

## Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Egypt comes under new pressures

*Qaddafi's meddling in the Maghreb and the Sudan is posing serious threats to national security.*

When many Egyptian leaders come back from their holidays in Alexandria, where they thought they could escape from the heat of Cairo and of the last months of political campaigning, the regional situation may fall on them like a cold shower. At the very point that Egypt is enjoying some domestic stability, it is surrounded by crises threatening to spill over the border.

First, there is the mining of the Red Sea which, while not putting Egyptian security immediately at risk, raises a few questions for the future. The claim by al Jihad al Islami that its frogmen operated from Egyptian territory, has had little credibility. However, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bunkers built during the Nasser period along the coast of the Red Sea to protect the Aswan Dam against an Israeli raid. Most have been totally abandoned by the Egyptian army, but are reported to be quite useful as depots to smugglers in arms and drugs. Their use in the mining operation cannot be ruled out.

A second major shock came as the wires announced the "merger" of Morocco and Qaddafi's Libya. Morocco was the country which, despite the opposition of Libya and of Syria (and more discreetly, of Saudi Arabia), campaigned for the reintegration of Egypt into the Organization of Islamic Countries at the last Casablanca conference.

That such an ally could merge with Cairo's arch-enemy, Colonel Qaddafi, is quite difficult for Cairo to understand. Cautiously, the Egyptian leaders have refrained from reacting too

quickly, but signs of anger were allowed to filter into the media. *October*, the major pro-government weekly, came out on Aug. 18 with a denunciation of Rabat for having betrayed anti-Qaddafi opposition groups. Morocco, said the article, had allowed the Libyans to hijack the Moroccan plane of a leading opponent, Omar al Meshishy, as he was on his way to Saudi Arabia. Nothing has been heard of him since.

Indeed, coming as the Egyptian President and military authorities were presenting growing evidence of Libyan involvement in the mining of the Red Sea, the Moroccan move can only be termed a slap in the face or even direct betrayal of the Egyptians. Knowing the Libyan colonel, few in Cairo share the illusions of Rabat that Morocco will prove to be stronger than Libya or that Qaddafi may change politically. Ultimately, Morocco will realize that it has shot itself in the foot.

Closer than the crisis in the Maghreb is Egypt's concern for the Sudanese situation—another very concrete reason for not appreciating the Morocco-Libya merger. Libya, which plays the Islamic fundamentalist card against Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, plays the "Christian card" in the Sudan, and makes no secret that it considers the overthrow of Julius Numeiry a first step toward the export of the "Libyan revolution" to Egypt.

Cairo's problem is that it cannot support Numeiry's policies—his decision to appoint himself "Caliph" of the Muslims as soon as possible. To do so, Numeiry has been wildly imposing the use of the *Sharia* or Islamic

law throughout the country, despite earlier promises that this would not affect non-Muslim Christians or animists in the South. Desperately attempting to quell the internal political crisis resulting from IMF-imposed austerity measures, Numeiry has inadvertently reactivated the old ghost of the 1970s: a Sudanese civil war between the Muslim north and Christian south.

While some may be tempted to let Sudan fall into a new dark age, as it is already being called, this has an impact on its northern neighbor. Numeiry's Islamic campaign has encouraged fundamentalists in Egypt to do likewise. As a result, most political parties had to compromise with them during the national elections. The Muslim Brotherhood can even spare themselves the cost of a newspaper, as all parties are competing to open their columns to them—a very dangerous course to follow, with very heavy consequences.

Indicative was a series of articles in *Le Monde* by former Egyptian communist Eric Rouleau, who concluded with quotes predicting that within two years, Egypt would either fall to a "uniformed Islamic dictatorship," or would face a "Lebanese-type situation of confessional civil war between Christians and Muslims."

Rouleau, the man who denounced the Shah for violation of human rights, and then supported successively Khomeini, Bani-Sadr, and now the "Islamic-Marxist" Mujahedeen-e-khalq, is a spokesman for those Anglo-American forces ready to sacrifice Egypt to Islamic fundamentalism and the Soviets, just as they have pushed Morocco into Qaddafi's arms. As an Egyptian watcher commented, Rouleau "writes what he wishes to see realized."

Now that the Alexandrian vacations are over, the Egyptian leaders have a few tasks to face.