

Monarchy under attack

The first three years of the 1970s turned out to become an important milestone in the relatively short history of Morocco since independence. In 1970, the retirement of French President Charles de Gaulle opened up the door to a renewed friendship between the two countries after several years of political hostility. Re-establishments of ties had been blocked by de Gaulle's insistence that Minister of the Interior General Mohamed Oufkir be removed from office because the French believed that he was involved in the kidnapping and murder of Mehdi Ben Barka in Paris. Despite various Cabinet reorganizations in 1969 the position of General Oufkir was untouched and did not affect the King's personal direction of the government.¹ In a July 9, 1970 birthday message to the Moroccan people, King Hassan II announced to end the "state of exception" during which both executive and legislative powers were concentrated in his hands since June 7, 1965. A new Moroccan constitution would be submitted to a national referendum on July 24, 1970 and that if it was approved, Morocco would return to parliamentary democracy with legislative elections in the following month. The new legislature would comprise one house, a National Assembly, not two houses as under the first constitution of 1962. The King's initiative was seen by some observers as a concession to various domestic political pressures. Many educated Moroccans and political parties had resented the longevity of the emergency rule. Anti-monarchical sentiment had risen in the previous months. Student unrest had led to university strikes lasting for nearly three months and revelations of official corruption embarrassed the government and raised doubts about the accountability of high officials. Senior officials in the military, among many of Berber origin, were very displeased with the blatant corruption and favouritism among high civilians. Together with the Istiqlal Party nationalist army officers were outraged after King Hassan gave up Morocco's longstanding claims to Algerian-held territory for which they had fought a short but intense border conflict in 1963.² The decision of King Hassan to recognize Mauritania as an independent state and that Rabat did not put much pressure on Spain to return the northern enclaves Melilla and Ceuta to Morocco further fuelled protests from Istiqlal and the press connected to the opposition. Several opposition leaders were arrested by the police and sentenced to years of imprisonment.

The declaration of the need for a new constitution was seen by several opposition politicians as a sign that although the King was now willing to hand over some power to parliament, power was still to be shared and not on an equal basis; in practice, the King was to remain in effective control of political life. These suspicions, coupled with the resentment towards the monarchy after several years of oppression, led the

¹ The American Jewish Yearbook, Vol. 71 (1970), pp. 510-513

² Intelligence Note RAFN-29 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

UNFP and the Istiqlal to urge the citizenry to boycott the constitutional referendum of July 1970.³ But King Hassan was prepared. He had made his announcement with little forewarning and deliberately set early dates for the voting exercises to coincide with the summer vacation season. He had also issued veiled warnings to the electorate that rejection of the referendum would mean continuation of the “state of exception” and to political parties that those who preached boycott would find themselves excluded from the political system.⁴ The official outcome of the referendum was an overwhelming ‘Yes’ for the new constitution, despite the broad opposition from Istiqlal, UNFP and trade unions. The outcome also underlined that even after five years of a ‘state of exception’ and relatively slow social and economic progress, the domestic position of King Hassan II was still very strong. The legislative elections for the 240 seats in the House of Representatives in the following month were held during two days, namely on August 21 150 representatives were indirectly elected by municipalities and the various professional colleges or Chambers, and on August 28 through direct universal suffrage the remaining 90 representatives were elected. All for a period of six years. The result of these elections was that two-third of the representatives elected were independent candidates, not connected to a political party, with various professions. Of the political parties the pro-monarchical party Mouvement Populaire received most of the seats (60), while the opposition parties Istiqlal (8 seats) and UNFP (1 seat) saw their political role diminish. The majority elected in the new Parliament were selected by the King and his entourage, which meant that there was almost no authority to challenge the King. It provided the illusion, rather than the substance, of popular participation in government.⁵ For the US government there were many doubts if King Hassan was genuinely prepared to use the pro-monarchical majority in the new Parliament to improve the confidence of the Moroccan population in the elected representatives when they would not receive real legislative power. That meant Hassan had to break with his tactics of ‘divide and manipulate’ of the previous nine years to hold power.⁶

On February 10, 1970 US Secretary of State William Rogers had a meeting in Tunis with Prime Minister Ahmed Laraki, who was appointed by the King a year earlier. During this meeting the Prime Minister told the State Secretary that “King Hassan sought to improve relations with his neighbours. The only outstanding point still in litigation was the Spanish Sahara. UN resolution advocating self-determination for the people of Spanish Sahara had been introduced by Morocco⁷. This showed that Morocco was not interested in expansion or annexation. However, Morocco’s approaches to Spain, including King Hassan’s

³ Storm, 2007

⁴ Intelligence Note RAFN-29 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

⁵ CIA document, Prospects for Political Change in Morocco, 28 February 1972

⁶ Intelligence Note RAFN-29 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, July 14, 1970, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

⁷ On December 20, 1966 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 2229 to hold a referendum among the local people in the Spanish Sahara for self-determination. Spain voted against this resolution.

visit to Madrid in 1969, had not borne fruit. It was the strategic, not economic side of Spanish Sahara which interested Morocco.”⁸ The Prime Minister told Rogers that “Morocco also favoured self-determination and believed that if this were carried out under UN auspices, people of Spanish Sahara would chose union with Morocco.”⁹ The issue of the Spanish Sahara was at the heart of Morocco’s domestic and foreign policies ever since the country gained independence in 1956. Morocco saw the Spanish Sahara as an integral part of their country, based on historical ties since the Middle Ages. According to Rabat it had always exercised its influence on this region, and the Moroccan sultans, like their local (Saharawi) subjects, had always resisted Spanish presence. Also from a demographic point of view Morocco stated that it had close ties as both territories had the same population, namely nomadic tribes who ignored the artificial borders drawn by the Spanish colonizers.¹⁰ Spain seized the territory as a colony in 1884. Spain’s claims were later sanctioned by treaties with France between 1900 and 1912. Borders with the French’s colonies in the Maghreb were drawn without considering questions of historical or ethnic unity. In 1958 Madrid declared the territory an overseas province of Spain, following border incursions by armed tribesmen from Morocco.¹¹ The Spanish Sahara was a territory of around 280,000 km², almost entirely a desert with an arid climate and sparse vegetation. The territory, which has a long coastline along the Atlantic Ocean, was limited to the north by Morocco, to the south and to the east by Mauritania and it had a short common border with Algeria. The Spanish Sahara included two quite distinct provinces: the Seguiet el Hamra in the north, where there was rudimentary agriculture and substantial deposits of phosphate, and Rio de Oro in the south which was nomadic land and included deposits of iron ore. Seguiet el Hamra was of the two provinces the most densely populated area (45,000 inhabitants and 82,000 km²) while Rio de Oro had only 15,000 inhabitants living in an area of 184,000 km². The population of roughly 60,000 people in 1970 consisted of approximately 43,000 indigenous Africans and 17,000 Europeans mostly Spaniards. The indigenous population included pastoral nomads¹², who were Arabized and Islamized Berbers living there since the Middle Ages with little if any sense of national identification with the political entity Spanish Sahara, and descendants from former slaves cultivating the oases on behalf of the Arab-Berber tribes. The nomads could be divided in three broad groups: the largest group was Tekna, herding people who lived in southern Morocco and northern Spanish Sahara. Moroccan authorities depended heavily on Tekna nomads for information on conditions inside the Spanish Sahara; the Reguibat group was the most powerful of the Saharan peoples in Spanish Sahara. They were known for their ferocity, ability with firearms and gun

⁸ Telegram Secto 27/727 From Secretary of State Rogers in Morocco to the Department of State, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

⁹ Telegram Secto 27/727 From Secretary of State Rogers in Morocco to the Department of State, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

¹⁰ Barbier, 1975

¹¹ CIA document, 6 September 1974

¹² Given the nomadic lifestyle statistics on the indigenous population were no more than approximations (CIA document, 6 September 1974)

running. The Reguibat used their camels to travel across wide expanses of southern Morocco, Algeria, Spanish Sahara and Mauritania. A third group of nomads, the Ulad Delim, inhabited the southwestern part of Spanish Sahara. Large numbers of the Ulad Delim are closely associated with tribes living across the border in Mauritania.¹³ The Europeans living in Spanish Sahara were mainly civil servants and soldiers. The majority lived in the capital El Aïoun (24,000 inhabitants) and the town of Villa Cisneros (7,000 inhabitants). Political power was concentrated in the hands of the Spanish governor general, who was directly responsible to the office of the Prime Minister in Madrid. The Spanish Sahara had very meagre agricultural activities, not enough to provide sufficient food and income to the domestic population. The coastal waters were full of fish, but fishing was practiced by fishermen from the Canary Islands and not by the Saharan population. For decades Spain largely ignored their colony in North Africa until large phosphate deposits were discovered by Spanish geologists in 1963 in the province of Seguiet el Hamra, extending over 250 km². Phosphate is an essential element in the production of chemical fertilizers and was seen as a key ingredient to agricultural development worldwide. Phosphates reserves were estimated at ten billion tonnes, which would put Spanish Sahara among the top phosphate producers in the world.¹⁴ In particular, the region of Bou Kraâ contained an estimated 1.4 to 1.7 billion tons of phosphate.¹⁵ That meant that this mine alone could produce 10 million tons of phosphate for more than 130 years. That would yield an income of 430 million US dollars each year at market prices of 1975.¹⁶ Surface mining of phosphate in the Spanish Sahara was also much easier and therefore less expensive compared to mining in Morocco. When the Bou Kraâ mine would be fully operational it could seriously undercut Morocco's dominant position in the phosphate world market. Phosphate mining in the Spanish Sahara was entrusted to Spanish company *Compagnie des Phosphates de Bou Kraâ*. They used the world's longest conveyer belt (100 km) to transport phosphate from the Bou Kraâ mine to the port of El Aïoun. Phosphate production mounted to three million tons in 1972¹⁷ and was forecasted to grow to six million tons in 1976. Also iron ore deposits in the province of Rio de Oro were found with estimated reserves of seventy million tons.¹⁸

Despite growing tensions between Morocco and Spain over the Spanish Sahara, the year 1970 was relatively calm. The end of the 'State of Exception' and the following referendum for a new constitution and subsequently elections for a new Parliament in August 1970 did not lead to large social unrest in Morocco as in previous years. Opposition parties Istiqlal and UNFP criticized the large-scale unemployment, high prices, low wages, poor housing, and widespread poverty as evidence of the government's inability or

¹³ CIA document, 6 September 1974

¹⁴ Barbier, 1975

¹⁵ CIA document, 6 September 1974

¹⁶ MERIP, 1975

¹⁷ For comparison, Morocco produced fifteen million tons in 1972 (UN Statistical Yearbook 1963)

¹⁸ Barbier, 1975

unwillingness to confront the country's problems. But this criticisms was not generally supported by most of the population who had little exposure to modern lifestyles and were more concerned with their daily survival.¹⁹ The agricultural campaign of 1970 - 1971 looked promising after the disappointed campaign of 1969 - 1970, which had the lowest cereal production since the start of the Five Year Plan 1968 - 1972. But the increased cereal production was more the result of favourable rainfall and a larger sown area than a positive effect from planned public investments. Most of the public investments favoured large irrigation works and hydroelectrical power projects benefitting larger modern farms. The majority of small scale farmers on the other hand did not experience much improvements in their living conditions. Their dependency on rainfall meant that when they were confronted with a drought agricultural output could easily drop between ten to thirty per cent. With a high annual population growth rate of more than three per cent it meant that most output expansion in agriculture was absorbed in just maintaining existing living standards. By the end of the 1960s average per capita income in Morocco was among the lowest in the region, and rural per capita income was one-sixth of that national average.²⁰

The relationship with the United States improved considerably at the beginning of the 1970s. For both countries closer ties proved to be more beneficial than staying at a distance. By mid-1970 the sole US military facilities in the Arab world were at Kénitra, although it was only used for communication purposes and not as a military base. King Hassan had strong personal feelings towards the US that went back to his presence as a young Prince at the 1943 meeting at Casablanca between his father and US President Roosevelt. Since then, Hassan had placed considerable value on friendship with the US, probably reflecting a continuing sense of personal gratitude to the first major Western power that expressed favourable interest in Morocco's independence. King Hassan had also an important political reason to be close friends with the United States. It provided him a counterweight to pressures from France and Algeria. At the end of the 1960s this special relationship somewhat cooled down as US Congress was not prepared to deliver substantial military arms to Morocco. Congress was afraid that the United States would be drawn into an arms build-up in North Africa with on the one hand Algeria supported by the Soviet Union and on the other Morocco and the United States. Although Hassan was quite disappointed by the stance of Washington, he kept on reassuring President Johnson that the United States could continue to use the Kénitra communications facilities.²¹ For the American government there was no connection between access to the Kénitra facilities and their economic and military aid program for Morocco.²² Their policy was more

¹⁹CIA document, March 1973

²⁰ CIA document, March 1973

²¹ Intelligence Note RAFN-49 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, November 3, 1970, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

²² Between 1949 and 1969 Morocco received US\$ 726 million in military and economic assistance from the US, making it the largest recipient of US aid in Africa

aimed at supporting a strategic and long-lasting partner in a volatile region.²³ But clouds were on the horizon. On June 9, 1971 US ambassador in Morocco Stuart Rockwell send a telegram to the US Department of State arguing that it might be time for a reorientation of US policies in Morocco. The ambassador recommended his government to 'dissociate ourselves from the regime [of King Hassan] and that we encourage those elements which are by their nature opposed to an autocratic government in Morocco.' Rockwell also stated that 'we [US government] should do what we can to urge the regime to increase popular participation in the development effort and to make better utilization of its human resources.' The American embassy in Rabat believed that the US government 'should not associate ourselves with the repressive political aspects of the regime and will do our best to avoid doing so.'²⁴ At the same time Rockwell understood very well that little could be done by the United States to radically change Hassan's regime or its domestic policies without jeopardizing the good relationship between the two countries. For the United States there was no real political alternative to King Hassan. The only institution that had the 'force to mount a revolution' was the Moroccan army, but Rockwell did not think that the army would be any less autocratic or more effective in promoting the social and economic development of the country than Hassan's regime. Therefore, he did not see the army as a realistic option for political change. Within Morocco this was thought otherwise.

Since Hassan ascended the throne in 1961 there was a growing discontent among opposition parties, labour unions, and student organisations in large cities about the corruption and inadequate social and economic policies of Hassan's regime. To this multitude of discontented groups was added an increasing number of senior and junior officers of the Moroccan army.²⁵ The senior officers were powerless to halt the corruption among politicians and civil servants and were increasingly outnumbered by them in accumulating material wealth. The dissatisfaction was particularly felt among senior officers from Berber origin. The agrarian reform program, as laid down in the Five Year Program 1968 – 1972, favoured the modern irrigated sector which included former colonial land. The Berber officers felt that these reforms were deliberately favouring the Arabs from Fez - or Fassi - officers interests as they had most of these lands. Junior officers were dissatisfied by the fact that they had almost no access to the same wealth and power that senior officers had. Promotions and command commissions of junior officers were delayed by the King as it was opportune. This system of royal patronage among the military came under pressure with the mechanization of the Moroccan army in the late 1960s. As opposed to their seniors, the junior officers had no combat experience. Their military training at home and abroad strongly emphasized the technical

²³ Telegram 51970 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Morocco, March 27, 1971, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

²⁴ Airgram A–117 From the Embassy in Morocco to the Department of State, June 9, 1971, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

²⁵ In 1970 the Royal Armed Forces of Morocco (R.A.F.) had a strength of 60,000 men

aspect of modern warfare. As a result, the junior officers proved better qualified than their seniors for command over highly mechanized units such as the Air Force, the Navy and Artillery. The junior officers were able to challenge the seniors' authority on the grounds of technical competency, and in their return, senior officers resented the fact that units commanded by junior officers often received the most sophisticated equipment. On top of that, the commanding senior officers who had fought the Algerian forces during the border conflict in 1963 resisted the King's effort to transform the Moroccan army into a necessarily unpopular instrument of internal security maintenance. These officers were confronted with the growing power of General Oufkir – who was a Berber – and its National Security Police. When Oufkir was appointed Minister of the Interior and commander of the National Security Police in 1964, he broke up the riots in Casablanca in 1965 without the use of regular army units. The special relations between Oufkir, several senior officers and the King were greatly resented by the rest of the senior officer corps.²⁶

On July 10, 1970 King Hassan II was celebrating his 42nd birthday and hosted a reception for a group of 500 people consisting of diplomats and notables – top Moroccan politicians and businessmen – at the Royal Palace in Skhirat located south of Rabat. At about 1:30 pm the Palace was attacked by some 1,400 military cadets, students at the Non-commissioned Officers School of Ahermoumou near Fez. They were under the command of five to seven²⁷ of the fourteen generals of the Royal Moroccan Army including Mohammed Medbouh, commander of the Royal Military House and generally thought of as the leader of the putsch, Mustapha Amharech, commander of all military training schools, Amahzoun Hammou, commander of region 1 (Kénitra), Abderrahman Habibi, commander of region 3 (Marrakech), and Khyari Bougrine, commander of region 6 (Taza-Fez). Only a small group of high-ranking junior officers, mostly of Berber origin, participated in the putsch, notably Colonel Ababouh, commander of the Non-Commissioned Officers School of Ahermoumou, who led the cadets into the Palace ground, and Colonel Abdelhaye Labsir, commander of region 5 (Marrakech), Colonel Chelouati (General Staff officer), and colonel Feneri, commander of the military school of Kénitra.²⁸ After the cadets burst into the Palace grounds shooting broke out with loyalist officers. The King was held prisoner for two hours while the putschists rounded up the hundreds of guests. The putschist leader general Medbouh was shot dead at the early stage of the attack on the Royal Palace by colonel Ababouh. Ababouh was infuriated when he found out that general Medbouh had negotiated with the King to abdicate from the throne without any further bloodshed, but the King refused to step down.²⁹ Ababouh himself had a different objective. He wanted the King, the Royal

²⁶ Braun, 1978

²⁷ General Mohammed Ben Amar, commander of the military region 2 (Casablanca) was arrested for alleged implication in the putsch, but later released. General Mohammed Mezziane was temporarily placed under house arrest.

²⁸ Braun, 1978

²⁹ In the press conference of July 11, 1971 King Hassan told the news reporters that general Medbouh wanted to negotiate with him about stepping down, but he refused after which the general went to see colonel Ababouh.

family and all senior officers directly connected to the King to be eliminated and establish a Republic.³⁰ Ababouh left the Royal Palace and led a group of soldiers to Rabat to seize control of key government installations, including the radio station, the Ministries of National Defense and Interior, and armed forces headquarters. The dissident soldiers who remained behind in the Royal Palace ran out of ammunition and, left leaderless, switched their support to the King. Loyal troops at Rabat, led by General Bouhali, attacked the putschists and regained control of armed forces headquarters. Both he and Ababouh were killed. Following his release at Skhirat King Hassan II bestowed unlimited powers to General Oufkir to restore order. Using the security police and auxiliary forces General Oufkir quickly restored order.³¹ On Sunday morning July 11, King Hassan II officially announced the failure of the putsch during an emotional press conference on radio. Libya had announced their support for the dissident soldiers, which led Hassan to conclude that the coup attempt had foreign support. The Libyans also sent an emissary to Algiers to consult with Algerian President Boumediene. Boumediene, however, was prompt to wire a message of support to Hassan and send his Minister of State to Rabat to assess the situation.³² In all about 200 persons were killed, including 158 of the dissident soldiers, several Moroccan top leaders, the Belgium ambassador Marcel Dupret, and more than 200 people were wounded among them the King's brother Moulay Abdullah and the Saudi ambassador Fakhri el Adhr. Two days later on July 13 at 11:15 am ten officers involved in the putsch, including four generals, were executed.³³

The failed attempt to overthrow Hassan's regime and its aftermath severely weakened the military establishment. The top command structure was virtually destroyed – nine of Morocco's sixteen general officers lost their lives including the Major General of the Armed Forces, the Commander of the Air Force, the Director of the Military Household, and the King's Aid-de-Camp. Four other generals and six lower-ranking officers were executed for taking part in the coup d'état. This event was a major turning point in the reign of King Hassan. His relationship to the army had changed significantly. The idea that the army gave unconditional loyalty to the monarch was in shatters. Hassan, who was founder and commander-in-chief of the Royal Armed Forces, regarded the military as indispensable. The coup attempt had cast doubt on the country's military establishment.³⁴ Before the military coup, the monarchy's strength had rested on two pillars of traditionalism. These were the urban clan establishment of traditionally prominent commercial (Fassi) and civil servant (Makhzen) families, and the Berber nobility from the Atlas and Rif

³⁰ Gourdon, 1971

³¹ CIA document, March 1973

³² CIA document, 12 July 1971

³³ Of the one thousand and eighty-one conspirators who were indicted, only one death sentence was handed down on February 29, 1972, one thousand eight acquittals, three imprisonment with sentences ranging from one to twenty years of imprisonment. The one death penalty was later commuted to life imprisonment by King Hassan.

³⁴ Intelligence Note RAFN-39 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, July 15, 1971, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

mountains. Post-independence royal policy had been carefully construed to fashion an alliance between these two forces and to absorb both into the royal system of patronage. The coup d'état of July 10 not only marked the end of this alliance but also the point where the traditional system of patronage, manipulation, and institutional corruption around the King was no longer workable.³⁵ Hassan's success of rule in concentrating all effective powers in his hands destroyed the balance of political forces on which the monarchy rested when he acceded to the throne in 1961. Political parties, trade unions, and other civilian political forces eroded into near impotence, leaving the King virtually alone with the military. By relying heavily on the security forces to repress popular discontent, Hassan contained potential trouble but deepened resentment against the regime.³⁶ Morocco's political establishment was shocked by the putsch and showed little inclination to reconsolidate its commitments to the monarchy. As a result, the King was more isolated than ever before and was forced to look for political support outside of the traditional establishment he carefully had created.³⁷

In the months following the putsch the country was in disarray. Despite its failure, the coup overturned a set of institutions and values which constituted Morocco's stable framework of thought and action. The people discovered that their King 'Commander of the Faithful' was vulnerable, and this had more impact than any criticism of the opposition during the previous ten years. It helped modify the political consciousness among large groups of people like the urban youth and students. Although corruption was often cited as one of the major causes of the coup d'état, many of the young people pointed more to the flamboyant lifestyle of the King, his numerous palaces and high living expenditures, while much needed investments by the government were postponed because of lack of money. In a telegram send to the US Department of State by the American embassy in Rabat on July 23, 1971 it was stated that 'the regime of Hassan was and is institutionally vulnerable because it is headed by an autocratic monarch and monarchs are increasingly anachronistic in transitional societies. Even in Morocco, where the monarchy is native and of long standing, the traditional basis of Hassan's kingly legitimacy is not alone sufficient to justify his rule in modern times. His role as 'Commander of the Faithful' and his descent from the Prophet may assure him some conservative support, but have never cut much ice in Morocco when it comes to bread and butter issues such as tribal loyalties, vengeance, schools and jobs.'³⁸ Hassan's refusal to share real power with political parties, labour unions, students, and other political interest groups made him now weak as the only institution he paid real attention to was the military establishment who had tried to overthrow him.

³⁵ Braun, 1978

³⁶Intelligence Note RAFN-39 Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, July 15, 1971, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

³⁷ Braun, 1978

³⁸ Telegram 3745 From the Embassy in Morocco to the Department of State, July 23, 1971, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

The army itself remained traumatized by the event which had suddenly deprived them of many of its leaders. With virtual unlimited powers as the commander of the Royal Armed Forces and Minister of National Defense general Oufkir started to purge the Moroccan army to restore order and confidence amongst all ranks.

On August 6, 1971 King Hassan appointed a new Cabinet with the new Prime Minister Karim Lamrani. But a more important result of the coup d'état was that Hassan understood that something in his policies had to be changed. In the fall of 1971 he started undertaking negotiations with the opposition parties Istiqlal and UNFP about sharing political power. For the political opposition the coup d'état of July 10 illustrated the failure of the policy of personal and absolute power by the King, and for them the only remedy for the crisis lay in the establishment of a democratic constitution and institutions freely chosen by the Moroccan people. Therefore, the King had to renounce a large part of its powers.³⁹ The negotiations with the opposition broke down on this central issue of power sharing, as it became clear to UNFP and Istiqlal that Hassan was not prepared to change the rules of the game.

Many believed that 'Skhirat' could be a real turning point in the evolution of Morocco's political regime, but by the end of 1971 they felt that it turned out to be more of an incident in the political course of an ambitious King. A sovereign that believed it is possible to continue the traditional system of royal rule without meaningful concessions to political parties. US Central Intelligence, however, saw the odds in favour of a military coup growing. For Hassan's success it was key to maintain the loyalty of the military, and at the centre of the military establishment stood General Oufkir. In their National Intelligence Estimate on Morocco of June 1972⁴⁰ US Central Intelligence did not see Oufkir and his senior officers take over the government, although they believed that 'Oufkir would be tempted to step in if Hassan seemed to be fumbling badly in handling the problems of government', and that 'Oufkir with a firm grip on the military establishment would stand an excellent chance of success should he decide to depose Hassan.' Two months later on August 16, 1972 King Hassan was flying back from a visit to France when four Moroccan F-5 fighter planes suddenly appeared in the sky. One of them opened fire on the royal aircraft injuring a number of passengers. Thinking they had seriously injured or even killed the King the fighter planes ceased firing. The royal aircraft made a crash landing at Rabat airport after which the fighter planes resumed the assault and fired on airport buildings killing at least eight people inside and injuring forty-seven including four Cabinet ministers who were waiting to greet the King. After this attack of about ten minutes, the rebel planes appeared above the Royal Palace and before returning to their airbase in Kénitra launched rockets on the Palais des Hôtes and on the residence of the King's brother Prince Moulay Abdallah without making

³⁹ Gourdon, 1971

⁴⁰ National Intelligence Estimate Outlook for Morocco, N^o 277, NIE 61-72, 15 June 1972

any victims. That same evening, royalist forces occupied Kénitra airbase from which the air assaults had started and arrested the pilots involved in this operation with codename "Overflow". Commander Kouera, who personally led the air attack, was arrested at sea after having ejected himself from his plane. The other pilots fled in a helicopter to Gibraltar to seek asylum, but were refused by the British authorities and flown back to Rabat. The following day, on August 17 General Oufkir was found dead. It was officially stated that he had killed himself. For the US Government this second unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hassan only one year after 'Skhirat' made it clear that the King was in a weak and difficult position. Hassan had taken personal command of the army, but was not sure of its loyalty. His overtures to the opposition parties to join the government and participate in parliamentary elections were rejected. This made the King quite vulnerable to the extent that the US Government thought that another coup or assassination attempt could come at any time.⁴¹ Two months after the attack, on October 17, 1972, the trial began against 220 military personnel who worked at Kénitra airbase. They were charged with the attempted attack on August 16, 1972 on the life of King Hassan and the Royal Family and to overthrow the regime. Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Amokrane, former deputy commander of the Royal Air Force, was seen as the coordinator of this operation. During the trial it became clear, or so it was told by the indicted, that General Oufkir was the mastermind of the conspiracy. According to Amokrane he had a meeting with Oufkir on November 15, 1971 during which the General strongly criticized the Royal Family and revealed his plan to remove the King. On August 9, while the King was in France, General Oufkir asked Amokrane and Commander Kouera to prepare the air attack on the Boeing one week later.⁴² Amokrane and Kouera told the court during the trial that they were, like Oufkir, outraged by the corruption and immorality in the Royal Regime.⁴³ As General Oufkir was already dead before the start of the trial, killed or suicide, his true involvement in the air attack on August 16 will never be known. Hassan did not believe that neither General Medbouh nor General Oufkir were capable to organise the military coups of 1971 and 1972 all by themselves. In a meeting with the American ambassador Stuart Rockwell at the Royal Palace on September 7, 1972 the King told Rockwell that 'neither Medbouh nor Oufkir could have managed to run the country by themselves, lacking as they did any popular base whatsoever. They must have counted on someone outside to help them, someone who would be willing for his own profit to provide the assistance, which the Medbouh-Oufkir cliques would have required in order to meet Morocco's needs and thus maintain themselves in power. In order to avoid chaos and because of the Moroccan people's concern for legitimacy, either General would also have had to find a member of the Alaouite dynasty to use as a puppet.'⁴⁴ In that regards, King Hassan II publicly stated that

⁴¹ Memorandum From the Secretary of State (Rogers) to President Nixon, September 5, 1972, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

⁴² Roudan, 1972

⁴³ The New York Times, January 14, 1973

⁴⁴ Telegram 4147 From the Embassy in Morocco to the Department of State, September 8, 1972, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969-1976, VOLUME E-5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969-1972

General Oufkir wanted to eliminate him so he could place young Crown Prince Sidi Mohammed on the throne and govern the country as Oufkir pleased.⁴⁵ Although Hassan did not have any evidence for outside support of the putschists, he found it the only logic conclusion. US Ambassador Rockwell did not believe that Hassan really thought that there was a foreign hand in the two plots. In his opinion the King found this story useful to distract people from the real causes of the two attempts and that were his failings.⁴⁶ Of the 220 military men who stood trial, 177 were acquitted and 32 were given prison terms ranging from three to twenty years. Eleven men went before the firing squad on January 13, 1973, including Amokrane and Kouera. What became clear of the two assassination attempts was that they were carried out by small groups of military officers. There were no formal contacts between the military plotters and political leaders of the various parties. The military men involved in the attempts were almost exclusively conservative, rural Berbers. They wanted to eliminate the King and get rid of the corrupt and wasteful entourage that surrounded him. The officers did not want to bring about sweeping social and economic change. Both attempts took place in almost complete isolation from the general public. There was little enthusiasm expressed for either, and few among the populace seemed to care whether Hassan survived or not.⁴⁷ One of the main consequences of the two failed coup attempts was a mistrust developed by the King with regard to his army. It resulted in strict controls in distribution and storage of ammunition, and by frequent transfers of senior army officers.

March into the Sahara

The two assassinations attempts on King Hassan took place at a time when there was economic and social distress in the country, although this was not equally felt. In 1971 twenty per cent of the poorest households in Morocco owned only seven per cent of the national income while 20 per cent of the richest households owned sixty-five per cent of the national income. As a result the share in national consumption expenditures of the richest households grew by ten per cent to thirty-seven per cent between 1961 and 1971 while that of the poorest part of the Moroccan population decreased from around three per cent to just one per cent.⁴⁸ Not only where there large income differences between individual households, also regional disparities were relatively large despite the various developments plans that aimed at diminishing these differences. Income per capita in the central and western regions of the country with large cities like Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat and Tanger were double that of the southern and eastern regions. The

⁴⁵ Roudan, 1972

⁴⁶ Telegram 4147 From the Embassy in Morocco to the Department of State, September 8, 1972, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

⁴⁷ Special National Intelligence Estimate 61–1–72, September 14, 1972, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E–5, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON NORTH AFRICA, 1969–1972

⁴⁸ Bulletin Economic et Social du Maroc, N° 136/137

income inequality between rural and urban areas was even larger, with people living in the cities having an average income per capita that was more than three times that of people living in urban areas.

Region	Population, 1974 (%)	GDP, 1974 (%)	GDP per capita, 1974 (dirhams)
North-West	35	34	760
Central-West	42	52	968
South-West	6	3	391
South	9	5	435
Oriental (North-East)	8	6	586
<i>National</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>789</i>
Rural areas	71	42	463
Urban areas	29	58	1564

Source: *Bulletin Economic et Social du Maroc*, N° 136/137

The main cause for the income inequality in Morocco was the uneven distribution in ownership of the production factors land, labour and capital. Ten million people lived in Morocco's rural areas in the early 1970s and their main source of income derived from working the land. Three-quarters of the farmers were mere subsistence farmers having less than five hectares, covering only twenty five per cent of the total cultivable land in Morocco. In contrast, two per cent of the landowners owned ten per cent of the cultivable land, with an average plot size of more than one-hundred hectares. Almost three and half million rural farmers had to work on these larger farms, owned by people who lived in the cities, to earn additional income for their families. Besides uneven distribution in land ownership, the number of water irrigated farm plots showed a strong preference for larger farm holdings. Most of the irrigated plots were in the hands of large farmers, which in a country with water scarcity made a considerable difference in agricultural output and yields. The same trend was seen in farm mechanization, especially in the ownership of tractors. The deterioration in the income of rural workers during the 1960s and early 1970s could therefore be explained by the unequal distribution in production factors. But this was not only seen in the agricultural sector, also in the domestic industry there was an uneven distribution in production factors.⁴⁹

The weak social and economic progress in Morocco since independence and the two failed assassinations attempts on King Hassan II were severely threatening the stability of the Royal Regime and therefore of the country as a whole. An ancient Arabic proverb says that Algeria is the man of the Maghreb, Tunisia its woman, and Morocco its lion. This proverb originated probably from the fact that Algeria was centrally located in North Africa, with smaller Tunisia on one side and on the other the more rugged, untamed Morocco. By the early 1970s the validation of this proverb for Morocco could no longer be upheld. The country was lagging behind its two neighbours on many accounts and was highly dependent on external

⁴⁹Bulletin Economic et Social du Maroc, N° 136/137

funding for its public investment programs in modernizing the country. Economic progress made during the second Five Year Plan 1968 – 1972 were mainly driven by a bumper harvest in 1967 – 1968, exports and tourism. The development plan was unsuccessful in tackling the growing gap between the incomes of rural and city dwellers, and between traditional and modern farmers.

For King Hassan and his regime much was at stake. Like many other autocratic rulers when confronted with domestic problems, the King looked abroad to strengthen its internal position. In early July 1974 Spain told Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania that it was preparing to implement a new policy of increased autonomy for its overseas province Spanish Sahara. Subsequently, on August 20, 1974 Madrid notified the UN Secretary General that a referendum to decide the political future of Spanish Sahara will be held in the first half of 1975 under UN supervision. Madrid declared that its decision was consistent with UN resolutions calling for self-determination for the peoples of the Territory. Hassan reacted sharply to the announcement of Spain for granting autonomy to the Spanish Sahara by warning Spain's Head of State General Franco that such a move would lead to a deterioration in relations. The King emphasized in a speech given on July 8, 1974 that he could not permit the establishment of a puppet state in the Sahara and implied that if discussions failed, other means would be pursued.⁵⁰ Morocco started a major diplomatic campaign to pressure Spain to abandon its plans for greater autonomy for Spanish Sahara. Moroccan diplomats visited various Arab and African capitals as well as Asian and European countries to seek international support for its territorial claims on Spanish Sahara, but many were not inclined to support Morocco's territorial ambitions. Most Arab states were reluctant to take side in any inter-Arab quarrel at a time when the conflict with Israel was far more important to keep Arab unity. Meanwhile, Hassan deployed approximately one-quarter of Morocco's ground forces – or an estimated 12,000 – 15,000 troops⁵¹ - to southern Morocco. He hoped that his campaign to reclaim Spanish Sahara would strengthen his domestic position and distract attention from his country's political and economic problems.⁵² Hassan knew that despite many differences between his regime, political opposition parties, trade unions and other activist groups they all shared the same opinion towards Morocco's territorial claim on Spanish Sahara. Madrid wanted to hold a referendum in the territory of Spanish Sahara in 1975 regarding self-determination. This caused King Hassan to attach tough conditions to Morocco's agreement to such a referendum. He insisted that any vote must occur under international control after Spanish troops and administration had been withdrawn. He further indicated that he would oppose holding the referendum if the principle of independence for Sahara were included. During earlier talks between the US and Morocco in 1970 Rabat had implicitly accepted independence as one option, provided the 20,000 – 25,000 Saharans it claimed live in Morocco were

⁵⁰ CIA document 'Spanish Sahara: Pawn of Northwest Africa', 6 September 1974

⁵¹ CIA document 'Moroccan Plans to invade Spanish Sahara', 3 October 1975

⁵² CIA document 'Spanish Sahara: Pawn of Northwest Africa', 6 September 1974

allowed to vote to. Morocco's standpoint in 1974 meant that if Spain would withdraw its troops prior to the referendum, Hassan might be tempted to push across the border. If a referendum went against Moroccan interests, Hassan might move to annex the territory forcibly, in the hope that Algeria would not react militarily. The relations between Morocco and Algeria were since the border war in 1963 tense. Although Algeria did not make territorial claims on Spanish Sahara, the country was highly sensitive towards the growing military strength of Morocco in North Africa and its expansionist policy regarding the Spanish Sahara. Algeria supported UN resolutions calling for self-determination for the peoples of Spanish Sahara, which should be held under UN auspices and led to an independent state. This put Algiers in direct confrontation with Rabat, although it was unclear what Algeria would do if Morocco should use military force to gain control over Spanish Sahara.

On 21 December 1974 the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, received a request from the UN General Assembly for an advisory opinion on two questions: (a) whether Western Sahara (Rio de Oro and Sakiet el Hamra) at the time of colonization by Spain was a territory belong to no one (*terra nullius*), and (b) if not, what the legal ties were between that territory and Morocco and Mauritania. In the course of 27 public sittings held between 25 June and 30 July 1975, the Court heard oral statements on the questions submitted by representatives of Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Spain and Zaire. On 16 October 1975 the Court stated with regard to the question of whether Western Sahara was *terra nullius* at the time of Spanish colonization that the time of colonization by Spain was to be regarded as the period beginning in 1884 when Spain had proclaimed a protectorate over the Rio de Oro. During that period, territories inhabited by peoples having a social and political organization were not regarded as *terrae nullius*. According to the Court that was exactly the situation in 1884. The Western Sahara was inhabited by peoples which were socially and politically organized in tribes under chiefs competent to represent them and that Spain had not proceeded on the basis that it was establishing its sovereignty over *terrae nullius*. The Court, therefore, unanimously found that Western Sahara was not *terrae nullius* at the time of colonization by Spain. With regard to the question of the legal ties of the territory to Morocco or Mauritania, the Court concluded that at the time of Spanish colonization there were legal ties of allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and some tribes living in the territory of Western Sahara. On the other hand, the Court concluded based on the materials and information presented that there were no ties of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and Morocco or Mauritania.⁵³ In addition to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice the UN General Assembly decided to send an UN Visiting Mission to talk with all parties involved during the period May and June 1975. The findings of this Mission were presented by the Chairman on October 10, 1975. The Spanish government

⁵³ Yearbook of the United Nations 1975, pp 871-911, December 1975

wanted a decolonization of the Territory as quickly as possible without leaving a vacuum and supported the right for self-determination by the people living in the Spanish Sahara. The Moroccan government reaffirmed its territorial claim to Western Sahara and insisted that the Territory be integrated with Morocco, although they could accept a referendum subject to certain conditions including the withdrawal of the Spanish troops and administration, the temporary presence of the UN to supervise the maintenance of order and the proper functioning of the administration and the return of refugees. The Moroccan government also told the members of the Mission that the referendum could relate only to the choice of the population between Morocco and Spain. The Mauritanian government reaffirmed its territorial claim to Spanish Sahara and insisted that the Territory be integrated with Mauritania. The Algerian government had no territorial claim on Spanish Sahara, but it considered that the Territory should be decolonized and the population given an opportunity to exercise its right to self-determination. The people living in Spanish Sahara were, according to the Mission, categorically for independence and against the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania.⁵⁴ The Mission concluded that 'the General Assembly should take steps to enable those population groups (within and outside the Territory) to decide on their own future in complete freedom and in an atmosphere of peace and security in accordance with the provisions of UN resolution 1514 (XV)⁵⁵ and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly concerning the [Western Sahara] question'. To this end the Mission recommended that the Secretary-General of the United Nations should appoint 'in close consultation with the administering Power and the other concerned and interested parties' a new visiting mission to define the procedures for such consultation which should take place under United Nations auspices.⁵⁶ The Visiting Mission did not specifically recommend a referendum as requested by Morocco.

Earlier, during the Summer of 1975, Spain tried to reach a settlement with Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria over the future of Spanish Sahara. Madrid made it clear to all parties that they were determined to withdraw from the Territory and called for a resolution in the UN General Assembly that would permit Madrid to terminate its role and transfer sovereignty to officials selected by the Saharans themselves. Spain did not want to remain in the Sahara or fight a colonial war, although they were concerned that an unilateral pull out would trigger an armed conflict between those countries contesting the area and might result in Spanish casualties.⁵⁷ Another concern for Spain was a potential loss of their multi-million dollars investments in the phosphate mining industry in Spanish Sahara, and therefore backed the local political

⁵⁴ Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara, 10 October 1975

⁵⁵ UN resolution 1514 (XV) concerns the 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', 14 December 1960

⁵⁶ United Nations Decolonization files, No. 17, October 1980

⁵⁷ CIA Staff notes, September 26, 1975

party PUNS (*Partido de la Union Nacional Saharaui*)⁵⁸ who sought 'Saharan independence through a process of accelerated self-determination' and 'preserve mutual friendship and co-operation with Spain in every field'.⁵⁹ By supporting the PUNS Spain hoped to counter indigenous groups favouring annexation by Morocco or Mauritania. But these talks ended without an agreement between all parties involved.

When on October 16, 1975 the International Court of Justice presented their conclusions, the same day the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations issued a press release stating that 'the opinion of the Court can only mean one thing: the so-called Western Sahara was a part of Moroccan territory over which the sovereignty was exercised by the Kings of Morocco and that the population of this territory considered themselves and were considered to -be Moroccans.'⁶⁰ This statement came as a big surprise to many outside Morocco as it was in sharp contrast with the Court's conclusions. Besides a press release, in the evening of October 16 King Hassan addressed his people on radio and television and called for 350,000 volunteers to occupy the territory in furtherance of Morocco's claim to sovereignty there. Spain and Algeria urged the UN Security Council to take steps to prevent this march into Spanish Sahara. The following month, armed only with the Koran in one hand and the Moroccan flag in the other, 350,000 Moroccan volunteers were transported by 8900 trucks and 1200 busses to the south. During the night of 5 to 6 November the UN Security Council issued an 'urgent request' to King Hassan 'to put an end forthwith to the declared march into Western Sahara'. In reply to the appeal, King Hassan send a cable informing the Council that the march into 'our Sahara' had already begun.⁶¹ While General Franco was lying on his deathbed⁶² and the Spanish government was paralyzed over his succession, on November 6, 1975 the hundreds of thousands volunteers started to march to the border and crossed into the Spanish Sahara without being halted by Spanish soldiers who were stationed there. On November 9, 1975 on orders from King Hassan⁶³, this 'Green March'⁶⁴ stopped at approximately 20 to 30 kilometres from the border and turned around and went back to Morocco. The 'Green March' was a huge political success for King Hassan, not only in his own country but it also strengthened his position abroad. On 14 November 1975 the governments of Spain, Morocco and Mauritania signed an agreement in Madrid in which Spain confirmed to 'decolonize the Territory of Western Sahara by terminating the responsibilities and powers which it possesses over that Territory as administering Power and in conformity with the aforementioned determination and in accordance with the negotiations advocated by the United Nations with the affected

⁵⁸ This party, which was formed in 1974 was the only political movement legally recognized in the Spanish Sahara. They claimed to have 15,000 members in 1975 which belonged to the Reguibat tribe.

⁵⁹ Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara, 10 October 1975

⁶⁰ United Nations Security Council Official Records, 1849th meeting, 20 October 1975

⁶¹ United Nations Decolonization files, No. 17, October 1980

⁶² General Franco died on November 20, 1975

⁶³ In a brief speech held in Agadir on November 9, 1975 Hassan said that the march had accomplished its mission and hinted that Morocco's claim to the Territory would be resolved through negotiations (National Intelligence Bulletin, November 10, 1975)

⁶⁴ The colour green symbolizes the Islam

parties, Spain will proceed forthwith to institute a temporary administration in the Territory, in which Morocco and Mauritania will participate in collaboration with the Yema'a⁶⁵ and to which will be transferred all the responsibilities and powers referred to in the preceding paragraph. It is accordingly agreed that two Deputy Governors nominated by Morocco and Mauritania shall be appointed to assist the Governor-General of the Territory in the performance of his functions. The termination of the Spanish presence in the Territory will be completed by 28 February 1976 at the latest'.⁶⁶ Algeria was not present at the Madrid talks and complaint to the UN Secretary-General that this tripartite agreement was against the earlier Security Council Resolution of October 1975 which talked about 'all parties concerned and interested'⁶⁷. Algeria saw itself as 'party interested' and therefore did not recognize the Madrid Agreement.⁶⁸ The country categorically rejected the position that was taken by Morocco and Mauritania that the Western Sahara belonged to them by historical ties and insisted that the people of the Territory were enabled to decide their own future by means of a referendum organized by the United Nations.⁶⁹ Finally, based on the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and on the results of the Visiting Mission, the UN General Assembly in their plenary meeting on December 10, 1975 requested the interim administration of the Western Sahara 'to take all necessary steps to ensure that all the Saharan populations originating in the Territory will be able to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination through free consultations organized with the assistance of a representative of the United Nations'.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, beginning in mid-November 1975 Moroccan and Mauritanian troops gradually occupied most of the Territory. By mid-January 1976 the last Spanish troops left the Western Sahara.

⁶⁵ The Yema'a was the Spanish Sahara General Assembly consisting of 102 prominent Saharans appointed by the Spanish Government

⁶⁶ Declaration of principles on Western Sahara by Spain, Morocco and Mauritania, Madrid 14 November 1975

⁶⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 377, 22 October 1975

⁶⁸ United Nations Decolonization files, No. 17, October 1980

⁶⁹ United Nations Decolonization files, No. 17, October 1980

⁷⁰ Question of Spanish Sahara, 2435th plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, 10 December 1975