

THE KIDNAPING CASTS ITS SHADOW

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THE October 29 abduction in Paris of Mehdi Ben Barka, 45-year-old leader of the Moroccan *Union nationale des forces populaires* (UNFP), has not yet had its full impact on politics in either Morocco or France. The French Government has charged Rabat with complicity in the affair and has issued international warrants for the arrest of three high Moroccan officials: Minister of Interior Mohammed Oufkir, the chief of the National Police, Major Ahmed Dlimi, and the chief of the Secret Special Police Brigade, Larbi Miloud Chtouki. Since these men are trusted appointees of King Hassan II and subject to his royal control and supervision, the integrity of the monarchy itself has by implication been challenged.

President de Gaulle is embarrassed by public evidence that he does not fully control his own police and intelligence services. He is irritated by disclosures of unsavory underworld connections in his regime uncomfortably reminiscent of the scandal that rocked the Fourth Republic and infuriated by the affront to French sovereignty which the kidnaping entailed. He has shaken up the French police system, fired the general who headed the *Service de documentation extérieur et de contre-espionnage*—the French equivalent of the CIA—and dismissed an underling implicated directly in the case. The intelligence agency itself has been brought under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Defense, whose activities de Gaulle monitors personally.

Both countries recalled their ambassadors on January 23-24, but they have avoided a complete break. Morocco will apparently continue to receive about \$100,000,000 in financial aid yearly from France, and about 100,000 French businessmen, technicians, and school teachers will remain in Morocco, at least for the time being. Considerable credit for averting a rupture belongs to Ahmed Rheda Guedira, a former minister and Hassan's onetime Man Friday. (See

"Hassan's Morocco," by Stuart Schaar, *Africa Report*, July 1965.) His experience in negotiating with French officialdom in behalf of the royal palace played a significant role in mollifying de Gaulle and retaining French aid. In time Guedira may be rewarded for his skill and loyalty to the throne with an important ambassadorial post, or a portfolio in some future Moroccan government.

One asks, however, whether General de Gaulle's decision to go on supporting the shaky Moroccan economy was influenced as much by Guedira's silken diplomacy as it was by Hassan's knowledge of official French involvement in the case. If more evidence comes to light, perhaps in a public trial of some of the participants, the rift in Franco-Moroccan relations would almost certainly grow. Opposition elements in both countries, and friends of Ben Barka throughout the world, are waiting for explanations.

Two Hypotheses

In their own ways, both Rabat and Paris have been procrastinating in solving the crime. Despite President de Gaulle's intervention and his promises to get at the facts in the case, many of the charges remain unanswered, including those against the three Moroccan officials. Several actors in the drama have managed to leave France or slip into hiding. A key organizer of the crime, Georges Figon, conveniently "committed suicide" just as the police were preparing to arrest him in his apartment. Another suspect initially found sanctuary in Morocco and was apparently even questioned by the Moroccan police, only to vanish. As a result, many observers wonder whether they will ever know what really happened to Mehdi Ben Barka.

One thing seems clear: if, by chance, Ben Barka is still alive, the engineers of his kidnaping will not allow him to reappear. He has caused enough scandals, and his resurrection would cause more heads to roll in both France and Morocco.

The exile in Paris

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