
THE REGIONAL THREAT

Sudan: next target of insurgency?

Egypt's ally Sudan is the next immediate target of the Muslim Brotherhood, which operates within the country through fundamentalist networks, in turn tied to the Qaddafi regime of neighboring Libya. The security of the strategically located Sudan, the biggest country in Africa (roughly the size of Europe) which shares borders with seven countries, has always been a major point of concern of both Egypt and the Saudis.

Iran Foreign Minister Hossain Musavi has explicitly relayed a message from the international Muslim Brotherhood networks which installed the Khomeini regime.

In an Oct. 8 interview with CBS, Musavi lauded the assassination of Sadat, saying it reflected the growing strength of the "Islamic Revolution." He stressed the role of Islam in fighting Westernization, and threatened Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia in addition to Egypt. And Khomeini's ally Qaddafi, calling for the overthrow of Sudanese President Gaafar al-Numeiry, has been using his petrodollar accounts to train Sudan exiles for a "Salvation Army for the Liberation of Sudan." Qaddafi has reportedly been expelling 3,000 to 4,000 Sudanese a day who refuse to join his anti-Numeiry effort, for a reported total of 250,000, many of whom are suspected of being undercover anti-Numeiry operatives.

Qaddafi was behind an anti-Numeiry coup attempt in September 1976, in which he attempted to install Sadiq al-Mahdi, the head of the Islamic Ansar fundamentalist tribal sect. At that time over 1,000 rebels were infiltrated into Sudan from Libya while Numeiry was out of the country, and it took the armed forces three days of fighting in the capital, Khartoum, during which about 700 of the insurgents were killed, to crush the operation.

Numeiry has ruled Sudan by attempting to balance the numerous regional and ethnic differences in the country. The extensive Muslim Brotherhood organization in Sudan, headed by Hassan Turabi, is formally in the government as the result of a deal made with Numeiry, who reconciled himself with the Mahdi after the coup attempt, and returned to Sudan in 1977. The Mahdi's Ansar movement is the largest group that could pose an alternative to the Numeiry government.

The combination of Libyan operations and economic problems leading to food shortages, price increases, electricity and water cutoffs, etc., make the Sudan extremely vulnerable. It was Sadat's concern over this conjuncture that prompted him to send Vice-President Hosni Mubarak to Washington a week before he was assassinated, to urge more U.S. aid to Sudan. The Libyan and Muslim Brotherhood operations in Sudan could bring Numeiry's consensus politics to an end, reducing the country to chaos—which would reverberate throughout the region.

A call for help

Ever since Sudan canceled several development projects in 1979 in response to IMF dictates, Numeiry's balancing act has been unraveling. Tensions between the country's north and south of Sudan are mounting. In 1972, Numeiry had ended a 17-year civil war the south had been waging against the north by granting autonomy to the former. During the civil war, southern rebels were supported from Ethiopia, then under the regime of Haile Selassie, by an alliance of Coptic and Israeli intelligence networks. This Oct. 5, Numeiry dissolved the parliaments of both north and south, as part of a plan to subdivide the two areas into more regions in order to calm unrest.

Last month Numeiry initiated a crackdown on the large refugee population in and around Khartoum, shortly after Sadat launched his crackdown in Egypt. Over 17,000 were arrested, and 6,000 to 8,000 are still being held, according to press accounts. Over 2,200 rifles and other weapons were confiscated.

About 500,000 refugees from Ethiopia, Chad, and Uganda are in Sudan, adding to the economic burden and creating openings for political operations.

And tensions are growing on Sudan's border with Chad, which has been occupied by Libyan troops since December 1980. Anti-Libyan Chadian forces have been fighting, both the Libyans and forces of the pro-Libyan government installed by Qaddafi from Sudan, drawing Libyan air attacks into Sudan.

Egypt has troops and air force units stationed near Khartoum and around the country in strategic locations, backing Numeiry's never-too-firm consensus. Numeiry has survived three major coup attempts since he took power in a coup in 1969, as well as numerous plots. The Saudis, however, have stupidly undermined their interests in Sudan security by abiding by the International Monetary Fund dictates and refusing to bail out Sudan financially.

The Mahdi, with one faction of his Ansar movement in Khartoum, benefiting from Numeiry's national reconciliation efforts, and another faction operating from Libya, is reportedly biding his time, waiting for the situation to deteriorate.