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Summary: The Polisario has had some success in the Western Sahara with modern heavy arms supplied largely by Libya and shipped to Polisario bases in southern Algeria. There is little reliable information on direct Algerian aid to the Polisario. Algerian transport of arms and supplies for the Polisario is mainly by truck and train, and would probably continue to be overland even if Algeria's airlift capacity were increased.

Over the past few years Libya has supplied Polisario bases in Algeria with SA-9 launchers, three to four SA-6 launchers, about 40 T-54/55 tanks, BMP armored vehicles, and RM-70 rocket launchers. Other items have included Soviet-made field artillery pieces, ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns, and Toyota trucks fitted with heavy machineguns and anti-tank guns.

The Polisario has 8,000-10,000 combatants and support personnel. Its tactics originally consisted largely of hit-and-run attacks by small motorized units. Since gaining the initiative in most of Western Sahara outside the Moroccan defensive barrier, however, the Polisario has used heavier weapons deployed to fixed camps.

The Polisario received its major infusions of modern Soviet arms--including most of its SAM launchers--in 1981. The most significant arms shipment since then was in August 1982, when 16 T-54/55 tanks arrived from Libya. We have no detailed information on how munitions and other stores are replenished.

The Algerian air force has 16 intermediate-range transports: three L-100s, six C-130s, and seven An-12s. Algeria, however, transports almost all equipment for the Polisario by rail from Oran to Bechar and by truck from Bechar to Tindouf (see map). Algeria will probably continue to rely on this method, even if allowed to purchase more C-130s.

A comparison of the Algerian and Moroccan armed forces is given in the following tables.

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