

STATEMENT OF SENATOR PAUL E. TSONGAS
OCTOBER 30, 1979

ARMS TO MOROCCO

MR. PRESIDENT, LAST WEEK THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION DECIDED TO PERMIT THE SALE OF OV-10 ARMED RECONAISSANCE PLANES AND COBRA HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS TO MOROCCO. THIS FOLLOWED MONTHS OF HEATED DEBATE, BOTH WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION AND HERE IN THE CONGRESS. THIS HAS BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE, MR. PRESIDENT, BUT THERE NOW APPEARS TO BE A SILENT ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION HERE IN THE SENATE. I, HOWEVER, WILL NOT REMAIN SILENT WHEN SO MUCH IS AT STAKE. I OPPOSE THIS SALE OF ARMS, MR. PRESIDENT, AND I WANT MY VIEWS KNOWN.

THIS IS NOT A ROUTINE PURCHASE OF AMERICAN WEAPONS, MR. PRESIDENT. KING HASSAN OF MOROCCO HAS COMMITTED HIS UNDERDEVELOPED NATION TO A DEBILITATING AND ULTIMATELY UNWINNABLE WAR IN THE FORMER SPANISH COLONY OF THE WESTERN SAHARA. THE ARMS IN QUESTION WOULD BE USED DIRECTLY IN THE CONFLICT.

MOROCCO'S THINLY STRETCHED FORCES FACE A DETERMINED AND RESOURCEFUL OPPONENT IN POLISARIO, A WESTERN SAHARA LIBERATION GROUP. THE WAR IS BEING FOUGHT FOR CONTROL OF THIS MINERAL RICH AREA IN THE SAHARA. MOROCCO CLAIMS THAT THE REGION IS HISTORICALLY LINKED TO THE MOROCCAN THRONE AND HAS ANNEXED THE ENTIRE REGION. THE POLISARIO ARGUE THAT THE MOROCCAN ANNEXATION CLEARLY VIOLATES THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF DETERMINATION FOR THE REGION'S INHABITANTS. THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE WESTERN SAHARA.

MR. PRESIDENT, THE HISTORY OF THIS SMALL, BUT DANGEROUS WAR IS COMPLEX. KING HASSAN'S CLAIMS CANNOT BE DISMISSED EASILY. THE KING HAS WIDESPREAD DOMESTIC SUPPORT FOR THE WAR AMONG HIS PEOPLE. HISTORICALLY, HE CAN CITE PRE-COLONIAL ANTECEDENTS TO A WIDER MOROCCO. MORE RECENTLY, SPAIN DID CONFER CONTROL OVER MOST OF THE REGION TO MOROCCO.

THE POLISARIO, HOWEVER, IS RIGHT TO CONTEST THE MOROCCAN ANNEXATION. SPAIN, MOROCCO, AND MAURITANIA DID NOT CONDUCT A REFERENDUM IN THE WESTERN SAHARA BEFORE DIVIDING THE REGION BETWEEN MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA IN 1976. MOROCCO'S ANNEXATION OF THE MAURITANIAN SECTOR IN AUGUST OF THIS YEAR WAS A FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF DECOLONIZATION PRACTICES. THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION ARE ENTITLED TO THE BASIC RIGHT OF SELF DETERMINATION.

THESE CONTENDING ARGUMENTS FUEL A CONFLICT OF RIVAL NATIONALISMS. A RESOLUTION OF THIS WAR WILL NOT COME EASILY OR SOON.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT NEUTRALITY IN THIS WAR IS THE APPROPRIATE COURSE FOR THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE. THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THIS.

FIRST, THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF DETERMINATION IS ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH OUR OWN NATIONAL IDEALS AND WITH ACCEPTED INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS. A PLEBESCITE FOR THIS REGION WOULD ALLOW THE 75,000 INHABITANTS OF THE WESTERN SAHARA TO EXPRESS THEIR WILL. A POLICY OF U.S. NEUTRALITY WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH THIS JUST SOLUTION.

SECOND, AMERICA HAS GOOD RELATIONS WITH BOTH MOROCCO AND ALGERIA, THE POLISARIO'S MAJOR SPONSOR.

WE HAVE SUPPORTED KING HASSAN WITH THE SALE OF DEFENSIVE WEAPONS AND GRANTS OF MILITARY AID. HE, IN RETURN, HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF THE U.S. POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST. WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO ASSIST THE KING IN THE DEFENSE OF HIS COUNTRY.

ALGERIA, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS BECOME A HELPFUL AND MODERATE FORCE IN THIRD WORLD AFFAIRS. SHE SUPPLIES THE U.S. WITH 9% OF OUR CRUDE OIL IMPORTS. PRESIDENT CHADLI BENJEDID IS A PRAGMATIST SEEKING IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH OUR COUNTRY.

WE SHOULD NOT CONSCIOUSLY ALIENATE EITHER OF THESE TWO STATES. THE PARTISAN AMERICAN APPROACH WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER SUPPORTS CAN ONLY LEAD TO A DECREASE IN AMERICAN STATURE IN NORTHWEST AFRICA. WHAT WE NEED IS A POLICY OF NEUTRALITY TO GUIDE US THROUGH THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO FRIENDS OF THE UNITED STATES.

FINALLY, THE POLISARIO HAS OBTAINED WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR ITS CAUSE IN THE THIRD WORLD AND AFRICA. MEETING IN JULY OF THIS YEAR, THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF A REFERENDUM AND SELF DETERMINATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF WESTERN SAHARA. AT LAST COUNT, THIRTY-FIVE NATIONS HAVE RECOGNIZED THE POLISARIO'S POLITICAL ARM, THE SAHARAN ARAB DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC. THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE JUSTIFICATION FOR OPENLY SUPPORTING THE AIMS OF MOROCCO WHEN THAT COUNTRY ENJOYS SO LITTLE SUPPORT INTERNATIONALLY.

THIS IS A DELICATE AND SENSITIVE ISSUE, MR. PRESIDENT. I RECOGNIZE THE MERITS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE QUESTION. YET, THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT THE DECISION OF THE PRESIDENT IS CONTRARY TO OUR INTERESTS IN AFRICA AND THE WORLD. THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR THROWING OUR SUPPORT BEHIND ONE SIDE IN THIS CONFLICT. A POLICY OF NEUTRALITY WHICH STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF DETERMINATION MAKES SENSE BECAUSE IT IS RIGHT AND BECAUSE IT IS EFFECTIVE.

I BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF MY COLLEAGUES TWO ARTICLES ON THIS SUBJECT: ONE PRINTED IN MONDAY'S BOSTON GLOBE, AND THE OTHER IN THE OCTOBER 12 EDITION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES. I REQUEST UNANIMOUS CONSENT THAT THEY BE REPRINTED IN THE RECORD.