

Africans seek 'Marshall Plan'

by Mary Lalevée

The 13th Franco-African summit in Lome (Togo) on Nov. 13-15, attended by more than 20 heads of state and government leaders, once again demonstrated the close link between stopping insurgencies like those run by Libya's Qaddafi, and resistance to the economic instability fomented by the international bankers.

In his opening speech, Togo's President Eyadema described the economic crisis facing Africa, saying, "we are almost being crushed by a debt of over \$175 billion." He added that "something like a new Marshall plan" for Africa was needed, to help African nations to develop their economies. French President François Mitterrand responded favorably to Eyadema's proposal; indeed, the French authorities have been known to be quietly promoting such a proposal, out of concern that some of their former colonies are on the verge of total economic chaos. The 40th anniversary of the first Marshall Plan is in 1987.

No doubt Zairean President Mobutu's recent rejection of International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity conditions and his government's decision to limit debt payment to no more than 10% of export revenues were hotly discussed in private. Zairean sources commented that many African leaders had been carefully watching the "Zaire experiment" with the IMF to see if complete submission to IMF demands brought results in terms of an improved economic situation and increased investments.

Zaire had been praised as a model by the IMF and the international bankers. "Now that it is clear that the IMF medicine doesn't work, it is doubtful whether other African governments will submit their population to such austerity," said a source, adding that the austerity imposed there would have caused "revolution" in any other African nation, and indeed would have caused violent revolts in Zaire, had it been continued much longer.

Talks on Chad crisis

Chad was the focus of informal talks between various African leaders, the President of Chad, Hissain Habré, French President Mitterrand, and Premier Jacques Chirac. Under military threat from its northern neighbor, Qaddafi's Libya, Chad also faces a severe economic crisis due to the drastic fall in the price of its export commodity, cotton.

Seventy percent of Chad's export earnings derive from the local production of cotton. Levies paid by the company,

Cotton Chad, provide the largest source of government revenue. Cotton Chad buys the raw cotton from the farmers, paying a guaranteed price of 300 CFA (\$1) per kilo. By the time the cotton has been transported to the Cameroon port of Douala, it has cost about 400-500 CFA per kilo. Profit has dwindled as the market price has gone down to 270 CFA, meaning huge losses on each kilo sold. Cotton Chad is unable to pay its debts, incurred while paying the farmers for the last two seasons. The debt is officially guaranteed by the Chadian government, but the government has no money, because the levies from Cotton Chad have not been paid.

This situation is typical of many African countries. What makes it worse in Chad is the Libyan-backed insurgency. President Habré announced dramatically at Lome that heavy fighting was going on "as I speak to you now" between Libyan troops and Chadian forces formerly opposed to Habré, but who have now rallied to the government. Rebel leader Goukouni Weddei, head of the Gunt opposition movement, had announced in early October his willingness to meet Habré without preconditions. His Libyan hosts promptly moved to arrest him and 50 of his followers. In a struggle with the troops sent to arrest him, Goukouni killed two Libyan soldiers and was himself wounded. He is now reported to be under heavy guard at a military hospital in Tripoli. However, 200-300 troops loyal to Goukouni have rallied to Habré, agreeing to a cease-fire on Oct. 14, then to undertake common actions against the Libyans.

Goukouni's men are reported to have left their Libyan allies in their position in northern Chad, taking quantities of arms and ammunition with them, including SAM missiles. On Nov. 12-13, a Libyan plane was shot down.

On Nov. 12 President Mitterrand announced that Paris was committed to helping Habré regain control of the north of Chad. While officially this help will primarily be logistical, accurate reports from French sources indicate that whenever Habré decides to move north, "French mercenaries" will accompany his forces. With Libyan troop morale very low, this will lead to a humiliation of Qaddafi.

Diplomatically, Habré has launched an offensive at the U.N. Security Council, which is due to discuss a Chadian appeal for a condemnation of Libyan genocide in northern Chad. Libyan air and artillery bombardments are reported to have killed hundreds of civilians in the towns of Goura, Nyang, and Gouma.

In Lome, the French pledge to increase military aid to Chad was repeated strongly. Parallel discussions involving Chadian government officials, a representative of the Gunt, an American emissary, French officials, and officials from Chad's neighboring states took place. The American emissary is reported to have promised air cover for units acting on the ground, provided France is ready to act. Habré then called for the "rapid reconquest" of the north, underlining that "Chadians are now unanimous in the fight against Libyan aggression."