

# AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

## USA/AFRICA II 2

### Washington who's who

Few are indifferent about Washington's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Susan Rice, who inspires critics and loyalists in equal measure. She's set to stay in the Africa Bureau for the rest of the Clinton presidency.

## ALGERIA 3

### Boutef is bounced back

Just as in Nigeria and Indonesia, Algeria's generals are controlling the election process and have decided on their favoured candidate - Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

## SUDAN 4

### War in the mountains

Alarmed at the success of opposition fighters in the Nuba mountains, President El Bashir told a passing out parade that the government was launching a major offensive.

## DJIBOUTI 6

### Gouled's choice

Incumbent President Gouled's circle reckons it's sure to win the 9 April elections and its candidate is his nephew, Ismael Guelleh.

## LESOTHO 7

### Disunited kingdom

When Lesotho's young nationalists protested against South Africa's 'protective' intervention, they jeopardised the country's future as a sovereign state.

## POINTERS 8

### Nigeria, Togo & Namibia

## USA/AFRICA

### Battle lines in Washington and Africa

#### Washington's ministerial meeting raised morale but offered no new strategies for tackling the worsening regional conflicts

For a time during Washington's 16-18 March Africa Ministerial Conference, the capital's political hatchets were buried and politicians, business people and bureaucrats applauded the administration's efforts to bring together more than 80 senior African ministers with senior officials from 15 government departments. Administration kingpins such as Treasury Secretary **Robert Rubin** and Secretary of State **Madeleine Albright** addressed the meeting, as did Agriculture Secretary **Dan Glickman** and Labour Secretary **Alexis Herman**. Only **Libya**, **Somalia** and **Sudan** were barred from attending, but 46 African states sent delegations, as did the World Bank, the United Nations and the African Development Bank.

African diplomats, such as dean of the Africa corps in Washington, **Djibouti** Ambassador **Roble Olhaye**, argued that at last Africa was being treated with the same gravitas as Asia or Latin America. Delegation leaders, such as **Tanzania's** Foreign Minister **Jakaya Kikwete** and **Rwanda's** Finance Minister **Donat Kaberuka**, commended President **Bill Clinton's** promise of support for a US\$70 billion debt write-off for Africa. This was the conference highlight; the trickier questions of winning congressional support for such a measure, let alone getting European creditors to agree, were left for later.

#### Annus horribilis

The Washington conference was partly Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs **Susan Rice's** response to an *annus horribilis* in Africa. Almost everything that could have wrong-footed US policy in Africa has conspired to do so since President Clinton's historic six-nation trip there a year ago. Clinton had echoed **South African** Deputy President **Thabo Mbeki's** talk of an African renaissance and the State Department had chosen six states - **Ghana**, **South Africa**, **Botswana**, **Rwanda**, **Uganda** and **Senegal** - thought to be representative of emerging Africa. Of these six, three are now embroiled in new wars.

Rwanda and Uganda are energetically backing the rebel *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* in **Congo-Kinshasa**, while Senegal has become involved in the **Guinea-Bissau** war, propping up beleaguered President **João Bernardo Vieira**. A side-shoot from the Clinton entourage last April flew to Luanda to encourage the government's peace-making efforts; by December **Angola** was back at war. And Washington's key allies in its battle against Khartoum's National Islamic Front regime, **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**, have started a deadly border war against each other. The final blows were the bombings, linked to **Saudi Arabian** Islamist **Osama bin Laden**, of US embassies in **Kenya** and **Tanzania**.

Asking about these developments in Washington elicited a sardonic response from one veteran Africa watcher: 'And do you blame the United States for all this?' No realistic observer does, especially not Rwanda's Vice-President **Paul Kagame** who insisted to *Africa Confidential*: 'US policy isn't wrong - we Africans have gone wrong'. Yet many argue Washington's foreign policy efforts are misplaced: 'I'm not saying that the US should have stopped these wars, just that we should have seen them coming . . . and done more to help prevent them,' said one American businessman, 'if we can send our air force to Kosovo to help a few thousand refugees, then what about Africa . . . and we do much more business with Africa than former **Yugoslavia**'.

The other problem for Africa policy is economic. Attempts to boost US-Africa trade have been marred both by the Asia-inspired global recession and by congress' reluctance to support the administration's Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which aims to secure US market access for African textiles. It proposes that African textiles should be allowed in tariff-free, provided they don't exceed 3 per cent of the USA's imports. It also includes provisions for debt relief, technical assistance, and greater access to US loans and credit through government-backed equity funds and insurance schemes. Clinton's Trade Representative **Charlene Barshefsky** and her Africa representative, **Rosa Whittaker**, expect a hard struggle if the bill is to pass through congress

at all, even without major amendments.

African ministerial delegations joined the lobbying effort for the AGOA on 21 March on Capitol Hill, along with the bill's supporters in both houses of congress: Senator **Richard G. Lugar**, and Congressmen **Ed Royce**, **Charlie Rangel** and **Phil Crane** in the House of Representatives. AGOA's supporters will have to work hard to convince more protectionist elements in congress that just 3 per cent of market access for African producers will not grossly damage the domestic garment industry. But African ministers also faced criticisms of the bill from non-governmental organisations' such as **Randall Robinson's** TransAfrica lobby. While ministers dismissed such critiques as irrelevant, they worried that the rival 'Hope for Africa Bill' (which includes provisions for a total debt write-off and much more favourable market access for Africa), sponsored by the Reverend **Jesse Jackson's** son **Jesse Jr.**, might divide support for AGOA in Congress. The end result, they feared, was that no Africa bill would pass at all.

### Republican rightists, liberal leftists

Arguments over the Africa trade bill mirror wider divisions over Africa policy. From the republican right, the administration is criticised for not promoting US commercial interests strongly enough and for doing too little for stability; the liberal left lobby the administration to stop putting US commerce above development, and 'forces for stability' above 'forces for democracy'. Aside from the politically-aligned critics there are plenty of plain sceptics, such as South Africa's *Business Day* correspondent **Simon Barber** who, referring to Clinton's 'simulated Africa policy', questions his characterisation of the US-Africa partnership as one of substance and backed by long-term commitment. 'Happily for Clinton,' wrote Barber, 'lying to Africans is not an impeachable offence'.

While the general framework for Africa is agreed across the administration, much of the detailed policy is ad hoc. The Africa summit in Washington was originally planned in October to include just 15 strongly reforming countries in Africa and invitations were sent directly to African capitals for what was to be the Economic Cooperation Forum. But African governments rejected such cherry-picking and the African diplomatic corps went to work with Susan Rice's Africa bureau and a small secretariat to organise in a matter of weeks a substantive conference. The next obvious step is the US-Southern Africa Development Community forum to be held in Botswana this month. It is meant to work on a regional level in the way that the US-South Africa commission works on a bilateral basis (AC Vol 40 No 5). After that comes the US-Angola bi-national commission designed to improve the prickly relations between Washington and Luanda.

Other regional initiatives might follow with US officials holding a series of meetings with groupings such as the Economic Community for West African States, the Inter-governmental Authority on Development, and East African Cooperation. These moves, together with Clinton's Africa trip (he may also be going to **Nigeria** for **Olusegun Obasanjo's** inauguration) have raised the continent's profile and made Washington's departmental officials more Africa-literate but leave out central questions about conflict and instability. While the ministerial meetings discussed such matters alongside a few hastily-arranged bilaterals between governments embroiled in the Congo conflict, little substantial progress was reported.

Critics from all sides in Washington want a more interventionist strategy. Many accuse officials of 'hiding behind' an 'African solutions for African problems' strategy. 'We should be helping to

facilitate an African dialogue to get substantive talks going, engaging strongly with countries that want to work with us,' a Washington-based academic commented, '. . . standing back like this means we're losing influence'. Former NSC chairman **Tony Lake** got high marks for his repeated, if unsuccessful, attempts to head off the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict but some criticised the administration's failure to see it coming.

But in Congo-Kinshasa and Angola, the Washington critics want to see more heavyweight diplomacy 'right up the food chain - to the White House if necessary'. As one self-confessed old generation Africanist commented: 'Some of us fear that this new style Africa policy is heading towards something rather old - the sort of bloody process that led up to Europe's Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 - and we don't think we should stand back and watch Africa go through another Thirty Years War.'

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## USA/AFRICA II

# Washington who's who

### The capital's Africanists are divided over new policies and their authors

Few are indifferent about Washington's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, **Susan Rice**, who inspires critics and loyalists in almost equal measure. The press oscillates from adulation to condemnation as sentiment on Africa swings from hope to despair - and back. Few question her abilities as a Washington operator, with strong political skills and connections, notably a family friendship with Secretary of State **Madeleine Albright**. She also meets frequently with President **Bill Clinton** and Vice-President **Al Gore**, both of whom have become increasingly enthused about African issues. Rice is also on first-name terms with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, **George Tenet**, who was working on the intelligence dossier at the White House when she was Senior Director for Africa and Special Advisor on African Affairs to the President at the National Security Council.

Like Clinton, Rice was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford; her doctorate was on **Zimbabwe** but she says she isn't an Africanist. She started her Washington career as Director for International Organisations and Peacekeeping at the National Security Council in 1993 after a stint with McKinsey's management consultants in **Canada**.

In the white-male-dominated world of Western diplomacy, an assertive and cerebral African-American woman in her early thirties was bound to make enemies. She has. Some critics accuse Rice of 'policy by tantrum', of pointlessly alienating governments which although fairly venal might have been able to assist US policy aims; others say she runs an antiseptic 'laser-guided' policy (referring to her support for the US decision to bomb the El-Shifa factory in Khartoum, **Sudan** (AC Vol 39 No 17)), with a reluctance to engage diplomatically. Old-stagers accuse her of not using established expertise; some younger Africanists blame her for relying too much on the old Washington networks.

Equally, Rice has engendered fierce loyalty (14-16 hour working days are common) from those who regard her strategy as symptomatic of a new US approach to Africa, leaving behind Europe's colonial baggage and Washington's old Cold War perspectives on 'shaping' the continent. No one disputes that Rice has raised Africa's profile among Washington policy-makers and

lobbyists, with President Clinton's six-nation Africa tour last year and the African Ministerial Conference this month. This plays well with the Democrats' African-American voters. One Republican Party official complained: 'We've given Africa to the Democrats'.

Rice is set to continue in the Africa Bureau job for the duration of the Clinton Presidency, so long as she wants it. The coming reshuffle among Deputy Assistant Secretaries (DAS) and Bureau Directors is unlikely to change much, in style or in substance. The well-regarded Principal DAS, **Johnnie Carson**, ex-Ambassador to Zimbabwe, becomes Ambassador to **Kenya** and will be replaced by the current Director for West Africa, Ambassador **Howard Jeter**. The second DAS **Vicky Huddleston** goes back to the Cuban interests section, to be replaced by the current US Ambassador to Uganda, **Nancy Powell**. The third DAS, **Witney Schneidman**, a former consultant to the World Bank who covers economic policy and Southern Africa, stays on.

Rice's experience on the NSC has helped coordination with the White House's Africa team - **Gayle Smith**, **Erica Barks-Ruggles** and **Robin Sanders** - and with the State Department. **John Prendergast**, a fellow at the US Institute for Peace, recently left the NSC for the Africa department at the US Agency for International Development. Both Smith and Prendergast have strong backgrounds on the Horn of Africa and agree with Rice on containing Khartoum's National Islamic Front regime. After his stint at USAID, Prendergast is likely to move to the State Department as an advisor. The USAID makes critical input into Africa policy; particularly important here are its Assistant Administrator for African Affairs, **Vivian Derryck**, and Chief of Staff to the Director of USAID **Dick McCall**, an enthusiastic Africanist.

### Call the ambulance

Differences persist on Sudan within Washington's policy establishment but have become less marked on Nigeria in recent months. One source said the trip by Rice and Under Secretary of State **Thomas Pickering**, a former Ambassador to Lagos, to Nigeria last July was a 'consensus defining' period for them. They were both in the room when 1993 election-winner **Moshood Abiola** collapsed and died. It was Rice who called the ambulance.

Relations between the State Department and the Department of Defense on Africa matters have been more problematic. Pentagon officials have lost much of their early post-Cold War enthusiasm for innovation in Africa, after disasters such as intervention in **Somalia**. Insiders say proposals by Pentagon staffers for a 'quiet review' of Africa policy have been rebuffed by the State Department. While globally the Pentagon has more than ten times the budget of the State Department, in Africa the budgetary proportions are reversed and the State Department insists on taking the lead on new initiatives.

Pentagon-State Department coordination on the African Crisis Response Initiative has been difficult at times, with the State Department maintaining control over 'presentation' and diplomatic negotiations over deployment and structure. Both sides have been disappointed with the lack of progress on ACRI, overtaken by conflicts from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. The ACRI idea was modelled on the Pentagon's Baltic Battalion project which aimed to provide the Baltic States with the military training and capacity for a regional police force, but Africa's military has proved more intractable and more blighted by conflict. The appointment of **Bernd McConnell** (who replaces **Vince Kern**) as the Pentagon's top Africa watcher (DAS for International Affairs for Africa) may galvanise policy. McConnell, who has just finished a stint in

Bosnia, is an experienced Africa hand who reportedly sees eye-to-eye with Rice 'on the big picture'.

Also on the military beat, Lieutenant Colonel **Jim Babbitt** (ex-Defence Intelligence Agency and former Defence Attaché in Brazzaville) is to replace **Peter Jordan** as Vice-President Gore's advisor on Africa. Also important is Lt. Col. **Rick Orth**, Africa representative on the Joint Chiefs of Staff Policy and Planning Committee (J5). Orth, a tank commander in the Gulf war, was also in the DIA and a Defence Attaché in **Rwanda** where Vice-President **Paul Kagame** requested his tenure be extended.

There are changes afoot in Washington's key ambassadorial posts: Ambassador **James A. Joseph** in Pretoria is to be succeeded this year by former director of National Public Radio, **Dell Lewis**; **Prudence Bushnell**, shortly to leave Nairobi for **Guatemala**; also well-regarded is **Brian Curran** in **Mozambique** who is due for a more senior posting this year. There is another tough year ahead for both **Tom McDonald**, a political appointee from Ohio, in Zimbabwe and **William H. Twaddell** in Nigeria. Ambassadors in the conflict zones include: **Robert Gribben III** in Rwanda; **Nancy Powell** in Uganda; **Bill Swing** in Congo-Kinshasa; and **Joseph Melrose** in **Sierra Leone**, currently engaged in setting up peace talks.

## ALGERIA

# Boutef is bounced back

## The generals' choice seems certain to be the people's new president

Like **Nigerians** last month and **Indonesians** in June, Algerians will get their chance on 15 April to vote for a civilian president after decades of despotic and corrupt military rule. Up to a point. Just as in Nigeria and Indonesia, Algeria's generals control the process and choose their favoured candidate. But the political class too looks forward to the poll. The front-running candidate, **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**, is backed by veteran establishment jobbers, such as retired Generals **Larbi Belkheir**, former President **Chadli Bendjedid**'s chief aide, and **Khaled Nezzar**, who as Chief-of-Staff in January 1992 ordered Chadli's overthrow. Bouteflika's main rival, a former foreign affairs minister, is **Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi**. He is backed by former members of the banned *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), including **Abdelkader Hachani**, who think he might follow an Islamist agenda and settle with the FIS.

The military prerogative takes precedence over the 17,495,707 voters registered within Algeria and 773,000 registered abroad. In his Berber-speaking Kabyle heartland, many voters will support a genuine opposition figure, **Hocine Ait Ahmed**, one of the nine '*chefs historiques*' of the 1954-62 Algerian revolution, who went into opposition as early as 1963 with the creation of his *Front des Forces Socialistes* (FFS). Economic liberals will rally to **Mouloud Hamrouche**, now seen as Algeria's most reformist Prime Minister despite his background in the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). Villagers who support the self-defence militias established by outgoing President **Lamine Zeroual** may opt for **Youcef Khatib**, a distinguished guerrilla fighter now linked to the 'patriot' groups. Partisans of militant Islam may prefer **Abdallah Djaballah**.

But most potential voters are unmoved. Given that the electoral system is controlled by a constitutional council, few voters expect a surprise landslide like that which brought **Mohammed Khattami** to power in **Iran**. The 'opposition' vote will be split. There have been

rows over eligibility; the constitutional council blocked four candidates from running, including the leader of the legalised Islamist *Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* (MSP, formerly Hamas), Shaikh **Mahfoud Nahnah**, a skilled political operator who came second to Zeroual in the poll of November 1995.

Nahnah was rejected for the technical reason that he did not take part in the war of independence, a condition for candidates born before 1942. Several leading wartime figures, including Khatib, his former commander in military region IV, have however said that Nahnah was indeed a *moudjahid*.

The other excluded candidates all failed to muster the necessary support: **Noureddine Boukrouh**, also a candidate in 1995; former Premier **Sid Ahmed Ghozali**, who in the early 1990s took French nationality; and the respected *Parti des Travailleurs* (PT) leader, **Louisa Hanoune**. The line-up is therefore Bouteflika, Ibrahimi, Hamrouche, Khatib, Aït Ahmed, Djaballah and **Mokdad Sifi**. Some might drop out before polling day.

## Transparent voting

On 23 March, two days before campaigning officially started, Aït Ahmed met Zeroual to discuss the President's promise that the voting would be transparent, free and fair. The opposition candidates' main concerns are that the security establishment's backing for Bouteflika would make their candidacies irrelevant. Without clear assurances Hamrouche (whose FLN supporters complain of harassment) and Aït Ahmed might withdraw.

This would leave Bouteflika and Ibrahimi poised for a second-round run-off. 'Boutef' is said to have told senior security officers that, in the spirit of his slogan 'for a strong and dignified Algeria', he would prefer to avoid the indignity of a second round. Bouteflika was largely invisible in the months before the campaign proper, preferring to work among the power brokers than on the hustings. To underline his credentials, he started his campaign in the FLN heartland of Guelma, birthplace of his mentor, the late President **Houari Boumedienne**.

All the candidates come with historical baggage:

- Bouteflika (62), as Boumedienne's Foreign Affairs Minister from 1965 to 1978, built up formidable international contacts, then went into business in the Gulf where he bought a couple of hotels. He is expected to exploit those links if elected. After Boumedienne's death in 1978 he played no formal role, and has since spent much of his time in 'exile', based in Geneva. He was expected to be named president after an extraordinary national conference in January 1994, but refused the terms offered, leaving the presidency to the then Defence Minister Zeroual. He was born in the Moroccan border town of Oujda.

- Ibrahimi (67) was Chadli's Foreign Affairs Minister but seems untainted by the unfashionable 1980s; supporters point to his revolutionary past, formidable intellectual record and, above all, his links with political Islam: his father, Shaikh **Bechir Ibrahimi**, succeeded Algeria's Islamic reformist Shaikh **Ibrahim Ben Badis** as head of the Ulema movement. Some see Ibrahimi as a guarantor of the regime's Arab/Islamist wing, and some former FIS members support him as the best hope of a negotiated peace; born in Setif, he will be strong in his native Constantine region.

- Sifi (59) born in Tebessa, is a former prime minister (1993-95), whose limited support comes from members of the *Rassemblement Nationale Démocratique* (RND) who failed to climb on the Bouteflika bandwagon when the RND imploded in the last year. Sifi sells himself as an anti-Islamist technocrat and a safe pair of hands.

- Khatib (67) born in Chlef has impeccable credentials as a commander of the FLN's army of the interior, with the *nom-de-guerre* 'Colonel Hassan'; he is untainted by the *hizb franca* (party of France) slur. As an adviser to Zeroual, Khatib was closely linked to the 'patriot' militias, and he opened his campaign in the 'triangle of death' region - but this may no longer be an electoral asset.

- Hamrouche (56) born in Constantine is on the regime's dissident, reformist wing; as Premier in 1989-91 he oversaw economic and political reforms and led the rump FLN into the Rome Group of parties who sought reconciliation with the FIS. His few supporters advocate liberal reform.

- Djaballah (43) has split from his own party *Ennahda* - whose opportunists opted for Bouteflika - and created the *Mouvement de Réforme Nationale* (MRN). He started as an Islamist and moved into the Rome Group; he has little support outside his base in Skikda and the east, but gives the election credibility as a formal Islamist candidate.

- Aït Ahmed (73) counts on his Kabyle supporters, and will be backed elsewhere by those who have appreciated his opposition to the regime from abroad; 20 per cent of the poll is his top limit.

Critical to the election's success is whether the power-brokers - led by Chief-of-Staff Lieutenant-Gen. **Mohamed Lamari** and the head of military intelligence **Mohamed 'Tawfik' Medienne** - tolerate a result unapproved by the military establishment. The winner may open talks with part of the FIS, but rule out any formula which might bring back the FIS's President, **Abbasi Madani**, and especially the radical **Ali Belhadj**, still in gaol.

Meanwhile, units of the *Groupe Islamique Armée* (GIA) will carry on their fight against the security forces and Algeria's most vulnerable communities. The Islamists are divided, and elements of the FIS's *Armée Islamique du Salut* seem happy to operate with the army against the GIA. The movement no longer seems in a position to overthrow the regime (AC Vol 39 No 19). Whoever wins - probably Bouteflika after a second-round run-off against Ibrahimi - will seek to co-opt more FIS supporters.

Senior officers will remain Algeria's most powerful political force. Some junior officers and many ordinary Algerians - including many within the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens* (UGTA), which is formally pro-Boutef - grumble about this. But unless a discredited election pulls down a tired regime, their protests will remain private. There could well be a mass resignation of the senior generals quite soon. But their immediate replacements would hardly want to rock a boat which has brought such profits to Algeria's nomenklatura.

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## SUDAN

# War in the mountains

## The National Islamic Front fears the Nuba revolt will derail its partition plan

The ruling National Islamic Front has started a major new offensive against the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the Nuba mountains. Apparently alarmed at the success of opposition fighters in the Nuba mountains, President **Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir** told a passing out parade this month for the People's Defence Force militias that the government intended to crush the rebellions in the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile.

NIF forces have recently attacked the rebels' umbilical cord - the bush airstrips through which the SPLA brings in weapons, a minimum of humanitarian supplies and visitors to publicise their cause to the outside world. The SPLA's air-lifted supplies, at some US\$10,000 a charter plane, are tenuous and expensive; it currently gets only marginal external support, mainly from **Uganda**. Indeed one SPLA official told *Africa Confidential* they planned to raise funds by exporting agricultural commodities grown in specially designated farms.

Prisoners taken by the SPLA say government troops have been ordered to crush the Nuba rebellion within three months. **Ismael Khamis**, Commander of the SPLA's 5th Division in the Nuba mountains, says: 'Their intention is to cut us off from the world so that the Nuba are not on the agenda at the coming Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) talks, and they just talk about the problem of southern Sudan.'

### Backing the south

Nuba leaders believe Khartoum wants to divide the SPLA by agreeing to self-determination for southern Sudan, but not for the 48,000 square kilometres of the Nuba mountains, which are defined as within northern Sudan. Many Nuba are Muslim, and the government is thought to fear that concessions to them would encourage rebellion among the north's other marginalised peoples in Darfur, the Red Sea Hills and Blue Nile province. **Yussef Kuwa**, the Nuba rebel leader, believes that SPLA leader Colonel **John Garang de Mabior** is committed to Nuba self-determination. But many Nuba fear they would be left out of an eventual peace agreement. Kuwa thinks that possible, but argues that a separate southern state would at least give the Nuba a sympathetic regime on their southern border.

Both the Khartoum government and its northern Sudanese opponents are determined not to let the Nuba secede. The opposition vehemently re-asserted its opposition to Nuba self-determination in February, when the Inter-Africa Group organised a conference in Kampala, **Uganda**, on 'Human Rights in Sudan in the Transitional Period'. One delegate suggested that the Nuba should be offered self-rule only if it was also offered to the Baggara Arabs who live in and around the Nuba mountains.

The NIF started attacking the Nuba bush airstrips in November, three months ahead of its usual dry-season offensive. From 28 November to 23 December, a government force estimated by the SPLA at 700 men tried to take the busiest and most central of the three strips, Zulu 2, near Koya village. The attack was driven back after three days of fighting, 5 km short of the airstrip; but that was close enough to let the government artillery move up within range, to Tebari village, and Zulu 2 was closed in February. Alternate Commander **Youssef Karrar** claims the government attackers left behind three mass graves, several artillery pieces and a 122 mm howitzer, while the SPLA lost only seven men from a total force of 280. The rebels also claim the commander of the government's 10th Brigade, Brig. **Abdul Halim**, was killed by one of their mines on the el-Obeid-Koya road, outside the garrison town of Um Sirdiba.

Government troops had taken Um Sirdiba in 1994; in January the rebels failed to recapture it but claimed to have killed 25 government soldiers and taken 25 prisoners, several rifles, a machine-gun, a rocket-launcher and a light mortar. The SPLA adds that, in January, it lost three men when repulsing an attack on another airstrip near Tadjjura; a captured government flag flies high in the nearby SPLA garrison of Gidel to encourage young recruits. A

third airstrip is so far safe from attack, and the rebels hope to find a location for a fourth. On 16 January, arguing that 'attack is the best means of defence', they tried to pin down the NIF forces by attacking their garrison at Buram.

The government has tried to take Tima, birthplace of Commander Khamis and backbone of the rebel movement in the west. The SPLA claims that it killed 50 NIF troops in three attacks there, two in November and the third on 14 January. 'Government morale is very, very low because we have managed to contain the offensive this year,' said Khamis. He claims that NIF soldiers are deserting, and that the local Arab ethnic groups are no longer keen to join the government side: 'Now, if we have prisoners, we don't kill them. We treat them well and give them the choice of joining us or going back. Up to now, no Nuba have said they want to go back. We have one Arab who wants to return to his family, and we will be releasing him shortly.'

The United Nations' Operation Lifeline Sudan is not allowed to operate in the Nuba areas controlled by the SPLA, but some small civilian relief agencies defy the ban and try to help the 300,000 Nuba thought to have remained there. Last May the UN Secretary General, **Kofi Annan**, was assured by the Khartoum government that OLS would be allowed to send an assessment mission to the mountains, but it has still not arrived. Commander Khamis thinks that Khartoum's early offensive had a secondary motive of keeping the UN out. 'Khartoum's promise to allow the UN to come was a delaying tactic. The government is using food as a weapon here. Although the rainy season was good, some people affected by last year's famine were weak and unable to cultivate. Some areas have been burned by government troops. They are fighting an economic war.'

The SPLA estimates that 5,000 people left the mountains last year in hope of finding food on the government side. **Nira Suleiman Bashir**, Women's Coordinator of the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Society, said some have risked their lives to return. 'They said the government gave them only one small container of sorghum and some sugar on the first day. After that they had to work to get food. You wash clothes for them, you clean the houses for them. Sometimes the enemy uses them for sex.'

The rebel area's only hospital is small, run by the **German** Emergency Doctors at a secret location in the eastern jebels. It was evacuated from Kauda in November, when NIF troops advanced on the town but failed to capture it. Earlier, two people were killed outside the hospital, and its water system was destroyed, by what are thought to have been 500-pound bombs dropped by Antonov aircraft. Dr. **Sebastian Dietrich** of GED claims the hospital was deliberately targeted. He bitterly criticises the UN's failure to challenge Khartoum's veto on relief to the Nuba, accusing it of complicity in the war. He says the UN Children's Fund refused a request for vaccines 'because the Nuba mountains are out of the OLS area. I think it is a scandal'.

At a recent meeting with OLS officials in Nairobi, the rebel leader Kuwa warned the SPLA 'could not permit' the UN to continue supplying government-held areas but not rebel-held areas. 'It would be agreeing to commit suicide', he told *Africa Confidential*. 'They should help both, or help neither.' He did not spell out what action he would take, but hinted that SPLA guns could move up within range of the government-held capital of South Kordofan, Kadugli, where Nuba civilians who have moved out of SPLA areas are given UN food aid in 'peace camps', before being transported outside the mountain region.

## DJIBOUTI

# Gouled's choice

## Ismael Guelleh is set to win the election - having an uncle for President helps

The ruling group reckons it is sure to win the presidential election on 9 April; the opposition keeps up its spirits by claiming the result is open. The probable winner, **Ismael Omar Guelleh**, is chief of the private office of the aged and ailing outgoing President, **Hassan Gouled Aptidon**. He is also the President's nephew, and officially 51, although widely thought to be 53. Since his uncle took office in 1977 he has been in charge of state security, and his nomination by the ruling *Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progrès* (RPP) on 4 February was a mere formality (AC Vol 40 No 4).

The opposition's standard-bearer is political veteran **Moussa Ahmed Idriss**, (66), who sat proudly in the **French** parliament from 1962 until 1967, when the newly independent government of Djibouti gaoled him for 'defaming the President' and dissolved his *Parti du Mouvement Populaire* (PMP). He was gaoled again for six months in 1981 when, with **Ahmed Dini** and others, he tried to form an opposition *Parti Populaire Djiboutien* (PPD), but in 1997 he accepted a parliamentary seat for the ruling RPP.

The new coalition backing Moussa Ahmed Idriss is called the *Opposition Djiboutienne Unifiée* (ODU); its policies are vague, its three constituent parties have different bases, but by contrast with the RPP, the ODU wants to talk peace to the armed opposition, the *Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité et de la Démocratie* (FRUD), whose leader is Moussa Ahmed's old ally, Ahmed Dini. The FRUD, which draws its support primarily from the Afars but now includes some prominent non-Afars in its ranks, has set up the *Front Unifié de l'Opposition Djiboutien* (FUOD) to back Moussa Ahmed alongside the ODU. The government's counter-move was to invite Ahmed Dini to meet its candidate, but the FRUD insists it will meet the government only for genuine peace negotiations.

The FRUD was gravely weakened in 1994, when the government persuaded a faction led by Commandant **Ougoure Kiffle** to join the administration. Kiffle and one of his comrades became ministers, and the FRUD's unity was broken, leaving its President, Dini (a former prime minister), out of the presidential contest. In February 1997 President Gouled ruled out the two contenders within the RPP, when **Ismael Guedi Hared**, then director of his private office, and **Moumin Bahdon**, then Foreign Minister, were deprived of their civic rights for five years, having been convicted of defamation of the Head of State.

The government's advantages are vast. Ismael Omar began campaigning on 4 February, and can rely on support from the two main state enterprises, Djibouti port authority and *Électricité de Djibouti*. The power monopoly - whose director, **Djama Ali Guelleh**, is a cousin of the candidate - is two months in arrears with salary payments, and it is widely assumed that the cash is in use for the campaign. The port authority's chief, **Aden Ahmed Doualeh**, is also related to Ismael Omar, but has smaller available cash resources. Power cuts are frequent.

The government's candidate may also be helped by the United Nations Development Programme, which announced on 13 February that it is putting US\$580,000 into projects for promoting 'good

governance', strengthening non-governmental organisations, and fighting malaria. That has enabled Ismael Omar and his supporters to announce official backing for popular schemes. Three weekly magazines have been launched, targeted at young people, women and disadvantaged communities. The candidate's wife, **Kadra Haid**, a former teacher, has been organising among her ex-colleagues, and has encouraged ministers' wives to do likewise. An NGO forum at Tadjourah on 19 March gave local women a chance to sell handicrafts. Moreover, Ismael Omar has promised a new clinic for Dorra where a recent malaria outbreak killed 70 people; and the government stopped the French army distributing anti-malaria drugs in November 1998.

The opposition candidate, by contrast, is backed by Djibouti's two main trade unions, and by Mrs. **Amina Ismael** widow of the late opposition leader, **Mohamed Djama Elabe**, and known as a defender of human rights. **Choukri Abdourahman**, a leading opposition figure whose father was killed in 1963, has also declared for Moussa Ahmed.

The army Chief of Staff, General **Zakkaria Ibrahim**, with Lieutenant Colonel **Osman Nour Soubagle**, visited barracks in the north of the country in early March, to look for signs of dissidence. But the army (90 per cent of its soldiers are Issa) was purged of suspected opposition sympathisers in August-September 1998, and its loyalty is not seriously in doubt. The *gendarmérie* is solidly pro-government, and its commander, Col. **Mahdi Cheik Ahmed**, is closely related to Guelleh. The civilian police, whose chief, Gen. **Yassine Yabe**, supports the government, seem largely favourable to the opposition.

Since the government's base is perceived as being among the Issa clan, Ismael Omar Guelleh has sought to appeal to others such as the Gadabourssi. He has a tougher job reconciling the Afars, who form 40 per cent of the population and blame him for what they regard as their disadvantages in access to jobs and promotion. They suffer especially in the districts affected by the war with the FRUD; 18,000 Afars are exiled in **Ethiopia**, and 6,000 in **Eritrea**.

Ismael Omar Guelleh makes much of his experience in dealing with neighbouring states. He is a friend of Ethiopia's Prime Minister, **Meles Zenawi**, and the two armies cooperate. On 4 February two Ethiopian helicopters machine-gunned the FRUD's camps at Ayri and Dalha, in the Tadjourah district. Inevitably the FRUD has grown closer to the Eritreans, especially since Meles deported several of its leaders and staff, who now face tough conditions in their Djibouti prison; one of them, **Abdi Houffaneh Liban**, died in suspicious circumstances in his cell on 12 March. Guelleh met an Eritrean delegation in Rome on 10 February, and hopes to re-establish contact with them. To counter Arab suspicions of his friendship with Ethiopia, he promises to make Arabic an official language in Djibouti.

When the campaign officially opened on 26 March, Ismael Omar made his first speech in Arhiba, Djibouti's poor Afar quarter. There were more policemen than supporters. Moussa Ahmed, at Balbala, began his campaign by denouncing the government's faults and promising to bring real peace by negotiating with Ahmed Dini and the FRUD. The opposition is ready with accusations of electoral fraud; Moussa Ahmed wants to see the electoral rolls, not yet published for some districts, and to know which international observers will be present. The Minister of the Interior - **Elmi Obsieh Wa'ays** - has announced that Ethiopia, the Arab League and **Japan** will send observers. The opposition claims that the European Union, the **United States** and the UN were ready to send observers but that the government has refused to accept them.

## LESOTHO

# Disunited kingdom

## South Africa rescued the government but may have destroyed the nation

When they looted and burned businesses in the capital, Maseru, last September, Lesotho's young nationalists meant to protest against the 'protective' intervention in their country by **South African** soldiers, acting in the name of the Southern Africa Development Community. The unintended result was to weaken their own fragile state. To do their shopping now, people from Maseru travel 10 kilometres across the border to Ladybrand, a small South African town which is booming as a result of its neighbour's misfortune.

When the National University of Lesotho held its graduation ceremony in November, the proceedings were broadcast in the Sesotho service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. One student won loud applause by castigating the government for 'surrendering' Lesotho to the South Africa National Defence Force, but met a deafening silence when he condemned the burning of businesses. He went on to ask three crucial questions:

- What happens to Lesotho's economy once South Africa has renegotiated the terms of the Southern African Customs Union, whose revenues provide most of Lesotho's government income? Lesotho could lose as much as 70 per cent of its current tariff revenues after the renegotiation.
- What happens as South Africa's gold-mines try to survive by cutting their labour-forces, and send home many of the migrant workers whose remittances are levied by Lesotho's government?
- Will revenue from the Lesotho Highland Water project be enough to replace those dwindling sources of income?

## Pretoria's apron strings

The hard answer is that Lesotho faces economic devastation unless it stays tied to South Africa's apron strings. The mountain kingdom's economic problems loom even larger with its domestic politics in disarray. The traditionalists of the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy had for decades been at odds with South Africa's African National Congress; now the ANC has sent troops to save them. The main opposition party, the Basotho National Party, used to be close to the ANC, which in November put down an uprising which the BNP had quietly supported. BNP leader, **Retselisitsoe Sekhonyana**, spoke as diplomatically as he could about the South African action, but his supporters vigorously denounced **Nelson Mandela**, as did his opposition partner **Qhobela Molapo**, leader of the smaller Basotholand Congress Party.

Sekhonyana died in early December, while Molapo is unwell after suffering a mild stroke. The opposition is leaderless. The BNP-BCP alliance was anyway based not on agreement, but on shared anger at the LCD's crushing election victory in May 1998. Neither leader had fully carried his party faithful into the alliance, whose younger members, in particular, spearheaded the September protests. The discontented young activists have, moreover, not accepted the all-party compromise deal that emerged after meetings organised by South Africa's Minister for Safety and Security, **Sydney Mufamadi**. The opposition parties wanted a government of national unity. Because they did not get it, the young feel

betrayed.

The deal brokered by Mufamadi allows the LCD to run the government, until a national election is held in 2000. The poll will be organised by an Independent Electoral Commission and its running overseen by an Independent Political Authority, including two representatives of each of the 12 opposition parties.

Against the fragmented opposition, weakened by Sekhonyana's death and Molapo's illness, the LCD has the obvious advantages of a party holding power. The Lesotho army, which was formerly a rival power-centre, has been weakened by the South African intervention. The monarchy, also seen as opposing the LCD, has lost prestige through its alleged role in the South African intervention. Once regarded as a force for national pride and unity, over the past four years the monarchy has been associated with minority parties, which together with factions in the military, have backed and provoked armed confrontations.

Much will depend on how King **Letsie III**, 35 years old, handles the aftermath of the present crisis. Although he had no constitutional powers to intervene in last year's political crisis he is caught between the opposition, who regard him as ineffectual, and the government, which suspects him of sympathising with the militant oppositionists in the army. He had spoken sadly of 'looking into the possibility' of setting up a commission of inquiry, just days before the South African army moved into Maseru. No one in the government had consulted King Letsie. Alongside other constitutional reforms, some Basotho are calling for a referendum on the future of the monarchy. On present showing King Letsie might not survive such a test. Even the widespread anti-South African feeling, which worked against the LCD, seems to be subsiding. In the rural areas where most voters live, South African soldiers have organised football matches against village teams as part of their post-intervention charm offensive.

The LCD itself has never been united since its formation as a BCP breakaway in 1997. **Shakhane Mokhehle**, younger brother of the late **Ntsu Mokhehle**, former Prime Minister and LCD founder, has never hidden his ambition to follow his brother as leader, and barely tolerates present Prime Minister **Pakalitha Mosisili**. Quarrels within the party could, perhaps, hand the opposition an election victory. Whoever wins, the student's questions will haunt any Maseru government. Lesotho's fate cannot be separated from that of the larger nation which surrounds it, South Africa, - and an LCD victory would do nothing to assert the smaller partner's independence. Last September's military incursion may have hastened the reinvention of Lesotho as South Africa's tenth province.

Published fortnightly (25 issues per year) by Africa Confidential, at 73 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3JQ, England.  
Tel: +44 171-831 3511. Fax: +44 171-831 6778.  
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Administration: **Clare Tauben**.

Annual subscriptions, cheques payable to Africa Confidential in advance:  
UK: £250 Europe: £250  
Africa: £233 US:\$628 (including Airmail)  
Rest of the World: £325  
Students (with proof): £75 or US\$124

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Subscription enquiries to: Africa Confidential, PO Box 805, Oxford OX4 1FH England. Tel: 44 1865 244083 and Fax: 44 1865 381381  
Visit our web site at: <http://www.Africa-Confidential.com>  
Printed in England by Duncan Print and Packaging Ltd, Herts, UK.  
**ISSN 0044-6483**

# Pointers

## NIGERIA

### Muddy waters

Friends of President-elect General **Olusegun Obasanjo** say he is incensed by the decision of the outgoing military regime under Gen. **Abdulsalami Abubakar** to award 11 oil exploration blocks and eight oil lifting contracts to a group of well-connected military officers and local businessmen. The lack of accountability in the awards of some of West Africa's richest exploration acreage (alongside blocks where Shell, Texaco and Agip have made major discoveries) may have cost the treasury millions of dollars. Some Western officials say the awards and the associated mismanagement of public funds could damage Nigeria's chances of securing debt relief.

How Obasanjo tackles this issue will be an early indicator of his ability and determination to make the oil business more accountable. Abuja insiders expect him to take personal charge of the oil sector after his scheduled inauguration on 29 May and to appoint a high-level oil advisor.

A former chairman of the Berlin-based anti-corruption lobby Transparency International, Obasanjo's reported ire is understandable. The awards were finalised during his triumphal post-election overseas tour to re-establish Nigeria's diplomatic and financial credibility. The state-owned Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (under the control of Abubakar and the Provisional Ruling Council) didn't open a public competitive tender: only one of the 11 exploration blocks has been granted to a local oil exploration and production group with a proven track record, Amni International. The Chairman of Amni is **Sani Bello**, whose son **Abu** is married to Abubakar's eldest daughter, while economic advisor for the victorious People's Democratic Party **Emmanuel Edozien** is a director of Amni.

Arousing greater interest in oil company circles are the powerful figures associated with the other 'virtual' oil companies. Under the terms of the contracts, the recipient companies must pay signature bonuses of US\$20 mn. each to NNPC by 7 April. They must also assure NNPC's exploration division they are capable of development. Apart from Amni's block, foreign companies are likely to be brought in - both to pay the signature bonus and an additional 'joining fee' of a further \$10-20 mn.

Nigerians associated with the other ten awards include the glitterati of military-business circles: OPL (oil prospecting licence) 215 - Anchorage Petroleum (Chief of Defence Staff Air Marshal **Al-Amin Daggash**); 242 - Dajo Oil (Chief of Army Staff Gen. **Ishaya Bamaïyi** and leading oil trader **Mike Adenuga**); 243 - Ozeko

Energy Resources (Chief of General Staff, Vice-Admiral **Mike Akhigbe**); 244 - Totex Oil (Brigadier **Anthony Ukpo** and Texaco); 245 - Malabo Oil (former Oil Minister **Dan Etete**, who uses his **Ghanaian** name, **Kweku Amafegha**, on company documents, and senior diplomat 'Alhaji **Aminu**'); 247 - Heritage Oil and Gas; 248 - Zebra Oil and Gas (trader **Leni Adesanya** of Lenoil has approached Mobil); 249 - Oil and Gas Petroleum Limited; 314 - Paragon Group of Companies (**Prince Oladoyin**); 315 - Lagoon Petroleum (**Gilbert and Jack Chagoury**).

Foreign exploration companies are sceptical about whether awards will stand. Concern that Obasanjo might rescind the contracts on taking office deters them from teaming up with what they regard as Nigerian front companies. Even those who believe the awards were part of an agreed 'golden parachute' plan for the outgoing military and their business allies believe that most of the companies won't deposit the necessary \$20 mn. signature bonus by 7 April. Some Abuja-watchers detect a wider pattern. The Abubakar regime announced 41 senior diplomatic appointments this month. Although all 41 are career diplomatic posts, some are said to have made way for political appointments, such as former Internal Affairs Minister **Babagana Kingibe** to head the Embassy in **Spain** and serving Information Minister **John Nwodo** to become High Commissioner to **Britain**. Perhaps most significant was the statement by Defence Chief Gen. Daggash that while Gen. Abubakar and Vice-Adml. Akhigbe would retire on 29 May because they were political appointees, the service chiefs (including himself and Chief of Army Staff Gen. Bamaïyi) would stay on, with Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Adml. **Jubril Ayinla** and Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal **Nsikak Eduok**). As an afterthought, Gen. Daggash added that any subsequent redeployment of officers would be, of course, the prerogative of the incoming civilian government.

## TOGO

### Lomé minus Lomé

President **Gnassingbé Eyadéma**'s latest round of fraudulent elections, held on 21 March, could provoke Togo's suspension from the European Union's preferential trade treaty known as the Lomé IV agreement. The EU suspended aid after last June's equally fraudulent presidential elections when security agents took over the counting of the votes from the electoral commission (AC Vol 39 No 14). Not only will the EU Commission not resume aid to Togo but it will be pushed by members such as **Germany** and **Britain** to ratchet up the pressure on Eyadéma. After the June elections, EU officials persuaded Eyadéma to talk to his opponents about arrangements for the parliamentary polls.

All the opposition parties, from those of **Gilchrist Olympio** and **Edem Kodjo** to that of

**Yaovi Agboyibo**, boycotted the election. Unsurprisingly then, Eyadéma's *Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais* swept the polls, winning 58 seats in the *Assemblée Nationale*; the remaining 23 seats were won by 'independent candidates' close to the RPT. The National Electoral Commission reported a 76 per cent turn out but the opposition insisted it was under 10 per cent. Diplomats and independent observers said the opposition figure was nearer reality.

Eyadéma is banking on his chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States, and his involvement in regional negotiations on both **Sierra Leone** and **Guinea Bissau**, to forestall tougher sanctions. But his backing within the EU has sunk to an all-time low. His former supporters in Paris regard **Burkina Faso**'s President **Blaise Compaoré** as a more acceptable operator in West Africa. Agreeing a tough line on Eyadéma may be one of the first tests of the new **Robin Cook-Hubert Védrine** axis between Britain and France (AC Vol 40 No 6).

## NAMIBIA

### Ulenga's challenge

**Ben Ulenga**, who resigned last year as Namibia's High Commissioner to **Britain** in protest at intolerance in the ruling South West African People's Organisation, has helped launch a new party, provisionally called the Congress of Democrats (CD). He has not said he is a candidate, but the party will fight Swapo at the presidential and parliamentary elections next year. Business donations will be crucial as state funds go only to parties with parliamentary seats: Swapo has two-thirds.

At a public meeting on 23 March Ulenga said that detailed policies will be set by a party congress, but identified as symptoms of a 'deadly disease' Swapo's changing of the constitution to enable President **Sam Nujoma** to stand for a third five-year term; involvement in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**'s civil war; the Caprivi secessionist crisis; and self-enrichment by politicians. The CD's committee contains an equal number of men and women broadly representing the main ethnic groups. Ulenga, a former liberation fighter, political prisoner and mineworkers' leader, is from the predominant Ovambo north. Other members include a former trade and industry permanent secretary, **Tsudaog Gurirab**, a Damara, who resigned from the public service and has done well as a private consultant; **Kaveri Kavari**, a Herero and an ex-member of the South West African National Union (Swanu); **Marthina Shulz** and Dr. **Neville Cupido**, from the mixed race/Rehobother community, leaders of Swapo's disaffected 'internal' wing. **Peter Katjavivi**, University of Namibia's Vice-Chancellor is not joining just now but his wife **Jane** was at the meeting which was filmed by state security agents.