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SUBJECT: The Maghreb: After Oujda [Redacted]

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 September 1986

The Maghreb: After Oujda

Summary

King Hassan's decision on 29 August to unilaterally abrogate Morocco's political union with Libya--the Treaty of Oujda--will not significantly alter relations among the states of the Maghreb. The most likely outcome will be Libyan sponsorship of terrorism directed against Moroccan interests and eventually renewal of some Libyan support for the Polisario. We do not expect any significant, near term changes in Moroccan-Algerian and Algerian-Libyan relations or Tunisia's diplomatic position as a result of the short-lived treaty. The rupture between Rabat and Tripoli is a boon to US interests--it removes a sore spot in our ties with our closest ally in the Maghreb and reinforces US claims that Qadhafi is isolated in the Arab world.

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King Hassan ended the Moroccan-Libyan political union in a nationwide television address on 29 August. He stated that his decision was a response to Libyan and Syrian condemnation of the visit to Morocco last July by Israeli Prime Minister Peres. We believe, however, that Hassan was looking for a pretext to end a relationship that had been under strain since its inception two years ago. For Morocco, the primary reason for the union was no longer valid. King Hassan initiated the union because he wanted assurances that Qadhafi would abide by a 1983 agreement with Morocco to curtail Libyan support for the Polisario guerrillas

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Maghreb Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 25 September 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division [redacted].

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fighting Morocco for control of the Western Sahara. By this August, Hassan saw Qadhafi as increasingly weak at home and a diplomatic liability for Rabat. Morocco is winning the war and probably less worried about a resumption of Libyan support to the guerrillas. [redacted]

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There also were secondary considerations for Hassan's decision. He may have detected Libyan plans to retaliate against Morocco through terrorism following the Peres trip. The bad feeling between the United States and Libya also made Qadhafi a liability to Hassan, who wants to improve ties with Washington--especially whenever he detects a warming in Algerian-US relations. Finally, Qadhafi's growing economic woes probably have destroyed any hope the King may have had of achieving further economic benefit from the pact. [redacted]

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What it Means Domestically for Morocco

There has been little reaction at home to the King's announcement. Nevertheless, King Hassan almost certainly expects Qadhafi to try to cause trouble for Rabat. We believe Tripoli never ceased its machinations against Morocco during the life of the treaty and probably used the two years to recruit agents. For example, [redacted] the number of Libyan visitors to Morocco, including those involved in espionage, increased dramatically after the conclusion of the Oujda accord. [redacted]

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[redacted] Tripoli also may decide to deport the nearly 18,000 Moroccan workers in Libya, as it did in the case of Tunisian workers last year. Such a move would compound problems for a government already grappling with severe unemployment and under pressure from foreign donors to implement additional austerity measures. [redacted]

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As a precaution, Moroccan security services are on alert for terrorism, [redacted]. The police have adopted aggressive and highly visible measures, including tighter security at airports and borders. [redacted]

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[redacted] Moroccan press reports that the government has apprehended four foreign nationals, allegedly members of the Palestinian 15 May group, who were planning acts of subversion. Hassan could restrict the entry of Libyans, expel Libyan residents, or impose restrictions on Libyan diplomats. These actions would hamper Libyan intelligence and terrorist operations in Morocco and elsewhere, since Libyan intelligence operatives use Morocco as a convenient point of transit. [redacted]

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Effect on the Saharan War

Algiers' reaction to the King's announcement has been muted, but the government almost certainly is relieved that its two neighbors are no longer allied. Nonetheless, relations between Rabat and Algiers are not likely to undergo much change. Both

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sides are concerned about stability and economic problems in the Maghreb, but the Polisario question stands in the way of significant cooperation and is a threat to peace between the two countries. Algerian aid to the Polisario could lead to the resumption of limited border skirmishes that characterized Moroccan-Algerian relations in the past. We also do not expect any progress in the diplomatic arena in settling bilateral differences or the Western Sahara dispute. [redacted]

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There is a strong possibility that Qadhafi will resume some military support for the Polisario. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Algerians might approve renewed Libyan aid to the Polisario, since it would reduce the burden of economic support for the Polisario's Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. The major constraint on Qadhafi is that supporting the Polisario would prompt Moroccan countermeasures, including a renewal of Moroccan support for Chadian President Habre and Libyan dissidents, and possibly a break in diplomatic ties. In any case, since the Polisario already has more equipment than it can effectively use, additional Libyan shipments are not likely to affect significantly the military situation. [redacted]

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Several conceivable but unlikely developments could produce an escalation of the Western Saharan conflict. Bendjedid is firmly in control of the Algerian Government, but his policies are being challenged by radical hardliners. This opposition supports the regime's overall stance toward Morocco, but it supports a more aggressive military strategy for the Polisario--including terrorism within Morocco--and apparently is less sensitive to the risks of conflict with Morocco. We doubt that the opposition has the strength to overturn Bendjedid's cautious policy on the war, but the President may decide to accommodate the hardliners and allow the Polisario to pursue more aggressive tactics. These might include land or sea commando raids deep inside the Western Sahara or in Morocco. [redacted]

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In addition, Qadhafi eventually may try to expand his influence with the Polisario, exploiting the dissatisfaction of some insurgent leaders over Algiers' conservative strategy in the conflict. Qadhafi would hope that his dispensation of weapons would strengthen the hand of Algerian hardliners. Algiers, however, would not relinquish its control over the Polisario, because of the risks such a development might pose for Algerian-Moroccan relations. The Algerians provide the Polisario the bulk of the movement's military and economic resources and territory for the Polisario refugee population. [redacted]

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The Fallout for Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia

During the past two years, Algeria's policy toward Libya has gone from hostility to a more ambiguous stance. The breakup of the Moroccan-Libyan union, a key goal of Algiers, diminishes Algiers' fear of the possibility of joint Libyan-Moroccan actions against Algeria. Bendjedid thus has greater flexibility in dealing with Qadhafi, especially because of the Libyan leader's isolation.

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In our judgment, however, Bendjedid will be reluctant to meet with the Libyan leader anytime soon because of his concern over Algeria's diplomatic image in the Arab world and in the West. The Algerians deeply distrust Qadhafi and differ with him on a range of issues such as Chad and Tunisia. Even though Algiers will try to reach an accommodation with Qadhafi, President Bendjedid will not go so far as to sign a political accord with him--as some Algerian hardliners recommend--unless, as we think unlikely, Qadhafi makes substantial concessions on issues of bilateral interest.

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Qadhafi, for his part, is eager to strengthen ties with Algiers and to seek a rapprochement with Tunis because of his international isolation since the US air strike last April. His principal interest is to prevent Algeria from expanding relations with the United States and to minimize Algerian support for exiled Libyan dissidents. To achieve this, he may give the appearance of greater receptivity to Algerian conditions for reconciliation, including demarcation of their common border, cessation of support for Algerian and other dissidents, and settlement of Tunisian claims against Libya. Qadhafi may also respond favorably to a direct Algerian call for assistance for the Polisario, even though he regards such a posture as extremely risky. Unless Algeria agrees to some form of union with Libya--a highly unlikely development at this juncture--Qadhafi will avoid commitments and go no farther than necessary to placate Algeria.

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Tunisia will be the least affected by developments between Morocco and Libya. The Bourguiba government probably believes that Qadhafi's growing problems and need for better ties with neighbors will strengthen Tunis' hand in bilateral relations.

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Since the rupture of diplomatic ties last year, Tunisia has been seeking financial compensation for Libya's abrupt expulsion of Tunisian guest workers, and recent press reports indicate that Qadhafi is now meeting some of these Tunisian demands. Tunis probably will be most concerned about any signs of progress between Algeria and Libya, since closer ties between these powerful neighbors might limit its own diplomatic options. As long as Algeria maintains its distance from Libya, Bourguiba can afford to adopt a hardline position toward Qadhafi. A settlement of differences between Libya and Tunisia would help ease tensions between Algeria and Libya and reduce somewhat the threat of overt Libyan aggression against Tunisia. We doubt, however, that peace between Tunisia and Libya would remove the danger of Libyan subversion against the Bourguiba regime. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

Hassan's move draws Morocco closer to the United States and helps to isolate Libya. The King not only hopes that the United States will reward him with economic and military aid, but also that Morocco's overall image in the West will improve and pave the way for expanded financial credits from Western governments and banks. His most important objective probably is obtaining sophisticated military equipment to replace Morocco's aging inventory of weapons. Even so, we believe that the King will want to avoid appearing especially close to the United States. [redacted]

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Bilateral relations probably will cool only moderately if the King concludes that Washington is unwilling to reward him sufficiently for his meeting with Peres and the breakup of the Oujda accord. Hassan would be tempted to broaden further Morocco's ties with Western Europe, in particular France, Spain, and Italy, and to expand contacts with the Soviet Union. Since the abrogation of the Oujda accord, Moroccan officials have hosted Italy's Defense Minister Spadolini for discussions of military and security cooperation. [redacted]

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[redacted] In addition, the Moroccans have allowed two Soviet naval combatants to weigh anchor in Casablanca--the first Soviet combatant port call in a decade. [redacted]

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The principal concern for the United States would be closer relations between Algeria and Libya. Such a development would erode Tunisia's national security, reduce Washington's access to Algeria, undermine Algerian willingness to maintain ties with Libyan dissidents, and make it more difficult for the United States to help Algeria and Morocco achieve a peaceful settlement of the Western Sahara dispute. Closer US-Moroccan ties, and

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especially a decision by the United States to increase military assistance to Morocco, would give impetus to Algerian-Libyan relations.

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