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MOROCCO: KENITRA AND THE KING

Since the evacuation of Wheelus airbase in June 1970, the sole American military facilities remaining in the Arab world are in Morocco: the US Navy Training Command at Kenitra and sensitive communications installations at nearby Bouknadel and Sidi Yahia. A king's word rather than any written treaty guarantees their existence. In 1963, when the US evacuated the military bases it had occupied in Morocco, King Hassan orally assured President Kennedy that these facilities could remain indefinitely; he repeated this oral assurance to President Johnson in 1967. Both sentimental and political reasons appear to lie behind the King's commitment. This, however, may increasingly be eroded by anti-US pressures and by his own excessive efforts to utilize the existence of the bases as a lever for obtaining greater US aid and support.

Royal Sentiment. King Hassan's personal feelings towards the US cannot be accurately measured. We do know, however, that they go back to a memorable boyhood experience: his presence at the 1943 meeting at Casablanca between his father, Mohammed V and President Roosevelt. Since then, Hassan has placed considerable value on friendship with the US, probably reflecting a continuing sense of

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personal gratitude to the first major Western power that expressed favorable interest in Moroccan independence. In addition, the king probably retains favorable memories of his contacts with American personnel at Kenitra while he was Crown Prince in the late 1950's: he, his brother, and sisters got to know Americans there and learned to rely on US facilities for luxury goods and on base officials for various personal and political services.

A Convenient Option. Hassan has also developed important political reasons to cultivate the US. His "American option" has become a means to many ends. On different occasions he has been able to use the US as counterweight in various dealings: with his domestic opposition, hostile neighbors (notably Algeria), ex-colonial power France, and the USSR. His trip to Washington in 1963, for example, enabled him to draw an implied US stamp of approval for the controversial constitutional system he installed at that time. Similarly, he played up Moroccan-US ties during the four-year period, 1965-69, when the French withdrew their ambassador and suspended economic assistance.

From the outset Hassan apparently recognized that his US option, to be credible, required a continuing and visible US interest in close relations with Morocco. While Hassan probably appreciated the element of disinterest in US diplomatic friendship for Morocco--in contrast to the French whose designs he considered neo-colonialist--he also seemed to have

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realized it could well lead to declining US attentiveness. Hassan therefore looked to the US military for support and sought White House attention, skillfully trying to establish a personal relationship with each new president.

To place his US insurance policy on a more secure basis, he assured President Kennedy in 1963 that the Kenitra facilities could remain. Three years later, he attempted to carry his "special relationship" with the US a step farther. Hassan's domestic problems in 1966 were formidable; drought had caused a severe shortfall in farm production, and the political parties were chafing under a state of emergency rule imposed the previous year. Moreover, Morocco was at odds with its North African neighbors as well as Spain and France, and the king was under military pressure to counter the Algerian threat with an arms buildup. In a deftly orchestrated campaign (including a visit to Moscow and bilateral talks with the US at diplomatic, military, [REDACTED]), Hassan laid the groundwork for his proposition in January 1967, that Morocco and the US conclude a formal mutual security arrangement. His proposal met with rebuff by US officials, but Hassan nevertheless reassured President Johnson, during a visit to Washington in February 1967, that the US could continue using the Kenitra facilities.

Advantages to Hassan Outweigh Drawbacks. The arrangements on Kenitra have provided Hassan with considerable leverage to help ensure a continuing flow of US military aid and economic assistance. It has enabled

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him to prevent a gradual phase-down in US aid levels that had been planned as a consequence of the 1963 evacuation. Instead he was able to count on substantial US support in later years. Overall, through fiscal year 1969, Morocco has received, since 1953, about \$66.2 million under the military assistance program and an additional \$692.4 million in US economic aid (\$56.2 and \$292.5 million, respectively, since FY 1963).

Over the past seven years, Hassan has thus parlayed the US stake in Kenitra into concrete political and economic advantages for his regime. These benefits give Hassan, if anything, a greater stake than Washington in a continued US military presence. Moreover, he has thus far succeeded in neutralizing the political drawbacks in the arrangements. Foreign criticism from radical Arab quarters, notably Algeria during the June 1967 war, has not deterred him from maintaining this apparent anachronism in the Arab world--nor has it barred him from active participation in Arab councils and diplomatic campaigns. At home he has been able to sidestep the potentially embarrassing question of whether the US military facilities constitute an infringement of Moroccan sovereignty. By placing Moroccan flags over the three installations, Moroccan military insignia on the uniforms of US personnel, and a sizeable Moroccan military presence at the Kenitra base, Hassan has been able to marshal supporting evidence for his claim that the three bases are legally--and genuinely--Moroccan. (Moroccan military and civilian officials and, to a considerable extent, educated Moroccans in general, are aware of the continuing US

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military presence at these installations--although not the details of their activities). Indeed, at a press conference in July Hassan baldly asserted that even Soviet party leader Brezhnev had acknowledged the bases to be Moroccan. His credibility appears to remain intact even though the Moroccan opposition press, echoing news despatches on the Symington sub-committee hearings, has recently begun for the first time to question the US military presence. His defense of the status quo serves to tie his past verbal assurances even closer to his power and prestige.

Facilities May Be Caught Between Hassan's Enemies and His Own Expectations.

Notwithstanding this royal support, the US military facilities in Morocco face an uncertain future and may be increasingly subject to royal pressure. The Moroccan monarch appears in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, his present determination to preserve the US presence leaves him increasingly vulnerable to the tides of popular opinion. Another rapid rise in Middle East tensions could compromise the US facilities, and a renewed outbreak of Arab/Israeli hostilities almost certainly would do so. Furthermore, Hassan's uncompromising stance toward his domestic opposition is likely to drive the political opposition, desperately searching for ways to embarrass and harass the regime, to intensify its attacks on the US presence. Moreover, organized labor is likely to join the attack since the authorities on October 1 ordered the Moroccan workers (over 750) employed at US facilities on the three installations to disaffiliate from the country's largest trade union.

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On the other hand, the growing number of dissatisfactions Morocco finds in its bilateral relations with the US, including the prospects of declining American economic and military assistance, will probably cause Hassan once again to attempt to use the bases as leverage against the US. That the regime has thus far permitted the opposition press to publish articles critical of Kenitra--while Morocco seizes newspaper issues and arrests journalists for articles on numerous other subjects--suggests that Hassan may already have opened such a campaign. If the American response is unsatisfactory to Hassan, he may well put additional pressure on the US by increasing Moroccan controls over the bases.

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