Memorandum on
Moroccan Use of South African Manufactured Arms

Information has come to light that Morocco is now using weapons manufactured in South Africa. South African armored vehicles known as the MK-6 were captured by Polisario, the movement struggling for the independence of Western Sahara, in a battle with Moroccan troops in March.

The MK-6 is a South African-built version of the French Panhard AML-90. It is made under license and differs in some respects, including armament, from the French model. According to information from Polisario, Morocco had clearly tried to hide the origin of the weapons by obliterating all markings written in Afrikaans or identifying South Africa as the manufacturer. However, some markings had been missed on the captured MK-6s. Further, according to captured Moroccan soldiers, South African instructors were involved in providing the training which preceded use of the vehicles.

In 1975, Morocco and Mauritania invaded Western Sahara in an attempt to annex the former Spanish colony against the wishes of the Saharawi people. Polisario, founded to resist Spanish colonialism, continued its struggle for independence against the invading forces from neighboring countries. Since that time Mauritania has signed a peace agreement with Polisario and has withdrawn from the territory, but Morocco has persisted in its territorial claims to all Western Sahara.

Morocco has been unsuccessful in militarily defeating Polisario and now controls only a few towns inside Western Sahara. Further, Morocco has become increasingly isolated internationally. The Organization of African Unity and the United Nations General Assembly have both declared that the people of Western Sahara have the right to self-determination and independence and that Polisario is a primary party to the dispute. Further, some 22 African states recognize the Polisario formed Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic as the legitimate government of Western Sahara.

The evidence that Morocco is using South African weapons is a measure of Morocco's desperation. South Africa's apartheid has been condemned universally, and has been looked upon by African states as a prime enemy of African independence. Morocco's use of South African weapons can only further isolate it from other African countries.

The revelation of South African arms in Morocco puts the U.S. arms deal with Morocco in an even more compromising light. In early 1980, the U.S. agreed to sell Morocco $232.5 million worth of weapons including six OV-10 counter-insurgency aircraft, 24 Hughes 500 MD helicopters and 20 F-5E/F aircraft. First deliveries arising out of this sale are due to arrive in Morocco in June. The United States and South Africa are now allied with Morocco against the people of Western Sahara.

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