

# SPSC

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# LETTER

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## MISSILE DOWNS US AID PLANE IN ACCIDENT 25 KILOMETERS FROM DEFENSE WALL IN WESTERN SAHARA

The accident was inevitable. Despite UN/OAU efforts for several years to bring Morocco to negotiate directly with the Polisario Front, Morocco continues to resist. It was a given that in such circumstances, sooner or later, additional innocent victims would be claimed in the war of the Sahrawis to exercise their right to self-determination, a right upheld by the UN, the OAU, the Non-Aligned Nations. The Sahrawis' right to self-determination is also recognized by the over 71 nations that currently recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the nation proclaimed by the Sahrawis in 1976.

What is unfortunate is that the incident occurred at a point in time when both parties in the almost 14-year conflict have agreed in principle to the UN/OAU Peace Plan, but have not yet settled the sticky issues of Moroccan military presence (over 150,000 military personnel), Moroccan civilian presence (settlers and administrative personnel), and a ceasefire.

In the U.S. it is about 6:00 A.M. EDT, Friday, December 9. Two AID planes who have just finished spraying locust infes-

tations in the region of Dakar, Senegal, are to return to Agadir, Morocco. Instead of taking the safest route over the sea, the pilots and crews decide to use the overland route, a route which leads them directly over a region in the Western Sahara that has very recently been the site of major Moroccan-Polisario battles. The AID personnel are aware of the war. AID officials interviewed by National Public Radio Friday were reported as saying that AID had not told the pilots of the two planes to take the route they chose. The AID officials further stated that the agency and its personnel were well aware of the conflict over Western Sahara.

Moroccan officials also know that taking that inland route is dangerous. Heavy battles have taken place at Oum Dreiga and in the area around Guelta Zemmour in recent weeks. The particular region chosen for the planes' flight over Western Sahara is near Guelta Zemmour, an area used by Polisario for staging massive troop actions.

The planes are flying some 11,000 feet in the air. They are DC-7's. On the ground are Polisario soldiers. They hear the planes, believe them to be Moroccan. Who else flies over the region? They believe the planes to be Moroccan C-130's, bought from the U.S. and used

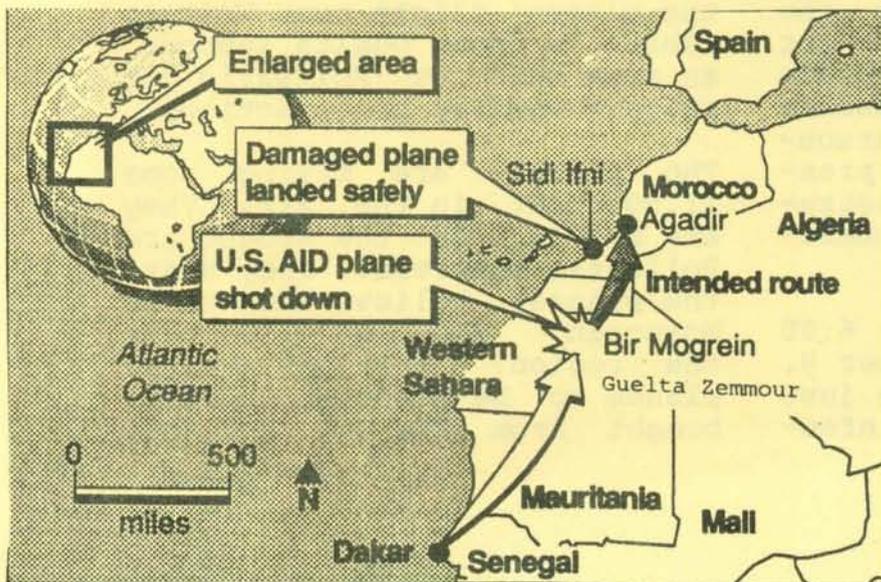
for troop transport. Two SA-7 hand-held missiles are ejected. Both planes are hit. One, containing pilot Jack Loughran and T&G Aviation owner Sergio Tomassoni, is crippled. Loughran manages to steer it some twenty-five to thirty feet above ground until he can land at an abandoned air field at Sidni Ifni. The other plane, according to Sergio Tomassoni, contained Joel Blackmer, Frank Kennedy, Ben Rossini, Frank Hedeman and Wes Wilson. All are killed.

In a communique Sunday, December 11, Polisario officials stated that shooting down the plane was an accident. Madjid Abdallah, Polisario representative to North America, noted that once the incident had occurred, the Polisario Front had launched its own investigation. Polisario authorities found that a unit of the National Liberation Army had attacked the planes by accident, believing they were C-130's. He noted the planes were about 25 kilometers from the Moroccan defense wall. Abdallah said that Polisario officials had contacted the U.S. government, the U.S. Embassy in Algiers, and are in the process of attempting to retrieve the bod-

ies of those killed, which will be returned to U.S. government officials. He noted that the Polisario Front regrets the incident and the loss of these AID workers.

A question that must be asked in the aftermath of such an incident is why the planes took the inland route given recent heavy military action in the region between Moroccan forces and the Polisario Front. It is not that U.S. officials are ignorant of the conflict or of recent events. Were the planes only involved in the humanitarian war against the locust plague that is currently besieging the continent of Africa? Were the planes involved in taking surveillance photographs of the region, since it had been reported that Polisario forces were massing in the territory?

Recent events (Contragate, for example) have made us suspect plots where there may be none. The question to be answered, however, as we join everyone in regretting the loss of life in this accident, is why did the planes choose that particular route rather than the safe sea route? That question needs to be answered.



This map is an adapted map taken from USA TODAY. The map shows the inland route taken by the AID planes rented from T&G Aviation, Phoenix. Usually planes in the region are Moroccan C-130 Transport planes or Moroccan surveillance planes. The Polisario Front has no airforce.