



Libya:

A People on the Alert

The military coup in Libya, which proclaimed the Republic on September 1, 1969, awakened a feeling of expectation throughout the world and a noticeable degree of unrest among US European circles linked to oil investments.

US and British concern over the fate of their respective oil investments and military bases in Libya has also grown as the Libyan military regime (Council of the Revolution) outlines its policy, a national, pan-Arabic policy in support of the cause of Palestinian liberation.

Much of this unrest is based on the interests that several dozens of foreign oil cartels—which exploit 70 percent of the territory—have in Libya. Through the years, some 40 foreign combines, headed by US, British, Italian, and West German companies, have obtained exclusive rights to oil exploitation.

The other aspect of the question is purely strategic and has to do with the

existence of the Wheelus Field Base (US) and those in Tobruk, Aden, Derna, and Benghazi (British). These large-scale military fortifications in southern Africa are aimed not only against the Maghreb and the interior of the continent, but also against the Mediterranean in the event of a war.

The US base at Wheelus Field, near Tripoli, is an air and naval complex valued at over 100 million dollars. There are some 140 000 persons working there, and the base includes the largest US military camp on foreign soil. Also included on the base are NATO's main airfields and the vital center of supply and protection for the Sixth Fleet.

The expiration date for the agreement giving the United States the right to the site for its base was set for 1970, while that of the British fortifications was set for 1971. Nevertheless, while the now overthrown King Idris remained in power, both the United States and England were confident that a comfortable extension would be granted in due time.

Going back to the economic aspect of the question, we find that by 1971 Libya will have become the world's third greatest oil-producing country, after the United States and the USSR. In 1968 Libya's oil production was 125 million tons, and this year's production is expected to be 150 million.

With the monarchy in power, international cartels had an excellent opportunity to make even greater profits. To this end, the imperialist sectors counted on King Idris, the monarch of a country in which the organization of political parties, trade unions, and student unions was prohibited.

Since the overthrow of King Idris, however, the situation is no longer so attractive for foreign interests in Libya. To begin with, there is growing apprehension among foreign consortiums that the agreements may be altered and similar substantial changes made in connection with the royalties which have to be paid for oil prospecting and exploiting concessions—especially after the new Libyan Prime Minister, Mahmoud Souleiman Al Maghrebi, stated, "We exercise tight control over the activities of the oil companies."

Al Maghrebi also predicted that all future agreements would be to the benefit of the people, which could very well be interpreted as an indication that his Government will demand higher royalties. Some sources have already voiced the opinion that the Council of the Revolution of Libya aims to demand a higher price for the nation's crude oil so as to raise additional revenue.

If the statements in connection with the raising of the royalties produced apprehension, Al Maghrebi's declarations to the London daily *The Observer* concerning military enclaves in Libya was also cause for serious consideration in both Washington and London.

In his statements to *The Observer* the Libyan Prime Minister also said that the people "reject the presence of foreign military bases on their territory, and we will heed the people's wishes." He added that, once the agreements expire, there will be no extensions. Shortly after these statements were made, the first conspirators in league with the US Government were arrested; several opposition elements were caught by security agents in the act of picking up US-made weapons at the Wheelus Field Base.

In the face of such evident signs of sedition, the Libyan Government decided to apply a number of "vigilance" measures. A military committee was set up for the purpose of controlling personnel and vehicular traffic in and out of the US air and naval complex.

The new conditions, which have led the Western powers to fear the possibility that they may lose their concessions in Libya, have also prompted them to start conspiratorial activities. Without a doubt, these activities will find fertile soil for development in other sectors, such as the fifth column represented by foreign technicians and specialists, leeches who live in that country only because of the fat salaries they are paid and who are completely unmoved by the people's standard of living and even less interested in the future of the nation. It is estimated that there are from 30 000 to 40 000 Italians and from 10 000 to 15 000 Anglo-Saxons in the country.

Attempts have been made—and will continue to be made—to utilize these foreign technicians in subversive activities. Only two weeks after the Council of the Revolution was installed in Tripoli, the foreign specialists attempted a mass exodus with the obvious intention of throwing a monkey wrench into the nation's economic, administrative, and productive activities.

In turn, the Government, instead of becoming frightened and giving in, issued a decree which prohibits foreign technicians from leaving the country until they have fulfilled their contracts.

Independently of other adverse factors, the large number of foreign technicians holding key posts constitutes one of the serious threats that hovers over the young Republic of Libya, since it is practically impossible to replace these technicians at present in the required numbers by skilled native technicians loyal to the Republic.

This situation is the result of the negative policy pursued by the deposed monarchy with regard to education—considered an element for social agitation—and of the fact that King Idris was completely opposed to the entry into Libya of Arab immigrants from neighboring countries, as he wanted to keep more educated or politicized Arab immigrants from being assimilated—which would have occurred readily, as a result of their speaking the same language and practicing the same religion—and disseminating among the native population a more advanced concept of social problems and of how to tackle them.

Another potentially subversive element which neocolonialism will seek to utilize in its activities aimed at undermining the Libyan Government will be that of stirring up tribal differences in Libya—evident in the federal status the nation had until 1963—to produce territorial splits.

Until now, the country has been divided into three provinces: Tripolitania, in the northeast; Fezzan, in the southwest; and Cyrenaica, bordering the United Arab Republic, in the east. Cyrenaica, the most backward and primitive region, is where the main oil fields are located. This is the region of King Idris' origin where he has the strongest influence over the tribal chiefs, because of his being both temporal monarch and foremost religious chief of the Senoussou Islamic sect, founded by his father.



Tripolitania —the Government's administrative seat— is the urban business center. Oil resources have little importance in this region.

Such an uneven distribution of the oil wealth may easily be exploited by the deposed monarch —a tool in the hands of the Western powers— to use agents to incite the nomad tribes to bring about a division of the country in case of a progressive radicalization of the Libyan military regime's nationalist measures. The example of Nigeria, despite its distinguishing characteristics, is an illustration of this.

Even though imperialism has these means at its disposal, the Libyan Government can call on what appear to be even more effective countermeasures.

With the September coup d'état, Libya emerged on the scene as the fourth link in the chain joining three of the most progressive Arab states in Africa —Algeria, the United Arab Republic, and Sudan— which certainly will not stand idly by in case of internal subversion promoted in Libya by the Western powers, or of direct intervention —from which the imperialists will not shrink when other measures fail to bring results, especially when 150 million tons of oil, 5 000 million dollars in investments, and several major military bases are at stake, to say nothing of what the possible overall loss would mean for the preservation of US-British economic and military hegemony in the Mediterranean, which assumed increased importance following the closing of the Suez Canal as a result of the June 1967 war.