MEMORANDUM

TO: Foreign Affairs Department
FROM: Paris Office
SUBJ: North African Situation

The position of moderate North African leaders such as the Sultan of Morocco and Premier Habib Bourguiba of Tunis has been made much more difficult, in the last month, for two reasons:

First, and more important, was the French kidnapping of five Algerian leaders who were in a Moroccan government plane on their way to a meeting with the Sultan and Bourguiba in Tunis, at the end of October. This created powerful anti-French feeling in both countries, and gave rise to the conviction that one could not trust the French even among those elements which, until then, had been most ardently advocating the necessity for cooperation with the French and Western powers. It led directly to killing of Europeans in the Meknes area of Morocco, with the consequence that French colonials and administrators in that area no longer want to remain. It resulted in the almost immediate appointment of a completely Istiqlal-party dominated Moroccan cabinet, although the Sultan had been maneuvering and delaying for months in the hope of avoiding such a step, and had been trying to keep in office a national coalition body of all parties and independent groups. Tension and bitterness in both Tunisia and Morocco reached a peak, since the kidnapping was taken as a direct insult both to the Sultan and Bourguiba, and it was only with considerable difficulty that both governments managed to keep their people under control. In both lands, too, the French kidnapping gave currency to the thesis put forth by Moslem extremists that the French wanted not only to beat down the Algerian rebellion but, also, later to use Algeria as an eventual jumping-off place for trying to reconquer Tunisia and Morocco.

The Israeli-French-British action in the Middle East tended to strengthen this conviction further -- for many Moroccans and Tunisians saw an analogy between their own situation and that of Nasser in Egypt where, in their view, the British and French had used the first available opportunity to move into an independent Moslem country. Public emotion, while strong, did not reach the
climax occasioned by the kidnapping of the Algerian leaders. In the first place, Morocco and Tunisia themselves were not directly affected, as they had been by the kidnapping. Secondly, it is no secret that both the Sultan and Bourguiba have had no great love for Nasser and some of his policies. Both Moroccans and Tunisians have visions of becoming the leading power in an eventual North African federation, a united Maghreb. Nasser's claim to pan-Arab leadership is thus a source of competition; and other North African leaders dislike Nasser's appeal to their own masses, which often forces them into positions they would rather avoid. Both the Sultan and Bourguiba felt constrained to issue statements in support of Egypt, but these were relatively moderately worded and were probably made with some reluctance.

Both the kidnapping of the Algerians and the Middle East crisis have given great impulse to the already-strong feeling of unity among the three North African lands — Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. This is reflected, for instance, in Moroccan Premier Si Bekkai's open pledge of support to the Algerian revolutionaries; and Tunis is now considered an open capital of Algerian independence leadership. Certainly, Western influence has received a damaging blow, mitigated only by the United States stand in the United Nations. Recent events have made much more difficult the working out of any satisfactory terms of cooperation between the French and North African lands. For the West, there remains one major, important asset: both Morocco and Tunisia are in critical need of economic aid. Both are determined that this aid shall not become another means for colonizing them, however; any nation giving aid must recognize this desire, or see its help rejected. To date, in Morocco and Tunisia, the Soviet Union and the Communists do not seem to have made progress with the government leaders despite their vigorous action in favor of Nasser, events in Hungary acting as an antidote. The Moslem masses, on the other hand, get their facts and a good part of their opinions from the Cairo radio, and so pro-Soviet feeling can be assumed to have been strengthened among them.

For North African countries, the critical area is still Algeria, not the Middle East. The moderate leaders of Tunisia and Morocco have been insisting for months, first privately and then more and more publicly, that the French would have to negotiate and come to a settlement in Algeria, and quickly, or else their own positions would become impossible. Now, the moderates in Morocco and Tunisia are turning to open support of the Algerian nationalists, despairing of the French, and they hope that the United Nations and world opinion will help in settling the Algerian question. L'Action, the weekly of the leading Tunisian party, the Neo Destour, sums the situation up as follows, in an editorial of November 19:

"Sincerely, we wished to establish peace between France and Algeria. Sincerely, too, we wanted to launch the idea of a French-North African ensemble, based on independence and cooperation..."
We did not count... alas, on the kidnapping of Algerian nationalist chief Ben Bella, followed by the aggression against Egypt, which put a brutal end to our hopes and projects. Worse, it tore up the contract of French-Tunisian friendship...

"Nonetheless, the massacre in Hungary, the war in Algeria and the aggression against Egypt have given rise in us and in all small countries not only to horror, but, also, to hope. Hope that the United Nations will be strengthened, and that the small countries will stand shoulder to shoulder... Only an international force can check the law of the jungle... It is unthinkable that the arm of the UN should act in Egypt and not intervene in Algeria. It will be grave for the UN's prestige to permit the Algerian abscess to rot away the flank of North Africa..."

Of all the North African countries, it was only in Libya that the Middle East crisis resulted in any overt action being taken by the public against local Jews; while some hooligans took advantage of the situation in some southern Moroccan villages and towns. There were reports of some rioting in the business section of Tripoli -- where very many of the shops along the main business street are owned by Jews -- with some wrecking and pillaging of Jewish shops, and two Jews hurt. No anti-Jewish action was reported from Algeria. In one south Moroccan town four Moslems used the occasion as an excuse to enter the Mellah and rape the prettiest of the Jewish women; in another, a Jew was kidnapped, beaten up, and held for 250,000 francs ransom, after which he was released. To the great credit of the Moroccan and Tunisian governments, however, there were no manifestations of any kind against Jews in those countries. Indeed, the governments of both nations took very positive action to control popular emotion, both with regard to Algeria and to the Middle East crisis. Just after the Israeli invasion of Egypt and on the eve of a general Moslem-world strike called for November 1st in commemoration of the date when the nationalist uprising started in Algeria, Bourguiba issued an appeal for calm. It was reported by AJC's correspondent in Tunisia that the Tunis Hara (i.e., the Jewish ghetto section) was given particular police protection after the Israeli entry into Egypt. Immediately after the Israeli action, Istiqlal leaders in Morocco made it clear that they were "putting on the brakes" even though they warned that "sometimes brakes break," according to reports in French newspapers. AJC's European Office was informed confidentially by the U.S. Embassy in Paris that it had received word from Mr. William Porter, Charge d'Affaires in Rabat, to the effect that the Sultan was well aware of possible danger to the Jews in Morocco, and that he was insisting on the need for a clear distinction between Moroccan Jews and Israelis, and that no harm should come to any of his subjects.

Recent events were naturally a cause of considerable concern to all the Jewish communities in North Africa. The reaction of the Jewish community in Morocco and that in Tunisia, however, was quite different. In Tunisia, the Jewish community leaders rode out the
storm and continued normally about their business. The position of the Moslem leaders of Tunisia is that they consider Jews as all other Tunisians and part of the Tunisian collectivity, they clearly distinguish between Tunisian Jews and Israeli Jews. Indeed, one of the reasons given for closing down a leading Tunisian newspaper, La Presse (owned by a Parisian Jew of Algerian origin, Mr. Smadja, who is also the publisher of the Parisian daily Combat), was that La Presse had been giving tendentious information tending to disrupt Moslem-Jewish harmony in Tunisia. At the same time, these Moslems likewise appreciate that the great mass of Tunisian Jewry has strong attachments to Israel. Naturally, the Jewish community did not emphasize this attachment in recent days in any overt manner; but neither did it deny it. Tunisian asperity at this state of affairs did not go much further than the comment by a columnist in L’Action that a current issue of the French-language magazine Match had sold out immediately on arriving in Tunis. "Of course," he said, "the magazine had most interesting pictures about the revolution in Hungary - but it also carried on its front cover a full-page photograph of General Moshe Dayan of the Israeli Army."

The Tunisian Jewish community leaders, then, have remained silent and simply have gone about their normal community business: Only this week, on November 20, they issued a communique to Jewish press agencies asserting that "The national office of the Council of Jewish Communities of Tunisia, composed of several community presidents, had just met to consider present difficult financial problems of the Jewish communities and have advanced useful measures to remedy this situation, with government help and solicitude."

In Morocco, however, the most important of the local Jewish communities, that of Casablanca, adopted a different attitude after recent events. First, some background about the composition of the Casablanca community council is necessary to understand what occurred. One of the effects of the fight last year in the Council of Jewish Communities of Morocco was to split completely the Casablanca Jewish Community Council. A number of Casablanca community leaders resigned from the Council, furthermore, on receiving threats which ostensibly came from a Moroccan terrorist organization but which probably were inspired by Jews who were opposed to the old council, on the grounds that it was not properly Moroccan-nationalist oriented. Be that as it may, the result was that only a rump council of a few members was left, with the President and the Vice-President having resigned. After several months of inter-communal acrimony as to the status of the old group, the Moroccan governor of the Casablanca region, Si Bargash, appointed a new community council. Though some of the old-timers protested this (actually, because they were affiliated with the Democratic Party of Independence, and because the new council was completely Istiqlal-dominated, rather than for any reasons arising out of Jewish concern) the matter was ended when the Sultan received the new council last September.

The new Casablanca council, headed by David Benazaref, pledged itself to work toward awakening "national consciousness" among the
members of the Jewish community. Recent events made it clear what was meant by this. After the opening of Israeli-Egyptian hostilities, Mr. Benazaref sent a telegram to the Moroccan Premier, Si Bekkai, stating that Moroccan Jews were of the unanimous opinion that "aggression against the independence and integrity of Egypt also menaces the independence of our country. The Committee solemnly declares that it approves the protest of the Sultan and his Government" against the attack on Egypt. The telegram added: "The war imposed on the Egyptian people is not a religious war between Moslems and Jews but war between Egypt and other nations." It ended by requesting the Moroccan Minister of Information to make a distinction between Jews and Israelis in official communiques.

Actually, however, according to reports received from Casablanca, even the Istiqlal-dominated new council was sharply split over whether such a statement should be issued. The nationalist extremists won this fight; but to be on the safe side asked Casablanca Governor Si Bargash to check their statement before they issued it. According to rather reliable reports from Morocco, Governor Bargash told the Jewish community leaders that they should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and actually edited the statement they had prepared to make it weaker. Aside from Casablanca, no local Jewish community group made any statement; and the Central Council of Jewish Communities, while still in existence legally, has shown no signs of life of any kind since last February. Recently Mr. Benazaref resigned as President of the Casablanca Jewish Community. Opposition to his statement may have been one of the causes for this resignation; on the other hand, it may have been due rather to the fact that he has just been appointed a member of the Consultative Council just established by the Sultan.

The establishment of a National Consultative Council was promised by the Sultan of Morocco to his people many months ago. This National Consultative Council, appointed by the Sultan, is seen as the forerunner of an eventual Moroccan parliament. The 76 members of the Council - carefully chosen so as to assure regional representation and representation of different classes of Moroccan social life - the liberal professions, the trades, religious and cultural institutions, etc. - first met on November 12. The President of the new body is the "hard man" of the Istiqlal Party, Mehdi Ben Barka, Declared the Sultan in his opening address: "The Council is destined to permit the people to manage its public affairs within the framework of a constitutional monarchy; will establish an authentic national and constructive democracy in Morocco in conformity with the egalitarian principles of our religion and of our national traditions which have known no other political regime than that of religion, founded on justice and respect for the human person." This statement would make it appear that the separation between religion and state may not be too clear in the new Morocco. On various occasions, the Sultan has shown some reluctance to relinquish any of
his prestige and power as both the religious and temporal head of
the Moroccan state.

There are five Jews among the 76 members of the National
Consultative Council. In addition to Mr. Benazaref, there is Mr.
Joe O'Hana of Casablanca, who has been influential in the Party for
Democratic Independence but who previously had little to do with
Jewish community life; Mr. Lucien Bensimon, a businessman of Casas-
blanca; Mr. Jacques Elkaim, a lawyer from Rabat; and Mr. Ben Sabat,
a virtually unknown rabbi from Larache in the Spanish Zone of
Morocco, as the religious representative of the community.

It is thus clear that none of the old-time Jewish leaders of
the Jewish communities of Morocco have been called upon to serve,
but only those who have pronounced Moroccan nationalist tendencies.

It should be noted that in the recent shifts of the Moroccan
government cabinet, during which the Istiqlal asserted its complete
domination, Dr. Leon Benzaquen, a member of the original coalition
cabinet appointed by the Sultan in December 1955, retains his post
as Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone.

It is still too early to presage what kind of permanent
Moroccan governmental system will be advocated by the National Con-
sultative Council.

In Tunisia, our correspondent met with Mr. Ahmed Ben Salah,
the prominent labor leader who is also head of the constituent as-
sembly. Our correspondent was assured by Mr. Ben Salah that the
constitution now being elaborated by various commissions of the
constituent assembly would be in full harmony with the U.N. Decla-
ration of Human Rights. Mr. Ben Salah also told our correspondent
that he expected that a draft constitution would be submitted to the
assembly at the end of November or the first few days in December
and that this draft would be distributed to the deputies of the
constituent assembly before discussion in the assembly itself. (It
will be remembered that there was some criticism of the fact that
the first and only three articles already adopted of the Tunisian
constitution were presented to the assembly without having been
previously seen by the delegates.) The constituent assembly will,
also, give three readings of each of the articles of the draft con-
stitution. Our correspondent was invited by Mr. Ben Salah to submit
any suggestions he might have when the drafts become known.

Mass emigration from Morocco, as you are well aware, was
halted after the departure of more than 6,000 persons who were in
the camp along the Casablanca-Mazagan road, this movement being
finished by the middle of September. Theoretically, there are no
restrictions on individual emigration from Morocco, and United HIAS
has continued to operate for migrants who are going to countries
other than Israel, hoping to increase the number of people it is serving as a result of recent agreements concluded with the Canadian government, which will make more visas available.

Migration to Israel has not ceased. Jewish Agency sources here are reluctant to give any figure whatsoever, but will only say that the movement is low.

In Tunisia, however, the government took steps on November 8 to end mass migration which had been continuing until then. Almost 900 people left Tunisia last month. Reports we have received about the precise action of the Tunisian government conflict to date. Our own sources say that the offices of the Agency were closed down on November 8. The Agency people say that the only difference now is that the Tunisian government will not permit the Agency to present a group of visa applications at the same time, as it has done in the past, but now insists on processing each visa separately, although the Agency personnel may still help the individual to prepare his visa application. This obviously can lead to administrative delays in visa application at any time the Tunisian government is so minded on administrative excuse grounds that would be difficult to argue against. At the same time, it is reported, the persons filing the applications cannot list Israel as their destination, which again can be a source of complication. It is still too early to see what the effects of these new measures will be. Certainly, however, Tunisia is, in fact, approaching in a gentler and more dignified way the position taken by the Moroccan government in making mass movement impossible.

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Algeria

In Algeria the kidnapping of the five leaders of the National Liberation Front has, for the nonce, taken off the pressure on the Jewish community. This arose when the National Liberation Front sent letters to Jewish community leaders in which they were told that the Jewish Community of Algeria must choose between France and Algeria, and in which they were exhorted to act as good Algerians. In the excitement that ensued after the kidnapping, the Jewish community leaders simply decided not to make any response whatsoever, publicly or privately, to the FLN request for the Jewish community to take a public position. Thus far, there have been no repercussions of any kind; the FLN is probably too busy with its own internal troubles at this stage to worry about the Jewish position. This does not mean, however, that the question cannot be expected to come up in the future.

In the meantime, the FLN has issued a charter of the revolution. As published in the Tunisian newspaper, El Amal, of November 11, 1956, this charter asserted in a section entitled "Purpose: National Independence:"
"1. By the institution of an Algerian state endowed with a personality and with social democracy within the framework of Islamic principles.

"2. By respect of all fundamental liberties without distinction of race or religious belief."

Further on in this document, in taking up the question of nationality, the charter says:

"All Frenchmen who desire to remain in Algeria will have the choice between their original nationality (and the Algerian nationality). In the first case they will be considered as foreigners by the law unless they should accede to Algerian nationality. In this case, they would be considered as Algerians and would have the rights and duties thereof."

This position is particularly important insofar as the Jews of Algeria are concerned, inasmuch as almost all of them are French citizens.

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Libya

The Libyan government has been one of the most ardent supporters of Nasser’s Egypt, and this is fully reflected in the position of the small Jewish community there, of perhaps three to four thousand. A confidential letter reaching Paris gives the following picture:

"The situation of our religious brethren in this country is today in a most critical moral and material state.

"Independently of the measure taken by the Libyan government prohibiting any Jewish native from returning to the country when he has left it, there are also financial measures which are applied. This, in addition to boycott of foreign firms dealing with Israel, shipping companies which make port in Israel are put on a Libyan government index. German firms must sign an agreement that the monies they take out of the country will not wind up as Israeli reparations payments.

"A special office has been created in Tripoli not only to carry out these controls but also to check on the stocks held by Tripoli merchants, without distinction of religion, and to confiscate stocks which bear any indication whatsoever similar to the Star of David.

"The Council of the (Jewish) Community has tried on several occasions to contact the Libyan government with a view to asking for an explanation or amelioration of this measure, but the government has always found some pretext for delaying an audience."
"It should be pointed out, furthermore, that the Community treasury depends on receipts from the taxes on (kosher) meat and wine, on cemetery and synagogue fees, etc... However, the income is always less by several million (probably lire) than the expenses needed to take care of the persons who are a charge on the Community. The Community, therefore, has habitually met its deficit by imposing individual contributions on rich Jewish notables of Tripoli. The authorization of the government is needed for this, however. (Note: The Jewish Community of Tripoli was organized according to Italian law affecting the structure and rights of the Jewish communities in Italy, where the government enforces Jewish community taxing of its members, up to a certain percentage of income.) The Libyan government has never been willing to give such authorization, however, despite the pressing and sometimes desperate requests of the Council of the Community."

The letter then went on to describe how the Community had had to cut down on certain of its services, notably on canteen facilities for feeding some 300 children in different schools. The letter concludes:

"According to reliable information furnished by people coming from Libya, the situation has become worse since recent developments in the Middle East... A bomb was thrown into a Jewish shop, causing serious damage, and wounding father and son, the owners.

"This situation has created an understandable fear psychosis, forcing the merchants to remain on the alert continually. They keep their shops closed (almost) all day, but it is forbidden not to open shop without some raison majeure."

Attempts of a representative of the European Office of the AJC to get a visa to enter Libya have thus far proven unsuccessful, but continued effort is being made.

cc: Dr. Slawson
Mr. Frankel