

What Norway wants from Zanzibar

Summary & Comment: There is an international scramble for oil and gas on the coast of Tanzania. The Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation lists 17 licensed oil and gas exploration companies that operate in Tanzania. One, Statoil Asais from Norway, is not operating in Zanzibar. Who are really involved in Zanzibar? Apparently the company that is operating in Zanzibar/Pemba is a Canadian one known as Antrim Resources among other names. Shell International from Holland is operating in the Deep Sea Blocks Number 9, 10, 11 and 12 that surround Zanzibar. "The whole on and off shore of the Indian Ocean in Tanzania is licensed for oil/gas exploration, and companies from as far afield as Australia, Brazil, and the United Kingdom are involved." DN

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Zanzibar is back on the national and international agenda. Of course it has always been on the agenda. But it's a long time since it was such a mysterious agenda. For a whole week we have been treated with puzzling news. 'What are Karume and Seif up to in Zanzibar?' queried *The Citizen*. 'Z'bar's strange bedfellows', quipped the *Sunday Citizen*. What I found particularly surprising is not 'the recent rare talks between Zanzibar's erstwhile political foes, President Amani Abedi Karume and the opposition *Civic United Front* leader, Maalim Seif Shariff Hamad' (Sunday Citizen 15 November 2009). Why should I be shocked while I know if nothing, or anything, is not done now Zanzibar will explode? When? 2010!

Then what did I find surprising?

Is it the claim that not even the ruling party let alone the presidency knew about the secrecy behind the meeting? Or is it the assertion that our friends in 'war on terror' and piracy are behind the new-found unity in Zanzibar? Could it be the oil factor? Well, what I found intriguing is the energy that our partners in development, Norway, are putting into this agenda. I am particularly startled by the fact that the Ambassador himself has taken a lead on this. He has 'been the busiest and most visible over Zanzibar', affirming that 'Norway strongly encourages' Karume and Seif's 'efforts to bring lasting peace to Zanzibar' (Ibid). Surely we know why Tanzanians or Zanzibaris need lasting peace in Zanzibar. But what about Norwegians? Why should they be interested in such peace? For the sake of humanity? Maybe.

The clue to why our friends in development are so interested in our peace is found in what they have been up to in the past week. Tellingly, their minister for environment and international development was 'the first international personality to send a congratulatory message, a few hours after news of the meeting emerged' (Ibid). The ambassador even crossed the ocean to meet the president of Zanzibar. He also met the minister responsible for Union matters. More tellingly the Norwegian Embassy 'conducted two separate workshops for members of the National Assembly, and the Zanzibar House of Representatives to sensitise them on oil exploration and drilling for an impending Bill on the matter' (Ibid).

The possibility of oil discovery in Zanzibar has caused a lot of animosity between those who want its revenues to be shared as a Union matter and those who don't. Why, then, is Norway so interested in this issue? The official website of the *Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation* (TPDC) lists the 17 licensed oil and gas exploration companies that operate in Tanzania. Out of these only one is from Norway. Its name is Statoil Asa. Ironically, it is not operating in Zanzibar. Rather, it is operating on what is referred to as Deep Sea Block Number 2. On the map this block is close to Mtwara and Lindi. According to this company's official website, its total area is '11,099 square kilometres, and it lies in water depths of between 400 and 3000 metres' off 'the coast of Tanzania in the Indian Ocean.'

If a Norwegian company is thus far removed from Zanzibar, who then is really involved in Zanzibar? Apparently the company that is operating in Zanzibar/Pemba is a Canadian one. It is known as Antrim Resources among other names. Shell International from Holland is also operating, albeit in the Deep Sea Blocks Number 9, 10, 11 and 12 which, in a way, surround Zanzibar. As a matter of fact the whole on and off shore of the Indian Ocean in Tanzania is licensed for oil/gas exploration and companies from as far afield as Australia, Brazil and the United Kingdom are involved.

It is thus quite clear that there is an international scramble for oil and gas in this Eastern board of Tanzania/Africa. This, I contend, is the one of the main reasons why Norway is so interested in what is going on in Zanzibar. As history has taught us Zanzibar has always been a strategic area. Commenting on this historical legacy, Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu said: 'A country like Zanzibar was quite strategic in superpower manoeuvres because of its historic role in influencing events in the region.' This is the Zanzibar that attracted a whole Empire to move its capital from Muscat into it. It's the Zanzibar that is facing the shaky Middle East. It is a Zanzibar that is a corridor to Somalia, the new zone of piracy. Who wouldn't want to control such a Zanzibar?

Surely Norway, as a country that has used oil among other resources to develop, wouldn't want to be a loser in a battle for the soul of Zanzibar. Neither would America. Nor would Tanzania.

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