

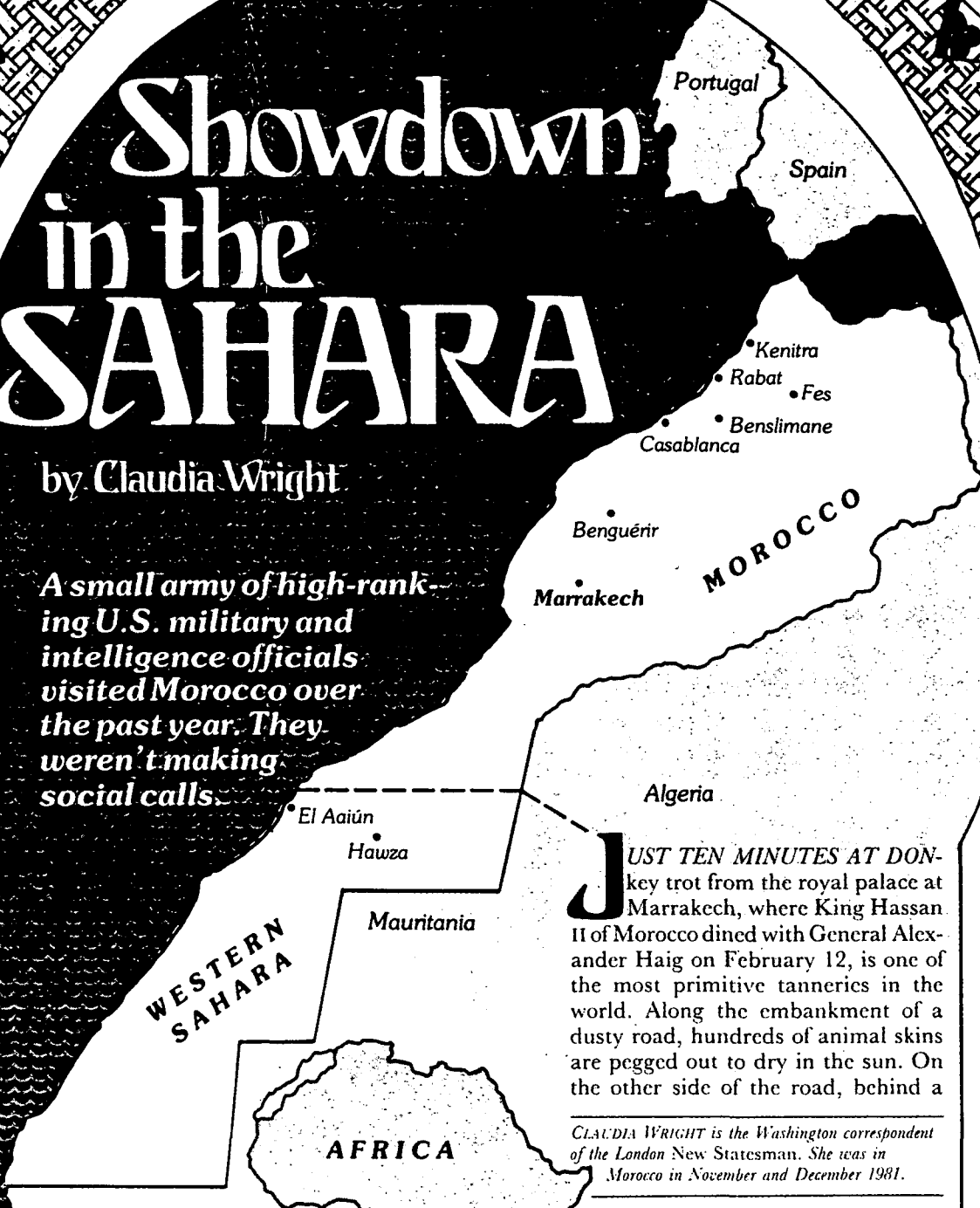
# Showdown in the SAHARA

by Claudia Wright

**A small army of high-ranking U.S. military and intelligence officials visited Morocco over the past year. They weren't making social calls.**

**J**UST TEN MINUTES AT DON-key trot from the royal palace at Marrakech, where King Hassan II of Morocco dined with General Alexander Haig on February 12, is one of the most primitive tanneries in the world. Along the embankment of a dusty road, hundreds of animal skins are pegged out to dry in the sun. On the other side of the road, behind a

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stone wall, are the brick vats where dozens of tubercular young boys, aged five to fifteen, spend their days picking the flesh from the skins and, thigh-deep in pools of foul-smelling water and colored dyes, treading the skins into the suppleness required by their masters.

To the boys of the tanneries, King Hassan's six-year-old war to conquer the Western Sahara—one of the topics of palace talk with the American secretary of state—is still a *jihad*, a holy war in defense of Moroccan sovereignty and of the memory of the kingdom's once glorious empire. So

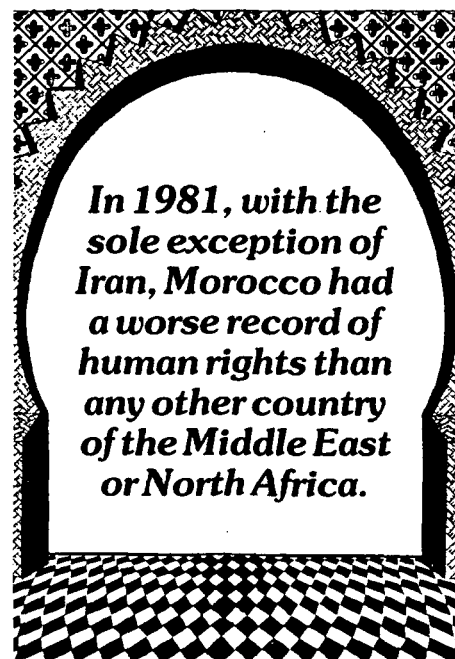
offer at least \$100 million in credits for Moroccan arms purchases next year. In return Morocco agreed to establish a joint American-Moroccan military commission and to give the United States landing rights at Moroccan air bases. But these public agreements are far from the full price each side will pay for the other's indulgence. They conceal several still-secret agreements that Morocco and the United States have made in pursuit of a much grander fantasy: a high-stakes gamble for power in Africa from Tripoli to Cape Town.

All of these economic pressures have aggravated a politically explosive situation. On June 20, 1981, the government's decision to cut food subsidies led to riots in Casablanca's slums. Police and troops fired on demonstrators, killing at least 637—a third of them children and youths under eighteen, according to an investigation made by a committee of French Catholic jurists. Between 6000 and 8000 people were arrested, including the leaders of the union federation and of the Moroccan socialist party. But the government didn't stop there. To deal with continuing opposition from

## Hassan's vulnerabilities

The seventeenth-century Moroccan monarch, Moulay Ismail, from whom King Hassan is directly descended, was a decisive leader who dealt with opponents by sawing them in half from the head down, until the body fell into two pieces. Hassan's ancestors conquered an empire that encompassed what is today the Western (or Spanish) Sahara, Mauritania, and the northernmost territory of Senegal. Hassan II has much less territory, tougher opponents, and smaller revenues. Surrounded by squads of nurses and bodyguards when he travels, with courtiers always on call at his numerous palaces and royal châteaux, the king is inclined to moodiness, bouts of despondency, and, when criticized, of spleen.

He has much to be moody about, quite apart from the protracted war in the south. More than three years of drought—the longest in living memory—has devastated the citrus orchards and olive groves that sustain the economy, and forced the country into expensive emergency imports of food from Europe and the United States. With the price of phosphates, Morocco's most important export, failing to match the rising cost of imported oil and industrial goods, the trade deficit has ballooned to more than \$1 billion each year. Recession and protectionism in France have further diminished the market for Moroccan manufactures, cut tourism, reduced the flow of remittances from expatriate workers, and blocked the only escape left for jobless Moroccan youth.



***In 1981, with the sole exception of Iran, Morocco had a worse record of human rights than any other country of the Middle East or North Africa.***

university students, Hassan ordered a military takeover of the engineering faculty at the University of Rabat in December. Then twenty-one leaders of the national student union were put on trial and dispatched with prison sentences of up to three years. In 1981, with the sole exception of Iran, political repression and loss of life were greater in Morocco than in any other country of the Middle East or North Africa. Fingering the royal signet and twirling his cigarette, Hassan is peremptory when these subjects are raised. "Human rights," he told an interviewer in Paris in February, are "a subjective affair. A climatologic affair. Montesquieu would tell you so..." Asked whether he would release the political detainees, he snapped: "The less you talk about it, the better."

Hassan is personally more threatened by his army. In 1971 and again in 1972, Hassan was lucky to

***The Reagan White House is indulging the Moroccan king's dreams because the U.S. has become as dependent on him as he is on us.***

long as the boys think that, the Moroccan army will not lack volunteers or popular support, and the king will press on in quest of a victory no one now but his courtiers and the Reagan administration says he can attain.

Hassan's war against the indigenous guerrilla force of the Western Sahara, the Polisario, has cost his regime billions of dollars and thousands of lives, and brought nothing but a steady series of military defeats and strategic retreats. Yet General Haig and the Reagan administration are indulging the Moroccan king's dreams because they have become as dependent on him as he is on them. As a former U.S. official familiar with Morocco observed after Haig's visit to Marrakech: "It was like holding a piece of candy in front of a baby. He will always grab it—and I'm not talking about the Moroccans."

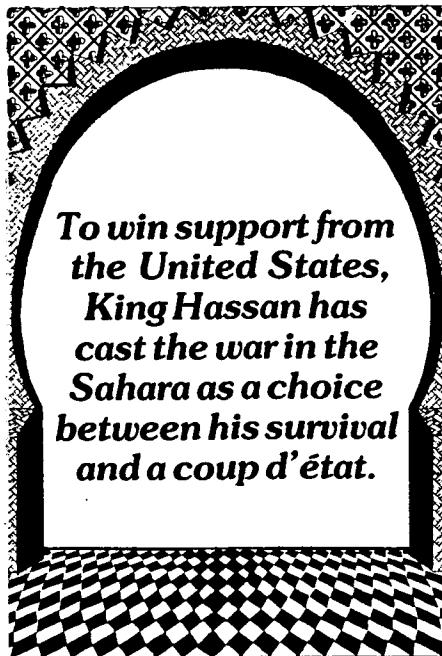
Haig's sweet tooth apparently resulted in a promise by Washington to

survive coup attempts from within the armed forces. The plots not only had the support of senior army and air-force officers—and, in 1972, of the defense minister, General Oufkir—but also of many Berber tribesmen who serve in the lower ranks of the army. Their resentment of the repression of their tribal leadership, language, and culture has long soured their loyalty to the throne. Distrustful of both his officers and men, Hassan has waged his war in the south by isolating units from one another and keeping their commanders under close supervision from Rabat. Representative Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.) reported after a visit to Morocco and the Western Sahara in mid-1979 that “since King Hassan fears a renewal of the coup attempts of 1971 and 1972, he continues to insist on overcentralized communications and command structures. Thus several hours often pass between a reported attack on a Moroccan garrison and the arrival of nearby airpower, since the request has to go through Rabat.” The desert war keeps the army busy well away from the royal palace, but it also creates pressure on the king to give his officers whatever equipment they demand. To preserve their loyalty, Hassan has a durable incentive to keep fighting; by casting the war in the Sahara as a choice between his survival and a coup d’état, Hassan managed to persuade even the unsympathetic Carter administration to authorize the sale of twenty F-5 fighter planes, seven C-130 transports, six OV-10 counterinsurgency planes, and twenty-four helicopter gunships. The decision to permit these arms purchases was reached in October 1979 on the understanding that the arms would “give Morocco the self-confidence that is necessary to go down the route toward a negotiated settlement,” as a State Department witness told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

## Winning the unwinnable

The conflict in the Western Sahara dates from efforts of groups of students in the late 1960s and early 1970s to obtain the withdrawal of the colonizing power, Spain. The Polisario—an acronym for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguiet El Hamra and

Rio d’Oro, the northern and southern provinces of the territory—was formed in 1973. The Polisario describes its ideology as Islamic and non-Marxist, but above all as nationalist. After attacks by Spanish, French, and Moroccan forces in 1975, the Polisario found sanctuary for its guerrilla training and refugee camps in the Algerian Sahara. From this start it has steadily gained ground against Morocco, both militarily and diplomatically. The Moroccan occupation of the Western Sahara was rejected at the outset by a decision of the International Court of Justice, and by a



United Nations mission that toured the region in mid-1975. After four years of fighting, on August 5, 1979, Mauritania withdrew its claim to the Western Sahara and signed an agreement restoring the southern portion of the territory to the Polisario. Morocco has fought on, claiming the entire territory as its own.

In 1976 the Polisario announced the establishment of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic on Saharan territory recaptured from Morocco. In five years it has gained diplomatic recognition from a total of forty-five states, although many Arab governments, Algeria and Libya excepted, are still reluctant to back it. Within the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Hassan has had to fight the longstanding majority view in favor of the new state. The Moroccan position has been that the Polisario does not exist—that it is merely a tool of Algeria and Libya against Morocco. King

Hassan has refused all OAU recommendations—the most recent at Nairobi on February 9—to negotiate an end to the war with the Polisario, and although last year he formally accepted the principle of a referendum to permit the inhabitants of the area to decide their own political future, Hassan has made it clear that, in his view, such a referendum could only be “an act of confirmation” of Moroccan sovereignty. Morocco also insisted the vote in such a referendum should be limited to 75,000 Saharawi counted in the last Spanish census and remaining still in the territory. The Polisario claims that roughly 1 million people are qualified to vote, and that the referendum must offer a clear choice between Moroccan sovereignty and full independence.

On the battlefield the Moroccan forces have been hampered by more than the nervousness of their commander-in-chief. Recruited primarily from the Berber tribes of the Atlas mountains, the army is unused to desert fighting. Tied down to isolated forts, immobilized by their slow equipment and dependence on vulnerable roads for supplies, unable to coordinate effectively with their air support, the Moroccans have steadily retreated northward, losing men, morale, and vast stocks of their weapons to the highly effective Polisario forces. In October the Polisario destroyed a 2000-man Moroccan garrison, captured large amounts of matériel, including tanks and trucks, and shot down five Moroccan aircraft—a C-130 transport, two Mirage F-1s, an F-5, and a Puma helicopter. Hassan’s forces have since retreated further behind a wall of sand, ditches, mine fields, and barbed wire that has been under construction for over a year. The wall encloses the mineral-rich centers of the Sahara that make the sand worth fighting over. Polisario tactics have been to press the initiative inside the wall. In late January, the guerrillas broke through near Smara, blew up a five-kilometer section of fortifications, captured fresh tanks, and withdrew before the Moroccans could organize a counterattack.

In April 1981, testifying on behalf of the administration’s proposal to sell Morocco the M-60 tanks, Morris Draper, the deputy assistant secretary of state for the region, declared that “no side can win a clear-cut victory in military terms.” The United States, he emphasized, “is neutral as regards



the final status of the Western Saharan territory."

By November the Reagan administration appeared to have changed its mind. Francis West, in charge of international security affairs at the Pentagon, took American military advisers into the war zone for the first time, and in private remarks that were reported in the U.S. press, he appeared to encourage the Moroccan belief in military victory. In December senior U.S. officials in Rabat expressed confidence that with improved surveillance equipment, a new Westinghouse radar network, satellite photography of the desert, and better troop training, the Moroccan army could take the offensive. The new official line from Washington was that the Western Sahara was Moroccan, the Polisario was an army of mercenaries, and the Saharawi people didn't exist.

## The Reagan men arrive

Hassan is suitably grateful for this warming trend in relations with Washington. When President Reagan's ambassador, Joseph Verner Reed, Jr., a former Chase Manhattan Bank official and longtime friend of the king's, offered his credentials in November 1981, the king contrasted Reagan's attitude to the "pettiness" of the previous administration. When America has been led by men who "knew what they wanted," he told a press conference, "Morocco and the United States have really covered great distance together." Comparing President Reagan to President Eisenhower, Hassan declared that Reagan appeared "to have the same rectitude and the same respect for the aspirations of countries. I think that Mr. Reagan and Hassan the Second have no reason not to understand each other."

This understanding was carefully nurtured throughout 1981 by a series of high-level military and intelligence visits. General Vernon Walters, deputy director of the CIA between 1972 and 1976 and now ambassador-at-large for the State Department, visited Morocco in March, October, and December. Lannon Walker, then acting assistant secretary of state for African affairs, met with CIA agents in Rabat

in March. Francis West, assistant secretary of defense for international security, made two visits, the second in November with a team of twenty-three military advisers and experts. Frank Carlucci, the deputy secretary of defense, was there in midsummer, and he was followed secretly by



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Admiral Bobby Inman, deputy director of the CIA. In September Lieutenant-General James Williams, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, arrived. In November Caspar Weinberger, the secretary of defense, stopped at Fez to see the king; he was followed in December by Senator Charles Percy, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and in February by General Haig. Admiral Thomas B. Hayward, chief of naval operations, followed Haig later in the month.

The United States also has a significant longer-term military presence in Morocco. According to reports filed by the administration with Congress, there are currently sixteen U.S. military officers, two U.S. civilians, and four Moroccans assigned to the Morocco-U.S. Liaison Office in Rabat, whose job is to supervise the assimilation of American weaponry into the Moroccan army and air force. In addition, more than 100 Americans—some U.S. government, some civilian personnel—were reported to be working with the Moroccan armed forces during 1981.

In March 1981 State Department officials told a House subcommittee hearing that "there are no Green Berets or military advisers in Morocco..

There are no U.S. government-supervised contracted personnel involved with equipment used in the Western Sahara conflict either in the Sahara itself or Southern Morocco." The administration subsequently sought—and in December won—congressional approval to enlarge the number of military advisers it could station in Morocco. If these advisers were to go into the war zone in the Sahara, that would trigger the War Powers Resolution, and Congress could order them out.

Just before Christmas, Polisario spokesmen told me in Algiers that "more than a dozen" American military advisers had been spotted—wearing Moroccan uniforms—at Smara, El-Aaiún, and Goulimine. Apparently their job is to operate and maintain radars and ground-to-air communications for Moroccan F-5s and Mirages engaged in the fighting. There has been no official word from the administration regarding these men.

## The hidden stakes

In Washington's view, Hassan must be protected from military reverses that threaten the stability of the throne. "There is a credibility to U.S. foreign policy to defend," maintains one senior U.S. official with responsibility for Moroccan affairs. "If you look at Vietnam and Iran, to let that happen to Morocco we would consider horrible." But there is more at stake in Morocco than the Saharan war, and the visits of the intelligence men suggest at least part of what this might be.

King Hassan has long played a role in secret U.S., Israeli, and Egyptian moves in the Middle East and Africa. He was one of the go-betweens in the planning of Anwar el-Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977. He participated in U.S. and French plans for the 1977 and 1978 interventions to rescue General Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in Zaire. There is a long and murky tale of Moroccan-French collaboration in intelligence operations in West Africa, in the Algerian war, in the assassination of the Moroccan socialist leader Mehdi Ben Barka in 1965, and in the training of French intervention forces at Benguerir, near Marrakech.

Since 1969 Morocco has been a cen-

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ter for Libyan exiles and opponents of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi; King Hassan is actively maneuvering behind the scenes to deprive Libya of the presidency of the OAU and shift the organization's summit meeting from Tripoli later this year. Moroccan troops have been reported in the Sudan and eastern Chad, helping the dissident army of Hissein Habré, the former Chadian defense minister, in his war against the Libyan-supported government in N'Djamena. Since Mauritania withdrew from the Saharan war, Hassan has backed Mauritanian dissidents, and supported their abortive coup attempt in March 1981.

Morocco is the only Arab state and one of the very few OAU members to have bought military equipment from South Africa, and to have engaged South African military advisers to train army units. With South Africa and the United States, Morocco is currently backing the Angola rebel group, UNITA, led by Jonas Savimbi. Rabat was the site of meetings between Savimbi and CIA officials during 1981, and Moroccan officers are reportedly in Zaire instructing another guerrilla group allied with Savimbi—the military committee for the Angolan resistance (COMIRA). Savimbi himself told the *Wall Street Journal* during his visit in December to the United States that "Morocco helps train his men."

It is in covert operations of this kind that the Reagan administration is dependent on King Hassan. He has allowed the CIA to build up its station in Morocco, compensating for the agency's losses elsewhere in northern Africa (in 1979 it lost its Libyan post after the embassy withdrew, and in July 1981 the chief of station in Algeria, Norman Descouteaux, was exposed by the Algerian authorities and expelled). *Covert Action Information Bulletin* in Washington has identified three senior CIA men in Morocco. The newest, Joseph Pettinelli, arrived in February 1981. He was last spotted in Islamabad, Pakistan, during the final tumultuous years before the Bhutto government was overthrown by a military coup ["Reaping the Pakistani Whirlwind," *INQUIRY*, Sept. 14, 1981]. Two other agents, David Wilson and Arthur Nimer, Jr., were identified in Casablanca and Rabat two years ago, and may no longer be there. Both had served in the Middle East before Morocco, and most important, both had had experience in Colonel Qaddafi's Libya.

If the CIA is to use Morocco as a staging base for operations in the Middle East and Africa, it must have secure access to ports and airfields, and this is precisely what General Haig's agreement with King Hassan on landing rights provides. In 1950 Washington arranged with France to use four



air bases—at Nouaceur, Benguéir, Sidi Slimane, and Benslimane—as well as an air and naval base at Kenitra and two military communications facilities at Sidi Yahia and Bouknadel. On the initiative of the Eisenhower administration, the bases were evacuated by 1963. But the withdrawal was never quite total, U.S. officials say, and over the years an understanding between the two governments has existed for making the facilities available in case of emergency. King Hassan has often sought a new agreement on the bases, permitting the United States to return, but until now Washington has not been interested.

The administration is also anxious to take up Hassan's old offer of "transit rights" to cover its covert operations in Africa, particularly in Angola. Before Congress put a stop to CIA assistance to the Angolan guerrillas in 1976 (the Clark amendment), the agency had been able to supply UNITA directly through Zaire: during the Carter administration, the White House would not allow more than a trickle of aid to reach UNITA because it sought to negotiate normalization of relations with the Angolan government. Now, committed to what it has defined as a Soviet and Cuban adver-

sary in Angola and neighboring Namibia, anxious to placate South Africa, and unable to get Congress to lift the Clark amendment, the Reagan administration has turned to Morocco for help. With substantial new arms flowing into Morocco for the Saharan war, it will be virtually impossible for Congress to spot the diversion of weapons through Morocco to UNITA. This concern is not merely speculative. Jonas Savimbi told a Portuguese journalist in Rabat that he was receiving American arms and financial aid despite the congressional prohibition. "Material help is not dependent on, nor limited by, the Clark amendment," he said. "A great country like the United States has other channels. . . ." One of those channels is Morocco.

But the Pentagon and General Haig are also counting on Morocco for a more general strategy of U.S. intervention in the region. Formally, this involves stretching the area of NATO operations well below the Tropic of Cancer, the southern border of the Western Sahara, and the Spanish Canary islands, which are the southernmost limits of the NATO area, according to the 1949 treaty. U.S. facilities in the Portuguese Azores—now under renegotiation—and a new NATO naval base to be built at Porto Santo in the Portuguese Madeiras, off the Moroccan coast, will be linked to French facilities in Senegal and Gabon, and to the South African naval bases at Walvis Bay (Namibia) and Simonstown (near Capetown). Together they will form a coordinated allied platform for projecting forces at any point along the Atlantic coast of Africa. This is the plan King Hassan had in mind when he recently described the agenda for his forthcoming visit to Washington.

He intends to "discuss not only our bilateral affairs but our geostrategy," he told the Parisian *Le Matin* on January 30. "America is the head of NATO. . . . We cannot ignore the fact that the Atlantic stretches as far as southern Africa. . . . I think it is a matter of geostrategic and geopolitical necessity to go and visit that great country on the other side of the sea which separates us."

Hassan knows how badly U.S. officials want to support their expanding fleet, and link it to the Rapid Deployment Force intended for action in the Middle East. By playing on their ambitions, he has secured their unwavering allegiance to his own. □

**ELVIS, by Albert Goldman. McGraw-Hill, 598 pp., \$14.95.**

**FLOWERS IN THE BLOOD: The Story of Opium, by Dean Latimer and Jeff Goldberg. Franklin Watts, 306 pp., \$16.95.**

## Purifying America

THOMAS SZASZ

**J**ACK ABBOTT, NORMAN Mailer's famous murderer friend, is released from jail and kills again. He receives an eighteen-year prison sentence. At the same time, the Supreme Court upholds the forty-year prison sentence of a man convicted of possessing and selling nine ounces of marijuana. These two crimes and punishments dramatize the consequences of taking seriously the proposition that this nation's "number-one" crime problem is "drugs." However stupid and ugly that idea might seem to some of us, the fact is that it has fueled the great anti-drug crusade our nation has waged for the past several decades.

Instead of questioning the absurdity and futility of this unwinnable war—our second since World War II—we steadily escalate the conflict. Declaring that narcotics trafficking was "the nation's most serious crime problem," on January 21, 1982, Attorney General William French Smith announced that the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation will take over efforts to combat it. At a news conference Smith said that he had given the bureau concurrent jurisdiction with the Drug Enforcement Administration, "bringing the full resources of the FBI to bear on the problem of domestic drug trafficking." The stubborn American fantasy that "drugs" are a "crime problem," soluble by means of draconian laws com-

passionately administered, was thus given another shot in the arm.

What the two widely different books under review here have in common is that each tells us a good deal about the phenomenon now called, rather stupidly, "drug abuse." As nearly everyone must know by now, during much of his career as a performer, Elvis Presley used a variety of psychoactive drugs. How did Presley procure these drugs? He got them quasi-legally, by prescriptions from doctors; they were delivered to him, through his servants, by pharmacists. I say quasi-legally, because from the very first step of Presley's drug-procurement program the whole affair was a fraud. Many of the prescriptions were made out in the names of people in Presley's entourage, or in his wife's or daughter's name, and the drugs were then transferred to and used by him. This itself was a violation of the drug laws. But these laws were never intended to control people like Elvis Presley, as we shall see.

What drugs did Presley use? Mainly Quaalude, Placidyl (recently in the news in connection with Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist), Demerol, Dilaudid, Dexedrine, and Biphentamine. Pills and tablets Presley took orally, liquids intramuscularly. This was very important for him. As Albert Goldman tells us in his brilliant, biting book *Elvis*, Presley "never takes a shot in the mainline. He associates intravenous injections with the despised character of the 'junkie,' a type he would like to see rounded up en masse and committed to lifelong imprisonment in concentration camps." If this seems like a delicious bit of hypocrisy, wait—there is more, more.

The popular image of Presley—that when he was not making music, he was making love or counting his money—could not be more false. During much of his career, Presley's main interest in life was drugs: getting drugs, taking drugs, lying about drugs, and, above all else, participating in the American Holy War against drugs. Believe it or not, Presley was actually a fanatic drug-prohibitionist who believed that "drugs" were a "Communist conspiracy" against America. Goldman relates how Presley met and became infatuated with a narcotics agent named John O'Grady, and how, when listening to O'Grady's drug-busting tales, "he would sigh wistfully and say, 'Man, I wish I could be an undercover narcotics detective!'"

Presley's ambition to play a publicly recognized part in this purification program—America's latest and perhaps most hypocritical ever—was fulfilled in 1970, when President Richard Nixon appointed him as an agent of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. Presley treasured the gold-and-blue enamel shield symbolizing his achieving this lofty position and kept it always with him, in the same case in which he kept his illegally prescribed pills. The Swiftian irony of the meeting between these two clowns whom all the world mistook for kings is marvelously captured by Goldman:

Richard Nixon was poised to launch at that very moment a mighty new crusade against drugs. He planned to label drug abuse "America's Number One Problem." Not content with just denouncing drugs and beefing up the federal drug budget, Nixon was already planning to set up a drug superagency, modeled along the lines of the FBI and the CIA, called the Drug Enforcement Agency. The cost of this new secret police force would be staggering. By Fiscal Year 1974, Nixon would have raised the drug law enforcement budget 1100 percent above what it was when he took office in 1968. . . . Now, just as he is to sound the clarion call to the nation . . . along comes one of the greatest heroes of American youth, Elvis Presley, America's Number One Entertainer, proposing to talk to the Number One American about America's Number One Problem! . . . This was an opportunity for a real summit!

When Elvis walked into the Oval Office, he was "high as a kite," says

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