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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

3 June 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: Representatives of the National Foreign Intelligence Board

SUBJECT : NI IIM 77-008: THE CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN SAHARA [REDACTED]
(Final Draft)

25X1 1. [REDACTED] The final draft of IIM 77-008 is attached for your review.
Required changes identified at the meeting of 24 May have been incorporated and
the Principal Judgments have been substantially rewritten. Please note also
25X1 that the Principal Judgments, when separated from the remainder of the IIM bear
the classification of SECRET [REDACTED] This lower classification will facilitate
the broader dissemination of the study's conclusions. Representatives who desire
to discuss any of the textual changes that have been made should contact the
Project Officer, [REDACTED] (DIA/DN-2E2), [REDACTED]

25X1 2. [REDACTED] It is requested that representatives register their agencies'
concurrences by telephoning [REDACTED] by not later than 1600,
25X1 Friday, 10 June.

3. (U) It is not anticipated at this time that IIM 77-008 will be
submitted for formal review by the NFIB.

25X1 [REDACTED]
National Intelligence Officer for the
Near East and South Asia

Attachment: As stated

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Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN SAHARA

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Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN SAHARA*

Principal Judgments

Morocco and Mauritania are tenaciously maintaining their hold on the former Spanish Sahara despite persistent harassment by the guerrillas of the POLISARIO movement. Algeria refuses to recognize the Moroccan-Mauritanian annexations, advocates self-determination for the Sahara, and gives substantial material support to the POLISARIO insurgency. In the short term, there appears to be little chance of a negotiated settlement of this conflict.

The POLISARIO movement has caused a significant amount of Moroccan and Mauritanian resources to be used for countering guerrilla activity. As long as the flow of Algerian military supplies is continued and their Algerian safehaven is maintained, the guerrillas should be able to operate almost indefinitely. Numbering only some 3,000 to 5,000 men, however, and hampered by logistic constraints and their heavy dependence on outside military support, they do not pose an insuperable military threat to either Morocco or Mauritania. Nor do we believe that the POLISARIO can, at its own initiative, significantly upgrade its existing military force.

* This memorandum--at the request of the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia--was prepared under the direction of [] DIA/DN-2E2, with major contributions being submitted by [] CIA/OGCR, and [] State/INR. The memorandum was coordinated at the working level among DIA, CIA, State/INR, NSA, Treasury, and the intelligence organizations of the Armed Services.

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During the next two years, the current situation will probably continue:

- Morocco and Mauritania will strive to consolidate their political control over the territory, alleging that integration of the Sahara fulfills the desires of the Saharan people, but avoiding any referendum not under their control. They will control the principal population centers but will not be able to eliminate the guerrilla movement so long as it is sustained by Algeria.
- the POLISARIO will continue to move through the countryside harassing Moroccan and Mauritanian forces, and on occasion scoring minor military successes, some of considerable propaganda value.
- Algeria will continue its support of the POLISARIO and will try to keep the issue before international forums. Algeria will not, however, seek outside help other than diplomatic support as it does not wish to dilute its influence over the POLISARIO.
- Internationally, most countries, while withholding formal recognition, will regard the Sahara annexation by Morocco and Mauritania as a fait accompli.

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There is little likelihood that the Soviets will become involved in the conflict on a large scale, since they do not want to jeopardize their relations with Morocco by providing direct support to the POLISARIO.

Prospects for a reduction in tension in the short run are dim because of the lack of negotiating flexibility exhibited by all parties, which in turn results partly from the moderate military losses being inflicted on either side. Serious political, economic, and military restraints, however, will probably keep the conflict from escalating into a conventional war between Algeria and Morocco.

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BACKGROUND

The coup in Portugal in April 1974 and Lisbon's subsequent decision to grant its African territories independence prompted King Hassan of Morocco to press Madrid to pull out of the Spanish Sahara. Rabat was convinced that Spain would not wish to remain long as the only significant colonial power in Africa.

On 20 August 1974, Spain notified the UN Secretary General of its intention to hold a referendum on self-determination in its colony. Morocco seized upon the announcement to reassert its claims to the phosphate rich territory. Rabat argued that in the pre-colonial era Moroccan rulers intermittently exercised varying degrees of control over much of this territory, as well as portions of western Algeria, Mauritania, and parts of Mali.

Indeed, it was not until 1970--14 years after achieving its own independence, that Morocco recognized Mauritania and dropped its claims to that country. Rabat's feud with Algeria over the region stretching from the area south of Bechar and including Tindouf was the cause of a brief border war in 1963. Both countries signed an agreement in 1972 delineating a common boundary, but Rabat has not yet ratified the accord.

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In conjunction with Rabat's aggressive political campaign to recover the Sahara in 1974, Mauritania took the occasion to voice its own territorial claims. The former Spanish Sahara has no natural frontiers and shares its southern and virtually all of its eastern border with Mauritania. The nomadic tribes of the Sahara have traditionally roamed across those borders, as well as across into Morocco.

Mauritania's assertion of its own territorial ambitions resulted in a brief period of tension with Morocco. A reconciliation was effected by September 1974 when the two countries agreed to submit their case to the International Court of Justice for a legal opinion. By the end of the year, Rabat and Nouakchott agreed in principle to partition the territory.

In May 1975, Madrid announced it was prepared to transfer sovereignty of the territory. Five months later the International Court of Justice concluded that, although certain ties of allegiance existed between Morocco/Mauritania and the Western Sahara prior to Spanish colonization, these did not support a claim of territorial sovereignty for either party. The principle of self-determination was upheld.

Algeria, for its part, sought to secure an independent Spanish Sahara amenable to Algerian influence. Algiers was concerned that Rabat's acquisition of additional territory would

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enhance Morocco's role in north Africa at the expense of Algerian interests.

Nevertheless, Rabat moved ahead with its plans for annexation by organizing the ''Green March'' into the Sahara by some 350,000 unarmed civilians in early November 1975 while Spain remained in control. This compelled Madrid to partition the country and transfer administrative responsibility, but not sovereignty, to Morocco and Mauritania. Spain withdrew from the Spanish Sahara in February 1976, advocating a self-determination for the Saharan people--a stance it has continued to maintain. On 14 April Morocco and Mauritania formalized their annexation of the Sahara by announcing new boundaries; Rabat gained the phosphate-rich northern two-thirds.

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DISCUSSION

Who Owns the Sahara?

1. Morocco and Mauritania exercise de facto control over most of the former Spanish Sahara. United Nations General Assembly resolutions have upheld the right of self-determination of the Saharan people, but both governments claim that the convocation of the Saharan territorial assembly in February 1976 and the vote of some 60 of its original 102 members to integrate the Sahara into Morocco and Mauritania constituted compliance. They further cite the participation of the Saharans in the Moroccan and Mauritanian elections during the past year. Neither Spain nor the UN has accepted Rabat's gambit to dispose of the troublesome consultation process.

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