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Morocco-Algeria: Living Near the Brink



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*NESA 87-10014
March 1987*

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Morocco-Algeria: Living Near the Brink



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An Intelligence Assessment

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**Morocco-Algeria:
Living Near the Brink**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 13 February 1987
was used in this report.*

Algeria and Morocco are competitors for regional hegemony that prefer to keep their competition in the diplomatic arena. Even their opposition over Western Sahara—where for 11 years Moroccan troops have fought Polisario Front guerrillas trained, supplied, and advised by Algeria—is not an issue that either Algiers or Rabat believes should be settled by a direct war. The two rivals are interested in cooperation for the sake of economic development, and each generally accepts the regime of the other.

The Western Sahara war, however, prevents a normalization of relations between the two countries, aggravates their mutual distrust, and keeps their forces dangerously close to one another. Both sides pay lipservice to the concept of third-party negotiations under UN auspices to end the war, but neither has been willing to make substantial concessions. Algiers almost certainly will continue its longstanding diplomatic campaign to isolate Morocco until Rabat accepts earnest negotiations with Polisario Front leaders. Consequently, we see little prospect of a diplomatic solution.

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We believe that the prolongation of the Western Sahara war will occasionally prompt Algeria and Morocco to move closer to hostilities. Having nothing to show for their diplomatic efforts, the increasingly frustrated Algerians may try to use just enough force to jolt Rabat out of its intractability. Algerian officials would try to limit this force because they do not believe that the Western Sahara war can be finally resolved by military means alone:

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- It is likely that, between now and 1990, Algeria will at least engage in brinkmanship on behalf of the Polisario Front. Algiers did this in 1984—maneuvering its forces and ambushing a Moroccan border patrol—when Rabat was energetically driving the Polisario guerrillas from their Western Sahara strongholds.
- Once the choice is made to engage in brinkmanship, the risk of an armed clash would be high, with a significant potential that Morocco and Algeria would embark on a series of raids and skirmishes. This occurred in 1963, when they fought a series of engagements along their central border, and again in 1976, when they fought two battles in Western Sahara.

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- The potential for all-out fighting between Algeria and Morocco is much more remote. Neither sees the surrender of the other as a goal attainable at reasonable cost. Both have displayed a realistic perception of the danger of an all-out war and have been careful to avoid such an eventuality. Indeed, this dynamic is so strong that just the fear that any clash could escalate to full war tends to reduce their willingness to take military risks. [redacted]

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In the atmosphere of extreme mutual distrust created by the Western Sahara war, other developments not directly related to the war could produce occasional flareups in Algerian-Moroccan tension, any of which would raise the risk of armed raids and skirmishes. Instability in Mauritania, for example, could increase Algerian-Moroccan competition for dominance there. Hostilities could also arise accidentally, with either side misreading the military intent of the other. [redacted]

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The potential for miscalculation would increase substantially if either King Hassan or President Bendjedid were replaced. Although both leaders appear secure in power for the next few years, each country has radicals and malcontents from whose ranks an assassin could arise. A successor might be more inclined toward unrestrained brinkmanship or exaggerating the foreign threat to consolidate his power base. [redacted]

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If Algerian-Moroccan tension were to escalate to, or near, the point of hostilities, Washington's efforts to be friendly to both would be jeopardized:

- Rabat would ask for expanded US military support—at least arms delivery and intelligence support—in return for continued US military access to Moroccan ports and airfields.
- Algiers would want strict US neutrality. Should Washington provide significant military support to Rabat after hostilities began—for example, airlifting Moroccan troops—Algiers probably would break off relations with Washington. [redacted]

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Even without a clear escalation in tension, Rabat's perception of an increasing Algerian threat—largely driven by Algeria's growing military inventory—is likely to cause Morocco to intensify its efforts to obtain US arms at concessional terms. Rabat's willingness to increase US military


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training opportunities in Morocco and to enhance access for rapid deployment contingencies almost certainly will depend on the extent to which Washington finds ways to increase support for Moroccan security. 

Libya's allegiances have a subtle but real influence on the balance of forces and state of tension between Algeria and Morocco. When the Libyan-Moroccan union was active, Algiers feared a two-front war should tension on either border enter the military arena. In addition, troops that Algeria moved to the Libyan border in 1985 had to be drawn from the Moroccan border. Now that the union is terminated, Morocco is watching Libya closely, fearing that Algiers and Tripoli will cooperate to isolate Rabat in the region. 

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**Morocco-Algeria:
Living Near the Brink**

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Algeria and Morocco are competitors for regional hegemony that prefer to keep their competition in the diplomatic arena. Even their opposition over Western Sahara—where for 11 years Moroccan troops have fought guerrillas trained, supplied, and advised by Algeria—is not an issue that either Algiers or Rabat believes should be settled by a direct war. The regimes trade propaganda jibes but generally accept each other. [Redacted]

The Western Sahara war, however, prevents a normalization of relations between the two countries and keeps their forces dangerously close to one another. The dispute also creates an atmosphere of extreme mutual distrust, raising the risk that competition over Western Sahara in particular and regional preeminence in general could move from the diplomatic to the military realm with little warning. As long as the Western Sahara war drags on—and we see little prospect for a resolution soon—leaders in both capitals will continue to believe that they are living under the threat of war in the medium term. Algerian and Moroccan leaders appear eager to avoid war and are likely to prevent a drawn-out conflict, but we view a move to the brink of hostilities as likely between now and 1990. Moving a step closer to the brink would bring a high risk of a clash, perhaps culminating in a series of raids and skirmishes. [Redacted]

Algeria and Morocco have been to the brink of war several times, most recently in the spring of 1984. In that year, Moroccan forces expelled the Polisario from nearly all of their base camps in Western Sahara. Algiers signaled its displeasure by:

- Ambushing a Moroccan supply column that had crossed Algerian territory on a regularly used shortcut to a Moroccan border post, [Redacted] which left four Moroccan soldiers dead and 31 captured.

- Flying fighter aircraft over Western Sahara and deep into Moroccan airspace, [Redacted]

- Deploying its newest and best interceptors, MIG-23 Flogger-Bs, to the Moroccan border [Redacted]

- Conducting the largest and most sophisticated exercise ever attempted by the Algerian Army and staging it near the undefended northern Moroccan border.

- Upgrading the Polisario arsenal by providing more advanced tanks and antiaircraft artillery. [Redacted]

Before this 1984 activity, Moroccan and Algerian forces had clashed twice, leaving dozens of casualties and nearly 2,000 prisoners who have yet to be repatriated, [Redacted] In 1963 a series of battles was fought along the undemarcated central border. In 1976, Algerian forces were expelled from the Amgala area of Western Sahara after two battles with Moroccan forces. [Redacted]

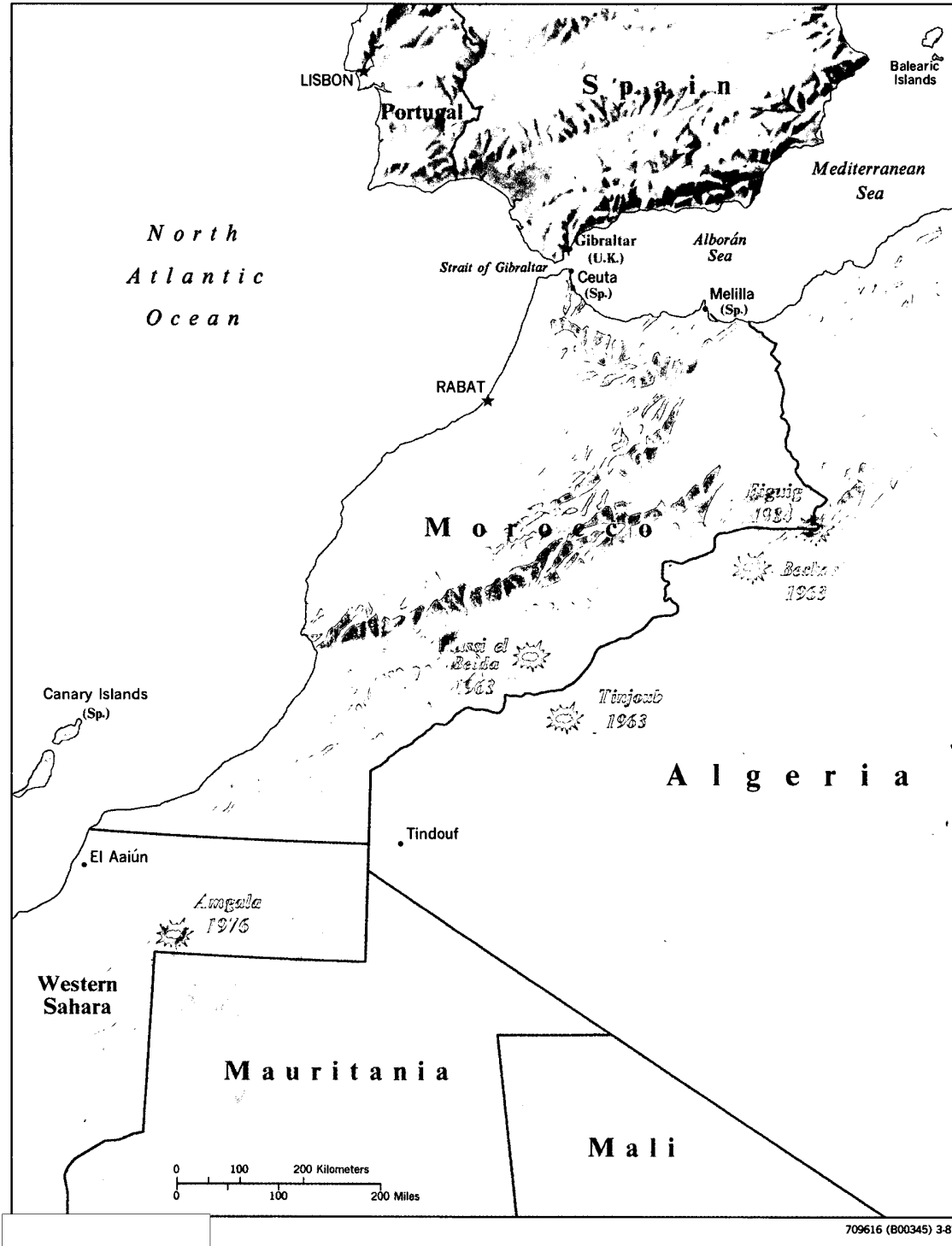
Current relations between Algiers and Rabat remain as cold as they were in the period leading up to the 1984 clash. They have no diplomatic relations, although unofficial contacts occasionally are made. We believe both are genuinely interested in better relations that would allow for broad economic cooperation; an abortive effort toward this end was made in 1983. Such a breakthrough is not likely, however, as long as no progress is made toward a settlement of the Western Sahara war. [Redacted]

Neither side desires an Algerian-Moroccan war, in our view, and it is significant that the conflicts in 1963, 1976, and 1984 passed without escalation.

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Figure 1
Clashes Between Algerian and Moroccan Forces



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Indeed, the desire to avoid war, in our view, is so strong that it generally serves to restrain Rabat's and Algiers's willingness to take military risks. Nevertheless, their differences over Western Sahara, Mauritania, and regional preeminence are so intense that periodic returns to the brink of military conflict are likely. [redacted]

Scenarios for Hostilities

The risk of limited war between these neighbors could be sharply increased by any of several situations. In none of these does armed conflict become inevitable, but each raises the potential that one of the sides will—probably reluctantly—initiate hostilities. [redacted]

An Extension of the Western Sahara War

The Western Sahara war, in our view, is the greatest potential flashpoint between the two neighbors. We estimate that over 100,000 Moroccan troops are engaged in defending Western Sahara against 3,000 to 5,000 Algerian-supplied guerrillas of the Polisario Front. We believe both the 1976 and 1984 crises stemmed from Algiers's efforts to influence the war with its own forces. In the earlier case Algerian forces actually fought in Western Sahara. In a press interview in 1984, the commander of Morocco's Western Sahara campaign claimed that Algeria is fighting the Western Sahara war by proxy. [redacted]

[redacted] this view prevails throughout the Moroccan military. [redacted]

Algiers clearly is frustrated with King Hassan's intransigence about a settlement of the conflict. The Moroccan strategy of walling in most of Western Sahara with an earth berm has given Rabat firm military control over most of the contested territory, stymied the Polisario forces, and reduced pressure on Hassan to negotiate, in our view. A senior Algerian Government official told the US Ambassador last June that Algiers was eager to achieve a face-saving settlement, but "Hassan only played games." He said that Algiers cannot afford to have the Polisario lose the war outright [redacted]



Figure 2. Polisario armored vehicles supplied by Algeria

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Algiers has several options available to bring more pressure on Hassan to enter serious negotiations on Western Sahara:

[redacted]

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- Algiers could allow the guerrillas to cross directly into Morocco from Algeria for operations behind the berm. [redacted] this did happen on a small scale in July 1986. Moroccan forces are not arrayed to defend against this approach, and Rabat would have to rethink its ground tactics if the Polisario infiltrated more than a few hundred guerrillas at once or a few dozen in frequent operations.

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- President Bendjedid could repeat the saber rattling of 1984 as an expression of frustration over lack of progress toward a negotiated settlement.

- A few Algerian armored battalions or aircraft could enter the fighting in Western Sahara to help the Polisario punch large holes in the berm. [redacted]

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Algiers probably is deterred from taking any of these steps for the present because of the high risk that they could lead to a direct Algerian-Moroccan war.

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Wild Cards

Several factors could increase the likelihood of a Moroccan-Algerian war under one or more of the scenarios discussed in this study. Some of these political wild cards may already be a source of pressure on either Moroccan King Hassan or Algerian President Bendjedid to adopt a more aggressive policy. Information, however, is not available to assess reliably the degree to which such pressure could influence a decision by either leader to engage in a military conflict. [redacted]



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Economic Deterioration. Both Algeria and Morocco are plagued by increasing economic problems. Both have experienced rioting attributed to declining living standards—Morocco in 1984 and Algeria in 1986. Neither has much hope of reversing its fortunes in the next few years. Should economically inspired unrest become more widespread and put the survival of either regime at risk, officials may be prompted to try to rally local support by beating war drums. [redacted]

Diplomatic Gambit. Algiers and Rabat tend to view diplomatic initiatives in the region as a zero-sum game: a gain for one is a loss for the other. At the same time, both believe that the image of a strong military can buy influence in the region. This produces an equation wherein making the enemy's military appear impotent can translate into diplomatic gains. We cannot envision a scenario in which this dynamic is strong enough by itself to lead to war, but it will be added to the arguments for war in any scenario described in this paper. The influence of the military image on decisionmaking will be greater if the tension comes in a period when one player believes the other is making diplomatic breakthroughs. This particularly could be the case if Rabat, which already has firm military control of Western Sahara, suddenly secured major diplomatic support as well, such as the ouster of the Saharan representative from the Organization of African Unity. [redacted]

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Radicals in Algiers. If elements opposed to Bendjedid's moderate policies gain greater influence in the Algerian military or ruling party, Bendjedid could be forced to take a harder line with Rabat, particularly over Western Sahara. [redacted]

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[redacted]—that the expense of the Western Sahara war eventually will force Morocco to negotiate a settlement reduces the appeal of such precipitate initiatives. We believe, however, that Rabat can sustain the war for several more years and that Algiers eventually may have to choose between accepting failure of its pro-Polisario policy or engaging in new military brinkmanship. [redacted]



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War by Misperception

General hostilities could result from either capital misreading the military intentions of the other. Any large Moroccan maneuvers behind the northernmost part of the berm, for example, would resurrect long-held fears in Algiers of an assault on Tindouf. In a

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Figure 3. Moroccan berm defense [redacted]

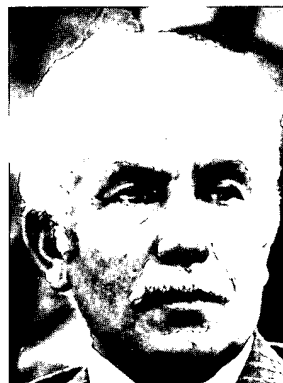


Figure 4. President Bendjedid [redacted]



Figure 5. King Hassan [redacted]

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similar vein, when Algerian armored maneuvers happen to coincide with Polisario advances toward the berm, the Moroccan command must consider whether the Algerian forces intend to assault the part of the wall that is less than 10 kilometers from the Algerian border. [redacted]

Under usual circumstances, both Algiers and Rabat would work to prevent such crises from escalating.

[redacted]

[redacted] If, however, the misperceptions coincided with increased mutual tension, constructive communications could be disregarded and the risk of a clash would be high. [redacted]

Bendjedid or Hassan Removed

We believe both President Bendjedid and King Hassan are eager to avoid a war and can curb aggressive impulses among their subordinates. [redacted]

[redacted] Algiers regards Hassan as a stabilizing influence in Morocco and, despite the King's intransigence over Western Sahara, worries that his successor will be much more belligerent. Similarly, we regard Bendjedid as a moderating force in Algiers, [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] In addition, we believe Hassan and Bendjedid each generally are sensitive to and usually avoid the kinds of military activity that would alarm the other. [redacted]

We view both leaders as having a firm grip on power that probably will not be relinquished through 1990. Each country, however, has a generous and increasing portion of radicals and discontents from which an assassin could arise. Should either Hassan or Bendjedid be removed from power, relations between Morocco and Algeria could become much more volatile. [redacted]

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Successor regimes may be more inclined toward bold brinkmanship while having a less refined sense of what the other side will tolerate, significantly raising the potential for border clashes and raids. We anticipate that a less experienced military successor to either Hassan or Bendjedid would be more likely to take risks in pressing for an end to the Western Sahara war. Depending on the circumstances of succession, a new leader might be attracted to the well-worn strategy of enhancing his popularity by exaggerating the threat on the border. Similarly, a new regime could find a small clash convenient as an excuse to implement special war powers to consolidate its position. Algerian President Ben Bella, for example, used fighting with Morocco in 1963 as an excuse to dismiss the parliament. [redacted]

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Conflict Over Mauritania

Mauritania could become the venue for a clash between its northern neighbors. In our view, Algiers and Rabat each see this weak state as a potential vassal. Each has tried both to intimidate and to woo the shaky regime in Nouakchott. [redacted]

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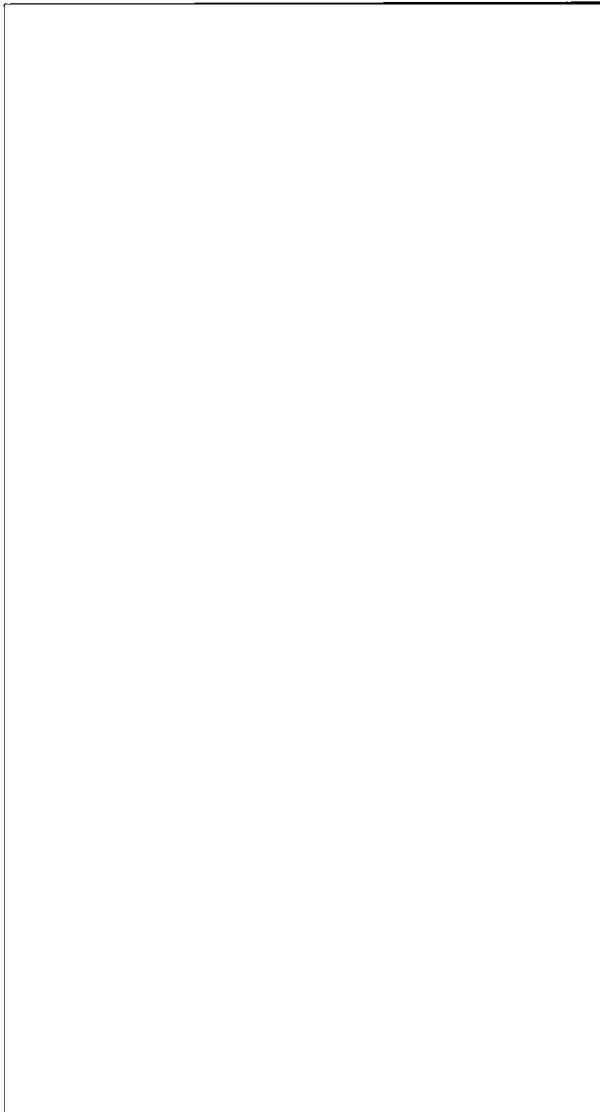
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Should it begin to serve the interests of one at the expense of the other, however, the scenario for a clash could develop. If, for example, Nouakchott offered general sanctuary to Polisario guerrillas, Rabat could order hot pursuit into Mauritania. Algiers, in turn, could augment Mauritania's northern defenses with its own troops. Alternatively, if the current Mauritanian regime is toppled and a succession struggle develops between pro-Moroccan and pro-Algerian factions, both neighboring states would be tempted to try to force an outcome with their own troops. [redacted]

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War of Raids Most Likely

We believe that a war between Algeria and Morocco would involve a series of raids and skirmishes rather than a protracted, broad-front war. This would be especially true if both King Hassan and President Bendjedid were in power. Their behavior in previous crises suggests that they appreciate the costs of a war that is not quickly resolved. Both leaders almost certainly would seek quick victories to gain advantage at the negotiating table but would seek to avoid prolonged combat. [redacted]

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In our view, both Rabat and Algiers would face serious hurdles in trying to achieve a major strategic victory. Rabat almost certainly believes that its forces have insufficient aircraft, armor, and transport to push beyond Algeria's western defenses. Rabat undoubtedly realizes that acquiring the requisite equipment is well beyond Morocco's means, given its current struggle to pay for the upkeep of its forces. In the case of an Algerian offensive, it is likely that Algeria accepts that attrition would be high among its forces in any thrust through the Atlas Mountains. In addition, the drive probably would be slow enough to allow major elements of Morocco's 100,000 southern troops to reinforce the north. [redacted]

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[redacted]—committed itself to intervene if Moroccan troops violated Mauritania's border. The next year, Rabat encouraged—and perhaps engineered—the coup that ousted Mauritanian President Haidalla, in our and probably Algiers's views. [redacted]

The current regime in Nouakchott has been more careful than its predecessor in maintaining Mauritania's neutrality toward both Morocco and Algeria.

We believe that the economic burden of an all-out war also serves to deter Rabat and Algiers. Algiers is having to rein in its economic development programs and is encountering growing domestic criticism over its handling of the reduction in hydrocarbon revenues.

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Rabat has even less breathing space. It has already refinanced its foreign debt twice and suffered urban riots in 1984 when it tried to reduce government subsidies on bread and other staples. Neither side can count on significant outside financial support in the event of a war, since their primary potential donors are Arab states that would be reluctant to take sides in inter-Arab fighting. Both nations almost certainly would disregard their economic concerns once war had spread, but these concerns would be a significant factor weighing against escalation in the early stages of fighting. [redacted]

Finally, we find no issue so critical as to lead either capital to consider all-out war at this time. The principal source of friction between them—Western Sahara—may spark Algerian-Moroccan clashes, but Algerian officials have often repeated that they do not believe the war in Western Sahara can be resolved by military means alone. The Polisario's aspirations for statehood are not a vital Algerian interest, in our view. The more basic source of division—competition for regional dominance—lacks the focus required to catalyze a massive military offensive. Neither side has a near-term prospect of dominating the region at the expense of the other. [redacted]

Raids and skirmishes, on the other hand, could be used to exert pressure on either side while avoiding the commitment of men and resources for sustained warfare. Military action would be intended to gain limited political victories relatively cheaply. In this context, raids could be ordered with any of several goals in mind:

- To prompt negotiations.
- To uphold national honor.
- To placate hawks in one's own government.
- To demonstrate military power.
- To test the resolve of the enemy. [redacted]

Several options would be available to Rabat or Algiers if either decided to press the other with limited military action. Actions would be quick and probably self-contained to reduce the risk of escalation and to allow the capital to exercise tight control of the campaign. There are several types of tactics that we believe would be employed in Algerian-Moroccan

Thinking the Unthinkable

There is a remote chance that an Algerian-Moroccan clash could develop into a full-blown war, despite the fact that both capitals dread such an outcome:

- *The cycle of strike and retaliation between these neighbors could build a momentum that weighs against a quick negotiated settlement.*
- *Military leaders of either side could miscalculate the likely level of retaliation for any strike.*
- *A scenario could develop in which sustaining an unwinnable war would forestall the collapse of one of the regimes.*

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For the present, the risk of uncontrolled escalation appears to be acknowledged by both Rabat and Algiers and deters even limited military action. Algiers's brinkmanship in 1984, however, which included a clash with Moroccan forces, illustrates that the deterrent is not always overwhelming. [redacted]

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hostilities.¹ Each of the measures probably would prompt an immediate defensive response as well as a retaliatory strike of similar magnitude. Raids back and forth could drag on for days or even weeks, probably without decisive results. We believe that fear by both sides that the violence could get out of control would provide impetus for a resolution, although the longer the clashes dragged on, the greater would be the pressure for escalation to full war. [redacted]

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If Rabat wanted to press Algiers to reduce its support for the Polisario, it could:

- Stage air raids against Polisario base camps near Tindouf. Surprise would be essential to avoid Algerian interceptors and surface-to-air missiles in the area, and so we would not anticipate large or frequent strikes.

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¹ Each of these measures could be successfully staged within present capabilities. Some would be achieved only with concurrent employment of surprise, however, and could not be regularly repeated. [redacted]

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Figure 8. Oran [redacted]

- Pursue Polisario units across the border into Algeria, particularly if the guerrillas began attacking Morocco north of the berm. [redacted]

If Rabat wanted to demonstrate Algeria's vulnerability, it could:

- Fly fighter-bombers over the economically important Oran-Arzew region (but not bomb; this would maximize Algeria's sense of vulnerability without the necessary escalation that would be prompted if bombs were actually dropped).
- Bomb an isolated airfield such as Hamaguir or Tinfouchy. [redacted]

If Algiers wanted to press Rabat to be more flexible in negotiations on the Western Sahara war, it could:

- Send two or three battalions against the northern section of the Moroccan berm to overwhelm the frontline defenders but withdraw before Moroccan reinforcements arrived.
- Assist a Polisario offensive against the berm with Algerian air support. (By restricting its actions to Western Sahara, Algiers would be signaling its desire not to widen the war.) [redacted]

In an effort to intimidate Rabat, Algerian forces could:

- Overrun the Moroccan garrisons at Bou Arfa and Figuig.
- Bomb airfields at Meknes or Goulimine. [redacted]

We anticipate that Algeria would have an edge in a "war of raids." Algeria's forces are much better equipped and arrayed for shallow probes across the border. In addition, Algeria's defenses are good should Rabat try to strike Algerian territory. Finally, Algeria has dozens of battalions that are free for action. In contrast, Moroccan units would be tied down by the Western Sahara war in most scenarios. If Moroccan units were drawn from Western Sahara to meet the Algerian threat elsewhere, Algiers almost certainly would push the Polisario to attack the berm to take advantage of the shift. This imbalance assures that Algiers would have the advantage in any cycle of attacks and counterattacks. [redacted]

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Outlook

We anticipate that, as long as the Western Sahara war goes on, Algeria and Morocco will occasionally move toward hostilities. The fundamental Algerian belief that the defeat of the Polisario is unacceptable combines with Rabat's intransigence in a potentially volatile equation. The risk of a clash—accidental or calculated—will be high each time Morocco invigorates its military campaign to secure Western Sahara and each time Algiers sees progress toward a diplomatic resolution set back. [redacted]

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Other areas of dispute—such as the unsettled boundary between the countries and the holding of prisoners of war—are not in themselves likely to spark a clash in the next several years. These issues, however, will continue to be available as pretexts should leaders in either country be attracted to military action for political reasons. [redacted]

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Algeria's ability to outstrip Morocco in a war of raids in the next few years will increase. [redacted]

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[redacted] It is actively pursuing several contracts with Western arms producers and is likely to conclude the high-priority ones—for enhanced electronics and air transport—in the next year, despite

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Extreme Options in the South

The Western Sahara war has prompted both Algeria and Morocco to station several thousand troops in the south. The proximity of these large forces raises the potential for significant fighting, although each side normally keeps its units in a defensive posture. The following are two scenarios in which Rabat or Algiers presses its maximum offensive option in this region. These worst case scenarios are not likely in the next few years, but they illustrate the limit of what we believe could be achieved by force of arms in the south.

We believe that, with maximum effort, Morocco could seriously damage the largest Polisario base camps near Tindouf, Algeria. By loading 20 of Morocco's Mirage, F-5, and Alpha Jet fighters with bombs (including cluster munitions) and using another dozen or so for air intercept, the strike wing could reach and cripple the Polisario's two primary maintenance and storage bases. The strike would require a low-level approach (a tactic usually shunned by the Moroccan Air Force) and maximum surprise to minimize the threat from Algeria's nearby surface-to-air missiles. A raid of this magnitude could destroy most of the Polisario's tank transporters, some armor and SA-6 launchers, and many support buildings. A simultaneous raid by airborne commandos against the Polisario armored brigade arrayed near the

Algerian-Mauritanian border could increase the Polisario's disarray and inflict further personnel casualties, although materiel damage probably would be modest. The combined Moroccan effort could significantly reduce the Polisario's attack capabilities for at least a year, while risking heavy Moroccan casualties and the entry of Algeria into the Western Sahara war.

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In a scenario in which the initiative is on the other side, we believe Algerian forces could dramatically increase the cost of Morocco's Western Sahara campaign by sending an armored brigade against the berm. The objective would be to signal the depth of Algiers's commitment to the Polisario and punish Rabat for its intransigence rather than to win the Western Sahara war. The difficulty of moving armor over long stretches of desert would restrict this tactic to the northern third of the berm, which is also the best defended section. We believe the balance between the attackers and defenders would be relatively even, generating heavy casualties on both sides. It is likely that such a move by Algeria would force Rabat to abandon most of the berm and concentrate its forces to defend southern Morocco and the "useful triangle"—the northwestern corner of Western Sahara that has been the target of over \$1 billion of Moroccan investment.

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the belt-tightening caused by declining oil revenues.

We see no prospect that Morocco will be able to keep pace with the development of the Algerian military in the next few years. Rabat will be hard pressed even to maintain its existing inventory unless it soon wins a substantial increase in outside financial backing. The prospect of such backing from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates has prompted a resurgence in Rabat's approaches to Paris and Washington for Mirage 2000 and F-16 fighters, but contracts remain unsigned. Even if the fighter purchases go through, we judge that they would not be enough to tip the air

balance with Algeria if, as we anticipate, Algeria also receives new-generation Soviet fighters in the next few years.

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Meanwhile, using budget adjustments and creative financing, Rabat has lined up delivery of over 1,400 Spanish trucks and 58 French armored vehicles. These items will probably help Morocco maintain its stranglehold on Western Sahara against the Polisario but will not redress the equipment imbalance with Algeria. Moreover, additional cash purchases probably would have to be

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The Libyan Angle

Libya's allegiances have a subtle but real influence on the balance of forces and state of tension between Algeria and Morocco. Libya's potential impact on the Moroccan-Algerian balance was highlighted during the two-year existence of the Libyan-Moroccan union, signed in the summer of 1984. We believe the union prompted fears of a two-front war among Algerian military planners. The relaxation of the Western Sahara war during this period—Polisario offensives decreased and Algerian saber rattling disappeared—probably was due in part to these fears. Moreover, in 1985 [redacted] three Algerian brigades had been shifted from the Moroccan border to the Libyan border. [redacted]

Now that the Libyan-Moroccan union is terminated, Tripoli's influence is less direct but still a matter of keen interest in Rabat and Algiers:

- *Libya may renew military or financial aid to the Polisario, relieving Algiers of at least a small part of this economic burden (but not appreciably increasing the Polisario threat to Moroccan borders).*
- *Tripoli could work toward rapprochement with Algeria and Tunisia. If achieved, the rapprochement would increase Rabat's feelings of isolation and vulnerability in the Maghreb, in our view, and probably prompt increased urgency in Rabat's appeals for US and French military aid.*
- *Finally, should Libya directly threaten Tunisia, we believe Algeria would shift forces to that front to protect its small neighbor. For a time, Algiers's attention would necessarily be shifted from Rabat.*
[redacted]

covered by shifting funds from more politically sensitive parts of the government budget such as social services and consumer subsidies. [redacted]

The widening gap between Algerian and Moroccan military inventories is likely to make Algeria bolder



Figure 9. Algeria's advantage in heavy armor is likely to grow.

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and Morocco more cautious in making military initiatives. As Algiers perceives its growing advantage, it will be tempted to try to intimidate Rabat. This factor increases the likelihood of a clash, in our view, although the current constraints against a major war are likely to continue to weigh against escalation of the clash. We do not anticipate that Algeria's strength will grow to the point where an all-out invasion of Morocco would be an attractive option. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

We believe that a Moroccan-Algerian war—or even a series of skirmishes—would be a serious setback for US efforts to maintain close cooperation with Morocco while developing an increasingly friendly relationship with Algeria. Indeed, there is a significant risk that both belligerents would be dissatisfied with the US stand. [redacted]

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Rabat Will Want Too Much

We anticipate that, in a war situation, Morocco would ask for urgent US military support. Key requests probably would include rapid delivery of equipment under liberal financing terms, [redacted] and perhaps air transport for its troops. At a minimum, Rabat would demand urgent resupply of ammunition and maintenance of US-built aircraft. To try to secure Washington's help, Rabat

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Figure 10. King Hassan with President Reagan [redacted]

Algiers Will Seek Strict US Neutrality

We believe that, in an environment of increased Algerian-Moroccan tension, any gesture toward Rabat by Washington would greatly complicate US efforts to maintain cordial relations with Algiers. Algerian officials already have complained that current levels of US support to Morocco's military make cooperation with Washington difficult. In periods of peak tension, we expect that the Algerians would press Washington to deny all of Rabat's military requests, considering even resupply of ammunition unacceptable. Should Washington step up support from current levels on Rabat's behalf after hostilities begin—if, for example, the United States provided aircraft to lift Moroccan troops—we anticipate that Algiers would break relations with the United States.

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almost certainly would back its requests with threats to curtail US military access to Morocco for training, port calls, and rapid deployment force contingencies.

[redacted]

Algiers's perception of US support to Morocco would at the same time be a factor weighing against escalation of any clash. The Algerians already appear to have an inflated view of US-Moroccan cooperation and probably fear that secret defense commitments have been signed. If fighting broke out, Algiers probably would try to calculate the level of pressure that could be exerted against Morocco without causing direct US intervention.

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Even without a war, Rabat's perception of the Algerian threat has prompted repeated pleas to the United States for such items as F-16 fighters, M-48 and M-60 tanks, and a general increase in military grants and credits. Beyond enhancing Morocco's defenses against its neighbor, these big-ticket items would help Hassan to maintain the allegiance of the military. We judge his forces' loyalty would be at risk if they believed the King was neglecting Morocco's defense needs. Moroccan military officials in contact with the

[redacted]

[redacted] may be at risk if Washington does not extend more military support soon. For now, this implied threat probably is just a negotiating tactic to secure increased US aid cheaply. We believe Rabat would be willing to take a different tack and

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Appendix

Balance of Forces

The overall military balance between Algeria and Morocco is even enough to prevent either from taking the prospect of war lightly. Morocco has a slight edge in men under arms. Its combined services total some 220,000 men, compared with about 165,000 for Algeria. At the same time, equipment inventories favor Algeria. It has roughly a 2:1 advantage in heavy field equipment (tanks, armored vehicles, artillery) and a 3:1 advantage in combat aircraft. The balance in ground forces approaches 10:1 in Algeria's favor along the northern half of their common border. [redacted]

Evening the Ground Balance

Algeria's overwhelming advantage in equipment along its border with Morocco does not, in our view, translate into a capability to win an easy strategic victory against Morocco. The factors listed below would work to increase the cost to Algeria of trying to press an unconditional surrender on Rabat. These factors would not necessarily preclude an Algerian victory, but they would ensure that the Algerians, like their opponents, would suffer heavy casualties in the contest. [redacted]

Target Accessibility. There are no strategic targets in easy reach of the Algerian Army. We believe that Oujda, the largest city in arid eastern Morocco, would be expendable in the fighting—to be regained in eventual negotiations—from Rabat's point of view. Morocco's political and economic heartland lies west of the Atlas Mountains. [redacted]

Inadequate Transport. Algeria's investment in heavy armored equipment has not been matched by an investment in transporters to move it quickly into hostile territory [redacted] Algeria could muster only about 100 tank transporters for an invasion, enough to lift a brigade of tanks or armored personnel carriers deep into northern Morocco. This would leave at least seven brigades in the

border area, ensuring Algeria's defense but contributing little to an effort to overrun Morocco's heartland rapidly. [redacted]

Difficult Terrain. We believe that pushing through the Atlas Mountains would be costly for Algerian forces. Few routes are passable to armor units, and the most direct route—between Taza and Fez—is where Moroccan forces almost certainly would concentrate their defenses. [redacted]

[redacted] have long regarded the Taza Gap as the most likely invasion route. One Algerian armor brigade funneling through this gap and assisted by an airmobile brigade probably could be held back for a week by Moroccan units immediately available. That would be long enough for additional Moroccan artillery and antitank units to be brought north from Western Sahara to defend the western end of the gap against new Algerian reinforcements. [redacted]

Beyond the difficulty the Algerians would face in breaking through dug-in Moroccan Army positions in the mountain choke points, we believe they would face significant harassment from Moroccan tribesmen en route. In 1979 the Moroccan Foreign Minister announced that arms had been issued to civilians near the border to enable them to face possible Algerian aggression. We believe this tactic would be repeated among the tribesmen in the mountains—many of whom already have guns—if Algerian units crossed the border. [redacted]

Morocco's Combat Experience. The Western Sahara war has provided Morocco's Army and Air Force with experience that would serve them well in a major contest with Algeria. The 11-year-old war has given Moroccan commanders and field grade officers training in movement and logistics that we anticipate would eliminate many of the mistakes from which their opponents would be likely to suffer in the early

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Figure 12. Moroccan antitank vehicles would slow any Algerian advance through the Atlas Mountains [redacted]

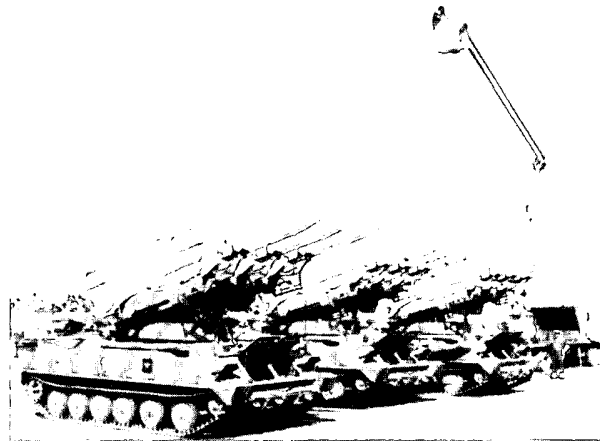


Figure 13. Algerian SA-6 [redacted]

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stages of the war. Algeria's only significant combat experience has been its clashes with Morocco in 1963, 1976, and 1984. [redacted]

Air Balance

Algeria almost certainly would dominate an air war with Morocco. Algeria enjoys decisive advantages:

- Better than a 3-to-1 advantage in manned and operational interceptors.
- Nearly a 4-to-1 advantage in air defense missiles, including surface-to-air missile coverage of all key areas in westernmost Algeria.
- Overlapping and deep coverage (out to 50 kilometers, in some instances) of high-priority targets by several types of surface-to-air missiles, as compared with Morocco's only surface-to-air missile, the Chaparral, with its 6-kilometer range.
- An Air Force much less vulnerable to preemptive strikes at the opening of hostilities because its fighters are spread over several bases around the country. In contrast, Morocco's primary fighters normally are stationed at only two bases.
- MIG-25 aircraft capable of flying reconnaissance missions at altitudes and speeds Moroccan forces are incapable of opposing. [redacted]

Morocco has much more experience in ground attack missions—frequently conducted against the Polisario in Western Sahara—but may have little chance to gain from this edge. Attrition of Moroccan strike aircraft is likely to be high if they repeatedly try to approach targets protected by Algerian interceptors—as all significant Algerian troop concentrations and support areas are likely to be. [redacted]

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We have insufficient information to gauge the two sides' relative skills in air interception. Neither has had air-to-air combat experience. Even if Moroccan flyers are somewhat better trained than their Algerian counterparts—which they may be, thanks to joint exercises with French, Spanish, and US interceptors—we anticipate that Algeria's numerical superiority would overcome this. [redacted]

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Eventual Algerian command of the skies, which is likely, would not necessarily provide decisive air support to a ground campaign to break through the Atlas Mountains. Dislodging dug-in Moroccan defenses from mountain passes would be difficult for even well-trained ground attack pilots. If, as we expect, the Algerian ground attack training is no better than that demonstrated by other Soviet clients such as Libya, Iraq, and Syria, we would not anticipate decimation of Moroccan ground forces from the air. [redacted]

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