

Nigeria: the plan for disintegration

by Mark Burdman

A scenario for splintering Nigeria into feuding ethnic-tribal blocs was set into motion during the last weeks of 1980, thanks in large part to the meddling into Nigerian affairs by Libya's Col. Muammar Qaddafi.

Qaddafi and his agents have recently funded and instigated regionalist, secessionist sentiment among various of the Muslim-populated states in Nigeria's north. Qaddafi's actions, in conjunction with those of the intelligence agencies of several nations, created the preconditions for the outbreak of the worst civil unrest in Nigeria since that country's tragic and bloody late-1960s civil war. The shockwaves of this unrest are now reaching out into other parts of Nigeria and are raising the spectre that Nigeria's venture into American-modeled federalism will collapse and that the country will again sink into chaos.

If Nigeria disintegrates, the repercussions will be profound throughout Africa: Nigeria is the most populous nation in black Africa, and is a major global energy producer. Its political fate is watched with great interest by its neighbors, who will be hard pressed to contain the spread of Dark Ages tribalism if Nigeria collapses.

Sect on rampage in Kano

On Dec. 29, the Nigerian Third Infantry Brigade, equipped with machine guns, armored cars, mortars, and shells, forcefully suppressed an uprising in the city of Kano by a Muslim fundamentalist cult, which had taken 65 people hostage. In the fighting between the federal armed forces and the cult's fanatics, 400 to 500 people were killed.

For two weeks before the Third Brigade intervention, the cult—variously identified as Yen Izala, Yen Awaki, and al-Masifu by Nigerian sources—had committed an estimated 500 murders, both individual acts of murder and killings carried out during riotous rampages throughout Kano.

According to sources in Nigeria's capital city of Lagos, the murders were carried out in classical fundamentalist cult format: victims, labeled "infidels" by the cultists, were slain with primitive bow-and-arrow or

dagger-and-sword weaponry, after which their bodies were hacked into little pieces. At the same time, market areas of Kano were ravaged by the fanatics.

Although the savagery of the Kano killings shocked many Nigerian observers, their occurrence was not entirely unexpected. During Nigeria's 1979 national election campaigns, charges were made by several Nigerian journals and politicians that Kano was the one state in Nigeria that was receiving Libyan money to influence the outcome of the elections. Colonel Qaddafi's fanatical propaganda was able to make some headway in Kano because the predominant Peoples' Redemption Party bases its appeal on a pseudo-mystical "popular revolution" ideology not dissimilar to Qaddafi's own Jacobin preachings. The state also has many Muslim sects and grouplets with a mystical doctrine modeled after the same "Sufi" ideas now hegemonic in both Libya and Iran.

Since the Dec. 18 initiation-date of the cult outbreak, several Nigerian newspapers and political insiders have asserted with certainty that Libya has been behind the most recent spate of events in Kano.

On Dec. 30, the Nigerian Defense Ministry issued a statement that "foreign elements" were responsible for the Kano destabilization. Central government sources asserted that the Libyans were acting in concert with Pakistan and Iran in Kano, and that Ayatollah Khomeini was a "brain" behind the destabilization. Libya, Pakistan, and Iran are all run by the British intelligence-created Muslim Brotherhood, a covert organization committed to restoring a feudalistic order under the cover of "Islam."

The Peoples' Redemption Party newspaper added a further element to these charges Dec. 30, claiming that the Kano unrest was attributable to "a carefully planned operation of the Israeli Mossad" aimed at splitting up Nigeria and overthrowing of the Lagos government. The PRP paper stated that the sect behind the unrest was the "al-Masifu" group, a fundamentalist sect headquartered in Israel which had been involved in the November 1979 uprising in the Mecca mosque in Saudi Arabia.

The Borno precedent

Prior to the Kano events, Qaddafi was intervening extensively in northern Nigerian affairs. In November 1980 his emissaries obtained airspace rights for incursions into Chad from the rulers of the northeastern state of Borno along Chad's borders. The Borno government's action was taken in defiance of instructions from President Shehu Shagari in Lagos.

After the Borno-Libya agreement was concluded, Nigerian Foreign Minister Adu charged for the first time that Libya was actively interfering in Nigeria's

internal affairs. Several complaints have since been made to Libya's ambassador in Nigeria—whose mother is Nigerian—protesting against Qaddafi's meddling, and the ambassador has been threatened with ejection from Nigeria.

The Borno incident set the stage for the Kano unrest. It is no coincidence that high-level Kano sources

Sudan: trigger for U.S.-Soviet conflict

The Sudan delegation to the Dec. 23 Lagos summit on Chad left before the summit had officially ended, outraged that the summit could not agree to strongly denounce Qaddafi's invasion of Chad. Sudan is vulnerable to destabilization operations by Qaddafi due to its deteriorating economic situation, aggravated by a recent IMF-dictated cancellation of planned development projects. From neighboring Chad, Qaddafi is ideally situated for operations into Sudan.

Any such Libyan activity will prime Egyptian President Sadat to carry out his role as anti-Soviet gendarme for Africa, an assignment that was one of the secret clauses of the Camp David agreements. Egypt has historically close relations with Sudan, and has troops stationed in Sudan.

This would set the stage for U.S.-Soviet conflict in the eastern and Horn of Africa regions. On his latest trip to the Mideast, Henry Kissinger also went to Somalia, where he advocated that the U.S. should supply arms to Somalia. This would push a reluctant Ethiopia to grant military bases to the Soviets, which would embroil Ethiopia in a regional superpower conflict that would sabotage its development efforts.

The economic collapse in Sudan, territorially the biggest country in Africa, has aggravated tensions in the country, which was the scene of a protracted 17-year-long civil war resolved in the early 1970s.

In January, President Numeiry will begin implementing a decentralization plan, creating semi-autonomous regions in a desperate gamble that will only make the country more vulnerable to destabilization. Qaddafi has links to the opposition in Sudan, and supported a coup attempt against Numeiry in 1976.

blame the recent unrest on the Yen Awaki sect, which has its origins in Cameroon and Chad—both of which are geographically close to Borno.

'A flare-up of tribal rivalries'

The mooted Borno-Kano linkage may presage the outbreak of wider unrest throughout Nigeria's states.

According to the *Daily Telegraph* of London Dec. 30, "the disturbances may spread wider than Kano and may not be entirely sectarian. There are reports from Lagos of 'border clashes' between some of the states in the Nigerian federation." These episodes, the *Telegraph* suggests, "may be the result of a flare-up of tribal rivalries" throughout Nigeria.

The *Telegraph* projection has a basis in the political facts of life in Nigeria. By his intervention into Borno, Qaddafi greatly exacerbated an already delicate political struggle in that state between the state ruling party, the Greater Nigerian People's Party (GNPP), and the federal ruling party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

The GNPP is a small, regionally based party founded by Waziri Ibrahim, a Nigerian merchant who made a financial killing running arms during the 1967-70 civil war. Since mid-1980, Shagari's NPN has been carrying out a systematic political challenge to the GNPP in Borno and in the state of Gongola to Borno's south. One aim of the challenge is to undercut the working alliance between the GNPP and the NPN's main political rival, the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), headed by Obafemi Awolowo, a leader of the Yoruba ethnic grouping in southwestern Nigeria.

Awolowo has been engaged in strident polemics against Shagari's government throughout 1980, and has been systematically cultivating a mood of secessionism among his Yoruba grouping if his demands for power are not met in the future.

As the GNPP-NPN fight heats up, Awolowo may decide to intensify his own secessionist demagoguery as a countermove. Then, what would occur in Nigeria is the intersection between northern-Muslim fundamentalism and Yoruba fundamentalism. The interplay between northern, Yoruba, and southeastern-Ibo chauvinisms was what brought about the late 1960s events. The repeat of this dynamic is now threatened.

A 1960s dynamic?

Qaddafi's activities alone might not be enough to blow Nigeria apart, given the intent of majority internal forces to avoid sundering the country. But Qaddafi is not alone. The suspected roles of Israel and Iran have already been cited. The specific British targeting of Nigeria is evidenced in a Dec. 26-28 three-part series in the Lazard-Frères-controlled *Washington Post*, profiling labor unrest and tribal hostilities in Nigeria.