

Libya heading for economic breakdown

When the radical pan-Arabist Hibadite (Yemeni tribe) Col. Muammar Qaddafi deposed King Idriss in a colonels' putsch in 1969, he inherited the vast petroleum wealth of an otherwise barren land. While in 1962, Libya's oil revenues were a mere \$38 million, by the end of 1974, after the first major

oil price rise, they rose to \$2 billion. By 1980, after the second oil shock, Libyan oil revenues totaled \$23 billion, falling to \$10 billion in 1984, and to an estimated \$7 billion in 1985.

Although Libyan oil revenues have declined since 1980 as a result of the latest ratchet-step in the world depression, Qaddafi and his revolutionary councils have had a very large available surplus of cash to finance enormous armaments expenditures. Libya's national budget was estimated at 2.1 billion dinars (0.27 dinars = \$1) in 1984 and 1.7 billion dinars in 1985. The regime spent \$3.175 billion on arms imports in 1980 and has not slackened the pace of arms investments since then.

These expenditures do not take into account the "investments" of the Libyan regime into international terrorism, "friendly" regimes, and "liberation movements," nor their

Civilized forces vs. forces of barbarism

"Beyond the immediate appearances, the real problem of the crisis between Tunisia and Libya, is the issue of a choice of society, a battle of civilization." So began our one-hour long meeting with Mr. Mahmoud Messaadi, chairman of the Tunisian National Assembly who, in constitutional terms, comes third after President Habib Bourguiba and Prime Minister Mohammed Mzali.

Now in his early 70s, Mahmoud Messaadi is a long-time associate of Bourguiba since the very early days of the struggle for independence, when he rallied the main trade unions to the leadership of the Neo-Destour party. He has held ministerial posts several times since independence, and in his earlier days, he was the teacher of many who are now today's politicians. He taught for years at the famous Sadiki college, established in the 1880s by the Bey of Tunis as a Western-oriented school, and staffed with French and Italian collaborators of the French Ecole Polytechnique, as a rival to the more traditional religious establishment, the Zitouna. Most, if not all, of Tunisia's leaders of Habib Bourguiba's generation were educated at Sadiki. Mahmoud Messaadi is also an accomplished writer and philosopher and is known for his wit, which he has been using deftly since he became chairman of the parliament in 1981.

No one could better underline the fundamental issue at stake in a crisis which threatens the national sovereignty of the most Western nation of the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, as Tunisians rightly stress, Tunisia is the only country in the entire region, to have had a democratic system ever since independence and to have never been threatened by a military putsch. Granted, a choice was made from the beginning not to develop an armed forces which would be out of proportion to its 7-8 million inhabitants. This was not out of fear of a military threat, but to concentrate the maximum of its meager economic resources on internal economic development. However, the decades of democracy have had much to do with the personalities of Tunisia's leaders, as well as the cultural environment they have created.

Augustine and Ibn Khaldoun

As Mahmoud Messaadi told us: "We have made our choice. Tunisia has had many civilizations," from Carthage, the colony of Phoenicia, to Rome, Byzantium, and finally Islamic civilization. Tunisia has also had many leading thinkers such as the 15th century Ibn Khaldoun. But, Tunisians are also proud of one very early thinker of theirs: Saint Augustine. The current minister of education is a scholar of Saint Augustine.

"We belong to Western civilization, based on progress in science and technology," the chairman of the parliament said, adding that Tunisia could never deny the importance of the values and principles he had learned from the West during colonial times. Bourguiba himself concretized the theme when, weeks after the declaration of independence, he told the Tunisians that the fight with the

raising and funding of mercenary armies throughout the Sahel region. The staggering nature of the expenditure is made vivid when compared to Tunisia's arms bill: \$77 million in 1974, \$235 million in 1982, \$250 million in 1984 (in constant 1980 dollars). Since the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union has, of course, been the major supplier of arms to the Qaddafi regime, occupying over 80% of Libya's arms market, with Italy, France, and West Germany holding the rest.

During the middle and late 1970s, Qaddafi and what he called then his "popular committees" utilized the country's large foreign exchange reserves for large scale commitments into international terrorism (for example, harboring the "Carlos" organization, and financing the radical Palestinian PFLP and PdFLP) and financing of subversive operations, military or covert, into neighboring countries. The pace of these operations did not abate, but rather increased in the early 1980s,

even though the Libyan regime was and is increasingly faced by explosive economic and political problems. Since 1980, Libya's foreign exchange reserves more than halved.

Given that neither military expenditures nor foreign subversive commitments diminished in the intervening period, the regime has compensated for its loss of revenue through a very harsh and irrational austerity program imposed on its population and on the community of foreign workers in Libya. In 1982 the regime instituted new regulations which allocated a large proportion of employees' salaries to special funds and to the armed forces. Soon afterwards, the regime announced major curbs in imports, including food imports, although Libya is largely dependent upon the latter to feed its own population.

To brutalize the population into passive acceptance of these measures, the regime has forbidden the use of musical

colonial power was over and the time of cooperation had now arrived. No other country which has Islam as the dominant religion, has made such a radical choice.

Islam is not the State religion of Tunisia. Bourguiba made a point, shortly after independence, of stressing that Islamic customs such as Ramadan (fast) are to be based on private beliefs. Christianity and Judaism have similar freedoms, with large churches and an imposing synagogue in the middle of the capital. Such religious tolerance was in recent months a target of Muammar Qaddafi, who created his "Radio of Holy Hatred" in which he called on Muslims to massacre Jews. This did more to provoke anti-Qaddafi outrage than anything else, even though a few Islamic fanatics were prepared to follow Libya's orders. In the same vein, and indicative of the level of moral development of Tunisian society, was Bourguiba's very early decision on an independent status for Tunisian women, who are well represented in the country's leadership.

Mahmoud Messaadi stressed the fundamental, qualitative difference between Tunisia and Libya: Tunisia is a nation-state based on democratic and republican institutions. A few months after independence, Habib Bourguiba made an offer to the ruling monarch: quietly resign and welcome a Tunisian republic, or be overthrown. Wisely, the monarch agreed to step down, and since then his numerous family members have been integrated within the republic.

Contrasting the Libya of Qaddafi, Messaadi cited an example where he had been offered the chance to chair a joint session of the Tunisian and Libyan parliaments. However, as he pointed out, Libya has no parliament, but only local people's congresses. "How could we meet, I



EIR correspondents Thierry Lalevée and Philip Golub, at left, meeting Mahmoud Messaadi, the chairman of the Parliament of Tunisia. This photo appeared in Tunisia's *Al Amal* newspaper.

told the Libyans. You have no parliament. . . . Send me the address of the people. . . ." Such a system, he continued, rejects all the principles on which nations are built. "It is outside the logic of nationalism."

While talking more on Tunisia's culture, he went on asserting that for this very reason, "Tunisia cannot compromise" with Libya and a leader who "threatens to cut off the hands of whoever met with Reagan." "Maybe we cannot change them, but we know how to defend ourselves," Messaadi continued, as he elaborated on the measures announced the previous day by the prime minister, concluding that these very Western values were the ones for which the Tunisian people as a whole would fight.

instruments, and, in 1984, dissolved all schools on the grounds that "mothers and not schools should educate children." Measures also include increasingly arbitrary and brutal regulations, such as the most recently announced policy of eliminating the use of money and replacing it with coupons, thereby creating a veritable coupon system for all Libyans: coupons for food, for household goods, for gas, and so forth. Internally the country is facing increasing economic anarchy.

Deported Tunisian workers, engineers, and artisans all report that the average Libyan cannot feed himself or his family adequately. There is not enough bread, no fresh fruits, few vegetables. Meat is consumed perhaps once every two weeks, or once a week if a family is lucky. The per-capita Gross National Product of the country belies the real situation of the population which, if it is not starving, is not satisfactorily fed.

Yet, the population can do next to nothing about this state of affairs. Libya is run as a police state. "Libya is verging upon what Pol Pot did in Cambodia," a Tunisian intellectual told us. The police state is run by the revolutionary committees, who police the country along with the armed forces, though the latter are considered highly unreliable by Qaddafi and his immediate circle of advisers. The Libyan security services headed by Said and Ahmed Khedafaddam are ubiquitous, and are themselves controlled and serviced by the highly professional Staatssicherheitsdienst (Stasi) of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), special units of the North Korean secret services, as well as by KGB instructors. One must add to this the Cuban intelligence and military personnel who provide additional screening for Qaddafi.

Qaddafi's own security is organized by an inner ring of Stasi agents (among them Khalifa el-Hanesh) and North Koreans. With an estimated 14,000 Russians in Libya, plus a couple of thousand East German, Cuban, North Korean and other Soviet bloc agents, Libya represents one of Moscow's major non-Warsaw Pact outposts. The port of Tobruk serves as a Soviet naval repair and refueling base. Soviet and East German military advisers are to be seen everywhere in Libyan uniforms: at Gadames, a Libyan military base on the Tunisian-Algerian-Libyan border, at Zawi near the coast, etc.

The city of Tripoli, ex-capital of the former Italian colony Tripolitania, serves as an international mercenary and terrorist arms market. Mercenaries are bought and sold in Tripoli and from there are deployed into dozens of other countries. The infamous "Islamic Legion" of Qaddafi is merely an organized mercenary force. Immigrant workers who had the misfortune of working in Libya, sometimes found themselves impressed into the Legion and sent to war. Over the past few years, Tunisian and other immigrant workers have been found fighting in Chad, on the front in the Iran-Iraq war (on the Iranian side), and in Lebanon. In many cases, Qaddafi had lured young immigrants into signing up, by offering them a spurious "Arab nationality," rather than Libyan citizenship.

Qaddafi is not mad. There is method in his apparent folly.

It is one of the most curious chapters of recent history, that a palpably terrorist and pro-Soviet regime has maintained a very wide net of commercial, diplomatic, and political relations in the West, with Europe as well as the United States. According to North African officials, the U.S. State Department has regularly discouraged political or military maneuvers against Qaddafi. Hundreds of millions of dollars, billions have been invested by the West, and new investments are still flowing in. Three major projects are now under way in Libya run by large American corporations.

This Western ambiguity never fails to astonish the regional allies of the West in North Africa, be it the Algerians, the Egyptians, or the Tunisians. There are tens of thousands of Western technicians working in the country, among them some 15,000 Italians.

Yet, in spite of this, Qaddafi's hold on power is weakening. Over the past year there have been a number of serious coup attempts originating in the officer corps. The most recent one, on Aug. 31, was organized by two colonels, Col. Bargash and Col. Kheder, who, when it failed, were both executed. Both, like many Libyans, had been educated in Tunisia. The armed forces have been showing strains, serious strains, since 1983.

The invasion of Chad in the summer of 1983 cost Libya a fortune, and rumblings were heard in the officer corps. Poorly organized, Libya's army nonetheless disposes over very modern hardware. Recently they have acquired MiG-27s from the U.S.S.R. But the hardware alone does not make Libya's army into an effective fighting force. Experts estimate that, had Egypt been given the required international guarantees and political support in 1977, they could have readily crushed Libya. Similarly, had France acted as some senior French officers suggested in 1983 and bombed the Libyan columns driving down towards Faya Largeau in northern Chad, there would have been major revolts in the Libyan army.

Because of the repeated coup attempts, Qaddafi and his inner circle have sent the armed forces to faraway outposts, border duties, foreign operations and, when at home, confined them to their barracks. With the economic and food situation deteriorating, this conflict with the army can only worsen. Renewed fighting has just broken out in Chad, and Qaddafi has dispatched one of his most trusted operatives, Colonel Messaoud, back into Chad.

As a result of this double crisis and its increasing isolation in the Maghreb, the wild adventurism of Qaddafi is expected to increase. As far as his neighbors are concerned, there is no longer any possibility to negotiate with the present regime. While they intend to make no move which would provide Qaddafi with a pretext to consolidate his hold over Libya and keep his armed forces busy away from home, they will certainly do their utmost to subtly hasten the demise of a regime which is, in the words of one Tunisian government official, "enslaving its own people."

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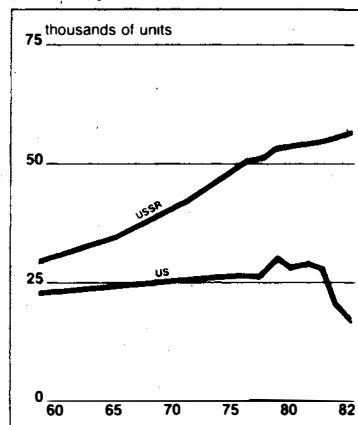
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