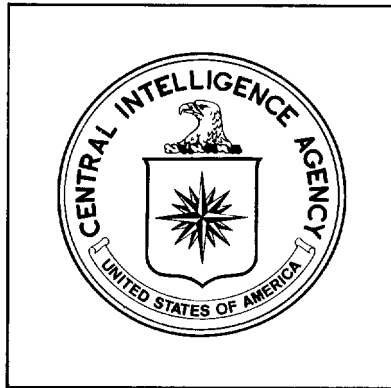


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140

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

Malagasy Republic: Radical Leader May
Come to Power 1

Mauritania: Concern Voiced Over Spain's
Sahara Policy 3

Africa: OAU Liberation Committee Meets
In Rabat Next Week 4

June 6, 1975

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Malagasy Republic

Radical Leader May Come to Power

Commander Didier Ratsiraka, the leader of the radical faction in the ruling military directory, may soon replace General Gilles Andriamahazo, a moderate, as head of state and government. Ratsiraka is the architect of Madagascar's militant nonaligned policy and favors socialist domestic policies.

If he gains power, Ratsiraka would almost certainly demand a large back rent payment from the US as the price for extending the agreement that permits NASA to operate a tracking station on the Indian Ocean island, the agreement formally expired at the end of 1973. He had pressed for such a payment when he was foreign minister from 1972 until early 1975 and brought up the question again last March after becoming a member of the directory.

Ratsiraka and Andriamahazo have been engaged in a quiet struggle for influence since the military directory was formed in February, following the assassination of head of state Richard Ratsimandrava. Ratsiraka's skillful maneuvering appears to be giving him sufficient support to take over the government. He has, for example, apparently consolidated his support within the directory. Although some army and gendarmerie officers are known to oppose Ratsiraka, the transfer of power, if it occurs, will probably take place without violence. In addition to enjoying the backing of key security officials, Ratsiraka has support within both of the island's main tribal groups; he thus may be able to hold in check the tribal animosities that have been behind recent political unrest.

Ratsiraka has successfully exploited popular unrest over the conduct of a military tribunal that has been trying defendants accused of rebellion and of complicity in Ratsimandrava's assassination. He has been aided by friendly journalists, who have focused press and public attention on him.

(Continued)

June 6, 1975

1

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The recent resignation without explanation of the popular and respected head of the military tribunal diminished the tribunal's prestige and created suspicions that the directory, under Andriamahazo's leadership, has been attempting to influence the tribunal's proceedings. Public doubts about the proceedings have intensified by the belated presentation of evidence that revealed gaps in the government's case and by the refusal of two directory members to testify.

Ratsiraka, as foreign minister, weakened drastically his country's strong ties with France, cut its controversial ties with South Africa, and established relations with communist countries to balance relations with the West. He was also primarily responsible for Madagascar's policy, adopted in late 1973, of barring all foreign warships from its ports. (CONFIDENTIAL NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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June 6, 1975

2

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Mauritania

Concern Voiced Over Spain's Sahara Policy

Madrid's announced intention to accelerate the decolonization of Spanish Sahara has drawn a worried response from Mauritania, which wants to be sure Spain's withdrawal is accomplished in close consultation with the parties that are contesting the disposition of the territory.

In a recent interview, Mauritanian President Moktar Ould Daddah chided Spain for threatening to abandon the territory and hand over political sovereignty to an entity unilaterally chosen by Madrid. He asserted that Spain has incurred by its presence in the region an obligation to maintain political stability there until the International Court of Justice hands down its advisory opinion on legal aspects of the dispute and the UN works out a transitional program.

Until recently, Mauritania had walked softly on the Saharan issue because it had no stick--political or military--to wield. Instead it employed quiet diplomacy and took a fence-setting posture to avoid alienating any of the interested parties--Spain, Morocco, and Algeria. Mauritania can be expected to increase its diplomatic efforts to arrange a partition of the region with Morocco, hoping Rabat will ultimately scale down its claim to the entire territory.

In an unusual move, Foreign Minister Mouknass has asked Washington to press Spain not to withdraw hastily but to resolve the issue in full concert with the UN. He probably fears that such a withdrawal by Spain would create a vacuum into which Morocco would quickly move. An orderly transition, on the other hand, would improve Nouakchott's chances of achieving its territorial aims through bargaining. Mouknass has indicated his country's claim extends as far north as El Aaiun. (CONFIDENTIAL NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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June 6, 1975

3

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Africa

OAU Liberation Committee Meets In Rabat Next Week

The foreign ministers of the 18 African states that comprise the OAU's liberation committee will meet in Rabat on June 9. The liberation committee is charged with channeling financial, military, and political support to OAU-recognized liberation groups and with coordinating their activities.

The ministers will review strategy and prepare recommendations for consideration by the summit of OAU chiefs of state scheduled to be held in Uganda from July 28 to August 2. Rhodesia and Namibia will be the top priorities in the Rabat discussions. The conferees are also expected to discuss Angola, Spanish Sahara, and the French Territory of Afars and Issas. The Eriterian problem probably will not receive formal attention because of the OAU's unwillingness to tackle issues that it views as interference in the internal affairs of its members. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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June 6, 1975

4

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