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MOROCCO: ANATOMY OF A PALACE REVOLUTION THAT FAILED

The process of modernization in Morocco is dramatically symptomized by the decline of traditional authority. Postindependence politics have been in a state of permanent crisis, and the monarchy could only survive as any other political alternative promised imminent chaos. The abortive military coup of Skhirat in July 1971 was only another link in the chain of events that have perpetuated internal crisis. The army's massive interference in national politics was, however, a novelty. It had the effect of greatly accelerating the latent process of disintegration of traditional society and politics.

In the period before the putsch, the monarchy's strength had rested to an extent on two pillars of traditionalism. These were the urban clan establishment of traditionally prominent commercial (Fassi) and civil servant (*maghzen* and *shaifiran*) families, and the martial Berber nobility from the Atlas and Rif mountains, the traditional area of dissidence (*bled as-siba*).[1] Postindependence 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 army rebellion not only marked the end of this alliance, but also the point where the traditional system of patronage, manipulation, and institutionalized corruption revolving around the king was no longer workable. In the putsch's aftermath, the Berber military establishment emerged thoroughly decimated as eight of the army's thirteen Berber generals[2] had died in the event. The political clan establishment was shocked into a state of *attentisme* and was showing little inclination to reconsolidate its commitments to the monarchy.[3] As a result, the king was more isolated than ever before, and he was forced to look for political support outside of the traditional establishment. The most important outcome of this process so far has been the acceptance of a more democratic constitution by referendum on 1 March 1972, and the promise of a 'government of national union'.[4]

ARMY STRENGTH AND ORGANIZATION

The total strength of the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) can be estimated at

[1] For a summary of Morocco's clan constellations, see Octave Marais, 'La classe dirigeante au Maroc', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 14 (Aug. 1964), 711–712.

[2] The Moroccan army has only one Arab general, Driss Ben Oamar.

[3] John Waterbury, *The Coup Manqué*, American Universities Field Staff Reports, North Africa Series, 15, 1 (July 1971), 16.

[4] *The Times*, 4 March 1972, p. 13.

60,000 men which includes 1,200 for the Navy and 3,000 for the Air Force. The FAR's supreme commander is the king, who is also chief of the General Staff and of the Royal Military House. The Army, Navy, and Air Force fall within the purview of the General Staff, while the Royal Guard and the Royal Gendarmerie are subordinate to the Royal Military House. The decision-making authority of the Ministry of Defence is confined to administrative matters. The Army has two motorized brigades, one armored brigade, one paratroop brigade, one light security brigade, and twelve infantry battalions. These are grouped in six military regions. The Navy has one base and the Air Force has four. The National Security Police and the paramilitary forces which include the Auxiliary Forces are attached to the Ministry of the Interior. Their strength is approximately 40,000.[5]

The First Armored Brigade, potentially the strongest FAR contingent, is equipped with Czech, Soviet, and French armor, in particular heavy T-54 and light AMX-13 tanks. The Air Force uses American and French aircraft, which includes twelve F-5A Northrop supersonic fighter bombers, a number of jet trainers, and a small fleet of Agusta Bell and Alouette helicopters.[6]

THE SENIOR OFFICERS' DISCONTENT

Since none of the putsch leaders has survived, their motivations have remained obscure. It is undeniable, however, that the putsch occurred against a general background of growing unrest among the senior officers, which related directly to the conventional system of royal patronage, clan politics, and corruption. Though King Hassan II had endeavored to promote an apolitical technocratic orientation among his officers, clan competition and politization had gradually engulfed the army. The senior officers of the over-forty age group with ranks above lieutenant-colonel were among the most favored in the royal patronage system. Five and possibly seven[7] of the FAR's fourteen generals, however, were implicated in the putsch, including Mohammed Medbouh, commander of the Royal Military House, 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 but significant group of high-ranking junior officers, mostly of Berber origin, participated in the rebellion, notably Colonel Ababouh, commander of the Non-Commissioned Officers School of Ahermoumou, Colonel Abdelhaye Labsir, commander

[5] This figure is a rough estimation, based on J. C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 341.

[6] For details on the FAR's military hardware, see Stuart H. Schaar, *The Arms Race and Defense Strategy in North Africa*, American Universities Field Staff Reports, North Africa Series, 13, 9 (Dec. 1967), 3–15.

[7] 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.

of region 5 (Meknès), Colonel Chelouati (General Staff officer), and Colonel Feneri, commander of the military school of Kénitra.

The senior officers' discontent arose primarily from a deeply felt sense of status insecurity, for which material rewards from royal patronage were unable to compensate.[8] Royal surveillance prevented them from transforming their command positions into bases of personal power, and the junior officers' progressive advance to operational command posed a direct threat to their own privileged status. The senior officers were powerless to halt the rising tide of corruption among politicians and civil servants, which played into the hands of the leftist opposition and endangered political stability.

Politicians and civil servants had progressively outdistanced the senior officers as far as accumulation of material wealth was concerned. In particular, the success of prominent Fassi clans in appropriating a large share from the pool of recovered colonial land posed a problem for the senior officers. Originating from traditionally prestigious Berber clans, these officers had numerous connections in the countryside. The government's agrarian reform program, as laid down in the Five Year Plan (1968–1972), favored the modern irrigated sector which included the former colonial land. This was felt to be deliberately favoring Fassi interests and discriminating against large Berber landowners who were essentially confined to the nonirrigated sector.

The Fassi politicians were less scrutinized by the king than were the senior officers, and they were in a better position to add political power to wealth and status. By April 1971, they were not only in control of the office of the prime minister, but also of most strategically important ministerial departments and administrative agencies. In December 1970 a Fassi politician, Ahmed Bahnini, was nominated minister of Defense, which the army considered as symptomatic of Fassi hegemony in national politics. In regional administration, traditional Berber power was gradually eroded as many Berber *caid*s were replaced by modern-trained Arab functionaries, many of whom were thought to be of Fassi origin.

With the Fassi's increasing wealth, incidents of corruption became more numerous and out of proportion.[9] These were seized by the press, and public opinion was gradually aroused to the state of degeneration of the political establishment. Appropriation by the city clans of land in the rural sector produced a series of peasant riots, and the 1970 resignation of two ministers, Benhima and Imani, was thought to have been connected with an incident over land speculation.[10] In April 1971 three ministers were implicated in a corruption affair and subsequently discharged. The king refused, however, to bring charges against his ministers, and it was apparent that their dismissal amounted to

[8] The degree of status insecurity among some of the senior officers is indicated by King Hassan's reference to General Medbouh as a 'paranoid schizophrenic'. See *Le Monde*, 19 July 1971.

[9] For a more detailed description of the corruption incidents, see Waterbury, *Coup Manqué*, pp. 3–4.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

little more than a temporary suspension from office. It might have been this recognition which prompted General Medbouh and his fellow senior officers to act on their own.

Within the army itself, the senior officers' position was even more precarious than at the level of national politics. Rapidly succeeding shifts of command and a tight security system prevented their concentration of power. In fact, the thought of a military take-over by colonels and generals on the model of Middle Eastern military coups was, for a long time, the primary source of anxiety for the king.[11] Control over senior officers was based on a complex system which involved the king himself, the General Staff, and for a time the general inspector, the National Security Police, and junior staff officers and brought on competition among colonels, generals, and regional and brigade commanders. Regional commanders were rarely entrusted with more than three battalions,[12] and brigade commanders were based in the capital where the king and the General Staff were able to supervise them more effectively. The local power of regional commanders was checked by the fully motorized contingents of the Auxiliary Forces and the National Security Police which were at the disposal of the minister of the Interior or of the provincial governor.

Products of the French and Spanish armies and strongly influenced by the elite spirit prevailing in their officer corps, the FAR's senior officers had come to consider themselves a privileged caste, protected by the king's benevolence from any major changes in their status. The king had greatly contributed to the formation and reinforcement of this caste thinking as long as it was opportune. Promotions and command commissions for junior officers, who were primarily of Arab middle-class origin, were delayed as long as possible. When the king finally succumbed to the junior officers' demands, it was inevitable that the senior officers would feel betrayed.

Before 1959 there were no promotions at all and, in 1962, there were only thirty officers above the rank of captain, as compared with twelve hundred subaltern officers.[13] In the following years, pressure for promotions increased, and the king began to satisfy these demands by creating positions for military officers in the civil service. This was designed to confer status without power. In 1962, twenty-five officers were sent to attend special courses qualifying them as assistants to provincial governors.[14] In 1964, the army was given control over the Ministry of the Interior, and army officers began to assume a major role in local administration and politics. Moreover, the army was used for a variety of civilian tasks which included disaster relief, school building, and the like.[15]

[11] I. William Zartman, *Morocco: Problems of New Power* (New York: Atherton Press, 1964), p. 107.

[12] Léo Hamon, ed., *Le Role Extra-Militaire de l'Armée dans le Tiers-Monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), p. 40.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[14] *Akhbar Ad-Dounia*, 29 June 1962.

[15] For more details on the FAR's civilian functions, see Hugh Hanning, *The Peaceful Use of Military Forces* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 141–143.

In late 1967 the king designed the Program for National Advancement, and an initial thirty officers were assigned to local administrative functions.[16] At the operational level, the king designed plans for the creation of military regions which provided for the establishment of a series of staff positions for junior officers. Sporadically announced since 1961, these plans produced few tangible results, and in 1971 the establishment of regional staffs was still at a very provisional stage.

A real opportunity for the advancement of junior officers was finally provided by the progressive mechanization of the army. As opposed to their seniors, the junior officers had no combat experience. Their military training at the Royal Military Academy (former military academy of Dar al-Beida) at Meknès and in special training courses abroad had strongly emphasized the technical 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, the Paratroopers, the Armored Forces, the Artillery, the Light Security Brigade, and transmission and engineering contingents. Junior officers of the ranks of major or lieutenant-colonel advanced to the level of battalion commanders in all motorized units. They took full command of the First Light Security Brigade (Mohammed Assari), the Paratroop Brigade (Loubaris), the four Air Force bases, and the three technical instruction centers. They were in command of the engineering and transmission departments and three of the four specialized *bureaux* in the General Staff. They advanced to positions of second-in-command in the Air Force (Brahim Aguizoul), the Navy (Mohammed Aziz), and the Royal Gendarmerie (Abdelkader Allam). Junior officers with the rank of colonel commanded the Noncommissioned Officers School of Ahermoumou (Ababouh) and the military school of Kénitra (Feneri). In all of these positions, the junior officers were able to challenge their seniors' authority on the grounds of technical competency, and in their turn, senior officers resented the fact that units commanded by junior officers often received the most sophisticated equipment.

INCOHERENCE AMONG THE SENIOR OFFICERS AND THE PUTSCH LEADERS

The putsch failed, because its leaders were unable to gain the support of either the entire senior officer corps or a significant faction from among the non-Berber junior officers. Moreover, there were both senior and junior officers among the putsch leaders, and their tactics and strategic goals proved mutually incompatible.

The senior officers who were implicated in the putsch were a close-knit group with many ties of solidarity.[17] All of them originated from the Middle Atlas and Rif Berber nobility which had once been closely associated with the

[16] Schaar, *Arms Race*, p. 17.

[17] For details on the putsch officers' personal backgrounds, see *l'Action*, 14 July 1971.

French protectorate. General Habibi and General Amharech came from the same tribe, the Beni Mtir.[18] Being of approximately the same age, their middle and late forties, they had been well acquainted throughout their military careers. All of them were alumni from the military academy of Dar al-Beida, and veterans from the French army's World War II campaigns, the Indochina war and the Algerian–Moroccan border conflict in 1963. Because of their family backgrounds and military careers, they were staunchly pro-French, and both their participation in the Indochina war and the border conflict with Algeria had produced a pronounced anticommunist and antisocialist orientation. They strongly disapproved of the deterioration of Franco-Moroccan relations in connection with the Ben Barka affair,[19] and they were highly suspicious of the king's policy of *rapprochement* with the Soviet Union and Algeria.[20] This suspicion was particularly directed against Air Force General Driss N'Michi who had played a key role in the negotiations with the Soviet Union and Algeria.

Ever since the 1963 conflict with Algeria, when the FAR had received enthusiastic popular support, the commanding senior officers from this episode had resisted the king's efforts to transform the FAR into a necessarily unpopular instrument of internal security maintenance. The king's conception had only been supported by those senior officers who were directly associated with the build-up of the National Security Police, the Mobile Intervention Force, the Light Security Group (GLS), and, subsequently, Light Security Brigade.[21] These officers were General Driss Ben Oamar, the FAR's only Arab General, General Mohammed Oufkir, Colonel Bouazza Boulhimez, and Colonel Hassan Hammou. Driss Ben Oamar and Boulhimez were the FAR's two most prominent veterans from the 1960 UN Congo expedition which had essentially been a police operation. In 1971, General Driss had no army command, while Colonel Boulhimez was commander of the Royal Gendarmerie. General Mohammed Oufkir had been appointed minister of the Interior and commander of the National Security Police in July 1964, and in 1965 he broke up the Casablanca riots with only GLS support and without the use of regular army units.[22] Colonel Hammou had previously been commander of the Royal Gendarmerie and in 1971, he was second-in-command of the First Armored Brigade. The special relations between the king and these officers were greatly resented by the rest of the senior officer corps. In particular, General Oufkir's Security Police represented an ever present threat to all senior officers, and General Driss's functions as major general and general inspector (between 1967 and 1970) had been primarily of a supervisory nature.

[18] Waterbury, *Coup Manqué*, p. 18.

[19] For details on the Ben Barka affair, see Stuart Schaar, 'L'Affair Ben Barka: The Kidnapping Casts Its Shadow', *Africa Report* (March 1966).

[20] The border settlement with Algeria included the understanding of Algerian support for Moroccan claims on Spanish territories. This may have contributed to General Mezziane's alienation from the king. Mezziane is a veteran of the Spanish civil war and was a close friend of General Franco.

[21] For the earlier history of the GLS, see Zartman, *Morocco: Problems*, pp. 109–110.

[22] Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics*, p. 344.

All of the senior officers associated with the king's police conception of the army remained loyal during the putsch. Boulhimez was executed by the putschists, and Colonel Hammou probably escaped the same fate because he was a cousin of General Ahmazoun Hammou. General Driss had been appointed minister of the Post, Telephone, and Telegraph Services, and he no longer played a major role in the FAR. General Oufkir may have played a double game of supporting the putsch and only at the last moment changing sides.[23] Another two close associates of the king, the Generals Gharbaoui and N'Michi, were also executed by the putschists. As the FAR's youngest general (aged 41), Gharbaoui had been in command of the army's potentially strongest contingent, the First Armored Brigade. Similar to Oufkir's role during the putsch, Major General Bouhali's position has remained ambiguous. He probably decided to oppose the putsch only when control had slipped from the senior officers into the hands of radical junior officers, in particular Ababouh.[24] The only commander of a military region who remained loyal was Colonel Benkirane (region 4, Agadir). He was an Arab, and as commander of the least important military region he was only of peripheral significance.

All of the junior officers among the putsch's leadership were of Berber origin; in fact, Colonel Ababouh came from the same tribe as General Medbouh (Iqzinnayan). Their political orientations and military tactics were, however, radically different from those of their seniors. It is probable that the revolutionary socialist and republican slogans broadcast over Radio Morocco were ordered by Ababouh, and there are indications that he personally ordered the massacre of Skhirat.[25] The broadcast support from Radio Libya also suggest a pro-Arab, socialist tendency among the junior putschists. Major Manouzi, who was executed for his participation in the putsch, had definite connections with the former pro-Algerian and Socialist Liberation Army (AOL),[26] and his brother was among the 161 people who went on trial at Marrakech on 14 June 1971 for leftist-inspired conspiracy.[27]

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The putsch was not timed to coincide with deteriorating senior officer power,

[23] General Oufkir's ambiguous role is indicated by the fact that his closest collaborator in the Ministry of the Interior, Allem, was also a cousin of one of the putsch leaders, Colonel Chelouati. Moreover, the putschists made no effort to take over strongholds of Oufkir's personal power, in particular the National Security Police headquarters and the regional headquarters of the Auxiliary Forces. See also comments in *Le Monde*, 16 July 1971, and Waterbury, *Coup Manqué*, p. 12.

[24] General Bouhali was still negotiating with Ababouh at a time when there was no possible chance for a reconciliation with the king. Bouhali was killed after shooting Ababouh in a personal confrontation.

[25] *Le Monde*, 17 July 1971.

[26] For the AOL's role in the immediate postindependence period, see Zartman, *Morocco: Problems*, pp. 69–75.

[27] For Manouzi's personal connections, see Waterbury, *Coup Manqué*, p. 5.

but it occurred at a time when the senior officers were preoccupied with consolidating their newly gained autonomy. General Oufkir, potentially the putsch officers' most dangerous antagonist, had considerably lost in power, when his direct command over the National Security Police was transferred to Colonel Ahmed Dlimi. At the level of national politics, the Fassis suffered a serious setback when General Medbouh's revelations resulted in the dismissal of three of their ministers for corruption. Finally, within the Army itself, General Medbouh and his fellow senior officers succeeded in consolidating their positions when General Driss was removed from the office of general inspector in March 1970.

General Medbouh was instrumental in the organization of the putsch. He was officially in charge of the Royal Military House, which involved command over the Royal Guard and the Royal Gendarmerie. The six regional commanders reported directly to his office, and he had succeeded in interposing his office in the direct line of command from the king to the General Staff. As a result he had good connections to the General Staff's military intelligence department (*2e Bureau*), which enabled him to camouflage the transfer of the NCO cadets who spearheaded the attack on Skhirat. Medbouh had established solid organizational connections with Colonel Ababouh, in charge of the NCO School of Ahermoumou, through the intermediary of General Mustapha Amharech, director of all military training schools in the General Staff. Amharech also implicated the commanders of the Royal Military Academy at Meknès and the military school of Kénitra. Medbouh implicated another key officer in the General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Bouberrie, commander of the logistics department (*4e Bureau*). Logistics units in the military regions had not been placed at the disposition of regional commanders but had remained under the competency of the General Staff. General Medbouh's position was essential for the putsch's success, and when he was killed at an early stage, the putsch leaders were unable to agree on either objectives or the tactics to reach them. Subsequently, key senior officers, in particular General Oufkir and Major General Bouhali, refrained from joining the putsch, and most of the junior commanders took a wait-and-see attitude.

When the chief coordinator in the General Staff, Major General Bouhali, decided to rally to the king, the General Staff became useless as an instrument of directing the putschists' military operations. After taking over the General Staff premises, the putschists failed conspicuously to establish a line of command to the military regions. They had also neglected to take over the post office in the capital which would have provided the only alternative way for communicating with the provinces. General Oufkir's rallying to the king proved of even more disastrous consequences for the putsch. As minister of the Interior, Oufkir was in control of the National Security Police and the paramilitary forces which include the Auxiliary Forces.[28] Another stronghold of Oufkir's

[28] General Oufkir in unison with General Driss had attempted to transform the Program of National Advancement, launched in 1967, into an instrument of rural

power was the military school of Kénitra which had provided the training grounds for the Ministry of the Interior's local administrators.[29] Oufkir had also all but nominal control over the Light Security Brigade which had been the crack force of the the Ministry of the Interior in dealing with all major disturbances in the metropolitan Casablanca–Rabat area.

The king had deliberately delayed the establishment of regional and brigade staffs. As a result, in 1971, regional staffs were inoperable, and brigades, with the exception of the Light Security Brigade and the paratroop brigade, were far from functioning as coherent operational units according to modern military standards. Since the FAR has no regimental or divisional command, battalions were essentially the largest independently operating units. Most of them were commanded by Arab junior officers, but in view of their different social and ethnic origin, the senior putschists were incapable of establishing informal contacts with the Arab junior commanders. The putsch officers also failed to reassert the direct line of authority from the General Staff to the battalions. As a result, the rebels had to rely exclusively for operational support on contingents provided by junior Berber commanders, which proved to be limited to the NCO cadets of Ahermoumou commanded by Colonel Ababouh. The senior officers remained without operational power, and consequently control fell into the hands of the only rebel officer with operational units at his disposal, Colonel Ababouh.[30]

When General Oufkir rallied to the king and subsequently was invested with all civil and military power, he immediately mobilized the Auxiliary Forces and the contingents of the National Security Police and brought the situation in the provinces under control. He undercut Colonel Feneri's attempt to rally the cadets from the military school of Kénitra to the putschists, and in the capital, Rabat, he succeeded in establishing a direct line of command to the Light Security Brigade and the paratroop brigade. Subsequently, the NCO cadets were quickly defeated in a series of mopping-up operations.

It is one of the more significant facts of the putsch that the majority of Arab junior commanders rallied neither to the king nor to the putschists. There were indications, however, that some Arab junior commanders, in particular those based in Casablanca, the center of leftist power, showed some sympathies for the rebellion. This applies notably to the Navy. These sympathies were not translated into concrete support, because the junior commanders were probably as confused and taken by surprise as was the king.

The Arab junior commanders' loyalty to the monarchy had always been highly conditional. Their social origin from the urban middle class potentially

mobilization under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior. See Schaar, *Arms Race*, p. 21.

[29] For the role of the Ministry of the Interior in training local administrators, see Michel Rousset, 'Le Role du Ministère de l'Interieur et sa place au sein de l'administration marocaine', *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 7 (1968), 91–106.

[30] In his press conference on 13 July, General Oufkir stated that he considered Abadouh rather than Medbouh the real leader of the putsch. See *Le Monde*, 15 July 1971.

disqualified them from participation in traditional clan politics, and their great number has made them all but unsusceptible to the king's highly personalized policy of patronage and manipulation. Moreover, the junior officers have been inclined to accept authority only on terms of competency, and they have been attracted by the dynamism of some of the leftist political leaders, in particular Ben Barka. Because of the junior officers' uncertain allegiances, the FAR is not more reliable now than it was before the putsch, and the prospect of violent Middle East-style army politics in unison with communist-influenced labor forces might not be too distant in Morocco.

The Moroccan coup d'état of July 1971 corresponds superficially to the pattern of Middle Eastern army coup politics. The political establishment's growing affluence had come into conflict with the rising expectations of the officer corps and the relative deprivation of their social class of origin. At the same time, the army's expanding role in civilian administration had given the impression that civilian authority could no longer be maintained without military support, and incidents of corruption had added to the political establishment's image of inherent weakness. Eventually, the army's emergence as an independent force in national politics was symptomized by its increasing unsusceptibility to political control.

The Moroccan version of a coup d'état, however, differed significantly from the Middle Eastern pattern, as its initiators represented an isolated group in society without revolutionary appeal and consequently without support from either the junior officers or the popular masses in the metropolitan centers. Their strategic goals were highly ambivalent and their refraining from the attempt to overthrow the monarchy represented a gross underestimation of the king's ability to rally instantaneous support for the established order. This strategic mistake was complemented by the tactical error of overestimating their own operational effectiveness. In particular, the putsch officers failed conspicuously to mobilize the armored forces, the key element in all Middle Eastern coups d'état and in Morocco the only contingent able to match the crack forces of the Ministry of the Interior.

The Moroccan coup d'état brought to a close the king's experiment of merging the bureaucratic and military elite into a new ruling class with a modernizing vocation. Moreover, the virtual elimination of the Berber senior officer corps decisively reduced the regime's capacity for reform implementation in the countryside. As a result, incoherence in the form of distrust and noncooperation is very prevalent now at all levels of policy implementation, and the political climate is charged with potential violence. This stage of development, however, may prove to be the necessary prelude to a new style of politics and a new qualitatively different approach to modernization.

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