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Prospects for the Moroccan Monarchy

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PROSPECTS FOR THE MOROCCAN MONARCHY

SUMMARY NOTE

This estimate was requested by the Department of State to assess the outlook for the Moroccan monarchy in the light of the 16 August coup attempt. It is not intended to supersede NIE 61-72, "The Outlook for Morocco", dated 15 June 1972, SECRET, since the analysis of underlying social, political, and economic issues in that paper remains generally valid.

This paper concludes that King Hassan is in a seriously weakened position and that a successful attack on him could take place at any time. He retains some assets and is a skillful political manipulator, but he devotes insufficient effort to governing. The loyalty of the military establishment, on which the throne has traditionally relied, is severely strained and the King can no longer count upon his inherited role as religious and temporal leader to sustain him.

In the near term, an attempt against Hassan is most likely to come as a blow by a handful of military officers bent on ousting a monarch whom they now believe is an obstacle to Morocco's progress. Over the longer term, a move against Hassan could come as a part of broader deterioration in the body politic, perhaps including a breakdown in public order or the development of a revolutionary movement. Since Hassan has isolated himself from most significant sources of support in the country the odds are that one or another attempt against him will succeed.

THE ESTIMATE

1. In little more than a year, there have been two attempts to eliminate King Hassan. The details of the 16 August attack on his plane and the planning behind it are still unclear, but there is good evidence that the Minister of Defense and strong man of the Moroccan Armed Forces, Major General Mohamed Oufkir, was implicated in the plot. In any case, it is widely believed in Morocco that he directed the attempt and that he was killed for this reason. There do not appear to be any officers capable of replacing Oufkir as a strong commander of the Moroccan Armed Forces. King Hassan has abolished the position of Defense Minister and has assumed direct control of the military establishment.

2. It is noteworthy that both the July 1971 attempt to overthrow the King and the August 1972 effort were carried out by small groups of military officers. We have little hard evidence about the beliefs and ultimate aims of these men. Morocco has fundamental social and economic problems, and discontent is growing in many parts of the population, a state of unease which is reflected—though

rather ineffectively—in the political parties. As far as we know, however, there were no contacts between the plotters and the civilian political leaders. The military plotters were almost exclusively conservative, rural Berbers—the majority element in the officer corps. Available evidence indicates that the would-be regicides aimed at eliminating the King and getting rid of the corrupt and wasteful entourage that surrounds him. The officers did not appear bent on bringing about sweeping social and economic change, although they sought to constrict the monarchy's power severely at least. Relatively few officers were directly involved in each attempt, and among others who may have had advance knowledge none appears to have been sufficiently loyal to report the plans to the palace.

3. Both attempts took place in almost complete isolation from the general public. There was little enthusiasm expressed for either, and few among the populace seem to care whether Hassan survives or not. In his 11 years in power, Hassan has expended much of the political capital he inherited from his father—

the religious and political legitimacy of a three hundred year-old dynasty, the throne's prominent role in the struggle for independence, and a measure of popular regard for the monarch's effectiveness as a ruler.

4. Following the two attempted coups, King Hassan has expressed his determination to go on ruling his country as before, but he cannot be sure who is loyal to him and who is not. Members of the officer corps cannot be sure of their own position or that of their brothers in uniform. The ministers and senior officials for whom service to Hassan has been the route to riches are bound to consider whether their fortunes are now tied to a waning star. Opposition political leaders will consider whether recent events have made the time ripe for them to press Hassan for a share of power in the government or whether they should bide their time. These and other forces—students, labor organizations, religious leaders—will be jockeying for advantage in the months to come.

Hassan's Position: Liabilities and Assets

5. The key question of what effect this second coup attempt will have on Hassan himself is yet to be answered. He has twice shown an admirable capacity to escape from a hail of bullets and take charge of the situation. He has also over the years demonstrated great ability at political manipulation, balancing this political party, that clique or that person off against one another. But he has also devoted a large part of his time to the pursuit of pleasure. If Hassan cannot buy the loyalty of his officers and administrators nor count upon his inherited role as religious and temporal leader to win him popular support, his future would seem to lie in changing his method of governing and giving the appearance at least of having the welfare of his people at heart. The coup attempt of 1971 did not teach him anything in this regard. The attempt of 1972 may, but we doubt it strongly. His initial response has been to blame

virtually everyone else in Morocco for the conditions that brought attempts on his life. He does not seem to recognize that his own performance can be faulted; he is a very traditional monarch in the sense that he believes authority is his by right of inherited status and does not need to be earned by effective governing of his realm.

6. Traditionally the Moroccan military establishment has been a basic prop for the throne, providing not only the power to maintain internal security but a cadre of favored people from which appointments to key provincial administrative positions were made. There are no doubt many officers who remain loyal to the King, but he cannot be sure who they are. He reacted to the disloyalty of a few by giving a scathing talk to senior officers of the Royal Moroccan Forces in which he impugned their integrity and that of the institution of which they are a part. Furthermore, this denunciation was broadcast to the entire population. He has taken over the running of the military establishment on grounds that he cannot trust any of his military subordinates; in these circumstances the loyalty of the military has been put under severe strain.

7. Since Hassan's reliance on Oufkir (who had been close to King Hassan and to his father) turned out to have been misplaced, Hassan must worry deeply about the loyalty of others. With Oufkir dead there is a gap in the administration which cannot be readily filled. Temporarily, the King has appointed General Driss Ben Omar to assist him in administering the armed forces. But the General is not considered to be a strong person; moreover, he is not in good health and has the further disadvantage of being an Arab in charge of a largely Berber officer corps.

8. In the aftermath of the two coup attempts there has been considerable weeding out of top levels in the Moroccan Armed Forces. In contrast to the 15 generals serving in June 1971,

there are now only four. By purging the top echelon of the armed forces, however, Hassan also runs the risk of putting into important positions officers in the ranks of major to colonel who may be even more disaffected with the monarchy. The younger of these men, frequently better trained and educated than their seniors, appear to have chafed under the command of older generals, many of whom were pampered by the King and had become tainted with his dissolute life style. The purge has removed, however, virtually all the senior officers who had followings, and it may take some time before new leading personalities appear and cliques form around them.

9. We have at present very little direct evidence as to attitudes of individuals or groups within the Moroccan officer corps. The fact that two groups, within a period of little more than a year, have taken the risks involved in an assassination attempt should be convincing evidence of deep dissatisfaction in the officer corps with Hassan's rule. We doubt that Hassan's purges have eradicated this dissatisfaction. Indeed, there are signs that his tongue-lashing and withdrawal of ammunition from military units has turned others against him. The attempts of 1971 and 1972 were made by officers who evidently sought more efficient government, but were conservative in political outlook. As younger officers move up in seniority we believe the attitude of would-be coup-makers is likely to change, moving toward more radical social and political forms.

10. There are more persons of Arab origin among younger officers and thus a greater chance of any given individual being influenced by political ideas in other Arab states. Libya has been loud in praise of Moroccan plotters, although there is no evidence of Libyan contact with either the 1971 or 1972 plotters. The Libyans are assisting Moroccan civilian exiles, but they appear to have no direct working relationship with dissi-

dents inside Morocco. Moreover, Qaddafi's regime commands little respect in the Moroccan Armed Forces. The Algerians, who are more likely to have influence in Morocco, have no love for Hassan or the monarchy, but are concerned that a successor might be worse from their point of view. Hence, Algiers will be cautious about supporting anti-Hassan elements.

11. Hassan does have some assets. The countryside, loyal to the monarchy in a passive way, provides a backdrop of stability. The King cannot count on rural support to deter opposition initiatives, however. Such support as he derives from these grass roots is diffused and disorganized and, in the King's mind, probably exaggerated. Moreover, the rural populace is largely unarmed and would not constitute an effective counterforce in the event of further blows at him.

12. There is a substantial number of court officers, senior officials and ministers, such as Prime Minister Karim-Lamrani and the Benhima brothers (Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Interior), who owe their positions and frequently their wealth to Hassan's favor. Some of these will serve him well, either out of conviction that his way is correct or perhaps as a consequence of seeing no alternative for themselves but to support his rule. Others probably will distance themselves somewhat in an effort to avoid ruination if the royal house is overthrown. But virtually all of these people will devote a certain amount of time and energy to insuring that they appear loyal to King Hassan, to assessing the loyalty of others, and to putting assets away abroad for the future. This, plus Hassan's assumption of more direct control of day-to-day decisions, is likely to result in a decline in governmental efficiency. The King himself has set a poor standard of attention to administration, budgetary matters, and the like, and shows no sign of changing.

13. The intelligence apparatus of the government is likely to absorb a great amount of the King's attention. It has already failed to alert him of two potentially disastrous blows at the throne and he must try to insure that he is not taken by surprise a third time. His principal intelligence officer is the experienced Colonel Ahmed Dlimi who heads the palace intelligence service. Dlimi has served Hassan in a variety of intelligence and security posts over the past 10 years. We presume, however, that Hassan will not depend on one service alone but will also try to place loyal officers in charge of the military intelligence department and of the security apparatus within the Ministry of Interior. He will no doubt be willing to put up with the inefficiency of a number of competing services in the hope of increasing the chances of receiving warning of impending danger.

14. The King will seek to maintain his control by balancing various military and security forces. He reportedly plans to reduce the size of the regular army (now about 50,000) and may lean more on the gendarmerie and other internal security forces. In the near term at least, Hassan probably could count on these forces, which total 12,000 men spread around the country, and on various elite units of the army to crack down on manifestations of public disorder. The gendarmerie has received more favorable treatment than the armed forces and has shown no signs of disloyalty in either the 1971 or 1972 coup attempts.

15. Hassan also benefits from the lack of unity and common purpose among those who oppose him. The legal civilian political parties in Morocco wish to share some of Hassan's power. They have little in common with the military establishment. Moreover, neither the politicians nor the military are likely to believe that they can force Hassan into the role of a constitutional monarch. The parties, principally the Istiqlal and its offshoot the Na-

tional Union of Popular Forces, have steadily lost effectiveness over the last 10 years or so. They have had little success in attracting support from an apathetic populace. Their very poor performance in office in the late 1950s and early 1960s made it relatively easy for Hassan to push them aside even before he assumed direct rule and suspended parliament in 1965. The leadership of both parties is far from inspiring, is given to quarrels, and has been readily out-manuevered by the King.

16. Hassan's technique has been to hint at certain limited reforms, to dispense some royal favors, and to promise a chance at office—and the perquisites that go with it—for political leaders willing to collaborate or cooperate with him. He has generally held out just enough promise to attract the more venal party leaders and to divide party councils about the advisability of going along with him. And on at least one occasion he has double-crossed the parties by making a political move during a period when they understood him to be awaiting their reply on a royal offer.

17. In present circumstances the political leaders face a dilemma. If the King offers them some role in the government, as he may well do if he permits elections under the new constitution, they would risk alienating some of their supporters by accepting, since Hassan almost certainly would not offer them truly meaningful political power, nor even a chance at it through free elections. If, on the other hand, they choose to go into outright opposition, say employing tactics of public meetings and demonstrations, they risk severe and violent repression from the security forces. In this situation our best guess is that, while some political leaders may reach an accommodation with the King, most will try to straddle the fence as long as possible and in effect do very little but make some verbal remonstrations against the monarchy. They may be influenced

in this course by a judgment that the King will not last for long.

Can Hassan Survive?

18. Hassan will be disposed to employ every manipulative weapon at his command—including the rearrangement of foreign ties—in order to maintain his throne. Morocco presently has close bonds to France and to the US. The former is the major source of foreign investment and is the principal foreign cultural influence in Morocco; the latter supplies some \$45 million annually in aid, mostly in surplus food. Hassan himself is a francophile, and he is basically friendly to the US, but the foreign ties he favors are not generally popular in Morocco. Prior to the latest coup attempt, he had been increasing the French role in his internal security apparatus; he may now attempt to engage the US more firmly in defense of his regime, calling for greater intelligence support and other forms of assistance in the security sphere, despite the domestic opposition that would follow such a move.

19. If he comes to sense that political party leaders are making headway against him, however, he probably would want to divert attention to other matters. The classic maneuver in such circumstances is pandering to xenophobic sentiment. He might well choose to move against French investment in Morocco or to reassert Moroccan claims to Spanish territories in North Africa. In addition, the US military presence in Morocco,* principally the communications facilities at Kenitra, could appear to him as a particularly inviting target. Hassan probably has a nagging suspicion that

*The US military presence in Morocco consists of a training team for the Moroccan Air Force and a communications school at Kenitra, plus a naval communications facility at two sites near Kenitra, which serves the Sixth Fleet. Some 4,000 personnel and dependents are present in the country.

somehow one of the scores of Americans at the training mission in Kenitra could have given warning of impending trouble on 16 August. In any event, he knows that civilian political forces, particularly the Istiqlal Party, are opposed to the US military presence. Hassan is aware that some circles in Morocco favor the US presence, but circumstances might develop in which he concluded that he would gain important nationalist support by ejecting the Americans.

20. The elements of classic tragedy are present in Morocco. Some monarchs—Hussein and the Shah come to mind—have faced similarly parlous situations and survived. But they had such assets as a body of loyal subordinates, a disposition to work at the business of governing, and a willingness to make the throne an agent of change. Hassan has lost the support of most important groups in the country and the people generally are apathetic as to his fate. Moreover, he is a dilettante, is convinced of his own righteousness and seems unable to comprehend that his survival and that of his dynasty depends, at the very least, on winning the support of some influential groups and on administering the country more effectively.

21. Another effort to remove Hassan could come very shortly or it could be delayed for years. In the near term, it is most likely to come as those of 1971 and 1972 have—a blow by a handful of military officers bent on removing a monarch whom they now believe is an obstacle to Morocco's progress. In short, further blows at the King appear certain; he is not of a character to abdicate and go into exile. He will stay and try to ward off blows, even though there is no way of knowing when or where they will come. But since Hassan has cut himself off from most significant sources of support in the country, the odds are that one or another attempt against him will succeed.

22. Even if Hassan stays in power for a year or two, there are potential sources of formidable political trouble in Morocco. Unemployment and poverty are endemic and growing in the cities which, with their large numbers of impoverished slum dwellers and frustrated students and intellectuals, are breeding grounds for dissent. Organized labor, the student organizations, or radical political groups such as the communists' illegal Party for Liberation and Socialism may come to believe that the recent blows show King Hassan's weakness. They could try to further weaken the King by such revolutionary tactics as mass demonstrations, general strikes, and riots, and perhaps even by turning to urban terrorism. Hassan would certainly respond to such development with vigor. There is a chance that some of the forces he relies on to maintain order might be unwilling to take serious risks on behalf of a King to whom they are no longer loyal. And if violence were to persist over an extended period, it could add a very unsettling element to Hassan's control, perhaps leading to a breakdown in public order.

After Hassan?

23. Just what Morocco would look like without Hassan is most difficult to delineate at this point in time. The makeup of the forces that toppled him would of course do much to determine the nature of the regime that succeeds him. A successful coup by another group of conservative Berber officers could

produce a government not notably different in political outlook than the present one, but presumably less corrupt and possibly more efficient. On the other hand, the initiative might be seized by more socialist-minded officers from the middle or lower ranks. Their orientation could be basically "Morocco-first" and reformist, or it could be of a revolutionary cast and more militantly Arab.

24. Any successor government, even a re-gency, would encounter an increase in the divisive tendencies characteristic of the country. For all Hassan's extravagance and inattention to the nuts and bolts of government, the royal house has provided a certain focus for the disparate elements of Moroccan society.

25. Given the problems it would face, almost any government that took over from Hassan would seek to increase its own popularity by a cheap and easy victory. The foreign presence in Morocco would almost certainly come under attack. Inviting the US to leave its military communications facilities would be an obvious move for any government. A nationalist one would almost certainly do this—and probably also reduce the French presence. Even a conservative regime would be tempted to take anti-foreign measures to attract the support of political elements in the cities. Under almost any conceivable circumstances, there would be substantially less willingness to permit a continued US military presence than we have enjoyed since Morocco became independent.