

Habib Bourguiba:

Revolution and Responsibility

CLAIRE STERLING

TUNIS has replaced Cairo as the logistical, administrative, and diplomatic capital of the Algerian revolt. This is a momentous change. It may ultimately prove to be a change for the better as far as the West is concerned, but as of now it has produced painful consequences for France.

A year ago, when the independent state of Tunisia was only a few months old, Premier Habib Bourguiba assured the French that any outright assistance to the Algerians would be "unthinkable." Today the Algerian Army of National Liberation maintains training and rest camps all along the Tunisian side of the border, the leaders of Algeria's "External Delegation" make their headquarters in Tunis, and arms of all kinds, from machine guns to heavy artillery, are crossing the Tunisian frontier into Algeria. General Raoul Salan, the top French military commander in Algeria, may exaggerate when he says that without this aid the revolt would "dry up." But so long as the aid continues, there are no prospects of the revolt's drying up at all.

Presumably, the French should be comforted by the fact that it is no longer Nasser but the friendly, educated, temperate, pro-western Bourguiba who is priming the war, and to a certain extent they are. They are irritated by Bourguiba's policy, they do not forgive it, they would like to change it, but they understand it.

Not even the most colonial-minded politician in Paris had ever seriously expected Tunisia to be scrupulously neutral in the Algerian war. The young Tunisian state is naturally grateful to France for its independence, and for the annual French subsidies of \$100 million without which it would go bankrupt in short order. On the other hand, Tunisia and Algeria have 250

miles of common frontier; they have a common language—or languages, since French is preferred among their intellectuals—and a more or less common lineage; they have shared the same colonial ruler for a long time; and their joint subjection to that ruler has been geographically inescapable. "When France moved into Algeria a century ago, we knew our own fate was sealed," says the Tunisian Under Secretary of State for Information, Bechir ben Yahmed, "and so long as France stays in Algeria, we can never feel safe."

Accordingly, the French have taken it for granted all along that Bourguiba would do something modestly helpful for the Algerians—provide shelter for the refugees, say, or give medical care to the wounded, or look the other way when caravans of contraband arms passed through his territory. What they did not expect was that he would permit so many and such large rebel bands to train on his soil—at one point last winter, the rebel chief of East Constantine had more installations and top personnel in Tunisia than he had in Algeria—or that he would send his own national guard to escort the contraband caravans right up to the Algerian frontier under the nose of the French Army, or that he would boast of these undertakings as loudly as he has in public lately.

ONE has the impression, in talking with Bourguiba, that he is not entirely happy about these commitments. Unlike Nasser, he is not a professional anti-western *provocateur*. Having wrested his nation's independence from the French, his primary concern now is to develop the friendliest possible relations, particularly since he needs French financial help so badly. Furthermore, he has every reason to fear that if the Algerian war goes on much longer, it may spill over into Tunisia.

While he may now be helping appreciably to prolong that war, he has been trying hard for a year to get peace talks under way; and he might have succeeded if the Algerian rebel leader Mohammed ben Bella had not been shanghaied by the French authorities last October, while flying to Tunis for just that purpose.

That arrest was the turning point in the Algerian war and Tunisia's relation to it. While ben Bella could not by any means be called moderate, he was far less fanatical than the man who succeeded him, and Bourguiba had talked him into opening negotiations with the French in a climate far more favorable to peace than any prevailing since. At that time the rebels were bargaining from relative weakness. They were still novices in large-scale warfare; they were far more disorganized than they are today; and since they were relying mainly on Nasser for help and guidance their cause had become so entangled with his that they could hope for little active sympathy from the West—notably from the United States State Department, which flatly refused to support the Algerian appeal in the United Nations. There was considerable chance therefore that ben Bella would end by accepting Mollet's proposal for a ceasefire and free Algerian elections to be followed by peace talks. Indeed, it was because the prospects were so good that the French *colons* engineered ben Bella's kidnapping.

Nothing could have been better calculated to stiffen the Algerians' resistance or to push Bourguiba into adding his to theirs. Even then he might have proceeded more cautiously. But directly after ben Bella's arrest came the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt. As a consequence Nasser was in no position to give the Algerians his full attention—nor, because of his ignominious performance in the Sinai Peninsula, could he inspire the reverence among North African Arabs that he had enjoyed before. It was a great temptation and Bourguiba can hardly be blamed for yielding to it.

All through that fall, there was a lull in the Algerian fighting, while arms caches were transferred laboriously over southern desert routes from Libya and Morocco

into Tunisia, and the National Liberation Front (F.L.N.) reorganized its leadership. In February, the F.L.N. chose Colonel Omar Ouamrane to succeed ben Bella, Ouamrane had a long talk with Bourguiba, and the fighting flared up more fiercely than ever, with Tunisia as the rebels' main external base.

Unity for the Maghreb?

It is hard to see how Bourguiba could have acted otherwise. Apart from the king of Morocco, who trails him at a considerable distance, he is the only personality with enough stature to organize and lead the twenty-two million Moslems inhabiting the two-thousand-mile North African coastline west of Egypt known as the Maghreb. He has long dreamed of unifying the Maghreb with himself at the head of it, and tying it to metropolitan France in much the same way that Canada, for instance, is tied to the British Commonwealth. No Moslem who persisted in remaining aloof from the Algerian conflict could claim such leadership. Had Bourguiba stood aside for long, he would not only have ruined his own chances but would also have left the field clear for Nasser, whose competition he fears and whose policies he dislikes intensely. Moreover, he might have seriously undermined his own position as ruler of Tunisia.

It would be absurd, of course, to say that Bourguiba's position is precarious. He is the undisputed leader of his country. It is, however, a very young and very poor country, much poorer now than it was under French rule, and too young to have attained great political maturity. Despite Bourguiba's popularity, there have already been attempts to overthrow him, most notably that of a religious fanatic called ben Youssef, who with money from Cairo (where he has now taken shelter) had organized a campaign of violence against him. The fact that this attempt failed doesn't mean there will be no others, especially since Tunisia's economic difficulties at the moment are immense. Bourguiba could not afford, therefore, to leave any propaganda openings for Nasser's agents, nor could he afford to offend the nationalist sensibilities

of a people for whom the Algerian uprising is as natural a concern as the life or death of a father or brother.

A PART from these general considerations, there was the specific one of what to do with the Algerians streaming over the frontier. Of the 200,000 now in Tunisia, about half had drifted in before the uprising began. Among the rest were authentic refugees whose villages had been razed; those who were fleeing recruitment by the F.L.N. or the rival National Algerian Movement (M.N.A.), or extermination by ei-



ther; those who were wanted by the French police; and those fighters in search of medical care, rest, or military training on safe terrain.

For a country with about five hundred thousand of a total population of 3.8 million unemployed, the civilian refugee problem alone was crushing. Most of these people arrived penniless and huddled miserably in wretched villages. Those who brought any money soon lost it to rent gougers, and those with no money soon turned to the only visible means of getting any—black-marketing and gunrunning. The effect on the local populations can be imagined.

Fellagha and Finesse

Far more serious, however, were the irregular bands of Algerian *Fellagha*, which were living off the countryside in fine terrorist style

and obeying nobody's rules but their own. The F.L.N., whose authority inside Algeria was far from undisputed and whose internal affairs were in monumental disorder, had little or no authority over these bands. Neither did the Tunisian government, for which they were an increasingly ominous threat. Since none of them had any regular sources of supply, they procured their arms by hijacking and their food at gunpoint. Many, too, were fanatics who would have liked nothing better than to engulf all North Africa in the war. Accordingly, *Fellagha* chiefs were trying, with growing insolence, to blackmail Bourguiba into providing for their maintenance, by threatening to launch a terrorist campaign not only against the French *colons* in Tunisia but against Bourguiba himself.

The only Tunisian military forces available to cope with this were a thousand-man battalion organized by the French soon after independence, a small national guard set up late in 1956, and a police force turned over to the Tunisians in the summer of 1956 but not yet "cleansed" of its Corsican and French officers. Bourguiba could not rely on so inadequate a force to protect himself and his country's internal security from the *Fellagha* menace; and he would not turn to the French for protection as the king of Morocco had done. Instead, he turned to the F.L.N.

The agreement between Bourguiba and Colonel Ouamrane was reached around the end of last April. Under its terms, Bourguiba recognized the F.L.N. as the sole official fighting force in the Algerian war, allocated specified areas to its cadres for training and rest camps, and undertook the exclusive management of all contraband arms traffic crossing Algeria's eastern border. In exchange, Ouamrane promised to provide whatever military strength might be needed for Bourguiba's protection inside Tunisia.

The arrangement was mutually beneficial. Bourguiba averted—narrowly—a terrorist campaign against the French *colons* in Tunisia that would have embarrassed him immeasurably. He also ensured his own and Tunisia's political safety on what, by Arab standards, were hon-

orable terms. And he became a hero for the F.L.N. fighters. The F.L.N., for its part, was now assured of safe and steady arms deliveries, and a more or less complete embargo on such deliveries to its rivals. It could thereby establish its authority in the Aurès-Nementcha, and get the upper hand over the irregular *Fellagha* bands in both Algeria and Tunisia.

Within a month after the deal was made, all but one of the *Fellagha* chieftains in Tunisia had gone over to the F.L.N. The last to hold out, Taleb Belarbi, was taken by the Tunisian Army on June 19.

WHILE both the Tunisians and Algerians were pleased by these developments, the French were outraged and dismayed. They did nothing for some weeks. But in late May, French troops stationed in southern Tunisia spotted a contraband arms caravan at Beni-Gadan, and advised the local governor of the fact. The governor's response was to dispatch the Tunisian national guard, which escorted the caravan to the Algerian border, whereupon Premier Guy Mollet abruptly announced in Paris that all financial aid to Tunisia would be suspended.

Mollet, who made this announcement a few hours before his cabinet fell, had evidently made it in a last-ditch effort to appease the "tough" independents in the Chamber of Deputies. While he failed in that, he almost succeeded in bankrupting the Tunisian government, which, with its treasury practically empty, had been expecting the first slice of a new fifteen-billion-franc loan only two days later.

In spite of this blow, Bourguiba didn't yield. A few weeks later, however, the French did. Not only did the new Bourgès-Maunoury cabinet restore the credits that Mollet had suspended, but it announced that France would withdraw fifteen thousand of the twenty-five thousand troops still on Tunisian soil. Bourguiba had been pressing for this almost from the day his country became independent in March, 1956, and he could not fail to be gratified by such an unexpectedly generous concession. But as far as anyone knows, he did not make a secret

deal with the French to get it. "We have not bargained with Bourguiba on this," says an authoritative French spokesman in Tunis. "He dislikes bargaining and thinks it contrary to his honor. We have simply told him frankly that we are ready to regroup our forces, and that an orderly withdrawal will take place. Now, it's up to him to act responsibly in return."

The Friend and the Brother

If the French mean by acting responsibly that Bourguiba should retreat to a position of strict neutrality, they are bound to be disappointed. What they might reasonably expect is that he will alter his present policy so as to satisfy the Algerians enough without irritating the French too much.

If that might not be sufficient from the French point of view, it would still leave France in a better position than she was in a year ago, when the Algerian "External Delegation" was meeting in Cairo.

Not that Nasser has lost all his former influence among the Algerians. He is still admired in rebel circles and is still supplying a good portion of their arms—largely selected, these days, from the military stores that the British left behind in the Suez Canal Zone. But he is very much the second man now. "Where we regard Nasser as our friend," says a leader of the External Delegation in Tunis, "we think of Bourguiba as our brother."

NASSER may hate us and Bourguiba may not," one Frenchman told me, "but the rebels are still getting as many arms as they ever did, if not more." Nevertheless Bourguiba is helping the rebels, as he has pointed out recently, so as to "avoid anarchy, Communism, feudalism, and fanaticism" in North Africa—just the opposite of what Nasser had been doing. This is a change for the better. And the French themselves may sometime learn how to take advantage of it.

Between the Saudis And the Sharks

RAY ALAN

GUARDED on the east by forbidding cliffs and reefs and a shark-infested sea and to the west by the sand ocean of Arabia's vast Rub el-Khali ("Empty Quarter"), the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman has very little contact with the outside world. It sends no diplomats abroad and even the Arab League states are unrepresented there. Three years ago, when a mission accredited by the imam of Oman arrived in Cairo to request Oman's admission to the Arab League, employees of the League secretariat and even a delegate to the supreme Arab League Council asked them rather tactlessly: "But where is Oman?"

Sheik Ibrahim et-Tafeeshi, a member of the mission who stayed on as the imam's "ambassador" to Egypt, has never quite forgiven the Arab League for this affront. A sol-

emn, bearded man in a white turban, he has acquired the standard Arab League idiom. "Aggressive British imperialism" is trying to crush Oman's "struggle for national liberation" and force upon Oman a puppet ruler, the sultan of Muscat, "whom no Omani recognizes." Omanis acknowledge only one sultan and king, the Imam Ghalib.

Has the Imam Ghalib a full-time army? "Of course. Thirty thousand men—and reserves of half a million." (The total population of Muscat and Oman is estimated at around six hundred thousand.) But there are no officers. "Our soldiers train one another."

Is the imam an absolute ruler? In an Omani context the question is meaningless. "Our constitution is the Koran. We have a supreme council of religious notables—cadis and