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MOROCCO - A QUICK GLANCE.

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Dear Peter;

I arrived in Morocco a couple of weeks ago and promptly set off for an extended tour around the country. My two next reports or so will be impressions from my trip around this most western of the Maghrebi countries. I will finish up my stay here in Rabat, the capital.

Since the next reports will be more travel reports than anything else, I would like to set down in this initial report from Morocco some of the most recent political and social events that happened here. I must admit a certain reluctance to come here. It is the only North African country I have not visited extensively, and its politics have never really intrigued me. Only a few weeks into my stay here I am already changing my mind. Of all the Maghrebi countries Morocco has perhaps best preserved its own traditions and customs. Not even in gigantic Algeria or isolationist Libya have I encountered the kind of authenticity that seems to be the norm here.

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There is a certain contradiction in Morocco. It is ruled by a modern monarch, Hassan II, who maintains a traditional court and traditional methods to rule his country. Most of what the king says is literally law. As Commander of the Faithful Hassan is both the spiritual and temporal leader of his country. The Moroccan Supreme Court decided in 1970 that the king was beyond its jurisdiction and that his acts could not be questioned.

Surrounding the king are a relatively small elite group of urban intellectuals drawn from the grandes familles of Fes, Rabat, Casablanca and Marrakech. As in Tunisia, those who make their way up to a cabinet position are almost entirely at the

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mercy of the king. As the Tunisian leader, Hassan rules in a paternalistic fashion. Both refer to their people as "my children" and both have carefully controlled whatever opposition might emerge. As in Tunisia, Morocco is in effect a one-party system. The Istiqlal (Independence) Party grew out of Morocco's nationalist movement and, like Tunisia's Destour, became an instrument used by the ruler to control the political process. Although there are some opposition parties in Morocco, they have been eviscerated to the point of non-existence. They have also been blamed for much of the country's recent social turmoil and saw most of their publications suspended these last few years.

Morocco's parliament is also largely moribund. It ratifies in essence what the king proclaims. For a few years he even suspended it, claiming that it served no function. Only a few years ago was it reinstated, largely because Hassan has been trying to project himself as an enlightened monarch. This pro-western initiative has more to do with the fact that Hassan needs capital and technology from the West than with a genuine desire to rule according to the rules of popular consultation.

As the other North African countries, Morocco bears the impact of French colonial rule. The administrative structure in the country is modeled on the métropole. The security forces, on whom the king ultimately depends, are divided into a number of complementary and competing elements: the National Police, the Auxiliary Forces, the Royal Gendarmerie and the Royal Armed Forces. Morocco's army remains essentially neutral. Although the king has on at least two occasions needed its help during coup attempts, there are no indications that the army is loyal to him. Many analysts agree that the army sided with the King until now for reasons of self-interest.

It is in this atmosphere that Hassan must continue to divide-and-rule, an activity that goes back centuries in Morocco and one he has been able to exploit skillfully until now. After the last coup attempt in 1972 the armed forces were reorganized completely, and the king himself took over direct command for a while. But this produced another conundrum. The centralization after 1972 increasingly interfered with Hassan's policies in the Western Sahara. This large piece of desert real estate, abandoned by Spain in the early 1970s, was gradually palmed in by Morocco, based on claims that date back several decades.

The Western Sahara remains the biggest stumbling block for the Kingdom today. It has until now been a source of political support for Hassan - even the opposition parties have heartily endorsed the annexation of what is now known as "southern Morocco." In 1975 he organized the Green March, a peaceful occupation of the Western Sahara by an estimated 350,000-500,000 Moroccans. In 1979 the territory was formally annexed, but Morocco has in fact only controlled the most strategic points and towns within the area. These last few years the Moroccan army has built a wall - several hundreds of miles long - around their newly acquired territory. All of this to keep the Polisario out, a group of native guerillas who are actively supported by Algeria. (The issue remains the biggest obstacle to improving the relations between the two countries, even though contacts do take place;

a recent meeting between representatives of the two countries took place at a village near the border but without any apparent result.)

While the war in the Sahara has added to Hassan's political capital, it has also increasingly contributed to the economic woes of his country. By 1979 the desert war was conservatively estimated to cost \$1 million per day. Since then the kingdom has spent hundreds of millions more for infrastructure in the area, permanently puts almost 150,000 of its soldiers on duty and diverts a substantial amount of badly needed fuel to its Saharan adventure. Figures on all of this cannot be obtained but well-informed sources put Morocco's military expenditures at close to half of the annual government budget. (Tunisia in comparison less than 5 percent; Algeria around one quarter of its budget.)

Add to this a number of disastrous crops in the last few years, a weak world market for phosphates - Morocco's biggest single cash earner after revenues from its expatriate population - and you can understand some of the difficulties the country labors under. In January 1984 there were serious riots in Casablanca and other major cities. As in Tunisia a few years earlier they were sparked by higher food prices. And as Mr. Bourguiba, Hassan had to personally intervene to rescind the measures taken by his ministers.

There is, however, little the king can do to improve the economic situation of his country. As all other North African countries, Morocco witnessed a serious decline of its agricultural sector. Still exporting grain at the time of its independence in 1956 - the same year as Tunisia - Morocco now imports most of its grain and some other staples. Although attempts have been made to correct this situation, the country seems unlikely to ever reach selfsufficiency again: the flight from the countryside into the cities is as severe here as in Egypt, Algeria or Tunisia. The slums around Casablanca have reached a point of no return. And amidst all this squalor disaffection and frustration has grown dramatically. Unemployment remains endemic, estimated at half the active population.

Since opposition is carefully controlled, much of it takes place underground. As in Tunisia analysts have noted the impact of muslim fundamentalists during the riots of 1984, but I have little information to share with my readers about their role in Morocco. There is very little available about the subject. My own impression is that the movement is much weaker than in either Algeria or Tunisia and I wonder if this fact doesn't derive from the physical isolation in this rough and mountainous country, and from the fact that many of the Berbers here adhere to a rather rigid, almost orthodox ^{interpretation} ~~reference~~ of Quranic scripture. In any case, the absence of a fundamentalist movement has seemingly little to do with Hassan's position as Commander of the Faithful. I will try and report later on some aspects of religion here.

Most social scientists that deal with the problem of stability in the Third World consider two alternatives as likely: either some form of socioeconomic and political development or control and repression. I have outlined in my last report from Tunisia (DJV-17) the route President Bourguiba took: initially an attempt to make the necessary reforms and then, impatient with the results and paternalistic to a large extent, a turn-around to an autocratic system that continues functioning.

Hassan has also faced the same choices since he came to power. But in Morocco the difficulties are perhaps greater, and of a different nature. Here loyalty to tribe, sect and other smaller groups - often formed in a climate of widespread corruption and clientelism - produce some unique obstacles. This is what I hinted at when I wrote in the beginning of this report that the country possesses a much larger and lingering sense of authenticity than any of the other Maghrebi countries I have visited.

How the King will deal with all of these difficulties cannot be forecast. As Bourguiba in Tunisia he has built around him a formidable clique of supporters - supporters perhaps only because their positions entitle them to many things denied to the average Moroccan. The Commander of the Faithful and the Supreme Commander have much in common. Each man has until now skillfully exploited the differences that exist between different groups in their countries. The only real major difference is that the role of the army in Morocco is much larger than the (until recently) benignly neglected armed forces in Tunisia.

It has been fashionable for a while to predict Hassan's demise. But that - like Bourguiba's death in Tunisia - has been a speculation for too long. As of now the Commander of the Faithful seems clearly in control. The country may be experiencing difficult economic times and a rather colorless political existence, but that doesn't seemingly have much impact on the King.

I could only hint very briefly at the very rich and varied political and social history and remaining problems in this country. As I'm typing this report I'm traveling through southern Morocco near Ouarzazate, a stronghold of Berber history and customs. My next two or three reports will be on my trip, after which I will stay in Rabat before going on to Algeria.

All the best,

Danswaine

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