

TRIBES THREATEN MOROCCAN UNITY

Riffian Fighting and Unrest in South Viewed by Rabat as Challenge to Nation

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RABAT, Morocco, Jan. 15—Tribal unrest in the mountain areas during recent weeks has impelled Morocco into perhaps the gravest crisis in her three years as an independent state.

One of the young Government leaders here compared the present phase of Moroccan history to the days of the Civil War in the United States. He called it "the battle for national unity."

Western diplomats felt that a showdown between the Government and the tribal chiefs might determine whether any central authority in Rabat could impose a firm rein on the country or whether Morocco was drifting into a breakdown of public order.

If the present central authority—King Mohamed V and the Government of Premier Abdallah Ibrahim—should lose out, one diplomat said, it might become virtually impossible to keep the Algerian war from spreading to Morocco.

Sharp Rif Fighting

The strongest challenge to Rabat has come from the mountains of the Rif in the north.

Ten days ago the conflict there took a form approaching civil war as the royal army, supported by tanks and rocket-carrying planes, went into action. The Rif tribesmen have lost at least 200 men so far, according to the best estimates. Army losses were placed at sixty men after the first five days of fighting.

Challenges of a similar kind but in less brutal form have come from several tribal chiefs in different regions of the Middle Atlas. No serious fighting has been reported from that area.

In southern Morocco, the Government's authority is being challenged by remnants of the Liberation Army, whose men fought for independence but refused to be incorporated in the royal army after independence came early in 1956. Also tribal partisans who have long been virtually autonomous are operating in same region.

The situation in the south is reported to have become disturbing since all but about 5,000 men of the royal army were sent to the Rif area and the northern rim of the Atlas ten days ago.

Reaction to Algeria

In the Rif, as distinguished from other areas of unrest, the tribal discontent has been organized politically in the Riffian Movement of Liberation and Purge and in a military organization patterned after the nationalist rebel movement in Algeria.

Western diplomats said they noticed a distinct improvement in French-Moroccan relations and a simultaneous cooling off of relations between Morocco and the Algerian nationalists.

Premier Abdallah Ibrahim, who took office three weeks ago after a prolonged Cabinet crisis, was chosen by the King because he was thought to be best capable of dealing with tribal sedition.

Also, Mohamed V has committed himself and the royal family more directly than ever before to direct action. It was the King, not Premier Ibrahim, who sent the rebels an ultimatum and accepted responsibility for use of the Royal Army. And it was Moulay Hassan, the Crown Prince and Army Chief of Staff, who assumed personal command of operations in the Rif.