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25 March 1980

# Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 10/80)

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NEAR EAST/NORTH AFRICA REPORT

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA: 'QADHDHAFI IS CRAZY'

Paris PARIS-MATCH in French 15 Feb 80 pp 28,33

[Article by Liliane Gallifet]

[Text] Governed by a 76 year old man worn out by his struggle with illness, Tunisia has just experienced another ordeal which shook the entire country--the attempted uprising at Gafsa, a town of 35,000 inhabitants in the south. This peaceful people, with no experience of war, has only one bulwark against Qadhdhafi's folly--France's friendship and its military aid.

Unkempt, in tattered clothing, handcuffed, some 30 prisoners faced me in the offices of high security in the Ministry of the Interior. On an average, they were 25 years old and they face the death penalty. Their crime: the attack on Gafsa the night of 26-27 January 1980 which was to be followed by the overthrow of the Tunisian Government with the help of a "foreign power."

Noureddine Dridi comes from Tunis. The cuff of his grey, threadbare pants and his old sandals are covered with dust. He hobbles because he was hit by a bullet during the attack. Sitting in a corner of a room in the ministry, the prisoner told his story. "I went to Libya in 1977 to work. One day in Tripoli, I was in a cafe at noon, when an unmarked car stopped. All the young people in this cafe, whatever their nationality, were assembled and sent to a military camp in Tripoli. They took away our papers, then sent us to another camp 25 miles from Tripoli. There, for 3 months, we underwent commando training with light, medium-caliber weapons. Our instructors were Cuban, Soviet and Libyan."

With few variations, the scenario is the same for the 42 members of the commando group taken prisoner at Gafsa. All went to Libya looking for work--like 100,000 of their compatriots--holding papers more or less in order; this somewhat illegal status puts them at the mercy of the authorities. Enlistment in a training camp was sometimes camouflaged in an offer of work and always accompanied by promises of money. During their 2 or 3 years of training, some were sent to Lebanon; some 400,

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according to Nouredine Dridi, between 18 and 20 years old, took part with the Palestinians in the fighting against the Israelis. Some were wounded, others killed. Some months ago, they hinted to those most homesick that they might return to Tunisia by doing some smuggling. The prisoner was much more discreet about what happened next. He who had spoken uninterruptedly for 20 minutes with perfect ease, adding the names of all his Libyan instructors and many other precise details, forgot all.

When I asked him where he crossed the border, the interpreter told me: "He does not know his geography." What exactly did he do when he arrived in Gafsa? "What you read in the newspapers." Obviously, the Tunisian authorities do not wish to stress the capture of the town abandoned by the army, which was holding maneuvers in the south.

For several days, curiosity seekers were carefully kept away from the town. Was this to conceal the presence of a 16 member intervention team from the national gendarmery? Nothing allowed us to confirm this rumor. When we arrived in Gafsa, 350 kilometers south of Tunis, no one appeared to have anything to hide. On the military airfield protected by several anti-aircraft batteries, guns pointed toward the sky, a Transall with a blue-white-red emblem on its sides occupied a place of honor; "the other two are in operation," we were told, and so were the planes made available to the Tunisian army by the king of Morocco. The town in daylight had resumed nonchalant activity. One could scarcely believe that several days earlier this mining town had been the scene of bloody battles. The only reminders were the bullet holes in the walls of several buildings, and a frame of a bus which the assailants had used to set up a barricade.

I had the privilege of examining minutely the incredible arsenal, part of which had been discovered in a house, at police barracks near Tunis: Franco-German G-3 rifles, Belgian Brownings, Belgian Fal rifles, very sophisticated Rbj-7 Soviet bazookas, Sterling automatic pistols equipped with silencers, M-12 Beretta pistols, Yugoslav mortars, cases of ammunition, grenades and shells. On each weapon the manufacturing numbers had been carefully scratched off but, something extraordinary, bills from the British firm Presley to the Libyan Jamahiriya and printed matter in English were discovered, and on the cases could still be discerned the half-erased address: Tripoli.

In Gafsa, in the gardens of the governor's palace where the bougainvillea was in bloom, some suspects covered with dust, with beards of several days' growth, were led in. The armored cars and the tanks took up positions at all the strategic intersections. In nearby alleys, the merchants spontaneously talked of the hours of anguish they experienced that night, holed up in their homes. Soldiers and policemen, most of whom received their baptism of fire-- because, except for the 1978 riots, Tunisia has not experienced any armed clashes since its accession to independence in 1956--continued to patrol and carry out searches on the

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outskirts of the town. The rumor spread that three who fled to the nearby mountain were being sought.

Nevertheless, there were only two roadblocks on the 125 kilometers between Gafsa and Nefta where President Bourguiba and his wife arrived for a stay in the country 3 days before the attack. At the foot of desert hills, donkeys, motorbikes and small delivery trucks were on the road as usual. On the road covered with sand, we passed herds of camels and goats fighting over the rare clumps of yellow grass, while on our car radio the Libyan radio station announced that the fighting was raging in Gafsa and other provinces of Tunisia.

From the terrace of their suite at the Sahara Palace, President Bourguiba and his wife, Wassila, looked at the white domes of Nefta whose shadows extended in the setting sun over the Chott and Jerid Desert.

"My wife wanted me to return to Tunis, but why do that? We are fine here and there is sunshine," said the president. "When that happened, I slept soundly," he added, "I was sure that it would not lead to anything."

Since illness laid him low, President Bourguiba has met only very rarely with the international press. A heart attack, then viral hepatitis and a nervous depression resulting in terrible insomnia kept him away from affairs. "It has been 10 years now," said Mrs Bourguiba, raising both hands in an eloquent gesture. "I am glad you can see how well he is and what good shape he is in." The president, despite his 76 years, seems, in fact, recovered. He is, after Tito, the veteran head of state. Illness affected his body, but not his lucidity. "It took me one half century of direct contacts and speeches to unite the tribes and sub-tribes of this country; a union is not achieved overnight. Qadhdhafi is totally insane. Of course, he is playing the Soviet's game, but he is too weak to be useful to the Soviets."

The president's days, in Tunis or elsewhere, unfold according to the same rhythm. Awakened at 0630, he has his breakfast in bed, listens to the news on the radio and has one of his friends who acts as his private secretary read the newspaper to him in detail. At 1000, he takes a long walk. At Nefta, he tramps through the palm grove with a quick step every morning, over 4 to 6 kilometers. Midway, he sits on a folding chair and glances at the headlines in the French press and has the articles which interest him read to him. On his return, he meets with several visitors, watches the news on television and lunches at a set time. The afternoon is devoted to reading and short walks around the hotel.

Mrs Bourguiba only rarely accompanies her husband to the palm grove. "I have a bad knee," she said, leaning on my arm, "so I do not like to walk these days. I avoid photographers and journalists," she added with

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a broad smile, "because I am too heavy to look good in photographs and I speak French too poorly to express myself as I would wish." The first lady of Tunisia exudes intelligence and goodness. Like her husband, she is outspoken. Qadhdhafi? "He wants union by force. I was astonished that he attacked us during the president's lifetime. I thought he would wait until his death. We must break diplomatic relations completely with him. I do not think he will last much longer. Even his people are against him." The Gafsa attack? "The commando group was larger than the 50 who were captured. The others escaped with local help. What concerns me most is the quantity of weapons that they accumulated. There was enough to equip a real army; they must have spent a year gathering all that together."

Several days after the attack President Bourguiba received a phone call from Libya. Wassila picked up the receiver: "I am his secretary, what do you want?" she asked her interlocutor, Qadhdhafi's right hand man. "Colonel Qadhdhafi wants to speak to President Bourguiba..." "The president has nothing to say to you," replied the "secretary" who put an end to the communication. "I feel we are isolated here, 500 kilometers from Tunis, and I do not like it," she told me. "I am always afraid that something will happen. I sometimes tell the president: 'You are oblivious.'"

She unceasingly praised France. She was present at the meeting her husband had with the Tunisian ambassador to France, Hedi Mabrouk. "We know, happily," she said, "that, if necessary, President Giscard d'Estaing would even send us armed soldiers in uniform." Mrs Bourguiba did not conceal her fear that the Gafsa attack might be the first stage of a series of similiar raids. The Tunisian authorities, moreover, have information that their embassies in Rome, Paris and The Hague are threatened with the same fate as the French Embassy which was burned Monday in Tripoli.

Measures will be taken immediately to increase the small Tunisian army; sentries may be posted every 500 meters of the hundreds of kilometers of border with Libya and even with Algeria since the Gafsa attackers transited this country. Will that be enough? "I consider that the most powerful weapon is the people's support," repeated President Bourguiba unceasingly to his wife. Is he worried about his country's future? "No. The militants and the young people whom I have trained for one half century," he answered, "will face the future confidently."

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AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN: NO EMPIRE CAN HANDLE IT

Madrid CAMBIO 16 in Spanish 3 Feb 80 pp 42-46

[Text] The Guerrillas Do Not Surrender

Ethnic, ideological and religious differences keep the guerrillas from uniting their forces against the Soviet Invaders. Isolated from the West, dispersed and poorly armed, the guerrillas have only one common goal: throw the Soviets out in any way possible.

After apparently sleeping for centuries, the Pakistani city of Peshawar has again become a participant in history. Located 30 km from Afghanistan, it is on the road to the Khyber Pass, the historic threshold between central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. This strategic position allowed Peshawar to give an involuntary welcome to Alexander the Great, to the founders of the Mongol dynasties which dominated India and to the British generals who lost three wars to the fierce tribesmen. All the houses are small fortresses surrounded by exterior walls, towers and battlements. And there are few places where more human beings have died in wars and episodes of violence than in the Khyber Pass.

Now Peshawar has reencountered international fame, according to the testimony of the hoard of journalists from throughout the world who roam its chaotic streets. This is the headquarters of the Afghan rebels who are now fighting against Soviet invasion. Also to be found here is the Pakistani Land and Air Forces command, which is concentrated to deploy against its new neighbor, the red army. The tribal chiefs come to the city to demand that the Pakistani president declare a holy war against the Soviet Union. In the immediate area are the major Afghan refugee camps. There is a total of a half million people dispersed along the lengthy border area. And in the midst of this chaotic procession of historic events, the strangest and most intense trafficking of drugs and arms continues, unaffected. From Peshawar reports Juan Carlos Alganaraz, CAMBIO-16 special correspondent.

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#### A Resistance Without Unity

Peshawar is the precise point where the rulers of Pakistan meet with the tribesmen who dominate the mountains of the border with Afghanistan and control the Khyber Pass. In the tribal zone the Pakistani presence is nearly symbolic. This fact is basic for the future of the Afghan resistance, since the possibilities of developing the resistance depend on supplies and communications controlled by the Pathustan tribe in the central area and the Baluchi tribe in the south.

This ambivalence of power can be seen in the barracks of the Afghan resistance, guarded by the mujahedin (holy guerrillas) themselves with their "kalashnikov" machineguns on their shoulders. After interviewing a half dozen of the major groups, the conclusion of the CAMBIO 16 correspondent is that the Afghan resistance lacks political as well as operational unity. In the battlefield the only thing which unites them is the rejection of the Soviet regime installed in April of 1978, which opened the road to civil war, and now they also have the presence of the Soviet invader, a traditional enemy since the times of the czars.

"Actually, we are still recovering from the tremendous 'shock' of the invasion," Hassan Gailan, guerrilla military commander of the Patkia zone, explained to CAMBIO 16 correspondent. Patkia is one of the most effective centers of resistance against the Soviets.

#### Error in Calculation

Mangal Hussian, spokesman for the Islamic Party (Hizbi Islami), said: "When the Soviets executed Amin and replaced him with Karmal, the mujahedin had complete control of the rural areas and had disrupted communications. We calculate that within 3 to 6 months, Kabul (the capital of Afghanistan) would have fallen into our hands. But the Russians were also aware of this and they then launched their invasion."

A question without an answer is what would have happened after a mujahedin victory, because there is no unified political command capable of supporting a new government. Nor is there one now. The two principal groups now are the National Front, led by Sayed Gaelami, and the Islamic Party, of Gulbuddin Hekmaytyar. In these two is concentrated the major portion of the political loyalties and they have the principal guerrilla groups.

Hekmaytyar said: "They want us to appear to be a group of fanatics, but there is nothing farther from the truth."

#### The Diagnosis of Hekmaytyar

"We went into battle in 1968 because the king and his successor, Prince Daud, opened the way for communism, which finally arrived in April of 1979 in the various guises of Taraki, Amin and, now, Babrak Karmal. Our program clearly

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explains that we want a society based on Muslim principles and we want to follow the inspired teachings of the Koran. Traditional customs should also be respected, because they are indispensable to the identity of our people."

It should be stated that in Afghanistan there are about 15 ethnic groups, each with its own customs and a series of codes and norms centered on loyalty to distinct, and often antagonistic, tribes and clans.

"If the communist governments fell in the face of our fighting it was because they did not understand that the changes had to be made within our traditions. Our people love their independence a great deal; they have fought for it for centuries and they are deeply religious. But we do not want to create a reactionary society, without social justice and buried in the middle ages," concluded Hekmaytyar.

The Radio Is a Weapon

The mountains lack vegetation to hide the presence of the guerrillas who use, in order to escape detection from the air, the numerous caves and who know how to camouflage themselves under the immense rocks or in the smallest nooks.

"Our principal bases are the villages, the thousands of tiny villages which give us all types of support and refuge. They are, in addition, our families, our tribes, because we mujahedin always fight near the place where God sent us."

The guerrilla chiefs of the Islamic Party proudly exhibited a short-wave radio from which was emerging the sounds of the rebel radio station. "This is a formidable support for our brothers in the resistance and for the refugees in the camps," they explained. Although 90 to 100 percent of the population is illiterate, radios and apparatus for playing music are seen everywhere. It doesn't matter how much it costs: this is a luxury which the Afghans will not do without.

In the National Front headquarters too the groups meet to listen to the clandestine radio. As in the case of the Islamic Party, with almost identical words the figures are repeated, regarding their own forces. "We control the majority of the population and the guerrillas. The rest are minority groups."

Spokesman Mohamed Hakkim added: "Basically we have a different vision of the future. For this reason there is no unity, but only contacts with other groups. The essential difference is that we believe in democracy as the system to be implanted after the defeat of the Soviet invasion. We do not want another dictatorship in the name of Islam. We are Muslims and we respect our religion. But we want a secular state, modern and not managed by the clergy. The mullahs (priests) are a vital part of our lives. But their place is in the mosques and not in politics."

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The clash between the National Front and the Islamic Party has blocked all possibility of a common resistance action. In a headquarters of the Islamic Party, in addition to large photographs attesting to the successes of the guerrillas or honoring the martyrs are effigies of the Ayatollah Talegani, the great moderate religious leader of Iran who died a few months ago.

A Labyrinth of Rebels

The gap between the ideology which the Muslims support--without the fanaticism of a Khomeini--and the almost social democratic program of the National Front is very small. But what does constitute an unbridgeable barrier is the complex personal, tribal rivalries between the two groups. The remainder of the groups, of lesser importance, line up with the Khomeini (New Afghanistan), the pro-China (Jamial Islami) and the most fanatic fundamentalists (Jarakat Enquelab Islami) led by professor of theology Mohamed Nebi, tendencies. To these groups are added others in Baluchistan, in the central provinces and in the north. This torrent of parties and groups has received what nearly amounts to an ultimatum from the Muslim nations, following the meeting of the Conference of Muslim Nations in Pakistan, to try to unify themselves and the Muslims will try to aid the resistance.

"We have won a number of sophisticated weapons from the Afghan Army, but not enough to fight against the Soviets," explains Commander Gailan, who belongs to the National Front. The Soviets have completed the first phase of their operation--control the main roads and cities--and now await the coming of spring in order to move on the rebel strongholds in the mountains.

A Mule Rather Than an Airplane

"Do you expect aid from abroad?"

The commander replies: "It is essential to us. This is not just our problem, but that of all the Muslim people, of the whole Third World. We cannot ask anymore of Pakistan. Just taking care of the refugees is sufficient. But without weapons we cannot throw the Soviets out of our country."

"Will the Soviets be able to reestablish the Afghan Army?"

"The army dissolved because the successive communist governments killed the commanders. They will not be able to rebuild it, because the soldiers are our brothers, our families and just as they deserted before, bringing us their weapons, they will desert again. Since the invasion we have received chiefs, officers and soldiers into our ranks and now they are mujahedin. Even some former procommunist leaders have learned from the Russian invasion that our independence is now at stake and they are fighting with us.

"We have something very precious: the support of the people. In these mountains, being able to deploy an old friend with a mule is worth more than ten tanks or a helicopter. So now what we have to do is prepare ourselves for a very long, very bloody war in which our people will be victorious just as they have always been over the centuries against all invaders."

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In Peshawar reports are also received on the organization and the action of the resistance in Kabul and the major cities. During the days this correspondent spent in the Afghan capital and Jalalabad the people's repudiation of the invasion was categorical and reached extremely imprudent proportions.

In a bank, from the employees of an important local company, in the bazaar and in the university, CAMBIO 16 saw evidence of a stubborn desire to resist.

In the university, the only place in the city where the very few members of the local bourgeoisie are appreciated, the students explained that the Amin government had caused more than 100 of their colleagues to "disappear" some 20 of them from the same engineering course. "During the first week of the invasion other colleagues also 'disappeared' the majority of them leftists and we believe they are in jail."

But the left seems to have lost popularity since the invasion. Support is almost always oriented toward the National Front or the Islamic Party. A young medical student confessed to reporters: "I was thinking of completing my course and going to live abroad. But now I am going to stay and fight, even if they kill me here. The victory is ours because we have God and the Russians do not."

'The Russians Will Go'

Ingenuous words? Perhaps, but stated in Kabul some 15 days after the invasion they ring with impressive dignity and a mystical, patriotic content which is the basis of the resistance.

Despite the triumphant reports, the resistance in the cities is minimal and in Kabul is limited to the circulation of leaflets exhorting national unity against the Soviets.

"But we organize more easily than anyone might imagine, because the police have very little control." This information was given to CAMBIO 16 by an Afghan who met this correspondent in Kabul. "It is basic, despite the risks, that it be known that we are going to resist. And that they have to support us. We are beginning, but we in the cities and the mujahedin in the mountains can hit and hit the Russians until they leave."

It still remains to translate this national reaction into a common political organization, which now seems difficult after showing the degree of conflict between the islands or groups within the resistance. A poor people, backward, isolated and for now able to count only on the very insubstantial support of the moral indignation of the West, the Muslim countries and the Third World, carries on its shoulders the resistance against a formidable superpower. Will they continue alone? So far the world has shown that after the scandals caused by episodes such as the one in Afghanistan, time buries the great declarations and also the hopes of the victims.

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Blood Came to Peshawar

Dragging a bullet-wounded leg, Abdur accompanied us between the jumbled rows of tents where the rest of his family is surviving. The refugee camp stretches out for more than 2 km along the railroad which links Peshawar with the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad.

The tents are insufficient to meet the needs for receiving the new wave of refugees caused by the Soviet invasion. Many families have improvised pathetic huts of straw which provide little protection against the rain, snow and the cold.

Abdur, a 26-year-old man who learned English as a taxi driver in order to converse with the tourists, said: "We arrived here 2 months ago. The Amin government had launched an offensive in October. Our village, Ramak, was destroyed by artillery. Some 14 members of our family left and we joined a caravan to cross the mountains. We walked for 20 days in order to get here. The worst was one morning when some soldiers shot me in the leg. They brought me as they were able, traveling at night, always in the snow. I survived, but two children, an old man and a sick woman died on the road. Many have died on the road. We also lost the few animals we had."

Abdur's family listens to his story in silence. In the tent there are some blankets, a little food and an improvised oven. They have arrived without anything in a land where the people have very little to offer them. Above the ethnic and tribal differences here misery unites everyone.

The camp holds the recent refugees. It is here that the tragedy is greatest, where the needs are most pressing. Rahim Shamsiair, director of the Pakistani Office of Assistance, told CAMBIO 16: "There are already more than a half million refugees. We have asked for help from all countries and international organizations, but so far very little aid has arrived. Only the Pakistanis are making the effort to meet the needs of this mass of people. Since the invasion, more and more refugees have arrived and, if it continues at this rate there will be more than a million by April."

In these camps, many located in quagmires, the men gather near the roads with nothing to do or any where to go. Mawlawi, the chief of a family which took nearly a month to get here, said: "We were able to get here thanks to the tribes, our brothers of the borders, who guided us and gave us food. Many of the sick and wounded remained with them because they could not continue."

From the beginning of the war 20 months ago, the flow of refugees has fluctuated in relation to the intensity of the bombing against the civilian population. Now the government, over Radio Kabul broadcasts, is urging the people to return, but there are few who decide to return in the face of live testimony offered by those who have arrived since the Soviet invasion. Although the Russians are not trying to get to the guerrilla strongholds in the

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high mountains, any movement against the rebels brings the artillery, helicopters and airplanes into action against the smallest concentrations of people or villages, which are always guerrilla sanctuaries.

The mujahedin fight against the Russians, but they go to the mountains. "We want to fight, but we have no weapons," explains one of the chiefs of the camp located on the road between Peshawar and Barza. He adds: "It is also necessary to remember that those who are arriving now come from the combat zones on the border. Those who escape the war in the central area, in Bemian and Badakshan, will take more than a month to get here. Those who can."

More political or patriotic speeches, the refugees demand food, shelter and medical treatment. Although Pakistan is making a praiseworthy effort, it is easy to see that the aid is insufficient for the mass of refugees who continue to arrive by the thousands.

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IRAN

REVOLUTIONARY ATMOSPHERE IN TEHRAN SAID SIMMERING DOWN

Paris L'EXPRESS in French 19 Jan 80 p 94

[Article by Jacques Buob, L'EXPRESS special correspondent in Tehran: "A Dismal Period"]

[Text] In spite of the impending presidential election, the revolution is simmering down. And the taste for luxury and lust reappears on the scene.

Twelve months have elapsed since the shah's departure. On this 16th day of January 1980 Tehran is covered with snow, which blurs the ugliness of the city. The revolution is getting bored. In front of the United States Embassy, which was stormed on 4 November last year, the banners which have been soiled by the weather and weighted down by the rain and snow, are a dismal sight. The traffic has been restored on Talegani Avenue. Almost forgotten are the 50 American hostages about whom we now know, almost certainly, that they have been dispersed throughout the city and even in the countryside. The anniversary of the shah's flight went by in an atmosphere of almost complete indifference, far from mass demonstrations which had marked Tehran's daily life regularly until the last few weeks.

Meanwhile, at the Hotel Intercontinental, more than a hundred journalists and technicians of all the American news media are packing their bags. They are being expelled by the Revolutionary Council for dissemination of malevolent information. Having used the media after the embassy incident to give weight to its anti-imperialist/American campaign, the regime is getting rid of them, now that it does not need them any more. Because, if it was good to show the world a unanimous Iran shouting its hatred of America, it is less profitable to let pictures get out of Tabriz showing fratricidal battles between supporters and opponents of the imam. It is not good to show summary executions of anti-Khomeynists. Nor is it good to allow the media to say that insurgency is being hatched in Azerbaijan, especially in Tabriz, where the movements which changed Iran's destiny have always originated.

Nevertheless, the hour of an historical event approaches. On 25 January (with a second round scheduled on 8 February), the Iranians will elect the first president in their history by universal suffrage. The imam has decided to play the game of free elections.

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To the great chagrin of Ayatollah Khalkhali, the grand inquisitor of the Islamic tribunals, no mullah has been authorized to present himself as a candidate. Khomeyni himself will not give his patronage to anyone. Almost 120 Iranians have seized the chance to be nominated, among them a karate instructor, a master of hypnotism and an unemployed worker who stated that since he was prepared to accept any offers, even though that meant going job hunting, he might as well try for the highest position. Of course, the authorities considered this massive rush of candidates to be a perfectly anti-revolutionary manifestation stemming from an imperialist-Zionist plot. More than 100 have been eliminated under the pretext of collaboration with the former regime or, simply, mental weakness. One of them (the karate instructor) has been arrested. He is accused of being a former collaborator of SAVAK.

Half a dozen candidates are still in the running. One of the favorites, Jalaloddin Farsi, an obscure party worker from the powerful Party of the Islamic Republic, dropped out 10 days before the election, the victim of a low blow. It was discovered that his father was Afghan, which did not permit him to seek the highest office: the candidate must be "of Iranian stock." After the elimination of Farsi, two names remain at the head of the list: Admiral Seyed Ahmad Madani and Abolhassan Bani Sadr. In addition, there is the incumbent foreign minister, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, who had been considered soundly defeated until now.

The first candidate named above, who is the navy's chief-of-staff and former governor general of Khuzistan, carries the hopes of the nostalgic moderates of the National Front and the rich bazaar merchants who see in this military man wearing civilian clothes a guarantor of a strong centralized power, a liberal economy, and an end to uncertainty. He should be able to gather the secular votes.

The Anti-Sin Brigade.

Bani Sadr, in turn, forged a good reputation during his brief tenure in the Foreign Ministry. He counts on the support of a substantial part of the clergy and the intellectual left. But there are no indications that these two men will be reaching election day unscathed. Here the campaigns of disparagement are running full steam ahead; already Madani's American military training is held against him and Bani Sadr is being reproached for his 15 years of comfortable exile in Paris.

Even so, the new political game in this country does not excite Tehran, under its blanket of snow. None of the candidates show in their programs the dynamic strength necessary to rekindle a revolution which is losing steam again.

On 14 January four officers of the imperial army were executed for having fired at the crowd on Jaled Square during the riots in September 1978, bringing to 732 the total number of persons officially executed since the

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ayatollah's return on 1 February 1979. The hostages are nearing the end of their third month of detention. The Iranian government is signing economic treaties with North Korea. In Tehran, the big American cars are reappearing after having been prudently kept in the garage by their owners to avoid provocations. The middle-class ladies are rediscovering their love of Western finery and, with the winter cold, their plush fur coats. The prostitutes are timidly returning and slowly pacing the halls of the big hotels. A ridiculous "anti-sin brigade" has just been established within the police in order to curb dancing, Western music, films and immoral magazines. The taste for luxury and lust reappears on the scene as a means of escape from Iran's boredom and its sad revolution.

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MAURITANIA

NEXT FEW YEARS VIEWED AS CRITICAL FOR REGIME

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 11 Jan 80 pp 59, 60

[Editorial: "The Road to Recovery: Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla Invested With Full Power in Mauritania"]

[Text] All essential power will henceforth be concentrated in Lt-Col Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallá's hands following the change which occurred on 4 January in the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. While retaining his duties as prime minister and defense minister, he is replacing Lt-Col Mohamed Mahmoud Louly in the chairmanship of the Military Committee of National Welfare, the country's supreme court. Lieutenant-Colonel Louly had simultaneously been head of state, but his purely honorary duties had gradually led him to dissociate himself from public affairs.

Thus ended the bicephalism instituted on 6 April 1979 when the head of state, then Lt-Col Mustapha Ould Mohamed Ould Saleck, who would later resign, found himself confirming a prime minister in the person of Lt-Col Ahmed Ould Bouceif, whose death in an airplane accident would result in Lieutenant-Colonel Haidallá's succeeding him.

Several days earlier on 20 March, Lieutenant-Colonel Saleck, challenged by his peers, had in fact changed the constitutional charter promulgated the date after President Moktar Ould Daddah's overthrow to his advantage, conferring full powers on the chairman of the Military Committee "when exceptional circumstances" necessitate. When creating the consultative National Council with a view to involving the Mauritanian people in political decisions, he took advantage of this change to eliminate from the government the three principal heads of the "progressive" trend who were considered supporters of the Front Polisario. The council was unable to meet as planned on 30 March owing to the refusal to sit of 26 black African representatives who called the number of seats reserved for them on the council "iniquitous." The Moorish community was represented by 80 representatives. At the same time a Front of Armed Struggle for Self Determination of Black African Populations (the Walfougui Front) emerged; unrest developed in academic circles, and an atmosphere of crisis spread to Nouakchott.

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Thus, with the support of officers considered to be "pro-West," Lieutenant-Colonel Bouceif decided to give himself the post of prime minister. The head of state was retained in the chairmanship of the Military Committee but saw his powers considerably limited after Lieutenant-Colonel Bouceif's death and Lieutenant-Colonel Saleck's resignation. Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla became prime minister, and Lieutenant-Colonel Louly, chairman of the Military Committee and head of state.

Between a head of state without real power and a prime minister who is the true master of the country, the division of powers could not fail to create a political malaise which would aggravate the opposition between the two different trends represented in the Military Committee. In order to discard a structure that seemed increasingly ill-adapted to the country's situation and to the gravity of its problems, the Military Committee, which met on 4 January with all members present, concluded that it was necessary to return to a system conferring all power on a single official. According to reliable sources, a vote produced a large majority for the appointment of Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla. Later on, a new constitutional charter will specify the division of powers between the state and the Military Committee.

The designation of Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla to the highest post in fact constitutes simple normalization. In reality he held power even before acceding to the post of prime minister on 31 May 1979, since he had previously been chief of staff from 10 July 1978, the date of President Moktar Ould Daddah's overthrow in which he had played a major role, until 6 April 1979 and was minister of national defense after that.

Born in Houadhibou to a semi-nomadic, semi-sedentary family, and a former student of Saint-Cyr Military School, he made his mark in the army through his courage, his competence and his incontestable integrity. Almost shy, devoid of personal political ambition, ready to restore power to civilians if they were more worthy than he to exercise it, imbued with a high sense of duty which forbade him to leave his country's service, Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla, a sincere nationalist, has retained the simplicity of a meharist officer and an abhorrence of all financial compromise. Under his authority a certain number of civilian and military officials who did not display the same strictness were eliminated.

As an editorial of the daily newspaper CHAAB emphasized, the Military Committee wanted "to rid itself of all fence-sitters and other opportunists who served only their own selfish interests and who ended up being an obstacle on the road to radicalization of the ideas and principles of the movement of 10 July 1978." By taking power on that day, "the Armed Forces undertook the re-establishment of peace and began the country's economic, financial and social recovery."

The first objective was realized on 5 August with the signing of the "definitive peace accord" between the Front Polisario, which thereby

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claims to have no territorial claims on Mauritania and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which for its part declares that it has no territorial claims on the former Spanish Sahara. Since withdrawing from the war, the government of Colonel Haidalla has endeavored to maintain a position of strict neutrality between Morocco and Algeria.

The evacuation by Morocco of its last garrison at Bir Moghreïn normalized relations between the two countries, and it is unlikely that Mauritania's foreign policy has been affected by the change which occurred in Nouakchott, except perhaps for more pronounced "rapprochement" with Algeria, say some observers, calling attention to the fact that the new incumbents of two key posts, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of the interior, are known for their sympathy for Algeria, while the supporters of Morocco have been eliminated from the new government.

Before attacking economic and financial problems Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla was able to defuse the tension between the Moorish and black African communities. Bilingualism has been retained for the next six years, leaving hope for the promotion of national languages and thus giving satisfaction (at least during a long trial period) to the justified demands of black students, who now seem themselves largely eliminated from the competition for admittance to the civil service by their ignorance of the Arabic language. The reopening of the schools carried out last October without incident bears witness to the calming of tempers in this area.

Without dissociating itself from the evolution of the situation in the Sahara and from the solution which will one day be found for it, the Military Committee, by increasing Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla's powers, wished to give him the means to pursue energetically the economic and financial recovery which began six months ago and which has been indicated by distinct improvement over the situation prevailing a year ago.

Military outlays, which had risen to 5 billion ouguiya\* during the last year of war, should be reduced gradually as the government reduces the army's effective forces to their prior level by gradual demobilization of approximately 10,000 men. Reform of public finances has been undertaken, and struggle against waste and corruption, begun since Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla's coming to power. Fiscal laws have been strengthened. Austerity measures which have made it possible to reduce public expenditures by approximately 10 percent in 1979 have been reintroduced in the 1980 budget. The Zouerate iron mines have been put back into operation, and iron production is on the road to recovery. Production for the first six months of 1979 was 35 percent higher than for the first six months of 1978, and the corresponding receipts from exports were 54 percent higher.

Mauritania has chosen to pursue the realization of infrastructure works, the beneficial effects of which will not be felt for several years. Thus

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work on the deep water port of Nouakchott is continuing, and the realization of the second section (Boutilmiy-Nema) of the 1,100-kilometer road which will later link up with the trans-West Africa (Dakar-N'Djamena) road has just been begun. Exploration in connection with the possibilities of exploitation of hydrocarbons in the east of the country and offshore off Nouakchott and of uranium in the north-east between Bir-Maghrein and Ain Ben Tilli is being continued with the participation of French companies. The financing of the Guelbs project, valued at \$500 million, will henceforth be underwritten simultaneously by the World Bank and by 50 investment or assistance funds, including the Central Economic Co-operation Fund. This project will provide, in addition to the opening of two mines in El Rheih and Oun Arwagen, for the construction of mineral crushing and enrichment units, should enable Mauritania to maintain and even develop exploitation of iron ore after the exhaustion of the Zouerate deposits, predicted for 1992, to ensure the government of receipts in currency and to create several thousand jobs while retaining qualified Mauritanian personnel presently employed by SNIM [National Industrial and Mining Company] in Zouerate.

At the same time, the government is engaged in developing the country's two principal potential resources: agriculture, in these last years a victim of persistent drought and of the preceding regime's neglect, and fishing. The prior system of thoughtless granting of fishing licenses deprived Mauritania of the greatest part of the resources due it from fishing.

Large agricultural projects and projects for creating agro-food industries are contingent on the realization of the Diama and Manantali dams. But as of this writing, work on irrigation (Gargal) or the planning of large projects (including that of the M'Pourie plain with Chinese assistance) is either in progress or under study.

A French mission came to Nouakchott last October to explore the possibilities of fishing along the Mauritanian coast, continuing co-operation of long standing between France and Mauritania in matters of evaluating and managing the qualities and quantities of fish in Mauritanian waters. The Mauritanian government intends hereafter to protect its fishing resources and to develop small-scale fishing for the benefit of its citizens, to give priority to foreign equipment which will maintain local plants in such a way as to make the existing industries profitable, to create new ones if possible and to increase budgetary resources. The renewal or signing of new fishing contracts will henceforth make allowances for these new objectives.

Thus it is not Mauritania's long-term future which inspires concern but rather the next few years to come during which the new regime must surmount the after-effects of the war, put the administration in order, revive public spirit and restore the confidence of friendly countries whose financial assistance has enabled it to weather the last few difficult years. In their co-operation is sustained, particularly that of the

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Gulf States and of the Near-East states, which in the name of Islamic solidarity have never spared their support, then Mauritania will be able to regain its equilibrium at the budgetary level within four or five years. The minister of finance expressed this expectation while presenting the 1980 budget. The presence of Lieutenant-Colonel Haidalla at the head of the government should justify him.

FOOTNOTE

\* 1 ouguiya = Fr 0.10

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MAURITANIA

PRO-ALGERIAN POLISARIO ELEMENTS GAINING IN INFLUENCE

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 16 Jan 80 p 31

[Article by Abdelaziz Dahmani]

[Text] "Eighteen months of peace have killed off more Mauritanian army officers than 3 and a half years of war," someone said, with a touch of irony, in Nouakchott after the recent purges which took place in the Military Committee for National Salvation (CMSN) and in the government. It is true that, of the 18 regrouped officers on the day after the coup d'etat of 10 July 1978, only 6 in the Military Committee for National Recovery (CMRN) remained in active service. Moreover, of the 16 ministers who made up the government after Ould Daddah, only 3 remain in power. Hence, one can say that the first 9 months of the military regime have been "calm" and it is since April of 1979 that the machine seems to have taken off at high speed.

In the course of the past 9 months, Mauritania has had 3 presidents and 2 prime ministers, all assumed to be "strong men." The latest, Khouna Ould Haidalla, once again took over the duties of president and leader of the government, while also hanging on to the Defense Ministry. On Friday, 4 January, he eliminated the acknowledged president of the Republic, Lt Col Mahmoud Ould Louly, and above all, his most dangerous rival, Lt Col Ahmed Salem Ould Sidi. The latter was the vice president of the CMSN and for a few days had held power pro-tem, immediately after the accidental death of Lt Col Ahmed Ould Bousseif, on 27 May 1979.

Other officers, such as Maj Thiam el-Hadj, former minister of the interior, and Lt Col Sheik Ould Boyde, former chief of the constabulary, were accused of lukewarmness and opportunism, and thus were superseded. These decisions to shelve the old guard made room for a military and governmental team that was deemed more "homogeneous" and "well-knit."

However, the homogeneity was achieved at the cost of the "neutrality" which Mauritania had relentlessly sought. Since the position was almost untenable, we now witness new and accelerated moves toward Algeria and the POLISARIO, made over the last few days, together with a massive elimination of the "pro-Moroccans" or "pro-Westerns," whether military or civilians.

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And What Next?

The most notable of departures from the government was that of Ahmed Ould Abdallah, until recently minister for foreign affairs, whose main strength was his relationship to his namesake, Lt Col Ahmed Ould Abdallah, chief of staff. It was the latter who, on 31 May 1979, established Khouna Ould Haidalla as prime minister, by virtue of his direct authority over the chiefs of the eight military regions. Is the departure of the minister for foreign affairs to be regarded as the prelude to the eclipse of the chief of staff?

While we wait for an answer, it is Algeria and the POLISARIO who have been marking up points. The new ministers for the interior (Moulaye Ould Boukhreiss) and foreign affairs (Mokhtar Ould Zamel) are among their strongest supporters. The French, including the French military presently in Mauritania, for the time being are attempting to maintain a detached attitude...while feeling shifting sands slip away under their feet.

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MAURITANIA

NEED TO RESTORE ECONOMY, SOCIAL, POLITICAL PROBLEMS NOTED

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 4 Feb 80 p 26

[Article by Faiz Ouldna: "Nation's Salvation Changes Hands"]

[Text] The new chief of state, who in the eyes of Mauritians is considered a personality above all suspicion, will have to get the country back on the track.

Mauritians began the year 1980 with a new chief of state, Lt Col Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah. In the new leadership team, the successor to Lt Col Ould Louly, Ould Haidallah, in addition to his job as chairman of the CMSN (Military Committee for National Salvation), is also head of government and defense minister. According to the constitution, the so-called "4 January" Constitution, the CMSN moreover must appoint a new president in case the sitting president is definitely disabled. An acting president therefore is no longer possible since the new chief of state has taken the necessary steps and has simply dropped the posts of first and second vice chairman of the CMSN.

There is thus every reason to believe that the current number one man in Mauritania is determined to consolidate his power and to guarantee the country's leadership in a more rigorous fashion. This is so especially since the new constitution stipulates that the chairman of the CMSN, who holds executive power, is also the supreme commander of the armed forces. It is therefore up to him to make decisions on appointments to civilian and military positions as well as diplomatic accreditations.

Out of fear that this might be a little bit too much concentration of power in one person, public opinion has recently expressed some reservations which, to be sure, were quickly stifled, by the supporters of a strong central government and serious and energetic restoration of control over the country's destiny. These minor protests however seem to be counter-balanced by the very high esteem and respect inspired by the personality of Ould Haidallah who, in the eyes of Mauritians, is a citizen above and beyond suspicion, determined to pursue a policy of real neutrality.

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It is in any case certain that, in view of the maneuvers by the Royal Palace in Rabat, Nouakchott would have to react very clearly and without any complaisance. People are only too aware of what the wait-and-see attitude of Mr Ould Salek--who at that time was chairman of the Military Committee for National Recovery--cost the country.

Mauritania certainly is no longer at war. But the toughest job remains yet to be done: getting the country back on the track. The important thing as a matter of fact now is to make up the delay caused by the war effort imposed by Ould Daddah and surmount the real or artificial difficulties which sprang up over these past 5 years.

First of all there was the problem of Mauritians of black origin which a certain Western press exploited skillfully but which suddenly declined in significance, especially after the champion of this cause, Mr Senghor, had personally reassured his Mauritanian counterpart. This initiative coincided with Morocco's reinforcing its positions along the northern border of the RIM (Islamic Republic of Mauritania). In other words, the various Moroccan maneuvers of destabilizing the country were essentially aimed at this "ethnic conscience," as it is called by the specialists: a perfect colonial blemish which is still a painful sore.

The danger is all the more real since it is known that the trouble is brewing particularly among the young people and in the schools; this is an environment where the Muslim Brotherhood is beginning to assert itself forcefully. The militants of the PKM [Party of Mauritanian Toilers] (Kahidine), at Nouakchott, the ethnic problem helps to "alienate the masses from the class struggle which is supposed to overthrow the conservative secular [centuries-old] structures and plunge us into an interminable language dispute. These controversies, by the way can only alter the concept of national identity, according to all evidence." In the clandestine journal SAYHAT EL-MAZLOUM (the Cry of the Oppressed), the PKM constantly keeps calling for a radical conversion of the Mauritanian social structure, often still governed by feudal laws.

The second major problem which Mr Ould Haidallah must urgently address himself to is of an economic nature. For the fragile Mauritanian economy, the bell has been tolling since since 1968, as a result of the drought which settled all over the Sahel. Although, especially due to earnings from the fishing industry, total disaster was partly averted, the Saharan conflict aggravated the situation, gobbling up all of the profits earned and a large portion of foreign aid.

Right now, there is practically only one economically viable region, situated on the Chemama, the Mauritanian bank of the Senegal River. But the speculations of Senegalese merchants are turning out well, in particular causing the transfer, across the borders, of entire herds, cereal crops, or the earnings derived from their sale; that means that Mauritania is losing considerable revenues.

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Here again the task of the government in Nouakchott would appear to be enormous since it presupposes a kind of "opening up" of the southern part of the country.

A potentially strong Mauritanian state however can derive maximum profits from the confused economic and social situation prevailing in the south where the brotherhood of the Tijaniya (founded in Algeria in 1782 by Sheikh Ahmen Tijani) occupies a preponderant place on both banks of the Senegal River.

The statement by a CMSN spokesman, who recently asserted that Mauritania would provide new impetus within the regional organizations (OMVS [Senegal River Development Organization], CEAO [West African Economic Community]), to which it belongs, undoubtedly runs in that direction.

This assertion shows in any case that Nouakchott is today looking for new and solid guarantees intended to protect the country against the neo-colonial maneuvers of Rabat and its acolytes.

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TUNISIA

AHMED BEN SALAH ELECTED SECRETARY GENERAL OF MUP

Unanimous Election

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 4-17 Feb 80 pp 23-25

[Article by Adel Wahid: "Ahmed Ben Salah Unanimously Elected Secretary General of MUP"]

[Text] The National Preparatory Conference of the Popular Unity Movement [MUP] animated by Ahmed Ben Salah has just given itself structures which will enable it to look forward to the Constitutional Convention.

Ahmed Ben Salah was unanimously elected, at the end of the labors of the National Preparatory Conference, Secretary General of the Popular Unity Movement (MUP). Also put in place were a politburo and a national council, whose tasks and jurisdiction were defined by the appropriate procedures. All these decisions submitted to the vote and approved by all the delegates have only a provisional character, while awaiting in particular the holding of a constitutional convention, which can only be held in Tunisia itself, as the MUP leaders forcefully reaffirmed to us: 'In a new Tunisia, free, democratic, at last rid of all forms of oppression and repression, committed to the path of socialist construction and united with all peoples struggling to win their liberty and independence.

It is symbolic that the National Preparatory Conference of the MUP should be held ten years after the rightist judicial coup of September 1969. It was then that Ahmed Ben Salah, the principal force and promoter of the socialist experiment of the sixties, was arraigned before a High Court of Justice created to that end and which was under orders from the Palace of Carthage. Ahmed Ben Salah was sent to prison, from which he escaped in February 1973 to announce, some months later, from beyond Tunisia's borders, the creation of the MUP.

It is also symbolic that this conference took place less than three years after the wave of repression which struck hard at the movement in March 1977. It is this in fact which provides the best proof of the vitality,

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the deep-rootedness, the strengthening of this socio-political current whose origins go back to the workers' movement and to the battles led by the two great figures of Tunisian syndicalism: M'hamed Ali al-Hammi and Farhat Hached.

The event is of great importance, as much from the importance and diversity of the subjects submitted for debate as from the new structures added to the MUP, made necessary by the extension and enlargement of the bases of the movement, both in Tunisia and abroad.

#### An Iniquitous Fiscal Policy

In the course of the work sessions, some of which lasted more than 10 hours under the chairmanship of the indefatigable Ahmed Ben Salah, the numerous delegates, sent from various branches of the movement, discussed and sifted three reports by committees designated several months before and whose conclusions will soon be made public. But here and now, authorized MUP members we have met have painted a general picture of the national conference and given us the tenor of the reports studied, pointing out, however, that it will be up to the MUP [constitutional] convention to ratify or modify these decisions.

Underlining from the beginning that the notion of national unity is /"used like a repressive ideology in the service of the dominant class and the privileged,"/ and that, throughout the decade of the seventies, [the forces of] reaction /"exploited this to discredit socialism along with everything else that has reference to the laboring masses and progressive forces,"/ the economic report denounces the campaign orchestrated against the public sector, accused by the authorities of being poorly administered and inefficient. It also denounces the decline of investment in this sector, as also the "sale to the highest bidder" of the national economy, the pivot of the present economic policy, notably through the bias of the laws of April 1972 and August 1974 and the exorbitant fiscal advantages conferred on foreign capital.

The economic policy followed during the decade 1970-1980 further aggravated the inequalities between individuals and classes. Thus more and more Tunisians fall under the poverty line, while the redistribution of national income becomes more and more unequal to the detriment of the working masses (decline of aggregate wages in the national income and orientation of profits toward consumption for the benefit of the leisure classes, concentration of landed property in the hands of a minority of rich farmers...).

In other areas, the regime has opted for a system of iniquitous taxes which punish the wage-earners and the working masses and which accentuated the gaps between generations and regions (decline of investments in the most deprived zones of the country...). The conclusion of this important report, supported by statistics, is clear: the present economic policy is not necessary; it can and should be changed. Besides, in the near future, the MUP will propose an overall solution.

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## Forgotten Youth

Because the failure of the liberal-capitalist policy led during the last 10 years is, according to the political report, patent. And recourse to permanent repression has been the only means of imposing this choice (violation of the constitution, multiplication of political trials, mass arrests in the ranks of the progressive and democratic forces, use of torture...). The process of fascistization resulted in the massacres of 26 January 1978, in the total break between government and the popular masses, in the isolation of the Destour and in the present political impasse, none of which can be shoved under a rug by the authorities who regularly propagate rumors of an "opening-up" and "liberalization." Reaffirming the MUP's fidelity to its fundamental principles spelled out in the "manifesto of the Popular Unity Movement" of March 1975, the political report declares that /"the socialism for which we fight is not opposed to the notion of democracy--indeed cannot be distinguished from it,"/ and recalls that the MUP chose the democratic path in its fight. Elsewhere, the document contains a long analysis of the relations of the MUP with other political currents, with the present situation of the country, and the place of the MUP in Tunisian society and political life.

The national conference of the MUP paid particular attention to youth and to the grave problems confronting it. One report was in fact dedicated to this fundamental question. In a country like Tunisia, where more than half of the people are younger than age 20, it is imperative to conduct a strong and courageous policy in the interests of youth, the guarantor of the Tunisia of tomorrow. Now youth today are bullied, discredited, and repressed. The rise in unemployment, the absence of any future, have thrown large sectors of the youth into despair and indifference, and are at the origin of the increase in juvenile delinquency. Lost, forsaken, youth has more than once risen up against the regime responsible for this situation. Throughout the animated debates, it was thrown into relief that the Popular Unity Movement must be seen as a national liberation movement, open to all progressives of diverse views, united around a common project but linked by political discipline, and the many delegates speaking in turn insisted on emphasizing it. /"To present the country an overall solution as much on the political and economic planes as on the ideological," "to develop the struggles and strengthen the bases of the movement,"/ these are the kind of essential tasks to which the MUP is applying itself today.

The developments which can occur in the situation of the country are unforeseeable, and one must be prepared to confront no matter what circumstance, with faith and determination.

## Biographic Information

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 4-17 Feb 80 p 24

[Article: "Always a Militant"]

[Text] Ahmed Ben Salah was born 13 January 1926 in the small village of Mohnine. Starting at age 14, he committed himself to the struggle against



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colonialism. In 1946, he went to pursue advanced studies in Paris and there became secretary general of the Neo-Destour cell. He was responsible notably for maintaining liaison between his party and the bey Moncef, exiled to Pau by the colonial authorities because of his support to the nationalists.

Upon returning to Tunisia, Ahmed Ben Salah continued to militate actively in the ranks of the Neo-Destour and the syndicate Tunisian General Federation of Labor [UGTT]. Farhat Hached makes him responsible for representing UGTT before the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions [ICFTU] in Brussels, which he did until 1954, when he was elected by the Fifth Congress of the UGTT as secretary general of that organization. (He succeeded Farhat Hached, assassinated on 5 December 1952 by a terrorist organization in service to the colonial authorities). In September 1956, Ben Salah was abruptly relieved of his duties as secretary general of the UGTT by the prime minister of the time, Habib Bourguiba. He was criticized for having vigorously defended the UGTT program, which called for, among other things, a profound structural reform in all areas to bring Tunisia onto the socialist path.

In 1957 he was named secretary of state for public health, then in 1960 he was given the ministry of planning. He published with other socialist militants "Perspectives of Development for the Decade." which would guide the economic policy of the sixties and which were directly inspired by the UGTT program of 1956.

In October 1964 the Neo-Destour, now become the Destourian Socialist Party, opted for socialism as a basis for planning and structural reform. Having become minister of planning, the economy, then national education, Ahmed Ben Sala gave of himself without measure to make this policy succeed in spite of the resistance of the leisure classes, who tried to sabotage his work.

Finally, [the forces of] reaction and certain foreign powers which put pressure on Bourguiba got the upper hand and, in September 1969 Ben Salah was sacked, put under house arrest in November, arrested in March 1970, then condemned in May of the same year to 10 years of hard labor. On 5 February 1973 he escaped from the Tunis prison and got to Europe where, since then, he has lived in exile. In May 1973 he announced, in a lengthy declaration, the creation of the Popular Unity Movement. In August 1977 he was again condemned to 8 years in prison at the time of the proceedings brought against MUP militants.

On 25 June 1978, Ben Salah sustained, at the Sorbonne, a doctoral thesis in sociology entitled, "Men, Structures, and Development: The Tunisian Experiment, 1961-1969." In addition, he discoursed at length on the Tunisian policy in the sixties in a book published, in Maspero, by Marc Nerfin: "Talks with Ahmed Ben Salah."

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TUNISIA

TREATMENT OF IMPRISONED TRADE-UNIONISTS DECRIED

Paris AFRIQUE-ASIE in French 4-17 Feb 80 p 25

[Article by Omar Nasser: "Winter of the Detainees"]

[Text] In prison and out of prison, the Destourian power uses constant violence to try to keep the people down.

Someday we must collect all the testimony of victims of the political trials--some hundred in all--brought against opponents by the Bourguiba-Nouira-Sayah government, in order to write the black book of the Tunisian prison regime. It is in truth a machine for torturing and destroying: the true face of a Destourian power which tramples under foot the dignity of an entire people. How can one really not be profoundly disturbed listening to an old trade unionist, arrested the day after the massacre of 26 January 1978--which brought many more deaths than admitted by the sbires [translation unknown] of Sayah--confide to a European doctor that the French colonists were more humane with their prisoners, Tunisian nationalists, than is today's regime of "independent Tunisia"?

After the butchery of "Black Thursday", 26 January, the trade unionists and political opponents, as well as 7,000 young people rounded up by the police and whose main crime was to be unemployed, languish in prisons in the most abominable conditions.

In their humid and icy cells, most are nourished--when their families cannot furnish them with a daily "basket"--by a notorious soup, full of parasites and bereft of the least protein. They do not get the chance to be part of the small number of known prisoners which the authorities show-case to try to fool an indignant international opinion. And even those who could pass for being "privileged," cannot get their needs attended and get out of the total isolation in which they are confined. This is the case of the trade unionist Abdelaziz Ghorbal, whose right arm is nearly paralyzed. All the detained have also been tortured. Torture which one Destourian official described as simple beating with a stick, comparable to that which is endured by recalcitrant students in the schools. "Refined" tortures, in reality, learned by the jailers in the course of their trips to the United States or the FRG.

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As well as sexual abuses about which the victims often will not speak for shame, or electrical tortures, or the "helicopter" system (which has been compared to bastinado), or the procedure of the "drop of water," which are as often described by the detained and whose objective is not to force a confession but to destroy systematically their victims and to spread out of the prisons a cunning fear which grips the whole country. To the point that certain families no longer dare admit--especially after Black Thursday--the death of one of their own, from fear that...One never knows...

Alarmed by this state of affairs, the Council of the Order of Tunisian physicians recently succeeded in having adopted a law which requires that each prison doctor immediately inform judicatory authorities in case he witnesses evidence of cruelty. A courageous initiative in itself, but one which is doomed to have no effect. Because it is in the secrecy of police stations that torture is performed, and it is there that victims of "preventive arrest" can remain locked up for more than a year! The responsibility of the prison doctors in the situation of the detainees however remains real. Some are hardened to the point of sadism, and others simply refuse to take initiatives in making investigations of the state of health of the detainees.

What exactly happened to Said Guagui, tortured in prison, as he recounted in detail before his death, 9 January 1979, as a victim of generalized cancer? What happened to Sallouz, native of Menzel Bourguiba, militant belonging to the "Ech-Chaab clandestine" group, dead in suspicious circumstances three months after his release from prison? And these are only a few cases which broke through the wall of silence and fear.

This somber picture, comes from testimony collected by Dr Antoine Lazarus and Ms Le Loc'H Marianne, who recently visited Tunisia and are thus able to paint it. The first, leader of a multiprofessional group on prisons and professor of preventive and social medicine at the CHU [expansion unknown] of the Saint-Antoine Hospital in Paris, came to Tunisia last 10 January in connection with a medical mission inquiry on the conditions of prisoners of conscience. The second, a leader of the health federation in the CGT [General Confederation of Labor], went during the same period on a mission to Tunisian trade unionists and their families. Both gave accounts of their observations in the course of a press conference called by the "Tunisian Collective of 26 January," in the context of two weeks of solidarity with the Tunisian workers and the UGTT, their legitimate union.

#### Strikes and Petitions

This means, and in spite of the climate of cunning terror which reigns in Tunisia, that the police state is not succeeding in silencing the struggles. No less than 212 strikes are on record, according to the Tunisian administration itself, in the course of the first nine months of the past year. Demonstrations of support for the legitimate UGTT continue in the

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country, where more than 20 petitions were widely signed, notably on the occasion of 5 December, the date commemorating the assassination in 1953 by the colonial Red Hand of Farhat Hached, a prestigious figure of Tunisian syndicalism. This pressure from workers and militant unionists has not relaxed since Black Thursday 26 January. It has succeeded so far in keeping the puppet UGTT of Tijani Abid in total isolation. And that is not a small victory.

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TUNISIA

PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSES GAFAH INCIDENTS, DOMESTIC AND ARAB ISSUES

Paris AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI in Arabic: 8-14 Feb 80 pp 29-32

[Interview with Tunisian Prime Minister Hedi Nouira, Conducted by Nabil Maghrabi]

[Text] Tunisian Prime Minister Hedi Nouira stressed to AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI that the Gafsah incidents created a national consensus throughout the country for reacting to any attempt to damage Tunisian stability and growth. He renewed his charge that the "Libyan regime" had arranged these incidents, and dealt with Tunisia's stands on various local, Arab and international issues.

The future? It is in the hands of the Tunisians alone. They are not afraid for Tunisia, the country of legal organizations and agencies. As long as the people are devoted to these organizations, there is nothing to fear for the future. With these words, Tunisian Prime Minister Hedi Nouira responded to a question dealing with future eventualities, especially after the Gafsah incidents.

In his lengthy meeting with AL-WATAN AL-'ARABI, the prime minister was determined and unequivocal, saying, "The Gafsah incidents have created an all-embracing national consensus based on exposing and reacting to any attempt directed at Tunisia's stability and security."

When asked about the dimensions and purposes of the Gafsah incidents, he answered calmly, "Some people don't want Tunisia to have security, peace and growth, but are made uneasy by the stages of development on various levels which Tunisia has witnessed and is still witnessing. They are making efforts to stir up trouble, but Tunisia is always on the lookout."

[Question] The finger of suspicion in the Gafsah incidents has been pointed at the Libyan regime. On another occasion you said that you made a distinction between the good Libyan people and the regime. The question is: on what material proof are you relying in directing this immediate accusation?

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[Answer] The proof was discovered by judicial investigations. The prisoners confessed that they had been trained in Libyan training camps, and that most of them had taken part in the Ugandan and Lebanese wars. Also, a number of them had participated in the May 1978 Orly Airport operation. The investigations are still in progress.

[Question] Some people say that the Gafsa incidents cannot be isolated from other incidents which have happened in the region (such as the criminal attack on the mosque at Mecca and the activity of some radical religious parties in Algeria and Tunisia), and that these incidents are directly or indirectly connected with the phenomenon of the spread of Islam. How do you explain this phenomenon?

[Answer] Mosques are houses of God, built to commemorate His name and for Moslems to meet to pray and receive inspiration and guidance. This is common knowledge and cannot be denied. Citizens cannot be allowed to use these mosques as places to bring up matters over which the Tunisians disagree, for the mosques exist to bring together all Tunisians without exception, whatever their opinions or view of society. We believe that wrapping oneself up in the cloak of Islam to attain political ends will create, in the houses of God, differences which we can do without. If some citizens have a political view or stand on a given topic, they should bring it up outside the houses of God.

However, I want to make it clear that in Tunisia no one of this inclination has been imprisoned, although some have been summoned because of having done certain material acts, in order to get an explanation of their motives from them. They have all sworn not to repeat their actions, and official reports were compiled about them without any of them being arrested, as I have mentioned.

Radicalism Is Not in the Moslems' Interest

[Question] But what is your evaluation of the spread of Islam in the region in general? Some observers say that the Arab world is going overboard because of this phenomenon and because of the interactions of the Iranian events.

[Answer] I feel that some elements who have no other excuse want to wrap themselves in the mantle of Islam in order to stir up some problems and profit from the incidents now taking place in Iran, while conditions here in Tunisia are completely different from those in Iran.

As I have said, we feel that radicalism and the call to radicalism and its resultant damages at home and abroad stirs up a counter-reaction, and this is not in the interest of either the Arabs or the Moslems.

We have noticed that some newspapers which had supported the Iranian revolution reversed themselves after a while and began to take a more

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negative attitude. Reactions such as these were caused by radicalism and extremism, inasmuch as Islam is a philanthropic religion, a religion of equilibrium and tolerance.

[Question] Do you believe that any foreign powers have acted or are acting to stir up such matters?

[Answer] Such powers are many, and whoever wants to can demolish a society, using every means to do so. Such has been the case for a long time. As for Iran, the problem is not a religious one but is in fact a social one, for Iranian society was petrified and divided into distinct classes, and therefore there was inertia and development was impossible. Since there was no breathing space to express political or social opinions, the opposition took the religious path in order to proclaim its views. This explains the significant response which the religious leaders received.

[Question] The Gafsah incidents confirm once again that Tunisia has always successfully confronted radicalism. This phenomenon really deserves to be mentioned. What is the magic formula which Tunisia relies on to eliminate attempts to impinge on its stability and security?

[Answer] We don't have any magic formula in Tunisia. The Tunisian people are above all a pacific people, and most of the time their attitudes avoid excessiveness. This may be due to their history, for Tunisia has been for ages a crossroads for peoples and civilizations, and its geography has dictated openness to the outside world. All these factors make the Tunisians' attitudes moderate ones, based on analyzing the circumstances and trying to find solutions which take into consideration the higher interests of the Tunisian nation and people.

#### The Disasterous January Incidents

[Question] The Gafsah incidents coincided with the anniversary of the 26 January 1978 incidents, which led to the arrest of Habib 'Ashur. Is there something the prime minister would like to say in this context?

[Answer] If it were in my power to obliterate this day from Tunisia's history, I would do so, for it should not remain as one of the memories which we want to preserve. It was simultaneously a surprise and a calamity. The friends and lovers of Tunisia were surprised by it, and it was a catastrophe for Tunisians and their friends, a disaster caused by recklessness, thoughtlessness and miscalculation.

[Question] It is said abroad that the January 1978 incidents have not yet ended on the judicial level, meaning that there are still political prisoners because of these incidents. Are there any political detainees in Tunisia now?

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[Answer] Naturally, there are those who were justly tried. There is no judicial problem now, for the judicial system has looked into and settled all the violations.

[Question] Other news says that Habib 'Ashur was released and placed under house arrest. It was then rumored that he asked to go on the pilgrimage and the authorities did not permit him to do so. How true are these reports?

[Answer] I had not heard that Habib 'Ashur asked to make the pilgrimage, especially since he had gone on the pilgrimage before.

The Future Is in the Hands of the Tunisians

[Question] Some observers say that Tunisia is now in an excellent position and is capable of facing all difficulties, because of the presence of certain persons at the summit of power such as President Habib Bourguiba and yourself. But people don't live forever. Permit me to ask you: after the recent incidents, how does the future appear to you?

[Answer] The future is in the hands of the Tunisians, and it is clear. I don't suppose that a question like this would be posed to Giscard D'Estaing or Helmut Schmidt. It would never occur to any journalist or politically-informed person to ask President Carter, for example, what America's future would be after his departure. The future lies in the legal organizations and agencies. People pass on, but organizations remain.

As long as the organizations remain and the people remain devoted to them, there is no fear for the future. This is from the standpoint of the constitutional entity. As for practical daily policies in the social and economic spheres, they depend on the circumstances, and they are modified by each generation according to its needs.

There Are No Economic Troubles

[Question] How do you view today's domestic economic situation? Last week you raised wages, and some people say that the country is suffering from some economic troubles.

[Answer] The world is passing through an international economic crisis which is now at its worst. Maybe you know how Tunisia hit upon the way to deal with this crisis and how it worked to overcome it. However, those who criticise our conduct don't know anything about economics, or else they are avoiding the truth. Do these people have any knowledge of the concept of inflation, and how far it has gone abroad and in Tunisia? There can be no discussion except with speakers in possession of the objective factors on which we all agree.

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All the world organizations have seen that in 1978 Tunisia had the world's third lowest rate of inflation, after Switzerland and West Germany. This verdict was reached by respected experts working in world organizations like the World Bank or in some well-known private organizations. Domestically, the price inflation index has never even reached 8 percent, and even today it is below this percentage.

However, local products are facing domestic pressure because of low production and excessive consumer demand. We have no control over the prices of imported goods. The prices of some food items have risen by 50, 60 and even 100 percent in recent years. However, their prices on the domestic market have remained fixed, for the state is paying the difference through the compensation fund. We have done so throughout the Seventies.

However, the situation has been aggravated, and it is our view that it cannot continue this way. The consumer must bear part of the rising cost of living, because it is one of our development principles that equality among generations must be achieved. It is inexcusable to deprive one generation of job opportunities so that another generation may enjoy excessive consumption. Therefore we decided on the recent price rise.

The effect of the rise in food item prices on the price index is estimated at 3 percent, and as of December 1979 the inflation rate in the price index was 4.8 percent, i.e. a little less than 5 percent. The agreement reached among the various social parties calls for a rise in wages whenever the price increase index reaches 5 percent or more and stays so for 6 consecutive months.

In order to protect buying power, we raised the minimum wage by 3 percent. We preferred this solution to waiting for the price inflation to reach 7 percent, for example, and continue so for 6 months. Therefore, we acted so that the increase in the index would stay around 3 percent from the standpoint of increased wages and actual price increases. If anyone has any proof to the contrary, let him present it.

I would like to mention that our conduct in this respect was in consideration of the present world crisis, which has led to a major rise in wheat, coffee and sugar prices. We took this urgent step on the understanding that we would reevaluate the situation in 6 months time and decide on a wage increase if the situation called for it. We have met our promises, and have perhaps granted more than we promised. All the social parties agree on that. But the saying "the enemies were satisfied but the judge wasn't" might apply to some people.

They Are Satisfied With the Election Experiment

[Question] My last question about the domestic Tunisian situation is: Tunisia has once again embarked on a new experiment in parliamentary elections. Are you completely satisfied with it?

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[Answer] The experiment was positive and we are continuing with it. The municipality elections this May will be conducted in this manner. This experiment represents a new step towards granting more democracy to political life and expanding the field of choice and the citizens' participation in managing public affairs, and the candidates were given a greater opportunity for useful dialog with the electorate.

As for the election results, they were legitimate with the exception of two districts where some objections were raised. The objection of one region was accepted, and the other was rejected. Some people were afraid of this undertaking, but in reality it had praiseworthy results, and work on it will continue in the future.

#### Afghanistan and Soviet Intervention

[Question] Let us move on to your stand on international issues, in the forefront of which, naturally, is the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Could you tell us the Tunisian government's stand on this intervention, and what solutions you are proposing for confronting similar situations should they arise in the future?

[Answer] Tunisia's stand on the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was made clear by President Habib Bourguiba on the day he received the new year's congratulations of the diplomatic corps. The head of state's analysis of Tunisia's stand was ample and needs no further explanation.

In response to the second part of your question, I would like to make it clear that a small country like Tunisia cannot base its foreign policy on anything but firm bases such as respect for international law, non-interference in the affairs of others, and above all not occupying weak, neighboring countries.

As we see it, these foundations represent an essential principle to which we have committed ourselves and according to which we have acted ever since Tunisia's independence. We believe that respect for international law represents a guarantee for all nations, and that it is our duty to call world attention to such incidents.

[Question] In this context, some people are calling for taking a harder stand, such as calling for an Arab or Islamic summit conference to face these matters. What is your opinion of this?

[Answer] The Afghanistan issue is in principle an international one, as I have made clear. On top of that, Afghanistan is an Islamic country. Calling for an Islamic summit conference is more all-inclusive than calling for an Arab conference.

[Question] And how does Tunisia feel about the holding of American hostages in Iran?

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[Answer] Our view on this issue is no different than our view on the situation in Afghanistan. That is, we have based and will continue to base our foreign policy on firm foundations--respect for international law and compliance with it.

We also call for respecting all international agreements, especially those which pertain to diplomatic representatives. Without them, international relations cannot be conducted with any peace of mind.

President Habib Bourguiba has previously analyzed Tunisia's stand on this issue. However proud we are of what the Iranian revolution is doing to defend the dignity of a people whose rights have been long oppressed by domestic and foreign forces of exploitation, and without meddling in Iran's internal affairs, we nevertheless do not support the holding of diplomatic emissaries as hostages, nor the negation of international agreements recognized and complied with by the various countries of the world.

You know that international usage calls for protecting diplomats, in such a way that should an emissary enjoying diplomatic immunity violate the customary conditions, he is considered persona non grata and is expelled from the host country.

[Question] And how are your present relations with the Iranian government?

[Answer] We have representation in Iran, and Iran is similarly represented in Tunisia.

[Question] Tunisia is trying to establish its international relations on the basis of balance. Can you evaluate Tunisian-Soviet relations on the one hand and Tunisian-American relations on the other hand in the present phase?

[Answer] Our relations with the Soviet Union are good--President Habib Bourguiba confirmed this when responding to the new year's felicitations from the ambassadors, among them the Soviet ambassador. We have cultural, economic and technical cooperation with the Soviet Union, but this does not prevent us from having our say on questions of principle.

Tunisia and the Possibilities of American Intervention

[Question] President Carter stated recently that America might intervene in the Middle East if a foreign intervention occurs, thereby alluding to the possibility of a Soviet intervention in the region. Does Tunisia approve of the dispatching of American forces to the region?

[Answer] There are American forces in the area now, since the American fleet is here, and has been reinforced recently. There is also a Soviet fleet. The forces of both superpowers are present in the region.

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[Question] The Middle East, and in particular the Gulf, has witnessed an international polarization. Some observers feel that there are possibilities that the cold war, or even the hot war, might start in this region. Do you believe that the situation in the Gulf and in the Middle East in general is currently threatening world peace?

[Answer] We have warned on more than one occasion that the situation in the Middle East might have a bad effect on world security, for this region is exposed to intervention, and these interventions might have a repercussion on world security and peace.

[Question] You know that some Arab states were opposed to participating in the Islamabad conference, while other states attached great importance to its results. What is your opinion of this conference's usefulness?

[Answer] Naturally, after an incident like what happened in Afghanistan, a Moslem country, the Islamic countries' concern has been directed towards this situation, and there is much discussion about it, because another Islamic country might be exposed tomorrow to what happened today in Afghanistan, if international dealings continue in the manner we are now witnessing.

[Question] Moving on to the Arab scene, we are faced with differences and divisions. The accusation that the Libyan regime arranged the Gafsa incidents is basically a confirmation of the existence of these divisions, along with the dangers they represent. Some people say that the Arab split is the child of the Camp David peace phase. What is your proposal for getting out of the current Arab dilemma?

[Answer] We do not allow ourselves to offer solutions which might not be consistent with the stands of fraternal Arab states, and we definitely don't want to interfere in the internal affairs of any other nations. All we want to do is expound, elucidate and justify our stands. This has been the aim of Tunisian policy in all issues, including Arab issues, naturally.

In 1955, President Habib Bourguiba delivered his famous speech in Ariha, on the West Bank, analyzing Tunisia's experience in the struggle against colonialism and appealing to the Palestinians to rely on international legitimacy, to which all nations agree, whether they belong to the western or eastern camps.

In this way, the Arab nation would be able to resist those who created Israel and who have stated many times that they are determined to perpetuate it on Arab territory. The establishment of Israel in this manner, although it represents the greatest injustice in history, has been adopted by international society.

Therefore, we feel that we are committed to this international legitimacy, and we demand the implementation of everything resulting from it. This

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legitimacy calls for giving part of the Arab territory to Israel and the rest to the Palestinians. Tunisia, speaking through President Habib Bourguiba, calls for establishing the Palestinians in the lands reserved for them by the provisions of the international partition agreement.

At the time, this stand aroused private and public scorn, and we were accused of being weak and denying the Arab cause. But our stand was aimed at establishing the Palestinians according to an internationally recognized legal foundation which would open windows permitting them, if not to regain all their rights, to at least come close to it.

An English politician has said that there is no friendship among nations, but only interests. The important thing is to have the correct vision for discerning these interests, and to follow the best ways of attaining them.

This means that the question is how to deal with matters and correctly analyze situations, so as to determine the method of action and follow a certain political course. This is our way of dealing with our domestic problem or with world issues.

The Summit Will Not Resolve All the Differences

[Question] Does Tunisia support the call for holding an Arab summit conference to resolve Arab differences or to study the post-Camp David stage?

[Answer] Holding Arab summits should not become a commonplace occurrence. That is, the purpose of summit meetings is to resolve what is agreed upon by diplomats and foreign ministers, who prepare the dossiers, collect all the data, and discuss the issues. If they arrive at a solution pleasing to all parties, the summit can meet to sanction what has been arrived at.

As for holding a summit without sufficient preparation and without the participants' seeming to agree, that is not a practical solution which will enable progress to be made in the issue. A summit cannot eliminate all the differences, if they are many and varied, even if it meets for weeks.

We Are All For a Policy of Stages, But. . .

[Question] With respect to the Camp David peace, how do you view the stage now reached by Egyptian-Israeli relations, the so-called normalization of relations and the exchange of diplomatic representation?

[Answer] We took a stand on this matter earlier, when we said that the Camp David agreement, no matter how it is interpreted, has above all created a state of separate peace, which violates Arab commitments. As for the issue of Palestinian autonomy, the nature of this autonomy is not yet known, and every party has its own interpretation. Perhaps this is an opportunity for us to see an aspect of international law which we had not known before.

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Some people question how Tunisia, which approves of a policy of stages, can oppose an agreement which is also based on a policy of stages. Yes, we are one of those who call for a policy of stages, but only after elucidating the goal, defining it precisely, and working in stages to approach it. The goal is for the Palestinians to establish a state on the land of their fathers and grandfathers. This is our position on the Camp David agreement.

We have said that there is a misunderstanding which is giving advance warning of something the upshot of which will not be laudable. Perhaps Egypt will get some satisfaction out of its position, but with respect to the Palestinian issue, which is the mother issue for the sake of which the Arabs waged war four times, it will not achieve any results worth mentioning.

[Question] And your position on the Lebanese crisis? Does Tunisia see any way out of it?

[Answer] The solution we agreed on at the last summit was, in our opinion, a positive one, in that it prevents the occurrence of violent disagreements among the parties. We left the resolution of the remaining differences to daily life and the mutual understanding of the parties concerned. This, as far as I know, is what is in force now. I have also learned that the Arab League representative had a positive role. Although what we arrived at during the tenth summit was an inadequate solution, in any case it was a compromise solution which will help reduce the tension which had existed between the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese government.

Will the League Ultimately Remain in Tunisia?

[Question] In the past, Tunisia has had differences and crises with the Arab League, and Tunisia has always objected to the Egyptian hegemony over the league's organizations. The overall picture of the Arab League has now changed, and in a very short time the secretary general has undertaken significant diplomatic activity, whether on the Arab or the international level. But don't you believe that the presence of the Arab League in Tunisia, as a neutral country, has aided the accomplishment of the Arab League's task? Do you think that it would be preferable for the Arab league to ultimately remain in Tunisia?

[Answer] It is hard for a Tunisian official to answer this question. Tunisia took in the league only at the request of many fraternal Arab states. We thanked them for this valuable trust, which is a great responsibility, and we took in the league.

I believe that the experiment has proven that every member of the league, no matter what his political school, economic inclination or social outlook, feels that whenever he discusses and debates in the league he is free to take his stand, without rancor, because he is convinced that no one wants to influence him.

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I believe that the officials of the Arab states had these considerations in mind when they chose Tunisia for the league's headquarters, for dialog in Tunisia is open, and any problem and any issue can be dealt with in complete freedom out in the open. Tunisia has no intention of imposing its hegemony or its own way of looking at things. Therefore, the league is in a place safe from pressure of whatever kind, be it intellectual, political or material.

[Question] Do you therefore propose that the Arab League ultimately remain in Tunisia?

[Answer] The Arab states must look into this matter.

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