

## THE UNITY OF THE MAGHREB

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THE concept of a Maghreb federation took shape in April, 1958, when leaders from the three North African liberation movements met in Tangiers. It was enthusiastically endorsed by the Maghrebin masses and viewed with immediate alarm by the French Government. Thirty months have passed, however, and nothing more has been done. The Permanent Secretariat established by the Tangiers talks has met only once, the planned Maghrebin Consultative Assembly—which was to consist of ten representatives from each of the countries concerned—was never born, and the dedication to a 'united Maghreb' has become, in the minds of most of the North African leaders, nothing more than an objective to be recalled every once in a while, an aim to be pursued after Algeria will at last have attained its independence.

And now all at once, the idea is acquiring new vigour, as it is fed by the relentless evolution of the Algerian war. The conflict in Algeria is more and more turning into a revolutionary war with the creation of a united Maghreb as one of its basic objectives, especially since the Melun talks have failed and the possibility of ever solving the Algerian problem through a peaceful dialogue with France has evaporated.

This is why voices are being raised on either side of Algeria for a close association of the Maghreb countries as the only real solution to the Algerian problem and the only way of providing the Maghrebin peoples with the political, economic and social uplifting that the colonial system has for so long denied them.

First the President of the Tunisian Republic, Habib Bourguiba, called for union between Algeria and Tunisia in his speech at Kairouan last September. He confirmed this in an interview published on October 17, 1960, in *'Afrique-Action'*:

"The idea is in the air. We have launched it to let it grow, and we would like it to be a contribution to peace . . .

We are prepared to accept a period of hardships if we can be assured that when the moment comes, our friends will be at our side to help us without hesitation or reserve. We have informed President Eisenhower of this and will not undertake anything before the United States have a new government."

In Morocco it was the National Union of Popular Forces which

expressed this popular aspiration. Abderrahim Bouabid, former Vice-President of the Council and former Minister of National Economy, proclaimed before the National Council of the N.U.P.F., meeting on October 21 at Casablanca:

“. . . to make statements is not enough, they must be followed by action, because the Algerian war is the war of the whole of the Arab Maghreb.

“We cannot hope for a solution by the French Government, because even though all the left-wing organizations call for negotiations, the extreme right—the intention of which is to keep Algeria under domination—is still very active.

“General de Gaulle has spoken of self-determination, a principle which he cannot or does not want to apply, as has been proved by his attitude on the Melun talks . . .”

Tying the Algerian war to the presence of French military ‘training’ bases on Moroccan territory, sanctioned by the Government of H.M. Mohamed V until the end of 1963, the National Council of Popular Forces in Morocco asked

“. . . the Moroccan people to do its duty in conscience to set a term to the provocations and the insecurity stemming from the remaining of French troops in Morocco. There lies the only means to complete the country’s independence and to demonstrate in a concrete manner (our) solidarity with the Algerian revolution, which has become a symbol for the liberation of the whole of Africa.”

On the one side stand the North African liberation movements, ready to find some way of stimulating Western pressure upon France—whatever risks may have to be taken—or prepared to organize enlistment in the war on the side of the Algerian people in the firm belief that a united Arab Maghreb will be born at the same time as an independent Algeria.

On the other hand, the French Government supported by some of its Western allies remains exclusively concerned with maintaining the major part of its economic and military domination on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, securing the area from Eastern influence even if, in doing so, it must freeze the present main Maghreb shapes, carve up Algeria itself, and construct a precarious equilibrium on the co-existence of neo-colonialist and semi-feudal regimes.

Judging from the recent pattern of events, both combatants are bound to stiffen the stands they have taken.

The French Government itself is now faced by the following

alternative—maintaining an intransigence which may lead at last to a trial of force between the East and the West; or negotiating with the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic at the risk of provoking internal strife.

The people of the Maghreb and their authentic leaders are determined to prosecute the struggle for the fulfilment of their national aspirations, conscious of the support they are receiving—and will receive—from the irresistible surge towards liberation sweeping across Africa and the active assistance of all countries that value liberty.

The second All African Peoples Conference held at Tunis in January, 1960, as well as the second Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference held at Conakry in April of the same year, unanimously resolved to “reinforce the effective support of the Algerian people and to supply them with all means required for the attainment of their national independence”. Among the means recommended was the creation of a “volunteers’ corps for the Algerian Independence War” and the request to all independent African States to help in establishing this.

Further steps towards Algerian independence have been taken in the recent trip to Peking of an Algerian delegation headed by the President of the P.G.A.R., Ferhat Abbas, in the *de facto* recognition of this Government by the U.S.S.R., and in the renewed statements by both Moroccan popular forces and the Tunisian Government on the common destiny of the Maghreb people and their common struggle for a true independence. A united Maghreb is bound to be brought about in the very near future, by war if it is impossible to accomplish in peace.

A peaceful solution is not yet impossible, and it is made ever easier to reach by the support of the countries surrounding Algeria and by the development among the French people themselves of a strong current in favour of peace and co-operation on a basis of equality and mutual interest with the Maghreb and with the other countries of Africa. The Sino-Algerian press communiqué of October 5 states that

“ . . . The Government of China supports the Algerian people in its determination to pursue and reinforce its armed fight without, in its effort to recover national independence, ruling out negotiations on a basis of equality . . . ”

It cannot be denied that we want peace and co-operation. We want it as much as all the other peoples who have reconquered or are reconquering their independence. Our determination

only grows as we face the problems ahead of us: we must wipe out the ravages of poverty and plunder, catch up on centuries of backwardness in the building of a new society at the service of man and of progress.

In seeking a peaceful solution to the Algerian problem, two basic considerations are essential:

- (1) the satisfaction of the people's aspiration to full sovereignty, and
- (2) the safeguard of the interests of the French minority living in Algeria. This minority will have the choice, repeatedly pledged by the leaders of the P.G.A.R., between full integration in the new nation or its own free development as a foreign colony within the framework of Maghrebin institutions.

The prospect of co-operation with the Maghreb as a whole should facilitate such an agreement, all the more so because the independence of Morocco and Tunisia, although dating back to 1956, has still not been followed by true and open co-operation between these two countries and France.

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At the end of 1955, two courses were open to Morocco and Tunisia. They could pursue the struggle for independence by armed force on a common Maghreb front, using the weapon hammered out in the course of resistance to repression by the French Administration since 1951. Made up of the *fellaghas* in Tunisia, this was the resistance movement from which were later to spring the Liberation Army in Morocco and the F.L.N. with its Algerian Liberation Army. What the three traditional political movements of the Maghreb—the Neo Destour, the M.T.L.D.<sup>1</sup> and the Istiqlal—had been unable to achieve since they had signed their first Maghrebin Charter in May 1945, was accomplished by the working-class and peasant rank-and-file members of these movements, who took to direct action in protest against the shillyshallying of some of their traditional leaders, believing these to be bent on seeking some forms of compromise that would achieve the political shadow without harming their own economic substance. An extension of such activity would undoubtedly have led to the formation of concerted economic struggle under the leadership of a Maghrebin revolutionary organization.

<sup>1</sup>M.T.L.D.—'Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques'—Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms.

All those with substantial economic interests in North Africa, however, viewed with alarm the popular wave of revolution sweeping over the whole of the Maghreb, and they worked instead for the second course of compromise.

This second course brought about the Carthage Statement and Tunisia's internal autonomy, the La Celle-St. Cloud Statement, the return of the Sultan from exile in Madagascar and, finally, the proclamation of independence for Tunisia and Morocco.

Those of the Maghrebini revolutionaries who accepted the compromise believed that even an incomplete independence (where military and economic domination persisted) could be used to give more substantial and valuable support to the Algerian struggle, upon which France was likely to concentrate all its efforts.

After five years, however, we must admit that events have taken a very different course. Tunisia and Morocco, settling into their newly-acquired independence, tried to cope with all the different problems of their separate new political societies and found themselves caught by limitations on their freedom of action imposed by France.

Official help to Algeria was neither as large nor as efficient as those who had accepted compromise now expected it to be. It proved too difficult to build up the two new independent States along the lines proposed in 1955. True, in Tunisia the feudal political system was destroyed and replaced by a parliamentary democracy. But in Morocco, semi-feudalism, wary of a democratic and popular Algeria, has tried to impose its will on those popular forces who had given life to the whole liberation movement and who maintained a liberation army on the Sahara borders until May 1960.<sup>2</sup>

Economically, however, Morocco has made considerable progress in liberating itself and expanding its yields, while Tunisia is still heavily handicapped by the demands of the war in Algeria. And so, on either side of Algeria, the two new Sovereignities have come to a dead-end—mainly political in Morocco, and essentially economic in Tunisia. This is why we are witnessing today the awakened spirit of 1955, hearing once more demands for a common struggle to liberate and build in unity the whole of the Maghreb.

<sup>2</sup>This army was disbanded by former French officers, now in the Royal Army of Morocco, on the instructions of Prince Heir, during a police operation against the leaders of the U.N.F.P. at the beginning of 1960.

What is to be gained by such a struggle? Tunisia's chances of economic expansion depend finally upon it. For Morocco, it is imperative to the wiping out of all remaining feudal and colonial vestiges; it provides once more the possibility—as in 1953—to unite and mobilize all popular forces for the liberation of Algeria, the evacuation of French military bases,<sup>3</sup> the safeguard of democratic freedoms, and the election by universal suffrage of a constituent assembly mandated to control the decisions of the executive.

A common wish for unity exists in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and even Libya. A united Maghreb will surely therefore come, and its people alone will decide its political and economic institutions. It will not be a historical restoration, an attempt to recapture the past splendours of the Almoravid and Almohad Empires. It will turn to the future, fully conscious of its historical inheritance and of the rôle it should play in the Mediterranean area and on the African continent.

Its main task will be to solve the centuries-old problem of under-development, to ensure better living standards and to guarantee the growing of a new society, based on progress and justice in the service of peace and of humanity. There are those who would deny to the Maghreb this opportunity. So deep is the urge towards unity among its peoples, so deep the desire to serve and to enjoy, that no such denial will for long be endured.

<sup>3</sup>The Agreement allowing French military bases to remain until the end of 1963 on Moroccan territory in the form of "training" centres, signed on September 1, 1960, between the Royal Cabinet and the French Ambassador, M. Parodi, was denounced on October 21, 1960, by the National Council of the U.N.F.P., which considers:—“that the continued presence of these bases is not only an infringement of our dignity and national sovereignty, but also practical help given by our country to the French army in the colonial war it is waging in Algeria”; —that “to prolong by three years the presence of French bases constitutes a danger to the Arab Maghreb, as this span of time corresponds to that considered necessary by the French army to put an end to the Algerian revolution”; and —that “the consecration of this state of affairs in law contradicts our national aspirations and the principle of united Arab Maghreb”.