

French President Sarkozy visits Morocco

By Alex Lantier
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On October 22-24, French President Nicolas Sarkozy travelled to Morocco on an official state visit to King Mohammed V. Accompanied by 70 top French business executives, Sarkozy confirmed several billion dollars worth of contracts for French firms in Morocco. He also promoted plans for a “Mediterranean Union” that would bring together France, a few other European nations, and the states of the Maghreb.

Morocco has emerged as a major cheap-labour platform for European manufacturers, as well as a commercial trans-shipment point for goods from all around the world passing through the Straits of Gibraltar. Moroccans’ knowledge of French has also led French banking and call-centre firms to set up service operations in Morocco. France is Morocco’s largest trading partner for both imports and exports, controlling more than 60 percent of foreign direct investment in Morocco.

Morocco also has close political ties to the US, from whom it purchases much of its weaponry. Sarkozy’s visit, therefore, had to a large extent the character of a trade tour, competing to secure deals and contracts for French firms.

During Sarkozy’s visit, the Moroccan government agreed to a 2 billion euro contract for the French construction firm Alstom—whose CEO Patrick Kron travelled to Morocco with Sarkozy—to build a TGV (high-speed train) line between Tangier and Casablanca. It also agreed to purchase a 500 million euro FREMM (Frégate Multi-Mission) warship from French shipyards in Lorient, for delivery in 2012.

The French nuclear energy firm Areva’s CEO, Anne Lauvergeon, reportedly signed a contract for mining and prospecting phosphates and uranium in Morocco. French officials and Areva management also participated in talks on building a civilian nuclear reactor in Morocco, near Marrakech. This is part of a larger initiative by Areva and the French government to

sell nuclear reactors to North African countries. According to *Libération*, such reactors were offered to Algeria and Libya in July 2007.

The French aviation firm Dassault, however, suffered a significant setback, as Morocco chose to buy US F-16 fighter planes instead of Dassault’s new Rafale jets.

Sarkozy reserved his major policy speech for his October 23 visit to the Tanger-Med I port complex. Built by French construction contractor Bouygues, which is competing for the contract to build an adjoining Tanger-Med II complex, the port is slated to host a major Renault-Nissan factory, producing 200,000 vehicles in 2010 and 400,000 by 2012. French shipping company CGA-CGM owns a 40 percent stake in the company developing the Tanger-Med II terminal.

In Tangier, Sarkozy repeated his calls for the construction of a “Mediterranean Union,” which would bring together France, certain selected European countries (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece), and the states of the Maghreb.

Besides calls for corporate collaboration, there was little substance in Sarkozy’s plans. Sarkozy’s call for a “struggle against inequality and for justice, without which there can be no peace” rings quite hollow, as he is preparing major reductions in the pension and social security rights of French workers. Simultaneously, he has granted himself a 140 percent pay raise, to 240,000 euros per year—more than 10 times the median salary in France.

On immigration—a key issue in Morocco, as more than 500,000 Moroccans live in France—Sarkozy cynically called for “man’s freedom to circulate to be built together.” How precisely Sarkozy would build immigrants’ “freedom” has become quite clear in recent months. He plans to recruit only skilled workers via a “selected immigration,” and to enforce humiliating conditions such as DNA tests on those who would try to rejoin their relatives in France. His

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Minister, Brice Hortefeux, now regularly pressures local officials to carry out mass round-ups of illegal immigrants.

French Justice Minister Rachida Dati—whose father is a Moroccan immigrant—traveled with Sarkozy to Morocco, drawing up plans with Moroccan justice officials to fight illegal immigration to France through Morocco.

The issue of immigration is symbolic of the Moroccan elite's fear of the region's population. The establishment daily *Le Matin* published an October 28 editorial by Ikbal Sayah stating that, to keep up with population growth, the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean had to “create 40 million jobs by 2025, so that economic growth rates in the region would have to double to reach 6, even 7 percent annually.” It added that given “the failure of US armed unilateralism,” the region had to rely on “European-Mediterranean partnerships” to resolve “the major challenges facing the region.”

Morocco faces these challenges in a particularly acute form. The CIA World Factbook lists per capita GDP as US\$4,600—only 60 percent of that of neighbouring Algeria, and 52 percent of Tunisia's figure. Its overall literacy rate is 52 percent, including only 40 percent of women. Much of Moroccan agriculture, which still employs more than 40 percent of the population, is rain-fed—i.e., non-irrigated—and crop yields are highly dependent on the weather. In 1995, after a harsh drought, wheat and barley yields collapsed by more than 80 percent.

The most remarkable portions of Sarkozy's speech, especially in light of US President Bush's recent comments about the possibility of World War III, were his musings about a possible large-scale war between Christian Europe to the north and Muslim Africa to the south.

He urged the Mediterranean countries to “put all their hearts into building the Mediterranean Union, because what is in play is absolutely decisive for the equilibrium of the world.... In the Mediterranean, it will be decided whether or not civilisations and religions will fight the most terrible of wars [and] whether the North and the South will confront each other.... Here we will win everything or we will lose everything.”

Sarkozy's basic attitude towards the Moroccan

people was perhaps best illustrated by his particularly vile paean to General Hubert Lyautey, France's Resident-General in Morocco from 1912 to 1925. In Sarkozy's upside-down world, Lyautey had “no other objective...besides protecting the Moroccan people, because he loved them and respected them.”

In fact, Lyautey, who had directed French imperialism's conquest of Madagascar in 1897, orchestrated the final French takeover of Morocco in 1907 by seizing on the murder of a French doctor, Emile Mauchamp, in Marrakech, as a pretext to disembark French troops waiting in warships offshore. French forces in Morocco fought continuously against mutinies and insurgencies under Lyautey's rule.

The imperialist character of French plans for a Mediterranean Union was tacitly acknowledged by the French daily *Le Monde*, which titled its editorial on the matter “Mare Nostrum,” Latin for “our sea”—the name given to the Mediterranean by the Roman Empire, and more famously adopted by Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini before World War II. *Le Monde* also drew attention, however, to powerful opposition to Sarkozy's plans in the EU: “Will the absence of the British, the Germans, the Scandinavians, etc., guarantee the success of this Union?”

The Mediterranean Union initiative is, in fact, directed in one way or another against the economic and political plans of several of France's major rivals inside the EU. The initiative also serves to shield Paris from accusations of anti-Muslim bias in the face of its opposition to Turkish entry into the European Union, favoured by Great Britain.

The move is even more directly aimed at Germany. By making more cheap North African labour available to French companies, it seeks to narrow the economic advantage afforded to the German bourgeoisie by its greater investment in cheap-labour areas of eastern Europe. North Africa's oil and gas, notably in Algeria, also provide an alternative to imports from Russia, with which Germany has close energy ties.

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