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Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 11/80)



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NEAR EAST/NORTH AFRICA REPORT

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE GAFSA AFFAIR

Libyan Role Questioned

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 p 44

[Editorial by B.B.Y.]

[Text] "Everything to stop the raiders." This is what the cover of this number of JEUNE AFRIQUE proclaims, and it is what we wanted to present to you: The truth about this affair, the entire truth.

In spite of our knowledge of the ground, out of the 6 days we have had at our disposal and in spite of the means that we have set into motion, we have not completely found the truth.

Through the fault of the Tunisian authorities, one week after its beginning the operation is still badly known and too many questions have not been answered. It is not the good will of those authorities that I am blaming but rather their knowledge of how to handle information and the real concern of the exigencies of this information. After the lack of information which has not allowed those same authorities to ward off the blow, another lack of information does not allow the truth to be known.

I know well that weakness is common to all countries in the Third World. That being true, however, what is the sense of our claiming to be a "new world order of information"?

It is still true, and it is beyond belief that in Kabul the Soviet Army has permitted journalists--including Americans!--to cover its intervention, while the Tunisian army, during five long days, has not authorized journalists (including our special envoy and our photographer) to travel from Tunis to Gafsa (350 km), under the pretext of security.

Since the first day--Sunday 27 January--every evening the Tunisian government declares: "The affair is over, we have taken the situation in hand," to be contradicted by the facts on the next day. Like the Saudi authorities in Mecca.

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The number of assailants given by the officials has varied from 110 on the first day to 250 or 300 during the week and gone back down to ...50. They have never felt the need to explain to public opinion why a raiding party of 50 persons was able to cause so much damage and to hold its ground for so much time against the Tunisian Army.

National opinion was badly informed or not informed at all up to the middle of the week, left a prey to the most insane rumors.

What is the role of Algeria? If it is "stupefied" by the operation, why does it not condemn it? The "little piece" of Algerian territory borrowed by the raiding party, how many meters (or hundreds of kilometers) does it extend? See our map.

As for the Soviet Union, protector (and arms supplier) of al-Qadhafi; why does not the Tunisian government ask it what it thinks about this and why doesn't it publish the answer?

As for French military aid, requested urgently and obtained illicitly, why was it necessary to deal with a raiding party of only 50 persons? Why don't they say clearly to public opinion what that aid has consisted of?

The same day when Tunisia sent back Libya's ambassador and called its own from Tripoli, the Tunisian minister of the interior was still speaking of the complicity "of a neighboring country": The fear of calling a spade a spade is the opposite of information.

Why not, since there are so many proofs of Libyan participation, resort to the Security Council, of which Tunisia is a member? Don't they know in Tunis that Benin, what it did so in 1976, came out of it well? The report of the commission of inquiry presided over by the Libyan Mansour Kikhya was right about general scepticism, including ours at JEUNE AFRIQUE. Why didn't Tunisia seize the opportunity of the Islamic Conference which was being held at Islamabad at the moment of aggression? And the Arab League, of which we had been told that its presence in Tunis would be "buckler" (sic) for Tunisia? And the OAU several members of which know that they are menaced by the "foreign legion" of al-Qadhafi?

Why were there so many information failures and why is there so much diplomatic passivity? So many rewards for aggression and so much encouragement for further offenses.

Let's finish talking about information! In order to know the entire truth, would it be necessary for the Tunisians---and the others---to read the French newspaper LIBERATION, which publishes the version, exaggerated but not groundless, of the attackers?

JEUNE AFRIQUE, as far as it is concerned, will do everything that it can to know and publish all of the truth.

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Tunisian Army Holds Ground

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 pp 45-48

[Article by Abdelaziz Barouhi]

[Text] The surprise was total on Sunday 27 January. At 0200 hours, on the Feriana road, some shadows travel furtively toward the Ahmed Tlili barrack, four kilometers north-northwest of Gafsa.

After the sentinel is rapidly disabled, the barrack is immediately invested by several tens of men in civilian dress who have no trouble at all in taking possession. The fact is that most of the troop has been on maneuvers in the Medenine region nearly 160 kilometers from there. Some 300 young recruits are suddenly wakened from their slumbers. They are not even allowed to get dressed. They are strictly watched over and one witness declares that he saw them in drawers and tee-shirts or in pajamas at the time of their transfer to the Technical High School located near the center of the town which was Sunday morning at 0900 hours. The attackers will make this their general headquarters as well, it seems. At the very moment when the Tlili barrack was occupied, a second raiding party mounted a rocket attack on the police post guarded by two policemen who were immediately killed. The same group then went to the National Guard post. A third raiding party invests another barrack not far from there. This barrack is much less important than the first. In the space of an hour and a half, the three raiding parties practically assured themselves of control of the town.

Heavy Gunfire

It was about 0230 hours that the inhabitants were awakened by heavy firing. Lying on the floors of their houses, they hear short orders given with a Tunisian accent: "Fire at anything that moves!" And this is what in fact would happen during the insane day of Sunday 27 January and even on Monday 28 January. The actor Mohamed Tahar Soufi (Abdelkrim in the famous play Hamma Jeridi) was wounded because he stepped out of his house. Police Brigadier Brahim Khider was also wounded. A native of the city, he would later be presented as a "hangman" in the mysterious communique from the Tunisian armed resistance broadcast from Paris.

Fatal Oversight

"He never did any harm to anyone," they repeated at Gafsa. The inhabitants, when they dared to go outside, discovered many corpses on the streets. The raiding parties, loaded into private automobiles "borrowed" from their owners, were patrolling with arms sticking out the windows. They were interested only in official buildings. They paid no attention to the

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populated sections. Having arrived at about 0130, the van providing transportation, 2 Sundays a month, between Bou-Chebka (Algeria) and Gafsa-Gabes-Medénine was waiting departure time. It was emptied of its 43 Algerian passengers (one a woman), and, mounted with a bazooka and machine gun, used in the ensuing engagements. Seemingly very confident of themselves, the attackers tried to "win over" those who ventured out; pleading: "Join us in rising up against tyranny to free the Tunisian people." Some were forced to go with them. These new recruits were issued weapons, which they would hastily discard in quitting a little later as the security forces intervened in strength.

The alert was quickly spread. Indeed, the attackers appeared at the main telecommunications center, but merely to demand they be handed over service vehicles. When those in charge delayed, they damaged the vehicles with gunfire. Paradoxically, they did not seize the station, so that Gafsa with a direct link to Tunis was able to maintain contact with the outside world throughout the incident.

Isolated, the capital of Chott el-Djerid could not be speedily relieved. The nearest troops were at Kasserine, Gabes and Sfax. As quickly as possible, armored columns and troop transports from these cities, as well as from Tunis, some 330 km distant, headed for Gafsa. As of 0900 hours, the army started to seal off the Gafsa area. President Bourguiba had been in Nefta, close to the border with Algeria and barely 100 kilometers away, since 24 January. A few attackers reportedly headed in his direction by the Gafsa-Tozeur Road, without success. Shortly before noon, the army attacked. Planes and helicopters overflew the city. Commandos fired at them with automatic weapons. At the same time, armor advanced, cautiously, however, since the commandos facing them had antiarmor rockets.

Similar to Mecca

The casern was easily recaptured. Midtown, the occupants of the police station and national guard headquarters surrendered only after heavy encounters. The only remaining objective was to dislodge those holding the Sidi Ben Yacoub Mosque and lycee, directly opposite. It evoked memories of the incident at the Great Mosque in Mecca, November 1979 (see JEUNE AFRIQUE No 989). Some armed men held the minaret and, in the lycee, the young recruits. Authorities pondered whether to attack or not. Finally, a hole was blasted in the wall of the lycee and in the general confusion nearly 150 of the recruits were able to escape. However, before they could reach the gap, 15 died and many were wounded by grenades thrown by the captors. As of 1700 hours, on Sunday 27 January, the raiders had lost the advantage. The authorities could then declare, in the first communique divulged at that same hour, that they had the situation in hand. However, the inhabitants heard reports of firearms until 2100 hours. Witnesses declare the sporadic and localized shooting continued until Monday 28 January, and even a part of the day Tuesday 29 January while airplanes continued to fly over the town. In fact it was a question of a few indomitable soldiers hidden in the houses or of raiders who were intercepted while they were trying to escape either toward the immense palm grove located on the western margin of the town or toward the mountains on the north and northeast. Early in the afternoon of Sunday 27 January the inhabitants went out to buy food before the curfew announced for 1800 but they hurried, because the firing had not completely ceased. The authorities raised part of the veil on Wednesday 30 January on the number of members

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in the raiding group: Officially they were only 50 Tunisians, 20 of whom were already there several days before the attack. According to official sources, they would have arrived via Rome, Marseilles or Frankfurt. Some emigrated workers who had returned to their country in some way. Two of them were in charge of preparing the details of the attack and of gathering the necessary information. One of those two men was able to flee. The other, a man named Ezzeddine Cherif, was arrested.

Master Mind of Plot

About 50 years of age, one-eyed, bald, this school teacher who was originally from Gafsa had already participated in the "Youssefist plot"* in 1962, according to Othman Kechrid, minister of the interior. He served 10 years in prison, while one of his friends, Akermi, also a native of the region, would be executed. After his liberation, Cherif made several visits to Libya. With a companion who succeeded in escaping Cherif prepared the "Gafsa affair." It was he who established the ground plan of the city, noting in particular in very careful Arabic writing the emplacement of the barracks which were to be attacked and the lodgings of the officers with their guards. It was also Ezzeddine Cherif who took charge of the transport and storage of the arms introduced into Tunisia after the beginning of January, before he went out in an automobile, still with his mysterious companion, to meet the commandos coming from abroad. Those 30 other attackers with their arms had crossed the Algerian-Tunisian border at Bir Hom Ali, opposite the town of Feriana, by following a path. According to the officials, the total number of attackers was 50 and they were all Tunisians. Estimates put out earlier indicated around 300. And then the size of the operation as well as the intensity of the individual combats allows us to think that 50 men were not very many. Above all, if the rumors that circulated at a certain time through Tunis are to be believed, the members of the expedition, equipped with radio transceivers, would have been commanded from a command post installed on Algerian territory. This permits the thought that the most battle-hardened members of the commandos received the order to go back through the mountains and there was only one path, which certain ones crossed. On Wednesday 30 January in Tunis the interior minister presented the first elements of his file to the press. Documents and plans found on the attackers; a delivery slip discovered in a box of arms. The arms seized were 40 submachine guns, 73 automatic rifles, 53 automatic pistols, 9 bazookas, 3 60-millimeter mortars, 10 long range type 100 radio units, 39 rifles and ammunition in quantity. The invoice indicates the destination of the weapons: The Libyan purchasing department, P. O. Box 2577, Tripoli. This document is on a letterhead of the English Pressy Avionics and Communications Company, Ilford, Essex IG 4 AG Telephone 014-78340 and lists in detail the arms that were supplied. Mr Othman Kechrid also computed the official number of casualties: 20 dead (5 non-commissioned officers and 15 conscripts) and 90 wounded (5 of them seriously) for the army; 2 killed and 1 wounded in the police; 1 wounded in the ranks of the national guard; 15 dead and 16 wounded among the civilian population. The minister added that the aggressors had left 4 dead and 3 wounded on the ground in addition to 42 prisoners.

*From the name of Sala Ben Youssef, a figure in Tunisian nationalism, thrown out by Bourguiba on the eve of independence and who tried several times to seize power before he was murdered in Frankfurt in 1961. His partisans had not abandoned the effort in 1962.

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However, no one was making either a direct or indirect accusation against either Libya or Algeria. For Algeria, it is solely a question of interrogations on an eventual implication, due to the fact that a "small part" of its territory served as a route for certain members of the raiding groups. As for Libya, other than the presentation of the documents, the prime minister spoke explicitly in an exclusive interview to JEUNE AFRIQUE, for the first time, of the role of Tripoli in the training and in the preparation of the members of the expedition. The Tunisian emigres in Libya are asked to "serve the cause of liberty" in Africa and elsewhere in return for rewards. That is often brought to an end, unfortunately, with some bodies strewn over the battlefield or haled before the security court of the state, such as happened to the 42 arrested members of the unsuccessful expedition.

On the al-Qadhdhafi Trail

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 pp 48-49

[Article by Abdelaziz Dahmani]

[Text] Arriving from Libya by way of Algeria, some attackers followed the "al-Qadhdhafi Trail," the trail that the Polisario convoys use when they are heading for the Western Sahara.

In fact, for several months the Tunisian "opposition" trained in Libya has found an "objective ally" in the Polisario Front, which itself is solidly established in al-Qadhdhafi's regime. The experience of the front has been put at the service of those Tunisians through the intermediary of its military instructors, whose principal conductor, a certain Gashatt, is an old Libyan poet married to a Saharan who coordinates the "liberation movements" of the entire region.

Arms Smuggling

Originating in Tripoli, the "al-Qadhdhafi Trail" is utilized for the transport of weapons (in the beginning against the wishes of Algeria) as far as the border of Algeria with Mali and Mauritania. This necessarily crosses Algeria from East to West. In the unusual cases where there is a critical period in Algerian-Libyan relations, the North of Niger (which has a common border with Libya is followed, then the territory of Mali to the Mauritanian border. The most classic Algerian trail makes an end run around Tunisia by the way of Ghadames (thanks to an excellent road constructed by the Czechs), the Tassili and Hoggar mountains and descends afterward to the North of Mali....

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All the evidence permits the conclusion that during recent months a route has been created to Tunisia (with assembly points and caches of weapons), and ends up at the "smugglers' pass," north of Gafsa. On the Algerian part of the trail the people who use this route must, unless they have accomplices, avoid the controls of the El Ould and Tebessa regions where the traffic is heavy and active. Curiously, this Tunisian path runs close to the Algerian Edjeleh gasline and to the El Borma oil line (in Tunisia). These works are generally watched over very closely unless there is reciprocal confidence.... Hence the regrets expressed by Algerian authorities when their country was cited at the time of the interrogations of the first prisoners at Gafsa.

United Front Needed

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 p 49

[Editorial by Habib Boulares]

[Text] The Gafsa affair is unacceptable and unjustifiable. It was executed entirely from abroad. It does not correspond to the line of any really Tunisian opposition. From that fact, it does not indicate any relationship with domestic forces. It was executed by men recruited, armed, trained, equipped and sent to Tunisia to serve the designs of the neighboring country which dreamed up this criminal enterprise.

Characteristic Aggression

It caused blood to flow in clashes of unheard-of ferocity.

Neither the claim for the operation by a completely unknown organization nor the choice of the date should give us any illusions; still less the designation of Gafsa as the battlefield. The tragedy of 26 January 1978 was the termination of an evolution of relationships among forces within the Tunisian regime, and in Tunisia in a general way. The repression essentially had the city of Tunis as its theatre.

Although the Gafsa region is an area with a high concentration of laborers, the legitimate union organizations have been only slightly concerned there and the mass of miners are not to be found in the major town of that region. A serious misunderstanding of the Tunisian situation and mentality is necessary to imagine that the inhabitants of the region were going to rise suddenly under the leadership of a commando that had come from the outside. The city is rather administrative and commercial and the Tunisians, whatever the complaints that they may have against their government, do not want foreigners meddling in their affairs. They have already reacted against al-Qadhdhafi in the past, held together by a unanimous patriotism around the state.

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In this affair the role of Algeria remains to be determined. On the other hand, the responsibility of Libya is directly indicated. By recruiting and training Tunisians in specialized camps, the al-Qadhdhafi regime has just reached a point of no return in its hostility toward the Tunisian government. After having sent Tunisians to Uganda and elsewhere, it has just thrown them onto their own country: As far as those men are concerned, they have committed an unacceptable treason; as far as al-Qadhdhafi is concerned, this was a characteristic and premeditated aggression against Tunisia.

A Sacred Union

Up to 27 January 1980 Tunisia had problems. It now and henceforth has a declared enemy who boasts over the waves of his radio about the "insurgents who struggle to liberate their country." The new situation has imposed a new definition of the international and domestic policies within the framework of a sacred union against the invader. It also supposes that all opposition elements will speak out clearly and declare themselves ready to form a united front against Libyan interventionism.

Whether it be "a point of departure" or an isolated operation, the battle of Gafsa has fundamentally changed the nature of the Tunisian problem and will weigh on the evolution of the Magreb.

Gafsa No Surprise

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 p 50

[Article by Souhayr Belhassen]

[Text] The Tunisians receiving military training in Libya amount to between 1,500 and 2,000. Lodged in two barracks, Sounani (in Tripoli itself) and Zaouia (50 km from the capital) they are lead by Palestinians and receive a salary of 90 dinars (about 1000 French francs). For the most part these young men were born in the center and south of Tunisia and left for Libya driven by unemployment and by a future that seemed to them blocked off. Enlisted in the ranks of the "Libyan Popular Resistance," they were used to help along al-Qadhdhafi's dreams of conquest and "liberation." Before the raids on Gafsa, some Tunisians had already been used in more distant theatres of operations. Some 40 of them were killed during the Libyan intervention in Uganda, and about 15 in Lebanon.

Turning Aside

Others participated in attacks, like the one at Orly in May 1978 against a plane belonging to El Al. Muammar al-Qadhdhafi has also "used" them to recall the Libyan-Tunisian Union which was aborted in January 1974. Thus, on 12 January 1979, five years to the day after the voiding of the Jerba Agreement, a Boeing belonging to the national company maintaining the Tunis-Jerba connection was hijacked to Tripoli. The three air pirates

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were Tunisians. "Well received" in Tripoli, according to the crew's declarations, they were neither extradited nor tried. On 14 January 1980 again, or scarcely 13 days before the attack on Gafsa, an Alitalia DC-9 was hijacked on the Rome-Tunis route. The destination (once again): Tripoli. However, the machine stopped at Palermo (in Sicily) and, after long negotiations, the chief of the hijacking surrendered to the Italian authorities. His name was Ferid Ben Mechri Zaich. He was a 28-year-old Tunisian, born in ...Gafsa. His history is very interesting.

Zaich left his country in 1970, and did not return there until 1974 when he had a short leave.

From Tunisia to Morocco

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 6 Feb 80 p 50

[Text] The events of 27 January at Gafsa also recall (see the comparison with the Bay of Pigs on page 51) what happened in the Moroccan Atlas some seven years ago.

During the night of 2-3 March 1973, some raiding parties amounting to several dozen of Moroccan dissidents attacked the mountainous localities of Moulay Bouazza and Goulmina. As for the Gafsa operation, the date of the attack had been carefully chosen: the rebels expected to celebrate the national day which coincides with the feast of the throne with blood.

The Moroccans--imitating their Tunisian "disciples"--had infiltrated through Algeria. Some cases of weapons (specifically 39 sub-machineguns) and some munitions were also to be discovered at Figuig near the Algerian border. The Algerian leaders could not be ignorant of the operation which had been prepared on their territory and which, moreover, was not the first of its kind. However, they had no illusions on the chances of success. If they had nevertheless left the Moroccan opposition alone or even helped it in their enterprise, it is because they had to take into consideration the higher bid offered by the Libyans, who granted their largesse to the "revolutionaries" in the kingdom. In particular Mr Mohamed Basri, one of the former leaders of the resistance under the French protectorate, who, in spite of the repeated failures of his "plots" against the monarchy, wanted to "try it again," found an attentive ear in al-Qadhafi. A proclamation broadcast on the waves of Radio Tripoli and...among Moroccan students in Paris would take credit for the attacks at Goulmina and Moulay Bouazza in the name of the "Moroccan liberation front" of which nothing more was heard. The Atlas commandos were rapidly neutralized. Three of them, including a former captain and an engineer, found their death during their clashes with the forces of order. It must be reported that the Moroccan forces had not been surprised by the operations prepared in Algeria and in Libya. Of public notoriety, the activities of fquih Basri were attentively followed. Furthermore, the infiltrated commandos had counted on the friendship of the population, and it was tragically lacking. On the contrary, the residents sometimes helped the army to drive out the rebels. The repression was not limited just to the partisans of Mohamed

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Basri inside the UNFP (National Union of Popular Forces). It struck indistinctly all of the left wing, which was then obliged, at the time of the Kenitra trials in 1973 and 1974, to publicly take its distance from the military strategy which was considered over-adventurous.

If it turns out that among the Gafsa attackers there are some men who sincerely wish to transform the order of things in their country, they should meditate on the experience of the Moroccan left which spent 10 years (1963-1973) in getting rid of its putschist demons and which certainly paid too high a price.

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM GAFSA ATTACK

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 8 Feb 80 pp 296-297

[Article: "Tunisian Chronicle--Lessons of the Gafsa Affair: Increased Vigilance of the Tunisian Government"]

[Text] Responsibility for the bloody Gafsa affair (27 January) can doubtless be given to Colonel Qadhdhafi. It was recalled in these very pages recently that "the only method he believes to be effective is the Libyan revolutionary model, whose general adoption by the Arab world he thinks would be salutary (MM of 18 January, p 118)." Everything known, both about the enterprising character of the leader of the Libyan revolution and about the bitterness he felt after President Bourguiba's disavowal of the unionist accord of Djerba, would make the theory of a Libyan initiative plausible, even if certain details of the condition of the arms and munitions seized did not seem, in themselves, sufficiently revealing.

Perhaps, however, it is not necessary to assume a personal decision by Colonel Qadhdhafi. It is known and also documented in his orders that he installed in Libya a system of "revolutionary decentralization" of power, which encourages initiatives from the bottom and only organizes a somewhat loose control. Some revolutionary committee from the coast or the Tripolitanian Mountains, where contacts and personal relationships with meridional Tunisia have always been numerous and close, may well have thought up the scenario for this surprise attack, persuading himself that the fall of a provincial capital would suffice to shake the Tunisian regime.

This last deduction, in any case, was risky. However poorly equipped the armed forces and security services of Tunisia, which has always preferred the purchase of equipment to weapons, the Tunisian state had sufficient resources to quell a putsch; and despite all the criticism poured out on all sides against the government of Mr Hedi Nour, public opinion was unanimous in opposing such an adventure. Its goal was not chosen with great perspicacity.

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Why Gafsa?

Gafsa is at the same the center of a large oasis and of a mining district.

The oasis, crowned by old villages of artisans, with its extended new irrigation channels and its access to trails across the Sahara, is a typical shelter for military units, former nomads poorly domesticated, and irregularly employed day-laborers.

The mining district, which started nearly a century ago with the discovery of phosphates and is situated in what was then a very sparsely populated region, attracted from the start the manpower of mountain-dwellers of Berber origin, willing to migrate, from the Matmata mountains of Tunisia, and especially from Libya's Djebel Nefousa, which constitute a single and unique mass of mountains surrounding the Gulf of Gabes.

Respected for their vigor and hard work, rapidly established, quickly assimilated, the "Tripolitans" and their descendents, now become Tunisians, soon formed the main working element of the mines and thus the dynamo, or rather the dynamos, of the first social movements. Their ancestral tribal divisions were in fact reflected in the opposition of the two Tunisian labor movements born almost simultaneously following the Second World War, the USTT [expansion unknown] and the Tunisian General Federation of Labor [UGTT]. The latter, relying on the Destour, was soon to supplant the first, which was of communist tendency and whose affiliates would then rejoin the sole federation, while at the same time introducing into it persistent internal bickering.

It will be recalled, moreover, that the Gafsa region was the nursery of the fedayin who, starting in 1952, challenged the French Protectorate. Soon interrupted by the granting of internal autonomy, this resistance movement nonetheless was typical of this energetic and adventurous people.

At the present time, unionists from the mining-beds, coming in large part from this rude mountain setting, are among the elements which have for the most part remained faithful to the "old path" of Mr Habib Achour, dismissed and condemned after the incidents of 26 January 1978 in Tunis and Sfax and their extremely harsh suppression.

Doubtless the near simultaneousness of the dates: 27 January 1980, 26 January 1978, is but a fortuitous coincidence. Doubtless also it is but chance that the attack on Gafsa was unleashed while President Bourguiba, who had just inaugurated the new international airport for tourist at Tozeur, was resting at the nearby oasis of Nefta. But the choice of Gafsa seems, however, to have been resolved upon in terms of local support arranged by its authors, and further support they hoped to arouse.

One of the conveniences from which the enterprise benefited was the presence in Libya of a certain number of Tunisians with a taste for adventure for

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whom, in this respect, the atmosphere of their native country was unsatisfying. They were found among the "Libyan" contingents in Chad and Uganda. Nothing at all scandalous in this for the Libyan leaders; just another example of realizing Arab unity from the base. After all, before Colonel Qadhafi's rise in Libya, young Tunisians had fired shots for Palestine in 1948, in 1956, in 1967. The attraction of Libya, for these expatriate Tunisians, is not only the high wages: it is also that of space, of action, of movement, far from a small country which is too stable and too wise.

Insidious Crisis Within the Labor Movement

The authors of the surprise attack, to extend their movement, counted on a certain discontent of the Tunisian population. They exaggerated the extent of this discontent, and especially the willingness of the Tunisian population as a whole to rebel. However they were correct in discerning, among the Tunisian people, elements of malaise.

The crisis of the winter of 1977-1978 in the labor movement does not seem to have been reabsorbed as much as the authorities had hoped. Certainly, pacifying measures were taken; on the eve of the second anniversary of the events of 26 January 1978, two of the principal figures still incarcerated, Mohammed Triki and Mohamed Ali Chaabane, were freed, and 138 detainees received conditional release.

But the release of Mr Habib Achour, who seems to have remained very popular in labor circles, remains incomplete; his return to his present domicile has the character of being put under house arrest, with severe restrictions on outside contacts. And his successor as head of the UGTT, Mr Tijani Abid, has not yet made a great impression on public opinion among workers; the violent attack he launched against Mr Habib Achour at the time of the 20 January celebration of the 34th anniversary of the UGTT, charging him with "full responsibility for the crises and internal convulsions suffered by the syndicate since 1956," seemed at the very least, lacking in elegance.

Very jealous of its external independence, a fact which led it several weeks ago to "freeze" relations with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions [ICFTU] [which it] judged indiscreet, the UGTT of Mr Tijani Abid is, thanks to the number of its adherents, too complacent about the Destourian Socialist Party [PSD], which could exercise over it a more and more constraining influence.

In addition, while the very praises Mr Tijani Abid sings to his own organization, "wisdom, moderation, objectivity," hardly imply the dynamism which however he declares he wants above all for the "syndicates from the base," the PSD never stops innovating and perfecting its operational structures. Following the coordinating committees good for developing breadth of political views, the "company cells," being organized for several months in the very midst of production and workplaces, cannot fail to compete with the syndicates on their own ground.

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The suppression of the movement of 26 January 1978 put an end, by a type of surgical operation, to an extended crisis of the Tunisian labor movement. But it appears more and more clearly that an insidious crisis subsists, generating diffuse discontents.

Price "Readjustments" for Basic Consumer Products

Sensitized, to a certain degree, by the easily perceived problems of the overall syndicate, Tunisian workers, on the other hand, have come to feel strongly the "readjustment" of prices henceforth to be asked for "basic consumer products," grain and its derivatives, "blended" oil, coffee, sugar.

Like a number of Arab governments, the government in Tunis comes to the rescue of the most disadvantaged segments of the population by subsidizing a part of the price of basic food products; and, also like them, it would like to be able to reduce somewhat this burden, in order to be able to dedicate directly to development the sums saved from the costs of the subsidies. From which come the measures taken in the middle of January to increase slightly the price of these basic products, measures moreover compensated by a corresponding increase in the minimum wage.

It has been noted that more than once increases thus decreed in the price of basic goods brought social problems. This was the case in Egypt in January 1977, in the Sudan in August 1979. One is thus tempted to add that in January 1980 this is again the case in Tunisia, but the facts would weaken this theory. Because the Gafsa affair, even if it benefited from complicity on the spot hatched in a climate which favored it, is not in any sense a local uprising.

In abandoning this false parallelism, however, one should not for all that ignore this little Tunisian event, the readjustment of prices of basic consumer goods, because it seems very characteristic of Tunisia today. The readjustment was long considered, calculated with care, maintained within reasonable limits, and copiously explained by the written and spoken press. The authorities emphasized that the economies to the public treasury would permit the creation of 30,000 jobs.

To this convincing argument, government information added other considerations: the total of expenditures by the Bank of Compensation will still represent, despite this alleviation, 17 percent of the operating budget of the state; national consumption of some products has grown in a way that evidences an ever growing affluence; in the course of the last two years, 30 percent for coffee, 20 percent for sugar, 10 percent for oil; and this at a time of considerable increases in the international price of these commodities, increases estimated at 100 percent for sugar and 50 percent for grain and coffee, in just one year.

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Finally, import statistics, technical details, and authorized commentaries have been furnished to the Tunisian public, which in this case could not complain of not being treated as adults.

The criticisms are rather directed to the "accountant mentality of a decidedly bourgeois government," more capable of calculation than of spirit, inept at arousing enthusiasm, and which tomorrow may be too lustreless to inspire any more devotion and loyalty. A tendency, one could say, perhaps. For there is in Tunisia a characteristic division of functions: the labor movement moderates, the Party organizes, the Prime Minister administers, and it is the president who excites.

Renewed Activity of President Bourguiba

Recovered, the health of President Bourguiba allows him once again to play his role of sovereign animator. His moves, always conceived in terms of the good of the state and the Tunisian people, nevertheless retain an extremely personal character, which gives to his authority a human aspect, certainly conducive to arousing affection and adherence.

On 31 December, President Bourguiba receives members of the government and the Politburo accompanied by their spouses: he insisted on and stressed this last detail. Thus in effect he gives a lesson to Muslim fundamentalists, or simply to traditionalists who try to maintain and even reinforce the confinement of women: to encourage the modernization of mores, the president puts his own weight once more into the balance.

In the course of the speech given on this occasion, the president makes statements in support of his "prime collaborator," Mr Hedi Nour. Even more than the present efforts and successes of the Prime Minister, he recalls the old friendship which links them, the circumstances in which they fought and suffered together. President Bourguiba is in fact more and more sensitive to the evocation of the past; he receives, with a tenderness hardly dissimulated, his old comrades in arms; and among their juniors, too young to have militated before independence, he is quick to honor those who at least have made themselves historians of the Destourian movement, such as Mr Mohammed Sayah, the head of the Party.

And certainly, if on 22 January President Bourguiba goes to Monastir, no doubt this move to his birthplace contains for him a powerful sentimental attraction. But on this occasion he insists on clearly pointing, by a personal gesture, the direction in which the Tunisian elite should go: he inaugurates the Department of Sciences and Technology, in the entryway of which moreover there is a plaque reproducing a passage of one of his speeches, underlining the importance attached to these domains of study and action.

After having shown in the Sahel his interest in the most modern projects, a piscicultural unit and greenhouse cultivation, the president lands, two days later, on the very long runway (3,225 meters) of the new international

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airport of Tozeur-Nefta, which he had just inaugurated. Thus he showed his interest in this important new element of touristic enterprise, which is one of the master resources of Tunisia.

The day after next, 27 January, President Bourguiba stays again in a large, recently renovated Nefta hotel, where he spends several days resting. Nefta is only 65 km from Gafsa. The Tunisian chief of state does not interrupt for all that his stay in the country, and he pursues peacefully his pedestrian promenades, which reassuring photographs capture for the press.

If there had been some probability of a general conspiracy, would not the chief of state, despite everything, urgently returned to the capital? But if it was only an isolated attack, what foreign leader would have had the frivolity to expect of it a decisive shock to the Tunisian regime? The interest of the Tunisian government in any case, in the present situation, is to use this threat, great or small, which it has endured, to get from the West an abundance of military goods at small cost. The Tunisian army, whose quality is sure, was not sufficiently well equipped; tomorrow it will have what it needs.

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

REVIEW OF GAFSA INCIDENT, IMPACT BY VARIOUS AUTHORS

Would-Be Liberators of Gafsa

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 13 Feb 80 pp 31-34

[Article by Abdelaziz Barouhi, special correspondent: "Tripoli-Gafsa via Algiers: The strange itinerary--by airplane and tourist coach--of a group of Qadhadhafi commando '*Liberators*'--passages between slantlines published in italics]

[Text] Tuesday 5 February, 1330 hours. In a eucalyptus clearing near Gafsa, I stop in the midst of a group of soldiers listening to...Radio Tripoli. /"The armed people's revolution extends throughout the south of Tunisia and is battling the French invasion,"/ the Libyan radio announces. General hilarity. The Tunisian psychological war experts could doubtless have found no more efficient way to galvanize the troops.

Tuesday and Wednesday, 5-6 February, I covered nearly 500 km in the district of Gafsa. In complete freedom. Gafsa, Tozeur, Nefta, Metlaouri, El Hamma, Degache, Bir el-Hafey...I took all the roads and I never saw a trace of fighting. Not a trace, nor any of intervention by the French either, except, stationed near Gafsa, the two Transalls which had after the attack assured logistic support between Tunis and the combat zone. I also learned that a small group of commandos (three men) had been actively pursued the last 6 days in the mountains, in Djebel Ouled Ben Omrane, near El Guetar, some 20 km east of Gafsa.

Wednesday evening 6 February, news from official sources came of the surrender of the military chief of the attackers in the Gabes region east of El Hamma.

Ahmed Mergheni was with two "accomplices," Larbi el-Ourhemi and Mohamed Ali Zlassi. The three men, who were barricaded in a hovel in the Jerouala zone, surrendered at 1100, after a quarter of an hour of combat with elements of the national guard. The guard Ali Achour Triki was killed in the course of this engagement.

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Brown, bearded 30 to 35, Ahmed Mergheni left the Gafsa region Monday or Tuesday 28 or 29 January, to cross the mountains and attempt to get to the coastal village of Zarzis, where he was born.

I visited, this same Wednesday morning, the lair of the Gafsa commandos. I made some surprising discoveries there. The commando unit, formed of Tunisians, was called the "Amr-Ibn-el-Ass Brigade," from the name of the great warrior who joined with the prophet after having fought against him, and next conquered...Egypt.

This "lair" of Gafsa is an Arabic style house, composed of three rooms opening onto a small yard, number 109, situated in the populous Moualla quarter. It is near the Tlili barracks and the technical school the commandos occupied Sunday 27 January at 0200. I discovered, written in red chalk on the wall of one of the three rooms, the following proclamation: /"The Amr Ibn el-Ass Brigade goes forth with the blessing of God. No revolutionary movement without revolutionary thought."/ Or again: /"With the blessing of God, the first revolutionary brigade of militants against the reactionary regime has been created. Written Saturday 9 rabii el-awal, year 1400 of the Hegira, corresponding to 26 January 1980 of the Christian calendar."/

It was here that 28 members of the commando unit waited nearly 3 weeks after crossing the Algerian border south of Tebessa. It was here too that the weapons introduced well in advance via the "Qadhdhafi trail" were stored. The ground is littered with packages of weapons, of plastic capsules for the protection of bazooka tubes, of cartridges. Also some household debris predominantly boxes of canned goods of Tunisian manufacture. There are also fragments of the jute sacks made by the commandos themselves on the scene, filled with grenades and carried like bandoleros at the hour of the attack. The room reserved for weapons has a grilled garret window which gives onto the street at ceiling level.

How could these men remain unnoticed in this populous quarter with narrow streets? The mystery remains. But, according to information collected at Gafsa, the house belongs to a customs official and had been rented out through an intermediary, a...police lance-corporal. Complicity at all levels seems established. We have learned that two customs officials and close to six policemen have been arrested and transferred from Gafsa to Tunis.

Beyond the "Amr Ibn el-Ass Brigade," there were close to 30 youths, jobless or workers for the most part, natives of Gafsa and the region. Among the faces in the photograph of the 42 first prisoners, Gafsa families have recognized their children. They joined the brigade at H-Hour. Counting everyone, the number of commandos seems not to have been as high as 60. But they were able to appear as more by reason of their mobility on the first day of the attack...and by reason of the number of

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urchins who came to surround them out of curiosity. They were waiting for something else: a massive upsurge of the population. /"We were told in Tripoli that the Tunisian people were waiting only for a shot to be fired. Well, shots were fired! But the Tunisian people did not join us..."/

In the Time of King Idriss

These disillusioned words were spoken by Mohamed Ali, 21, member of the "Amr Ibn el-Ass Brigade." According to the words of him and other prisoners, Col Qadhdhafi came in person to salute them before their departure and told them: /"Libya is in your hands, ask what you will. Only, follow my/ Green Book..."

The men of Amr Ibn-el Ass had been enrolled indoctrinated, trained, and tempered according to the now "classic" technique of Libyan recruitment (see JEUNE AFRIQUE No 996 and the article by Mohamed Selhami p 26). Through the good offices of the Arab Liaison Bureau [BAL], whose second in command, Bechir Chaaroun, had as his alter ego the Tunisian Ahmed Mergheni, he who led the operation.

Before the "Gafsa strike," they betook themselves to South Lebanon, where the Tunisians had been sent to become accustomed to the hardships of war with the extremist Palestinian movements. There, Chaaroun and Mergheni saw these men one by one, telling each that the Fath [translation unknown] of Yassir 'Arafat was watching them and their lives would be in danger...

Another Tunisian, Amara Dhaou, occupies a place apart in the BAL, where he is "the politician," responsible for recruiting and indoctrinating his youthful compatriots. Forty, heavy face surrounded by a shaggy beard, he was born into a respectable family in the Tunisian south. Amara made up for the brevity of his formal education by long reading of Arab writings on all the revolutions. A Youssefiste, he was among the first opponents of Bourguiba and fled into Libya in the time of King Idriss. At first an admirer of Nasser, he next turned to Kaddafism.

In 1978, he became one of the assistants of Omar Hamdi, permanent secretary general of the Committee of the Arab People which is headquartered in Tripoli in an old palace of Idriss I. The aforesaid committee has itself given birth to an Arab People's Progressive Front (FPPA), whose Tunisian wing, the FPLT (Popular Front for the Liberation of Tunisia), is directed by Amara Dhaou.

Under the cognomen of El Hadj Amara Naili, Chaou, who is known for his asceticism, owns a store in the Etrok market of Tripoli which serves him for cover. It is he who presented Ezzedine Cherif, who arrived in Tripoli in October 1976, to the Libyans of the BAL.

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January 1978: the planning of the "Gafsa strike" begins. The training of the young Tunisians is intensified. Oldest of the Tunisian guerrillas, trained, a native of Gafsa, Ezzedine Cherif, 50, calls himself "Boubaker the One-Eyed" in the field. He disposes of a budget of 20 million French francs. His knowledge of the Gafsa region, of people, and of the border will enable him to organize the movement of arms originating at one end of the "Qadhdhafi trail." He knows the smugglers' paths and, at need, bribes men who will look the other way. New stores of weapons have been discovered elsewhere, at the beginning of February, near Bir Om Ali: one in Tunisian territory, the other in...Algerian territory.

The 28 men of the "Amr Ibn el-Ass Brigade" arrived by a different route. At the start of January, they left Tripoli for Rome where they took a connection for Algiers. They were armed with Libyan passports which the Algerian authorities kept, except for one. The young people then took a bus for Tebessa (400 km from the capital, toward the Tunisian border). Not far from there, to the south, their point of entry into Tunisia: Bir Om Ali. Some had put on tracksuits: a sports team on a weekend trip, what could be more normal? But these "sports" had taken a very long trip. It was, let us realize, thanks to the counterfoils of the airplane tickets found on the prisoners that the Tunisian authorities were able to reconstruct the Tripoli-Rome-Algiers itinerary.

Another discovery: the members of the commando group were wearing "pataugas" [translation unknown] of Algerian manufacture which are very good practical shoes for trips into the mountains. In this detail, Tunisian officials would see in fact a diabolic maneuver by Kaddafi to convince them Algeria was implicated.

Another diabolic tactic of the Libyans: to have massed, from early January, troops including three tank battalions in the extreme southern part of the border with Tunisia. This is why the Tunisian army moved toward the Medenine region (to the southeast of Gafsa).

This also explains why Gafsa was able to be taken so easily. But the expedition failed above all because, as several witnesses insisted, /"the population did not rise up."/ The members of the commando unit, however, did all they could to bring along the inhabitants. They piled up weapons in Msilla Square and invited the civilians to use them to "make the revolution." It is true that some people took advantage of this improvised self-service. But in order to hold the weapons in their houses in order to return them to the authorities: /"They were friendly and correct,"/ one Gafsan avows, /"But we knew we were taking a chance."/

This explains why, several hours after the start of the operation, the attackers had no thought beyond falling back. But for many it was already too late. Even the artful Ezzeddine Cherif will be taken. Barricaded with two of his men in the house where he was born, a small ramshackle house in the old Arab style with a green door, situated exactly opposite

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the police station and beside the Sidi Ben Yacoub mosque, he resists until the afternoon of Tuesday 29 January. The armed forces had unleashed a barrage of fire to prevent him from climbing to the roofs, and had thrown teargas grenades to dislodge him.

In turn, two other members of the commando unit, surrounded 27 January not far from the government house, preferred to be killed point blank rather than to surrender. One of them, a youth whose identity has not been disclosed, shouted to the soldiers who were calling to him: /"I am a son of La Marsa..."/ (the name of a residential suburb of Tunis).

Gafsa, covered now with inscriptions such as /"Qadhdhafi Zionist"/, can now breathe again, as can the region. President Bourguiba, with the air of one who has seen this kind of thing before, kept cool. Remaining at Nefta, he did not interrupt his walks in the marvelous, sunny palm grove, nor cease to mingle with the crowds he found in Tozeur and Degache. The European tourists, numerous in Djerid as at Gafsa, young adults for the most part, also remained imperturbable.

The "Gafsa strike" thus failed. But all is not finished. Weapons could well be still hidden in the country. Close to 10 tons have already been discovered. And the social discontent persists in the South. All the while condemning the Libyan intervention, one young Gafsi told us: /"Sometimes bad things can lead to good. These events can bring a chance for the region, which up to now has been neglected on the economic and social plane."/

/(Research in Paris and Tunis by Souhayr Belhassen and Abdelaziz Dahmani)./

Internal Front Consolidation

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 13 Feb 80 pp 34, 35

[Article by Souhayr Belhassen: "After Gafsa: Everywhere, the attack against Tunisia comes as a revelation--A clear warning"]

[Text] Leaders and activists of diverse opposition groups condemned vigorously the foreign meddling and aggression in Gafsa. But it is only haltingly and gingerly that these opposition elements, under cover of the recent events, approach the process of rapprochement with authority. Thus, the declaration of the ex-minister of Tunisian foreign affairs, Mohamed Masmoudi, considered in Tunis as the instigator of that Tuniso-Libyan marriage of which he was the first victim, constitutes a virtual /mea culpa/. The ex-head of Tunisian diplomacy, still under house arrest, tenders his offer of service by stating in a telegram addressed to Bourguiba: /"The most urgent task is to close ranks behind you, in order to block the way of any foreign intervention."/

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Bahi Ladgham, right arm of the chief of state until 1970, also says he is putting himself at the service of the regime. This does not impede him from casting a critical eye on the situation. In a statement to JEUNE AFRIQUE, he discusses in fact /"the grave shortcomings in the maintenance of the security of our territory."/ Tunisia, he adds, should consider itself /"in a state of legitimate defense and act cunningly and without pity."/

/"Consolidate the Internal Front"/

For the Socialist Democrat Movement, the Gafsa attack is a real ordeal, because it allows cleavages to appear. It was not as one body that the founding members of this movement, excluded from the Destourian Socialist Party in 1974, will come to Nefta to express, as Hassib Ben Ammar puts it, their support to the depository of legitimacy in the country. Accompanied by Sadok Ben Djemaa, ex-minister of social affairs, and by Radhia Haddad, ex-president of the National Union of Tunisian Women, Hassib Ben Ammar thus clearly differentiated himself from Ahmed Mestiri who wants to transform the Socialist Democrat Movement into a party.

Ahmed Mestiri has conducted himself like a leader of the opposition by going to see Prime Minister Hedi Nouira at his request prior to meeting with President Bourguiba. This attitude remains closer to that of traditional opposition parties, whether they be communist, socialist (Popular Unity Movement), syndical, or integrist. A common denominator among all the opposition groups: the willingness to think through the implications in the aftermath of Gafsa.

They all stress the necessity of /"consolidating the internal front"/. These events should /"sound the alarm to government and move it to resolve the real social problems posed by the absence of public liberties,"/ says one labor figure from the "legitimate" UGTT [Tunisian General Federation of Labor] leadership.

Logistical support from France is not without its risks, and Ahmed Mestiri as well as Brahim Hayder, a member of the Popular Unity Movement, are more than reserved about the appeal to Paris. Mohamed Sayah, director of the Destourian Socialist Party, explains thus the "French intervention": /"While still remaining nonaligned, Tunisia lacks logistical resources comparable to those maintained and used by its adversary."/

The Tunisian authorities at the same time are not neglecting the task of consolidating their relations in the Maghreb and throughout the Arab world. Thus, after having sent an emissary to Algiers, where, it is said in Tunis, the leaders assured their interlocutors of /"all the sympathy and solidarity of Algeria,"/ Tunisia insisted on praising, in an official communique, /"the clarity which characterizes Tunisian-Algerian relations, and the concern of Algerian leaders to strengthen the fraternal relations between the two countries."/

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But in private circles there is talk of local complicities, regional complicities, even of the support of certain Algerian political factions. Obviously the French intervention was not of a nature to be appreciated by Algeria, nor by other Arab countries. From which comes their slowness in reacting to the "aggression" and to show their solidarity. From which also comes Tunisia's decision to send special envoys to the countries most sensitive to explain the context, especially the Libyan complicity, of which some, such as Morocco, were already convinced. Once obtaining the support of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia will ask for a meeting of the Council of the Arab League to examine the culpability of Libya in the Gafsa aggression. Meanwhile, the last bridges are burned: after having recalled its ambassador and closed down the Libyan cultural centers, Tunisia called on its 400 volunteers stationed in Liba to return. And, after the arrival of the 1,200 expelled Tunisians, President Bourguiba would prepare himself to recall the 80,000 emigrees who live in Qadhdhafi's land.

French 'Hostages'

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 13 Feb 80 pp 35, 36

[Article by Francois Soudan--passages between slantlines in italics]

[Text] /"Sir, if Tunisia were attacked, the duty and the mission of the French navy would be to protect the towns of the Mediterranean Club."/ This joke in the form of a prediction, appearing in the Parisian daily LIBERATION, just might furnish the key to the remarkable indifference of French public opinion in face of the "events" at Gafsa...For many, Tunisia is a matter of small import, to borrow an expression from CANARD ENCHAINE, a /"vacation colony,"/ about which one only concerns oneself between June and September. /"We got three or four telephone calls from clients who had reserved rooms in a hotel or cottage,"/ explains an official in one of the travel agencies. /"We reassured them. No one lost their rooms."/

Qadhdhafi? His distinctive image is nearly as black among "average Frenchmen" as that of Ayatollah Khomeyni. A few shades lighter perhaps: the Qom patriarch evokes fear, while the master of Tripoli still provokes a little bit of a smile. The latter elusive aspect doubtless explains the uneasiness of French political parties (and particularly those of the opposition) with the Gafsa affair. But the aid sent to the Tunisian army provokes various remarks which hardly rise above a whisper: socialists see in it the continuation of the "gunboat diplomacy" of Giscard in Africa. The Communist Party [PCF] blasts the "interventionism" of the Elysee. It's a small thing. After all, French aid at Gafsa was only limited and logistical in nature. No paratroopers. No deaths.

But a certain "slippage" in public opinion happens on Monday 4 February, when Libyan demonstrators sack the French missions at Tripoli and Benghazi.

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The affair is no longer between Tunisia and Libya; it is between France and Libya. The average Frenchman begins to be interested. And to become indignant. Words heard in a subway car: /"A nut, a real nut, and with the bomb!"/

/"A Nut, A Real Nut"/

There are also voices on the periphery, however, like that of the French philosopher Roger Garaudy, a member of Franco-Libyan Friendship. Questioned by JEUNE AFRIQUE: /"I understand the anger of the Libyan demonstrators. The French are detested throughout Africa. Libya an imperialist? But who gave it the military means for its imperialism: France!"/

On television the evening of 5 January, a speaker announces: /"There are 1,800 French citizens in Libya. Will they become 1,800 hostages?"/ At the Quai d'Orsay, a "crisis group" follows events hour by hour. A precise evacuation plan is mapped out. Ready to be activated, it is said. But secret. A reassuring bluff, or reality? Those few who would still like to pass their vacation between the sand and the derricks are being counselled to postpone their departure date. The ambassador is recalled, and Qadhafi is asked to reciprocate. Honor is almost safe, and France is already thinking about something else. Well, admittedly the "Club" does not extend to the mining towns. But where is Gafsa, anyway?

Glance at Tunisian Forces

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 13 Feb 80 p 31

[Article by H.K.: "Why French Military Assistance"--slantlines indicate published in italics]

[Text] In the Gafsa affair, did the Tunisian army and paramilitary forces need external assistance to overcome assailants numbered by the authorities at several hundred, indeed /"several dozens" of "bandits"?

At a strength of 22,000 men (estimated in MILITARY BALANCE 1979-1980), the Tunisian army can count on the support of 2,500 National Guardsmen, and on some tens of thousands of reservists recruited by conscription in the course of 24 years of independence.

The army has meanwhile acquired MB 326K chasseurs d'attaque au sol [translation unknown] from Italy, very effective in counter-guerrilla operations, and several dozen Kuerassier chasseurs de chars [translation unknown]. It also has some 20 helicopters and sufficient ground transport to enable it to get emergency aid or wounded men within a few hours on the road to or from the main cities. It can, with its own resources, hold back superior enemy forces and even a possible Libyan military invasion, until the arrival of allied troops, French or otherwise.

Thus, what is the purpose of French military assistance--even if it is only logistical?

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Algeria Implicated

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 13 Feb 80 p 34

[Article by O.S.: "Question to Algeria"--passages between slantlines in italics]

[Text] For the Tunisian Government, that of Algiers /"is not implicated"/ in the Gafsa affair. Neither directly nor indirectly. It is just that Algerian territory was traversed, unknown to the authorities, by members of the commando unit.

Now one of two things is true: either Algerian territory was used without the security forces realizing it--a theory that Algeria rejects categorically--or the operation against Gafsa benefitted from the connivance, if not of the highest authorities of the state, then at least of groups within the Algerian power elite--a theory which Algeria also rejects categorically.

Thus there is a disagreement between Tunisia and Algeria. Which one is right? It is difficult to say. We can only proceed by means of "interrogative affirmations." For example: Why did Algeria fail to show prompt solidarity with Tunisia, like distant Morocco? Why did the Algerian authorities fail to prevent--since they had the means to do it--the appeal by Brahim Tobal, a Tunisian "opponent" sheltered by Algeria for years, /"to all progressive movements in the world to /(support)/ the struggle which the Tunisian people have been waging for 25 years against oppression and servitude"/?

These questions do not imply, obviously, that Algeria is implicated in the Gafsa affair. It is clear that it is not...

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AFGHANISTAN

GUERRILLA WARFARE, SOVIET INTERVENTION METHODS REPORTED

Paris VALEURS ACTUELLES in French 28 Jan 80 p 25

[Article by Pierre de Villemarest: "Cold Guerrilla Zones"]

[Text] Could Afghanistan be the USSR's Vietnam? Doubtful, at least considering the conditions which will prevail until next March's thaws. The some 80,000 rebels currently fighting the Red Army risk dying until then in a type of genocide similar to the one practiced by the Vietnamese communists in the Lao mountains.

Unlike the Americans in Vietnam, the Soviets are not handicapped by a destabilizing of their own public opinion. Furthermore, the intervention is taking place at the very borders of their country. Finally, the USSR has already set up a system aimed at the total isolation of the mountaineer guerrillas.

Seven armored and motorized divisions, two airborne divisions, and units specializing in radar surveillance have blocked the Afghan frontiers and skies. In a second phase, the Russians isolate areas which threaten the scarce strategic roads, using armored combat helicopters.

Life in winter at elevations of 3,000 or 4,000 meters calls for warm clothing and instant canned food and drinks (as it is impossible to make a fire without being immediately detected). The Afghans have no such facilities. Furthermore, in order to avoid bombing and shelling, the rebels must operate in small groups instead of conventional units of several hundred men with ground-air and anti-tank missiles.

Five or six provinces only, such as Paktia, in the western part of the country, are both mountainous and forest covered, therefore offering "cover" to the guerrillas.

Elsewhere, they are at the mercy of Soviet radar and intervention units equipped with napalm and, above all, a new type of shell containing red and yellow gas, which, according to the dose, could paralyze or, gradually, kill up to 2,000-3,000 people in suspect agglomerations. This terrifying

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weapon was experimentally tried last year against the Meo guerrillas in the Lao high plateaus.

The rebels do not have hundreds of two-way radios, which they would need to keep in touch with the valleys, and, therefore, to coordinate their intelligence and their actions against their opponent. Unless provisions and advanced materials are parachuted, the rebels, therefore, would be forced less to fight the invader than to engage in an "operation survival" until next March.

Eighty percent of the rebels belong to some 60 Pathan tribes. However, the Soviets have committed on their side Uzbek and Tadzhik elements, which are racially and culturally close to the populations of the Afghan Northwest, once dominated by the Pathans of the Southeast. Moscow seems to have decided to base its intervention on a "settlement of accounts" among ethnic groups.

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MOROCCO

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY SLOWER IN 1979

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 18 Jan 80 p 131

[Text] As it usually does at the end of the year, CEDIES [Socioeconomic Research and Information Center] reviews the development of various economic sectors. It recalls first of all that the expected weak growth of the gross domestic product in 1979 (3 percent in volume) derives from the poor results of agricultural production, but also from the stagnation or decline that has characterized certain industrial and commercial activities for 2 years.

The general circumstances of the 1978-79 agricultural season were in fact again dominated (as in 1975 and 1977) by unfavorable climate conditions. Grain production in particular was poor: 36 million quintals, representing a 21 percent drop in comparison to last year's production, which itself was very mediocre. With the country's needs estimated at 60 million quintals, the grain deficit for 1979 will therefore be about 24 million quintals, to be made up by imports.

Moreover, in view of the effects of this situation on the income of the farming population, public authorities have decided to raise grain prices paid to producers, to the level of 105 dirhams per quintal (instead of 85 dirhams as before) for hard and soft wheat, and 80 dirhams (instead of 60 dirhams) for barley and corn. This was also done in the case of production prices for beets, sugar cane and oilseeds.

These increases, which were devised to encourage farmers, were also brought about by the increase in production costs following the rise of fuel prices, the 40 percent in farm wages established in May 1979 and the 15 to 20 percent increase in chemical fertilizer prices. The increases are mainly borne by the government, particularly in the case of grain, whose consumer prices have not been affected. On the other hand, the sale prices of sugar and oil, frozen since 1973, were raised in September by 20 to 30 centimes per kilogram of sugar and by 40 centimes per liter of oil.

With regard to industrial operations, if export sectors have somehow continued to weather the international economic situation, those oriented toward the

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domestic market have felt the effects of the decline in the general level of demand and of the austerity policy that has been in effect since 1978.

With regard to exporting industries, their performances actually appear to be good despite the unfavorable trends of foreign markets (development of protectionist measures and prospects of EEC expansion to include Morocco's principal competitors). For example, textile sector forecasts estimate an export turnover of 80 billion centimes in 1979, as opposed to 75 billion in 1978. Some recovery of foreign demand for canned fish has also taken shape in recent months. But this sector is facing many problems limiting its prospects because of structural problems in the regular supply of raw materials, inadequate procurement of equipment and cold storage facilities and increased production costs reducing the competitiveness of Moroccan prices in relation to foreign competition.

The development of industrial operations oriented toward the domestic market (private and public) in 1979 was characterized by a tendency for stagnation or decline, depending on the case. The reduction of public orders, following the decline of government investment, has actually had a serious effect on operations such as public works and metallurgy, which have had to make job cuts. The case was the same in the electrical industries, which watched their order books shrink by 10 percent.

Recovery of these types of economic activity is closely related to the resumption of investment and, among other things (which is expected for 1980), shelved or postponed programs (road and port operations, sugar, phosphate and cement projects, the housing construction program, etc.). Moreover, if import restriction measures have proved to be beneficial for certain types of production (such as household appliances), their application has hampered the operation of a large number of businesses due to the problems in acquiring raw materials, semifinished products and capital goods.

The general decline in the level of demand and the rise of prices have likewise had a strong effect on sectors such as the automobile industry, whose assembly and sales operations have been cut almost in half, particularly in the case of commercial vehicles.

Otherwise, the 1978 level of activity has at best remained the same or increased slightly, as in the case of general industrial engineering, cement consumption (+3 percent), sugar production (589,000 tons) and carbonated beverages.

The mining industry continues to be dominated by the hazards of the world economic situation. Overall, export turnover in 1979 rose by about 3 to 4 percent due to the increase in the price of most ores. However, the situation continues to be worrisome for other materials such as iron, zinc and copper, and particularly phosphates. In fact, the latter's revenue has continued to decline despite the increase in the volume of sales. For the first 8 months of 1979, phosphate sales rose to 11.4 million tons with an exchange value of 1.196 billion dirhams in comparison to 10.9 million

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tons with an exchange value of 1.331 billion dirhams in 1978, or a drop in value of more than 10 percent.

Industrial and household energy consumption in 1979 seems to have risen less rapidly than in the year before. In the first half of the year, gasoline sales (regular and premium) rose only 1.66 percent in comparison to 2.3 percent in 1978 for the same period; sales of gas oil increased 5.7 percent as opposed to 8.2 percent; fuel oil sales rose 13.9 percent instead of 19.7 percent.

This development is the result of a general decline in the growth rate of demand as well as the continued increase in sales prices, which went up again in July 1979. The increasing burden of imported energy costs, due to the rise of oil prices on the world market, also led to the launching of a national energy savings campaign in October.

Marketing and service operations have also felt the effects of the decline in the rate of general economic activity as well as the restrictive policy on finances and imports. In this respect, 1979 is considered by professionals as a turning point between the satisfactory development of previous years and the situation that has developed concurrently with problems in other industrial operations.

Finally, in the case of tourism, the number of tourists seems to have dropped again in 1979 following the upswing that began in 1977. In the first half of 1979, in fact, resort tourism showed a decline of nearly 18 percent, with visitors numbering approximately 614,000 in comparison to 747,000 the year before. This is partly due to the world economic situation, to which this sector is particularly sensitive, but also to the disturbances during the year in tourism in Spain, through which a large number of tourists travel en route to Morocco. The shortcomings characterizing the policy of promotion and solicitation of foreign markets would probably have to be added to these various factors.

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MOROCCO

INVESTMENTS DECLINE IN 1979

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 11 Jan 80 p 74

[Text] "The Moroccan Economy in 1979: A Year of Modest Performance" is the title under which CEDIES [Socioeconomic Research and Information Center] has published its usual year-end general survey.

The first part of this survey is concerned with the development of the main economic indicators and, among other things, notes that the gross domestic product (GDP) should show a 3 percent increase in volume, or approximately the same increase as in 1978, but less than the average for the 1973-77 period (6.8 percent). This overall development derives on one hand from poor agricultural results (new drop in grain production) and on the other hand from the weak performance of other industrial and commercial operations.

With regard to investments, the government's procurement costs should reach 7 billion dirhams, or approximately half of such expenditures made in 1977. Encouraged investment in the industrial sector continued to decline in 1979; it fell by 25 percent in the first half of 1979, with 466 million dirhams (1 dirham = approximately Fl.10) as opposed to 624 million in the previous year, and by nearly 50 percent in comparison to their level in the first half of 1977 (999 million dirhams).

CEDIES notes that this situation is mainly explained by the absence of large-scale public projects in 1978 and 1979; the government's industrial operations barely amounted to 34 and 15 million dirhams, respectively, for these last two years, in comparison to 323 million dirhams in 1977. Paralleling this, the effort of private enterprise declined in intensity (450 million dirhams in 1979 as opposed to 590 million and 676 million in 1978 and 1977 for the first half of the year) due to the reduction of government orders or to the international economic situation.

The case was the same in the mechanical and electrical industries (99 million dirhams in the first half of 1979 as opposed to 215 million in January-June 1978) and textile industries (103 million dirhams in 1979 in comparison to 120 million in 1978 and 333 million in 1977). As for other sectors,

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investments in the chemical and related industries declined 21 percent, with 149 million dirhams as opposed to 189 million in 1978. Only investments in the food-agricultural sector rose, by 15 percent, with 115 million dirhams, still far below the increase for 1977 (409 million dirhams).

Finally, it should be noted that the same trend affecting the mass of investments is also found in the case of new jobs created. The latter dropped from 13,600 in the first half of 1978 to only 9,500 for the first 6 months of 1979 (-30 percent).

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MOROCCO

ENERGY SAVINGS CAMPAIGN DESCRIBED

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 25 Jan 80 pp 190-191

[Text] A broad information campaign has been launched in Morocco to encourage citizens to save energy at all levels (household, industry and services) because of the continued growth of Moroccan energy consumption and the successive increases in the price of the "black gold," which the country imports for almost all its needs.

In submitting the 1980 budget appropriations bill recently, Moroccan Finance Minister Abdelkamel Reghai estimated that if measures were not taken immediately to limit energy consumption, the kingdom's oil bill could reach 4 billion dirhams this year as compared with 2.5 billion in 1979, a figure far exceeding the export revenue from phosphates, Morocco's main natural resource.

In 1979, Morocco consumed more than 4.5 million tons of petroleum, which represented 81 percent of its total energy consumption. The remainder came from anthracite deposits (10 percent) and hydroelectric power plants (9 percent).

Thus to reduce the Moroccan energy deficit, the government has just adopted a series of measures concentrating mainly on mobilizing already recognized new energy resources and those capable of being exploited under feasible economic conditions, such as coal, water resources and oil shale. The government has therefore allocated nearly 200 billion dirhams for building several hydroelectric power plants, for surface exploitation of the Timahdit oil shale deposits (whose resources are estimated at 10 billion tons), for increasing anthracite production (1 million tons as opposed to 750,000 tons in 1979) and for stepping up continental and offshore petroleum research with foreign partners.

The Moroccan Government has also decided to encourage the use of new energy sources in various areas of the country, including solar energy, which could replace petroleum products for certain purposes, such as heating public buildings (hospitals, offices), pumping for irrigation purposes and supplying Saharan seawater desalination plants.

Paralleling these measures, the Moroccan Government has just limited the speed of light motor vehicles to 100 kilometers/hour and those of vehicles

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for transporting goods and passengers to 70 and 80 kilometers/hour, respectively. Strict controls have been imposed to combat the abusive use of government vehicles.

In various administrative circles, the AFP adds, it has been learned that the government is currently studying a plan aimed at rearranging working hours in both the public and private sectors, in the sense of a "continuous day," to reduce oil consumption and traffic jams after the closing of offices.

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MOROCCO

ENERGY SECTOR INVESTMENTS FOR 1978-80 LISTED

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 25 Jan 80 p 190

[Text] Morocco's planned investment program in the energy sector for the current 1978-80 period amounts to 3.624 billion dirhams (1 dirham = approximately Fl.10). As CEDIES [Socioeconomic Research and Information Center] points out, it is comprised of a certain number of studies and projects to be completed, including in particular: the installation of an experimental nuclear reactor requiring an investment of 6.2 million dirhams; the establishment of a solar energy center in Marrakesh for the purpose of introducing this type of energy into Morocco; 2 million dirhams will be devoted to implementing the operations to complete this project; a study of the Tah hydrosolar project in the Tarfaya region for the production of electric power and salt; rural electrification, with a credit opened in 1978 for 7.7 million dirhams, supplemented by a large program to be financed on the basis of equipment funds of local communities; petroleum research, for which 331 million dirhams have been earmarked, with 175 million dirhams provided by the government, 30 million dirhams by BRPM (Mineral Prospecting and Investment Office) self-financing for shore-based operations and 126 million dirhams for offshore operations, to be provided by foreign partners; the zones that will be prospected first are the Rif and Pre-Rif, the Guercif Basin, the Errachidia and Boudnib basins, the Essaouira Basin and the Rif's Atlantic and Mediterranean offshore extensions; refining and distribution of petroleum products with an investment program of approximately 1 billion dirhams.

In the case of refining, the following should be noted in particular: completion (in 1978) of SAMIR's [Moroccan-Italian Refining Corporation] expansion operations, which will make it possible to satisfy refining needs until 1983-84; completion of a lubricating oils plant with a capacity of 100,000 ton/year, which could be put into operation in 1982-83 with an investment of 400 million dirhams; increased refining capacity of the Moroccan Petroleum Company, from 800,000 to 1 million tons (an investment of 42 million dirhams), and completion of a 100,000-ton "topping" installation for 40 million dirhams, which will make it possible to postpone construction of a third refinery; with a capacity of 4 million tons, this latter refinery will have to begin operating around 1984 to supply market needs until 1988-89; completion of the necessary studies for setting up a strategic supply of crude oil, to be stored either in elevated tanks or in underground cavities by dissolving salt.

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BRIEFS

CONTRACT WITH POLAND--Mr Moussa Saadi, minister of energy and mining research, presided over the signing ceremony of an agreement between Charbonnages de Jerada and the Polish organization Polservice for Polish specialists to carry out a general survey to delimit economically exploitable coal areas. Among other things, the research will be concerned with the possibility that coal beds currently being worked in the Jerada Basin may extend toward the south under high plateaus. The agreement was signed by Mr Mohamed Chahid, general director of the Mineral Prospecting and Investment Office (BRPM), and Mr Lucien Poziemski, Polservice's regular delegate to the trade adviser's office attached to the Polish Embassy. [Text] [Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 11 Jan 80 p 74] 11915

TAX FRAUD CAMPAIGN--Finance Minister Abdelkamel Reghai presided over a meeting devoted to the fight against tax fraud in Rabat on 7 January. A systematic national campaign has been organized. "All potential resources of the tax department will be mobilized, as well as personnel of the general board of tax inspectors," the minister said, "during this campaign, which will give special attention to reviewing certain suspect accounts and certain taxpayer returns, as well as to checking the resources of well-known wealthy individuals." [Text] [Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 18 Jan 80 p 131] 11915

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