

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

Countdown for the Maghreb

A regional conference to undertake economic development could defuse the European-based Muslim Brotherhood threat.

Unity of the Arab Maghreb" was the headline in the Algerian government newspaper *El Mujahid* on March 22 as it reported on Algerian President Chadli's just concluded trip to Tunisia. Summing up the achievements of that visit, *El Mujahid* underscored the political and economic agreements signed between both countries, as well as a military agreement which will provide for regular consultations between national defense forces and using such forces for "joint development projects at the border areas."

Chadli's little reported visit to Tunisia, his meetings with Tunisian President Bourguiba and other leaders, has been a direct followup to the recent surprising meeting between Chadli and Morocco's King Hassan, the first such meeting since the beginning of the Sahara crisis several years ago. Morocco and Algeria have been in a state of cold war for the past seven years over Algeria's backing for the small Polisario front, which is fighting for the independence of the Sahara territory from Morocco. These diplomatic moves, made in cooperation with France and Spain, are an answer to an ongoing attempt at destabilizing the whole Northern African region known as the Maghreb. The success of that attempt would have repercussions both in southern Europe as well as deep into Africa and into the Middle East.

Hence, the regional leaders have decided it was time to supersede local and regional problems to face the common enemy: primarily, Islamic fundamentalism organized in Libya

and Iran. As *El Mujahid's* headline suggests, a Maghreb front is being formed to stabilize the region, but it is a race against time.

Libya's Muammar Qaddafi is seen as the key organizer of this plot for several reasons, not least because he is losing all his allies except Syria and Iran. He is now contained on the east by a very solid Egypt and in the West by the new Maghreb front. In March, Qaddafi expressed for the first time his bitterness by insulting the Algerian leadership and denouncing their cooperation with "neocolonialist countries," a reference to Algerian contacts with France. Diplomatic sources report that Libya has tried to make no less than five sorties into Algerian territory, and, according to *Die Welt*, sent four tons of explosives into Algeria.

The Libyans have reached an agreement with Ahmed Jibril of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, for the intense training of a small hard core of Tunisian exiles to be deployed in a few months into the country for a new "Gafsa" operation—a reference to the 1980 military takeover of the Tunisian town of Gafsa by Libyan commandos.

Libya's and Iran's allies are the followers of former Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella, presently living in exile in a chalet near Lausanne (see Special Report). Though Ben Bella is in exile in Switzerland, after having been declared persona non grata in France by a government eager to foster good relations with Algiers, his

followers, members of the shadowy "Groupement Islamique" in Paris, are active. A front for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Groupement has recently become an international center coordinating the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood deployment into the entire Maghreb from Morocco to Tunisia. A clandestine leadership made of five "emirs," or Brotherhood chiefs, has been identified as coordinating intense military training for selected members in Iran and in Syria. Last December, when riots exploded in Algeria, it was discovered that many of the "the leaders" of such strikes had been French-based immigrant workers.

Though no one can yet have a precise idea of the real influence of such elements in Algeria, their activities are rapidly spreading among the immigrants in France, with the help of economic slump, racial fear, and blackmail. One to 2 million Muslim workers are directly affected by the Brotherhood, some sources report, transforming France into an international center as dangerous as Iran, despite efforts by French law enforcement agencies to crack down.

As the Brotherhood, controlled from Lausanne by the international Nazi apparatus of François Genoud, gears up its activity, its target is to prevent the realization of a Mediterranean conference as proposed by the French government a few months ago.

Though the content of such a conference remains to be clearly defined, especially whether it would take up the fight for a new world economic order, the immediate aim is to stabilize the entire Mediterranean through regional cooperation—a project which has aroused enthusiasm in Spain in particular and in the other countries in question, because it could launch a commitment to the in-depth development of the African continent.