

North Africa And the West

HAL LEHRMAN

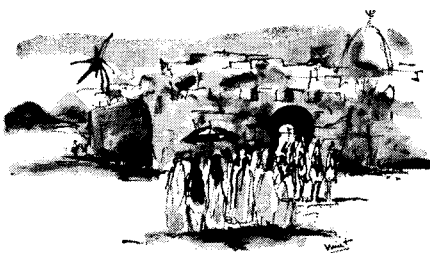
TANGIER
IN THE GORY MONTH of August, 1955, while Moroccan nationalists and the French were earnestly slaughtering each other, there came on three separate occasions a muffled rapping on the door of my room on the top floor of the Hotel Balima in Rabat, the capital of French-ruled Morocco. Each time, I would follow a small, retreating form down the corridor, outside and upstairs under the open sky to a secure angle of the parapet enclosing the hotel roof. There I had the honor of being instructed in the aims and horizons of the Moroccan Istiqlal (Independence) Party by one of its leading but then obscure practitioners named Mehdi Ben Barka. In those days he was carelessly shaven, seedily garbed, and as gaunt and hollow as a man so short in stature could be.

Today Ben Barka, no longer lean or threadbare, is president of sovereign Morocco's Consultative Assembly. He is the chief switch puller of the Istiqlal's party machinery, its ace tactician, and is generally acknowledged in Morocco as the strongest man after (and major potential republican threat to) King Mohammed V. The Istiqlal, already dominant, has just set up what amounts to a single-party government to replace the cabinet coalition between itself and a handful of outmaneuvered independents from which it had resigned last month. The party played host at Tangier, starting April 27, to a historic North African unity conference of the Istiqlal, Tunisia's Neo-Destour Party, and Algeria's battle-scarred Front de la Libération Nationale (F.L.N.)

Ben Barka, his Istiqlal associates, and their guests had lost none of their preference for clandestine deal-

ings. The conference's preliminary meetings in Rabat, purportedly to draw up an agenda, had somewhat the atmosphere of an underground conspiracy. Life for the advance guard of correspondents who were Tangier-bound via Rabat became a sequence of pursuits and disappearances. Appointments with individual reporters were given and canceled. Different Rabat offices began estimating different dates for the opening at Tangier. Rumors spread that the Istiqlal wanted to delay until it could go to Tangier as *the* government party (of equal rank with the Neo-Destour, which runs Tunisia single-handedly) or that Tangier would merely be the setting for formal perfunctory proclamation of agreements already reached.

In the end, the mystery boiled down to a mixture of habitual insur-



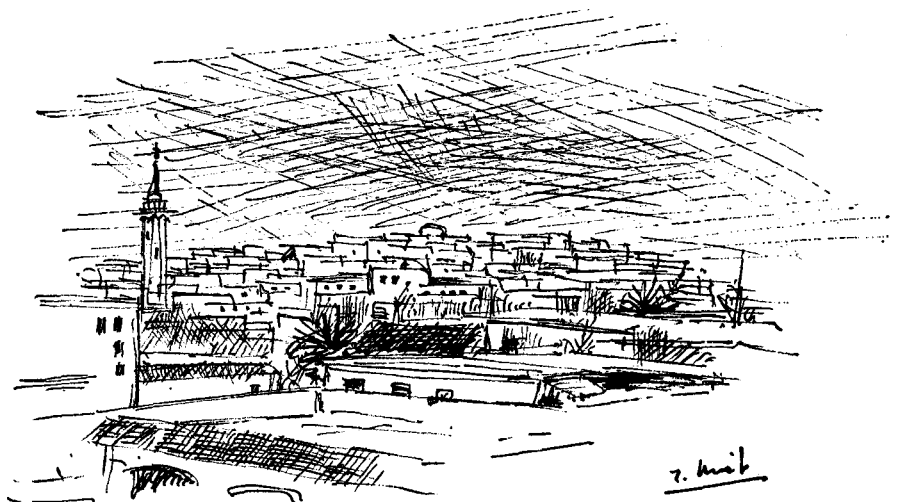
rectional secrecy and the Istiqlal's reluctance to absent itself from the king's presence before he "chose" the government it wanted. The Tunisians insisted on sticking to schedule, so the Conference of Tangier duly opened there on the appointed day. The hitherto phantom Algerians, backed up by a formidable *fellagha* bodyguard, became visible at last. They sat stiffly at the head of a horseshoe table in the great hall of the handsome Palais du Marshan, recently built for the

legislature of the International Zone just in time to house the ceremonies when the Zone passed into Moroccan hands and the legislature was abolished.

AFTER the first public burst of orotund Arabic speeches, the conference went into *huis clos*, so secret that even clerks, secretaries, and ushers were excluded. For three days the largest representation of the world press ever congregated in Tangier paced the hard marble floor outside the council chamber. We watched the eighteen delegates arrive and depart in their Cadillacs, Imperials, and De Sotos. We sipped minted tea, fruit extracts, and free cola drinks. Occasionally we fed on a barren communiqué or a *viva voce* declaration from Ben Barka or one of the others, announcing that the next point on the agenda had been reached amid universal accord.

The daily press, having to write daily stories, wrote them. "I've done three columns for tomorrow on how things are shaping up," one eminent French journalist advised me, "but it's probably all false." We were sure of only one thing: that the idea of an Algerian government-in-exile had been abandoned.

When the break came, on the fourth day, during a second public session ending the conference, it exploded with the force of a partisan assault on an ambushed French convoy in the Aurès. While the mayor of Tunis read the final resolutions from his place under a portrait of King Mohammed surmounted by a three-foot crown glowing with yellow electric bulbs, the text was distributed (in French) to the milling reporters in the rear. It denounced "certain western powers and NATO"



for helping France's "colonial war in Algeria." It demanded the immediate "cessation" of French use of Moroccan and Tunisian territory "as bases of aggression against the Algerian people." It called for "a federal form" of North African union. It proposed a Maghreb (North African) Consultative Assembly, made up of members of the Tunisian and Moroccan Parliaments and the "National Council of the Algerian Revolution." It created a six-man permanent secretariat from the three parties, to be located half the time in Tunis, half in Rabat. It summoned "the governments of the Arab Maghreb countries" to avoid separate foreign and military agreements "affecting the destiny of North Africa until the installation of federal institutions."

Most sensationally of all, the conference pledged the political parties to bring "the total support of their peoples . . . and governments" to the struggle for Algerian independence; singled out the F.L.N. as the "directing organ" of the Algerian liberation fight; and urged "the establishment, after consultation with the Tunisian and Moroccan governments, of an Algerian government."

The 'Youyous' of Battle

This spectacular document appeared to reflect an astonishing unanimity among elements that had numerous reasons to disagree, and a complete voluntary surrender to an Algerian faction that until then had made political progress only by fighting tooth and claw for every inch. The view widely held abroad that

Tunisia and Morocco feared nothing worse than a strong Algeria controlled by a belligerent F.L.N.—except the dread possibility of utterly estranging France by recognition of a rebel Algerian government—was shown to be false. Instead of being pulled toward a posture of peace, the F.L.N. had evidently prodded the Istiqlal and the Neo-Destour into a posture of belligerence, involving them in an intimate joint secretariat and in defiance of both France and the West.

The closing hours of the Tangier Conference had a certain epochal quality peculiar to great moments in history. There was torrential applause and a contagious tremor among the Moslem witnesses in the hall. Out under the bright African sun, a great throng of Algerian refugees and Moroccan country folk, mostly women and children brought in on Istiqlal trucks, chanted strange songs, shrilled the pulsating "youyous" with which North African females have traditionally goaded their men into battle, and waved official clusters of Tunisian, Moroccan, and (for the first time) Algerian flags. On the rostrum Allal el Fassi, Istiqlal's president, its chief theoretician and champion of pan-Arab brotherhood, was fervently embraced by the western-minded head of the Tunisian delegation, State Secretary Bahi Ladgham, who for years represented the Tunisian independence movement from an office in New York City's east Fifties, and F.L.N. delegation leader Ferhat Abbas, who is known to be about as Islamic as blueberry pie. Surely it

was a moment of majestic unity.

From private talks with some of the key figures at the conference, however, it was clear that there had been sharp differences and adroit compromises after all. It became apparent, too, that the stern conference positions were motivated by more than an understandable solidarity. They were impelled also by the quest, equally understandable, for maximum propaganda effect on the Moslem masses of Algeria and on the war of nerves between North Africa and France—with the United States as a harassed and already deeply involved observer.

The conference agenda drafted in the covert Rabat meetings had listed four points: the war in Algeria, liquidation of the remnants of "colonial domination" in North Africa, Maghreb unity, and a permanent structure to implement conference decisions. Nowhere cited in any public conference document, however, were two other points at the nub of the entire deliberations. First, the perilous possibility of closer F.L.N. involvement with Nasser—and even with the Soviet Union. Second, the problem of *peace* in Algeria, and the search for political devices for the achievement of a solution satisfactory to the North African régimes and parties most concerned.

AS LONG AGO as 1955, when I visited a North African Liberation office in Cairo supported by Egyptian and Arab League funds, it was already clear that Colonel Nasser and the F.L.N. were expecting much from one another. Since then, Cairo and Moscow have moved closer, the flow of arms and other aid via Egypt to the F.L.N. has swelled, and impressive evidence has come to light of war matériel shipments direct from eastern Europe to the Algerian partisans.

Thanks to modern automatic weapons received from such sources, the F.L.N.'s firepower and political prestige have mounted substantially, and so, reportedly, have French casualties. On the other hand, the partisan command has been complaining to Rabat and Tunis (perhaps overvehemently, for bluff and bargaining purposes) that its increased strength is limited to eastern Algeria, where aid sifts easily across

the unsealed Tunisian border. Deeper in the interior, allegedly, the F.L.N. situation has been made somber by stepped-up French military action, excessive strain on the local populations from partisan "taxation," and even a stark shortage of food for the "liberation" forces. So far as is known, Communist weapons are being sold to the F.L.N. at going Mediterranean prices. If the Soviet bloc started giving them out at cut rates, the relief to the F.L.N. treasury would be monumental. Rumors were actually being floated of a prospective F.L.N. mission to Moscow.

A Communist foothold in Algeria would be a palpable nightmare for Morocco's King Mohammed and Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba. But even the Marxist-tinged left wing of the Istiqlal Party dreads possible Kremlin prying next door (though a technically illegal Communist Party is tolerated in Morocco). The Istiqlal was therefore a prime mover in organizing the Tangier Conference. Ben Barka especially deplored any extension of the Algerian affair from a strictly family dispute between North Africa and France (and the West). The conference was designed in essence to bring Algeria back into the Maghreb.

At first the F.L.N. was lukewarm to the invitation, consenting only after promises of concessions. Betting heavily on the others' worry about Red orientation, its spokesmen laid down a hard line in their initial brief at Tangier: Morocco and Tunisia must leave off their impotent farce of mediating the Algerian war. Their joint attempts at "good offices," even after being sanctified in the United Nations and the State Department, had been ignored by Paris. They should cut away clean from France and its western allies, giving full material support to the F.L.N. struggle, whatever the consequences.

The Smell of Demagoguery

Morocco was especially culpable, the Algerians charged. Apart from permitting a trickle of arms and supplies, a small partisan camp, and a radio station that had transmitted warnings about nearby French troop movements, the Moroccans were doing nothing for the cause. In fact, their eastern garrisons were actually

helping the French by policing the frontier. Tunisia at least was letting the F.L.N. operate and squeezing the French out. The F.L.N. produced documents to show that enemy operations in westernmost Algeria hinged on the Oujda region in Morocco, from which Mohammed V had purged the partisan concentrations. If Morocco and Tunisia persisted in retaining their ties with France, however attenuated, then the F.L.N. must be free to make any other engagements it chose.

In reply the Moroccans argued for denunciation of the West but no rupture—a policy they call "non-dependence." Morocco was already being sorely pressed by French stoppage of economic aid. What good would it do Algeria if Morocco collapsed? Besides, France must be shown that a North African people (Morocco) could receive independence without catastrophe for the French. The demonstration might even help Algeria by possibly reducing intransigence in Paris.

The Tunisians smelled demagoguery in this Moroccan stand; the Istiqlal was pussyfooting in its Algerian policy abroad but weeping crocodile tears at home for its "suf-



fering brothers" in order to curry sentimental favor with its constituent masses. The Tunisians, already in trouble with the French, might have preferred the Moroccans to involve themselves, too, and thereby perhaps take some of the heat off Tunisia. Moreover, Tunisia had greater cause to fear an F.L.N. swing toward extremism, since it is almost an extension of Algeria (while Morocco is immunized by mountains and is an Atlantic country) and in effect is already enduring F.L.N. "occupation."

One the other hand, if the F.L.N. ever decided to proclaim itself a government, with its seat in Cairo or even in Moscow, no other Arab government could escape internal overthrow unless it granted prompt recognition. Better to offer first papers of recognition that would become final only "after consultation."

A 'Government' to Be Announced

The final "unanimous" resolutions were thus revealed as a neat compromise, with something for everybody. France, NATO, and the United States were loudly excoriated—but no bridges were burned. Just what "measures" were to be taken against colonial domination and to aid the Algerians materially was left vague, for future study. (Early developments may be the creation of a larger F.L.N. refuge and rest area in Morocco as well as authorization of a popular campaign for "voluntary" donations.) The two established parties gave the F.L.N. an enormous boost by acknowledging it as the *only* spokesman for fighting Algeria, and made it an equal founding member with them of the embryo Maghreb union. In vital exchange, the F.L.N. pledged to consult with the others before setting up a government, and joined them in promising not to take any unilateral decision affecting the whole area—i.e., political contracts with régimes farther eastward.

The fact that at the Tangier Conference Morocco and Tunisia were represented by parties, not by governments, may offer some opportunities for weaseling. But not many, since the parties are practically identical with the governments. More significant were the differences of interpretation immediately after the release of the decisions. The chief of the Tunisian delegation did not think that continuation of Anglo-American "good offices" for ending his country's present quarrel with France in the wake of the Sakiet bombing required consultation with Tunisia's partners. Nor did the Istiqlal secretary general, Foreign Minister (now Premier) Ahmed Balafrej, feel that Morocco had given up the right to make its own Algerian-frontier policy. As for when and where an Algerian government might be formed, Ferhat Abbas told

a press conference that this was up to the F.L.N. to "discuss and decide." (Later I was privately and "authoritatively" advised by an unidentifiable source that the Algerian government might be announced in early June; that its temporary "capital" would probably be Tunis; and that it would be a wholesome and moderating blend of political and military elements, with senior statesman Abbas the most likely premier and Krim Ben Kassen, a *maquis* commander, as defense minister.)

AT FIRST GLANCE the Tangier pronunciamento seemed to make no concession to the general western hope for a break in the Algerian deadlock or to the particular desire reported in Washington for the emergence of some new "interlocutor" with whom France might find it possible to negotiate. The F.L.N., regarding itself as the sole possible negotiator, talked of nothing less than full independence as a prime prerequisite. The other delegations hailed the F.L.N. as uniquely competent among present would-be administrators of Algeria: "We have seen dossiers on the extent and effectiveness of their control, and they are astonishingly impressive."

Public discussion of the move toward Maghreb unity stressed its inherent power and determination: "As long as France talks of war, we can talk only of defense." "When an Algerian government is formed and recognized, France will be dealing not just with Algeria but with all North Africa." "Maghreb unity means that there can be no more separate French mortgages on each of our territories."

The Message to France

Conference participants were patently bullish on Tangier's potential contributions to an Algerian settlement. After all, though they had not accepted any rival Algerian factions as possible interlocutors, they had brought in the entire North African subcontinent. There was a place left even for Libya, whose absence at Tangier was "explained" by the non-existence of Libyan political parties and a lack of time in which to select a delegation. (No mention was made of the Libyan prime minister's co-



incidental visit to London to negotiate for more British economic aid.)

It was felt that association with Morocco and Tunisia could have only a moderating influence on the Algerians. The presence of Abbas and other nonmilitary delegates as fully accredited spokesmen was taken to be a favorable sign of the F.L.N.'s increasing politicization and departure from military stiffness. Even the creation of a Maghreb Assembly—to be composed of sixty parliamentarians, twenty from each country—could be a helpful broadening of contact with Algerian elements other than the military.

In a sense, the entire conference proceedings and atmosphere constituted a message to France and the United States. The French, I was told, knew the jig was up in Algeria: independence was inevitable, but nobody dared come forth as liquidator of the problem. Well, here was a chance for a new Mendès-France. The Maghreb itself was a new interlocutor made to order; the F.L.N. was bound not to act without its partners, and Morocco and Tunisia were therefore available as the guarantors the French had been seeking. Conversely, U.S. pressure on France was now made possible. Washington had been seeking a pretext for urging France to regard Algeria as more than a French problem. Here now,

in the new Maghreb constellation, was the argument the rising pro-North African element in the State Department needed. In turn, whoever sprang up from the French political heap to risk the unpopular role of liquidator could use American pressure as his alibi.

THE LOGIC was neat, but it was not entirely in line with the results of a four-day Paris survey I had made before coming to Morocco. I interviewed French leaders and opinion makers ranging from the conservative Right to the liberal Left, just short of the Communists. Not even the sternest critics of previous French policy were willing to abandon Algeria's 1.2 million European settlers to F.L.N. mercies. I found some who were prepared to consider independence as a policy to be announced publicly and a few who felt negotiations with the F.L.N. ought to be attempted—but none who thought the F.L.N. would be anything other than unreasonable, thereby merely strengthening France's position before world opinion.

In the general French view, the test of F.L.N. reliability and representativeness is its refusal to accept free elections in Algeria. At the Tangier press conference, when I asked Abbas why he has rejected the offer of an internationally supervised elec-

tion, he replied that previous French Algerian electoral trickery, in the preparatory months before the vote as well as at the polls, was too notorious for comment. This is unhappily true, and the French today are being plagued by their own history. Are they more sincere now? The F.L.N. cannot be blamed for being less confident about this than France's friends.

But the French charge that the F.L.N.'s real reason for evading an election is its knowledge that it would lose even an honest one. According to many French spokesmen, the authentic temper of the Algerian Moslems is reflected by the number who join the voluntary defense militias to fight the F.L.N. when necessary (more than the regular strength of the F.L.N. forces) and by the seven thousand Moslems who have accepted posts as municipal councilors despite terrorist threats that they would be executed.

Many informed Frenchmen continue to believe that implementation of current political reform programs, giving Moslems the equality they desire without severance from France, will cut the ground from under the F.L.N. and make a better Algeria for all concerned.

Having noted all this, however, and leaving aside political and physical obstacles to genuine North African unity too complicated to be considered here, I have little doubt that the Tangier Conference will remain a landmark in Maghreb history.

THE MEN of the Maghreb are tougher, more resolute, and generally more enlightened than their nationalist counterparts east of them in the Arab world. The territories they hope to link in bonds not yet determined possess the clear advantage of similar forms and institutions fashioned by the French spirit and tradition that have ruled and helped shape them all.

Indeed, many of the Maghreb leaders now resisting French influence or government are themselves imbued with the mind and speech and genius of France. This is one of North Africa's basic strengths. It is also a cardinal asset to France in its present hour of anguish over Algeria and the Maghreb.

Lebanon: Buildup To a Breakdown

RAY ALAN

A DICTATOR could easily seize power here," the Lebanese used to say, "but he couldn't remain in power. The first question everyone would ask on hearing of his *coup d'état* would be not 'What is his program?' but 'What is his religion?' And that would be that."

This confidence has recently begun to wilt somewhat. A great many Lebanese have been hoping for some time for a *coup d'état* that would link Lebanon with the United Arab Republic; others have urged Lebanon's Maronite commander in chief, General Fuad Shehab, to take over the government. These two movements, which derive their support from both inside and outside of Lebanon, had been producing turmoil in the country long before the recent outbreaks of violence.

Political Balance of Sects

Religion has always been a paramount political issue in Lebanon, whose population of just under a million and a half is rent not only by conflicts between Christians and Moslems but also by sectarian hostilities within the two main groups.

The republic's founders agreed that no single leader could possibly depend upon the loyalty of more than a third of the population. If power were concentrated in Sunni Moslem hands, the Shiite Moslems, Christians, and Druzes would object; a Maronite Christian ruler would be opposed by the Orthodox Christians, Moslems, and Druzes; and so on. Apparently the only solution was to share the power and prestige; there would be a Maronite president, a Sunni Moslem prime minister, and a multi-religious chamber of deputies presided over by a Shiite.

Lebanon's sixty-six-member chamber is composed of twenty Maronite Christians, seven Orthodox Christians of the Greek rite and three of the Armenian rite, four Greek Catholics and one Armenian Catho-

lic, fourteen Sunni Moslems, twelve Shiite Moslems, four Druzes, and one "representative of the minorities." Lebanese Moslems have complained that these quotas fail to take into account the heavy Christian emigration (mostly to the Americas and French Africa) and the high Moslem birth rate of the last twelve years. They have argued that if Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were given citizenship rights, the Moslems would have a majority.

Despite the intensity of popular emotion, Lebanon's religious conflicts have rarely been discussed openly in the press, on political platforms, or on the radio. The subject has always been camouflaged—debated in terms of, for example, cultural trends or the future of individual political personalities or Lebanon's relations with its Moslem neighbors.

Even during the heated debates at the time the United Arab Republic was formed, Lebanon's religious lineup was blurred. Sunni Moslem opponents of the *status quo* were joined by many Greek Orthodox Christians who believe that more is to be gained by swimming with than against Moslem currents. A vigorous Maronite Christian minority began arguing that Lebanon had no alternative but to work for friendly co-existence, even loose federal ties, with the U.A.R. The Shiite community—generally oriented toward Iraq, which is the guardian of its main shrines and pilgrimage centers of Najf and Kerbela—was split on this issue.

FOR AT LEAST two years Lebanon has been a prime target of Syrian-Egyptian subversion and terrorism, conducted first by the Egyptian military attaché in Beirut (expelled last year), then by Colonel Abdel Hamid Serraj, chief of Syrian Army intelligence. Syrian frontier forces have violated the Lebanese border at will,