

ARTICLE
ON PAGE B-7

THE WASHINGTON POST
15 May 1983

Jack Anderson

A King in Danger

U.S. policy toward Morocco's King Hassan has grown more openly cordial during the Reagan administration, with the aim of strengthening an old and trusted ally. But this may prove to be a mistake. In the subtle world of Arab politics, Uncle Sam's warm embrace could be the kiss of death for Hassan.

It's known as the "Sadat syndrome," after the late Egyptian president, who lost popularity among his countrymen and other Arab states by becoming too cozy with the United States.

There is also the possibility that Hassan may not be getting much in return for risking his credibility at home. Recent U.S. assurances may have misled the king into believing he'll get more military aid than the United States is, in fact, ready to deliver.

Much of the U.S. aid has gone to help Morocco in its dragging, six-year war against the leftist Polisario rebels fighting to force Hassan to give up the Western Sahara, which he seized in 1980. Though the Polisarios have suffered serious setbacks recently and are in no position to win, many U.S. analysts doubt that Hassan can win either.

Officially, the United States is neutral in the conflict. But sources told my associates, Donald Goldberg and Dale Van Atta, that the Reagan administration has been far from neutral. For example:

- Delivery of cluster bombs has been expedited for use in the desert war.
- U.S. training and military equipment have been provided.
- American Embassy officials, including Defense Intelligence Agency personnel, regularly accompany visiting U.S. delegations to the Western Sahara war zone.
- The United States has even given the Moroccans intelligence information on the Polisarios' movements in the Western Sahara.

The result of all this, sources say, is exaggerated Moroccan expectations of U.S. support and a distrust of our intentions by other nations in the region.

A secret CIA profile of Hassan describes a growing estrangement between the king and his subjects. Where once he would ride a white horse through the crowds at religious observances, he rarely makes such vulnerable public appearances now.

The reason is simple: a series of close calls during the 1970s.

In 1971, his top generals tried to kill Hassan during his birthday celebration. A loyal major, Muhammad Oufkir, foiled the coup attempt.

A year later, three Moroccan Air Force F5 fighters tried to shoot down Hassan's plane as he was returning from a trip to France.

The once-loyal Oufkir was implicated in that 1972 plot, and may have been executed, though the official version is that he committed suicide.

Hassan has been understandably suspicious of his military leaders ever since. Last Jan. 25, Gen. Ahmed Dlimi, the king's longtime chief of security, was reported killed in a car accident; but key witnesses apparently disappeared and evidence was suppressed. A few days later, another of the king's aides was killed under equally mysterious circumstances. Western intelligence sources speculated that Hassan, habitually susceptible to rumors, was purging his top military command in fear of another coup attempt.

Certainly the king has become more security conscious and less tolerant of opposition. Many who made the mistake of criticizing the monarch are reportedly behind bars.

Suspicion and distrust permeate the royal entourage. "Rivalry and the jousting for position often pit family against family in the royal court, and intrigue and rumors abound," the secret CIA profile notes. "As the king is influenced by this gossip, the atmosphere is often such that efficient functioning at the top level of the bureaucracy is simply smothered."

Despite the soaring cost of food and oil imports and the country's appalling unemployment—one out of three adult males is without a job—Hassan still lives like a king. Corruption among Moroccan officials is endemic.

In short, Hassan is vulnerable enough to criticism without being embarrassed by public displays of affection from the Reagan administration.

And secret Pentagon and congressional assessments question whether Morocco is the strategic keystone that justifies U.S. support of Hassan. In their view, Morocco is a useful but not absolutely vital transit base for the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force.

There is a real danger that the administration's open support for Hassan may cost him his throne.