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## AFRICA

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# Development is now under siege in Nigeria

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Africa's most populous state, oil-rich Nigeria, is now faced with a British-authored destabilization that could spell calamity for all black Africa. If the project succeeds, Africa will lose the nation with the singularly greatest economic-development potential on the continent, the nation upon which the future of much of Africa will depend.

"Our nation is on trial," declared President Shagari in a recent speech, after rioting swept the northern city of Kano July 10. Tribal and regional enmity were at fault—but with plenty of outside encouragement. In addition, the National People's Party, which had ruled in coalition with Shagari's National Party, deserted the president July 22, leaving Nigeria with a one-party government. Such developments, says the London *Times*, are "threats to Nigeria's stability" that could lead to total unraveling of the country's governing institutions.

What makes such "internal" difficulties most ominous, however, is the recent sharp drop in Nigeria's oil production and revenues. The key to ruling the country has been President Shagari's formula for distributing oil revenues to numerous provincial and local authorities. Oil exports account for 93 percent of the country's foreign-exchange earnings, and 80 percent of all government revenues. Nigeria's large population—80 to 90 million people—and her oil revenues give the nation an enormous development potential, which the Shagari government has acted upon in the form of a 1981-85 Fourth Five-Year Plan calling for a total investment of 82 billion naira (1 naira = U.S. \$1.80). The plan is focused on the construction of much-needed infrastructural, industrial, and agricultural projects. "There is building going on all over the place in Nigeria," reports one recent traveler.

Such revenues and development plans have also been key to the nation's political stability, giving the government a means to avoid explosions of tribalist antipathies that are the principal legacy of the British colonial period.

Projections for the Nigerian budget were based on an anticipated oil-production level of 2.1 million barrels per

day. According to official figures, the average oil production for the first quarter of 1981 was 1.9 million barrels per day. By June, it was down to 1.4 million. Some unconfirmed reports say that production is now below 1 million. Such a falloff in oil revenues not only threatens to force dangerous cutbacks in the nation's ambitious development plans, but to thereby aggravate regional and tribal frictions that are the immediate source of political destabilization.

Nigeria, and what now threatens Nigeria, reminds one of the position of Mexico in every crucial respect. In both cases, an oil glut compounded by British-controlled oil multinationals' refusal to purchase oil at contracted prices, amounts to economic warfare against the nation, specifically designed to feed "internal" instabilities. In both cases, what is at stake is an ambitious economic-development plan which the forces behind destabilization wish to sabotage. In both cases, what is at stake is the economic future of an entire continent.

Nigeria is certainly the key to the development of black Africa. It has one-fifth the continent's population, and enough oil to be the second largest supplier to the United States after Saudi Arabia. The successful development of Nigeria would lead the way for the transformation of the smaller black African nations. If that development is sabotaged, by the same token, the chances for the rest of black Africa would be very small indeed. As one diplomat of a neighboring African country put it, "If Nigeria goes down the drain, there is no hope for the rest of us."

It is because the forces behind the Nigerian destabilization are committed to *depopulation* of the entire African continent that they have chosen to destabilize the Shagari government at this time.

### The basis for unrest

In a speech to the officers and men of the Nigerian army at July 5 Army Day celebrations, President Shagari sternly warned that if "political trouble-mongers" do not refrain from provocative activity, they must "face the music." Shagari warned of "agents of destabilization," and "elements" who were disrupting the country after failing to win political power.

"I want to assure you," said the president, "that there are adequate constitutional provisions for dealing with those forces which are disturbing the unity, stability, and progress of our country."

Only five days later, well-organized rioting erupted in the city of Kano in the north, targeting all the symbols of "modern" life and government. Under the suspected leadership of families descended from the emirs, the local rulers installed by the British in colonial times, rioters burned to the ground the state assembly, the finance ministry, and several other administrative buildings, destroying financial and land ownership rec-

ords. The state radio was put out of commission, and the home of the governor and those of his closest associates were also destroyed by fire. Initial estimates put damage at \$200 to \$300 million.

The unrest might be described as "internal" by British press. Nevertheless, the basis for such unrest was created by the British during colonial times, and the elements involved are best termed "British assets."

During colonial rule, up to the 1960s, the British used a "local-control" form of indirect rule in Nigeria, based on reinforcing the most backward tendencies in the population, and fostering conflict between various tribes and ethnic groups, suppressing any notion of the nation-state or national self-interest among the broader population. Nigeria's north was ruled by the equivalent of Iranian mullahs or the Indian raj, the emirs, whom the British gave the power of capital punishment. The emirs were an excellent instrument for keeping the country backward, as any form of economic progress was viewed by them as a threat to their privileges.

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria's nation-building faction has faced one long struggle with such tribalist leadership and the British legacy of communal strife. That struggle led to the bloody Biafra warfare in the late 1960s, followed by 13 years of military rule. In 1973, tribal and regional enmity was so strong that something as simple as a population census threatened to tear the country apart. Calculations for allocating oil revenues throughout the country were based on population figures. Population increases in some regions were so great, as indicated in the 1973 census, that other regions charged fraud. In the major political crisis that ensued, the military government threw out the new census in an effort to hold the nation together. Calculations for oil revenue allocations today are still made from 1963 projections.

Again last December, the groundwork for communal strife laid by the British was exploited through the agency of Libya's Colonel Qaddafi, who sponsored a revolt of a fanatical fundamentalist Muslim sect that resulted in over 1,000 deaths.

Before the return to civilian rule in October 1979, Nigerian leaders carefully constructed a new constitution and centralized system of presidential government modeled on the United States. At the same time, they began to consider how to develop an American-style education system, and to launch ambitious economic development programs—again seeing American agriculture and industry as a model.

After the 1979 civilian-government elections making Shagari president, he formed a government coalition between his own National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Nigerian People's Party (NPP). Like Nigeria's three other parties, both of the coalition parties were based on tribes, subject to petty local squabbling.

The NPP party controlled three state governments outside the northern region in which it is based—a capability demonstrated by no other region-based party, including Shagari's NPN. With its eye on the 1983 elections, the NPP leadership announced July 7 that it would terminate its alliance with Shagari's National Party in six months, seeking sole power for itself.

Shagari responded by demanding the immediate resignation of four NPP ministers, thus precipitating the coalition's breakdown under conditions of threatened new communal strife.

### The British press attack

But the biggest trouble-makers respecting Nigeria, predictably, have been the British newspapers and such American press as the *Wall Street Journal*.

Since Shagari's political style has been to keep internal political forces from getting out of control, instead of ostentatiously ruling over them, the *London Times* this month depicted him as incompetent and inactive—an "ineffective politician," said the *Times*, who "has proved indecisive. His government gives the appearance of drifting."

The *Wall Street Journal* subsequently reported an enormous falloff in Nigeria's substantial monetary reserves—the very kind of report the *Journal* has used in an effort to promote capital flight and a currency devaluation in the case of Mexico. Also as in the case of Mexico, the *Wall Street Journal* reports on Nigeria have proven to be false.

Other British newspapers have claimed that Nigerian army officers were "outraged" because Shagari did not make some show of military force during a border dispute with Cameroon—a dispute subsequently settled peacefully, with Cameroon apologizing and paying an indemnity. Shagari is actually close to the top leaders of the military, who have given much evidence since the Biafran civil war that they are principally concerned with maintaining Nigeria's integrity as a nation.

On July 16, the *London Financial Times* attacked the government's main weapon against British-inspired tribalisms and regionalisms. Under the title, "Strains Appear in Nigeria's Cumbersome Constitution," the article reported on the July 10 Kano riots, and breakup of Shagari's coalition. These incidents "go right to the heart," says the *Financial Times*, of what it calls "constitutional problems." "After 21 months of civilian rule, the government is struggling to make the complex U.S.-style presidential constitution work. . . . Observers in Lagos [Nigeria's capital] report that the federal government has been unable to control political developments." Such reports are not news, but ominous signals that forces centered in London do not intend to allow the government of Nigeria to "control political developments."