

# The Mediterranean crisis and Tunisia

The Libyan-Tunisian crisis is merely the latest major incident in the continuously deteriorating geostrategic situation in the Mediterranean area. The steady decline of Western influence is most dramatically demonstrated in the now completed process of Syria's takeover of Lebanon. The state sovereignty of Lebanon has been destroyed; this once prosperous and moderate nation has become a war-torn, divided appendix of Syria's regional imperial aims.

The growth of millenarian Shi'ite fundamentalism has spread from Iran to the shores of the Mediterranean, seriously affecting Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

## Egypt and Sudan

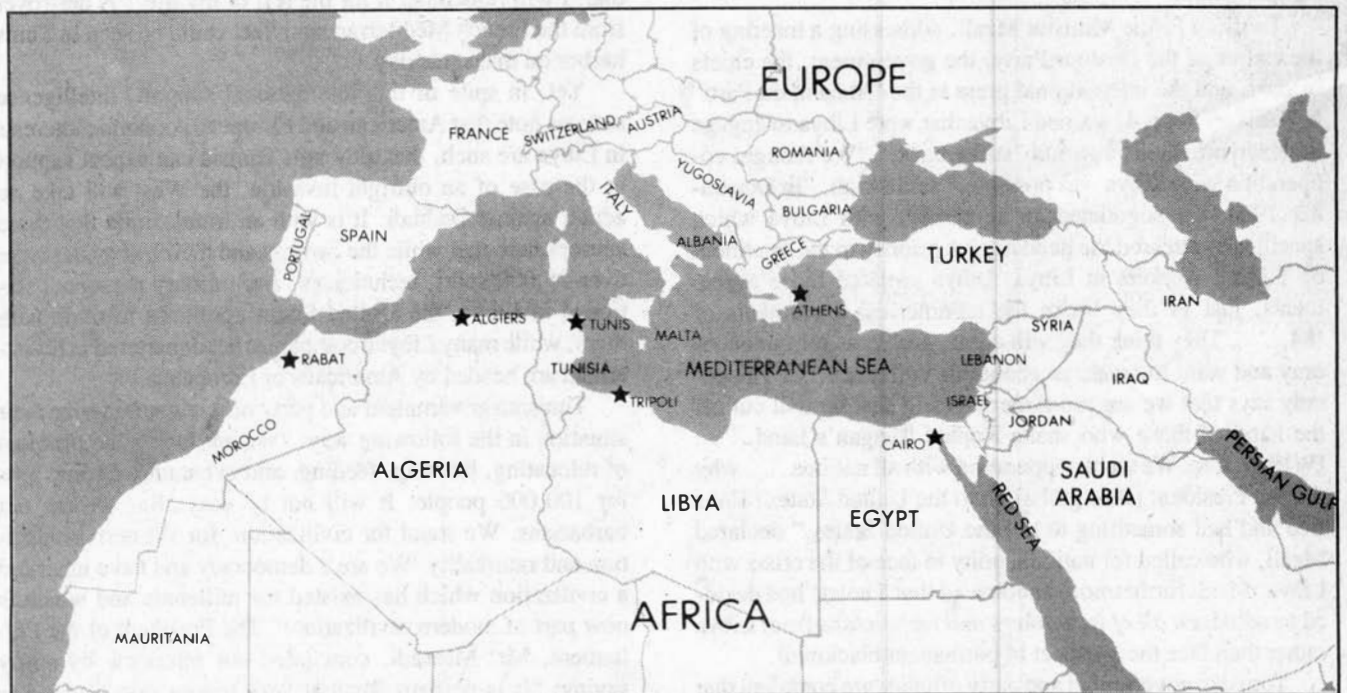
Sudan, once Egypt's major regional ally and buffer against Libyan-Soviet extremism, is in the process of reversing alliances under the dual pressure of a deadly economic crisis which has been dramatically worsened by International Monetary Fund's "conditionalities," and the growth of subversive influences which feed upon economic disorder.

## Greece and Malta

What is commonly called the Southern Flank of NATO mirrors this evolution. On June 2, 1985, Andreas Papandreou, the ultra-left leader of the Socialist Party, Pasok, was re-elected prime minister of Greece, effectively pulling Greece out of NATO. Soon after, Papandreou also announced a complete shift in Greek military commitments, away from the Greek-Bulgarian border and toward preparedness for conflict with Turkey, a NATO member.

Athens, under Pasok rule, has become a major international crossroads for Libyan, Syrian, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Islamic Jihad operations. It is therefore understood that Libyan-Greek relations are excellent and are cemented by ideological bonds and not mere mercantile interests.

Since Dom Mintoff's radical turn some years ago, Malta has signed military and economic cooperation treaties with Libya, Syria, and North Korea. Mintoff, until recently the long-time premier of the island-state, took it upon himself to introduce North Korean advisers into Malta.



## Spain, France, and Italy

At the same time, Pasok-dominated Greece initialed accords with Syria, Malta, and, most recently, Bulgaria, the Soviet satellite state most tightly ruled by the Soviet KGB. Of the major Mediterranean powers of Western Europe, socialist Spain and socialist France both maintain an ambiguous "third force" policy which is also supported by Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti.

Former Chancellor of Austria Bruno Kreisky, a dean of the Socialist International, told the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* on Aug. 16 that he was negotiating a "Mediterranean pact" between the European socialists, Libya and Malta, to make the Mediterranean a "neutral zone." In sum, Western political influence, and U.S. influence in particular, have clearly declined over the past five years.

## Syria, Lebanon, and Libya

Conversely, Soviet military and political power has significantly grown. The Mediterranean Squadron of the Soviet Black Sea fleet fulfills continuous duties in the Mediterranean and has been regularly modernized over the past decade. The U.S.S.R. has also created major air-strips for Soviet forces in northern and southern Libya as well as enormous, underground tank and armor depots near Damascus (Syria) and Tripoli (Lebanon). An entire tank division could be rapidly put on war footing with the equipment available near Damascus. Yet, more than a military theater, the area serves as an arena of political and subversive warfare in which the Soviet design is to destroy Western influence. The strategic significance of the United States and European military withdrawal from Lebanon cannot be underestimated.

Tripoli and Benghazi (both in Libya) are used as staging centers for the East German secret service, the Staatssicherheitsdienst (Stasi), and the Soviet KGB for all of Africa. Thousands of East German agents are processed through Libya. European intelligence reports indicated that between one and two thousand special operatives of the Stasi were deployed into Libya in July and August of 1985. East Germany maintains diplomatic relations with some 13 African nations and has commercial and representative offices in some dozen others.

## Tunisia

Tunisia remains a key to the stability of the entire region. Were radical pro-Libyan elements around the UGTT trade union to succeed in their destabilization campaign against the present government, not only would the West lose a precious ally and the Islamic world a center of moderation, science, culture, and reason, but the entirety of northern Africa would enter into a spiral breakdown: Algeria and Morocco would soon follow under the joint pressures of economic crisis and growing religious irrationalism. In turn, such a radicalization would inevitably hurt the social and economic stability of all West European countries.

# The mobilization to defend Tunisia

by Thierry Lalevée and Philip Golub

The visit of Algerian President Chadli Benjedid on Sept. 2 to Tunisia, followed on Sept. 4 by a courtesy visit of the chief of U.S. naval forces, Admiral Watkins, underscored the international mobilization which has rapidly gathered support for Tunisia against the threat of Libyan aggression. As the mobilization gathered momentum day by day, it sent a strong signal to Libya's ruler, Muammar Qaddafi, that not only was Libya's isolation growing, but that any attempt to carry out the Libyan threats would mean, with certainty, the end of the Qaddafi regime.

The effect of the mobilization has been seen in Libya's sudden change of behavior. On Sept. 1, Libya celebrated the anniversary of Qaddafi's "revolution" by sending one of its jetfighters to violate Tunisian airspace close to the Mediterranean island of Jerba. On Sept. 2, a few hours after the departure of Algerian President Chadli, Qaddafi broadcast over Libyan radio his new "admiration" for Tunisian culture, harping on how he had always wanted cooperation between the two countries. Qaddafi's speech misled no one in Tunisia, since only a few hours later, Libyan radio resumed its hate propaganda campaign, warning Tunis that should the Tunisian media continue attacking Libya, "Libya will have to react."

The strengthening of ties between Algeria and Tunisia, along the lines of the May 1983 treaty of friendship between the two countries, has done much to consolidate Tunisia's regional position. President Chadli's visit to Monastir, where President Bourguiba was taking his summer holidays, and his several hours of discussion with the President as well as Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali, were the outcome of several weeks of close cooperation between the two countries since the beginning of the crisis with Libya in early August.

Chadli came with several proposals which were revealed on Sept. 4 in a mass meeting of "national solidarity" chaired by Prime Minister Mzali. This included several badly needed economic measures, such as the creation of a special "solidarity fund" to finance the resettlement of the Tunisian workers expelled from Libya; the donation to Tunisia of one day of Algerian workers' wages; Algiers' decision to buy those