

## Middle East Report by Omar al Montasser

### The new countdown has begun

*Cornered, Qaddafi is reportedly increasing his daily intake of drugs, but has promised that his "prestige" will be avenged.*

**T**he beginning of May brought bad news for Libya's Muammar Qaddafi. On May 3, his month-long efforts to force the Arab League to denounce the United States, fell apart. After several days of sessions among Arab foreign ministers, a new consensus emerged: No Arab country was willing to denounce the United States or to even moot retaliations in Libya's defense.

As a last-minute face-saving operation, Qaddafi announced that if an Arab summit were convened in Fez (Morocco), he could not attend for security reasons; the summit would have been held in Tripoli. This irked Libya's Moroccan partners, who signed an "Arabo-African unity pact" with Libya only last year. Then, on May 5, the seven heads of government at the Tokyo summit voted a resolution against international terrorism which singled out Libya. Qaddafi's hopes that some of the European countries would veto such a statement, were dashed.

Muammar Qaddafi has been ostracized, and he knows it. His friends can be counted on the fingers of one hand—Syria, Iran, and the U.S.S.R. The support given to the Libyan resolutions at the Fez conference by Algeria and South Yemen can hardly comfort Libya. Algeria deliberately did it to annoy Morocco, while South Yemen's support meant little else than that Moscow had told Aden to do so.

Even Libya's closest friends look like summer soldiers. Syria spoke loud and clear in support of Libya, but from Damascus; it didn't bother to send anyone from the foreign ministry to Fez. Only Iran made the gesture of

dispatching on April 30 two high-level ministers to convey its moral support, Foreign Minister Ali Akhbar Veilayati and minister for the Pasdaran, Mohsen Rafiq-Dust.

From Fez to Tokyo, a new countdown has begun. Libya is expected to retaliate spectacularly against the United States and its allies. Already on May 6, Qaddafi called for a general *Jihad* (holy war) against the West. While swallowing one diplomatic defeat after the other, the Libyans have held meetings with their terrorist friends, and they are expecting Syria and Iran to pitch in.

On April 27, Col. Abu Bakr Yunis Jabr Ali, Libya's chief of staff, met with Abu Musa and Ahmed Jibril as well as a few of their underlings, Abu Khaled al Umlah, Abu Majdi, and Fadl Sharah Fines. Meanwhile, terrorist Abu Nidal was announcing retaliations against the U.S. government and some American figures. The very fact that Abu Bakr Yunis chaired the conferences pointed up the Libyan mood. Usually such gatherings are run by Libya's number-two, Maj. Abdelsalam Jalloud. By sending a lower ranking member of the Revolutionary Command, Qaddafi conveyed his rage that the Palestinian radicals were not doing enough to "defend the Jamariyaah."

Whatever form the new Libyan terror takes, Tripoli has little doubt that it will lead to more American reprisals, and is trying to guess what means will be used by the United States next time. Qaddafi cares little about the human casualties or material dam-

age a raid may provoke, but has serious worries about its aftermath. After the April 15 raid, it took three days for the Revolutionary Command to reassess its control over the army and quell local rebellions. Moreover, the army refused to mobilize during the air raid. According to British intelligence sources, as early as April 9, five days after the West Berlin terrorist bombing that led to the U.S. raids, the Libyan leaders, together with KGB Gen. Mikhail Bakov, had made a contingency plan in case of American retaliation. Reportedly, the plan included security measures for East bloc personnel, as well as the special deployment of East German and Czech troops, together with members of the Revolutionary Committees, at key infrastructure sites to prevent a coup. There was no coup, but this deployment proved unable to prevent a military revolt.

Abu Bakr Yunis was reportedly the only Libyan of any standing to exert influence on an army getting more and more restless at the Revolutionary Committees' insanity. It proved not to be enough. In late April, Qaddafi recalled to Tripoli Col. Abdel Hafiz Messaoud, the governor of the Fezzan region and military commander of the Sebha military base. Messaoud was put in charge of reorganizing the army, both to overcome the failures shown during the American raid, and to defuse any threat of rebellion—meaning wide-scale execution of potential opponents.

In charge of deploying the Libyan army in Chad for several years, Messaoud at least has a military record, contrary to the other Libyan leaders. But Messaoud may himself have some second thoughts about the task; his predecessor, Col. Hassan Skhal, was assassinated last November by Qaddafi, who considered him a potential rival.