
Fruits of the IMF

Ethnic warfare on the rise in Africa

by Lawrence Eyang-Echaw

Throughout Africa—in Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia, Angola, and Kenya—ethnic groups have clashed violently in the past year, leaving thousands dead. Ethnicity is threatening to destroy the fragile fabric of the African nation-state, while the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are driving populations into total despair.

The most ferocious fighting has broken out over the last year in Burundi and Rwanda, two densely populated countries in central Africa. In both countries, the Hutu are the majority tribe. Since independence, the Hutu have been involved in a sporadic vendetta of bloodletting against the Tutsi, a minority tribal group which enslaved and ruled the Hutu in the pre-colonial period. Belgium, the colonial master of Rwanda, had always backed the ruling Tutsi, but then abruptly switched sides to back the Hutu at the point of independence, when the Hutu rose against the Tutsi.

The latest round of massacres began in 1993. In October 1993, Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected Hutu President in Burundi, which has been dominated by the Tutsi tribe continuously, was assassinated in an attempted coup by the Tutsi-dominated military, at which point the United States ceased all aid to the country. This led to a carnage of inestimable proportions, as the Army went on a rampage, killing 100,000 Hutus. Since then, thousands of refugees have crossed the border into Rwanda. There, Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana has retaliated in sympathy with the Hutus, by refusing to implement the power-sharing deal with the Tutsi-dominated opposition.

This deal had ended a civil war fought in 1992 between the Hutus and the Tutsis, who were backed by the Ugandan government. This civil war had brought 680 French troops into Rwanda in a peacekeeping venture. Outside forces also benefitted financially from the warfare. According to the Human Rights Watch Arms Project, the French bank Crédit Lyonnais made possible a \$6 million deal for an arms shipment to the Rwandan Army from Egypt. Rwanda was also getting weapons from South Africa. The Rwandan war created more than 650,000 refugees and displaced more than 1 million of Rwanda's 7.5 million people. The tribal warfare has also accelerated the downward spiral of the country's

economy. According to President Habyarimana, "Our economy was already ailing in 1990, and, of course, the war has not resolved anything. We signed agreements with the IMF and the World Bank, which we have, of course, been unable to honor, because we have had to purchase weapons and supplies."

In Burundi, the ethnic conflict continues. On March 8,

Will France break the embargo against Iraq?

When the United Nations Security Council met on March 18 to review the sanctions against Iraq, it came as no surprise that the "permanent five" decided for the umpteenth time to continue the genocidal blockade. To prevent any loosening of the blockade, wild stories had begun to circulate, as they do every two months when the sanctions review takes place, regarding supposed Iraqi plans for new and gruesome deeds. Thus the London *Guardian* on March 17 carried the purported news that Saddam Hussein was preparing a military strike, either against Kuwait or to "liberate" the Kurdish north.

What was unexpected in the Security Council's proceedings, however, was the emergence of differentiated shadings of color in the otherwise grey, monolithic block of permanent members. France, Russia, and China distanced themselves from the intransigent stance of the United States and Great Britain. As rotating chairman of the Security Council, France proposed that Iraq's "progress" in complying with the U.N. resolutions be acknowledged. Russia reportedly sought to present a similar statement, and both Moscow and Beijing supported the French move. The British, who have called the shots since Desert Storm, refused, as did the United States.

Preparing for post-embargo era

The French, Russians, and Chinese have apparently understood something which has escaped the notice of London and Washington. The Iraqi leadership, having indeed complied with the U.N.'s demands to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, and with surveillance measures, has dug in its heels, determined to survive until the embargo is lifted. At the same time, as any visitor to the capital over the last months could readily ascertain, Baghdad is actively preparing for the post-embargo era. When that will begin is not known. In Baghdad, some reckon that after a six-month "trial period," as demanded by U.N. envoy Rolf Ekeus, world public opinion will

some 50 Tutsi tribesmen were killed in the north of the country in retaliation for earlier killings in the capital Bujumbura, in which the Tutsi-dominated Army massacred about 200 Hutus in a predominantly Hutu residential area. The next week, fighting broke out in the Burundi capital, killing at least 1,000 people. It is believed that in March, 1 million people fled Burundi to neighboring countries, where, ac-

ording to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, they are living on the edge of starvation.

Long list of conflicts

The Burundi massacres are the most prominent in a long list of conflicts which cause violence with untold suffering to Africa.

realize that there are no further pretexts available to justify the blockade. Others reason that the U.N. top dogs will keep the stranglehold in place until such time that peace treaties between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, all have been signed, sealed, and delivered. Iraq is seen not only as a potential magnet for political opposition to the Middle East peace process but also as the economic giant, albeit wounded, of the region; many leading Iraqis believe that the international movers of the peace negotiations want to maintain total control over the industrial potential of the country, so as to steer it into the desired direction within the context of a regional "free market."

Economic considerations uppermost

Economic considerations are uppermost in the minds of the French, Russians, and Chinese, all wracked by the depression crisis. Not only does Iraq have oil and in great quantities, but, having allocated its oil revenues over decades to building a modern infrastructure and industrial foundation, it also represents the biggest market for consumer and industrial goods in the region. Therefore, it is no wonder that businessmen from Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe should be seen in Baghdad, the capital of a former ally and trading partner.

Of the western European countries, France has been the first to openly strike an independent posture. According to accounts in such major press as *Le Monde* and *Libération* in March, the French have been working behind the scenes for months to improve relations with Iraq, holding high-level meetings. Although Iraq Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz's trips to Paris have been to receive medical treatment, he broke his low profile in October, when he met French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua. Other high-ranking Iraqi diplomats, such as Ryad al-Qayssi of the Foreign Ministry, and Parliament President Saadi Mehdi Saleh, have been received as well.

Recently, a parliamentary delegation from Baghdad was welcomed in Paris, at a reception organized by an association close to Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac. During the soirée, the political message that was delivered by the French was clear. Roselyn Bachelot, an RPR parliamen-

tarian, stated bluntly that the Kuwait crisis of August 1990 had been a trap laid by the United States for Saddam Hussein. "It is by now certain," she said, "that the Baghdad authorities had received assurances at the highest diplomatic level that the United States would not oppose the crossing of the borders by their troops."

Although this is a truth by now universally known, to say so diverges rather sharply from what was official French policy in 1990-91. Furthermore, Bachelot called for "the opening of an economic interest section as soon as possible in Baghdad, the unfreezing of Iraqi assets held in French banks, the purchase of food and medicines, and the relaxing of restrictions on visas" for Iraqis.

Business deals being concluded

The primary incentive behind French moves for a rapprochement with Iraq is economic. Before the war, French companies were active in the country with deals worth hundreds of billions of francs. The French oil companies Elf Aquitaine and Total, which are particularly eager to exploit the huge oil deposits in Iraq, have been conducting discreet negotiations with the Iraqis over the last year. *Libération* reported that in early March, for the first time, the oil companies received government approval to receive a high-ranking delegation from the Iraqi Oil Ministry in Paris. On March 26, the Iraqis were quoted as saying that the negotiations had "led to agreements which will be implemented after the lifting of the embargo."

The embargo must be lifted, and immediately. As reiterated in a statement of protest against the continuation of the sanctions, issued by the International Progress Organization on March 24, the sanctions defy international law and morality, as defined by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and undermine the chances for peace in the region.

The French overtures to Baghdad may be motivated more by pragmatic self-interest than by a moral commitment to justice or humanitarian concern for the well-being of an Iraqi population which has been subjected to unprecedented torture through the embargo. Nonetheless, the French are doing the right thing. And they are bound to benefit, not only economically, but politically in other parts of the Arab world.—*Muriel Mirak-Weissbach*

- In March, Ghana saw some of the bloodiest ethnic massacres since independence in 1958. In the northern regional town of Tamale, Dagomba tribesmen have had bloody battles with the Konkombas, the Nanumbas, and the Gonjas. The entrepreneurship of the Konkombas, who migrated from neighboring Togo in the early 19th century, has been a threat to the Dagombas, who have seen their land property at stake. They have been calling on the Konkombas to return to Togo, although by a 1956 referendum, these people had elected to become Ghanaians. The violence in March has taken the lives of 6,000 people, displaced another 15,000, and resulted in the total destruction of 200 villages by burning.

- In Zaire, the democratization process has opened a Pandora's box, with more than 300 tribes at each other's throats. The main tribes have been divided between supporters of President Sese Seko Mobutu's government and supporters of opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi. Tribes which support the opposition, such as the Kivus and the Balubas, have been harassed by Mobutu's army and forced to take refuge in neighboring Zambia or Angola.

- In Angola, the 17-year civil war has pitted the Ovimbundu-dominated Unita of Jonas Savimbi against the Bakongo-dominated MPLA of President José Eduardo do Santos.

- In Liberia, there has been a four-year civil war because the late dictator Sgt. Samuel Doe used his Krahn tribesmen to terrorize the dozen tribes of the country as well as the American-Liberians who had enjoyed privileges during the Tubman and Tolbert regimes.

- In Kenya, the Rift Valley has been ablaze with ethnic clashes.

Legacy of colonialism

African nations have been described as a "fragile patchwork of conflicting tribal states, artificially held together by authoritarian leaders with the help of western arms and aid." National unity is a far cry in most countries, where there are about 300 tribes, speaking different languages. In the pre-colonial era, most of these tribes fought bloody wars, and sold one another as slaves to European buccaneers. For instance, the Nigerian state of Benin exchanged ambassadors with Portugal in 1486. Today, the state of Benin has little in common with their compatriots of the northern state of Kano or Bornu, which had been parts of the Fulani empire of Usuman Dan Fodio in the 17th century.

The manner in which colonial administrators governed virtually ensured the failure of African states after independence. Their practice of "divide and rule," favoring some tribes to the exclusion of others, served to accentuate ethnic divisions that have pulled Africans into different directions for centuries.

In Burundi, for instance, where ethnic animosity has been most tragic and debilitating to the nation, the Belgian colonizers perpetuated ancestral patterns of discrimination by allowing the Tutsi, who were the nobles, to have exclusive

control over a strategic national institution such as the Army. The exclusion of the majority Hutu was a festering cause for later revolt which has plunged the country into a litany of violence and death.

Before independence, the colonizers were the common enemy. When they left, the major tribal groups in each country had to confront one another for leadership roles on a continent where tribal loyalties surpassed any allegiance to a nation. In addition, the colonizers became much harder to fight, hidden behind the screen of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The pattern of discrimination encouraged by the colonial masters has survived since independence. Tribes which had facilitated colonialism and acted as informants or soldiers in the colonial administration's attempt to "pacify" the rest of the tribes, have earned privileges in the country's administrative apparatus.

In Cameroon, for instance, the Bamilike and Bassa tribes, which fought in the liberation struggle, still feel a sense of marginalization. The Bamilikés, who challenged the economic domination of the French, still feel persecuted by the neo-colonialist government in power, which accuses them of communist sentiments. In Nigeria, the Fulani hegemony which dominated other tribes and created an elaborate system of governance under the authority of the Emir (spiritual leader), was used by the British to govern the country. Today, the Fulani still dominate Nigerian politics, with the Yoruba and the Ibo often relegated to secondary roles.

Tribalism therefore remains in Africa a major factor in wars, business, elections, and power struggles. It often determines who gets jobs, who gets promoted, and who gets accepted at a university, because by its very definition, tribalism implies sharing among members of an extended family, making sure that your own are taken care of first.

A 'cultural obligation'

A prominent Nigerian political scientist, Professor Asiwaju, has said that in Africa, "to give a job to a fellow tribesman is not nepotism; it is a cultural obligation. For a politician or military leader to choose his closest advisers and his bodyguards from the ranks of his own tribesmen is not patronage, but good common sense. It ensures security, continuity, and authority."

Nationalism is a new concept in Africa, not more than three decades old, and since most Africans are unable to read and do not understand the concept of a nation, they readily fall back on the concept of tribal affinity. Furthermore, even the tribal system is under threat of total collapse at the point that the government—no matter which tribe might be dominating it—is unable to provide for the well-being of its people.

The rise in tribalism in Africa therefore is a direct corollary of the downward slide of Africa's national economies in the decade of the 1980s through to today.