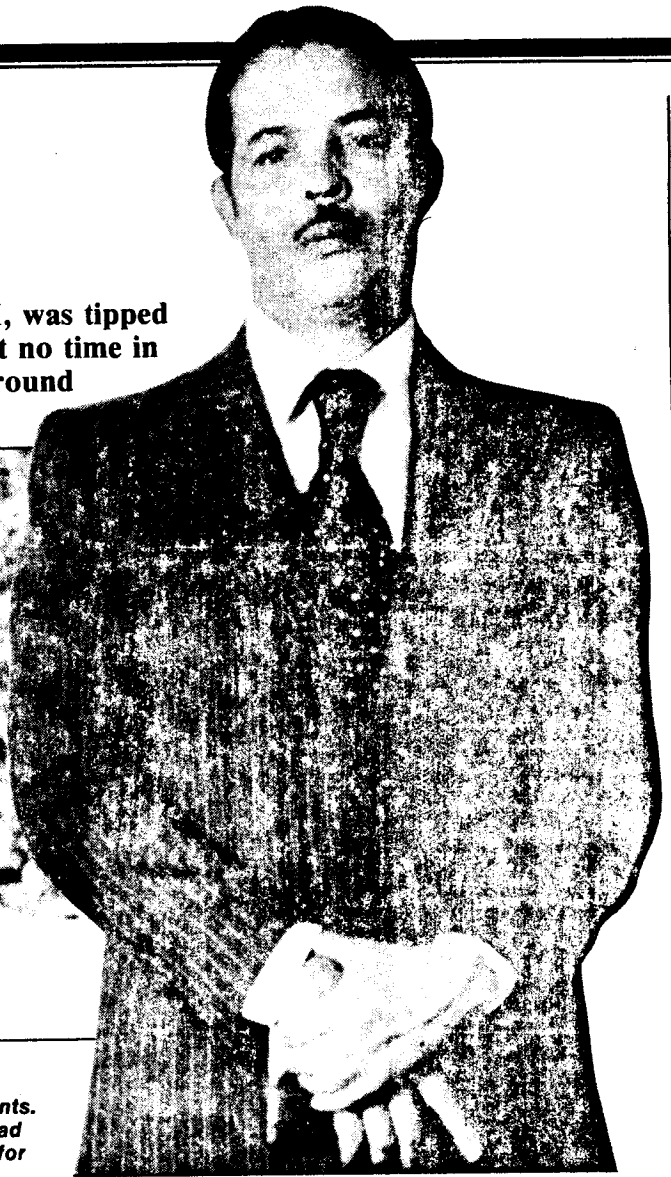
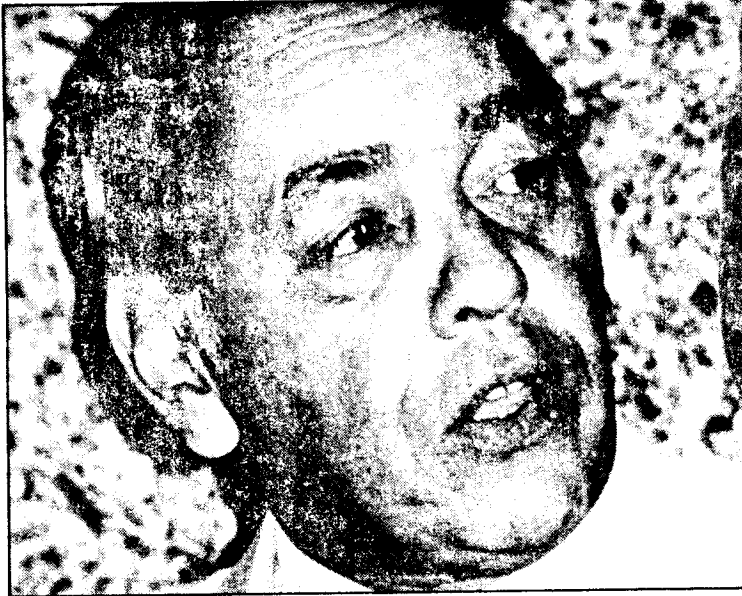




MARCH 1983

An 'accident' to forestall a coup

When Morocco's absolute monarch, King Hassan II, was tipped off that his only general was plotting a coup, he lost no time in silencing him, according to an officer in the underground movement interviewed by *Africa Now*



General Ahmed Dlimi, King Hassan's right-hand man and commander of the Moroccan army's southern forces did not die in a car accident as alleged by the regime. He was tortured and then shot after the CIA informed the King that Dlimi was planning a military coup to overthrow the monarchy in July this year and replace it with a democratic Arab Islamic Republic of Morocco.

At a secret hideout in Sweden, Lieutenant Ahmed Rami, a leader of *Le Mouvement des Officiers Libres*, the underground movement of Moroccan army officers dedicated to overthrow the King, told *Africa Now* that General Dlimi was called to King Hassan's palace in Marrakesh at 11 o'clock at night on January 23. There, 10 security men escorted him to an underground interrogation room. At 1 a.m., two American officers arrived with the King and went into the interrogation room for some hours. At 5 a.m., Dlimi was shot. His body was later placed in his car which exploded out in a suburb, probably as the result of grenades planted inside. The police cordoned off the area, Dlimi's bullet-proof Mercedes was disposed of at once, and no one was permitted to see the body, not even members of Dlimi's own family.

Above: King Hassan II: crimes against human rights says his opponents. Right: General Dlimi: had been working steadily for Hassan's downfall

The Moroccan Press has now come up with a story by a civilian called Lhrizi who said he was in Dlimi's car when the accident took place. But there are strong suspicions that Lhrizi, who has gone underground, is a member of the King's secret police.

Ahmed Rami is under sentence of death in Morocco for his part in a previous coup attempt on August 16 1972 when the *Officiers Libres* tried unsuccessfully to shoot down a Boeing jet carrying King Hassan. He now lives in exile and is the external contact man for the revolutionary officers' movement. Rami explained: "Dlimi avoided direct contact with *Officiers Libres* in Morocco. But he frequently travelled abroad and it was easy for me to be his link with the movement. We met about twice a year, and more frequently last year to plan details of the July coup.

"Unknown to us, however, the CIA was investigating him. When the CIA handed over a dossier to King Hassan in January it contained videofilm of General Dlimi and I

meeting in Stockholm last December. That was enough for Dlimi to be eliminated."

Already, on January 1, a leading investment risk analysis firm in New York, Front and Sullivan, had produced its *Political Risk from Territorial Disputes: A Global Survey*, in which Morocco was rated a country with a high risk of violence and where prospects of a coup were on the increase. The firm had noted the opposition to the corruption within Hassan's regime; the consequences of the prolonged war in the Western Sahara; POLISARIO's capacity to score military victories over the Moroccan forces; the country's continued economic problems and growing poverty — all of which increased the likelihood of a military alternative to Hassan.

The CIA perceived Dlimi's favouring of French rather than US aid as a potential threat to American interests in the region. (There have been rumours that the King asked the US for marines to protect him. But the Americans are insisting that Hassan first get rid of his close confidants who are

in favour of closer relations with France.)

Nevertheless, the King was informed of Dlimi's coup plans by American intelligence and Hassan acted immediately. Scores of senior officers were detained on January 17 and 12 of them interrogated. Almost simultaneously with Dlimi's liquidation, three colonels — Col. Bouarat, commander of the Royal Guard; Col. Ouazari, director of the gendarmerie and Col. Doukali — were arrested and subsequently executed. The King placed the army on a state of alert on January 25 and 26 after the palace announced the "grievous death" of Dlimi in a "car accident."

According to an Algerian announcement, some young officers were arrested last month because of alleged contacts with *Officiers Libres*.

Curiously, a news item released to the *New York Times* on January 26 described the emergence of Morocco as the US' closest Arab ally — but made no mention of the death of the country's only general and even as late as mid-February there was still no mention of it in the American Press despite numerous reports in Europe.

"I am a wanted man, dead or alive," maintains Lieutenant Rami. "The Swedish security police have already foiled one plot to kidnap me and I have to be very careful — of both King Hassan's men and even more of professional CIA agents."

Asked how he knew of the events in the palace, Rami said the ears and eyes of *Officiers Libres* were everywhere. "And of course communications between, say, Casablanca and Paris are far better than those between Rabat and Casablanca."

Ahmed Rami, who grew up in the Moroccan countryside amid poor Berber people, is recognised as an intellectual in Sweden. He often partakes in public debate in the newspapers and on television on issues related to the Middle East and to Afro-Arab relations. Among academics he is known as an acute political scientist who has written penetratingly about Nasserism, the subject of his doctoral thesis.

What has not been known is his role as a Moroccan revolutionary, working steadily for the downfall of the monarchy in his homeland. At meetings in Paris, London and Stockholm last year General Dlimi and Ahmed Rami formulated the plans for this year's planned July coup. Ahmed Rami was to have been smuggled into Morocco in a military aircraft a week before the coup in readiness to take charge of a panzer regiment and seize control of the radio headquarters.

"In Stockholm last year we began drafting the communiqué to be broadcast to the nation once the *Officiers Libres* had seized control. General Dlimi and I had planned to meet again in London last month — February — because he was going to accompany King Hassan on a visit to Britain together with a high-level Arab delegation. But then Dlimi was exposed and murdered."

The communiqué, Ahmed Rami told

Africa Now, would have read something like this: "In the name of Allah our martyr, and in the name of the people, we abolish the monarchy and tyranny in Morocco and replace it with the democratic Islamic Arab Republic of Morocco. The King will be put on trial and judged for all his crimes against human rights and against the people of Morocco."

"We do not do this as the army, but as active citizens. We have no magic formula to solve Morocco's problems. It is the people themselves who will solve the problems, in every city, in every quarter, in every factory and in every village."

"We have reversed the loyalty of the army which, until now, has had its weapons aimed at the people to protect the King. But now we aim our weapons at tyrants and corruption. The army will in future play its power role — the protection of Morocco's peoples. We have overthrown the great King, but we know that there are thousands of little tyrants in Morocco whom the people have to overthrow."

"*Le Mouvement des Officiers Libres* decided to move after Israel's invasion of Lebanon. We could not wait any longer while Israel continued with its humiliations of our brother peoples and Reagan was pressuring Arab leaders to recognise Israel. To recognise Israel is to legitimise colonialism and the death of the Palestinian people....."

About half of the communiqué was to be devoted to the need for Arab unity and the need to bring about the end of Israel. It was also to announce that *Officiers Libres* would co-operate with young officers in the Algerian and Tunisian armies — with whom relations had already been

established — to overthrow those North African regimes and together build an Islamic Arab Republic as a first step in building a federation in the Arab World.

Lastly the communiqué was to clarify that *Officiers Libres* did not plan to install a military regime but, instead, a democratic government agreed upon by all political groups. There would be a constitution with legislated guarantees for all political parties and for Press freedom. The death sentence was to be abolished and asylum would be offered to Arabs anywhere living under repression.

Ahmed Rami said he decided to reveal all this information to *Africa Now* because he wanted to counter the official version that General Dlimi died loyal to the monarchy.

General Dlimi was extremely popular in the army, especially in the south. The King knew that if he had officially executed Dlimi without trial, he would have faced great opposition from the army. Furthermore, King Hassan wanted it to appear that Dlimi died in the service of the monarchy. He was well aware of Dlimi's great popularity among army officers and probably expects them to emulate Dlimi's loyalty.

There are more than 150,000 men in the army but only the underground group knew of Dlimi's real ambition to see an end to the monarchic system, so many could have been fooled by the King's version of what happened to him. "That's why I am revealing that Dlimi, a fine and great man, was working steadily for Hassan's downfall," explains Rami.

General Dlimi was a man who had undergone a metamorphosis. He had been trained as an officer by the French army

Ahmed Rami in his Swedish hide-out: "I am a wanted man, dead or alive"



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and had absorbed its traditions of pride and dignity — which have their roots back in the French revolution. After Morocco achieved independence in 1956 he was among the many officers who came back and formed the Moroccan army. For many it was an instant shock to discover that King Hassan intended using them as police against the people — this had never happened in France. Expecting to achieve even more dignity as defenders of their own land, they found themselves minions of a monarch whose will was not that of the people.

"Those with access to the King, like Dlimi, were appalled at his sexual excesses, his drug abuse, his personal interests in the large-scale hashish traffic out of Morocco," said Ahmed Rami. "It is a scandal for the Arab world that such a person can be Head of State. Besides, Dlimi soon perceived that such an absolute monarchy was incompatible with the governing of a modern state. He said to me that no development was possible under such a system. So, because of his honest principles, Dlimi changed from an ordinary career officer into a politically conscious revolutionary. He told me he saw his duty as protecting the land and its people, not just the person of the King.

"His hands were not free, as King Hassan demanded his almost continuous presence, even to the extent of having him run around after him on the golf course and pick up his golf balls."

Ahmed Rami said General Dlimi had a greater vision than that of a Moroccan nationalist. Before Boumedienne took power in Algeria, General Dlimi had dreamed of an Arab *maghreb* ruled by Algeria's Ben Bella and comprising the present Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

It was important for world observers to see Dlimi's death in its broad geo-political context and to understand why the CIA had acted once again in support of an Arab African regime favourable to the US. The CIA had clearly been shadowing Dlimi for a long time. Morocco has a very important strategic position in the Mediterranean, giving the Americans a grip on the Straits of Gibraltar. King Hassan is their watchdog in the area. Having lost the Shah in Iran, they stand to lose a great deal if Hassan falls. Reagan's so-called peace plan in the Middle East is dependent on his three building blocks: Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco. So they are very fearful of change in Morocco.

Ahmed Rami and his army associates believe that the only possibility for change in Morocco lies in a military coup. The legal political parties exist only by the grace of King Hassan and may not oppose the monarchy. The state repressive apparatus is so severe that few civilians dare to partake in political activity. To demonstrate against the state means almost certain death. The only underground opposition consists of two small groups of "left extremists" known as the March 23 Movement and Ill



Dlimi: changed from an ordinary career officer into a politically conscious revolutionary

Amam which have a membership of only a few hundred Marxist intellectuals. Then there is the illegal *L'Option Revolutionnaire*, a small breakaway group from the *Union Nationale des Forces Populaires* (UNFP); and an unco-ordinated group of Muslim integrationists. None of these groups has the potential to bring about change.

Rami, 37, says he became politically aware in the early 1960's when he was a teenager. People were talking about Nasser in Egypt who had deposed a King and carried out agricultural reforms and abolished the feudal system. "I was of that group of youngsters who had grown up in suffering, for whom there were no job opportunities and no legal means to express discontent. Nasser had shown us that it was possible to achieve social justice and economic democracy. On March 23 1965, I was with a group of demonstrating students and unemployed in Casablanca. The police and army fired upon us and about 100 people died.

"Many of us then realised that via the

military lay the only way to bring about revolution in Morocco. This was why I entered the military academy in 1966. Today military opposition constitutes the strongest underground force in the country. Here lies the greatest threat to the King."

Speaking fluent Berber, Arabic and French and with an already brilliant student record, Ahmed Rami was a bright young star in the army. His rise was aided when he became personal tutor to the son of General Gharbouis, a simple officer whose only reading consisted of Donald Duck comics. In gratitude Rami was appointed head of a panzer regiment and was brought into the close circle surrounding King Hassan. Already he had joined the group of young officers who planned to overthrow the King.

The first coup attempt was July 10 1971, the King's birthday, and was masterminded by General Madbouh, then Hassan's closest military adviser. One hundred cadets were to storm the palace and shoot the King. It was a disaster. The soldiers bore the same uniforms as the palace guards, everyone was shooting each other and the King escaped by hiding in a toilet. Madbouh died in the crossfire.

Another French-trained officer, General Oufkir, was given the credit for aborting the coup and was immediately appointed Minister of Defence. He replaced Madbouh as the King's closest man, but, like his predecessor, came to hate all the King stood for. General Oufkir and Ahmed Rami became close friends and Rami was appointed the general's adjutant, which made him in effect the deputy Minister of Defence.

New plans to overthrow King Hassan were already afoot. The King's private Boeing jet was to be shot down by defence force Phantom jets on Hassan's return from vacation in France. On August 16 1972, with General Oufkir in command at the military airfield control tower, the three Phantoms went in to attack. But their machine guns turned out to be loaded largely with practice ammunition and their missiles had not been activated. A few bullets hit the Boeing and Hassan's pilot fooled the plotters by announcing that the King had been shot. After an emergency landing, King Hassan was taken to safety in the French embassy.

One of the Phantom pilots who had tried in vain to crash his jet into Hassan's Boeing and jumped out in his parachute, was captured on landing and immediately interrogated under torture. He told of General Oufkir's role. Oufkir was summoned to one of Hassan's palaces, in Skhirat, tortured and shot. It was officially announced that he had committed suicide. Says Ahmed Rami: "I saw Oufkir's body before it was removed. He had been shot several times. One eye had been blown out by a shot in the back of the head."

Several of the ringleaders were arrested. Ahmed Rami knew that he would be uncovered, as the radio communiqué he had

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prepared for the coup was in General Oufkir's car. He went into hiding in the Atlas mountains and managed to evade a widespread manhunt. Three members of *Officiers Libres* fled to Gibraltar and asked the British for asylum. The British handed them over to King Hassan's men and, together with eight of the other officers, they were publicly executed on one of the holiest days of the Muslim faith: Aid Elkbir. The executions were televised to the nation.

After a year on the run, Ahmed Rami left Morocco. General Ahmed Dlimi arranged for him to leave Morocco in a military plane with a false identity. "I have never told this before — because I had to protect Dlimi. He had, in fact, been with us since the beginning of 1971. I went to Algeria and then directly to Sweden where I was given political asylum and I straightaway began working in exile against King Hassan. Soon after leaving Morocco I was granted a personal interview with Colonel Gadaffi in Libya and I secured an undertaking from him that Radio Libya, which constantly attacked Hassan's regime, would not personally criticise General Dlimi. He kept his word.

Le Mouvement des Officiers Libres was crippled for a time after the second abortive coup. Hassan's spies and CIA agents were everywhere trying to uncover the unknown members. After lying low for a couple of years they began to regroup and gradually enlist new members. General Dlimi, himself became King Hassan's closest adviser and re-established contact with Rami and the secret officers' movement.

"We in the opposition recognised that Morocco was the victim of the activities of foreign powers," explains Rami. "So, of course, we spent much time discussing foreign policy to be pursued after our coup. We consider the war in Western Sahara to be absurd. It is maintained by the despicable regimes of Algeria and Morocco

to occupy their citizens with a problem which has no reality. We consider Western Sahara to be part of Morocco, but the inhabitants there would be able to make their own choice under the democratic future we envisage. Algeria's support for POLISARIO is of course motivated by her wish for access to an Atlantic port.

"We expect POLISARIO, the peoples of the Western Sahara, would want to join us in building a greater Arab unity."

Dlimi himself was the commander of the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara charged with its day to day control. Through the Saharan campaign, and particularly with Operation Ouhoud, he had been able to consolidate his power within the military there. But he soon

discovered that Morocco was in no position to suppress the POLISARIO. By last year, nine-tenths of the disputed territory had fallen under POLISARIO control and administration.

Dlimi witnessed a steady loss of morale among his troops and they experienced a bitter defeat at Guelta Zemour. In January this year, the 15 attacks launched by the POLISARIO inflicted casualties and equipment losses on the Moroccans. Dlimi saw the wave of economic deprivation inundate his country as the Saharan campaign consumed upwards of 40% of the nation's Gross National Product. Over the eight years the Palace had spent more on the war effort than on health, education and welfare; the discrepancy between the wealthy few and the impoverished many widened, with 10% of the population exhausting 45% of the nation's wealth.

Rami contends: "We stand on the threshold of great changes in north Africa, especially after what has now happened in Lebanon. Muslim integrationists everywhere are saying that it is not Israel that is strong, but Arab regimes that are weak. The King of Morocco is allied to America, which is allied to Israel. This is a shame for Muslim people and has to be brought to an end."

Moroccan citizens, unorganised and relatively powerless against King Hassan's repression, would welcome his downfall, maintains Rami. The two coup attempts of the early 1970's were welcomed with jubilation until people realised that they had failed.

And what of the future? "*Le Mouvement des Officiers Libres* has suffered a tremendous setback with the death of General Dlimi. A great loss, but our ideals live on" ●



Hassan riding with Reagan (top left); with Weinberger outside the Pentagon (above) and gesturing with Senator Charles Percy, chairman of the us Senate Foreign Relations Committee: the Americans are fearful of change in Morocco

Dlimi with his troops: he was very popular in the army

