

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DH-6
The Plot

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Dakar, Senegal

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Political talk in Dakar these days is about The Plot. The government has been dribbling the story out over the past month, giving rise, in the absence of facts, to all sorts of fabulous rumors. The story of The Plot ("le complot anti-national") throws some light on the nature of politics in this newly-independent African nation. (See map and text on Page 2 for some relevant background.)

On Feb. 13, our only daily paper, Dakar-Matin, printed an announcement that the Ministry of the Interior had discovered a plot and had made an "important arrest". No details were given. In the same issue the paper reported that five members of the presidential guard, accompanying President Senghor on a tour of remote Senegal Oriental, had been killed in a "road accident". No details of the accident were given.

This produced a rumor that could be heard all over town for the next two weeks. The two stories, read in conjunction, were analyzed to mean that Senghor's guards had been killed in defending him against an attempt by the plotters to assassinate him. Later on the rumor appeared to be false, and it died out. The peculiar reporting of the "accident" in which the five guards were killed could be laid simply to the low standards of journalism practiced by Dakar-Matin.

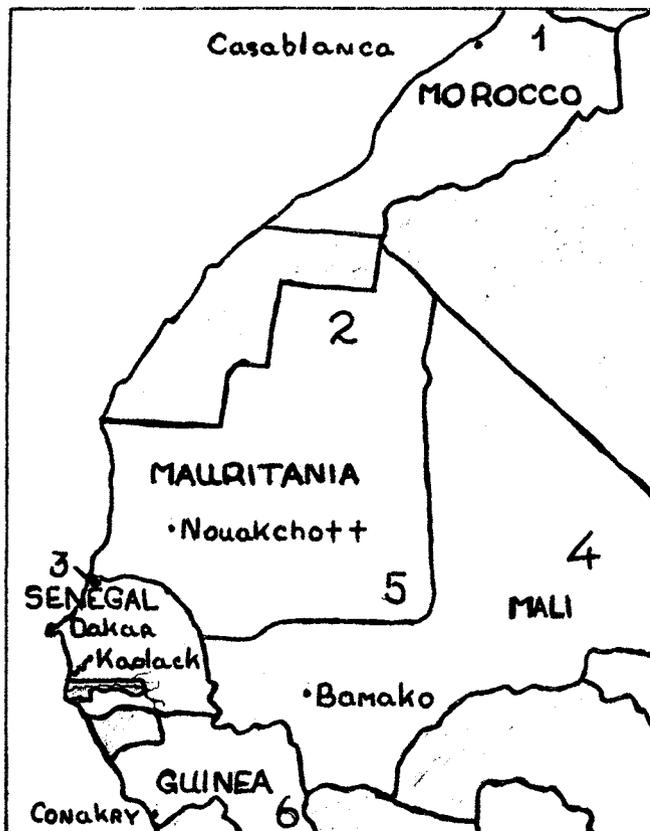
On Feb. 14, Dakar-Matin ran a government communique saying that the government had known for some time that Senegalese nationals had been preparing a "subversive action" at a "military camp" in a "neighboring state". On Feb. 17 the paper reported that it was said in "well-informed circles" that the plotters' base was in Mali. Dakar-Matin faithfully follows the government and this was the only time it ran anything on The Plot that was not a government handout. So the accusation of Mali was clearly a handout to which the government did not want to put its signature.

The Plot then dropped out of the news for two weeks, but meanwhile a related story appeared. The government protested to Morocco over a Moroccan broadcast that claimed that a strip of land in northern Senegal should be part of Mauritania. "When one knows Morocco's ambitions to annex Mauritania," said Obeye Diop, the Senegalese Minister of Information, "this clearly means (Morocco wants to) annex part of Senegal as well." Morocco simply replied that the broadcast was not an official one; the territorial claim was not specifically denied. "A new form of imperialism," said Obeye Diop.

On March 3, the government at last gave out a detailed account of The Plot. This was the government's story:

The Plot was uncovered on Feb. 10 when a courier for the plotters was caught at Dakar airport about to take a plane for Conakry. He was carrying documents that gave away The Plot; documents which (in the purest tradition of his trade) he tried unsuccessfully to swallow. The plotters were old opponents of the Senghor government, led by Majhmoud Diop (no relation to Obeye Diop), a leftist now in exile in Mali. The plotters set up a base at a Malian army camp and trained "commandoes" to overthrow the governments of both Senegal and Mauritania. "To the great surprise of the government of Senegal, there is a strong presumption of Moroccan involvement." The plotters planned to "infiltrate the opposition parties", stage Algerian-style "plastique" attacks, and eventually to "physically eliminate leading personalities in the government". The plotters tried to get Senegalese sailors in a "neighboring port" to smuggle arms to Kaolack, a port in Senegal. (Since Mali has no ports, this was interpreted as a reference to Guinea.) The captured documents included a report on one of the conspirator's "contacts with the leaders of the B.M.S." (Bloc des Masses Senegalaises: an opposition party) Five men were arrested on the charge of being involved in the plot; a sixth, the Dakar lawyer Mustapha Seck, was arrested for "failure to denounce the plot". The six will be tried by a special tribunal for political

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Morocco (1) claims Mauritania (2) on historical grounds. A recent Moroccan broadcast said a strip of northern Senegal (3) should be part of Mauritania. Mauritania is a desert land with iron and oil; it is formally independent but is in effect still run by the French. Mali (4) has claimed part of Mauritania along the border (5). Mali and Senegal have been on bad terms since the federation between them broke up in August, 1960. Guinea (6), not involved in the border disputes, lines up with Mali and Morocco in African politics in the "Casablanca" group; Senegal belongs to the "Monrovia" group. The cornerstone of Senegalese foreign policy is keeping Mauritania from being absorbed by Morocco in order to prevent Senegal from being surrounded by relatively hostile states. Senegal was a leader in the successful campaign last year to get Mauritania into the U.N. over the opposition of Morocco.

crimes (set up last year after a French judge in the regular courts released Majhmoud Diop against the government's wishes).

The press here handled this story daintily: not one paper or periodical printed anything but the bare text of the government announcement. The most interesting aspect of the story, from the point of view of Senegalese domestic politics, lies in these lines from the text: "infiltrate the opposition parties"... "contacts with the leaders of the B.M.S."... "failure to denounce the plot". This was widely taken to be either a warning to the B.M.S. or the first step toward banning the party, for its leaders presumably could be charged with "failure to denounce the plot". Mustapha Seck, the arrested lawyer, is an opponent of the government who is known to have been close to the B.M.S. leaders.

A similar technique was used in another plot episode last fall. Assane Seck (no relation to Mustapha), the university professor who is a leader of another opposition party, PRA-Senegal (Parti du Regroupement Africain), was arrested on the charge of being present in a home where guns were being collected for a revolt. Seck was said to be the most popular man in Casamance, a province where dissident feelings are strong. Yet the government kept Seck in jail for months in Ziguinchor, capital of Casamance, and nothing happened. When I was in Casamance in December, there was much complaining about the government, but little talk of Seck.

The government's attitude toward the opposition shifted perceptibly after the successful arrest of Assane Seck. L'Unite, the organ of the governing U.P.S. (Union Progressiste Senegalaise), stopped attacking the P.R.A.-Senegal and began sniping at the B.M.S. The B.M.S., which has an extremely vague program, has one important figure in it, the historian Sheikh Anta Diop (no relation to either of the previously-mentioned Diops). The government appeared to be worried because the B.M.S. seemed to be getting some support among Moslem leaders and among university students.

The line between permitted and forbidden opposition is not yet clear - not even, perhaps, to the government. On the one hand the government is reluctant to ban opposition parties, partly from sensitivity to foreign criticism, partly because the opposition is useful as a barometer of what little public opinion there is about politics. On the other hand the government will not allow the opposition to make its voice heard or to present any serious threat. This would interfere with the job of developing the nation, the government leaders say; it would also undermine the myth of unity around the state and the governing party. An opposition party can survive - at least at present - if it is silent and evidently ineffectual, like the P.R.A.-Senegal. (In fact Assane Seck was quietly released during the flap over The Plot. The only announcement of his release was a note on a university bulletin board saying that his courses would be resumed March 2.) Of course, an opposition party of this sort has little reason for existing.

A much wider latitude is allowed for opposition within the government and the U.P.S., since it does not - in the words of a member of the Senegalese Establishment - "stir up the people". The same man advises anyone who opposes Senghor's policies to join the U.P.S., since he can speak more freely, and is more likely to be listened to, within the party than in the opposition. The best example of this point is Valdiodio N'Diaye, Minister of the Interior. N'Diaye is probably more of a threat to Senghor or Prime Minister Dia (or both) than any opposition leader, though he is not necessarily a serious threat. N'Diaye leads a faction in the government and party that advocates, in a rather vague way, more forceful moves toward socialism. His faction was rebuked at the recent U.P.S. congress; but N'Diaye does not seem to have lost his clientele. Though his differences with Senghor and Dia are well known in political circles, N'Diaye remains a member in good standing of the Establishment. The explanation one hears is that this is because he is loyal to the system. He does not take his case outside the government and the party; he does not disturb the public image of unity. Indeed, N'Diaye played a major role in the story of The Plot: he was in charge of the investigation, and the guards killed on Senghor's tour were under his authority. There is no evidence today that the government is thinking of eliminating N'Diaye and his faction.

Obviously it is too early to guess with any confidence whether the Senegalese system will evolve toward democratic debate within the governing party, or toward elimination of such factions as N'Diaye's. Perhaps, if there is a severe internal crisis, N'Diaye will find himself named in another "plot".

"Plots" have been popular in Africa recently: there have been half a dozen cases in as many countries in the last few months. Each time the government has used the plot as a club against its domestic opponents. In the case of Senegal, it should be noted, the price of opposition is not so high as it has proved to be in Guinea. No one has been executed here. According to people recently arrived from Conakry, the five men arrested in the Guinean "plot" of last November are believed to be already dead.

Sincerely,

David Hapgood

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