

# Internationally isolated, Libyan dictator Qaddafi prepares new provocations

by Thierry Lalevée

Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi narrowly escaped an assassination and coup attempt which took place at his military stronghold, the Bab al Azizyar (Splendid Gate) fortress near the center of the capital city of Tripoli on May 8. The attack was launched by a small commando squad which has proven to have a sizeable following throughout the country. Libya's official news agency admits that Qaddafi's Revolutionary Committees are still searching for accomplices and other members of the commando unit—a surprising admission from a regime which claims that the population is fully united behind Qaddafi.

Qaddafi has threatened to unleash a new wave of international terrorism in retaliation. All countries harboring his opponents, the mad dictator said in an interview to *Le Monde* May 9, "will feel the wrath of the Libyan revolution." Qaddafi is indeed crazy—the West German press recently revealed that he was treated with electro-shock therapy for mental illness in Egypt in 1972 and again in West Germany in 1978—but he is not stupid. He knows that his regime is at a turning point, and the upcoming celebration of the 15th anniversary of his Sept. 1, 1969 military coup could become instead the occasion for his ouster. The next few weeks and months will be decisive, and Qaddafi is prepared to strike.

## The revolt against Qaddafi

The assault against the Bab al Azizyar fortress had little chance of success, as it involved a commando team of no more than 20 guerrillas; yet it was one of the most serious challenges yet to the Libyan regime, and it will not be the last. No one knows yet who the commandos really were, despite claims by former diplomat Mohammed Yussuf Margarief of the National Salvation Front of Libya (NSFL) that the operation was his handiwork.

Two days before the attacks, an NSFL commando squad of three persons, led by the former Libyan chargé d'affaires in Guyana, Mohammed Ibrahim Ehwas, was captured and shot on the border with Tunisia, as the group was driving toward Tripoli. The execution of Ehwas and his companions alerted the Libyan authorities to an upcoming plot, but there is evidence that they were not directly connected to the later military operation, which seems to have been perpetrated by members of the Libyan army itself.

Sabotage actions inside Libya for several months have prepared the way for the current crisis, the most spectacular being the explosion of the Al Abyar munitions depot close to Benghazi on March 25. In the following weeks, systematic acts of sabotage occurred in several supermarkets in Tripoli as cars of high-ranking officials were boobytrapped. Behind these actions was a well-organized underground organization which seems to maintain little contact with exiled opposition groups, which are generally based in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.

The success of Qaddafi's underground opposition is a reflection of growing domestic dissatisfaction. Libya is affected for the first time by a serious economic crisis, and several political reforms that Qaddafi wanted to introduce at February's People's Congress were rejected. Unrest is growing within the armed forces over Libya's military involvement in Chad and Qaddafi's intervention in Uganda several years ago in support of the followers of the overthrown butcher Idi Amin. Most members of the 90,000-strong armed forces are forbidden to carry loaded weapons, out of fear that they would turn them against the regime. What weapons are available are from the old stock of the last Egypto-Libyan war.

Qaddafi has created no fewer than half-a-dozen institutions and committees whose main task is to keep the army in check. Among these watchdog units are the Revolutionary Popular Committees, whose members are allowed to carry loaded weapons, and a large Presidential Guard led by Qaddafi's confidant Khalifa al Hanesh, who, together with East German and Cuban intelligence officers, is in charge of the personal security of the Libyan ruler. Then there are the Green Nuns of the Revolution, used more as a public relations smokescreen and personal harem than an actual security force. Backing that apparatus is the Deterrent Battalion, led by Qaddafi's cousin Ahmed Qaddafadam, which has the exclusive task of watching the armed forces and guarding Qaddafi's royal palaces.

## Qaddafi plans revenge

In the days immediately following the May 8 assault, Qaddafi is reported to have held several high-level conferences with his closest associates to plan retaliation. In a May

9 interview with *Le Monde* journalist Eric Rouleau, Qaddafi declared that he held "the United States, Britain and the Sudan . . . responsible. We have proof now that they are harboring international terrorists. We know that this commando force was trained at Wali Sidna in the Sudan by Sudanese and Egyptian instructors, under the control of American advisers. The Libyan people have the perfect right to hit these terrorists wherever they are, without warning. . . . As for these countries, Arab or not, which are exporting terrorism, they will feel the wrath of the Libyan revolution." Targeted countries also include Tunisia and West Germany, which Libyan Justice Minister Meftah Kuaiba described on May 16 as "harboring terrorists."

Crazy as Qaddafi may be, he is shrewdly covering certain flanks so as to concentrate his fire on others. Significantly, he has not mentioned his powerful neighbors Egypt and Algeria as potential targets. And in a second interview to *Le Monde* two days after the first, he offered a peace proposal to France over Chad: "We are immediately ready to withdraw our advisers [sic] from Chad if France withdraws its troops." Paris is reportedly seriously considering the offer.

Tunisia has been singled out as the immediate victim of "the wrath of the Libyan revolution." On May 9, without warning, Libyan troops entered Tunisia and kidnapped three Tunisian border guards; nothing has been heard of them since. On May 16, after several days of demonstrations in Tripoli and elsewhere by the Revolutionary Popular Committees, in which Tunisia was accused of harboring "terrorists" against Libya, Tunisian workers in Libya began to be expelled. The Tunisians returned home to tell how Qaddafi's committees were recruiting a score of Tunisians to form the core of a "popular revolt" in Tunisia.

Tunisian police arrested a small sabotage team in the Mediterranean city of Sfax, whose assignment was to blow up an oil refinery; warnings had been received that a major commando operation was in the making, like the 1980 military takeover of the town of Gafsa organized by Libya in an attempt to foment a nationwide revolution. The Tunisian army has imposed a curfew in all major towns. On May 17, Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba announced that he was breaking diplomatic relations with Libya. The following day, the foreign minister of Algeria arrived in Tunis, emphasizing in his speeches his country's desire for "friendship and co-operation" with Tunisia—a clear warning to Qaddafi.

A Libyan military move against Tunisia would immediately internationalize the conflict, as Tunisia has no more than 5,000 soldiers and would have to rely on its allies Algeria and Morocco, as well as on France and the United States, for its defense. Qaddafi does not seem ready to take such a gamble yet, but there are indications that his Big Brothers—East Germany and the Soviet Union—may be cultivating their own alternative to Qaddafi within the armed forces, and the dictator might decide to go for such a military move to force his military rivals into line. Qaddafi's friend Boris Ponomarev, the leading Soviet ideologue and terrorist-

controller, is known to favor the most extreme provocations right now.

## New suicide squads

Even if Moscow is keeping open the option of ousting Qaddafi to install a less volatile, more controllable military regime on the South Yemen model, as East German sources have reported recently, it will play the Qaddafi card as long as it finds this useful, especially for foreign terrorist operations. With Moscow's full approval, Libya's highest-ranking officer, Mustafa Kharroubi, an old friend of Qaddafi, made a well-publicized visit to East Germany in March to upgrade military and intelligence coordination between the two countries.

A few weeks later, Col. Belkacem Younis Ali, Qaddafi's intelligence chief, visited East Berlin to consult Gen. Markus "Misha" Wolff, head of the Staatsicherheitsdienst (Stasi—the East German intelligence service). Younis, whose wife is a fanatical devotee of Qaddafi, was educated in East Germany and is Qaddafi's special adviser on both Germanies as well as his Minister for External Security. On close terms with West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Younis has established a second international Libyan intelligence center in the West German city of Wiesbaden, the location of the headquarters of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA—the West German equivalent of the FBI), with which Libya has maintained close liaison for years to coordinate "anti-terrorist activities." It is out of Younis's Wiesbaden center that most of the Libyan activities will be deployed.

After a series of meetings between Qaddafi's special envoy Ahmed Qaddafadam and Syrian and Iranian intelligence officers, Tripoli paid Syria no less than \$350 million to smuggle weapons into Europe. These weapons, Libyan officials announced May 14, will be used by the new "suicide commandos of the sons of the Libyan revolution to hit Libya's enemies wherever they may be."

Professional hit-men will be added to the commando squads, such as members of Italy's Red Brigades or mafiamen with whom Younis's assistant, Col. Abderrahmane Shaibi, has been dealing for years. Shaibi also coordinates the separatist-terrorist operations in the Mediterranean, through the Libyan consulates in Milan and Palermo which deal with Sicilians, Corsicans, Sardinians, and Basque separatists.

Qaddafi recently praised the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as well as the old Nazi-created Brittany Liberation Front in France, whose operations will be merged with the Libyan-financed, anti-American peace movement as well as with Islamic fundamentalists controlled by Qaddafi and Nazi puppet Ahmed Ben Bella, the exiled Algerian leader. At a conference on the island of Malta March 15-18, financed by the Libyan government, 260 leaders of the separatist and peace movements met to plan out coordinated terrorist deployments for the spring and summer, including assaults on U.S. military bases in Western Europe.