

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

Qaddafi faces internal challenge

There's a lot of infighting going on, which may mean this is the best time to strike at the dictator.

According to European intelligence sources, Libya is about to face yet another major internal crisis. The present political and military crisis with the United States is directly exacerbating the internal situation. If any lessons can be drawn from previous crises with Qaddafi, the mad ruler will react in a predictable fashion: flight forward.

On Nov. 24, a longstanding associate of Qaddafi, Col. Hassan Skhal, was summarily executed. A close cousin of Qaddafi, from the Qaddafa tribe, Skhal's military career had included responsibility for Qaddafi's personal protection. Rumors say Skhal, whose wife is Egyptian, was accused of being an Egyptian or an American agent. The execution occurred at Qaddafi's headquarters.

However, something deeper may be at issue. The execution coincided with another attempt by Qaddafi to dismantle the Libyan armed forces and replace them with the more politically reliable Revolutionary Committees. Scores of military leaders have been purged in recent months, and it was reliably reported that during the September 1985 crisis with Tunisia, several garrisons disobeyed orders from Qaddafi to go on a state of alert. Skhal had reportedly become dangerously popular in army ranks.

Expected to follow Skhal's fate, if not physically, then politically, are even some of Qaddafi's closest associates, such as the Qaddafadam brothers, Said and Ahmed, who have been Tripoli's intelligence troubleshooters in Europe and the Middle East. Khal-

ifa al Hanish, another close associate whose position was momentarily upgraded after Skhal's murder, is not expected to remain in such a position for long. Instead, Qaddafi is engaged in a process designed to give his Revolutionary Committees more power.

For Qaddafi to purge his closest associates is nothing new. Of the dozens of officers who helped him to power, few remain. In 1970, 1973, and 1977, Qaddafi purged the country of anyone he might have deemed a potential opponent. In 1973, he created the popular committees, unleashing a Mao-style "cultural revolution." In 1977, when the country was officially declared a *Jamaariyyah* (rule of the masses), such committees took over many of Libya's economic institutions.

However, Qaddafi was careful to define what the committees could not yet take over: the army, the banks, and the oil companies. Local management of the banks was taken over in the late 1970s, but taking over the army has proved a very difficult task. Each attempt to do so has led to coup bids (1973, 1975, 1977, 1980), the commando attack in May 1984, and the military revolt of August 1985.

Each coup was defeated, thanks to Qaddafi's friends internationally, East and West. In 1980, for example, President Carter, who had prevented Egyptian President Anwar Sadat from destroying Qaddafi in 1977, feared that a successful coup would enhance the power of Egypt in the region. The repression which has followed such revolts, has been coordinated by Qad-

dafi's thousands of East German advisers.

Only a very small core of Libyans is still considered reliable enough to be members of the inner Revolutionary Council. These are Gen. Ali Bakr Jabr Younes, army chief of staff; Khawildi Hamaidi, de facto defense minister; General Kharroubi, and his personal assistant, Jalloud.

Outside of the Council is the enigmatic figure of Col. Ali Bakr Younes, a career officer, who was appointed "minister for external security" in February 1984. He is said to have been demoted in the spring of 1985, and even to have defected to West Germany in the fall of 1985. In a lengthy interview to the *La Repubblica* of Rome in October 1985, he dispelled such rumors. The rumors were likely spread by Libya intelligence itself, to give Younes better cover for his intelligence work in Europe. His role was to finger targets for assassination by the Revolutionary Committees' assassination bureau.

That bureau has recently been reorganized again. It is led by Musa Kusa, a former diplomat in London; Sayyed Rashed, a Libyan terrorist wanted in Italy and arrested and released in France; and Abdullah Senousi, who headed Libya's internal security until a 1981 purge, and whose comeback underlines Qaddafi's lack of manpower. Victims of the reorganization have been numerous: The ministers of heavy industry, education and agriculture are expected to be purged. Even the role of Foreign Minister Ali Treiki has been questioned recently by the Committees. The secretary of the Committees himself, Mohammed Mahjdoub, was purged in early January.

The implications of such infighting should be obvious: It may be the best time to strike at Qaddafi.