

Renewed Solidarity In North Africa

Early this month Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba accepted Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's offer to shelve an ongoing water rights dispute in the interest of inter-Arab unity, thus defusing a point of confrontation between the two countries. Within one week of this show of good will, Tunisia announced to Algeria, its neighbor to the west, that it was reconsidering the heretofore moribund Algerian proposal to build a gas pipeline via Tunisia to Italy.

Behind this renewed North African solidarity is the emerging European-Soviet-Arab axis, which is currently formulating a Mediterranean economic development program, the only viable solution to the Middle East war danger. Prior to the Belgrade Conference on European Security and Cooperation, Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Chatti issued a joint statement with Czech Foreign Minister Chnoupek calling for "new impulses for new and closer cooperation chiefly in the political sphere."

Euro-Arab Diplomacy

The ongoing feud between Tunisia and Libya, over ownership of the oil rich Gulf of Gabès region, erupted May 29, when a Tunisian naval vessel was deployed to the contested waters in order to demand the departure of an American-owned drilling rig in the employ of the Libyan government. The intervention of Arab League President Mahmoud Ryad, who met with Tunisian and Libyan Foreign Ministers on June 10, was a diplomatic success. Both parties agreed to refer the dispute to the International Court of Settlements at the Hague. Libya's Qaddafi reported that the Tunisian-Libyan dispute was no longer a problem. "In the interests of pan-Arab unity, the only solution to the problem is for Tunisia to unite with Libya. In that way, both countries can exploit the oil resources together."

The idea of a Tunisian-Libyan union was originally floated in 1974, when Tunisian Prime Minister

Mohammed Masmoudi authored the deal with the full backing of Libya's Qaddafi. Through the influence of the current Tunisian Prime Minister, Hedi Nouira, Bourguiba rejected the idea of union and Masmoudi was forced to leave the country in a classic power struggle. The authoritative London weekly *Arabia and the Gulf* has recently hinted that a rapprochement is in the making between Masmoudi, now living in exile in Paris, and Tunisia's Bourguiba.

The solution to the Gulf of Gabès dispute is apparently the key to the ongoing Algerian-Tunisian squabble. According to the June 14 issue of the *Journal of Commerce*, "There is some possibility that Tunisia's refusal on the Algerian pipeline may be tied to the offshore dispute with Libya."

The disputed gas pipeline was originally planned to cross Tunisian territory before taking to sea on its way to Italy. This billion dollar project would help to solve some of Italy's nagging energy problems. The Algerian-Tunisian dispute was apparently one of the main topics of discussion when Libya's Prime Minister Jalloud visited Italy in mid-May. Libya was asked to clean up its own dispute with Tunisia in order that the Algerian project could be renegotiated.

Algerian Stupidity

According to a spokesman for the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the remaining problem in Tuniso-Algerian relations remains Algeria's stubborn commitment to harbor and support the Polisario Liberation Movement, a synthetic guerrilla band demanding independence for the Spanish Sahara. By championing the Polisario, Algeria's role in the emerging Euro-Arab-Soviet axis is severely weakened, slowing the motion toward a Mediterranean peace agreement. So far, Tunisia has ignored the Spanish Sahara issue, which has pushed its staunch ally Morocco toward the brink of war with Algeria.

Brzezinski Cocks Djibouti Trigger Against USSR

Zbigniew Brzezinski's National Security Council has started the countdown to a shooting war between the littoral states of the Red Sea on the Horn of Africa, a countdown scheduled for ignition with the June 27 independence of the French colony and naval base of Djibouti, at the mouth of the Sea.

Djibouti contains the route to the sea of Ethiopia's only railroad, regularly blown up by the NSC's African counter gangs, but also part of the territorial claims of neighboring Somalia, whose traditional territory was carved up between Britain, Italy, France and the Ethiopian Empire during the colonial period.

The bloody destabilization of Ethiopia and Somalia over this issue is intended as a black eye for the Soviet Union which has close relations with both countries. Other African countries depending on the Soviets for economic and military support and who might otherwise be wide open to Wall Street's economic blackmail, are then expected to back away from the USSR.

In the face of panic from the inexperienced Ethiopian regime and pressure from ultra-nationalists in his own country, Somalia's socialist president, Mohammed Siad Barre is trying to counter this war scenario with a proposal for a "united anti-imperialist front" between

Ethiopia and Somalia which would shelve their territorial disputes. In two interviews granted in the last ten days, Barre rejected the notion that he was about to break with the Soviet Union because it supplies weapons to Ethiopia, although he expressed reservations about this Soviet policy. Barre then virtually pleaded with the Ethiopian ruling Military Council (the Derg) to give him some sign that they were willing to peacefully negotiate their differences. In an interview with the Paris-based magazine *Afrique-Asie* of June 13, Barre contemptuously rejected the notion prevalent in the Western press that his country's socialist policies are for sale to the Carter Administration, which has a stated policy of "challenging" Soviet "hegemony" in Somalia. "Eight years in power have sufficiently immunized us against those (Western reporters) who take their desires for reality."

Siad also challenged the Ethiopian Derg to demonstrate their new-found socialism: "Let them show that they are conscious of the fact that they could effectively constitute, with Somalia, a powerful and active anti-imperialist alliance, on the condition that this would be founded on a just and democratic settlement of the problems which separate us." Alluding to the pressure from extreme nationalists to reclaim land inhabited by ethnic Somalis but currently juridically part of southern Ethiopia, Barre said "no government, no regime, no Somali leader could survive in this country if he came to abandon the policy of reclaiming the territories which remain colonized by foreign occupation."

With Siad not only resisting, but actively countering the NSC's war scenario, the threat of a coup against him by the ultra-nationalists has been raised. Such pressure on Somalia is buttressed by a greatly escalated offensive against the Derg to drive them into a paranoid frenzy that would touch off a war, either with Somalia over Djibouti or with the Sudan, Ethiopia's western neighbor, over the secessionist movement in Ethiopia's coastal province of Eritrea.

On June 21, guerrillas blew up several bridges on the railroad near the Djibouti border putting it, and 60 percent of Ethiopia's foreign trade, out of commission for several months. A Somali-speaking guerrilla group reportedly claimed responsibility for the sabotage. Virtually at the same moment, the Sudanese government banned Ethiopian air traffic from their air space, prompting an Ethiopian government spokesman's wild charge that Somalia and Sudan were in collusion to isolate his country.

Psychologically profiled to have just this kind of reaction, Ethiopia's rulers have historically seen themselves as a Christian island in a sea of Arabs, and have primarily feared being cut off from the sea. The activities of Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiry, bankrolled and advised by Rockefeller conduits in Saudi Arabia, are also designed to provoke the Ethiopians according to profile. Nimeiry, the Saudis, and Egyptian president Sadat have recently launched a plan to make the Red Sea their official sphere of influence — an "Arab Lake" holding one conference of littoral states with a second planned pointedly excluding Ethiopia and Israel. Additionally, Nimeiry is openly backing both the remnants of Haile Selassie's feudal landlords in the "Ethiopian Democratic Union," and the Eritrean secessionist movement, in a campaign which in the Derg's perception approaches the proportions of a jihad, a Muslim Holy War. Under the cover of a "Soviet threat" from Ethiopia, Nimeiry has his army mobilized on the border, and seeking arms from the United States, while France and China already supply them.

Brzezinski and Giscard are apparently confident that their psychological warfare against Ethiopia is going to work: "I think they (the Ethiopians) will make a grab for Djibouti," one Rockefeller-linked scenario writer told a reporter June 21, "They'll fake an incident and make a grab for it. Then the Somalis will strike." If this isn't enough, Giscard has made provisions to increase tensions over Djibouti, according to an Algerian news agency report June 23. Four days before independence, according to the report, Giscard is insisting that the unstable Foreign Legion and 4,500 other soldiers stay in Djibouti after independence, contrary to the independence agreement already worked out, which allows 3,000 French troops to stay there.

In northern Ethiopia, the Ethiopian army and the newly formed peasant and militia have soundly defeated the Ethiopian Democratic Union reports the June 22 *London Financial Times*. They are now expected to move into Eritrea to take on the better armed and better trained Eritrean Liberation Front. This Ethiopian success, however, could very well be the trigger for Nimeiry to attack: he has already warned the Derg that he will not "stand idly by" and allow Ethiopia to retake parts of Eritrea already "liberated."

— Peter Buck