



American Committee On Africa

198 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10038 / (212) 962-1210 / Cable AMCOMMAF

September 21, 1979

Dear Friend:

The Carter administration is now considering a Moroccan request for purchase of a significant amount of weaponry at a time when that country is attempting to annex Western Sahara by military force. Furthermore, we understand that the U.S. is considering lifting the restriction on the use of U.S. supplied weapons in Western Sahara (a provision which Morocco has ignored for a long time). Our concern is outlined in the enclosed letter to the President and the Secretary of State.

In July at its summit meeting in Liberia, the Organization of African Unity voted overwhelmingly (33 to 2 with a few abstentions) that self-determination has not been exercised in Western Sahara and proposed an internationally sponsored referendum to determine the will of the people. Morocco has categorically refused any such referendum and has continued with its military effort to expand its borders.

At this moment Morocco is seeking OV-10 counter insurgency aircraft from the U.S. and Cobra Helicopters. The OV-10 is considered one of the most effective aircraft of its type. It has the capacity to deliver in excess of 4,000 lbs. of ordnance, and is equipped with night combat capacity. The Cobra helicopters are gunships. Both the OV-10 and the Cobra helicopters were extensively used in Indochina.

We feel it is very important to stop this sale. We urge you to take what action you can. Letters need to be sent immediately to President Carter, Secretary Vance, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Frank Church and George McGovern, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Africa and to the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. A strong stand in Congress was successful in stopping a similar sale in 1977.

Sincerely,

George M. Houser
Executive Director

GMH:jwb
Enc.

Sept. 19, 1979

A copy of a letter sent to the President and
the Secretary of State

I understand the administration is considering a change of policy in regard to Western Sahara. This change may take the form of lifting restrictions on the use of American military equipment by Morocco in the territory of Western Sahara, which Morocco is attempting to annex by force of arms. At the same time the U.S. is considering selling to Morocco such military equipment as OV-10 aircraft, Cobra helicopters, and anti-tank missiles. Morocco will certainly use these weapons in its expansionist war against the Polisario movement of Western Sahara.

As I am sure you are aware, Morocco is increasingly isolated in pressing its claim over Western Sahara. The International Court of Justice found in 1975 that contrary to Morocco's claims, the people of Western Sahara had the right to self-determination and independence. The U.N. Visiting Mission of the same year found the people "categorically" for independence and very strongly in support of Polisario, which was founded in 1973 to oppose Spanish colonialism. Spain, the former colonial power has recently recognized the legitimacy of Polisario, reversing its earlier position. And even Mauritania, which had initially been Morocco's partner in Western Sahara, has signed a peace agreement with Polisario and has withdrawn from the territory.

I can say from personal experience that Polisario is increasing in strength. Last May I had a chance to travel to Algeria and also in the Western Sahara with Polisario. We went all the way to the Atlantic by Land-Rovers across the contested territory. I also had a chance to visit the Sahara refugee camps in Algeria. For twenty-five years I have travelled in Africa on almost an annual basis. Rarely have I been so impressed with an organized movement as I was with Polisario.

The U.S. has had a close relationship with Morocco. But this should not be allowed to cloud the decision that should be made. The U.S. should support the position of the Organization of African Unity and recognize that self-determination has not taken place in Western Sahara. The U.S. should use its influence on Morocco to promote an acceptable solution. If the U.S. changes its policy even more pointedly in backing Morocco it will serve only to isolate our country from most of Africa and indeed the world.

Sincerely,

George M. Houser
Executive Director
American Committee on Africa

GMH:jwb