi's motives, but President Bendjedid appears willing to meet with him. Algeria reportedly set tough conditions for a meeting, however, including Libyan cessation of subversion in Tunisia. We believe Algeria also will demand that Libya cease its support for Algerian dissidents, and decrease its involvement with Morocco. Reports from the US Embassy in Tunis that Algeria is encouraging Tunis to adopt a less confrontational posture toward Libya could indicate that Algiers is taking steps to placate Libya. [redacted]

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Morocco generally has looked outside the Maghreb to make up for its isolation in North Africa. Hassan probably believes that he has little choice as long as he continues his union with Qadhafi. The King appears to view France as a counterweight to Algeria, and a potential source of military and economic support. There also are signs that Hassan is interested in expanding ties with Soviet bloc countries. Over the long term, he probably wants to persuade Moscow not to provide Algeria with new weapon systems. [redacted]

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Tunisia, more than the other countries, is militarily vulnerable. Its primary concern has been stability in the face of Libyan blandishments and doubts about French and American willingness to come to its defense. Even so, Tunisia remains wary of Algeria, and has looked outside the region to Egypt and Iraq for military support. [redacted]

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Regional Prospects

Neither of the two North African alliances is in imminent danger of collapse, despite the strains. Both Hassan and Qadhafi view the Moroccan-Libyan union as a "marriage of convenience" that serves useful purposes. Algeria and especially Tunisia will find it necessary to maintain their close ties, as long as the Rabat-Tripoli alliance endures, and the threat exists of Libyan interference in Tunisian succession politics. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, we believe the Maghreb countries will seriously consider foreign policy realignments in the region if current frictions intensify over the next year. It is also possible, but less likely, that a rapprochement between Libya and Tunisia would produce the same result. [redacted]

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Winners

Algeria and Libya would be the most likely countries in the region to change partners and negotiate a practical compromise with each other. They also would be the primary beneficiaries of any shift in the existing alliances. Reconciliation would serve to lessen the military threats each faces from abroad. Both countries are surrounded by hostile neighbors, and each would be able to reorient its forces toward its traditional enemies. Libya would be able to strengthen its border with Egypt, while Algeria would be able to reduce its new garrisons on the Libyan border and return units and equipment to the Moroccan frontier. [redacted]

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In our judgment, any Libyan-Algerian rapprochement at the most is likely to be no more advanced than a fairly loose association because of competition for regional dominance. [redacted]

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[redacted] Algerian distrust for Qadhafi is so intense that only his removal from power and a regime in Tripoli not controlled by pro-Qadhafi radicals would allow a close relationship. [redacted]

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Losers

Morocco and Tunisia would find themselves more vulnerable if the current alliances were to shift, especially because of their weaker military position and economic problems. They would find themselves without any partners in North Africa or thrown together in a weak coalition. Moreover, a collapse in the Moroccan-Libyan pact would tarnish somewhat the image of King Hassan, since he placed his prestige on the line in forming the union. He argued both at home and in Washington that the union would enable him to tame Qadhafi. [redacted]

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The loss of Algeria as a key ally would be a severe blow for Tunisia, since the country's leaders have leaned on Algeria in the wake of disillusionment over what they perceive as parsimonious security assistance from France and the US. Both Tunisia and Morocco would be prone to Libyan subversion. [redacted]

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Morocco almost certainly would be compelled to break ranks with Libya if the Algerian-Libyan rapprochement showed promise. The union might also split if Hassan became convinced that Qadhafi had resumed military aid to the Polisario or was engaged in subversive activity in Morocco. In these circumstances, Hassan could turn to Tunisia, even though he would know that his new partner would not be able to render the strategic and economic assistance Morocco needs. Tunisia might reciprocate a Moroccan overture, but its leaders, too, would see limited advantages to such a relationship. A more likely course for Morocco and Tunisia would be concerted efforts to obtain assistance from France, wealthy Arab states, and the USSR if the US was not receptive to their needs. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

The New Balance of Power

We believe that a realignment of states in North Africa would not significantly alter the balance of power or stability in the region. Morocco and Algeria will continue to be adversaries and will remain at loggerheads over the Western Sahara. The position of Libya vis-a-vis the other Maghreb states would be somewhat improved, because Algiers is the only regime that can effectively challenge Tripoli. Tunisia would remain a pawn between its larger neighbors. Overall military stability, at least in the short term, would be enhanced by an accommodation by Algeria and Libya, which have the largest and most lethal inventories of weapons. Thus while the prospects of military conflict in the Maghreb may recede with a change in the alliances, heightened anxieties on the parts of Morocco and Tunisia would continue to keep the region on edge. [REDACTED]

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The emergence of a formal political alliance between Algeria and Libya would produce a significant change in the balance of power in the Maghreb. Even cooperation short of a compact between them, such as support for the Polisario and Moroccan dissidents, would result in significantly heightened friction in the region. The war in the Western Sahara would be prolonged and state-sponsored terrorism would increase. Qadhafi, for his part, would be careful not to antagonize the Algerians with overt attacks on Tunisia, but he probably would adopt a more aggressive stance toward Egypt. [REDACTED]

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The Soviet Angle

Such shifts in the alliances probably would encourage Libya and Algeria to look to the Soviet Union as a potential wedge against the others. High level contacts between the Soviets and Algeria and Tunisia, including a reported forthcoming visit to both capitals by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, suggest that Moscow senses an opportunity to increase its influence in the region. Moscow favors a rapprochement between Algeria and Libya, because of the Soviet's traditional friendship with these two countries. Moscow also would discourage an alignment against Morocco and Tunisia out of a concern that such a move would increase opportunities for the United States. [REDACTED]

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None of the Maghreb countries, except for Qadhafi's Libya, are prepared to jeopardize their security links with Western Europe or the United States. Tunisia probably hopes its contacts with the Soviets will prompt the US to increase its aid, and Algiers and Rabat could do the same. These three countries also probably hope to get Moscow to curb Qadhafi's excesses. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the United States

These shifts in relations among the Maghreb states would have mixed results for Washington, but, overall, it is conceivable that the United States would lose influence in North Africa. Morocco and Tunisia would move closer to Washington out of necessity. Both countries would view Washington as the best source of military assistance. Nevertheless, the United States would not necessarily have greater leverage, because Rabat and Tunis would probably conclude that Washington would be more dependent upon them. The degree to which Rabat and Tunis turned to Washington probably would depend on the nature of the Algerian-Libyan relationship. The closer the ties between Algiers and Tripoli -- particularly any hint of military cooperation -- the more willing Morocco and Tunisia would be to cooperate with United States, perhaps even willing to discuss military facilities. [REDACTED]

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Bilateral relations with Algeria probably would become more ambivalent. Algeria presumably would want to continue to expand ties with the United States in order to modernize its economy and military. To the extent that Algiers felt compelled to placate Qadhafi, however, it would have less incentive to cooperate with Washington. Algeria may even decide to refrain from acting as a political conduit to radical Arab regimes. Qadhafi, for his part, would eliminate the military threat from Algeria and coopt a key ally of Washington in the US effort to undermine the Libyan regime. [REDACTED]

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