

Egypt-Libya Truce Precarious

The July 21 attack by Egypt into Libyan territory was preceded by months of steady troop build-ups by the Egyptians along Libya's border. In May, according to the London *Economist*, the Egyptians were ready to move, but were impeded by Soviet diplomatic intervention and by short-lived Soviet-Egyptian talks on the restoration of positive bilateral relations. By at least as early as mid-June, the July 24 *Jerusalem Post* reported, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts was fully aware of Egyptian invasion plans.

When Egyptian President Sadat gave the orders for the invasion, New York's Senator Jacob Javits was hardly surprised. Javits had been in Cairo the previous weekend and had informed Sadat that Wall Street was declaring "open season" on OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. So once a small-scale border incident gave Sadat the pretext, he ordered the attack.

Other calculations have entered into the malleable Egyptian President's mind. According to a knowledgeable Chase Manhattan Mideast expert, Sadat "wanted to keep the Begin-Carter talks, which were disastrous from his point of view, off the front pages of the Cairo papers, and he has succeeded in doing this." Sadat is reeling internally in Egypt from periodic public outbreaks of unrest during this year, from an economic collapse that is being stage-managed by the International Monetary Fund, and from the thorough discrediting of his persistent "rely-on-the-Rockefellers" foreign policy.

Were Sadat simply intent on "giving (Libyan leader) Qaddafi a lesson," as his July 22 nationwide speech repeatedly emphasized, the fighting need never have reached the proportion of full-scale warfare. After an initial skirmish near the Libyan town of Mossaid in which several Libyan tanks and jets were knocked out, the vastly superior Egyptian forces extended the fight towards the southeastern Libyan town of Kufra, near oil installations, and along the Libyan Mediterranean coast. Heavy enough damage was inflicted to create a steady flow of refugees westward toward the city of Benghazi, according to the London *Financial Times*.

After unleashing heavy fighting, Sadat later in the week demanded a veritable surrender from the Libyans in return for Egyptian acceptance of a ceasefire mediated by the Algerians and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Sadat insisted that Libya dismantle its Soviet-manned radar base near the Egyptian border and that Qaddafi discontinue all political campaigning against Sadat's pro-U.S. policies. According to the July 27 *Al Safir* newspaper, these conditions have been thoroughly rejected by Libya, which has instead called for vigilance and mobilization of its population to combat the continued threat from Egypt. According to one veteran Mideast observer, "Qaddafi could never accept those terms, so the chance of renewed fighting is very great."

Aside from rejecting Sadat's demands for Libyan

capitulation, Libyan government emissaries have accused Egypt of working intimately with the United States and Israel to destroy Arab national interests and of preparing the way for the extermination of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Libya's Ambassador to France, for example, charged this week that Egypt had "gotten the green light from the U.S. and Israel" to carry out its invasion of Libya.

Mediation Efforts, Soviet Response

While there is still a strong possibility of a renewed outbreak of heavy fighting, intense mediation efforts continue. By July 28, PLO leader Arafat was able to declare in a Damascus press conference that a ceasefire had been arranged on the basis of a Kuwaiti-Algerian leader Houari Boumediene had shuttled between Tripoli and Cairo, in the latter capital warning the Egyptians that he was prepared to intervene on the side of Libya if the Egyptian attacks continued.

The Foreign Ministers of Iraq and Syria have also engaged in mediation efforts during the week. According to the July 24 *Jerusalem Post*, the Saudis have sent concerned messages to Egypt warning that further fighting risked provoking a military intervention by the Soviet Union on the side of Libya.

Publicly, the Soviets have played the situation relatively low-key, which has misled many observers in the U.S. into believing a contrived U.S. National Security Council fantasy that the Egypt-Libya conflict was itself pre-arranged by the superpowers "to let off some steam." In reality, the Soviets are watching the situation extremely closely, fully aware of the Carter Administration's intentions to expand the crisis throughout Africa and into a general crusade against OPEC.

Otherwise, the Soviets and their Warsaw Pact allies have made it clear where they stand on this regional "limited" war. An official solidarity committee in East Germany and the Moscow-based Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Committee have expressed support for the Libyans. The Cuban ambassador in Cairo has expressed his government's alarm at the repercussions of the Egyptian attacks on Libyan security and development.

Expansion of the Conflict

An imminent expansion of the crisis into the volatile Horn of Africa region and across North Africa is highly likely. The Horn of Africa area is being lit ablaze by a wildly provocative U.S. government arms sales policy. As for North Africa, informed European military officials report that the U.S.-controlled Moroccan government is planning to open a "second front" against Algeria in the next days. The London *Financial Times* reported July 27 that Egypt and Morocco have recently inked a mutual defense pact which virtually certifies a Maghreb-wide expansion of the confrontation.

—Mark Burdman