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AFRICA/THE WEST

Unconstructive engagement

Western efforts to bring the NIF regime and its opponents to the negotiating table are speeding up. Outgoing special envoy Jack Danforth agreed a ceasefire in the Nuba mountains but the NIF has continued bombing civilians. New British special envoy Alan Gouly faces a controversy over Britain's approval of the sale of US\$23 million of radar to Khartoum.

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Who's after Ali?

Ali Osman Taha, the NIF's first Vice-President and Sudan's most powerful man, has had a heart attack. Already his would-be successors have begun circling. Most are civilians; the strongest contenders have security backgrounds.

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New rebels, new danger

Both sides want to play up the rebel offensive against President Charles Taylor. The rebels, known as LURD, lack the national support to push him out but many fear a new border war as Taylor's allies plan reprisals against their Guinean backers.

CONGO-KINSHASA

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High stakes at Sun City

Peacemaking in the Congo has been a gamble so the next venue – South Africa's casino – looks appropriate. Facilitator Masire has to hold the ring as a walk-out looms.

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Nigeria, Mozambique Burkina Faso & Morocco

Saying yes, saying no

Rich countries aren't offering much aid or freer markets in response to Africa's new development plan

Africa is enjoying, or perhaps suffering, a spring offensive by Western leaders. **France's** President **Jacques Chirac** hosted 13 African leaders in Paris on 8 February; **British** Prime Minister **Tony Blair** met Presidents **Olusegun Obasanjo**, **John Kufuor**, **Ahmad Tejan Kabbah** and **Abdoulaye Wade** on his 6-10 February whirl through **Nigeria**, **Ghana**, **Sierra Leone** and **Senegal**; **United States** President **George W. Bush** is hosting Presidents **José Eduardo dos Santos** of **Angola**, **Joaquim Chissano** of **Mozambique** and **Festus Mogae** of **Botswana** on 26 February at the White House; and the Group of 8's next summit host, **Canada's** **Jean Chrétien**, is also planning a trip to six or seven African states in April.

This Western wooing is part of the run-up to the G8 summit in June, in Kananskis, Canada, when the world's richest countries are to announce an action plan in response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD), launched at last year's Organisation of African Unity summit in Lusaka, **Zambia** (AC Vol 42 No 14). The new thing about NePAD is reciprocity. Africa commits itself to political and economic reforms, monitored by its own institutions; the G8 states agree to open their markets, boost aid and encourage private investment in Africa. The NePAD implementation committee, headed by South Africa's President **Thabo Mbeki**, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and **Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika**, are designing an African contract on codes and standards of both economic and political governance – legal guarantees on property, free and fair elections.

Before the G8 summit, there will be meetings between African leaders and the personal representatives of Western leaders in Senegal and Mozambique in March and April. Baroness **Valerie Amos**, Minister of State for Africa, represents Blair; **Michel Camdessus**, ex-Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, represents Chirac; **Robert Fowler**, Canada's former Ambassador to the UN, represents Chrétien; and the US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, **Walter Kansteiner III**, represents Bush. Big new promises of aid aren't expected at the Canada summit. 'It's a long term agenda, not a short term policy... the emphasis will be on aid effectiveness not absolute volumes,' said an official. Blair told *Africa Confidential* he hoped for a general increase in aid: 'We're increasing our aid budget, we've effectively doubled it to Africa in the past five years.' But he conceded that most of the US\$64 billion a year African resource gap identified by NePAD would have to be filled from the private sector. Canada has pledged an extra \$500 million for a NePAD trust fund ahead of the summit. France may agree an aid-boost if the centre-left *Parti Socialiste* wins the April elections. Bush is negative: **Stephen Hayes**, President of the Corporate Council on Africa in Washington, says that US funds intended for Africa have been diverted to Central Asia since 11 September.

The toughest battles will be over trade, where Africa has most to gain. In Ghana and Nigeria, parliamentarians cheered Blair's calls for rich countries to open their markets to African exports, and his condemnation of the \$322 bn. subsidies paid to rich-world farmers. At Ghana's main cocoa research institute at Tafo, an official explained how raw cocoa beans (whose world price is at a 20-year low) attract no duty in the European Union, but high-quality, made-in-Ghana chocolate bars attract 70 per cent duty because they contain milk and sugar.

Africa is allowed to export some unprocessed crops – tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber – that don't grow in North America, Europe or **Japan**. But rice, sugar, beef and so on grow outside Africa, and the rich world's governments lock them out regardless of cost to protect their own farm lobbies. Now Blair and NePAD's African promoters suggest a mass campaign could galvanise public opinion for fair trade for Africa in the same way that the anti-debt campaigners did. A minimum agenda would be to extend duty free access and quota free-access to the EU market for all African exports (negotiations will open in Cotonou, **Benin** in September) and for G8 countries to commit to a timetable to phase out agricultural subsidies.

There are also security issues on the G8 summit agenda: reform of the UN's peacekeeping operations (following the recommendations of **Lakhdar Brahimi's** report); a code of conduct for companies operating in war zones; backing for the International Criminal Court (opposed by the USA and several African states); and a crackdown on the trade in small arms in Africa (awkward for Britain whose arms sales to Africa have quadrupled to more than £200 million a year since 1999 according to the British-based Campaign against the Arms Trade). Finally on the G8 agenda, the wars in **Congo-Kinshasa**, **Sudan** and West Africa; the summiters will be asked to agree more support for peace-making efforts in all three. On the pages that follow, *Africa Confidential* correspondents analyse the prospects for resolving these three wars.

SUDAN

Unconstructive engagement

Western governments still don't get the measure of Sudan's resourceful rulers

As one Special Envoy gives up trying to bring peace to Sudan, another pops up with the same mission. **United States** Senator **John Danforth** is expected to abandon his brief next month, handing it back to a relieved Department of State. In **Britain**, the opposite is happening, as a former Ambassador to Sudan, **Alan Fletcher Goulty**, is appointed Special Representative with the same task. He reports directly to the Minister of State for Africa and the Commonwealth, Baroness **Valerie Amos**, and will have a fairly free hand, as he appears to have had on Sudan for some years.

Goulty may face an early challenge concerning radar contracts awarded to Marconi (see below) and clearly open to dual use by the Sudan Air Force which has been bombing civilians again this month. 'This is another example of the government using oil revenues to buy military supplies', said one aid official, 'and as in the **Tanzanian** case [December's controversy over a US\$40 million British air traffic control system], raises the issue of whether the country can afford it'.

Masters of war, masters of politics

Danforth has achieved another ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains and another promise from the National Islamic Front (aka National Congress, NC) government to stop bombing its own civilians. The latter followed the 10 February aerial bombing of Akuem, Bahr el Ghazal, straight after the United Nations World Food Programme had dropped supplies. Two children died. The USA, WFP and human rights bodies angrily protested. Danforth had already told the NIF bombing must stop as one of his four 'benchmarks' for peace (AC Vol 43 No 2).

His appointment also asserted the US share in the peacemaking effort. President **George W. Bush** persuaded the reluctant Episcopalian minister, whose credentials included taking part in the enquiry into the Waco massacre involving Christian fundamentalists. He is seen as out of his depth on Sudan (a problem unlikely to trouble Alan Goulty).

Danforth's deputy, **Robert Oakley**, served in President **Mohamed Siad Barre's** **Somalia**, President **Mobutu Sese Seko's** **Zaire**, **Pakistan** and **Vietnam**; some in DC think him too ready to speak his mind, others think him too Arabist. This compounds the State Department's aversion in principle to special envoys, who bypass normal diplomatic channels, and help to explain Danforth's difficulties with Oakley and Assistant Secretary of State for Africa **Walter Kansteiner III**. The Department wants the Sudan dossier back, under Defense Intelligence veteran **Charles (Charlie) Snyder**. This won't mean a return to isolationism: the aim is to get the NIF into a serious peace process.

'Do they want a deal or an agreement that lasts?' asked one former senior US official, adding, 'Peace at any cost is neither durable nor acceptable. Peace has to be based on the equality of human beings'. Yet official peace efforts now concentrate on getting the parties to the table rather than on issues underlying the war. 'One of our objectives is to be a catalyst', Oakley told *Africa Confidential*. 'We want to bring in the Europeans', he said, noting that Britain, **France**, **Italy**, the **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Switzerland** and the USA would all provide monitors, often retired officers, for the Nuba Mountains ceasefire. They hope that, on the ground, they will find out what's going on but doing this in the eastern and southern war-zones would be complex and

costly: Sudan is half the size of Western Europe but without the infrastructure. Oakley said that Danforth had also got **Egypt** and **Kenya** talking, hoping to integrate the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Egyptian-**Libyan** initiatives. Yet the NIF prefers peace initiatives to making peace. After it seized power in June 1989, a coup timed to sabotage promising ongoing peace talks, Lieutenant General (then Brigadier Gen.) **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir** declared: 'Our primary aim is peace... and I will enlist the help of all experts in the quest for peace'. The game continues.

US options range from, as one source put it, 'flattening Khartoum' (fear of which explains the NIF's courting of Washington), to leaping into the oil bonanza dominated by European and Asian governments and business. Between those extremes, tensions between appeasement, constructive engagement and isolationism play out, usually more influenced by American politics than by Sudanese realities.

Present and former US intelligence operatives are covering their backs after the 11 September atrocities. The NIF is doing much the same. It has produced a flood of documents purporting to show the guilt of **Usama bin Laden** and *Al Qaida*, and the NIF's innocence. The once unfindable former intelligence chief, **Qutbi el Mahdi Ahmed**, is in the Western media explaining how the NIF was the victim of what it took to be a **Saudi Arabian** businessman with a lot of 'Afghan' friends. It isn't mentioned that the foreign *mujahideen* were an integral part of the NIF system, within the People's Arab Islamic Conference (PAIC) which the NIF started in late 1990 as Western forces were building up in Saudi to retake **Kuwait** from **Iraq** (the PAIC strongly supported Baghdad) and of which the current Foreign Minister, **Mustafa Osman Ismael** ('Mr. Smile') was Deputy Secretary General. In 1996 and again in 2000, the NIF officially dissolved the PAIC – the second time days after *Africa Confidential* had written about it (AC Vol 42 Nos 3 & 13) – and just before Omer el Beshir's visit to Kuwait.

Shades of grey

The NIF is rewriting history. There were no training camps, not even on the farms given to Usama by the government in Blue Nile and Kassala provinces. In some, documents about terrorist activities were later found and seen, we hear, by the **Ethiopian** and US authorities. US sources are tight-lipped about the documents the NIF has now handed over (cooperation which the NIF boasts of in English and denies in Arabic). Khartoum has delivered hundreds of papers and very few 'low and medium level' people, most of them handed quietly to Egypt, to reinforce Cairo's belief (passed on to Western and Arab governments) that it can control the NIF.

The technique, said a US source, was to deluge US investigators with 'grey propaganda', in which truth and falsehood are entangled. How much testing is done to verify whether documents are genuine? How many fluent Arabic-speakers familiar with Sudanese affairs are available to read them? How do the intelligence people get the crucial information which was never (or is no longer) written down? The NIF's approach to security is more seamless than that of most Western governments, which lack the overriding motivation of the Islamist movement. We hear the flow of information from Khartoum to Washington has almost dried up.

The NIF will see Britain's appointment of Goulty, a long-time advocate of constructive engagement, as an opportunity to sideline self-determination for the south and to fuel Western rivalries. Divide-to-rule is an NIF speciality, used on the Sudanese opposition north and south, and on neighbouring governments. It has fuelled discord between the members of IGAD's Sudan Peace Committee, Kenya and **Uganda**, and **Eritrea** and Ethiopia.

Who's after Ali?

Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, First Vice-President, National Islamic Front (National Congress) leader and the country's most powerful man, is ill. A reported heart attack took him to **Jordan** and Geneva, **Switzerland**, for treatment. Though he has apparently recovered – he went to Mecca on the Haj last week – manoeuvring has started in the NIF. President **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir** has neither the power-base nor the respect within the party to lead it. Different people may be chosen for the vice-presidency and the NIF leadership, partly to placate other governments. Most likely contenders are civilian but none have the required theological authority; the ability to reconcile factions might compensate for a candidate's apparent political weakness.

● **Abdel Rahim Mahmoud Hamdi**: Finance Minister; held responsible in NIF for an economic disaster; veteran NIF; heads infant Stock Exchange; ex-Baraka Bank and Faisal Islamic Bank Director; powerful in Islamist International but weak candidate.

● **Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein**: Major General; Interior Minister; Northern region; Airforce engineer; NIF armed forces No. 1; tough; Omer el Beshir's gate-keeper since coup; several times Interior Minister and Omer advisor; a strong contender.

● **Abdel Rahman Sir el Khatim**: ex-Defence Minister; Refugee Commissioner 1989-91 (traditional security post); River Nile State ex-Governor; unlikely head for NIF as touted as non-NIF but possible VP; would please Cairo.

● **Ahmed Ali el Imam**: Authentication Affairs Advisor ('religious authenticity'); was Omer's Religious Affairs Advisor; very influential; not prominent in NIF; possible compromise candidate.

● **Ahmed Ibrahim el Tahir**: as NIF MP, worked for *Sharia* implementation before coup; chief government delegate, peace talks with **Lam Akol Ajawin**'s Sudan People's Liberation Army (United), Nairobi, May 1993; State Minister, Legal Affairs, at Presidency, 1994-5; Presidential Legal Advisor, 1996; low-profile, possible compromise candidate.

● **Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin**: Justice Minister; ex-Attorney General's Chambers (**Turabi**'s old haunt); Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary, then Ambassador to **Britain**, then United Nations; keeps low profile.

● **Awad Ahmed el Jaz**: Energy and Mining Minister; was senior in *Bank el Shamal*; Commerce, Cooperation and Supplies Minister, 1990; Cabinet Affairs Minister, 1993-4; visited **Iran** on oil guarantees, 1993; knows media; Minister for Council of Ministers in the Presidency, 1994; on Sudan-**Chad-Libya** High Committee and Sudan-Libya Integration Committee, 1994; security links; oil-power makes him very strong.

● **Ibrahim Ahmed Omer**: NIF zealot since student; University of Khartoum Professor; set up Khartoum University's Islamic Studies Department as NIF influence over President **Ja'afar Nimeiri** grew after 1977; many senior positions since 1989, most recently Higher Education Minister; NC Secretary General; intellectual; claims poor health; otherwise, strong possibility.

● **Bakri Hassan Salih**: Defence Minister; Maj. Gen.; previously Presidency Minister; friend of Omer's before coup; took army HQ on night of coup; initially security chief; believed to be one of trio running Islamic Security ('Revolution Security') after coup; personally interrogated prisoners;

reportedly liaison with **Somalia**'s late Gen. **Mohamed Farah 'Aydeed'**, 1992; with People's Defence Forces, 1994; Interior Minister, 1995, a job he exchanged several times with Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein and **El Tayeb Ibrahim Mohamed Kheir**; otherwise, usually Omer's Security Advisor; more likely for VP than for NIF.

● **Ghazi Salah el Din el Atabani**: Culture and Information Minister; (qualified) tank commander in coup; life-long NIF; medical graduate, specialised in biochemistry; as post-graduate in UK, chaired Union of Muslim Students; posts include Foreign Ministry State Minister; Presidency Secretary, 1992; Presidency State Minister 1993-4; close to Turabi and second-in-line after Ali Osman; denied Sudanese involvement in terrorism in **United States**, 1993; 'We represent a new trend in human experience', US News, 6 Sept. 93; delegate to peace negotiations, 1994; married Umma Party's **Mubarak Abdullahi el Fadil el Mahdi**'s wife's sister; member, Ali Osman's inner circle; moved with him to Foreign Ministry, 1995; very strong candidate.

● **Mahdi Ibrahim**: life-long NIF; reportedly key militia organiser pre-1989; Ambassador to UN-Geneva and USA before *El Shifa* bombing, 1998; posts include Information and Presidential Affairs ministers (Omer's gate-keeper); weakened by western origins.

● **Mustafa Osman Ismail** ('Mr. Smile'): External Relations Minister; charm offensive leader; ex-Secretary, Islamic Association of Student Organisations; ex-Director General, Displaced People's Affairs; government media/propaganda chief after coup; Deputy Secretary, Turabi's Popular Arab and Islamic Conference (PAIC); very strong candidate.

● **Nafi'e Ali Nafi'e**: Peace Affairs Advisor; NIF zealot; agriculture degree, U. of California at Davis; Agriculture lecturer, University of Khartoum, at time of NIF coup; deputy manager, Sudan Security Bureau, late 1989; by 1992 called 'intelligence chief'; responsible for links to Iranian Security; by 1994, in delegation to Nairobi peace talks as Minister of State at the Presidency; Director, Internal Security, 16 Jan 1995, with rank Maj. Gen., when passports handed out to foreign Islamists; in move seen as bid to placate **Egypt**, replaced August 1995 after assassination attempt on President **Hosni Mubarak** in Addis Ababa; Agriculture Minister, 1996; strong but his security role against him.

● **Qutbi el Mahdi**: Omer advisor; ex-Social Planning ('Social Engineering') Minister; Ambassador, Iran; years organising NIF activities in **Canada**: Canadian citizen; State Minister, Presidential Office, and External Security Director, 1996; strongish.

● **El Tayeb Ibrahim Mohamed Kheir** (Tayeb '*Sikha*'): Maj. Gen.; Security Affairs Advisor (security boss); won *Sikha* (Iron Bar) nickname as medical student when NIF activist; as Cabinet Affairs Minister, he purged civil service, 1989; reportedly secretly visited Iran with Omer, 1989; reported chief of Islamic Security (Revolution Security) after coup, an organisation linked to 'ghost houses' and disappearances; Interior Minister, 1994; Labour and Administrative Reform Minister, 1995; strong contender within military.

● **El Zubeir Beshir Taha**: Higher Education & Scientific Research Minister; NIF zealot; hobby to go on *Jihad* in south; ex-Vice-Chancellor, University of Khartoum; weak.

Goultly, 54, an Arabist with six years' service in Sudan, plus Egypt (deputy Ambassador), **Lebanon**, the USA and UK, advocated 'constructive engagement' after the US bombing of *El Shifa* pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum North in August 1998. UK support for the US bombing meant Goultly was expelled from Sudan but he did not hide his anger and he openly criticised President **Bill Clinton**'s government's policy of isolating the NIF. Under Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher**, the UK had condemned the NIF's human rights abuses, which led to the expulsion of Goultly's predecessor, **Peter Streams**. The criticism has steadily declined ever since. When Goultly became Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Middle East and North Africa Department in 2000, constructive engagement/critical dialogue was already well entrenched. Now it's

hard to find Whitehall officials who would support isolation of the NIF.

This change went down badly in Washington, before and since Bush. 'We're trying to tow the US towards our position', a Whitehall official told AC a couple of years ago. 'Tell them the US is not for towing', retorted a Washington counterpart. That same US official now talks of bringing the two positions together. This may be harder than it sounds. Premier **Tony Blair**'s government likes to think it takes the lead on Africa, under the influence of feisty Overseas Development Minister **Clare Short**. She is loudly committed to tackling poverty and other social injustice but has not done too well on Sudan. Her proposal some years ago to rehabilitate Sudan Railways' one line in the South, from Babanusa to Wau, provoked an outcry. The aim was to feed starving southerners but the NIF already uses this line to move troops and

militiamen (and their horses and vehicles) into Bahr el Ghazal, to kill, plunder and raid for slaves.

Short has condemned abuses by the Sudan People's Liberation Army as loudly as those by the NIF. Equating the government and the SPLA, a trend started by the NIF's public relations machine and challenged by human rights monitors – encourages the belief that peace can be made simply between the NIF and SPLA, leaving out other southern organisations, and the northern opposition parties which, their faults notwithstanding, are far more representative and democratic than the government. As it plays to its audience, it maintains the emergency laws that allow its security a free hand.

After visiting Sudan in January, Short pushed strongly for a Special Representative. Whitehall sources say NIF leaders were 'absolutely unequivocal' in telling her they want peace. After her trip, in a BBC broadcast, she condemned human rights abuses in **Zimbabwe** but not in Sudan. Instead, she emphasised that Britain must help the Sudanese make peace. This emphasis explains why the SPLA leader, Colonel **John Garang de Mabior**, has been officially invited to London, where he is expected before travelling to the USA in the second week of March. He will also visit Norway, where Development Minister **Hilde Frafjord Johnson** and colleagues help to balance the NIF-centrism of other European and/or IGAD Partners' Forum (IPF) governments.

Competition for oil-related contracts is intense and raises questions about commerce driving diplomacy. It means governments have no sticks to balance their much vaunted carrots; indeed, the NIF holds out the carrots. Once leading the rush to befriend the NIF, France has been elbowed aside by Britain. Paris is fighting back, announcing on 15 February that it would include Sudan in its 'priority solidarity zone' and help 'its reintegration into the international community'. Yet France and the European Union suspended aid to President **Gnassingbé Eyadéma's Togo** in 1993 because of a 'democracy deficit'. Last month, the EU resumed development aid to Sudan. Interests (AC *passim*) from **Austria, Germany, Italy** and **Sweden** (plus **Canada, China** and **Malaysia**) have now been joined by **Russian** and **Polish** companies.

Recent contracts

● On 24 January, Germany's Siemens announced a contract to build near Khartoum the world's largest diesel power station, producing 257 megawatts, and worth more than 200 mn. euros (\$175.7 mn.). Siemens said its consortium with H. Cegielski of Poznan, Poland, had been awarded the contract by DIT Power Kilo-X Limited (DPKX) of Labuan, Malaysia.

● On 15 January, Khartoum signed a \$200 mn. oil and gas exploration deal with Russia's *Slavneft* in a 126,000 square kilometre concession in central Sudan. *Slavneft* is majority government-owned, with **Belarus** holding a minority. Work should start next month.

● On 29 January, the Swedish-Swiss Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) began building 68 km. of power lines between Khartoum and the oil refinery at Jeili.

● Fugro Airborne Surveys, a **South African** company with branches in **Australia**, Britain and the USA, surveys possible oil reserves, including in the south.

● Tornado Air Boats of Newcastle, Australia, has its first international order, an 'unsinkable' airboat for the oilfields. It hopes for future orders from **Chad**.

● Most sensationally, Sudan has awarded a £15 mn. (\$23 mn.) contract to Marconi Radar Projects Ltd. for the Phase II Civil Radar Implementation Programme. Phase I covered radar equipment for Khartoum; Phase II involves surveillance radar and air traffic control

computers and displays, along with primary radar for El Obeid, Port Sudan and Juba airports and secondary radar for El Fasher, Dongola and Malakal airports. These airports take military traffic; several are used to bomb civilians.

● About a dozen MiG-29 fighter planes are being supplied by Moscow for \$400 mn. This cheap and useful old model is popular with pariah states keen on avoiding sanctions. Designed for air-to-air combat, they can also drop 'dumb bombs' (unguided), an NIF speciality in the south and Nuba Mountains.

● Spoornet, a subsidiary of the South African state railway company Transnet, has signed a rehabilitation contract. After we revealed the Sudan oilfield contract of military company NFD (AC Vol 42 No 23), President **Thabo Mbeki's** government tightened its ban on dealing with Sudan. Oil company Petro SA has backed off and SA sources tell us Pretoria is 'going to scrub' (scrutinise) activities by SA companies.

Oil money allows the NIF to buy weapons. Some Westerners argue that the NIF is politically weakened but is strengthened in military and security matters by oil; so it is time to bring the NIF to the table before oil wealth makes it unstoppable. For many officials, the hope is that concerted international pressure to open up will destabilise the NIF and eventually remove it.

Yet Western and Arab governments have been thriving in business with the NIF. Many foreign officials despair that the parties in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will show signs of coherent opposition. Many Sudanese feel the same about the NDA but still hope for democracy. Yet foreign governments have been unwilling to put financial and political resources into opposition capacity-building. They have chosen peace first, democracy second, seeing the NIF as little different from the opposition.

This view is reinforced by meetings such as last week's in Bonn. **Hassan Abdullah el Turabi's** faction, the Popular National Congress (PNC), led by **Ali el Haj Mohamed**, met the SPLA's **Pagan Amun** (who is also NDA Secretary General) and **Yasser Arman** (SPLA representative in Asmara). They were celebrating their 'Memorandum of Understanding' of the previous year – the official cause of Hassan el Turabi's arrest – by which they agreed to work together for democracy and self-determination. Two days later in London, at a meeting of which the outstanding feature was that ham sandwiches were served, Yasser and the long-time head of El Turabi's office, **El Mahhub Abdel Salam el Mahhub**, faced hostile questioning from members of just about every opposition party except the PNC. 'We want democracy, and self-determination for the south,' El Mahhub Abdel Salam told us. When Turabi led the NIF, it signed the IGAD Declaration of Principles (DOP), including the separation of state and religion. Asked whether the PNC endorsed this, El Mahhub replied: 'We can't say that! We can't continue with our party if we say that!'

Yasser spoke repeatedly of the 'Popular Movement' (*Haraka el Shaabiya*, meaning the SPLA), Mahhub spoke repeatedly of the 'Islamic Movement' (*Haraka el Islamiya*). It seemed to epitomise polarisation rather than cooperation and it also suggested that the Islamic Movement is greater than its factions. Many Sudanese think the PNC is waiting to pick up the baton if **Ali Osman Mohamed Taha's** ruling faction, the NC, should stumble. This is widely thought to be the Islamic Movement's plan, on the model of Turabi's imprisonment before President **Ja'afar Mohamed Nimeiri's** overthrow in 1985 and before the NIF's coup in 1989. Ali Osman, the NIF's '*emir*' and the country's most powerful man, fell ill this month with what insiders say was a heart attack (see Box). Eyes are on the succession. Any new leader will have to placate Western and Arab governments without threatening the Front's hold on power. It is a task in which the NIF has considerable expertise.

WEST AFRICA

New rebels, new danger

Guinean-backed war in Liberia may backfire on its sponsors and unravel the SL peace process

Both sides want to play up the recent rebel offensive against President **Charles Taylor**'s regime. The rebels, calling themselves **Liberians** United for Reconciliation and Democracy, are mostly Taylor's old Krahn and Mandingo foes and, like previous such armed gangs, call the BBC to claim their victories. The United Nations reckons more than 60,000 people have been displaced by the fighting. Taylor plays to the gallery, hoping to shore up support, justify repression and win sympathy as a victim under attack. This is just what his predecessor, **Samuel Kanyon Doe**, tried to do when attacked by Taylor's own National Patriotic Front of Liberia a decade ago. The hostilities could grow fiercer, to threaten Taylor and, spilling over into eastern **Sierra Leone**'s diamond fields, unravel the fragile ceasefire there.

As **Britain**'s Prime Minister **Tony Blair** visited West Africa, Taylor's Information Minister, **Reginald Goodridge**, plaintively appealed for support such as the West gives to President **Ahmad Tejan Kabbah**. Taylor, by contrast, faces sanctions and isolation, and on 8 February declared a state of emergency after an attack on Klay, 35 kilometres from Monrovia. His critics say the attackers were a small group of LURD rebels, and that most of the trouble was looting and brawling by Taylor's own Armed Forces of Liberia and the feared Anti-Terrorist Unit. After years of fighting, people are ready to run and a flood of refugees arrived in the capital. Then, on 15 February, an Antonov-12 flew in from Central Africa laden with arms, and crashed, suggesting that Taylor is rearming in violation of the UN

embargo. His government claimed the plane was flying over Liberia and had requested an emergency landing.

Officials in **Côte d'Ivoire** panicked at the LURD advance, telling diplomats that Taylor was about to be overthrown, and planning to close the border. Blair, visiting Sierra Leone the following day, talked to President Kabbah about security in the Mano River Union countries. London is worried that further instability in Liberia could undermine the Sierra Leone ceasefire; Sierra Leone and **Guinea** believe a small domestic insurgency will keep Taylor too busy to destabilise his neighbours. In the longer term they would like to topple him. A favourite replacement is **Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf**, a former UN Development Programme Africa Director once favoured by the **United States**, who was runner-up in the July 1997 election. She is in contact with LURD supporters in Freetown and Abidjan, and Taylor accuses her of backing the rebels.

Nobody knows how many defectors the LURD can recruit from the ill-disciplined, discontented army. At present the rebel force is too small to threaten Taylor, but even a small uprising weakens him. In December he denied reports of an assassination attempt against him; Liberian opposition sources say it was led by a **Libyan-trained Gambian** in the Armed Forces of Liberia, General **Jang**.

Taylor reaches out to the Christian right in the USA, calling for support against Muslim rebels backed by neighbouring Muslim states. There are suggestions that Liberia should formally declare itself a Christian state, which would further alienate the country's Mandingos but might appeal to some US politicians. The Vice-Chairman of the board of the Liberia for Jesus Crusade is **Victoria Reffell**, formerly Taylor's irascible spokeswoman, now Chairwoman of the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission. A nationwide Liberia for Jesus Prayer Crusade, with delegates imported from the USA, Europe and elsewhere in Africa, is scheduled for 22-24 February.

The LURD rebels have rear bases in the towns of Kissidougou, Nzirikori and Macenta, with support from President **Lansana Conté**

Rebels versus rebels

The **Liberians** United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebellion seems to have started in April 1999, when rebels attacked Liberia from **Guinea**. After more fighting in north-western Liberia in August 1999, a character calling himself '**Mosquito Spray**' rang the BBC to denounce President **Charles Taylor**. The name seemed derived from that of the Revolutionary United Front commander **Sam Bockarie**, a Taylor ally who calls himself 'Mosquito'.

More attacks followed. The LURD began to claim them in July 2000, when they captured Voinjama, in Lofa County, bordering Guinea. The county is home to many Mandingos and a logical place to launch an anti-Taylor rebellion. The LURD is not a national movement but overwhelmingly from Lofa County, controlling an ill-defined area around Kolahun.

LURD says it has no involvement with former warlords, but many of its members formerly fought for the United Liberation Movement for Democracy, and it suffers, as did Ulimo before it, from infighting between Krahn and Mandingo members. This was particularly apparent last year when **Prince Seo**, a Krahn who fought with **Roosevelt Johnson**, was named Chief of Staff to replace **Charles Dent**, a former Ulimo-K general.

The leadership has tried to stop the infighting and launched a recruitment drive in November. Some 500 Kamajor fighters from **Sierra Leone** are thought to have joined since the LURD was formed, travelling through Guinea helped by the Guinean Defence Ministry. There are no reports of movements from Sierra Leone, where United Nations troops are deployed.

The LURD's General Dent was killed in an ambush in December in Foya, near the Sierra Leone border. Fierce fighting continued in December and January. On 5 February the rebels attacked Tubmanburg; two days later they were blamed for fighting in Klay, just 35 kilometers from the capital. Taylor declared a state of emergency – more symbolic than practical: his

forces drove the LURD back to their base at Bopolu, 85 km. from Monrovia.

Most LURD weapons were captured in hit-and-run operations in Lofa until, last year, Guinea began supplying arms and ammunition in exchange for coffee, cocoa and diamonds. In the past three months Guinea has been much more robustly arming and supporting the LURD.

Most rebel operations are predatory, aimed at disruption, looting, and abducting young men as fighters and women as (among other things) porters. Recruiters regularly pass through Sierra Leone and refugee camps in Guinea and **Côte d'Ivoire** looking for young men. The result is a rag-tag bunch of abductees, desperados attracted by a down-payment of US\$300 and the chance of loot, and hardened survivors of gangs such as the West Side Boys, who fear pursuit by Sierra Leone's planned war crimes court.

There appear to be three LURD units: some 250 fighters in the forest along the Guinea-Liberia border; several thousand in the north near the Sierra Leone border, including many from Sierra Leone's pro-government Civil Defence Force; and a third group of ex-Lofa Defence Force fighters in the home county.

The LURD leadership includes Conakry-based **Sekou Kone**, a Liberian Mandingo with personal ties to President **Lansana Conté**. Gen. **Joe Wylie**, a friend of former Ulimo-J leader Roosevelt Johnson, is a military advisor to the group, whose political spokesman calls himself **William Hanson**. **George Dweh**, a close colleague of Johnson, is thought to recruit Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and **Ghana**.

LURD describes itself as an armed political organisation dedicated to the building of democracy in Liberia. It says it wants to work with other democratic organisations in a provisional government to prepare for internationally supervised, free and fair multi-party elections. A decade ago Charles Taylor, in warlord mode, was saying something fairly similar.

of Guinea, who wants to punish Taylor for backing the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Guinean dissidents. Late last year Conté, lobbied by his wife, agreed to talk, but efforts to arrange a regional summit came to nothing. Guinea has increased its support for the LURD, and an outside mediator is now sought.

The job is unlikely to go to the UN. Taylor rejected Secretary General **Kofi Annan's** nomination of **Haile Menkerios**, an **Eritrean** diplomat, to replace the Gambian-born Taylorophile **Felix Downes-Thomas** as head of the UN Peace-Building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL). **Morocco** has now taken up the challenge, and its Foreign Minister, **Mohammed Benaoussa**, in London this week, seeks to bring all three leaders together. Conté has a vacation house in Morocco and might just be persuaded to travel there, though Taylor, more paranoid than ever about security, will be hard to move.

Conté played a key role in prising off the RUF's grip on the diamond fields. Now there is a miners' free-for-all. Western countries have little diplomatic leverage in Conakry; Britain doesn't want Conté to be unduly rewarded for his support over Sierra Leone, and sees him as a problem in the longer term. He delighted American diplomats by visiting the US Embassy in Conakry after the 11 September attacks to express his sympathy and condemn terrorism.

Conté was due to retire in 2003 but the two-term limit was removed on 11 November by a 98.36 per cent vote in favour of a new constitution. The opposition boycotted the referendum, and said it would boycott the parliamentary elections due at the end of December, which have now been postponed. Opposition leaders have set conditions for participation, complaining that electoral lists have not been updated to take account of population movements after fighting, that there is no neutral body to organise elections, and that opposition parties cannot demonstrate freely.

Caravan to casualty

The security forces cracked down hard on a 'caravan of protest' against the referendum. Opposition leader **Alpha Condé** was in **France** for medical treatment but in his stronghold of Kankan police arrested some 60 of his supporters a week before the vote, and a dozen people were hospitalised. When the caravan reached Conakry, security forces dispersed the crowd with tear-gas and arrested all the party leaders present, including **Siradiou Diallo** and **Bâ Mamadou** of the *Union pour le Progrès et le Renouveau*, ex-Prime Minister **Sidya Touré** of the *Union des Forces Républicaines*, and **Fatou Bangoura**, Condé's number two in the *Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée* (RPG).

Condé has kept quiet since his release from detention in May, but attended the opening of parliament in September to show he is still a member. In 1998, without his parliamentary immunity being lifted, he was arrested and sentenced to five years for sedition. That gave him a criminal record, so theoretically he may not take part in politics. He is not expected to stand in the 2003 presidential election. RPG Executive Secretary **Mohamed Diané** had said the party would not contest elections as long as Conté remained in power, but has now softened his stance and says the RPG will contest the parliamentary elections provided the opposition's conditions of transparency are met. No new date has been set for the parliamentaries, which were originally due in June 2000 but have been repeatedly postponed.

The Guinean authorities were delighted by the success of their counter-offensive victory against the RUF and Liberian mercenaries who had invaded eastern Guinea last January (AC Vol 42 No 2). But soldiers are angry that Conté has not kept the promises he made after an army mutiny in February 1996. 'The next time there's a mutiny it's going to be really hot and we won't listen to anything,' said one.

With disarmament barely complete, Sierra Leone is getting ready

for presidential and parliamentary elections in May. The last election, in 1996, was held while some fighting continued, and the RUF did its best to disrupt the poll. This time RUF leaders are involved in the national reconciliation process, though their top man, **Foday Sankoh**, remains in detention. Kabbah and his Sierra Leone People's Party are keen, wanting another term with more legitimacy after the questionable 1996 vote. Civil society groups want a broad-based government first to consolidate the peace; the opposition All People's Congress also wants a transition, to reduce the SLPP's benefits from incumbency.

Under the constitution the elections were due in March 2001, and the SLPP majority in parliament has twice extended its mandate. A December opinion poll by the Campaign for Good Governance claimed 80 per cent approval for Kabbah. About a third of the Freetown residents polled believe he was personally responsible for bringing in British troops to protect them against the RUF; his SLPP got 24 per cent approval in the opinion poll, way ahead of any other party.

The poll also found that 82 per cent of those asked didn't understand the complex district block electoral system proposed by the National Electoral Commission and that two-thirds of those who did understand it would prefer constituency elections. The block system would require parties to put up lists of candidates in each electoral district, and the number elected from each list would depend on the proportion of votes cast for that list.

Voter registration ended messily on 10 February. Many centres, without forms or ink, could not register applicants; the extension didn't help because no more supplies were provided. Monitors said there was multiple registration and registering of under-age voters, but blamed the errors on bored officials or voters' misunderstandings, rather than deliberate fraud. The APC warns that irregularities in voter registration and the 'indecent haste' to hold the vote in conditions that favour the ruling party could undermine peace. **Zainab Bangura**, the respected coordinator of the Campaign for Good Governance is also running for the presidency. Expected to campaign against corruption, she may enliven the process by naming some guilty men.

Sierra Leone has a new Paramount Chief. Former British High Commissioner **Peter Penfold** was not given another diplomatic posting after Freetown, but he received a hero's welcome earlier this year, when he visited Sierra Leone and accompanied President Kabbah on a helicopter trip to Kono. Even his tacit endorsement would be invaluable to any candidate.

CONGO-KINSHASA

High stakes at Sun City

Slow-flowing funds and covert bargains put peace-talks at risk

Peacemaking in the Congo has been a gamble so it's fitting that the next venue for talks is **South Africa's** casino capital, Sun City. First, though, the man in charge has to get his stake-money in order, and the facilitator, ex-President **Ketumile Masire** of **Botswana**, insists on transparency. With the opening day set for 25 February, there is still much to do. Just five days before the opening, **Jean-Pierre Bemba** has pulled his *Mouvement de Libération du Congo* out of the talks because he claims many of the parties there will be mere fronts for President **Joseph Kabila**, and give him an unfair advantage in the negotiations. Bemba's main foreign ally, **Uganda's** President **Yoweri Museveni**, has advised Bemba to go to Sun City despite his misgivings.

Masire says there's a cash shortfall for the 45 days of talks among

some 300 delegates from Congolese parties and interests. That is expected to cost US\$45 million. South Africa has delivered almost a million dollars and promised to pick up the hotel and restaurant bills. **Belgium's** \$1.25 mn. is expected shortly by the facilitator's office, whose bookkeepers await \$560,000 from the European Union and \$200,000 from **Sweden**. The Organisation of African Unity/African Union has promised but not yet paid \$200,000. Contributions from **Libya** (\$300,000, promised on 15 October), from **Malawi** (\$100,000) and from **Mozambique** (no sum stated) had not arrived a few days before the opening. Botswana itself has already contributed \$140,000 'in kind', according to the ledgers.

Finance is central to the process. Masire claims that lack of resources wrecked the attempt to get the dialogue off the ground in mid-February in Addis Ababa, **Ethiopia**. At the time his office had \$250,000 on its books; the Addis hoteliers wanted a deposit of a million dollars for accommodation and food. Masire limited the size of the five delegations, from the government, the *Mouvement de Libération du Congo*, the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie*, the unarmed opposition and 'civil society'. The Kinshasa government objected, particularly to the exclusion of the Mai-Mai militias, and walked out, taking with it many 'civil society' people. Oddly enough, they arrived back in Kinshasa with wallets and baggage fuller than when they left. One observant journalist, **Timothie Tshidibi**, found that in one day the Congolese delegations, which had arrived penniless, spent over \$14,000 in an Addis Ababa gift shop.

Donor delay costs money

Masire and his staff, irritated when certain donors blamed the Addis failure on their failure to make proper arrangements, decided to shoot back. They explained that the facilitator's accounts, drawn up on 31 December 2001, showed that delays by donors in meeting their promises caused transaction costs amounting to \$265,467. The tardy donors included the EU, whose delays caused losses of \$159,050; and **France**, \$43,886 of whose contribution was absorbed before it reached the facilitator. The banks also managed to hold on to \$39,627 from Belgium, \$20,114 from **Britain** and \$1,750 from Sweden.

The accountants at the facilitator's headquarters in Gaborone were surprised that funds from France and **Italy**, among others, were routed by a pointlessly long financial trail through the United Nations' services in New York. Money promised by **Japan** ended up in the Trust Fund for MONUC, the UN mission in Congo. The promised EU contribution of \$1.8 mn. was disbursed by a slow procedure appropriate for a development project, unsuited to the urgent needs of peace talks. Masire is determined that none of the Congolese parties should be able to dodge responsibilities by pleading inadequate funds.

Civil society and the Congolese diaspora (whose delegates will join those of the appropriate internal faction) have established lists of delegates. In Brussels on 11 February elections were organised by three senior diplomats – Botswana's Ambassador **Archibald Mogwi**; a **Mauritanian** professor, **Hacen Lebatt**; and an Italian diplomat, **Ugo Solinas**. The aim was to select delegates from the external political opposition, whose list consisted of Dr **François Tshibampa Mpuila** (*Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social*) and **Laurent Otete Omanga** (dissident wing of the *Forces Novatrices de l'Union Sacrée*), for the diaspora in Belgium; ex-Foreign Minister **Kengo wa Dondo** and **Gérard Kamanda wa Kamanda** for the diaspora in France; and Dr **Alafuele M. Kalala** for North America. The facilitator's office then began selecting delegates from the diaspora in Africa.

By 18 February none of the warring parties had submitted a delegates' list, upsetting the South Africans in charge of logistics and security at Sun City. There seemed to be no reason why the government

should not name its delegates. For the RCD the task is harder, since it has two wings – the RCD-Goma (backed by **Rwanda**) and the *RCD-Mouvement de Libération* (backed by Uganda). In early February the RCD-ML's number two, **John Tibasima**, went to Gaborone asking to increase his group's delegation from its original nine members.

Some observers speculate that the parties may be coy for fear that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission might be set up, to look into the warring parties' crimes and exploitation of natural resources (the subject of several UN reports). The RCD-Goma wants to justify its inaction by claiming that the government is waging war behind its lines indirectly, through support for the Mai-Mai, the troops and militias loyal to the former Rwandan government, and **Burundi's** *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*.

A meeting of the warring parties in Geneva, **Switzerland**, on 5 February came to nothing because of this disagreement – at one point the RCD told the government and the MLC that it would no longer be a participant in the talks but an observer.

The representation of the unarmed opposition is also unresolved. The facilitator has proposed adding 20 extra groups to the 15 political parties represented at the preparatory meeting in Gaborone last August; Masire then asked them to 'expand their numbers vertically and horizontally', meaning to widen their constituencies. They did very little, and criticised the facilitator's office – which proceeded to organise, within Congo, representation for the Mai-Mai, regarded as qualifying for its own delegates. Some diplomats reckon the bargaining is made sharper because some delegates want to turn the Sun City gathering into a transitional parliament – with pay and perks.

Masire, the wise veteran, is determined to take control. He has silenced those who accused him of causing the delays, and challenged (in an interview with *La Libre Belgique*) Belgium's Foreign Minister **Louis Michel**, who seemed to want to take over the facilitator's job. Masire disliked Michel's attempts to run parallel negotiations, at meetings of the warring parties in Abuja, **Nigeria**, and Geneva which produced nothing significant. Equally unproductive was a round-table of civil society representatives, in mid-January in Brussels, which rejected the proposal that a transitional president should be flanked by two vice-presidents. Masire remarked that 'some conclusions of this meeting will have a negative impact because they have aroused certain parties [the rebels]', adding that initiatives of this kind could 'derail the process'.

Masire seems to say, loud and clear: 'Hands off. Let the Congolese decide'. He also wants to impress on the Congolese that they must not miss their chance at Sun City. Unlike his predecessor, **Nelson Mandela**, Masire does not like deadlines. But he admits he is 'taxed' and one day he could decide that enough is enough.

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NIGERIA

Crossed lines

Africa's biggest privatisation so far, the US\$1.3 billion deal for control of Nitel, Nigeria's state telecoms company, is unravelling. A consortium of Nigerian businesses, banks, state governments and traditional rulers won an auction last November of 51 per cent of the company, but now can't pay.

That sale, long delayed by quarrels between ministries and worries about the loss of state patronage, came as telecoms shares slumped everywhere. The hoped-for global players did not arrive, and the local ones didn't have the money. If the deal collapses, it will cripple President **Olusegun Obasanjo's** economic programme.

The winning bidder, Investors International (London) Ltd. (IIL), failed to pay the full \$1.3 bn. due on 11 February, and now has six weeks to come up with the outstanding \$1.17 bn. – which looks unlikely. First Bank, Nigeria's largest, tied up roughly two years' worth of profits in the initial \$111.7 million non-refundable downpayment. Telnnet, the reserve bidder, is a rival Nigerian consortium with expertise from **Korea Telecom**. It will not reopen negotiations, nor will Newtel, the third bidder, backed by northern industrialist **Aliko Dangote** and Datacom, the consulting arm of **Deutsche Telekom**. Nitel looked expensive, although an estimated \$8 bn. of state money has flowed into the company, and often out again, over recent years. Analysts reckoned \$600-700 mn. a fairer price, leaving investors with more funds to invest in services later.

IIL thinks Nigeria is even less attractive to foreign investors since the Attorney General, **Bola Ige**, was murdered on 23 December (AC Vol 43 No 1). Local investors have nevertheless tied up much of their free capital in the GSM networks run by Econet Nigeria Ltd. and MTN, which have gained more than 300,000 subscribers in their first six months. Nigeria's wobbly landline system is giving way to the mobile one, where Nitel would be a late entrant.

If IIL fails to come up with the money, the government could offer an initial 15 per cent of Nitel shares to the public, bringing in private management for three years during which it could sell more shares. In the meantime, the Nigerian Communications Commission is trying to interest investors in a second national carrier that is free of Nitel's staff problems and chequered history.

The Nitel debacle has the inevitable ethnic undertones. One of IIL's big investors is the discreet Yoruba tycoon, Chief **Bode Akindele**, backed by the Awujale of Ijebu Ode, **Oba Sikiru Adetona**, an influential traditional ruler. Northern interests assume that Obasanjo wants the consortium to succeed at any cost, since its Yoruba backers would then reward the President with plenty of votes in his native south-west, where he did not win a single state in 1999.

MOZAMBIQUE

Graca gets ready

Graca Machel's discreet campaign for the presidency gathers pace. We hear she failed to attend a meeting at the United Nations University for Peace – of which she is Chancellor – because she is too busy politicking in Mozambique. Presidential elections aren't due until 2004 but the ruling *Frente de Libertação Moçambicana* chooses its candidate this July.

Machel competes for the candidacy against former Interior Minister **Armando Guebuza**, leading a Frelimo faction, and Agriculture Minister **Helder Muteia**, leading a younger Frelimo faction. Insiders believe Machel could emerge as a compromise candidate. She benefits from the Machel name. Her late husband President **Samora Machel** – killed in a plane crash engineered by **South Africa's** National Party government – is more popular than ever. His government with its low levels of corruption is seen as a golden era.

Graca's international image helps, as does her marriage to **Nelson Mandela**. Graca's new house in Maputo is almost opposite the Presidential Palace currently occupied by **Joaquim Chissano**.

BURKINA FASO

106 Executions

Trigger-happy President **Blaise Compaoré's** human rights embarrassments have gone from bad to worse with an assault on 6 February from Amnesty International over 106 extrajudicial executions documented since the launch of an anti-banditry campaign in November.

The *Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples* (MBDHP) has been investigating the killings. **Halidou Ouédraogo**, a leading light in the MBDHP, is suspected by many close to Compaoré of using the organisation for party political ends. Ouédraogo is also active in the *Collectif d'Organisations Démocratiques de Masse et de Partis Politiques*, an umbrella organisation of the **Sankarist** opposition formed after the December 1998 murder of journalist **Norbert Zongo** by members of the Presidential Guard (AC Vol 42 No 21). Compaoré has been trying to keep a low profile since Zongo's death and the international scrutiny of **Liberian** President **Charles Taylor's** activities.

Some victims are rumoured to be Burkinabè veterans of Liberia's civil war. Burkina's independent press has played down the affair in recent days, but MBDHP staff hint darkly that some of the killings are linked to legislative elections due in April. The ruling *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* is expected to walk it.

Security Minister **Djibril Bassoli** has rejected forensic and photographic evidence from the MBDHP, which independent observers regard as convincing: some corpses appear to have been bound hand and foot before being shot en masse. MBDHP claims ballistics evidence confirms their

wounds were inflicted by security force weapons.

Human Rights Minister **Monique Ilboudo** has been gravely embarrassed: she is out of the loop where security policy is concerned and is already dissociating herself from Bassoli's stance, which he claims is legitimately 'defensive'. He has the confidence of Prime Minister **Ernest Paramanga Yonli** and Compaoré himself: the killings are likely to continue, with wary approval from frightened citizens. Unidentified security personnel are intimidating students at Ouagadougou University, long a hotbed of leftist unrest. Previously rare, armed robbery and rural violence have risen sharply since early 2001. Ironically this was just as Compaoré publicly apologised for the state's human rights abuses at a National Day of Pardon in March. Popular lynchings of people assumed to be bandits have also made an appearance: diplomats cannot remember the last time social tensions were running at this level.

MOROCCO/W.SAHARA

Uncharted waters

The United Nations has issued an ambiguous legal opinion about exploration licences in the ocean off Western Sahara, and Morocco is objecting to exploration by **Spain's** Repsol YPF off the Canary Islands. Spanish-Moroccan relations are further soured by the start of talks between **Britain** and Spain about the future of Gibraltar. The Rock's politicians, anxious to keep out of the hands of Spain, emphasise that Moroccan nationalists, led by the *Istiqal* (Independence) party, have long said that if Spain gets Gibraltar, Morocco will take back Spain's last African enclaves, Ceuta and Melilla.

In the waters off Western Sahara, Morocco has issued permits which purport to allow TotalFinaElf (of **France**) and Kerr-McGee (of the **United States**) to carry out research including seismic surveys. All sides were pleased but none was satisfied by an opinion from the UN's Department of Legal Affairs. It said the two contracts are not in themselves illegal, but that further exploration or exploitation would violate the legal principles applicable to mineral resources in Non-Self-Governing Territories if conducted 'in disregard of the interests and wishes of the people of Western Sahara'. Identifying those people is at the heart of the dispute. The Saharans say that some 170,000 of them live in refugee camps in **Algeria**, while El Ayoun and other towns in the disputed territory have been settled by Moroccans.

Executives hope the sovereignty issue will be solved when the companies want to start drilling. The UN Envoy, **James Baker**, has proposed autonomy for Western Sahara within Morocco for five years, then the long-postponed referendum. Polisario and **Algeria** say no. Polisario welcomed the UN's legal opinion, especially its reiteration that Morocco is an occupying power with no sovereignty over the area. TotalFinaElf says that's all right since its agreement was signed with Morocco as the administering power.