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# THE WESTERN SAHARA: A DECOLONIZATION DILEMMA

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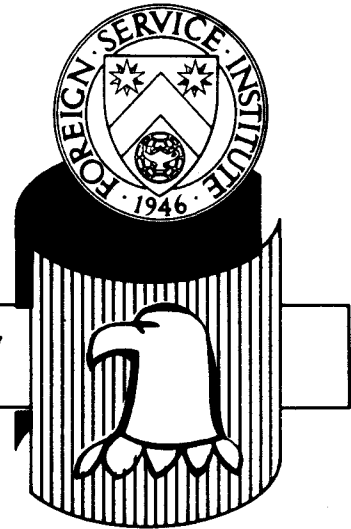
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EIGHTEENTH SESSION

**SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY**

DEPARTMENT OF STATE



1975 - 1976

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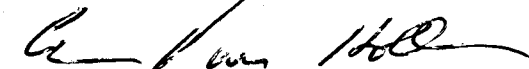
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# THE WESTERN SAHARA: A DECOLONIZATION DILEMMA

Case Study by ALBERT L. SELIGMANN

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COORDINATOR, SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY

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PREFACE

The author chose as a subject for this case study a part of the world with which he was utterly unfamiliar. Whether or not any fresh light is shed upon what has been at least until recently a fast-moving situation, it has been a stimulating, educational experience. For this, gratitude must be expressed to patient officers at the United States Embassies in Algiers, Madrid, Rabat, and Nouakchott, as well as the Defense Attache in Dakar, who, besides giving freely of their own time, arranged an excellent series of appointments with local officials and observers. Much appreciation is also due to officers in NEA/AFN, AF/W, INR, S/P, IO, PM, USUN, and the United Nations Secretariat. If errors persist, it is despite their efforts.

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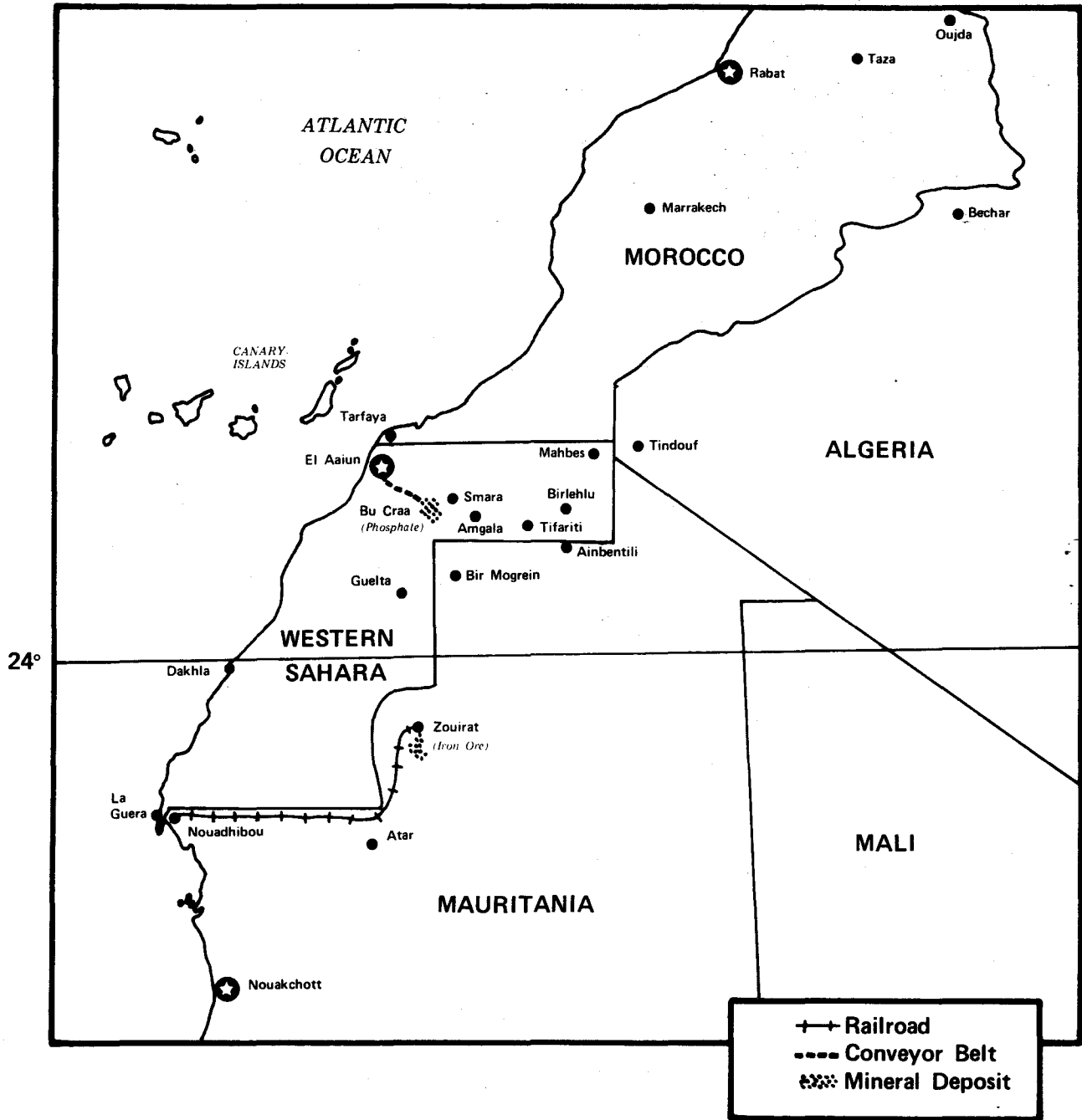
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The Western Sahara: A Decolonization Dilemma

I Introduction

On November 14, 1975, the Government of Spain, badgered by successive UNGA resolutions since 1965 to relinquish its authority in the Sahara, and faced with the possibility of internal political crisis, concluded an agreement with its principal protagonist, Morocco, and with Mauritania to withdraw from the area by February 28, 1976. The latter two countries were left to divide what was the Spanish Sahara between them. Despite rich offshore fisheries and a major resource, phosphate, Spain had determined some time earlier to profit from the Portuguese example and leave its colony without a fight. Its hand was forced, however, by the bizarre "Green March" of Moroccan civilians into the Sahara at the beginning of November 1975. The Spanish evacuation was completed two days ahead of schedule on February 26. Thus ended ninety-one years of unintensive colonial rule over a little-known sparsely populated part of the world.

In the months following the November 14 tripartite agreement hostilities between the Algerian-supported "liberation movement," the Polisario Front\*, and the Moroccan and Mauritanian forces that displaced the Spanish have continued, and on February 27, the Polisario's leaders proclaimed the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic. The events preceding and following the Spanish withdrawal illustrate three interrelated sets of forces at play:

- 1) The complexities of the decolonization process in its latter stages;
- 2) The relationships and rivalries among the nations in the Maghreb; and,
- 3) The pressures exerted on and by outside powers, whether or not they choose to be involved.

In examining these factors, the crucial question for the United States is to determine its interests in the area, and whether they are of sufficient significance to warrant diplomatic intervention or the application of pressure. A further complicating factor has been that the Sahara has been of considerable importance in terms of the internal politics of each of the parties directly involved in the dispute over its disposition--Spain, Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria--thus further exacerbating the international implications of the dispute.

\*Frente para la Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro--Sagua el Hamra and Rio de Oro are the northern and southern parts of the Western Sahara.

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## II Divestation of a Last Colony

### Background

Discounting the special cases of Hong Kong and Macao, which continue to exist at the sufferance of China, the Spanish Sahara was one of the last of the world's colonies, at least in the classic 19th century sense. With the withdrawal of Portugal from Angola it was the last in Africa, with the exception of the territory of the Afars and Issas, where the French face similar thorny succession problems. Had the Spanish long contended with a nationalist movement or had there been a clearly identified local regime in place, succession, peaceful or bloody, would at least have been accomplished within the Saharan borders, whatever aid might have come from neighbors. As matters stand, however, the very paucity of internal strength in the Western Sahara has been responsible for the current crisis in that area, where neighboring ex-colonies behave very much as the European metropolises of yesteryear.

An integral part of the Sahara desert, the Western Sahara is an inhospitable land, inhabited largely by nomads and traversed by caravan routes. The territory is bounded for 975 miles on the south and east by Mauritania, for 270 miles on the north by Morocco, and for 25 miles on the east by Algeria. A virtually harborless coastline of 690 miles faces the Canary Islands. A total area of 102,700 square miles was populated in 1974 by what a valiant Spanish census effort determined to be 73,500 indigenous Saharans, of whom 42,000 lived in the major towns, about 25,000 in the administrative capital, El Aaiun. In addition, about 20,000 Spanish officials, mostly military, lived in the colony; all Spanish have since left. (While population data are in dispute, the Spanish official responsible for the census, which involved the use of nomad-spotting helicopters, estimated the total indigenous population at 100,000 at the outside.) Population figures are at best distorted by the severe drought of recent years that has driven a good deal of population to neighboring countries or, within the Sahara, to the towns; if neighboring disputants are to be believed, some thousands of "political refugees" also lived by 1974 in encampments outside the Saharan borders.

Although Spain established a fort in the area in 1476 at Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequena, this was abandoned in 1524, and Spain took no formal action to assert its sovereignty until it proclaimed a protectorate over the southern two-thirds of the Western Sahara in 1885. The present boundaries, drawn along the arbitrarily straight lines that characterized the colony-carving of the turn of the century--with the exception of a neat, non-topographic curve to the southeast designed to give the iron deposits in that corner to France (Mauritania)--were the result of a series of Franco-Spanish conventions between 1900-1912. The importance of the Sahara for Spain lay largely in terms of flank protection for the Canaries, and serious colonization did not take place until 1912-1920; in 1958 the colony was given the constitutional status of an overseas province of Spain.

### Initial UN Involvement

The first international move directed at forcing Spain to relinquish its control over the Sahara took the form of a February 1956 letter from the UN Secretary General in keeping with the decolonization wave of the times, inquiring of Spain as a new UN member whether it was obligated under the provisions of Article 73 of the UN Charter to submit information to the UN on non-self-governing territories. In its delayed reply of November 10, 1958, Spain declared that since its African territories were provinces of Spain, Article 73 did not apply. This position was modified, however, two years later, when Spain agreed to furnish the Fourth Committee with

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information on the Sahara, despite the latter's status. In October 1964 the Special Committee\* adopted its first resolution on Ifni and the Spanish Sahara, calling for Spain to comply with the Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and in December 1965, the UNGA passed the first of a series of annual resolutions (with the exception of 1971) on the Sahara, requesting the administering power to take immediately all necessary steps for the liberation of Ifni and the Spanish Sahara from colonial domination and, to that end, to enter into negotiation on the problems relating to sovereignty presented by the two territories. Ifni, surrounded by Morocco, raised few problems of sovereignty, and its peaceful return was accomplished in 1969; the province of Tarfaya to the north of the Sahara had been ceded to Morocco in 1958. The 1966 resolution, which pretty much set the pattern for those to follow, explicitly invited Spain to determine at the earliest possible date, in consultation with the Governments of Mauritania and Morocco and any other interested party (read Algeria), the procedures for a referendum under UN auspices leading to self-determination. The resolution also called for a UN special mission to visit the area, a provision that was not implemented until 1975.

#### Steps Toward Self-Government

Cognizant of the need to show some forward motion, Spain in 1967, enacted a decree establishing the Jema'a or General Assembly as a local representative body with limited advisory and consultative powers, comprised of appointed sheikhs and representatives elected by various groups. An indigenous nationalist movement, based largely abroad, took its first vague shape in the late 1960s-early 1970s (see below), but it was the Jema'a in February 1973 that formally requested the head of the Spanish State to take measures for increased local autonomy, leading to a referendum. Franco's reply of September 21, 1973, agreeing both to additional autonomy and to observing the principle of self-determination, marked a major departure in Spanish policy. Franco had doubtless determined that Spain would not become bogged down in the sort of last-ditch stands that imposed so heavy a drain on national resources in Portugal's efforts to sustain its position in Africa. He was also probably reluctant to risk the radicalization of the armed forces which might result from prolonged involvement in the African continent as it had for Portugal. Moreover, Spain had little human or financial investment in the Sahara, which depended for most purposes on subsidies from the Spanish budget, and even the prospective return on its phosphate investment was not regarded in Madrid as worth the cost of one week of war. Franco's decision was further recorded in a letter to the UN Secretary General in August 1974, in which Spain announced its intended to hold a referendum under UN auspices during the first six months of 1975, and invited a UN mission to visit the territory.

#### UN Visiting Mission and the ICJ

At this juncture a rapid chain reaction was set off leading directly to what at present is an unresolved impasse. Morocco, whose position on the Sahara is discussed below together with those of Mauritania and Algeria, foreseeing the possibility of its territorial ambitions being thwarted

\*The Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, otherwise known as the Committee of 24.

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through the creation of some sort of semi-independent or independent state in association with Spain, moved to appeal to the International Court of Justice. UNGA resolution 3292 of December 13, 1974 requested the ICJ to give an advisory opinion on the questions posed by Morocco (and Mauritania) as to whether the Western Sahara when colonized by Spain was a "terra nullius," and, if not, what legal ties existed with Morocco and Mauritania. The same resolution called for a UN visiting mission to the Sahara and asked Spain to postpone its scheduled referendum. While the ICJ was hearing the arguments of the interested parties, a three-man visiting mission, headed by the Ivory Coast permanent representative, Simeon Ake, with representatives from Cuba and Iran, visited Spain, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and the Spanish Sahara May 8-June 8, 1975. Until this visit, it was a common assumption that such nationalist Saharan movements as existed were led by a handful of leaders, for the most part educated abroad, suborned in turn to support the case of one or another of the countries interested in the area, and numbering at most a few hundred adherents. It therefore came as a surprise to most observers, including the Spanish authorities in Madrid, when the Mission members were greeted by thousands of Polisario supporters professing support for full Saharan independence. The Spanish-sponsored, tame Partido de la Union Nacional Saharai (PUNS), referred to by some observers as "puny PUNS," made a poor showing in contrast. It would appear that the demonstrations, staged by the Spanish at their outset, got out of hand as it became apparent Spain was washing its hands of further political involvement.

Considering the make-up of the UN Mission and of the Special Committee to which it reported, it is not surprising that its report, delivered to the UN in November 1975, emphasized the overwhelming desire of the political representatives of the Sahara for independence to be achieved through self-determination. Moreover, the Moroccans, whose King Hassan had allegedly counted on his close friendship with Ivory Coast President Houphouet-Boigny for a report favorable to its case, were reportedly displeased with the aggressive ferreting-out of nationalist sentiment by Ake, and in turn put their worst foot forward through heavy-handed manipulation of Saharan representatives thrust before the Visiting Mission during its Moroccan visit. In retrospect, it appears that the Mission did little to advance a peacefully negotiated Spanish withdrawal. On the other hand, it stimulated such latent nationalist sentiment as existed and sharpened the conflict among Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria. Cognizant of these trends, without waiting for either the report of the Mission or the ICJ advisory opinion, Spain on May 23, 1975 informed the UN Secretary General that assuming the concerned parties could not harmonize their positions, the Spanish authorities would be obliged to set a deadline by which they would transfer their powers.

The ICJ advisory opinion, delivered on October 16, 1975, had something for everyone but not enough fully to satisfy anyone. After an exhaustive analysis of historical data and legal agreements, the Court concluded that the Western Sahara was not terra nullius at the time of Spanish occupation, but that ties of territorial sovereignty did not exist with Morocco or Mauritania. There was, according to the Court, a legal tie of allegiance between some of the nomadic peoples and the Sultan, and there were legal ties with Mauritania resulting from nomadic life, e.g. land rights. But all this, the Court went on to say, was not of such a nature as might affect the right of the population of the Western Sahara to self-determination, or the decolonization process called for in UN Res. 1514 (1960), etc.

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### The Green March

It was at this juncture that the essential dilemma of Spanish Saharan decolonization catalyzed. Faced with the prospect that Spain was serious about independence, and that there was no chance of an internationally sanctioned referendum on terms it could accept, i.e., a choice limited to continued Spanish rule or union with Morocco, King Hassan launched his imaginative "Green March,"\* in which 350,000 Moroccan civilians were positioned on the Saharan border much in the manner of the Oklahoma land rush, many of them indeed anticipating material reward in the form of land and houses in the "Morrocan Sahara."

Spain was frustrated. Although a determination had been made to leave the territory, there was something of an emotional attachment to the Sahara, and Spanish pride did not take kindly to reacting under outside pressure. In addition, there was no question but that leading members of the Spanish administration in the Sahara felt a strong sense of obligation to the Saharans. Spain's immediate, reflexive reaction to the Green March was to bring a complaint to the UN Security Council on October 18, with the predictable result that the latter passed two resolutions calling for consultation by the Secretary General with the interested and concerned parties and for restraint, and a third resolution, once the March started on November 6, deploring the March and calling for Moroccan withdrawal. Any more telling Spanish reaction was precluded by the internal situation in Spain. Franco was in the throes of his terminal illness, and pro-Algerian elements in the Foreign Ministry could not count on his backing. While sharp differences existed as to the preferred course of action, a consensus developed that the nation could not afford to engage the honor of the army at a delicate time when it might be needed to preserve the organs of the state at home. It is also argued, perhaps with hindsight, that the army was poorly prepared and ill-equipped. Whether or not this was so, it was not altogether clear how an army was to react to a mass semi-festive march of civilians across an international boundary without incurring risks that might result in severe international censure. The Spanish Minister responsible for the Sahara pointed out that the chances of an uncontrolled incident in which civilians might be fired upon were great.

### Negotiated Withdrawal

In these circumstances, the Spanish forces in the Sahara were consolidated along a "dissuasion line" twelve kilometers within the Sahara, and a decision was made to negotiate. On November 9, the Green Marchers were ordered to return to Morocco; on November 12 negotiations were opened in Madrid with Morocco and Mauritania; and on November 14 agreed principles were announced, subsequently communicated to the UN, whereby Spain undertook to withdraw from the Sahara by February 28, 1976. In the interim Morocco and Mauritania were to participate with Spain in a tripartite administration, after which they would administer the territory between them. Algeria, pledged to support undiluted self-determination, immediately declared that it regarded the agreement as null and void.

\*Green, the color of the Prophet, allegedly representing also such qualities as "peaceful," and "natural."

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There has been much speculation as to what else might have been contained in the November 14 agreement. As best as can be determined, all other understandings, economic and political, were ancillary, and perhaps not even reduced to writing. It was agreed that tripartite committees would meet in Madrid to discuss such questions as phosphates and fisheries. Although Moroccan officials allege that Spain was prepared to forego all rights to its phosphate operation, an arrangement has been reached whereby Spain is to retain a 35% share in the operation. No progress has been made, on the other hand, in regard to fisheries, inasmuch as Morocco, dissatisfied with Spain's subsequent position on the implementation of self-determination, has been unwilling to participate in further talks. An understanding also appears to have been reached during the negotiations or subsequently that Morocco would not press its claims for the return of the two Spanish presidios of Ceuta and Melilla until such time as Spain was successful in recovering Gibraltar. Inasmuch as it is doubtful whether Spain intends to bring its claim to Gibraltar to a head at a time when it seeks admission to NATO and other European institutions, this should provide some breathing spell for the sizeable Spanish population in these cities.\* Finally, according to the former Spanish Secretary General in the Sahara--and acknowledged by a Moroccan Foreign Ministry official--it was agreed that Spanish was to remain a second language.

The precise location of the boundary between the Moroccan and Mauritanian sectors of the Sahara was not announced and Spanish officials were probably being honest when they said they did not know where it was: as far as Spain was concerned, this was a matter to be worked out between the two new neighbors. The first "confirmation" of the boundary location appeared to take the form of a Mauritanian stamp issued March 19, which showed it at the 24th parallel, a point so southerly as to leave it as a possible source of future Moroccan-Mauritanian friction. (According to one well-informed Mauritanian, President Ould Dada was alone when he worked out the boundary with Hassan, supposedly in November 1974, and is the only Mauritanian who can verify its location.)\*\*

Mutual recrimination, reflecting the differences between the Spanish Foreign Ministry, more concerned about an even-handed approach toward Morocco and Algeria, and the Presidency, which engineered the agreement, persists. Charges have been levied by several Spanish officials--one of whom suggested need for a "Watergate investigation"--that payoffs were made to key Spanish officials by both the Moroccans and the Algerians. While there is no question of Spain backing out of the understanding, and a consensus appears to have developed in Madrid in retrospect that Spain did well to extricate itself from a no-win situation, there is strong sentiment that Spain was betrayed by the UN, which failed to take more decisive action, and by Morocco, which subsequently failed meaningfully to respect the views of the Saharan population (expressed through the Jema'a), which Spain regarded as an important part of the November agreement. Much of this may be Monday-morning quarterbacking, but a large body of

\*The cities, enclaves within Morocco, number about 200,000 Spanish inhabitants and are administered as any other city in Spain. It is interesting, however, that Spanish government officials appear reconciled to their eventual cession to Morocco, and the low real estate values in the two cities compared with similar cities in southern Spain was cited by a Spanish official as evidence of Spain's tenuous hold.

\*\*An April 14 Moroccan-Mauritanian agreement set the border along a line starting at the 24th parallel on the coast, running to a point at about the 23rd parallel on the eastern boundary.

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responsible Spanish opinion believes that in the light of the tragic events that have ensued, Spain did not live up to its obligations to the people of the Sahara, who would have been better served by earlier Spanish support for a Saharan state and more genuine cooperation with the Polisario. With arrangements negotiated over time, it is suggested that a Puerto Rico-like commonwealth association could have been achieved. It is questionable, given the virtually unreconcilable forces at work in the Maghreb, whether this would have been possible, but it is a view that is likely to continue to be heard on the Spanish political scene.

The United Nations reaction to the November 14 agreement was ambivalent. Following a precedent established earlier in the same session in regard to the Korean question, the General Assembly passed two contradictory resolutions on December 10, 1975. Resolution 3458 A, adopted 83-0-41, took note of all the UN actions of the past years, including the ICJ opinion, the report of the Visiting Mission, and the three Security Council resolutions, and renewed the annual appeal to Spain to assure in consultation with the concerned and interested parties a referendum of the Saharan people under UN auspices; Resolution 3458 B, adopted 56-42-34, similarly took note of the above UN actions, but called special attention to the November 14 agreement and requested the parties to the agreement (thereby excluding Algeria) and the interim administration to ensure respect for the freely expressed aspirations of the Saharan people and enable self-determination to be exercised through consultations organized with the assistance of a UN representative.

#### The Spanish Leave

In consolidating its forces at the "dissuasion line," Spain had in effect abandoned many of its outlying military posts, thereby beginning its withdrawal. Further evacuation proceeded rapidly until the last Spanish military forces returned to Spain by mid-January. Moroccan forces simultaneously filled the gap, and Moroccan civil authorities moved into both the Moroccan sector, and the southern Mauritanian portion, where they compensated for Mauritanian logistical shortcomings. Indicating that its opposition to the November agreement was more than verbal, Algeria in early December supported a series of sharp military attacks by the Polisario on Moroccan and Mauritanian forces, and while the military situation has more or less stabilized for the time being, these have continued with varying intensity.

Morocco, supported by Mauritania, indicated that it intended to convene the Jema'a on February 26 to endorse the November 14 understanding and that in its view this would constitute the promised act of self-determination. Spain, however, refused to send an observer, as invited, thereby providing the UN Secretary General with an excuse also to refrain from doing so. In a further gesture of dissociation, Spain withdrew its last administrative apparatus on February 26, two days ahead of schedule. On the following day, the Polisario, somewhere in the desert, very likely within Algeria, proclaimed the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic, recognized on March 6 by Algeria, and as of April 1 by 9 other states (see below). Relations between Morocco and Algeria were broken forthwith.\*

\*In order to dissuade further recognitions, Morocco has indicated it will similarly break relations with any state that follows the Algerian example.

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### III Pawn in Maghreb Politics

It would seem logical that any differences over the Spanish Sahara, bordered by three Maghreb powers, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, could be resolved within a Maghreb context, possibly in consultation with the other putative members of a Greater Maghreb, Tunisia and Libya. Greater Maghreb, however, is a concept to which homage is paid in state constitutions and joint communiqués, but which is rarely advanced in practice. Despite a common bond of struggle to secure freedom from colonial rule and some arguments for economic cooperation, personal and ideological rivalries have caused most nascent schemes for North African cooperation to abort. Moroccan and Algerian leaders today profess little interest in Maghreb solutions, a view rationalized in Algeria by a shift to support of a Maghreb of Peoples, i.e., peoples of political views similar to those of Algeria, rather than a Maghreb of Governments. While the economic ingredients for a Saharan solution exist, and have been tried on for size by would-be mediators, cooperation in such schemes as the transmission of Algerian natural gas to Spain via Morocco, joint development of phosphate resources, Algerian access to the sea through the Sahara, etc., are likely to follow rather than generate political solutions.

This said, there is a history of tripartite attempts in recent years to arrive at an agreed Saharan position, even though these probably conceal more disagreement than they reflect consensus. On September 14, 1970, Hassan, Boumediene and Ould Daddah, meeting at Nouadhibou (Mauritania) established a Tripartite Coordinating Committee to follow the process of decolonization in the Spanish Sahara. Subsequent meetings of the Moroccan, Algerian, and Mauritanian Foreign Ministers in January 1972 and May 1973, and a further meeting of the three Chiefs of State in Agadir in July 1973 pledged support for concerted action within a UN framework and for self-determination. Hassan and Ould Daddah met bilaterally in June 1975 and agreed to cooperate "to frustrate Spain's maneuvers," i.e., the Spanish announcement that it might be obliged unilaterally to set a withdrawal deadline. Three weeks later, July 4, Algerian Foreign Minister Bouteflika and King Hassan met and issued a joint communique recording that Algeria expressed its complete satisfaction with the Moroccan-Mauritanian understanding on the Sahara, i.e., the agreement of November 1974 on partition. This was, however, the last sign of Moroccan-Algerian cooperation.

### Moroccan Irredentism

Two years after Morocco regained its independence in 1956, King Mohammed V declared in February 1958 that Morocco would do everything possible to recover the Sahara. In Moroccan eyes this was a land which, together with Mauritania and parts of Algeria, had historically been under the suzerainty of the Moroccan Sultan--and it was not until 1970 that Morocco abandoned its claim to Mauritania and accorded it recognition. Allegiance, the Moroccans argue, is a more meaningful Arab-African concept than Western notions of sovereignty. Morocco also feels that it has a legitimate case in regard to the Tindouf region of Algeria, where the French adjusted the boundaries after World War II to give the iron deposits to Algeria at a time the French were determined to stay on in Algeria, although they realized they might be obliged to give Morocco independence. In the Moroccan view it was incumbent upon the Algerians to make the necessary adjustments after their war against the French, in which the FLN was assisted by Morocco. A brief border war in 1963 failed to resolve

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the issue, and Morocco has yet to ratify the 1972 treaty with Algeria affirming the French boundaries; the Moroccan radio reportedly includes Tindouf and Bechar temperatures in its weather report. All of this doubtless colors Algerian views toward Moroccan claims in the Sahara, leaving Algeria to feel released from early professions of support for Morocco's position on the Western Sahara.

From a legal standpoint, Morocco puts much stock in Principle V of UNGA, Resolution 1541 of 1960, which states that a non-self-governing territory can be said to have reached a full measure of self-government by emergence as a sovereign state; free association with an independent state; or integration with an independent state. The Moroccans cite the precedent of West Irian and, nearer at home, of Ifni, to show that integration with an existing state can be accomplished without applying universal suffrage or creating independent entities--accordingly, the only referendum question Morocco was willing to countenance was: "Do you want to remain under the authority of Spain or rejoin Morocco?" Today, Morocco regards the question of self-determination as closed. In justifying its Saharan record, Moroccan officials also point out that while Algeria frequently cites the 1966 and subsequent UN resolutions that called for self-determination, it omits from its presentations reference to the first UNGA resolution in 1965, which called upon the parties concerned to work out a solution in negotiation with Spain. In short, Morocco sees its claim to the Sahara as a natural right, much as Americans in the last century saw their rights to adjacent "unsettled" territories.

Hassan's vigorous espousal of the Saharan cause has solidified his popularity at home and done much to overcome the impression of internal unrest engendered by coup attempts in 1971 and 1972. Opposition leaders from Morocco's Communist Party on the left to the Istiqlal on the right all solidly back the King's Saharan policy even though they may otherwise be critical of the King and the oligarchy around him. There are, however, some longer-term political risks. After the two coup attempts, Hassan undertook a major reorganization of the armed forces, largely disarming the troops and placing in his own hands all major decisions and personnel appointments. Now he is dependent to a large extent on the armed forces for establishing and sustaining Moroccan authority in the Sahara. The military have performed well, and their morale is reportedly high, but they are still resentful of their humiliating treatment by the King following 1972. Should the military situation worsen or become an unacceptable burden on resources--developments that do not appear in prospect at this juncture--the King's popularity might wane. In these circumstances the military leadership might be tempted to take direct action. And the possibility also exists that striking military success and solidification of the Moroccan position might encourage the present officer corps, close to the civilian populace, and brought up at a time when Arab revolutionary socialism was the wave of the future, to see themselves as the agents of social and economic change. Added together, these considerations may act as a restraining influence against escalation of the present conflict, at least as far as Morocco is concerned.

#### Mauritanian Affinity

With a population of less than 2 million, compared with 17.3 million for Morocco and 16.8 million for Algeria, Mauritania has been the weakest player in the game. It has faced the perennial challenge of buffer states

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to capitalize on the role of a bridge, (in Mauritania's case, between black and Arab Africa), while shifting alliances as required to meet threats and provide time to build up national identity. Yet of the concerned parties, Mauritania, as inferred in the ICJ opinion, in some ways has the strongest case. The tribes of northern Mauritania are closely related to the Regeibat and Oulad Delim of the Sahara, for whom national boundaries are virtually meaningless--the visiting UN Mission was impressed by the Mauritanian argument that there were no Saharan refugees in Mauritania, only brothers visiting brothers, and a Mauritanian official said that when the Polisario representatives visited the UN under Algerian auspices last year, they wept upon encountering the Mauritanian delegation.

The Mauritanian claim to the Sahara was first enunciated by then Vice President Ould Daddah in a speech in July 1957 at Atar, close to the Spanish Sahara, in which he declared that Mauritians regarded Saharans as "brethren." Preoccupation with the need to resist Morocco in the early days of national existence caused Mauritania to turn to Algeria and Libya for diplomatic and financial support, as well as technical aid, while precluding any thoughts of cooperation with Morocco vis-a-vis Spain in the Sahara. Mauritanian officials point out somewhat tenuously that in laying claim to Mauritania during this period, Morocco made no separate claim to the Spanish Sahara, thereby implying that the latter should be considered part of Mauritania. This is an argument easily turned against Mauritania, however, inasmuch as Morocco in the past held that a claimed affinity to the Sahara belied Mauritania's right to an independent existence, both the Sahara and Mauritania being clearly part of Greater Morocco.

Why, then, did Mauritania agree to a division of the spoils that gave it only a small portion of the Sahara population and some additional fishing banks? (As a Spanish Foreign Ministry official pointed out, Mauritania tended to obscure its legitimate ties by not claiming all of the Sahara, making its agreement with Morocco instead appear to be an old-fashioned map-carving by two colonial powers.) One telling argument is that Mauritania did not want Morocco on its border, but realizing that it lacked the leverage to obtain the whole of Spanish Sahara and that it was likely, willy-nilly, to have Morocco as a neighbor, it decided it would just as soon have the border further north. Mauritania was also probably concerned about the drawing power of the Polisario. According to a third-country diplomat in Nouakchott, Morocco indicated to Mauritania that the Polisario intended to seize the iron mines at Zouerat, by far Mauritania's most important resource. It was also argued that should the Polisario gain control of the phosphate deposits of the Western Sahara it would make the Regeibat tribesmen, who form the backbone of the Polisario, so powerful as to attract the Regeibat of Mauritania northward. Should this occur, it was feared that Moorish domination of Central Mauritania, notably Nouakchott, would suffer. (Some substance is lent to this argument by the statement of a Polisario leader, recorded in the UN Visiting Mission's report, that if all with historical association had the option to join, the Polisario represented a potential population of 750,000, a figure that could only include a good many Mauritians. Finally, Mauritania realized that it would have to depend heavily on Moroccan resources and logistical help to back its claim to any part of the Sahara. Certainly no love for Morocco entered into Mauritanian considerations, and the simplest answer may be that it was better to get something than nothing--or worse. The upshot was a sharp deterioration in Mauritanian-Algerian relations, dramatized at a meeting November 10, just prior to the Madrid agreement, between Ould Daddah and Boumediene

\*Mauritania may have done a bit better. The second of two Moroccan-Mauritan agreements announced April 14 provided, imprecisely, for joint exploitation of the economic resources of all the "recovered provinces" in the Western Sahara.

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at Bechar, in the course of which the latter reportedly told Ould Daddah in so many words that he could "wipe Mauritania off the map."

Mauritania's Saharan position remains relatively unstable. The December military clashes with the Algerian-supported Polisario were unexpectedly severe, and even though the Mauritanian forces deported themselves well, they sustained heavy losses, and the drain on the country's limited resources has hurt, development funds being diverted to defense. While Mauritania has been fully cooperative with Morocco on the ground and in international forums, it does not condone the harsh behavior of Moroccan troops, and feels ill at ease with its heavy dependence on Moroccan support. For example, Mauritanian troops, equipped with Soviet artillery supplied sans shells by Algeria, could not retake the port of La Guera from the Polisario in December until Morocco flew in US 105s. By agreement, Morocco has continued to administer the port and airfield at Dakhla (formerly Villa Cisneros) in the Mauritanian portion of the Western Sahara, but reportedly has refused to recognize valid Mauritanian visas for entry, insisting on Moroccan documentation. Mauritania further realizes now that it has taken on an area, the infrastructure of which was wholly subsidized by Spain, and, as one Moroccan said, Morocco treats Mauritania as if it exists by sufferance of the Moroccan budget. While these are discomfoting considerations, Mauritania seems prepared to stay on its present course, at least so long as the situation does not worsen--after all, there remains latent concern that otherwise it might be next on Morocco's list. Should a prolonged crisis place Mauritania's weak economy under constant strain, however, the leadership of Ould Daddah, the nation's undisputed leader since independence, could be threatened.

#### Algeria: An Ideological Struggle

Early in the Saharan game, Algeria established itself as an "interested," as opposed to "concerned" party, and has consistently professed that it has no territorial ambitions in the Sahara and no interest in Saharan phosphate or other resources. While as recently as 1974 Algerian officials stated publicly and privately that Algeria could accept any position on the Sahara on which Morocco and Mauritania could agree, the principal Algerian demand, not necessarily consistent with this position, has been that self-determination be exercised through a UN-supervised referendum. Even today, Algerian Foreign Ministry officials say they would accept the Madrid agreement if approved by such a referendum. In justifying Algerian support for the Polisario--and now for the SDAR--Algeria has turned to UN resolution 3314 of December 14, 1974, which defines aggression to include the use of force to deprive a people of the right of self-determination (Article 6), while justifying the right of a people to seek and receive aid in the pursuit of self-determination (Article 7). When the Spanish withdrawal was imminent, Algeria addressed a memorandum to the UN Secretary General February 6, 1976 demanding that the Spanish authorities remain in place until a satisfactory referendum could be held. According to an Algerian Foreign Ministry official present in Madrid just prior to November 14, Algeria had been assured by the Spanish Foreign Ministry that no deal would be made with Morocco, and Algeria felt betrayed when the views of the Spanish presidency prevailed. In an effort to forestall the Jema'a's stamp of approval on the Madrid agreement, Algeria enticed or forced,

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depending on one's viewpoint, what it presented as a majority of Jema'a members to a meeting in Guelta, near the Algerian border, November 28, at which they proceeded to dissolve their assembly. (Inasmuch as the number of Jema'a members present at this meeting, coupled with those present in El Aaiun February 26 to approve the Madrid agreement, was considerably larger than the statutory membership of the Jema'a, something was wrong.) In brief, Algeria portrays its support for the Polisario as the backing of a "legitimate" liberation movement, consistent with its intervention in Angola, and its support for the Viet Minh. While there is nothing like the emotional attachment to the Saharan issue that is observable in Morocco, in recent months the Algerian regime has waged a major propaganda campaign on behalf of the Polisario and SDAR replete with posters, heavy coverage in the government-dominated media, and its own entry in the philatelic war.

Algeria takes its ideology seriously. Its official position is couched in terms of support for the Saharan people, and it is genuinely concerned about Moroccan "imperialist designs" on neighbors. But Boumediene also sees himself leading what has been described as the battle of revolutionary idealists vs. conventional realists.\* He looks upon Hassan, like Bourguiba in Tunisia, as having sold out to the old order and would like to use the Saharan issue to topple Hassan and his regime. The sentiment is reciprocated in Morocco, with the result that Algerians and Moroccans tend to agree that the Saharan controversy will lead to the downfall of either Boumediene or Hassan. Finally, while Algeria altruistically eschews any material interest in the Sahara, it can be assumed that it would count on an independent Saharan regime established under Algerian auspices to grant Algeria such desiderata as access from Tindouf to the Atlantic.

One unknown in the Algerian equation is the strength of Boumediene's Saharan position within the Revolutionary Council. Little is known about the inner workings of this body. In the view of a Moroccan professor of Algerian origin, Boumediene and Bouteflika having failed to participate actively in military action against the French, are taking a hard stand on the Sahara out of bad conscience; it was suggested that the Algerian military leaders, themselves, on the other hand, know they are not prepared for major hostilities and may be acting as a moderating force. A further sign of dissension under the surface, which came as a surprise to most observers, was the distribution of a "manifesto" March 9, signed by four former revolutionary leaders, which accused Boumediene of advancing a personality cult at the expense of democratic freedom, and demanded an end to conflict with Morocco over the Western Sahara.

Whatever divisions may exist among Algerian leaders, the outside possibility of any compromise solution was made more difficult by Algeria's role in sponsoring the formation of the SDAR and its recognition a week later of the new government. Some cynics have suggested that it was in fact Boumediene's purpose to foreclose options and cut off opposition

\*Zartman, William, "North African Foreign Policy," in Brown, Leon Carl (ed.), State and Society in Independent North Africa, The Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C., 1966, pp. 42-43.

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views. Some logistical strain is already experienced in supporting the long lines of communication to the Polisario forces as well as to the refugee camps; prolonged and escalated Saharan conflict could divert the Algerian military from civilian tasks, including aspects of economic development in which they are heavily engaged. While in the past Algeria has thrived on being surrounded by enemies, it is entirely possible that disunity over the Sahara could split the Revolutionary Council's ranks.

#### Saharan Nationalism

Opinions vary as to whether the Western Sahara could constitute itself as a viable independent state, as Algeria claims it should. Only an estimated 5% of the indigenous population is literate, and although riots against the Spanish authorities took place in El Aaiun in 1970, major organized political activity appears to have been of even more recent vintage. Of the established movements, two relatively small organizations advocated union with Morocco and received Moroccan support; a third was the short-lived Spanish-sponsored PUNS, referred to above. The Polisario, formed by a few disaffected intellectuals educated abroad, held its first Congress in 1973. Its leaders had looked variously for support from Morocco, Mauritania, and Libya before turning to Algeria. Polisario leadership today is a mix of Mauritians, Moroccans from Tarfaya, indigenous tribal leaders from the Western Sahara, and some Algerians, all believed to be tribally related. Notable among the Mauritians is Baba Miske, former Ambassador to Washington and the UN, and an arch-rival of Ould Daddah, a factor that has doubtless figured in the evolution of the Mauritanian position. Among those who have joined the Polisario are 90 Saharan students in Spain and a large number of phosphate workers from Bu Craa. It seems likely that the Polisario lacked a clear course of action at the outset and outright independence may not have been the initial goal. Although its military arm engaged in a series of military harrassing actions in 1973-74, including a disruption of the phosphate conveyor belt that carries the ore 60 miles to the port of El Aaiun, there is some suggestion that once the Spanish decided on withdrawal they attempted to work with the Polisario, and one or two Spanish officials commented that they regretted not having done so more purposefully.

Today the Polisario operates out of Algerian sanctuaries, notably in the Tindouf area, and is largely dependent upon support furnished by Libya and Algeria. Algerian troops participated with the Polisario in the military campaign of early December 1975, about 100 of them being captured by Moroccan forces. Until December, the strength of the Polisario armed forces was estimated by most observers, incorrectly, as no more than a few hundred. Today estimates vary from a low of 1,500 to a high of 6,000, with a good guess being about 3,000. In contrast to the classical guerilla strategy of fish swimming in the civilian water, the Algerian-Polisario tactic in the Sahara has been to remove the water. Partly in response to genuine concern about Moroccan domination, but more probably as a result of a deliberate instillation of fear and the use of coercion, a large part of the civilian population, especially women and children, have trekked out of the Western Sahara in recent months across the Algerian border. In the opinion of informed reporters who have been to the camps, at least 30,000 persons are now housed in difficult conditions in tent encampments in the Tindouf area, supplied by Algeria

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with help from the ICRC. Much of the livestock that is indispensable to the delicate balance of nomadic life has been lost in the course of this dislocation, and, like refugees from the drought in similar circumstances, it is questionable whether and when the displaced populace could be induced to take up its old life.

Whereas the Polisario's activity was foreshadowed by political developments, by most standards, even those of liberation movements, the formation of the SDAR, on the other hand, seemed premature and came as a surprise to most observers. Its "government" controls no meaningful territory; its existence has served as an embarrassment to those countries that would rather forego a decision on recognition; and, as indicated above, its formation has made any negotiated settlement that much more difficult.

#### IV International Repercussions

Apart from the immediate players in the Saharan game, no outside countries appear to have much desire to participate, but many of them have been unable to escape some degree of involvement. Spain, even after its withdrawal; France, former Metropole in Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania; members of the OAU and Arab League; the Soviet Union; and the United States. The demands placed on outside parties, most of which would just as soon maintain good relations with all three contenders, range from requests for military aid to diplomatic pressure to choose sides.

#### Stakes in the Western Sahara Proper: Phosphate

The Western Sahara is of little strategic importance in military terms. The area lacks good harbors, and whatever significance it might have for naval operations, free passage or overflight rights is effectively negated by the greater importance of Morocco and Algeria.

It also seems fair to conclude that up to now economic considerations have had relatively little to do with shaping any country's Saharan policy. The lines of the Saharan dispute were being drawn on political grounds well before the extent of phosphate reserves were first indicated in the early 1960s; the offshore fisheries are extremely rich, but their exploitation should be susceptible to negotiation; the possibility of further mineral finds cannot be excluded, but exploration to date has been unsuccessful and exploitation would be difficult.

Phosphate, however, is a major consideration. Its use in fertilizer is essential for the production of certain crops, particularly many high-yield hybrids; there are no known substitutes; and there is no known way of recovering and recycling phosphate. While further phosphate discoveries cannot be ruled out, it is an organic substance found only in limited locations. In 1974 the United States produced 45 million tons or 38% of the world's production; the USSR produced 25 million tons or 21%; and Morocco 21 million tons or 18%. The Spanish Sahara, which had just begun shipments from Bu Craa, ranked with Senegal as the eighth largest producer with 2 million tons. By 1980, it is estimated that 10 million tons will be produced by the Western Sahara. What is far more significant is that at present rates of production and consumption, United States and Soviet reserves will probably be exhausted by about the end of the century. Today, the United States is estimated to have 7 billion tons total reserves,

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whereas Morocco holds an estimated 60 billion tons. In the view of both Moroccan and US Bureau of Mine experts, the Western Sahara reserves have been grossly understated by the Spanish at 3.7 billion tons, but are more likely to be in the neighborhood of 40 billion tons or more. Saharan and Moroccan reserves combined currently account for at least 80% of world reserves, a figure that will continue to rise steadily. This is enough to last the world for the next 300 years, but there is no known alternative source. Accordingly, however devoid of economic considerations Moroccan policy has professed to be, the prospect of a virtual monopoly of a vital resource must hold some enticement--and Morocco has indicated in recent years it is not above price manipulation.

#### United States Interests

The United States has avoided insofar as possible public pronouncement on the Saharan issue; its official position is that this is a regional problem to be worked out by the countries in the area. Relations with Morocco have been closer than with either Algeria or Mauritania, however, influenced by Morocco's position athwart the Straits of Gibraltar, the availability of Moroccan ports for Sixth Fleet port calls, and by United States communication installations at the Kenitra base north of Rabat. No attempt is made here to determine the weight that should be given these strategic considerations, but such an assessment is patently crucial to decisions with which the United States will continue to be faced, such as the nature and extent of military aid to be furnished Morocco.

While sharp differences divide the United States and Algeria on almost every foreign policy question, Boumediene has been no Qadhafi. Algeria has avoided association with the Arab rejectionist camp, and has demonstrated willingness to separate economics and politics, evidenced in major natural-gas and oil projects involving United States firms. There is, however, widespread belief in Algeria, as well as in Spain and Mauritania, that the United States brought pressure to bear on Spain to negotiate with Morocco at the time of the Green March, and the United States vote in December, when it abstained on Resolution 3458 A, while voting affirmatively for 3458 B (see p. 7, above), is widely regarded as a pro-Moroccan tilt.\* Thus far this has had no major repercussions for the United States, which remains in better standing in Algeria today than France, but posters have been observed in Algiers showing a hybrid US-Moroccan flag, and an Algerian Foreign Ministry official referred to a "malaise" in US-Algerian relations.

United States relations with Mauritania have been minimal, but have been on an even keel. Even though the Mauritania have not been a traditional recipient of United States military aid, however, they find it difficult to understand why, when the Western Sahara is the major issue of the day in the region, the United States should be willing to supply Mauritania's current ally but traditional foe, Morocco, while failing to meet Mauritania's modest requests.

\*The United States had previously abstained on all UN Saharan resolutions since 1965, with the exception of the 1968 resolution, which mentioned the return of Ifni, and that of 1974, which called for an ICJ opinion; on these two occasions it cast affirmative votes.

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Apart from its interests in Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, the United States must keep in mind the phosphate picture outlined above. It is, of course, a picture known also to the Soviet Union, to which it is of equal importance. Phosphates are not consumable by themselves, however, and the world will continue to desire the food products they help produce in the United States. While it is tempting to conjure up a showdown over possession of a key natural resource, access should be the key question, and there is no indication thus far that interests inimical to the United States would run the risk that an attempt to deny such access might entail.

USSR

Although the Soviet Union has generally identified with Algeria on third-world issues, it has taken care not to worsen relations with Morocco or Mauritania. The USSR has probably concluded that the Moroccan coast and Gibraltar are of greater importance to it than any naval installation it might desire in Algeria, especially when it is able to get the support it requires in Algerian ports now. There are approximately 1,200 Soviets in Morocco and a large Embassy compound for a staff of 500 is under construction. (A second compound proportionately large in terms of Soviet activity and interest is half-completed in Mauritania.)

It has been suggested that the Soviets find it more congenial to work with an outmoded monarchy, in the belief that it will yield in time to revolutionary forces, than to count on a socialist Arab regime such as Algeria. Moreover, the Soviets have observed their best friends in the Arab world, Iraq and Syria, leaning toward Morocco. An Algerian Foreign Ministry official, in turn, went out of his way to protest that Algeria would not respond to pressure from any country, large or small. While there is no question but that the USSR will support Algeria in a crunch--and the Soviets have let this be known in diplomatic channels--by-and-large the Soviets have avoided openly taking sides in the Saharan dispute. (An exception was Part B of the December 10 UN resolution, which the USSR voted against, in the opinion of some observers in order to assure Algerian overflight rights en route to Angola.) A further indication of Soviet intent is seen in the restoration of relations between Morocco and the German Democratic Republic March 5. Morocco had broken relations with the GDR in November 1975 as a warning to communist countries not to choose sides in the Saharan dispute, and restoration, effected immediately upon the return of Moroccan Prime Minister Osman from a visit to Moscow, was read as a sign that the USSR had promised in turn not to recognize the SDAR.

There is a fly in all this ointment. Soviet ambitions since its Angolan venture may have expanded, and there is talk of Soviet compulsion to fill African power vacuums. Reports have also been circulated about massive Soviet arms deliveries to Algeria, possibly through Libya. These have not been verified, but it is assumed that, at a minimum, the USSR is engaged in a resupply program, inasmuch as the Algerians are conscious of new weapons received by other Arab states since 1973. Thus far there is nothing to substantiate occasional rumors that Cuban or Vietnamese forces will be employed in support of the Polisario. (China, incidentally, has maintained strict Saharan neutrality, abstaining on

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both parts of UN 3458; a Chinese member of the UN Secretariat attributed the ineffectiveness of that body in regard to the Saharan conflict to detente, i.e., unwillingness of either the United States or USSR to become involved.)

### Spain

Spanish officials tended to regard relations with Algeria and Morocco as of equal importance, and indicated Spain was trying to improve its position on both fronts--an effort which seems to have set a slight pro-Algerian, anti-Moroccan tone to Spanish North African policy in the wake of the Madrid agreement. For one thing, Spain is aware that it has lost most of its leverage with Morocco, and it does not trust the latter to live up to its understandings on fisheries or phosphates (Spain claims its fisheries agreement related to the return of Ifni in 1969 has yet to be implemented); the Moroccans, in turn, miffed at Spain's failure to endorse self-determination by the Jema'a, holds that there can be no economic cooperation until Spain recognizes Moroccan sovereignty in its part of the Western Sahara. While Spanish Foreign Ministry officials in Madrid and posts in North Africa interpreted Algerian footdragging on a number of pending economic projects, including natural gas, as pressure to move Spain away from Morocco, they indicated an inclination to patch things up with Algeria, even if it temporarily caused difficulties for relations with Morocco. In Madrid, the Minister who engineered the November 14 agreement said that Algerians were more straightforward than the Moroccans, and that he believed the Algerians when they said they were busy planting a green belt in the desert and did not want war. One Spanish diplomat indicated that Spain's failure to send an observer to the Jema'a session in February was in effect a gesture toward Algeria, albeit one which has not been acknowledged.

Now that they have extricated themselves from their colony, the Spanish should be able to navigate the shoals of Algerian-Moroccan rivalry without much damage. The Saharan issue still lurks in the shadow of domestic Spanish politics, however, not only within the establishment, but, as indicated by visits to Algiers in February and March by representatives of the Communist and other left-wing parties, as a matter of opposition interest.

From time to time the spectre is raised of a Canary Island liberation movement, and what amounts to a one-man office of such a movement, replete with radio, exists in Algeria, but there is little support in the Canaries, where the original Berber stock, few in number, has been well-diluted. The Spanish Embassy in Rabat sensed no Moroccan interest in the Canaries, but the Spanish have stationed the Legion forces withdrawn from the Sahara on Lanzarote, and were sufficiently sensitive to the issue to refuse to permit a meeting of Peace Corps representatives in Africa to take place in the Canaries--they would be welcome in southern Spain.

### France

Whereas Spain is fairly well tolerated in Morocco and Algeria as a player who got out of the game, France, in recent months, has been extremely unpopular in Algeria, where it is regarded as acting as if it is on the sidelines, while helping Morocco. Like other powers, France

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would prefer to maintain good relations with both Morocco and Algeria, but it finds little reciprocity in Algeria, where emotional reaction against the French is used to gain support for the Algerian government. Moreover, by responding to Morocco's arms needs, France sees itself as helping to maintain a necessary balance of power in North Africa in the face of Soviet arms shipments to Algeria. In Mauritania, where relations with France reached their nadir in 1973 with the expulsion of French military advisors and the withdrawal of Mauritania from the CFA bloc, France's standing has notably improved as it has acted swiftly to equip newly recruited military forces and to replace losses.

#### Arabs Divided

Algeria has had difficulty winning much support for its Saharan position within the Arab League for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that irredentism is a more compelling argument to many Arabs than self-determination. Morocco, in turn, found much sympathy among the Arab states once it gave up its claim to Mauritania, and has been able to cash in on the affinity of kings as well as its military contribution to the Arab cause in the Israeli war. In the voting on UN 3458 B, for example, only Yemen (Aden) joined Algeria in opposition, while nine Arab League members, including Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, voted for the resolution; Egypt abstained; and Libya, Syria and Yemen (Sana) did not vote. The Arab League has had no difficulty in going on record in opposition to continued Spanish rule in the Sahara, but it has been loathe to choose sides with Algeria or Morocco and Mauritania. Thus far, only Algeria itself among the Arab states has recognized the SDAR, and even Libya, which has been in the forefront in supporting the Polisario, has thus far confined itself to pledges of continued assistance. While Libya might in time be persuaded to recognize, it probably does not wish to cause Morocco to invoke its "Hallstein doctrine," and it enjoys good relations with Mauritania, to which it has lent considerable financial support, and which it regards as a "true Arab" country. According to the Spanish Embassy in Nouakchott, Libyan arms were furnished to the Polisario on condition they not be used against Mauritania, and Mauritanian Foreign Minister Mouknass is said to have told Qadhafi during a meeting at Tripoli airport just after proclamation of the SDAR that Mauritania would understand Libya's financial support and supply of the Polisario, but it counted on Libya to withhold recognition.

Although Algeria pressed for SDAR-Polisario support at the Arab League summit in Cairo March 15, and the SDAR publicly announced it would seek admission to the League, as far as it known no action was taken at the meeting. An Algerian Foreign Ministry official rationalized Algeria's Arab League rebuffs by noting that none of the members of the Arab League, with the exception of those in North Africa, had to fight for their independence--and they were Africans; accordingly Algeria would put more stock in actions of the OAU.

#### OAU

In the OAU, however, the picture has been mixed. To an increasing extent, as evidenced in the OAU split over Angola, the OAU has tended to divide along ideological lines. Pressed by Algeria to declare support for the Polisario, the OAU Council of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa at the end of February 1976 avoided a vote, adopting instead a resume of

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debate, which noted the right of people to self-determination but declared recognition of the Polisario as a liberation movement to be the prerogative of individual member states. According to head-counters, 16-18 states had favored the Algerian position; 13-20 opposed it; and the remainder had no opinion. An important restraint on the OAU has been the sacrosanct principle of respect for the former colonial boundaries contained in the OAU Charter. The arbitrariness of these boundaries is freely acknowledged, but it is well understood that once the principle is disregarded, there is hardly an African state against which some neighbor does not entertain territorial claims based on historical rights or ethnic unity. To be sure, the issue is not clearcut in the Western Sahara, where an existing colony has been divided between two OAU members, but this action having been taken, there is an inclination to accept it rather than open the Pandora's box of self-determination.\* Mali and Chad, for example, which took radical positions in regard to Angola, withheld support for the Polisario, presumably in consideration of their border differences respectively with Ghana and Libya.\*\* Moreover, Algeria came off more poorly than it expected because its heavy-handed tactics irritated many members--for example, at the OAU, the Algerian representative preprinted a pro-Polisario resolution on OAU letterhead prior to bringing it before the meeting.

As of April 1 eight African states in addition to Algeria had recognized the SDAR: Burundi, Benin, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Malagasy Republic, Togo, and Rwanda. The surprise here is Togo, not normally counted as a radical, and a state with good relations with Mauritania. The explanation offered by Moroccan and Mauritanian sources was that Togo, whose phosphate Morocco had been marketing together with its own, was in financial difficulty as a result of the recent drop in the world phosphate price, and succumbed to the inducement of a Libyan cash payment in return for recognition. There are still a number of other African and some non-African countries that can be expected to accord the SDAR recognition--an Algerian Foreign Ministry official anticipated a total of 20-30--but there appears to be no rush to get on the bandwagon. The only non-African country to recognize thus far has been North Korea, for which no plausible explanation has been offered. North Korea had a sizeable Embassy in Nouakchott and had been supplying "technical assistance," inter alia in the form of dance and sports training, which gave the North Koreans access to segments of the population normally out of foreign reach. In exercising a modified Hallstein doctrine, a Mauritanian Foreign Ministry official indicated the North Korean Ambassador, absent from post anyway, would be asked not to return, and North Korea would be requested to withdraw the technicians.

\* Moroccan Foreign Minister Laraki played at some length on African concern about liberation movements in his intervention at Addis Ababa.

\*\* Mali also values its cooperation with Mauritania in a joint Senegal River development project and refused to permit Algerian forces en route to the Sahara to cut across Mali in December 1975.

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In sum, Algeria's position in the third world has not profitted from the espousal of the Polisario cause, and its tactics have irritated countries that would prefer not to choose sides. Depending on the course of developments on the ground, this could be a chastening experience that might help condition Algerian attitudes toward eventual solutions.

#### United Nations

The major UN actions in regard to the Saharan question were outlined in Part II, above. At the moment the Security Council is no longer seized of the question and is unlikely to be, unless Morocco or Mauritania should bring a complaint to it, a course the Moroccans claim is part of Algerian strategy to which they will not succumb. Resolution 3458 A of the General Assembly, however, having requested the Secretary General to make arrangements for supervision of the act of self-determination, Swedish Ambassador Rydbeck was sent to the area as a special representative of the Secretary General in February, but reported on his return that there was no prospect for a referendum. A second Rydbeck mission in March aborted, when Morocco refused to receive him after he met with Polisario representatives in Algiers and Tindouf before his scheduled visit to Morocco--Morocco had agreed to Rydbeck's visit on the understanding he consult only with the Governments involved. According to one Secretariat official, Waldheim has taken too narrow a view of his mandate in interpreting it as confined to Part A of UNGA 3458, instead of both A and B, but in any event it appears unlikely that much will come of UN intervention at this stage.

In retrospect the UN has not come off very well in the whole affair. When there was still an outside chance early in the game that trusteeship, if proposed with sufficient outside backing, might have provided an interim face-saving solution, the UN failed to act. As previously pointed out, the UN Mission of May 1975 probably exacerbated an inflammatory situation. And when Spain brought its complaint to the Security Council in the fall of 1975, procrastination and quiet diplomacy may have been in order rather than frenetic resolution-passing. This is, however, water over the dam, and it is uncertain that anything more useful could have been accomplished, especially so long as the General Assembly and the Committee of 24 remained the scene of action. If and when tempers cool, there might still be a UN role to play, as one Secretariat official said, if only to act as scapegoat.

#### V Prospects

There are elements of a Greek tragedy in the way the Western Saharan drama has played itself out to date. The principal players are all prisoners of events that none of them could have predicted a year before, and all are doubtless troubled more by the risks that lie ahead than any losses suffered to date. There are indications that both Hassan and Ould Daddah anticipated a turbulent period lasting perhaps six months, but that if they had realized a protracted crisis was in store they might have had second thoughts. Perhaps the March 10 "manifesto" served as a jarring note for Boumediene. But for the moment, the Algerian, Moroccan, and Mauritanian positions remain too far apart and the leaders of the three countries too far committed to permit useful mediation or fresh solutions.\* From the standpoint of Morocco and Mauritania, the

\*Between the opening of hostilities in December and the end of Spanish rule, emissaries from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary General of the Arab League all tested the mediation waters but quickly withdrew.

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issue is closed: Spain has withdrawn and its territory has reverted to its rightful sovereigns. In Algeria's view, there is nothing to talk about, inasmuch as it is the Saharans, not the Algerians who are involved.

#### Prolonged Hostilities

As long as fighting does not escalate beyond the sporadic skirmishes experienced to date, it could continue for a long time. Desert guerrilla warfare is not new to this part of the world, and military harassment along frontiers has been a common phenomena over the centuries. The Polisario lacks the strength by itself to oust the Moroccans from entrenched positions, but is capable of mounting hit-and-run raids for an indefinite period as long as it has easy sanctuary in Algeria. Even a light campaign would continue to impose a logistics strain on Morocco and Algeria, because of the distances involved and the inhospitable terrain, but this too may be manageable. The Moroccan forces have been built up since 1974 to a strength of 50 batallions and have been largely reequipped through purchases from France and Belgium. Their fighting ability is rated high, and their morale has been recently rated "cocky."

When the Polisario attacked at the end of 1975, Mauritania had only an army of 1,300 a 1,000-man civil guard, and a 1,000-man national guard. This force has now been expanded to a 4,000-man army, and a gendarmerie and national guard of 2,000 men each, but the army is short on NCOs and junior officers. Like Morocco, Mauritania has purchased much fresh equipment from France. The Mauritians are confident that they know the terrain as well or better than the enemy, and after the first attacks have conducted themselves well; concern about black-white conflict in the Mauritanian forces, or unwillingness of black forces to fight in the northern desert do not appear to have been borne out. Compared with Morocco, Mauritania has felt more acutely both its losses and the economic burden of being on a war footing.

What appears to have been a well-planned, concerted Polisario offensive in December has not been followed up. The period since the formal Moroccan-Mauritanian takeover and the proclamation of the SDAR has been particularly quiet, whether because the Polisario's efforts have been concentrated on the diplomatic front, or because fighting in the Sahara in the view of many experts becomes intolerable as summer approaches. Failing some new element in the situation, however, it is anticipated that fighting will be renewed in the future. One outcome, then, could be no outcome--an indefinite war of attrition backed by efforts to gain international support for the SDAR, while consolidation of Moroccan and Mauritanian control over the populated area continues.

#### Escalation

The scenario no one wants and all parties fear is an escalation of hostilities. While Algerian military movements are shrouded in secrecy, and, as noted above, there are unknown elements in Soviet policy, there seems to be no evidence that either Algeria or Morocco is preparing for war, and Mauritania is already in deeper than it would care to be. An Algerian-Moroccan war could come about, however, if prolonged, inconclusive warfare generated sufficient opposition to Boumediene's position that he saw war as a means to unite a disgruntled nation behind him, or, alternatively, if the Moroccan military, with or without the blessing of Hassan,

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became fed up with attrition through harassment and decided to strike the Polisario sanctuaries. In this latter instance, an attack on Tindouf is regarded as the most likely gambit. (An Algerian Foreign Ministry official acknowledged this possibility, noting that "this time" /a reference to the 1963 border war/ "we are prepared.") Should the Moroccans strike first, it can be assumed that the Algerians would retaliate against some of the more accessible Moroccan targets, such as Oujda, close to the Algerian border. The outcome of warfare between Morocco and Algeria is not predictable, but most observers believe it could not last long, neither side being prepared or equipped for more than a short campaign. The Algerians are far superior in tanks and aircraft--the Moroccans have only 10-15 serviceable fighters--but the Moroccan fighting ability and training is generally rated higher than that of the Algerian forces. A third-country diplomat in Algiers thought that the Algerians had an inferiority complex in regard to the Moroccan forces. It seems unlikely, however, that unless there is outside intervention, a rather large "if," an Algerian-Moroccan clash would settle the Saharan issue. It could very well, however, lead to renewed UN intervention or other outside mediation, which, depending on a host of unknowns--e.g., the internal situation in Algeria and Morocco, the situation in the Western Sahara at the time, etc.--might receive a better reception than they could today.

#### Consolidation of Moroccan-Mauritanian Control

Starting with the installation of the interim tripartite administration in November 1975, Morocco and Mauritania have quietly established administrative control over their respective parts of the Western Sahara. Morocco has also moved into El Aaiun as many as 7,000 Moroccans from Tarfaya plus an indeterminate number of Green Marchers, who had been promised land. On March 12, Mauritania announced new administrative subdivisions for its portion of the area, sufficiently indeterminate to permit future adjustment of the northern limits, which remain to be officially announced. Should this Moroccanization (and Mauritanianization) of the area continue, it is possible that one day, even if hostilities go on, and despite Morocco's position that self-determination is a closed issue (Mauritania has never been quite as adamant on this question), the two countries could with impunity turn to the UN and announce their willingness to acquiesce in a referendum. The removal of much of the Saharan population has facilitated Moroccan settlement and would further weight the results of any such vote. In the eyes of some observers, the Polisario may have made a tactical error in any event, in removing many of its potential supporters. A referendum would serve little purpose as far as Algeria is concerned, unless Algiers, tired of an open-ended involvement, were to seek some face-saving way out. Short of a referendum or an escalation of hostilities, Morocco could try to cement relations with the local population that remains, a task which even a Moroccan Foreign Ministry official indicated had not been performed well to date. In the view of knowledgeable Spanish officials, there is still some residue of pro-Moroccan sentiment, on which the Moroccan authorities could draw.

#### A Separate Mauritanian Peace

When the Polisario brazenly crossed Mauritanian territory in December to strike Moroccan forces in the north of the Sahara and at the same time attacked the populated areas in the southern Mauritanian section, it was

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felt that the Polisario-Algerian tactic might be to cause Mauritania to conclude the Madrid agreement was not worth the fight and to make its own peace with the Polisario. With the virtual cessation of hostilities against Mauritania in recent weeks, it is suggested that the tactic may have changed, although the objective remains the same. The roots of Moroccan-Mauritanian cooperation are shallow, and, as indicated above, there is a strong ethnic basis for some sort of Mauritania-Polisario deal. A Mauritanian Foreign Ministry official commented that Mauritania was prepared to talk with the Polisario and accept any position in the future that was compatible with Mauritania's position. Another well-informed Mauritanian called for his government to join in federation with the "Polisario brothers," give the phosphate deposits to Morocco, but most of the land and people to such a federation. A slight variation was suggested by a Spanish Foreign Ministry official, whereby Morocco would get the phosphate, the Polisario the region around Semara and most of the land, and Mauritania a strip in the South. While none of these ideas have surfaced publicly, they are in the back of many minds. In the meantime, it is of interest that the 400-mile, single-track rail line carrying Mauritania's vital iron-ore exports to the port has not been cut, despite its vulnerability as it runs through open desert.\*

While it would be tempting to conclude from circumstantial evidence that some Polisario-Mauritanian deal is in the offing, there are strong counterarguments. The most compelling is that Morocco would not tolerate such an arrangement. A Moroccan Foreign Ministry official said unequivocally that if a Polisario-Mauritanian federation should be formed, Morocco would move in to and take over Mauritania itself (other observers add, perhaps leaving black Mauritania along the Senegal River to Senegal). In this context, an alternative explanation of the let-up in fighting against Mauritania is that Algeria does not wish to force Mauritania to opt out, thereby providing Morocco with a pretext for such a takeover. It is also unlikely that Ould Daddah, who participated in the present arrangements for the Western Sahara, and who sees the Mauritanian members of the Polisario leadership as personal political rivals, would enter into a behind-the-scenes deal. He could, of course, step down, but at this juncture, there is no reason to believe his government is not sufficiently unified for him to stay on course.

#### Mediation, UN Intervention, Fresh Negotiation

All of these are possibilities, either after the lapse of time, or in response to one of any number of developments, none of them easily predictable. For the time being, neither Morocco, which seems confident it is achieving what it set out to accomplish in the Sahara, nor Algeria, which is freshly committed to the new SDAR, are apt to be receptive to any concepts that diverted them from pursuit of present policies. New leadership in Morocco, Mauritania, or Algeria might be persuaded to take a fresh look at the Saharan problem, particularly if the change in leadership were the result of military setbacks or burdens otherwise imposed on the nation concerned by Saharan involvement. Outside offices might also be sought to settle matters if the situation remained more or less in balance, but unstable after many months, with no prospect of a breakthrough by one

\*A Spanish Embassy official in Nouakchott claimed that the reason the line was left alone was that the residents at the mining towns at the railhead, dependent on the railroad for supplies, agreed to make provisions available to the Polisario in return for the latter's promise not to disrupt traffic.

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side or the other. Algeria, for example, might conclude that between the Sahara, Southern Africa, and an unsettled Middle East, it had bitten off more than it could chew.

There is no dearth of sources for good offices: apart from Arab-world go-betweens, there is the Arab League itself, the OAU, and the UN. New solutions, some mentioned in passing, might include a belated referendum; Polisario participation in perhaps two Saharan governments in close federation respectively with Morocco and Mauritania; maintenance of present boundaries, but recognition of a large part of the Sahara, including the Western Sahara and parts of Mauritania, Morocco and even Algeria for what it is, a virtually borderless region across which nomads and caravans are free to move.

Neither Morocco, Mauritania nor Algeria has slammed the door to such approaches so hard that it could not be reopened, although none is amenable to talking about alternative solutions now. The fourth party, about which perhaps the least is known, the Polisario, may also have a say. Leaving aside the cynical comment of an Egyptian diplomat that nomads are easily bought and manipulated, it is by no means clear that the Polisario leaders are or will continue to be fully under Algeria's thumb, especially considering the early history of the movement and individual ties with Morocco and Mauritania.

#### VI Implications for the United States

Given a choice, it would seem in the United States interest to become as little involved in the Western Sahara dispute as possible. There are for United States purposes no moral issues at stake, and it is possible to see moral justification in the positions of each of the involved parties. While ostensibly the Moroccan, Algerian, and Mauritanian regimes are all on the stable side of an Arab-African scale, there is sufficient uncertainty about the future in each country to warrant as much of an even-handed approach as we can afford--this would be particularly true in Algeria, where it is perhaps most difficult to assess the staying power of Boumediene or the foreign-policy orientation of his successors. Rivalry between ideologists and nationalists for Maghreb hegemony, heavily influenced by personal competition, is endemic, the Saharan crisis being the current area of most patent manifestation. There seems to be an outside-power consensus, tempered by an instinctive judgement, that a rough balance of power between Morocco and Algeria may be for the best and that their rivalry should be worked out within the region. In any event, were the United States to intervene openly on the Moroccan side, it could not predict the subsequent course of events with any certainty.

Of the alternative outcomes suggested in Part IV, above, almost all would appear to be acceptable to the United States, including a continuation of hostilities on the present scale, consolidation of the Moroccan-Mauritanian position, or any of the fresh compromises that might find a hearing some time in the future. What presumably would not be acceptable would be control of the southern side of the Straits of Gibraltar by forces inimical to the United States or denial of Moroccan-Saharan phosphate to the free-world market. Neither possibility seems in prospect, but that, unfortunately, does not get us off the hook.

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The pro-Moroccan tilt ascribed to the United States by virtue of our support for UNGA 3458 B and our subsequent arms deliveries to Morocco has remained manageable in terms of our relations with Algeria, where economic cooperation has continued to grow, although some Algerians believe the United States is pressing Morocco to provoke a fight with the objective of overthrowing Boumediene. Up to now, it has been possible to describe our military aid including the transfer of F-5Es from Jordan, as part of an on-going military assistance program. And any more strident Algerian complaints would hardly sound convincing in the light of Algeria's receipt of a much more massive supply of Soviet equipment. While United States actions to date have fallen well within the framework of our normal diplomatic relations with Morocco, we would face far more difficult choices should the scale of fighting escalate either with the Polisario or more directly with Algerian forces proper to the point that we were confronted with major requests for new or replacement equipment. The precise parameters of "normal, on-going supply" are difficult to define, but the United States could find itself at that borderline on very short notice.

It would be presumptuous in this paper to make judgments as to just what decisions the United States should make in such circumstances, and it is simply not possible to game-play a fast-moving crisis. Events in the Third World have a way of getting ahead of us, however, and it is suggested that in broad terms a planning exercise against the contingency of escalation be conducted now. In so doing, it would be advisable to consider the area as a whole, giving full consideration to our interests not only in Morocco, where they are most tangible, but in Algeria, Mauritania, and Africa as a whole. Such an exercise could also consider the possibility of more direct Soviet intervention, even if that is not one of the most likely prospects. As indicated earlier, no effort in this study has been made to evaluate the strategic importance of our Kenitra facilities, but that should be done anew, if only to weigh this factor against other considerations. Finally, it is suggested that, tempting as it is to treat Mauritania as an "also ran," it behooves us either to meet some of its modest requests, if we meet Moroccan requests, or to deny both. While Mauritania is of little strategic importance, to do otherwise implies to the Mauritians that we favor Morocco, thereby creating anxieties that could in the end further complicate an already complex situation.

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Chronology

1476 Spanish fort established at Santa Cruz de la Mau Pequena.

1524 Spanish abandoned their Saharan position.

1878 British trading post established at Cap Juby, (since 1958 part of Morocco).

1885 Spanish proclaimed protectorate over southern two-thirds of area.

1900, 1904 Franco-Spanish agreements over Saharan border.

March 30, 1912 French protectorate established over Morocco.

November 27, 1912 Franco-Spanish Convention established boundaries of Spanish Sahara, now extended to the north.

1912 - 1920 Spanish founded further settlements.

March 2, 1956 Morocco gained independence.

July 1, 1957 The Vice President of Mauritania, Ould Daddah asserted in speech at Atar that Mauritania regarded Saharans as "brethren."

January 1958 Spanish Sahara became Overseas Province of Spain.

February 1958 King Mohammed V declared Morocco would do everything possible to recover the Sahara.

April 1958 Tarfaya returned by Spain to Morocco.

November 10, 1958 Government of Spain informed the UN Secretary General that its African Territories were provinces of Spain and hence not Non-Self Governing.

November 11, 1960 Despite its 1958 stand, Spain agreed to furnish the Fourth Committee with information on Sahara.

1962 A Spanish Government survey revealed the extent of phosphate reserves (first discovered in 1947).

October 16, 1964 Special Committee adopted first resolution on Ifni and Spanish Sahara, calling for Spain to comply with the Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (res. 1514 (XV)).

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- December 16, 1965 First UNGA resolution on Sahara, requesting the administering power to take immediately all necessary steps for the liberation of Ifni and the Spanish Sahara from colonial domination, and, to that end, to enter into negotiations on the problems relating to sovereignty presented by the two Territories (res. 2072 (XX)).
- December 20, 1966 UNGA invited Spain to determine at the earliest possible date, in consultation with the Governments of Mauritania and Morocco and any other interested party, the procedure for a referendum under UN auspices leading to self-determination. Also called for a UN special mission to the Spanish Sahara (res. 2229 (XXI)). (Similar resolutions adopted annually 1967-1973, except for 1971.)
- May 11, 1967 Decree enacted establishing the Jema'a or General Assembly as the local representative body in Spanish Sahara.
- 1969 Ifni returned by Spain to Morocco.
- 1970 Treaty of Friendship between Morocco and Mauritania.
- September 14, 1970 Joint communique by Hassan, Boumediene and Ould Daddah at Nouadhibou announced the establishment of a Tripartite Coordinating Committee to follow the process of decolonialization in the Spanish Sahara.
- July 1971 Coup attempt against King Hassan.
- January 5, 1972 Joint Communique by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, meeting as Tripartite Coordinating Committee at Algiers, announced agreement to concert their activities to hasten the liberation of the territory.
- August 1972 Second coup attempt against King Hassan.
- February 20, 1973 Jema'a requested the Head of the Spanish State to take measures increasing local autonomy and leading to a referendum.
- May 9, 1973 The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania meeting in Nouakchott renewed their pledge for concerted action in the UN framework.
- July 24, 1973 The Chiefs of State of Morocco, Mauritania and Algiers meeting in Agadir reaffirmed their attachment to the principle of self-determination for the Spanish Sahara.
- September 21, 1973 Franco communication, responding to Jema'a, agreed to additional autonomy and to observe the principle of self-determination.

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August 20, 1974 Spain announced in a letter to the UN Secretary General that it intended to hold a referendum under UN auspices during the first six months of 1975, and invited a UN mission to visit the Territory.

December 13, 1974 UNGA adopted Resolution 3292 calling for visiting mission and requesting the ICJ for an advisory opinion on legal aspects of the Saharan question. The resolution also asked Spain to postpone its proposed referendum pending the ICJ opinion.

May 8-June 8, 1975 Visit of UN Mission to Madrid, Algiers, Morocco, Mauritania, and the Spanish Sahara.

May 23, 1975 Spain informed the UN Secretary General that even if the concerned parties could not harmonize their positions, the Spanish authorities would be obliged to set a deadline by which they would transfer their power.

June 12, 1975 Joint communique after meeting of Hassan and Ould Daddah in Rabat announced agreement to cooperate "to frustrate Spain's maneuvers," which were designed to impede the ICJ proceedings.

July 4, 1975 Joint communique after a meeting of Algerian Foreign Minister Bouteflika and Hassan in Rabat welcomed Moroccan-Mauritanian agreement and pledged coordination of actions to end Spanish occupation.

October 8, 1975 Spain brought complaint against proposed Green March to the Security Council.

October 22, 1975 Security Council resolution (337(1975)) called for consultation by the Secretary General with the interested and concerned parties and for restraint.

October 25-28, 1975 Ineffectual consultation by the UN Secretary General.

November 2, 1975 Security Council resolution (379(1975)) urged restraint and continued consultation.

November 4-6, 1975 Consultations by special envoy of Secretary General, (French) Ambassador Lewin.

November 6, 1975 Green March by Moroccan civilians into the Western Sahara, halting before Spanish "dissuasion line."

November 6, 1975 Security Council resolution (380(1975)) deplored the Green March and called for Moroccan withdrawal from the Western Sahara.

November 9, 1975 Marchers ordered to return.

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November 12, 1975 Trilateral negotiations in Madrid between Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania.

November 14, 1975 Joint communique issued noting agreement on set of principles, subsequently submitted to UN Secretary General, for Spanish withdrawal.

December 10, 1975 UNGA passed two resolutions: 3458A(XXX) calling for implementation of measures directed at self-determination in consultation with all concerned and interested parties; and 3458B(XXX) taking note of the Madrid agreement of November 14, 1975 and requesting the interim administration to ensure that the right of self-determination was respected.

January 12, 1976 Withdrawal of Spanish military forces completed.

February 4, 1976 UN Secretary General Special Representative, Swedish Ambassador Olaf Rydbeck, visited area.

February 6, 1976 Letter from Algerian Government to Secretary General protesting implementation of the November 14 Madrid agreement and calling on Spain to remain as administrative authority until self-determination could be accomplished.

February 26, 1976 Spain withdrew from Saharan administration.  
Jema's endorsed the November 14, 1975 Madrid agreement.

February 27, 1976 Proclamation of Saharan Democratic Arab Republic.

March 5, 1976 Formation of the Government of the Saharan Democratic Arab Republic.

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