

## Growth of Tension between Morocco and Algeria

Following an interview published in the French Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanite* on Nov. 21, in which President Boumedienne declared that Morocco's takeover of Spanish Sahara threatened the Algerian revolution, King Hassan told a press conference on Nov. 25 that if President Boumedienne's statements were to be taken seriously he (the King) would not be surprised if Algeria declared war on Morocco. He warned Algeria that "wars have to be made not only with armed forces but with people", and maintained that the Algerian people had had no chance to express their opinions even though Algeria claimed to be a democratic people's republic.

President Boumedienne had added in the newspaper interview: "Perhaps the time has come for the Algerian people to prove that it is capable of defending its revolution. I am not like Christ, I shall not hold out my cheek for a second blow. I shall reply according to my means...."

In response to King Hassan's remarks, Radio Algiers on Nov. 25 stated that "the King of Morocco has talked of war" and that this was the first time he had made "remarks so heavy with threats", while *El Moudjahid*, the official daily newspaper, wrote on Nov. 20 that the King's remarks constituted a "scarcely-veiled declaration of war on Algeria".

President Boumedienne also attacked Spain's "pure and simple capitulation" over the Sahara question, in an interview with the Spanish weekly magazine *Cambio-16*. The article, which was censored in Spain before the magazine was allowed to be circulated on Nov. 27, was published in full by the Algerian news agency on that date.

A further sign of Algerian hostility to Spain was the authorization given to the Movement for the Self-Determination and Independence of the Canary Archipelago (MPAIAC see page 26715) to use a powerful transmitter in Algeria which, under the name of Voice of the Free Canaries, functioned daily and was clearly audible in the islands.

At his Nov. 25 press conference King Hassan also disclosed that the demarcation line between the Moroccan and Mauritanian sectors of Spanish Sahara had not yet been finally decided, but that the matter would cause no friction between the two countries. Moreover, he indicated for the first time that clashes with Polisario guerrillas had recently occurred in the north-east of the territory, where Moroccan forces were carrying out "security operations", resulting in some deaths and other casualties. [Polisario also claimed for its part that Moroccan regulars in that area had suffered heavy casualties.]

King Hassan further said that if Spain should regain control over Gibraltar (in respect of which she claimed sovereignty—see 26890 A), Morocco would assume control of the north African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla [see pages 27414-15], in order that Spain should not control both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar.

The creation of a National Provisional Council of the Sahara, which had been established on Dec. 3, was formally announced in Algiers on Dec. 6 when 115 prominent Sahrawis, including 57 members of the *Yemaa* (the Spanish Sahara General Assembly), four Cortes deputies and a number of tribal chiefs arrived in the capital. At a press conference Organized by Polisario, the secretary-general of the *Yemaa* read out a declaration signed

at a meeting at Guelta (in Spanish Sahara) on Nov. 28 by 67 members of the *Yemaa*, and approved by other members who could not attend the meeting, which stated that the *Yemaa* had been dissolved and that the signatories "reaffirm their unconditional support for Polisario as the only legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people... and affirm their wish to continue the struggle to defend their country and its total independence."

The members of the *Yemaa* indicated in the declaration that they had accepted seats in that body only in so far as "Spain had promised to make it into a national authority over the Sahrawi people" and to "allow the people to attain Independence within a short time". Denouncing the tripartite agreement, the signatories accused Spain of "selling Spanish Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania".

The president of the newly-constituted Council, Mr Mohamed Ould Ziou, said that delegations would be sent into all Arab capitals and most other countries of the world to explain the situation of the Sahrawis; copies of the declaration, as well as an appeal denouncing the "inhuman invasion to which the Sahrawis have fallen victim", had been sent to international bodies including the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League and the Islamic Conference.

A further 17 members of the *Yemaa* were among a second group of 85 Sahrawis who arrived in Algiers on Dec. 16 to join the National Provisional Council and Polisario. They reported a "climate of terror" in Western Sahara, where, they said, Moroccan troops had already arrested 500 people in El Aaiun alone.

However, Sheikh Ahmed Ould al Bachir, vice-president of the *Yemaa*, on Jan. 14 pledged his allegiance to King Hassan and told a press conference in Rabat that the tribal chiefs who arrived in Algiers on Dec. 6 had been brought against their will, and that the *Yemaa* had, moreover, approved the tripartite agreement on Dec. 22. Only 16 members—all of whom had been appointed by the Spanish Government rather than by Sahrawis—had voted against the agreement.

Earlier, Sheikh Hadi Khatri Ould Sald Ould Jumani, president of the *Yemaa* and also a member of the *Cortes*, had defected to Morocco on Nov. 3, pledging allegiance to King Hassan at a ceremony in Agadir.

The General Assembly on Dec. 10 adopted two contrasting resolutions (3458 A and) on the future of Spanish Sahara.

The first, known as the "Algerian resolution", made no mention of the existence of a tripartite agreement; it requested Spain to take immediate steps to enable "all Saharans originating in the territory" to exercise their "inalienable right to self-determination" under UN supervision, and appealed to all parties to refrain from unilateral or other action outside the decisions of the General Assembly. The resolution was approved by 88 votes (including Algeria and the Soviet Union) to none, with 41 abstentions (including Spain and the USA); Morocco and Mauritania did not participate in the vote.

The second resolution, known as the "Moroccan resolution", noted the tripartite agreement and requested the interim administration to take all necessary steps to ensure that "all the Saharan populations originating in the territory" were able to exercise their "inalienable right to self-determination" through free consultations organized with the help of a UN representative. It was approved by 56 votes (including Spain, Morocco, Mauritania and the USA) to 42 (including Algeria and the Soviet Union), with 84 abstentions.

Among those countries voting for both resolutions were the nine European Community member-states, while China did not participate in either vote.

Although according to the tripartite agreement Spain was to maintain a presence in the territory until Feb. 28, Morocco rapidly asserted its influence over Western Sahara; Moroccan troops entered El Aaiun on Dec. 11, and following their entry into the southern town of Villa Cisneros on Jan. 11 the last Spanish troops were flown from the territory on Jan. 12. As from Jan. 1 Sahrawis effectively ceased to be Spanish citizens, when responsibility for renewing passports and identity cards passed to the Moroccan and Mauritanian authorities; and by mid-January King Hassan had already appointed a governor for the province of Smara and prefects for several towns.

Moroccan forces on Nov. 28 took over Western Sahara's second largest town, Smara (60 miles south of the Moroccan frontier), apparently with tacit Spanish approval. The troops were led by Colonel Ahmed Dlimi, director of King Hassan's aides de camp and commander of military forces in southern Morocco, who had earlier in the week conferred with General Federico Gomez de Salazar, the Governor-General of Spanish Sahara.

Reports said that en route the convoy of troops had been attacked for more than 10 hours by Polisario guerrillas, and that Moroccan casualties had been evacuated by Spanish helicopters.

The Algerian news agency APS on Nov. 29 accused Spain of collaboration in the takeover and claimed, moreover, that Moroccan troops had on Nov. 1 killed about 160 inhabitants of the town of Al Djiria (east of El Aaiun), mostly women, children and old people, before the last Spanish troops had left the town. An Algerian representative in Barcelona of Sonatrach (the Algerian state oil and gas company) warned on Dec. 1 that Algeria would consider cutting off natural gas supplies to Spain if the withdrawal of Spanish troops left the local population exposed to "massacres

The Moroccan embassy in Madrid on Dec. 6 denied that a massacre had taken place.

Only hours after the approval of the two UN resolutions, some 5,000 Moroccan troops on Dec. 11 marched into El Aaiun. Colonel Dlimi maintained that the move corresponded with the wish of the Sahrawis, who received the troops "with joy", and was to protect them from "terrorist attacks". At the same time, Moroccan delegates in El Aaiun proclaimed in the name of King Hassan that the territory was henceforth Moroccan soil; Mr Oussa Saadi (Secretary of State for Trade, Industry, Mines and Merchant Marines) and Mr Arsalane el Jadidi (High Commissioner for National Promotions) said that Morocco would invest heavily in Western Sahara to raise the living standard there.

Algeria reacted by describing the move as "aggression" and an "invasion", and prevented Moroccans from entering Algeria at some border points. During the following weeks the Moroccan press agency MAP reported a systematic expulsion of Moroccan residents in Algeria, and claimed that by Jan. 14 the number of those expelled had risen to 80,000. According to the Red Cross, many of those expelled were Algerian-born Moroccans, and some Algerian women married to Moroccans were not being allowed to leave with their husbands.

On Dec. 12 Moroccan officials began preparations for a resumption of operations in the Western Sahara phosphate mines. It had been officially disclosed on Dec. 9 that the Spanish National Institute for Industry (INI) had commenced negotiations with the Office cherifien des phosphates, with a view to selling Morocco a 65 per cent share in the Sahara phosphate company, Fosbucraa, with Spain retaining the remaining 35 per cent.

On Dec. 20 the last Spanish troops left El Aaiun, and Dec. 28 Moroccan troops took over civil and military airfields there and occupied military bases.

As Moroccan troops occupied El Aaiun, Polisario guerrillas on Dec. 11 engaged in heavy fighting in Smara and were reported to have captured most of the town. However, *La Vanguardia* (of Barcelona) of Dec. 14 maintained that Spanish envoys sent to Smara by the Moroccan authorities had found the town calm and still in Moroccan hands, while the official Moroccan news agency also denied Polisario's claim.

Incidents also occurred on the border between Spanish Sahara and Mauritania. The Spanish news agency Cifra announced on Dec. 15 that bloody clashes had been taking place since Dec. 10 in La Guera (situated on a peninsula facing Port Etienne—Nouadhibou—Mauritania's chief port), when the Mauritanian Army had attacked about 800 Polisario guerrillas, who subsequently occupied a fishmeal factory and sabotaged the railway line which led to Port Etienne.

An official announcement by the Mauritanian Government on Dec. 28 confirmed Moroccan reports that its forces were in control of La Guera, that 14 Mauritanian troops had been killed and 86 wounded between Dec. 10 and 19, and that "adverse forces" had lost 80 dead and 74 taken prisoner.

General Gomez do Salazar told a press conference on Dec. 15 that Spain had "always defended the Sahrawi people" but that "difficulties created by the Polisario Front prevented us from continuing this protection". Asserting that "Spain has an easy conscience", he claimed that the activities of Polisario had obliged it to accept a tripartite agreement.

Members of Polisario declared on Dec. 21 that they would fight to prevent Morocco and Mauritania from taking over Spanish Sahara and added that the fighting could go on for a long time unless the two "aggressors" withdrew and granted independence to the territory. The Front claimed in the first week of January to have killed 817 Moroccan soldiers and wounded 814 since the Moroccan takeover began in December.

At the end of January 200 Cuban soldiers were reported to have arrived in Spanish Sahara to fight alongside Polisario guerrillas. At the same time a Madrid report, believed to be based on information from Spanish troops formerly in the territory, said that an unknown number of Vietnamese volunteers had also joined the guerrillas; this followed a visit to Algiers on Jan. 6 by General Ngyuen Giap, the North Vietnamese Defence Minister, who met Polisario leaders and subsequently announced North Vietnam's support for the Front.

Moroccan troops on Jan. 11 entered Villa Cisneros—which was henceforth to be known under its Arabic name of Dakhla—and the Mauritanian Army immediately moved 1,000 troops into the town. On the following day the last Spanish forces were flown out of the territory, and the Governor-General returned to El Aaiun, to head the official Spanish delegation until Feb. 28.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reported in early January that 40,000 Sahrawis (about 60 per cent of them children) had left their homes; about half of them were accommodated in camps erected by Polisario near the Algerian border, and the remainder had fled to Algeria.

Following a meeting in Tripoli on Dec. 11 between President Boumediene of Algeria and Colonel Moamer Kadhafi, the Libyan leader, at which their views on "current Arab issues in the Arab east and west" were reported to be "identical", a further meeting took place between the two leaders on Dec. 28–29 at Hassi Messaoud (north-West Algeria). A joint communiqué issued afterwards affirmed that "any attack carried out against either of the two revolutions will be considered by the other as an attack against itself", and noted that the two Governments had decided to intensify their efforts to establish institutional links between their countries. A timetable for future periodic meetings had also been agreed.

President Boumedienne said at a press conference after the meeting that there was complete solidarity between Algeria and Libya on the questions both of Western Sahara and of Palestine.

Following the conclusion of the agreement, the Algerian Government on Dec. 30 recalled its ambassador from Rabat. (In Algiers, only a Moroccan charge' d'affaires had remained since the ambassador's recent appointment to the Moroccan delegation at the United Nations.) On the same day both Morocco and Algeria sent troop reinforcements to their borders, and foreign diplomatic missions in Algiers were informed officially that travel to western and south-western Algeria was prohibited.

In the face of the military build-up, President Mokhtar Ould Daddah (of Mauritania) arrived in Rabat on Dec. 31 for talks with King Hassan, subsequently travelling to Libya and Tunisia on Jan. 1 for talks with Colonel Kadhafi and President Bourguiba respectively.

The Algerian Finance Minister, Mr Ismail Mahroug, announcing the budget on Jan. 2, said that his country's defence spending would increase in 1976 by over one-quarter—the largest increase for 11 years. Expenditure for 1976 would be 1,288 million dinars (£160,000,000) compared with 1,000 million dinars (£180,000,000) in 1975.

Mr Mahroug said that defence spending had previously been restrained so that maximum resources could be devoted to economic and social development, but that "the moment has come to give our popular national Army the means to undertake its mission of defending our country and our revolution".

Figures published in *Le Monde* on Dec. 31 showed that the Algerian armed forces comprised 68,000 men, the Moroccan 61,000 and those of Mauritania 2,600.

Mr Osman, the Moroccan Prime Minister, paid an official visit to France on Jan. 7–9, during which he held talks with President Giscard d'Estaing, M. Jacques Chirac, the French Prime Minister, and M. Jean Sauvagnargues, the Foreign Minister. At a press conference marking the end of his visit, Mr Osman said that "the question of Western Sahara is definitely settled", adding that "for us Polisario does not exist". Speaking of the prospect of war between Morocco and Algeria, he said that this would be "a catastrophe for the people of the region".

Mr Osman said that Algeria had no reason to make war, since it had always maintained that it had no territorial claims on Western Sahara. If Morocco were attacked it would defend itself, but the ensuing "catastrophe" would involve "a waste of energy and effort which would be better devoted to the development of the two countries". Regarding the expulsion of Moroccans from Algeria, Mr Osman affirmed that Morocco would not take reprisals.

The Moroccan Prime Minister also said that a Soviet trawler which had been seized by Moroccan patrol boats off Western Sahara on Jan. 3 had been cleared of suspicion of carrying arms to Polisario.

During the Prime Minister's visit it was announced that King Hassan would pay an official visit to France at the beginning of April 1976.

The Moroccan embassy in Paris subsequently confirmed on Jan. 15 that Morocco had ordered 25 Mirage F-1 fighters from France and had placed options on a further 50. On the same day diplomatic sources in Algiers said that Colonel Kadhafi had, during his meeting with President Boumedienne on Dec. 28–29 [see above], offered Algeria the use of Libyan Mirages. Colonel Kadhafi was also reported to have reiterated Libya's support for Polisario, which he said had been receiving Libyan arms since 1973, and to have stated that it was Polisario

activities which had forced Spain to abandon Spanish Sahara.

*Le Monde* pointed out on Jan. 16 that the Moroccan armed forces had been supplied with French equipment and arms for several years, that the Mirage contract had been under discussion for some months, and that the delivery period was normally about 18 months.

The Algerian news agency APS on Jan. 16 denounced the French sale as "directed against the Algerian revolution". (Times - Guardian - Daily Telegraph - Le Monde - La Vanguardia, Barcelona - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts - Economist - Neue Zürcher Zeitung - Financial Times - New York Times - International Herald Tribune - UN Information Centre, London)

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