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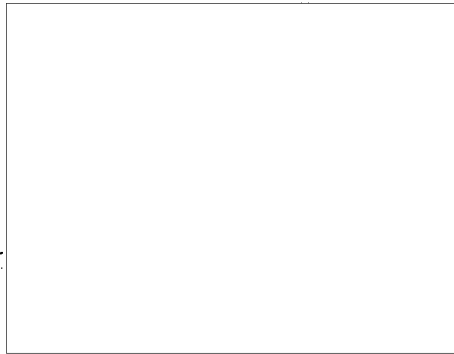
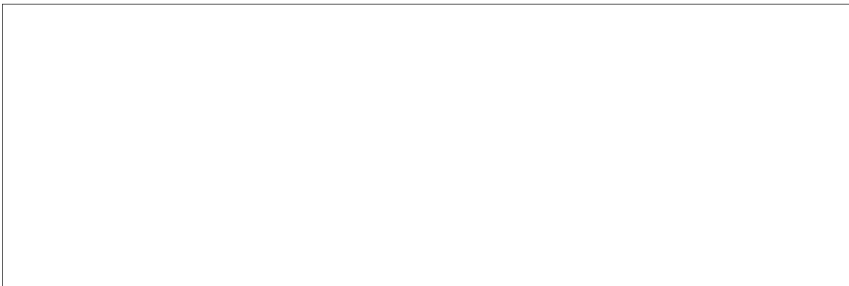


5 November 1979

Memorandum for DD/NFA
NIO/NESA
D/OPA
D/OSR

Subject: NFAC Reporting on Morocco/Western Sahara

1. The Senior Review Panel wonders whether there is a subtle reporting bias on Morocco's performance in the war in the Western Sahara. The NID and other current intelligence publications have fairly consistently portrayed the Moroccan military performance in pessimistic terms. There has been continued reports of poor morale, inadequate leadership, inefficient tactics, etc. While this may have been true in the past, more recent reporting in the news media, especially since the recent use of French airpower and the US arms decision, has been more optimistic. Thus, while the NID article of 10 October 1979 (Attachment A) treated the Polisario attacks on Zaag and Semara as guerrilla victories, The Christian Science Monitor on 18 October 1979 (Attachment B) described the Semara battle as a Polisario rout because of the effective use of airpower. The use of airpower was not mentioned in the 10 October 1979 NID. Furthermore, while a 29 October 1979 Washington Post (Attachment C) article speaks of the "recent military improvement" in Morocco's conduct of the war, including "improved air and ground coordination in a series of major battles since August", a 16 October 1979 NIE (Attachment D) article is headlined "Morocco: The Bleak Military Outlook." The NID article does mention Morocco's new airpower as improving military morale and the Army's plans for more aggressive operations with new US equipment. But it states that these are unlikely to significantly improve the armed forces capabilities against the guerrillas or Morocco's prospects for regaining the military advantage.



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2. The SRP realizes that the newspaper articles were datelined from Rabat and may reflect a pro-government line, although The Washington Post article seems particularly unbiased. The Panel nevertheless wonders whether the NID reporting is sufficiently balanced on Moroccan military performance. Perhaps there is a subconscious motivation by NFAC analysts to continue the estimative line taken in the April 1979 IIM on "Internal Stability in Morocco." That estimate took the position that the worsening military situation in the Western Sahara was promoting military discontent which eventually would threaten the monarchy if King Hassan could not find a solution. Reporting since then has indicated that even additional Western military aid will not enable the armed forces to defeat the Polisario. The SRP does not wish to challenge these judgments, but it would hope that the analysts have an open mind on the possibility that the Moroccan armed forces might improve their performance sufficiently to lessen potential military dissatisfaction with the King.

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Attachments:
As stated



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Subject: NFAC Reporting on Morocco/Western Sahara

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THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Thursday, October 18, 1979

Morocco uses new muscle in Sahara war

By L. Roberts Sheldon

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Rabat, Morocco

A new phase of fighting in the desert areas of what formerly was called Spanish Sahara has begun. The four-year conflict, which until recent weeks was composed of sporadic outbreaks of guerrilla warfare, has escalated into a series of major battles.

The Algeria-based Polisario Front guerrilla organization is staging full-scale attacks on Moroccan posts, both in Morocco and in its annexed Saharan provinces, aimed at capturing major towns and military garrisons.

As attacks on Tantan, Tata, Lemsed, Zag, Bir Anzahran, Lebouirat, and finally, Smara have intensified, Moroccan military observers now have convincing evidence that the Polisario Front possesses a large arsenal of sophisticated Soviet-built armament.

Yet Moroccan forces today are routing the enemy and starting to get the upper hand, according to reports reaching here.

At Bir Anzahran in August, a bold move by a 3,000-man Polisario force to take Dakhla, the capital of the southern portion of the former Spanish Sahara, was checked by Moroccan air power. More recently, an attack on the important garrison town of Smara, which is also the religious capital of the Sahara, indicates a distinct turning point in the war.

Never before has the guerrilla organization engaged so many men and so much equipment.

Some 5,000 Polisario fighting men moved on Smara and its 8,000 inhabitants during the night of Oct. 5, coming from three directions. The attackers were equipped with Soviet-type Kalashnikov rifles and submachine guns and Soviet-built 120 mm. and 160 mm. rockets, which are fired from Stalin missile launchers

with a range of 11 and 13 miles, respectively.

The Moroccan garrison of Smara, consisting of little over a regiment, withstood a 24-hour pummeling, including substantial man-to-man combat. Moroccan ground troops claimed to have destroyed 50 vehicles and killed 350 of the enemy on the first day.

On the following night, the Moroccan Air Force arrived on the scene. Waves of attacks by French-built Mirage F-1 fighter squadrons continuing throughout Oct. 7 encountered a barrage of Soviet SAM-7 missiles and other anti-aircraft weapons.

This was the first Moroccan air attack by night, which in previous battles has been the time of Polisario effectiveness. The Moroccans thus had the advantage of surprise. A disorganized retreat by the Polisario force, calling for reinforcements, under combined artillery and air attack turned into a veritable rout, despite Polisario's claim on Oct. 7 of having occupied the city of Smara.

After the air battle, over 200 more destroyed Polisario vehicles and 735 dead "mercenaries" were counted, according to Moroccan sources. Moroccan dead and wounded numbered 121, they said, though the Polisario Front placed the figure far higher. Morocco had the advantage of having been prepared for an attack, as the guerrilla advance had been observed for several days.

Moroccan military officials have deduced that several Polisario attack units started out from positions across the Mauritanian border only 40 miles away. As the Polisario force retreated, the Moroccan Air Force intervened, strafing the route from Smara to Tifariti on which enemy reinforcements were arriving.

Above all, the battle of Smara represented a smashing victory for the Moroccan Air Force. For the first time, Moroccan pilots were able to demonstrate their ability to handle the sophisticated Mirage F-1s, which they claim showed a performance superior to that of the older American planes Moroccans had been flying in the Sahara.

The attack on Smara, like the attempt to take Dakhla, was aimed at establishing a foothold for a Polisario-run Saharan government, as their headquarters to date has been situated in Algeria.

Monday, October 11, 1976 THE WASHINGTON POST

Hassan: Fewer Options in Desert War

Morocco's Diplomacy and Information Policy Considered Mishandled, Self-Defeating

By Jonathan C. Randal
Washington Post Foreign Service

RABAT, Morocco — Four years after masterminding the peaceful takeover of the Spanish Sahara, King Hassan II's often shaky throne is again weakened by the ensuing desert war it requires to go away.

Paradoxically, the recent military setbacks of the war is vaguely entitled. Rarely has it been so in the case the king has managed to secure all party support and obtain Saudi Arabia's financial aid. Even the Arab League's the result of the withdrawal of new French-made Mirage F-1 aircraft—does not change the

basic evaluation that Morocco is caught in a long, sapping conflict. So too, are the Polisario guerrillas, a regional independence group and their military, financial and diplomatic backers: Algeria and Libya.

Even the palace mood has changed. Gone is the pretension that the Sahara problem was solved when Spain, in Gen. Francisco Franco's dying days, agreed to give the California-sized territory to Mauritania and Morocco in November 1976.

The high economic cost of the subsequent war with Polisario guerrillas for control of the Western Sahara forced Mauritania to renounce its claim to the southern third of the territory in August and sign a peace treaty with the Polisario. As a result,

Morocco annexed Mauritania's portion and its forces have been stretched thinner than ever in trying to maintain control of the territory.

"Yes, the situation is grave, serious," a palace insider remarked recently, "but we are not in a trap."

Other observers are not so sanguine, even if they do not necessarily share a leader's Socialist opposition leader's private complaint that "everything is unraveling, everything is falling to pieces. The king is wasting valuable time."

The Socialists, still politically suspect because of earlier plotting against the king, have tended to support rightist opposition demands for "not pursuit" of Polisario guerrillas

inside Algeria, a people's militia to fight alongside the regular armed forces and annexionist land claims.

Diminishing options confront the king, who at 50 remains very much the same man who wrote his political science dissertation on Machiavelli and repeatedly has proved to be one of contemporary history's great survivors.

Politically, opposition parties find the king too moderate in his prosecution of the war. They are pushing him toward a potential conflict with Algeria, which he neither wants nor stands much chance of winning.

He is still too traumatized by military involvement in assassination attempts in 1971 and 1972 — plus an Algerian-backed abortive coup in 1973 — to appoint a defense minister or chief of staff. Most domestic and foreign analysts believe such a move is necessary to improve the armed forces performance.

Diplomatically, analysts say, Morocco has mishandled massively the defense of its claims to the disputed Western Sahara. It has argued that its case was self-evident and required no explanation, much less justification.

Such hubris has cost Morocco dearly and allowed the Polisario and its Algerian backers to make diplomatic gains.

At last count 25 countries have recognized the Polisario's political arm, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. The king's refusal to attend the Organization of African Unity summit in Monrovia, Liberia, last July was crucial in providing the Polisario with another easy victory. The king's few low chiefs of state were liked that he had not bothered to appear — and showed it by voting in support of self-determination for the Western Sahara.

Equally self-detracting is the government information policy which for years denied any problems — much less fighting in the Western Sahara. The Polisario has this attitude to its advantage. From the start of the war in early 1970 it has issued frequent,

troops attacked Tan Tan, a city in southern Morocco, did the government begin admitting there was a war on. Nevertheless, access to Moroccan troops is all but impossible.

Even when Morocco earlier this month announced a major victory over the Polisario at Smara — the king's Mirages chewed up major guerrilla units as they fled from the holy city they claimed to have captured — 11 days passed before the press was flown down for a brief two-hour visit. No detailed questions were answered, and while diplomats and journalists visited the airfield and adjoining town and barracks, they did not see the battlefield several miles away.

Economically, Morocco is beset with common Third World problems that have nothing to do directly with the war. However, pessimists are convinced it is only a matter of time before Moroccans start blaming their plight on a war costing about \$1.5 billion a day.

A rash of strikes last spring gave the king a whiff of what could be in store in the coming months.

The government is paying the price for overly ambitious development budgets — based on post-1973 skyrocketing phosphate prices — that were reversed back after the market skidded for Morocco's biggest export. Inflation is running at more than 20 percent annually while the population grows at more than 3 percent a year. Unemployment is rampant.

A mediocre harvest means importing 2 million tons of wheat worth \$100 million. Tourism receipts are down. Oil, which before 1973 accounted for 4 percent of Morocco's imports, now feeds up 25 percent of the total and exceeds phosphate export revenues.

Foreign investment is sluggish. Exports of value are no more than 10 percent of total exports.

See MOROCCO, A11, Col. 1

A Polisario guerrilla, left, focuses on the horizon in the Western Sahara; at right, Moroccan intervention units, stretched thin in the desert war, drop from a helicopter in pursuit of the

Morocco Threatened by Lingering Saharan War

MOROCCO, From A10

years of enforced government restraint before Morocco gets out from under a 22 percent debt ratio.

Relieving the gloom, however, are large loans underwritten by the Saudi government to involve several hundred million dollars—and a \$230 million undertaking by European banks.

Saudi largesse, interrupted last year apparently to signal displeasure with Hassan's spirited defense of the Camp David accord, thus has been restored. But the price is toeing the line on the Arab boycott of Egypt.

Diplomats are convinced that the king can do no more than accept limited Egyptian arms shipments despite his temptation both to break his economic and please the United States. Domestically, the king outwardly seems to be backing in the warm waters of 30 million nationalist Moroccans who, with the exception of a

C. Spenser—SYGMA

minority within the university student union, seem to support him solidly.

But the slight improvement in Morocco's military posture is not deemed sufficient to provide anything approaching a military victory for the king.

Indeed his greatest nightmare is said to be the possibility of a border strike led by some frustrated and disgruntled colonel against either Tindouf, the southern Algerian base area for the Polisario, or the Mediterranean port of Arzew, where much of Algeria's high-technology industry is located.

Not only would the Algerian posture almost certainly be massive—and potentially catastrophic, since Algeria's armed forces vastly outgun Morocco's—but the king would probably lose whatever remaining international credit he still enjoys.

The king has sought to control any such temptation to the "right of hot

pursuit" by first announcing he could rule out such a possibility, then trying to make sure no such action could take place. After the Polisario's Tan Tan raid, the king sidestepped the issue by naming a Higher Defense Council, which included members of all major political parties, but not a single military man.

Morocco's diplomatic failures, and the Polisario's concomitant successes, have made it all but impossible to envisage an honorable way out for any of the interested parties, diplomats say. It is too late for the king to peaceably accept Saharan self-determination. And in light of the wide recognition of the Polisario, it would seem equally difficult for the organization's Algerian backers to sell the Polisario down the river.

President Carter justified his controversial decision to provide new weapons to Morocco on grounds that the king would thus be encouraged to enter negotiations. So, far, however,

mediation efforts by Saudi Arabia's King Khalid, Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba and Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization have proved fruitless, and diplomats here hold out little hope of any quick negotiated settlement.

The king seemed to pin his hopes for an end of the war on a change of Algerian heart after Chadli Benfledj replaced Houari Boumediene as president of Algeria in January. But there has been no visible change in the Algerian policy of supporting the Polisario.

The main problem for Morocco is how to make Algeria and Libya feel the cost of escalating Polisario attacks. That is no easy task with the king's desire to avoid a wider war. Libya's willingness to supply the Polisario from its militant Soviet-supplied arsenal and Algeria and Libya both able to use their oil to dislodge nearby Third party diplomats.

So far the king has made do with stings and mirrors. He moved boldly

to prevent a Polisario takeover of Mauritania's third of the Western Sahara in early August after Mauritania pulled out of the conflict.

Similarly, improved air and ground coordination in a series of major battles since August has restored public faith in the armed forces and crystallized anti-Algerian nationalism, after the Polisario got the best of several clashes.

On the other hand, all parties to the dispute now seem trapped. Neither Algerians nor Moroccans can back down, and as an opposition politician said, "The history of the Moroccan monarchy is linked to defense of our territory."

"We will succeed if the war becomes unpopular in Algeria before it does in Morocco," he added. But even if the king were overthrown for losing the Sahara, many observers—including, it is said, some Polisario leaders—are convinced an even more nationalistic government would take his place and continue the war.

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