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PROLONGED WARS: THE WAR IN SUDAN

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Preface

I am greatly indebted to two centers of professional learning in Maxwell Air Force Base: the Air University Library and the Internet from where I got my research materials. Also special thanks to Maj John Reese, my mentor and a source of insight, stimulation, counsel, and encouragement.

I have benefited a lot in discussing the African/Arab conflict in the Sudan with many fellows Southern Sudanese including John Garang, the SPLA leader while on state duties.

Abstract

The Sudan is a country which is rich in human and natural resources, with great potential for national development and economic contribution to the region. Independent since 1956, Sudan has had a difficult political history, in which its leaders have failed to provide for the political enfranchisement of the people or, in the case of democratically elected governments, simply mismanaged the country. In 1989 a military junta aligned with the National Islamic Front (NIF) overthrew the last democratically elected government. The NIF strongly advocates Islamist programs and *sharia* (Islam law), not only in Sudan, but throughout the region. Like many of its predecessors, the NIF-led government allows little or no meaningful popular political participation and represses the political opposition.

Sudan is a nation of numerous ethnic groups, but there has historically been a distinct division in the country; between the predominately Arab/Muslim north and the predominately African/Animist/Christian south. The North-South conflict predates independence. However, since independence in 1956, except for the ten years between 1972 and 1983, there has been a bloody civil war in the Sudan, with Southerners seeking increased autonomy and freedom from the imposition of Islamic (*sharia*) law. Over one million people have died in the civil war, which has created in the Southern Sudan one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Over 500,000 Sudanese have fled the country and

are refugees, dependent on the international community and Sudan's neighbors for survival.

The internal war that began in the Sudan in 1983 fits the patterns of a protracted conflict. The struggle has become prolonged far beyond either side's desire to continue, with polarization so profound that neither side can end the contest without admitting defeat. No resolution would then be possible short of the total defeat of one side by the other.

Chapter 1

Overview

The Addis Ababa Peace Accord of 1972 was hailed as a unique example of a negotiated peace settlement in Africa and the third world in general. It was regarded as a unique not only because the leaders of the Sudan and its conflicting factions had managed to overcome their differences and opted for negotiated peace after seventeen long years of war and roaring guns, but also because it was negotiated by African partners at the peak of the “cold war” where every faction could easily have found allies with massive arms supplies.

Although the actual achievements of the peace accord and the political and institutional arrangements proved to have been exaggerated, the agreement showed that, even in the most complex conflicts, it is possible to trade guns and havoc for diplomacy and negotiations. However, the optimism which was precipitated by this “unprecedented” negotiated settlement of a complicated political armed conflict, and the feeling of national unity, were soon to be eroded by a combination of what Professor Ali Mazrui called “forces of anarchy” on the one side, and “forces of tyranny” on the other. “Africa” Mazrui writes, “was torn between the forces of anarchy on one side, in the sense of decentralized violence, and the forces of tyranny, in the sense of orchestrated centralized repression.”

The spirit of the Addis Ababa Agreement was gradually but consistently undermined and eventually eroded by the same political leaders whose courage was applauded by the world when it brought about the peace settlement. Despite the fact that the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 had stipulated that the three provinces of the South should constitute an autonomous region with its capital at Juba, for reasons of political expediency, the President of the Sudan decreed on 1 June 1983 the division of the South into three regions.¹ In September 1983 Islam Sharia law was also introduced by a presidential decree that reinforced the differences between the North and the South. Civil war returned again in 1983 and it continues unabated today.

When the conflict was renewed in 1983, the warring parties expected it to end quickly. The Governments viewed the rebellion as an illegitimate action by outlaws that could be thwarted by police action or as a manifestation of grievances that could be contained by rebels into the political system. Groups that challenged the regime considered the system already so decayed that it could be easily toppled, and also led them to believe that a simple change in the top leadership will accomplish their goals.

The military officers who launched the guerrilla struggle sought to transform the country's political structure. They recognized that an extended period of time would be required and systematically built up their fighting capacity. Their efforts brought them to the brink of success in 1989 when a broad range of sociopolitical groups pressed the government to negotiate a fundamental resolution of the issues that had caused the civil war.² But the seizure of power by hard-line military forces in that year preempted negotiations and exabated polarization. The new government insisted on total victory and wanted to impose its own ideological vision on the society, a vision diametrically opposed

to the rebels and to the social forces that supported negotiations. Since then the struggle has been prolonged in ways that destroyed the already weak economy, under cut its sovereignty, and damaged the body politic.

Notes

¹ Mohammed Omer Beshir, *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan* (London: Rex Collings, 1974) 143-49.

² P. M. Holt and M. W. Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1979) 89 -102.

Chapter 2

Background

The Republic of the Sudan is the largest country in Africa. Almost one million square miles in area, it stretches from the Sahara desert in the north to tropical rain forests in the south. Its 23 million inhabitants, scattered across this wide expanse of land, represent a complex diversity of ethnic origins, religions, languages and lifestyles. The ethnic composition of the Sudan is roughly one third “Arab”; one third “Southerners” and one third “others” (such as Nubians, Fur and Nuba). In religious terms, the majority of the Sudanese consider themselves Muslims. However, the religious orientation of traditional Southerners is animism. Moreover many southern leaders consider themselves followers of various Christian faiths established during the Anglo-Egyptian condominium (1898-1956).¹

During the Anglo-Egyptian rule of the Sudan, the British were mainly occupied with establishing control and maintaining order. In the north Messianic movements continued to appear but were put down, as Mahdist writings and organizations were outlawed. In the South there was protracted resistance to British efforts to establish control. In economic terms, the integration of the country continued in the form of expanded railway system and plans were made for a large agricultural project in the Gezira. By the time of

independence (1956), there was considerable economic development in the north, but little had been done to encourage comparable growth in the south.

The limited education development in the 1920s had created a small but articulate educated class in the Sudan. After early cooperation with the colonial system, this group began to grow dissatisfied with their prospects and the lack of possibilities for self-rule. Due to their anti-British tone, they found a natural alliance with Egyptian nationalists. They organized a series of demonstrations that culminated a military mutiny led by southern soldiers. Startled by this movement, the British reacted strongly by crushing the movement, expelling all the Egyptian officials and limiting the role of educated Sudanese.

In the ensuing turmoil the British became more active, trying to create instruments for controlling political development. The early step was the creation of the Advisory Council for Northern Sudan in 1944.² The activists objected because it had only advisory functions, excluded the south Sudan, and consisted largely of traditional leaders, and so they boycotted the council. The Legislative Assembly was formed in 1948 and was an elected body including both the northern and southern representatives. Unionists also boycotted it and the Assembly was dominated by the earlier created Umma Party. In international terms, the Anglo-Egyptian stalemate over the British role in Egypt made agreement on the Sudan impossible. In the Sudan itself the basic pillars around which politics revolved were the opposing nationalist themselves of unity or separate independence, the sectarian rivalries and the struggle of the educated class to define its role more clearly.

However, the resolution came suddenly, with the key being the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. The new Egyptian leadership was more flexible with regard to the Sudan issue.

Political issues were made less confusing and elections were held in 1953 when the National Union Party (NUP) won, followed closely by the Umma Party and the only large block of representatives was made up of the Southern members Liberal Party.

The NUP had supported a unity of the Nile region but political developments changed perspectives. As the Sudan moved towards the time of self-determination, the pro-unity people became convinced of the viability of a separate independent Sudan. Independence was voted by the NUP-led parliament and on 1 Jan 1956, the British withdrew and the Sudan became an independent state. One cloud had arisen on the horizon in 1955. Southerners were upset by the limited role given them in the Sudanization of the Government and they feared northern dominance. The issue of integrating the south into the independent Sudan became a major problem.

For the Southern Sudanese, the end of British colonialism in their land meant the beginning of Arab domination and colonialism.³ That was unacceptable and needed to be challenged in order to preserve Southern Sudanese identity and to gain their self-determination. For the Northern Sudanese, the British withdrawal meant assumption of political power and also meant gaining sovereign status in the Sudan which, in their view, included the South, as well. Any challenge to political and constitutional arrangements worked out with the departing imperial power by any group, such as the Southern Sudanese, was viewed by the North as treason.

The Southern Sudanese rejected that status most forcefully. They waged guerrilla warfare for 17 years, from 1955 until 1972. Having been denied their demand to decentralize authority over the regions, many Southerners pressed for separation and formation of their own state. They were also angered by government measures to Arabize

the educational and administrative systems in the South and to restrict Christian churches. In the mid-1960s, officials and political groups in Khartoum started to respond to Southern demands, when proposals for regional self-rule were discussed in a round table conference and other political fora.

By May 1965 the feeling of unrest paved the way for a group of young soldiers, led by Ja'afar Numairy, to take over the government. He announced his government's intentions to grant "Regional Autonomy to the Southern Sudan Provinces within the framework of a new integral social Sudan." Numairy's policy statement on the Southern question recognized the cultural, racial, religious, economic, and social differences between the North and the South, accepted the basic grievances of the Southern Sudanese, blamed past governments for their failure to solve the Southern problem, and the prescribed "regional autonomy" for the South as a solution for the North-South confrontation. A four-point program was announced at the same time: (1) promulgation of an amnesty law for Southern Sudanese refugees; (2) economic social and cultural development of the South; (3) appointment of a minister for Southern Affairs; and (4) training of personnel. Point three was implemented immediately: Joseph Garang was appointed Minister of State for Southern Affairs. That approach was embodied in the Addis Ababa accords of February 1972 that ended the civil war.⁴

Notes

¹ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobba, Richard A. Lobban, Jr. and John Obert Voll, *Historical Dictionary of The Sudan* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Metuchen, N.J. & London 1992).

² Ann Mosley Lesh, *Prolonged Conflict in the Sudan*, (Prolonged Wars - A Post-Nuclear Challenge 1994) 101-107.

³ Dunstan M. Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in The Sudan* (African Publishing Company, New York & London 1980) Chapter 6.

Notes

⁴ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobba, *Historical Dictionary of The Sudan* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Metuchen, N. J. & London) xcvii-cvii.

Chapter 3

The Addis Ababa Accords

According to the Addis Ababa Agreement, the entire South would comprise one region, with its own assembly and elected executive.¹ The region had an independent budget and tax source to control internal security and local administration in the social, cultural, and education fields. English, rather than Arabic, was recognized as the principle language in the South. Moreover the Addis Ababa agreement specified that the guerrilla forces, known as Anya Nya, would be gradually absorbed into the army and would serve in the South, Southerners thereby relinquish their demand for independence in return for gaining substantial self-rule and protection from pressure from the center.²

Numairy never allowed the system to function as intended. The most serious political failure of what increasingly was referred to as the Numairy “dictatorship” was the disintegration of the Addis Ababa Accords—the single most important achievement of his revolution—the deterioration of relations between North and South, and the renewal of civil war in 1983. A number of grievances led to the renewed outbreak of fighting, most basic of which was the failure to fulfill the spirit of the Addis Ababa Accords that were to have brought about economic development in the South and real, not token, political representation. Trust began to breakdown with the discovery of oil in the South, near to Bentiu, which Chevron Oil Company was to develop. The political decision in Khartoum

to locate the oil refinery in the North, near Kosti, and to pipe most of the oil outside of the Sudan for the generation of hard currency revenues was received with hostility in the South. When Southern protests became more organized and unified, Numeiry responded with a plan to redivide the South into three provinces in June 1983.

While these events shaped the more recent North—South relationship, Numeiry took steps to move the government and the nation away from its secular path since independence towards an Islamic emphasis in law and society. This state-supported Islamization began in 1977 with a plan to gradually Islamize laws, and there was some limited success in the banning of alcohol and the institution of *zakat*, a form of religious taxation. However, as secular forces from the South and their Northern allies objected, this gradual approach was abandoned, and Numeiry took the bold step of imposing Islamic Law upon the Sudanese state by decree. This occurred in September of 1983, and thereafter the new Islamic civil and criminal codes became known as the “September Laws.”³ With opposition to this move coming from the Judiciary and even staunch Muslim advocates, Numeiry sought even greater control of the application of these laws through newly appointed judges who served in the regime’s “ Court of Prompt Justice.” Harsh application of the penalties resulted in the use of these courts as tools of repression as the jails filled and many lost limbs to Numeiry’s version of Islamic “justice.” Public discontent galvanized by economic crisis as a result of drought, failed agro-industrial projects, high level corruption, and renewed war in the South led to the increasing overt public opposition that culminated in a popular uprising in Khartoum that overthrew Numeiry on 6 April 1985.

During the same period, soldiers who came from the Anya Nya units absorbed into the army after the Addis Ababa Accords, had resisted illegal orders to be transferred north. Rather than negotiating a resolution of the standoff, Numairy repressed the mutineers. After a long battle, the commanders and soldiers evacuated Bor and Pibor and regrouped in Ethiopia, where they coalesced with soldiers who had fled to the bush after earlier mutinies. Overall, command was assumed by Col. John Garang de Mabior, an officer from the absorbed forces who deserted his post in Khartoum to join the rebels. Garang welded the desperate troops into the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with its political wing , the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

The Bor mutiny triggered an uprising that caused unprecedented political turmoil, social disruption, and economic collapse. According to the SPLA/SPLM manifesto, the present war is intended to liberate the whole Sudan from its main enemies, represented by Northern and Southern Sudanese bourgeoisie and bureaucratic elites, religious fundamentalism and the reactionary commanders of the Anya Nya II.⁴ Although the alliance with the dissidents from the North had led to the popular uprising that overthrew Numairy in April 1985, the SPLA/SPLM felt that this was not enough. Liberation had assumed the wider meaning of a socialist transformation by which the enslavement of the masses by a local sectarian based aristocracy acting in collusion with rapacious foreign business interests will be brought to an end. Even though the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which was set up in April 1985, pledged to return power to an elected government within one year and even though activists from the professional and trade union movements were influential in the cabinet, the SPLM mistrusted the transitional government because the power of the Numairy's generals was still intact. The SPLA could

not forget that the chairman of the TMC had urged Numairy to suppress the Bor mutiny in 1983. And the September laws were not rescinded.

The SPLM also criticized the parliamentary elections held in April 1986, since the war prevented most southerners from voting and since no constitution transformation had yet occurred. The elected prime minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi, also failed to reach an understanding with the SPLA. Head of the Umma Party and great grandson of the regional-political leader who had ousted the Turco-Egyptian rulers a century earlier, Mahdi articulated a vision of a liberal Islamic government that would respect the rights of religious minorities within a relatively centralized Muslim state. That approach was suspect to the SPLM as well as to regional and secular political groups. They argued that the political system had to be constructed that would reflect the multireligious and the multiethnic realities in the Sudan. The situation polarized further in May 1988, when the National Islamic Front (NIF) joined the cabinet on a platform committed to instituting a comprehensive Islamic legal system within two months. NIF, a pillar of the Numairy regime, had rejected negotiations with the SPLM that would restructure the political system.

Meanwhile, the conservative Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) feared that its support among Muslim religious orders was being undermined by the NIF and that the Umma-NIF alliance would relegate the DUP to a minor role. DUP leaders were also concerned that NIF's absolutist approach would tear apart the country, and they believed that pragmatic accommodation was acquired in the multiethnic Sudan. The DUP therefore, negotiated a path-breaking accord with the SPLM in November 1988 that promised to freeze Islamic laws until a national constitutional conference could make fundamental decisions

concerning the legal system and the nature of the state. Mahdi and NIF rejected the DUP-SPLM accord, which forced the DUP to pull out abruptly from the government in late December 1988.⁵

By 1988 the SPLA was controlling 90 per cent of the countryside in the South. In February 1989 Mahdi proposed a motion in parliament to legalize the establishment under the overall command of the army, the tribal militia. It was further proposed that tribal militias should be renamed to become popular defense forces. Some political commentators and the army saw in this a desire to establish strong militias in the region of his party's support (Kordofan and Dar Fur) as a safeguard against military coups. In fact the motion was proposed not long after a military which had forced Mahdi to accept the November 1988 peace agreement between the SPLM and the DUP. By November 1989, however, the new military government of Lt Gen Omer El Bashir had promulgated the National Popular Defense Act (NPD) as a paramilitary force to operate in collaboration with the Army and assist in counter insurgency operations in the buffer zones between the South and the North. The Defense Act (6 November 1989) and the appointment of Brig. Babiker Abd El-Mahmoud Hassan to head the Popular Defense Forces were clear indications that the state had now legalized war by proxy, i.e. civilian to act on its behalf.⁶

These developments accelerated military operations against the SPLA. In 1991 NIF consolidated its hold by proclaiming Sudan an Islamic republic and organized it on a nominally federal basis. The central government retained overwhelming financial and executive powers, but states with non-Muslim majorities could exempt themselves from certain provisions of the Islamic criminal law. Popular committees were formed on the Libyan model to mobilize and control the public.

Despite the government's sweeping arrests of political activists and intellectuals, banned political and unionist forces created a national democratic alliance (NDA) in October 1989 that called for the restoration of democracy by a campaign of civil disobedience against the regime. The NDA charter was formally endorsed by the SPLM in March 1990 and, in September 1990, by the high command of the armed forces that had been ousted after the coup. The officers even urged army garrisons to stop fighting the SPLA and join forces against the government. Thus the political forces that sought to restore democracy aligned with the leaders of the violent rebellion in the common aim of destroying the NIF-led military government.

The SPLM/SPLA has grown from a small band of mutineers in 1983 to a broad-based movement that controls nearly all the South and allies itself with all the political groups opposing the regime. If the alliance can manage to hold together and overthrow the government, the SPLM might realize its far reaching aspirations. If, however, the government wards off those challenges, the protracted conflict could continue to wreck havoc on the society and the economy. With government and opposition pursuing their struggle in zero sum terms, no compromise appears possible

Notes

¹ *Draft Organic Law to Organize Regional Self-Government in The Southern Provinces of the Democratic Republic of The Sudan*. Chapter 4, article 7.

² Gustavo Benavides and M.W. Daly, eds, *Religion and Political Power*, (New York 1989) .83.

³ Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Towards an Islamic Reformation*, Chapter 4, 5 and 7.

⁴ Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Yoo Many agreements Dishonoured*, (London 1990). 251-5.

⁵ Ahmed and Soboro, eds, *Management of the Crisis in The Sudan*, (Bergen, Center for Development Studies, University of Bergen, 1989) Annexes 4, 5, 6 and 7, 145-152.

⁶ M. W. Daly and Ahmad Alawad Sikiang, *Civil War in The Sudan* (British Academy Press, London & New York). 130-131.

Chapter 4

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

The SPLM is a revolutionary political force currently fighting the Sudan government. Its aims are crystallized soon after its establishment in 1983. The SPLM articulated comprehensive goals: the creation of “a united Sudan under a socialist system that affords democracy and human rights to all nationalities and guarantees freedom to all religions, beliefs, and outlooks. A united and a socialist Sudan can be achieved only through protracted revolutionary armed struggle. Peaceful struggle has always been met with ruthless suppression and callous killing of our beloved people.”¹

Considering itself representative of the South, East, the West and Nuba mountains, the SPLM/A saw the war as struggle for liberation built on a populist, but nonetheless socialist, ideological base. The struggle against oppression and domination represented the main theme of SPLA/M ideology. In this respect the SPLM manifesto declares that “the main task of the SPLAM is to transform the Southern Movement from a reactionary Movement led by reactionaries and concerned with the South, jobs and self interest to a progressive movement led by revolutionaries and dedicated to the socialist transformation of the whole country. It must be reiterated that the principle objective of the SPLA/M is not separation for the South. The South is an integral and inseparable part of the Sudan.

Africa has been fragmented sufficiently enough by colonialism and neocolonialism and its further fragmentation can only be in the interests of her enemies.”

Garang declared that the new Sudan would be democratic and guaranteed equality, freedom, and economic and social justice and respect for human rights. The monopoly of power by any group must end, whether that monopoly is held by “political parties, families dynasties, religious sects or army.” Consequently Garang criticized the Transitional Military Council as a “gang of generals,” the Mahdist Umma Party and DUP as invidious exemplars of family dynasties linked to religious sects, and NIF as an ideological sectarian movement. The SPLA/M rejected tribalism and racial distinctions as base of rule: “the new Sudan as a concept strives to establish a new cultural order in the country. It takes as its point of departure the notion that human beings, in any given society, have equal rights and obligations regardless of color, etc. The establishment of the new cultural order demands of necessity a radical restructuring of state power to establish genuine democracy and to follow a path of development that will lead to far reaching social change.” Once power was restructured in Khartoum, each region could achieve genuine autonomy. Then the central government would not monopolize power, and the economies of the less developed peripheries would benefit. Since SPLM rejected the limited approach embodied in the Addis Ababa Accord, Garang criticized the government proposal to negotiate solely concerning the South.

The SPLM’s aims are all highly political. The movement was organized along military lines, since force was its primary tool for pressurizing and overthrowing the government. Because SPLM leaders believed that negotiations would not succeed without control over territory and considerable military leverage, diplomacy was initially

viewed as secondary. Although, a joint SPLM/SPLA high command governed the movement, the primary responsibilities of its senior members were to command particular battlefronts. Decision making was complicated and slow, since messages had to be sent to far flung officers, response collated, and further discussion carried out before agreement could be reached on major policies and diplomatic issues. Meetings were logistically difficult to arrange and relatively infrequent. Garang wielded special power. As the premier commander articulated the goals of the movement with authority, he provided direction of the overall military campaigns and served as the leading diplomatic envoy. Senior officers played prominent public roles in meetings with political groups and negotiating significant agreements.²

Until May 1991, the SPLM had its political headquarters in Addis Ababa and maintained its liaison offices in Nairobi and London. The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), which provides humanitarian aid in the SPLA-controlled areas, also has its headquarters in Nairobi. In practice, SRRA operations are controlled by SPLA officers in the field, even though the SRRA is legally independent.

Garang's concern for political coherence within the movement merged with his belief that maintaining the unity of political and military cadres was essential for long term success. SPLM leaders remembered that the Anya Nya rebellion suffered from military fragmentation and the conflicting ambitions of rival politicians; the movement could negotiate effectively with the central government only after Col. Joseph Lagu forcibly united the factions.³ The SPLM/SPLA faced competition initially from the emerging separatist Anya Nya movement, called Anya Nya II, whose leaders had deserted the armed forces shortly before the Bor. mutiny. They expected him, senior in age and rank to

Garang and the 1200 men from Bor and Pibor- to come under the authority of Anya Nya II. Instead, in Garang's words, the SPLA waged a "bitter struggle" from June to November 1983 before the "correct direction prevailed" and the SPLA killed or won over the "separatist reactionaries, and opportunists." The remaining Anya Nya II received arms and funds from the government; Anya Nya II was a low cost way to harass the SPLA.

Nonetheless, after prolonged negotiations, the SPLM appointed the most effective Anya Nya II commander, Gordon Kong Chuol, to the SPLM/SPLS high command in January 1988. He led operations in his home district, fighting the army garrisons that had previously funded him. Only remnant of the Anya Nya II remained under government control in Upper Nile. Those Anya Nya II members who joined the SPLA felt that their immediate interests in the comprehensive ideology had been the special needs of the South, recognition of their African heritage, and the establishment of a federal system of rule.

Many attempts have been made by the SPLM to bring about peace in the Sudan. With the current regime alone, the SPLM has conducted eight sessions of peace talks in Addis Ababa and Nairobi (1989), Abuja (1992 and 1993), and Nairobi again (1989 to 1995). The last meetings in Nairobi were held under the aegis of the East African Inter-Governmental Authority of Drought and Development (IGADD).⁴

Colonel Garang declared on 21st February 1995, the formation of the "New Sudan Brigade" (NSB), as an "organic and special unit of the SPLA", falling under direct political guidance and military command of the Chairman himself. It is composed of political cells inside Sudan and abroad; and military units in the countryside and armed cells in government controlled areas. The NSB is a response to and contribution to the on

going dialog between the SPLA and the Northern opposition on how to topple the NIF regime and build a new Sudan. Being open to all Sudanese patriots, it is supposed to extend the war to the countryside and urban areas of the North. Through it, the SPLA hopes to transfer itself into a national, rather than a regional movement. But no SPLM government has been formed up, even though a substantial number of former high level administrators in the Southern regional government joined the movement. Considerable tension between civilian cadres with solely military backgrounds therefore emerged.

Notes

¹ Garang's address on 3rd March 1984 and are quoted in full in Mansour Khalid, *John of Jonn Garang Speaks*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1987), 21-23.

² Meetings and constitutional conferences of the military government officials in 1989.

³ Alier, *Africa Confidential*, 30 October 1985; SPLA radio, 7 August 1985 and 28 January 1988; Omdurman (Sudan) radio, 17 August 1985; and Sudan News Agency, 6 February 1988.

⁴ Mansour Khalid, *The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-SPLM*, (Kegan Paul International 1995 London).

Chapter 5

Foreign Relationship

The SPLM leadership sought good relationship with foreign countries that could provide sanctuary, material assistance, and diplomatic support.¹ Ethiopia provided most substantial support. When the battalion from Bor. and Pibor took sanctuary in Ethiopia, Mengistu, then president of Ethiopia, was already hostile to Numairy, of whom he accused of supporting Eritrian secessionists and anti-regime forces in Tigre and Oromo. Mengistu preferred to support the SPLA instead of the Any Nya II since Garang rejected the concept of secession. That support continued during subsequent regimes in Khartoum, as the basic tension in Sudan and Ethiopia relations remained.

A powerful radio station was allowed to operate on the Ethiopian soil to report the SPLA's military campaigns and the outcome of meetings between Sudanese political groups and the basic philosophy of the movement. The radio was a vital means for the SPLA to transmit its messages direct to the Sudanese public. The SPLA operated training camps, logistic centers, a prison and a POW camp - all beyond the reach of the Sudanese army. By January 1990 the SPLA claimed several victories in Equatoria: the Kaya garrison fell on 14 January, Yei on 28th, and the Kajo Kaji plateau came under SPLA control. Juba was put under siege, and 100 foreign aid workers were evacuated during a cease-fire. Over 400,000 Southern Sudanese crowded into refugee camps operated by the

SRRA in western Ethiopia. It is probable that Mangistu provided military support in the form of transport planes, helicopters, and trucks that sometimes ferried SPLA forces and supplies among base camps in western Ethiopia and even into Sudanese territory. Ethiopian forces also provided long range artillery to shell Sudanese towns from Ethiopia. In 1987 reports surfaced that Cuban advisors to the Ethiopian army aided SPLA operations. The latest information from Sudan is that relations between Sudan and Eritria and Ethiopia have plunged to a new low, amid claims that the two countries are backing the increasingly active SPLA. Although ties between the Sudan and its two neighbors has not yet been broken off, since Ethiopia accused the Sudan of backing an attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's life in June 1995 in Addis Ababa. On the other hand, Khartoum has repeatedly accused Eritria of harboring the National Democratic Alliance, an umbrella opposition group including the SPLA, but whose military forces are mainly northerners based in Eritria.² Garang refuted these accusations and argued that most SPLA weapons came from the Sudanese army itself, either captured in battle or seized when garrisons were overrun. Other weapons, he asserts, were purchased on the international market.

Libya leader Muammar Qadhafi, who eagerly supported any groups that opposed Numairy, was more than happy to assist the SPLM. Garang's visit to Tripoli in April 1984 secured substantial military aid, although the SPLM resisted Qadhafi's pan-Arab political agenda. Cooperation ended abruptly when Numairy was overthrown and Qadhafi signed a military protocol with the transitional government. Tripoli subsequently provided not only sizable arms deliveries but also Libyan piloted Migs that bombed SPLA positions on behalf of all three post-Numairy governments.

The SPLM established significant relations with Egypt, a pivotal country in both Africa and the Arab world. President Mubarak consistently sought a negotiated settlement between the SPLM and the government. He facilitated Garang's meetings with Sadiq al-Mahdi at the summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in July 1986 and strongly supported the talks in 1987-1988 between the SPLM and the DUP. Cairo also tried to arrange negotiations between the SPLM and the military government that seized power in 1989 but shifted towards the antiregime National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1990. Mubarak's tilt became more pronounced during the Gulf crisis in reaction to Khartoum's overt sympathy for Iraq.

Sudan abstained from the August 1990 Arab League vote that condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, thus straining relations with Egypt, and with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Gulf monarchies. Relations took a further turn for the worse in mid-1992 when the government charged that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia were aiding SPLM. To Garang and the SPLM the diversification of sanctuaries at this time was vital as Mengistu and his government were overthrown. This proved invaluable, since the groups that seized power in Addis Ababa in May 1991 closed the SPLM office there. The SPLA was forced to hastily dismantle its radio station and relocate it to Kenya. By this time, the movement virtually controlled all of Eritrea and had access to both Kenya and Uganda, although no SPLA forces were stationed on their soil. Tentative contacts had been made with Zaire and Central African Republic, to which over 65,000 Sudanese refugees had fled during the fighting in 1990-1991. In addition, an agreement was reached with Chad in 1990 for SPLA and Dar Fur dissident forces to receive support.

Nairobi has been the center for both political and humanitarian supplies and a locale for political offices. The People's Relief and Rehabilitation Association (PRRA) is based here and coordinates all relief activities for Southern Sudan. Despite the Sudanese government's displeasure with Kenya on the SPLM and PRRA issue, the Kenya Government still retains their offices, and the relationship improved after the overthrow of Mengistu.

Supplies into Equatoria were facilitated by Uganda after Museveni came to power in January 1986. Khartoum responded with supporting Museveni's predecessor, Gen. Tito Okello, whose forces launched sporadic attacks across the border into northern Uganda. The Khartoum and Kampala governments managed, however to avoid diplomatic crises, and Museveni unsuccessfully to arrange meetings between Garang and the Sudanese leadership.

Notes

¹ Mansour Khalid, *The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-SPLM* (Kegan Paul International 1995 London) and Dunstan M. W. Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan*, (Africa Publishing Company, New York & London) 136-141.

² *The Daily Nation* January 14 and 17, 1977.

Chapter 6

Military Operations

The SPLA strategy was to undermine the government and the armed forces on the South by mounting protracted operations that would wear them down.¹ The forces sought to cripple major economic developments; block communication routes; surround, isolate, and overrun army garrisons; seize and administer towns; and expand the fighting to the north. The SPLA operations moved from beyond purely guerrilla tactics to include limited position warfare and rule over a vast territory.

The SPLA spent its first year consolidating a hold on the central area of the Southern Sudan and secure the long supply lines to bases within Ethiopia. They tried to neutralize the threat posed by Akuot Atem and Samuel Gai Tut who had earlier broken from the mainstream SPLA to form their own liberation movements, and also contacting independent Anya Nya II bands throughout the South to incorporate them into the new military structure. Early in January 1984 the SPLA attacked the forces of Akuot Atemi, Gai Tut and William Abdallah Cuol. By the end of May 1984, the SPLA ended the Anya Nya II as a significant force when Samuel Gai Tut was killed by his main subordinate, William Abdallah Cuol.

In 1984-85 the SPLA began making contacts in new areas and attracting new recruits. The pattern of contact, confrontation, and consolidation followed roughly a three-year

cycle. The outline of this pattern starts from northern Bar al- Ghazal, eastern Equatoria, southern Kordofan upto southern Blue Nile.

The SPLA started recruiting young men from northern Bar al-Ghazal in 1984. The SPLA strategy at the time was to concentrate forces in Lakes province, especially around Yirol, which fell to the SPLA as early as December 1985, and Rumbek in 1989. From this stronghold in Lakes the SPLA started advancing on Wau.

SPLA raiding continued into 1987. It was aimed almost entirely at civilian targets, moving as far south as Rumbek district in 1987. The SPLA started re-entering northern Bar al-Ghazal from its bases to the south in Lakes province early in 1986, but they did not confront government and militia forces until 1987. A militia defeat in one of these rare battles was the immediate cause of the retaliatory al-Dien massacre of Dinka refugees in southern Dar Fur.

The SPLA secured the border between Bar al-Ghazal and southern Kordofan and Darfur late in 1988 and deprived government aided militia of important dry season pastures and sources of water. Between 1989-1990 the militias started to reverse their previous hostility to local Dinka and the SPLA and started to re-negotiate their access to the river during the dry season of 1990.

The SPLA appeared as the defenders of the civilian population in Bar al-Ghazal after 1986. Steady military pressure mounted in eastern Equatoria throughout 1987 and 1988. After diverting government attention to Kurmuk at the end of 1987, the SPLA began to absorb previous hostile Lotuko, Didinga and Lokoya militias. The government started arming the Toposa against the SPLA and Lotuko, and the SPLA armed the Boya against the Toposa. On 29 September 1988 Kayala, on the Kapoeta- Torit road, was taken by the

SPLA. At the end of October an Acoli militia joined the SPLA. Also in 1988 a reported 10,000 Mundari joined the SPLA and were marched to Ethiopia for training.²

If the SPLA demonstrated they could move beyond the Nilotic heartland by establishing themselves firmly in eastern Equatoria, it also demonstrates that it could move, albeit tentatively, beyond the old North-South border, and expand the war into areas of the Northern Sudan which had been free from conflict in the previous war.

The Nuba hills in south Kordofan are identified by the SPLM as an “African” area in the Northern Sudan which had suffered underdevelopment under Arabist central government. It was an interpretation which had become increasingly popular among some Nuba intellectuals during the 1970s. Southern Kordofan was an obvious target for SPLA expansion outside the Southern Sudan if it was to claim to demonstrate its claim to be a Sudanese, rather than just a Southern Sudanese, movement. By the end of June 1985 SPLA attacked Gardud in southern Kordofan. They devastated the villages of Kau Nyaro, an area where there had formally been some local sympathy for the SPLA, who were seen as fighting the Arabs.

Southern Blue Nile area is another region frequently identified by Southern Sudanese as an area under Arab domination. From early 1986 SPLA units began passing through as they moved between Ethiopia and the White Nile. They made friendly contacts in the villages as they did so, for example in Uduk country. Some young men began to join the SPLA and were sent for training. By the end of 1986, when the government had heard of these happenings, they began harassing the local population, with the result that more joined the movement and an SPLA unit consisting largely of local men was advancing on Chili. The district administrative town of Kurmuk was taken by the SPLA on 12

November 1987, as was the even more northerly town of Gaissan. Further north in the Ingessana hills, some Ingessana joined the SPLA at this time.

By the end of 1988 the SPLA had consolidated its position in eastern Equatoria, had secured the northern borders of the old southern region, and had even pushed the war northwards into southern Kordofan and Blue Nile provinces. In January 1989 the combined forces of William Nyuon Bany's SPLA and Gordon Kong Cuol's ex-Anya Nya began to close on Nasir. On 28th January 1989, after prolonged and heavy fighting, they took it; thus began a string of victories which brought the war to a new phase by the middle of the year. Torit fell on 27th February, Parajok and Nimule in early March, Mongala on 17th March, Akobo on 17th April, and Waat on 2 May. The whole of the Ethiopian border from Jokau to Kapoeta was thus secured; the SPLA were able to control a continuous stretch of territory from the border to northern Bar al-Ghazal; forces in eastern Equatoria were able to concentrate around Juba without fear of army garrisons to their rear; and the Sudanese army could no longer bring its Mombasa shipped supplies through Nimule, but had to divert them to the longer Kaya road through Zaire. The SPLA now held three former provincial capitals; Torit, Bor, and Nasir. In addition to that, the fall of Torit left the SPLA with some heavy equipment, including tanks and long range artillery.

The territorial gains presented the SPLA with new challenges and opportunities. Militarily the SPLA has been tempted to alter its strategy from guerrilla to convention warfare. With new supply routes of its own through East Africa it launched an attack in the area west of Juba and took Koja Kaji and Kaya in February 1990. Later in the same year, again making use of its new supply routes as well as its old bases in Ethiopia, the

SPLA shifted significant numbers of soldiers from the Blue Nile and Upper Nile to the new western theater. The Nuer soldiers who featured so prominently in the siege and fall of Nasir were part of the spearhead which took the whole western Equatoria in November 1990 and began to close in around Yei and Juba. In western Bar al-Ghazal some of the Ferti militia also began making their peace with the SPLA. By early 1991 the military initiative seemed to lie securely with the SPLA.

The collapse of the Mengistu government in Ethiopia in May 1991 considerably slowed down the SPLA military momentum, bringing it to a halt in some areas. The SPLA high command had refused to enter into any talks with the Ethiopian rebel groups who were poised to take power in early 1991; as a result of which there was a very hasty evacuation of SPLA camps and personnel from Ethiopia, including over 200,000 Sudanese refugees who had been living in SPLA protected centers near the Upper Nile border. The new provisional government of Ethiopia was not only hostile to the SPLA but had close links with the Sudanese army. This and other problems brought latent tensions within the SPLA leadership to the surface. In August 1991 the three commanders of northern Upper Nile, based at Nasir, called for the overthrow of Garang and broke with the main body of the movement. Despite these setbacks, the SPLA has regrouped with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in January 1997 and have made coordinated attacks in the Blue Nile region. (The NDA is an umbrella opposition group including the SPLA but its military forces are based in Eritria). The Ethiopian leadership has increasingly become friendly to the SPLA after Egyptian Islamists tried to kill Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, in Addis Ababa in 1995, allegedly with Sudanese help. In addition, according to Reuter the Sudanese armed forces command said in January 1997,

that Ethiopian forces had shelled Kurmuk and Quassein, both border towns with the Sudan. SPLA forces were advancing towards Damazin, a large town and the site of Sudan's largest hydroelectric power station.

The sharp decrease in financial and arms support to the SPLA, just as it faced the increased costs of providing for refugees fleeing Ethiopia and displaced persons, risked overwhelming rudimentary administrative structure. Moreover, the SPLA is lacking the capacity to move north towards Khartoum. Despite its control over nearly one-third of the country, the SPLA realized the fighting has reached a stalemate.

Notes

¹ M. W. Daly and Ahmed Alawad Sikianga, *Civil War in the Sudan* 117-136.

² SPLA radio, 20-24 February 1988 and 2, 7 March 1988, 21 February 1988 and 2, 3 March 1988; SUNA of 27 February 1988.

Chapter 7

Perspectives from Khartoum

The transitional period after the overthrow of Numairy was one in which ideals frantically competed with a fluid context, with conflicting factions searching for points of anchor and leverage.¹ The government felt itself obliged to fulfill its promise of restoring democracy, and did little besides. The incoming leaders of parliamentary democracy felt euphoric about their victory and the anticipated harvest of the struggle for democracy. The SPLM/SPLA, seeing the continuing commitment of the system to the basic principle of Islam and Arabism that Numairy had introduced in his Islamic laws, dismissed the transitional government as nothing but a disguised continuation of the old regime and postulated themselves as the champions of the truly democratic, secular and egalitarian national movement that would bring justice, equality, and development to the Sudan. Rivalries and alignment of factions along these idealistic lines were not restricted to North and South relations, but were beginning to be expressed within the North and South. As a result, the country was becoming torn apart, indeed shattered, while the factions only saw the pieces on which they stood or which fell around them.

The issue of Numairy's Islamic laws, so-called September Laws, whose abrogation had been expected after the *antifada*, but which remained in force, dominated the political climate of discussion. Virtually all the Northern leaders, whether in the transitional

government or aspiring to assume control, asserted that in Islam there is no separation between religion and state and that secularism is a Western concept rooted in Western experience.

General Abd al-Rahman Siwar al-Dahad, the military leader of the regime and Dr. Jizouli Daffala, its prime minister, were unwavering on the issue, although they were also quite sincere about some form of diversification permit the application of different systems to different religious communities, not only in private, but also in public affairs. How a system of diversity with equality could be designed was a matter of detail that they did not venture to address.² General Siwar al-Dahab went so far as to say that no Muslim leader could possibly abrogate Islam laws and survive politically. Had Numairy not enacted them, the issue could have been avoided by omission; but once Numairy had ‘entrapped’ the nation by legislating them, there was no way they could be removed.

Sadiq al-Mahdi shared the Islamic perspective on the relations between religion and state, but he projected the image of a national leader who was trying to bridge the different points of view. He intimated that he saw the country threatened by two evils: racism, of which he accused the SPLM/SPLA, and religious bigotry, for which he held the Muslim Brotherhood responsible. To the extent that the SPLM/SPLA wanted to impose its will on the nation by force, it should be stopped by force. And referring to the danger that the brotherhood posed to the unity of the country, he said, gesturing with his right hand, that that was why he would not miss any opportunity to hit them with a stick as if they were scorpions. According to him, Numairy in alliance with the Muslim Brothers had tried to use *Sharia* as a balloon to lift them up from their problems and he, Sadiq al-

Mahdi, had come like a needle and puncture the balloon which led to the downfall of the regime.

While the National Islamic Front was unequivocally Islam, Sadiq and his party wanted to combine the mission of Islam with the idea of a historic multicultural and multireligious Sudanese nation, led by Mahdist dynasty. The common denominator between the Islamic Front and the traditional sectarian parties was the religious factor, the very ground or constituency for which they were competing. And so, while religion united them, politics divided them, and the rivalry for national building was inevitably a political issue that transcended even the family bonds of Sadiq al-Mahdi and Hassan al-Turabi as brothers-in-law.

Because Northern leaders did not fully understand the nature and dimensions of the SPLM/SPLA war agenda, they appeared genuinely puzzled by the stated objectives of the movement. That a movement led from the South and with rank and file support from the region would be fighting for the unity of the country was incongruous to most Northern Sudanese, just as it was to outside observers. The call for a new democratic Sudan where there would be no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, culture or sex sounded utopia, but was a detail that people did not focus on. What shattered the imagination of the Northern leaders was that the SPLM/SPLA did not jump on the band wagon of popular uprising against the Numairy regime and in favor of liberal democracy. The point was often made that Garang would have returned a hero had he joined the *antifada*. No thought was given to the fact that Garang would have surrendered his effective gun-power for the dictatorship of numbers in favor of sectarianism or the new Islam trend. Some suggested that he could even have been appointed prime minister during the transitional

period, but no thought was given to the fact that this would have been within the framework he was fighting to change.

While Garang did not heed the request of the transitional government for him and his movement to join the forces of *antifada* through the good offices of the National Alliance for National Salvation, the SPLM/SPLA held a meeting at Koka Dam in Ethiopia in May 1986 with all the political parties except Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the National Islamic Front. The meeting adopted the Koka Dam Declaration that would become a significant point of reference in subsequent debates.³ The declaration stipulated certain prerequisites steps towards convening a national constitutional conference, among them recognition of the problem as national and not regional; the lifting of the state emergency; the repeal of the September 1983 laws; the restoration of the 1956 transitional constitution as amended in 1964; the abrogation of military pacts that interfered with the country's sovereignty; and the observance of a cease-fire. These resolutions indicated that bases for dialog and agreement existed between the SPLM and potentially influential political and intellectual groups. And yet most parties that signed the Koka Dam Declaration lacked representation in the parliament elected the next month. The Communist party, Nuba based Sudan National Party, and the coalition of African parties totaled barely 17 per cent of the members of parliament.⁴ On their own they could not transform the conflict from zero sum to positive sum, although their efforts could contribute to the transformation.

Notes

¹ M.W. Daly and Sikianga, *Civil War in The Sudan* 186-200.

² William D. Coplin & Michael K. O'Leary, *Political Risk Yearbook* Vol. IV and V A-2 to A-8.

Notes

³ Francis M. Deng, and Professor Gifford, *The Search for Peace and Unity in The Sudan*, (Washington 1987), 24-26.

⁴ Abdel and Syrbo, *Management of the Crisis in the Sudan*, (Bergen, Center for Development Studies, University of Bergen 1989) 131-135.

Chapter 8

Obstacles to a Peaceful Resolution

The concern of both parties to the conflict was not only the tragic loss of lives and human suffering which the war was causing to the South, but the extent to which it had uprooted masses of people, dislodged them from their natural habitat, and divested them of the cultural, moral and spiritual values that had nourished their sense of identity and dignity as a people. Although much of the physical damage continued to be concentrated in the south, and therefore not sufficiently felt in the north, it had become increasingly recognized that the war was not only overburdening the ailing national economy, but was also causing a level of militarization, factionalization and proliferation of weaponry that could turn the Sudan into another Lebanon.

Until the Koka Dam Declaration of March 1986, Northern political forces did not realize fully that the SPLM would refuse a political settlement based on the Addis Ababa Accord and would insist on adhering to its comprehensive program to transform the government from the centre. For the North, according limited self-rule to the South was easier than countenancing a fundamental shift in power in Khartoum. By November 1985, however, the transitional government accepted Garang's idea of convening a constitutional conference to establish agreed upon legal bases for the political system. But the government was not willing to annul the September laws prior to the conference, as

the SPLA demanded. Both prepare for advantage on the ground, believing that the other side would not make significant political concessions until it was hurt militarily. The continued fighting, in turn, made each side more suspicious of the other's intentions.

Attempts at personal diplomacy between Mahdi and Garang failed to bridge the gap: Mahdi tried to bypass the Koka Dam, which Garang insisted was the only legitimate framework of negotiations. Mahdi claimed Garang had negotiated in bad faith when the SPLA subsequently shot down a civilian airplane. Garang claimed that Mahdi intended to accelerate the war by turning to Libya for additional bombers and shooting down the peace process itself by refusing to engage in further meetings with him.

In effect each side decided to reserve its substantive differences until a conference was convened. The military high command had to intervene to resolve the crisis with its ultimatum in February 1989. The officers forced Mahdi to form a broad-based government that excluded NIF and to make the DUP's chief negotiator with the SPLM the foreign minister in charge of finalizing arrangements for a constitutional conference. This paved way for the government and parliament to formally endorse the DUP-SPLA accord, and parliament voted to shelf debate on the Islamic laws until the constitutional conference. The SPLA responded with a cease-fire on 1 May, and both sides agreed that the state of emergence would end simultaneously with the beginning of a permanent cease-fire just before the constitutional conference would convene on 18 September. The peace process was at an advanced stage when the military officers took over power the same year.¹

The newly established Islam-oriented government immediately canceled the DUP_SPLM accord, reinstated the September laws, and reverted to viewing the conflict as the Southern problem. Two meetings between the military junta and SPLM held in

Nairobi in August and December 1989 reached a deadlock. Subsequent mediation attempts by Mubarak and Mobutu through the OAU failed even to get the two parties to the table, and similarly, an American proposal to separate the two sides by an internationally monitored buffer zone in the south proved a nonstarter. The latest initiatives by the heads of states of the IGGAD in 1994-96 have come to naught as each side geared up for a military showdown.

There are three situations which presented themselves for a negotiated end to the prolonged war in the Sudan. The Koka Dam conference of 1986 and the DUP-initiated accord of 1988-1989 could have resulted in an agreement that would restructure the political bases of power in the Sudan to meet the needs of the peripheral areas that the SPLM claimed to represent. But the weakness of the political system over the years has enabled political forces which oppose the implementation of those accords. The third situation, expressed by support for territorial partitioning was based on the failure to reach a mutually accepted accommodation and reservation to the view that the conflict has no benefit for the warring parties. The initial two accords are key to the Sudan conflict resolution.

The civil war in the Sudan since 1983, therefore, represent a classic prolonged war. Both sides have perceived war as a means of defending their core identity and ensuring the survival of their political community. At critical moments, one side or the other has perceived the benefits from conflict as outweighing the benefits of peace and has hoped that a clear military victory would replace the need for negotiated compromises. The war therefore, has been prolonged beyond either party's wish; has caused tragic loss of lives and human suffering. The economic and social life of the country as a whole has been

damaged by this long war. This prolonged conflict continues to destroy the people and society that the political forces sought to preserve.

Notes

¹ SPLA radio, 14 August 1989; on the coup d'état, see Ann Lesch "Khartoum Diary," *Middle East Report* 162 (November 1989): 36-38.

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