

France's Mitterrand sponsors the balkanization of Africa

by Thierry Lalevée

As the "merger" between the Alawite Kingdom of Morocco and the Revolutionary Jamariah state of Libya was concretized Sept. 1, little secret was made of France's immediate interests in the matter. French socialist President François Mitterrand flew to Morocco twice on Aug. 30 and Sept. 1 to meet with King Hassan, but refused to disclose the contents of the talks on the preposterous basis that these were "private visits" only.

On Aug. 20, King Hassan had explained to his people that the idea of a merger with Libya had come to him "by chance" on July 13, while meeting with Qaddafi's special envoy Mohammed Zwi, whom he told: "Let's show them that we can be the first to unite despite the 3,000 kilometers separating us. I then added that I was ready to realize the union of both states. I myself, who was speaking, was as surprised as everybody around, and was asking myself why I had not thought about it before. . . ."

On the day of the merger, Sept. 1, during Libya's celebration of the 15th anniversary of the revolution, Qaddafi told Libyans that the Moroccan king had indeed taken the initiative, and that "if there is any difficulty, God forbid, I wash my hands."

If the idea of a merger came to Hassan "by chance," it is more likely to have been during a meeting with a Parisian. Prior to Mitterrand's visits, a stream of French advisers had flooded the kingdom, including Mitterrand's longtime personal lawyer and spokesman for the government, Roland Dumas. In recent months, Dumas, who is also the lawyer for many African leaders, has occupied various government positions, including the short-lived ministry for European affairs. He had regularly traveled to Libya to meet with Qaddafi and his advisers during the Chad crisis.

Surely not by coincidence, Dumas was in the Kingdom on Aug. 14 when the merger was announced. The following weekend, it was the turn of Mitterrand's other adviser, Jacques Attali, to make a two-day visit, followed in days by François De Grossouvre, Mitterrand's special adviser on international and intelligence matters.

When the French President made his first unannounced "private visit" to Morocco on Aug. 30, Minister of Foreign Affairs Claude Cheysson just happened to be in Tunisia, which just happened to follow a short visit to Algeria. When

Mitterrand made his second visit to Morocco on Sept. 1, it was the turn of Defense Minister Charles Hernu to be in Chad, which just happened to follow a visit to the Central African Republic. On the latter trip, he was accompanied by a high-level French military delegation which included Mitterrand's chief-of-staff, General Saulnier, Hernu's director of cabinet, Rear-Admiral Goupil, and the chief-of-staff of the French Rapid Deployment Force (FAR) in Chad, Gen. Guy Forray.

A few days later, a special emissary, Guy Georgy, former ambassador to Teheran, Tripoli, and Algiers, was sent to Libya to give Libya's Major-General Jalloud a special letter from Mitterrand for Qaddafi.

Selling out Central Africa

Such a heavy diplomatic deployment naturally gave rise to much speculation on both sides of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and Mitterrand has come under much pressure to explain the nature and purposes of French policy. But the government isn't talking. Only upon the express request of the opposition parties within the parliament has the government finally agreed that in mid-September, Claude Cheysson can be interrogated on the matter. Otherwise, government spokesmen have only stated that whatever was discussed and arranged during the diplomatic flurry "will not become concrete before at least three months or perhaps even a year," to quote the Sept. 6 issue of *Le Monde*.

Such a defensive "leak" seeks to hide a very cynical deal. The talks did not merely focus on the crisis in Chad, whose northern part is still occupied by Libyan armed forces and their puppet organization, the GUNT of Goukouni-Weddei. They encompassed broader issues based on the willingness of Paris to reach a *modus vivendi* with Libya—whatever the consequences for North Africa as a whole.

In substance, the France of Mitterrand has been looking for a pretext to withdraw from Chad and leave the country to the mercies of the marauder in the north. This pretext has now been provided by the Moroccan-Libyan merger, which was encouraged by Paris from the start, for that reason. Using a guarantee from Morocco, whose military and intelligence services are now, at least technically, one and the same as Libya's, Paris could arrange withdrawal from Chad in a mat-

ter of months, even while Libyan troops remain in the strip of Aouzou which they have occupied since 1971.

While several other rationales, such as the financial burden of maintaining a military force in Africa, have been propagated, ultimately, it is the French government's unwillingness to confront Libya and risk antagonizing Qaddafi's big brother, the Soviet Union, which is governing policy. Mitterrand is bending to the "New Yalta" policy of Henry Kissinger and Lord Carrington. But making deals with a Qaddafi, as the London *Guardian* notes, could cost Paris much, and Mitterrand, may "end with a lot of diplomatic eggs on his face."

New strength for Qaddafi

Mitterrand has already managed to produce a political and diplomatic crisis between Algiers and Paris of the kind not seen for years. Calling French diplomacy what it is in fact, the Algerian paper *El Moudjahid* asserted Sept. 3 that the wheelings and dealings of Paris meant that the "French neo-colonialist establishment is again decisively guiding the behavior and actions of Paris toward Africa." True enough, but for the omission that this "establishment" these days is to be found among the bureaucrats of the Socialist International in Paris, who want to appease both Moscow and Tripoli.

Algeria's quick reaction to Mitterrand's visits with Hassan, after it had remained silent for days following the Aug. 14 Oujda meeting between Hassan and Qaddafi which arranged the merger, was surprising. Some press sources speculate that there is a growing fear in Algiers that former President Ahmed Ben Bella, the avowed Nazi who leads an Islamic fundamentalist opposition and has been generously financed by Qaddafi, may now be able to use Morocco as another base of operations. The French government has also behaved in a very complacent way toward Ben Bella and his supporters.

While Mitterrand was meeting King Hassan, Qaddafi was calling on Aug. 30 for the "liberation of the French colonies" in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. So much for the "Qaddafi is moderating his position" line circulated by the circle of Henry Kissinger, Vernon Walters, and others in the West to cover for their hand-over of the Maghreb to the Soviet sphere of influence. Such rantings and ravings as those of Aug. 30 were to have occurred only "prior" to the merger, effective Sept. 1; Qaddafi was thereafter sure to change so as not to antagonize his new ally, King Hassan.

But on Sept. 1 itself, Qaddafi reiterated his attacks against France, Britain, and the United States for "genocide against the red Indians and the blacks," announced that he had sent Libyan troops to Nicaragua, and made a point of underlining that, for the first time, the Libyan military parade was not organized from East to West, but from West to East; a direct warning to his immediate neighbors on the East, Egypt and Sudan. Believing that Algeria is now trapped and that Paris is ready to turn a blind eye to his southward expansion,

Qaddafi feels free to concentrate on his dreams of a "popular revolution" in Egypt and Sudan.

The advantages to Qaddafi of France's cowardly policy are thus evident to all. The Egyptian media were the first after Algeria to denounce the consequences of the new unholy Morocco-Libya alliance, which even such countries as Kuwait have welcomed without mentioning the very visible satisfaction of Moscow. At the beginning of July, Qaddafi had sent MiG-25 pilot Mohamed Hassan Baltamer to Egypt with the mission of bombing the Aswan Dam. Instead of committing such a dramatic action, Baltamer chose the course of sanity and asked political asylum of the Egyptian authorities; a rather embarrassing move for Qaddafi who is reported by the Sept. 6 *Al Ahram* to have offered no less than \$5 million to Cairo if the pilot and the plane were sent back to Libya. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak refused to even meet with the Libyan special envoy, and rejected the deal. In any case, Cairo has some grounds for worry.

Will Morocco be sacrificed?

The real victims will be the Moroccans and the Maghreb region as a whole, because, whatever the King may have said on Aug. 20, they know they were pushed into such an unholy alliance, primarily for economic and financial reasons. They also know that Paris has played more than a double-game in regard to the Polisario guerrillas in the Sahara, which have received the overt support of Algeria. Indeed, most Polisario attacks against Moroccan forces recently have been launched from the same Mauritanian territory which, as *Le Figaro* revealed Sept. 5, is under extensive surveillance and frequent patrol by French forces equipped with Jaguar surveillance planes. If Paris is thus informed of the Polisario activities, and did not pass along this intelligence to Rabat, the reasons are clear: Paris has played the Polisario as a means of driving a wedge between Algiers and Rabat, a wedge that aided in driving Rabat into the arms of Tripoli.

The Moroccans are not naive regarding the cynical deal-making and manipulations of the French Socialists. On the contrary, Morocco knows that Paris, Bonn, and Rome as well as Anglo-American strategists are ready to sacrifice it to their global strategy. As the merger becomes effective at the level of heads-of-state and ministerial coordination, therefore, both Morocco and Libya are engaged in a race against time, in terms of which of the two will be able to gain maximum benefits in the shortest period possible—before the alliance is broken, which certainly will occur. Qaddafi has little to lose and everything to gain. He will play for time, "using new tactics to change the equilibrium of the Arab world and the Maghreb . . . biding his time and continuing covertly with the same policy he has always had . . . which means to ultimately overthrow the Moroccan monarchy," to quote a European diplomat.

The private visits of Mitterrand to the Maghreb could thus have some very public consequences.