

Euro-Arab Development The Issue In N. African Troubles

The North African Maghreb, which includes the nations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, remains at the top of the agenda of development-oriented Euro-Arab circles who consider its political stabilization the prerequisite for a successful economic development program for the Middle East and African continent as a whole. But at present a series of provoked conflicts — the Algeria-Morocco feud over the Spanish Sahara, the political crisis in Tunisia which threatens Libyan-Tunisian relations, and the reemergence of guerrilla warfare in Chad — has turned formerly friendly nations into enemy camps.

The exacerbation of rival tendencies and proliferation of spurious guerrilla movements and border conflicts are not accidental. These crises are designed to thwart the emerging alliance between Europe and its Arab allies who have targeted this area for a zone of peace and cooperation.

A Bridge for Development

The notion of a Mediterranean zone of peace and economic development, which would act as a bridge between the advanced industrial sector and the underdeveloped nations, has taken shape from three principal sources — France, West Germany, and Saudi Arabia — who have recently coordinated their efforts to set up a new banking center in the small nation of Luxembourg which would eventually serve as the nucleus of a gold-backed international monetary system. This financial center, whose *raison d'être* would be the export of nuclear energy technology to the Third World, would be free from those adversary banking networks centered in the City of London who are demanding a no-growth, labor-intensive policy for the Third World.

The first signs of an emerging Maghreb unity appeared in September 1977, when Libyan president Muammar Qaddafi announced in an exclusive interview in the French daily *Le Monde* that he would personally undertake to settle certain internecine Maghreb disputes in the

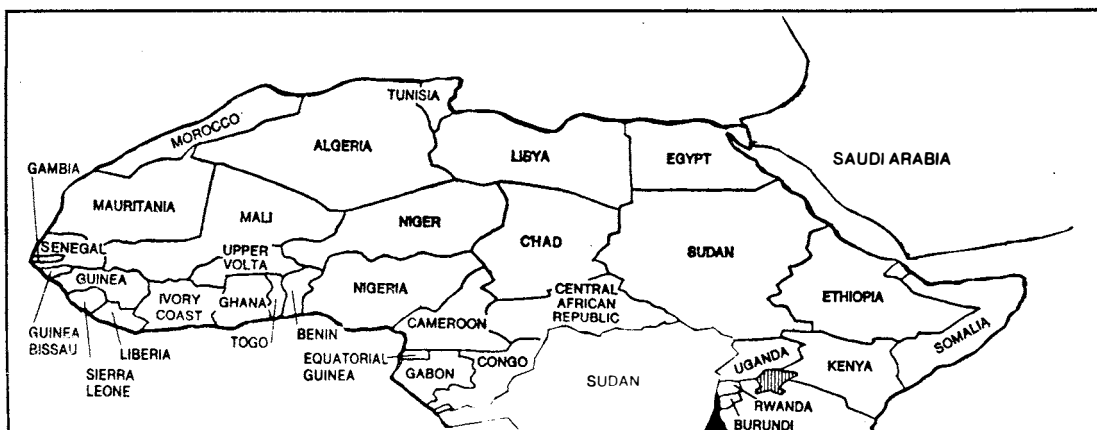
interest of forming a "Confederation of Maghreb States." No doubt modeling his strategy on that of the first proponent of Maghreb unity, ailing Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, Qaddafi offered his mediation in the Algerian-Moroccan dispute over the Spanish Sahara and in the Ethiopian-Somali war in the Horn of Africa.

Tunisian and Libyan Rapprochement

The impetus behind Qaddafi's sudden interest in Maghreb stability is the figure of Mohammed Masmoudi, the former Tunisian Foreign Minister who went into voluntary exile in 1974 when his project of Tunisian-Libyan unification failed. Traveling between Paris, Tripoli, and other Arab capitals, Masmoudi is recognized in international banking circles as a very astute businessman, having himself engineered the French-Libyan Mirage jet deal in 1975. Among his many business connections, Masmoudi is reported to be very close to both the French Dassault aerospace industry, which manufactures the Mirage, and to the Saudi ruling family.

In the fall of 1977, Masmoudi began constructing his return to Tunisian politics. In conjunction with Tunisia's Interior Minister Tahar Belkhouja and Habib Achour, the leader of the 650,000-member Tunisian Trade Union Federation (UGTT), Masmoudi formed a political faction armed with an economic program for Tunisian development. In exchange for skilled manpower (Tunisia has the highest literacy rate of any African country), Qaddafi would provide the oil and currency reserves that Tunisia severely lacks. Two crucial meetings — in September and December 1977 — took place in Tripoli, attended by Achour, Masmoudi, and Qaddafi, to map out a *peaceful* strategy toward the realization of these goals.

Tunisia, however, is now in the throes of a crisis that has occurred as one aspect of a broader destabilization of the Maghreb, designed to pit the "radical" states of



Libya and Algeria against the "conservative" regimes of Morocco and Tunisia. This slicing of the region into ideologically opposed bastions could set the stage for a massive Cold War push between U.S.-backed Morocco and Tunisia and the Soviet client states of Algeria and Libya. In order for this strategy to work, French influence must be removed from Tunisia, since France's international role has been to act as a deterrent to British-backed encouragement of Cold War confrontation between the superpowers.

The orchestrated Tunisian crisis was planned to erode French influence while simultaneously setting up a hardline military government for a "human rights" slander campaign led by the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies (see box). This eminently British strategy is hardly original. It calls for the creation of an ultra-rightwing government which comes to power through a provoked crisis, and then becomes a whipping post for various "human rights" organizations such as IPS or Amnesty International. By focusing on Tunisia's present \$25 million request for U.S. arms, liberal circles in the U.S. are softening up the military clique now in power in Tunisia to accept a more "democratic" government committed to "humanitarian" low growth and low capital investment policies. Under present circumstances, the progrowth "French" faction around former Foreign Minister Masmoudi, whose sentiments are shared by the military, is severely weakened,

and there is talk that Prime Minister Hedi Nouira may form a coalition with the Liberal Party leader, Ahmed Mestiri, who receives support from London's international "human rights" apparatus.

Prior to the catastrophic Tunisian general strike in January, a series of crises pushed Tunisia into the present junta government, which is led by Defense Minister Abdullah Farhat, Security Chief Zine Ben Ali, Prime Minister Hedi Nouira, and Destour Party strongman Mohammed Sayah. This clique has the backing of aging President Habib Bourguiba and his son as well. Beginning last summer, a round of suspicious strikes among Tunisia's textile workers involving the trade unions created fear among the existing government and Destour Party leaders that the real enemy was the threatening power of the UGTT. Then, last month, immediately prior to the strike, a cabinet shake-up ensued in which Interior Minister Tahar Belkhodja was ousted for showing too much interest in the opposing faction, led by Mohammed Masmoudi and later joined by trade-union leader Habib Achour and the president's wife, Wassila Bourguiba. Belkhodja's ouster caused the virtual collapse of the government with the forced resignation of six ministers.

From this point, the stage was set for the riots of January 26. The chaos and confusion of that day, when over 100 people were killed and several hundreds wounded, was thanks to urban mobs and well-placed

Times, IPS Join In Maghreb Destabilization

On Feb. 13 the editors of the New York Times and the Institute for Policy Studies joined forces in the Times' editorial page, attacking the Tunisian government and warning of worse to come unless Tunisia is forced to toe the "human rights" line.

On its editorial page, the newspaper ran an editorial titled "Checking Tunisia's Drift." Here are excerpts:

...The reality, one view of which appears in the article by Eqbal Ahmed and Stuart Schaar on today's Op-Ed page, is that Tunisia has grown steadily more repressive. Amnesty International reports that Tunisia now has its share of political prisoners and of torture.

...Prime Minister Hedi Nouira...has begun a program of military expansion supported by credits from the United States. The program seems ill-advised. It would be years before Tunisia's forces are ever trained or armed sufficiently to offer serious resistance to attack from heavily armed Libya or Algeria. Meanwhile there is a real danger that the new cadre of junior officers will become imbued with the anti-democratic doctrines of Libya and other Arab nations....Since American opinion evidently means much to Tunisia's leaders, the Administration should now indicate its distress and prepare the way for supporting action unless conditions improve.

On the facing Op-Ed page is the article referred to in the editorial, authored by Institute for Policy Studies fellow Ahmed and Schaar, a professor in the New York area. It read in part:

... As public demands for human and economic rights mounted, the (Tunisian) government responded with increased repression . . . The number of political prisoners has been augmented and torture is reported to be common. Hardliners within the ruling party have created an extralegal police force that has terrorized critics and dissenters. Increased American arms aid has reinforced repressive institutions.

By augmenting repression, the government will isolate itself further from the public and, like Iran and Chile, may come to rest solely on force. The alternative to this dismal prospect is a change of government to include the more representative elements outside the party's narrow and frozen confines.

One may hope that President Carter would fulfill his campaign promises of reducing military supplies and promoting human rights . . . In North Africa, this implies reducing rather than increasing United States military sales.

agent provocateurs who gave the military the pretext to intervene "in the interests of national security." On the heels of these incidents, Achour and 11 out of 12 members of the trade-union executive board were arrested, and the dismantling of the powerful trade union organization began. According to reports, more than a thousand trade-union leaders, students, and others are now in prison.

Although there has as yet been no overt Tunisian-Libyan confrontation, the danger exists that relations will deteriorate significantly, since Masmoudi is known to be backed by Libya's Qaddafi. What is clear is that Tunisia is being manipulated into being the foil for a "human rights" smear campaign that will tend to undermine the stability of the Maghreb as a whole.

Northwest Africa: French-Saudi-Soviet Cooperation Jeopardized

Another attempt to undercut French influence in the region is the destabilization in Northwest Africa, which has brought Algeria and neighboring Morocco to the brink of war over the Polisario Front's claim to the Western Sahara. On the one hand, it aims to force the French to take sides in the Polisario conflict by intervening militarily on the side of the Moroccan and Mauritanian governments, thus forcing a rupture in Algerian-French relations. On the other, the French are to be maneuvered into a Cold War posture against the Soviet Union, which would wreck Franco-Soviet cooperation in the immediate area.

Perhaps the most significant economic development in the Maghreb, which in magnitude rivals Algerian-American cooperation in the area of liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure, is the recently concluded phosphate contract between Morocco and the Soviet Union. Described by the London *Financial Times* as "probably the largest single investment by the Soviet Union in the developing world," and heralded by Moroccan King Hassan II as the "contract of the century," the deal will have the Soviets help build the Meskala mine in Southern Morocco at a total investment of \$2 billion in Morocco's phosphate infrastructure. This barter arrangement, signed in Moscow a few weeks ago by the powerful head of the Office Cherifien des Phosphates, former Prime Minister Mohamed Lamrani, will make Morocco, already the world's biggest exporter of phosphates, the world's chief producer, with an output capacity of 47 million tons a year.

Significantly, with this contract the Soviets have signed a 30-year cooperation agreement with a country which is ideologically and politically tied to the conservative regime of Saudi Arabia. King Hassan II is a very close friend of the Saudi royal family, and has expended much energy in the efforts at a settlement of the Middle East conflict. In addition to Morocco's longstanding Saudi ties, French influence there is significant in the area of technical cooperation. The French are known to be developing a process whereby uranium can be extracted from phosphate rock, in direct collaboration with Moroccan technicians.

Although diplomatic relations between France and Algeria have been severely strained by the Saharan conflict, economic relations between the two countries nonetheless remain very important, especially in the area of energy cooperation. Recently, through the influence of Saudi Arabia — which has just signed a joint nuclear energy cooperation agreement with France — Algeria's state-owned energy company Sonatrach has expressed interest in French nuclear technology as well. Rich in uranium, Algeria has publicly declared that it will go nuclear in the future.

The motive force in Algeria's energy strategy is none other than Saudi Arabia. According to French journalist Paul Marie de la Gorce, editorialist for the conservative daily *Le Figaro*, Saudi Arabia was the intermediary in setting up the huge U.S.-Algerian natural gas deals. Under these arrangements, Algeria will transport up to 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas, in the form of LNG, to the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s.

Polisario Linked to British Operations

The Front for the Liberation of the Saguia-El-Hamra and the Rio-de-Oro, the Polisario Front, was created May 10, 1973 in a split-off from the Saharan Liberation Front, whose leader, Mohamed Bessir, was at that time claiming simple autonomy of the Western Sahara, then under Spanish administration. The first military action of the newly created Front was to attack the Spanish military post of El-Kgangua on May 20, 1973.

Following the withdrawal of the Spanish from the territory, the Polisario proclaimed on Feb. 27, 1976 the existence of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic, whose government was set up on March 8. The creation of the Saharan Republic came at the time when the Organization of African Unity held a meeting in Addis-Ababa in order to discuss the recognition of the Polisario Front as a bona fide liberation front. The demand of the Polisario for recognition did not receive the accredited number of votes, and to this day it has not been recognized by the OAU. The Saharan Republic has been recognized by only 11 governments: Madagascar, Burundi, Benin, Angola, Algeria, and Guinea, North Korea, Togo, Mozambique, Rwanda, and the Seychelles.

It is fairly well recognized by the international press that the Polisario is armed, trained and deployed by the Algerian government. In fact, very little differentiation has been made as to whether Saharan or Algerian nationals take part in the fighting. Considered by some observers to be merely an extension of Algeria's political demands, the Polisario reminds others of the British-controlled networks in North Africa during the Second World War. In a recent article in the French daily *L'Aurore*, the Polisario was appropriately likened to the Spanish Nomad Guard, which had been set up by Britain's infamous Special Air Services during the North Africa campaign in the 1940s.

What remains uppermost in the minds of Saudi and French planners is a peaceful resolution to the Sahara conflict. Last summer, Saudi Arabia agreed to underwrite a development package whereby Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria would jointly develop the mineral-rich Western Sahara. The Algerians were urged to drop the Polisario as a political tool, but were assured by their Saudi backers that they would receive unhindered access to the Atlantic Ocean in order to transport their iron deposits from the iron-mining center of Gara Djebilet.

As the prospects for Euro-Arab-Soviet cooperation grew in the western end of the Maghreb, the Polisario Front launched a major offensive against the French government and the French-allied governments of Morocco and Mauritania. A series of guerrilla skirmishes and attacks against the Mauritanian mining center of Zouerate and sabotage runs against the rail line which serves as the only means of transport for iron ore, Mauritania's chief source of income, culminated in the kidnapping of eight French nationals who were working as technical assistants in Mauritania's mining sector. The situation created a crisis between France and Algeria, prompting France to send a fleet of Breguet Atlantique to guard Mauritanian territory and the mining center against Polisario raiding parties. Although the French hostages were subsequently released through the good offices of Libya and the perseverance of French negotiators, the situation remains tense in the area as long as the Polisario has free rein to repeat its marauding operations.

Support for the Polisario is limited in the international community, and even the Soviet Union has refused to come out publicly in its favor. It is reported that during his most recent trip to the Soviet Union, Algeria's President was hard-pressed to elicit Soviet support for the organization.

Within Algeria, there exists a certain "radical" ideological faction, allegedly led by Foreign Minister Bouteflika, which is utilizing the Polisario as leverage for its own political interests. These radical networks, a leftover from the anti-French terrorist agents which infiltrated the National Liberation Front during the Algerian war of independence, are using their anti-imperialist jargon to debilitate French technical cooperation in the area and assure that no capital-intensive, nuclear cooperation can be realized.

Chad: Rerun of the Western Sahara

The unfortunate reactivation of the Frolinat rebellion inside Chad has the same aim: to remove French influence from this Francophile country. Rich in uranium like Algeria, Chad depends heavily on French military and technical assistance. In addition to maintaining historical ties with France, Chad also receives arms from the Soviet Union.

Two weeks ago, a French national and his Swiss companion were kidnapped by the rebel Frolinat guerrilla organization, in a classic destabilization attempt against the pro-French Chad government of Felix Malloum. Utilizing the modus operandi perfected in the Sahara conflict, the bandit "third army" of the Frolinat called for a ransom of \$2 million and the withdrawal of French military assistance to Chad by Feb. 12, 1978.

The incident comes just when French President Giscard d'Estaing is planning an important state visit to Chad in an effort to organize an economic development zone among Francophone countries which would serve as a buffer against potential Cold War manipulations in the continent of Africa.

Last week the Vice-President of Sudan arrived in Libya to offer his assistance in solving the dispute in Chad. There are indications that Sudan has been instrumental in reconciling the various guerrilla factions with the Malloum government. Recently rebel guerrilla leader Hissen Habré, currently living in exile in the Sudan, announced that he had become reconciled with the Malloum government and that both leaders would seek a reconciliation with the other guerrilla factions. Simultaneous with the Habre-Malloum rapprochement, the Sudanese Vice-President arrived in Libya. Libya is backing the "second army" faction, which is fighting in the Northern Tibesti region. From all indications, Libya is willing to cooperate in this venture and is closely cooperating with the French in particular to solve the internal crisis in the country. Immediately after the Sudanese Vice-President's Libyan trip, both the French and Libyan governments announced that they would work closely to achieve a reconciliation of all factions within the government.

—Mary Jane Coates

What is the Frolinat ?

The Frolinat is split into three factions, or "armies." In 1966, a rebellion led by Ibrahim Abatcha among the Toubou tribesmen in the northern Tibesti region of Chad led to a series of "popular revolts" which seriously endangered French influence in the country. In 1968 Abatcha was killed, and was succeeded by Dr. Abba Siddick who later became the head of the movement known as the Frolinat (Front for the National Liberation of Chad).

Between 1968 and 1972, the French army was called in by then President Tombalbaye to quell revolts, led by the rival Toubou tribe, which had spread from the north to the south against the opposing Saras ethnic group. The French legionnaire force suffered heavy losses, and when it was finally pulled out of the conflict the French demanded that the central government institute administrative reforms, especially in the area of taxation.

The strong-man of the Frolinat is Libyan-supported Goukouni Oueddei, who is commander of the "second army," located in the northern Tibesti region. Both Goukouni and Hissen Habré took over the second army in 1972 and, in a power struggle, Goukouni emerged as the uncontested leader in 1976. A "first army" operates in the region close to Sudan.

The "third army," which claimed responsibility for the Jan. 16 kidnapping of the French and Swiss nationals, is located in the western region where Chad shares a border with Nigeria. Long decried by both the other Frolinat factions as nothing but a band of gangsters and bandits, the third army has absolutely no base in the country and is currently operating out of Nigeria, a country which is notorious for its penetration by the British.