

International Intelligence

Spain sees 'time bomb' in Maghreb countries

A "time bomb" is ticking in the Maghreb countries, which threatens the stability of southern Europe, warned Spanish Foreign Minister Francisco Fernández Ordóñez early in March. In a report to the conference in Brussels of European Community foreign ministers, on the theme "Europe and the Maghreb," Fernández Ordóñez called on the EC to engage in a more active policy to defuse a potential economic and social explosion in the North African states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya.

The Mediterranean is a "volatile border" to the Arabic and Islamic world, where different cultures are confronted, the report states.

High unemployment, "galloping demography," heavy indebtedness, periodic social crisis, and a growing influence of Islamic fundamentalism can no longer be ignored or, "in less than 30 years, 130 million people will knock on Europe's southern border." Spain is in the most sensitive position, says Fernández Ordóñez, only a few kilometers from Morocco, where per capita income is lower by a factor of 11. The Iberian peninsula is the entry-point to Europe for a steady growing migration.

The Spanish foreign minister points correctly to the vast development potential of the Maghreb region, but his call for more aid is coupled with an economically incompetent proposal for the establishment of a free trade zone there.

Haiti's Parliament rejects OAS accord

The Parliament of Haiti on March 21 blocked the "settlement" of the crisis there proposed by the Organization of American States (OAS), and postponed indefinitely a vote on the matter. Parliamentary opponents of the agreement, numbering about half the congress, walked out, denying a quorum, so that no vote could be taken. The settlement

package would have ended the embargo and provided for the eventual return of the ousted President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Aristide backers blamed the development on pressure from the Army. Aristide said he still believes he can return, based on peaceful change, not military intervention.

According to the *New York Times* of March 23, the United States is now trying to rally the rest of the OAS behind a decision to impose an actual blockade, where ships trying to dock at Haiti would be intercepted on the high seas, as distinct from an embargo, where compliance is voluntary. The Bush administration is reported to be "pointing to the failed coup in Venezuela as an example of why the region cannot allow the military coup to succeed in Haiti." The OAS is also reported to be discussing new treaty commitments to defend "democracy" from attack.

'United opposition' forms in Russia

A group of Russian leaders describing themselves as "the left-wing and right-wing opposition" met on March 1 and vowed to launch an offensive against the policies of the current government, according to a report and declaration published in the newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossiya* on March 10.

The members of the united opposition include the Russian People's Union, the Russian People's Assembly, the Russian Communist Workers' Party, the Coordinating Council of the People's Patriotic Forces of Russia, the Russian Party of National Revival, the Commission for the Investigation of Mikhail Gorbachov's Activity, and the Organizing Committee to Prepare for the Sixth Congress of U.S.S.R. People's Deputies.

Their declaration reads in part: "The artificially deepening crisis has brought the country to the verge of a catastrophe that can be compared to defeat in a large-scale war. Our historical Homeland—Russia—the Soviet Union—is being destroyed. . . . The economy was rolled far backward. State reserves were squandered. Total chaos reigns in finances. Even world-famous cen-

ters of science and culture were left without means of subsistence. The deliberate destruction of the army and the country's defense complex is under way. . . .

"The rapacious reforms rolled 130 million Russians beyond the official poverty line overnight. The physical extinction of the population began across Russia. . . .

"The ruling circles of the Russian Federation, which are carrying out dubious experiments with the people . . . are the first to shoulder the entire responsibility for what is happening. The anti-people's government subordinated Russia's national interests entirely to the world's reactionaries—the key architects of the U.S.S.R.'s disintegration."

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Gennady Burbulis charged the group with intending "to plunge us again into the old Soviet, communist repressive system."

Egypt hits 'racism' of western powers

The campaign for military intervention of the western powers in the Arab world smacks of racism, charged the Egyptian daily *Al Ahrām*, in an editorial published on March 19. This was the first salvo in a barrage of attacks in Egypt's press against the western policy.

The fact that the western powers are singling out Arab countries for military intervention, *Al Ahrām* wrote, reveals a doctrine of racism that the Arab world recalls from the colonialist period.

Then, on March 21, the same newspaper editorialized that "President Bush should find some other issue in this election campaign" than attacking Arab countries. The paper also accused the United States and Britain of "codified international piracy" over the Lockerbie affair, and warned that the ultimate Anglo-American aim was to reduce the Arab world to a "mass of clashing mini-states" so that Israel could effectively rule the region.

Reporting these commentaries, the London *Guardian's* David Hirst reported on March 23 that all the Arab countries, with

the exception of some of the smaller Gulf states, see the West's campaigns against Libya and Iraq as "an affront to all of them." The West is perceived as out to "get" Iraq and Libya, not really because either of them are bad, but simply because they are Arabs.

Israel cuts off Gaza from outside world

"Gaza is blockaded and isolated from the outside world; no one is allowed in or out of the Strip," charged Mansour Shawa, head of the Gaza Benevolent Association, in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corp. on March 20. Shawa denounced the action as "collective punishment" by the Israeli authorities, in response to bombing in Buenos Aires and knifings in Jaffa.

"There is no need, no justification for collective punishment of a population of 800,000 people living below the poverty line," he said, emphasizing that this was the first such exclusionary measure in Gaza since the end of the Gulf war. During the Gulf war, the Strip was sealed off for 42 days, depriving tens of thousands of residents of their livelihoods.

"The people are furious," Shawa told BBC. "People can't work. 30,000-35,000 people go to Israel every day to work, but now they can't leave. They are prevented from getting their daily earnings. As a result, they can't buy bread, food, medicine."

Shawa attacked the concept of holding an entire people responsible for terrorist acts. He also accused the West of "double standards, of not giving a hoot" when Arab or Muslim children are killed, yet of raising an international hue and cry when Israeli children are killed.

Pro-military parties win in Thailand vote

Pro-military parties won about half the seats in the lower house of Thailand's Parliament at the end of March, in the first general election since the military coup in February 1991. The

current military leader, Gen. Sunthorn Kong-sompong, has said he may ask Army chief and military commander Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon to form a new government.

Student leaders vowed to take to the streets to prevent a general being named prime minister, but the pro-military parties have more than the simple majority needed to form a government. The Samakki Tham Party, which has close links to the generals, won 79 seats in the 360-member lower house of parliament, according to *The Nation*. They, with the Chart Thai Party, which won 74 seats, the Social Action Party and the small Prachakorn Thai Party, met with the generals on March 23.

The Sunthorn-backed present government of Thailand has instituted a large number of economic deregulation reforms, along the lines of International Monetary Fund free market economics, which were relatively unpopular, but the opposition parties have not mounted an effective counter-policy to these.

Trilateral Commission to convene in Lisbon

The Trilateral Commission is holding its annual meeting in Lisbon, Portugal on April 25-27. The main speakers will be Henry Kissinger and Count Otto von Lamsdorff of Germany, the new president of the commission's European branch. Their theme will be "The New Geopolitics."

Other panels will include "Regionalism and Globalism," featuring British Foreign Office insider Sir Michael Palliser and former Carter administration official C. Fred Bergsten, among others; "Business Practices and Geo-Business," featuring Italy's Umberto Agnelli, Japan's Akio Morita, and former U.S. Federal Reserve chief Paul A. Volcker, who recently replaced David Rockefeller as North American chairman of the commission; "Shared Security Responsibilities," focusing on non-proliferation; and the problem of migration, with a focus on European responses and options in the face of the growing "migration wave."

Briefly

● **FORMER KGB HEAD** Leonid Shebarshin revealed, in an interview with Germany's *Der Spiegel* of March 16, that the CIA has made an effort to recruit former agents of the East German State Security (Stasi). Shebarshin advised Stasi spies in western Europe to "wait for German foreign intelligence to approach them and offer them to continue their work."

● **SWITZERLAND** has initiated a debate among European neutrals about the future of defense, the first meeting taking place in Berne on March 16 at the level of the chiefs of general staffs. Austria, Sweden, and Finland also participated. The meetings are to become a regular event, and will be held on the level of defense ministers, tentatively also with participation of the now non-aligned east European states.

● **THE ORTHODOX** patriarchs, meeting in Istanbul, announced that Sept. 1 would henceforth be celebrated as "Environment Day" each year by the Orthodox churches worldwide, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. Their final communiqué stated that "we must recognize the failure of all anthropocentric ideologies, which have created in men of this century a spiritual void."

● **CHINA** is refusing to support sanctions against Libya or military operations against Iraq, although it may abstain on any vote at the United Nations, as it did on the vote authorizing the Gulf war. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said that sanctions against Libya "could only aggravate regional tensions and result in serious consequences."

● **KHMER ROUGE** guerrillas are laying siege to the central Cambodian capital of Kompong Thom, despite the official cease-fire. The regional governor said the Khmer Rouge wants to get control of as much territory as possible before the U.N. peacekeeping forces arrive.