



# international UPDATE 11/93

## SUDAN: A COUNTRY DIVIDED

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### INTRODUCTION

During 1991 and early 1992 the Sudanese government began evicting people from the squatter camps that circle the country's capital of Khartoum. Close to half a million squatters were taken from their homes at gunpoint and dumped in camps far out in the Sudanese desert with little access to food, water, or sanitary facilities. At least a dozen people were shot in December alone as they attempted to prevent the government from bulldozing their makeshift homes. According to Khartoum, the owners wish to reclaim the land, but the real reason lies in the fact that the vast majority of squatters are refugees from one of Africa's most destructive civil wars. Christian or animist in religion (making up almost 40 percent of the country's population), they come predominantly from the three southern provinces of Bahr al-Ghazal, Equatoria, and Upper Nile.

History attests to the instability that has resulted from the conflict in Sudan. Since independence in 1956, war has claimed more than 400 000 lives through starvation and violence, and has caused the displacement of five or six million people (roughly half the population of the south). Seven regimes have ruled Sudan: a civilian government until 1958; a military regime until 1964 when it was overthrown by a civilian coup; a second civilian regime until 1969 when it was overthrown by the military; a 1985 military coup which formed a 12-month transitional regime; general elections in 1986 followed by a civilian coalition government; and a military-led coup on 30 June 1989 which overthrew the civilian administration and formed the present government. The latest upsurge in the civil war began in 1983, and following a brief lull in the fighting (which resulted from the opening of negotiations in April 1993), northern forces began a new offensive in July in an attempt to capture remaining southern strongholds and cut off rebel supply lines.

This Update will shed some light on a silent war that is often unnoticed in the international press. The first section will discuss some general facts about Sudan, and the second will provide a brief historical overview of the causes of the civil war. The third and fourth sections will deal with the southern and northern forces respectively, and the fifth section will cover the plight of the Nuba people who have been the innocent victims of the war. Finally, the last section will discuss the current situation in Sudan as northern forces continue an offensive in the south.

### SUDAN

Examining the economy and infrastructure of Sudan provides valuable insight into the extent of devastation that has occurred within the country and continues today. It is important to remember, however, that the north has always been more economically active than the southern regions, and since the vast majority of resources and services are located in the north, coupled with the fact that the civil war has destroyed all chances of improving conditions in the south, general statistics are skewed and do not adequately reflect the extent of deprivation that has been experienced in the three southern provinces.

Sudan is currently rated 145th out of 160 states on the United Nations Development Projects Human Development Index. The Index measures such things as life expectancy, literacy, education, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Between 1987 and 1989 only 51% of the population had access to health services, and between 1988 and 1990, just 21% of the population had access to safe water. Furthermore, the average rate of illiteracy was estimated at 72.9% in 1990.

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Infrastructure is virtually non-existent in the south. There has never been more than a rudimentary network of untarred roads, which are an easy target from mines, and are often flooded during the rainy season. The civil war is influenced by climatic seasons determining the degree to which either northern or southern forces maintain control over various parts of Sudan. Northern forces launch major offensives during the dry season when roads are accessible, and forces from the south strike in periodic, guerilla-like attacks when the rain provides their mobile armies with a safe retreat (motor traffic in the southern province of Upper Nile is limited to the drier months of January through May). Even roads in northern Sudan, other than town roads, are only cleared tracks and often impassable after rain. There is a rudimentary railway system with one line extending into the southern regions, and the Nile River has historically been a major route of transportation, but it is slow, runs only north-south, and vessels using it have come under attack.

Air travel is a particularly interesting dimension in the Sudanese civil war. The United Nations has for some time been struggling to provide the southern areas with relief through Operation Lifeline, but they have been frustrated by the actions of both sides in the conflict. The United Nations has accused the Sudanese government of using UN planes (without removing the UN logo) to supply its forces in the south. Conversely, the aid agencies operating in southern Sudan privately concede that about 20% of their supplies are siphoned off by the rebels in order to assure safe passage. This has led to suspicion from both the north and the south that the UN was working in favour of the other side. The tragic story of the southern town of Juba is an example of the UN's inability to fulfil its relief efforts without disruption.

In August 1992, Juba was the centrepiece of the civil war. Southern forces had besieged the city in an attempt to reclaim it, and the northern forces (fearing a mass exodus of civilians) had mined the surrounding area. Due to the past misuse of UN planes by the north, the southern forces threatened to shoot down any plane attempting to enter the city, and at the same time, the government had closed the airport to all traffic. Two months later, after inadequate relief had been supplied to Juba, the UN was forced to temporarily call off Operation Lifeline after southern forces had reportedly killed a number of aid workers. It is hard to say how many civilians died as they huddled in churches and football stadiums, but Juba is only one of many examples in Sudan where civilians have become the tragic targets of the long civil war.

## THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF SUDAN

Each of Sudan's governments has been forced to deal with three principal issues: Sudan's reliance on cotton as its only significant cash crop; the problem of southern Sudan, inherited from Britain's colonial administration; and the

attempt to find a permanent constitution acceptable to all sectors of Sudanese society. The single most important factor accounting for the lack of Sudanese political stability is the historical relationship between the predominantly northern Muslims and the Christian-animist populations of the south. Tensions between these two groups pre-dates (though was compounded by) the Anglo-Egyptian condominium that ruled Sudan from 1899 until independence on 1 January 1956. British policy reinforced ethnic difference by deterring interaction and encouraging separate colonial development. They were later to reverse their stance and foster a unified independent state. While Muslim slave traders helped to foster suspicion and hatred between the north and the south well before colonialism, and successive intransigent governments have perpetuated the civil war, it was Britain's attempt first to separate the two areas, and then later demand that a unified state be formed, that has led to protracted political crisis in Sudan.

The country's history has been plagued by the attempt to find a political solution to the differences between these two regions. While coups and elections are usually followed by the promise to allow the south a significant degree of autonomy, the country has consistently degenerated into dissatisfaction and civil war. Over the past 150 years, Sudan has experienced more warfare than peace, and this has bred a culture of violence that will haunt Sudan into the future.

## THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY

Southerners fought Sudan's central government from 1955 until 1972, when a constitutional formula was agreed upon which the south believed would supply them with an adequate degree of autonomy. For over ten years this relationship continued without erupting into civil war, but by the early 1980s southerners were becoming increasingly suspicious of the north's commitment to respect the distinct culture of southern Sudan.

In September 1983, Sudan's President revoked all existing laws in favour of a new system of Islamic (Shari'a) law. Sudanese Shari'a law has its greatest impact on the movement, work, and dress of women, but it also affects other areas of social, political, and economic life. It prohibits alcohol and gambling, and contains provisions for the death sentence and dismemberment (though it is important not to over-emphasize the degree to which dismemberment actually occurs). Another interesting aspect of Shari'a law is its effect on the banking sector. Controlling banking and international financial transactions is one of the government's means of securing a minimum income (Sudanese banks employ a system of profit-sharing instead of the traditional interest-based system). It is important to note that Islamic law requires a specific interpretation of the Islamic faith, and the laws above should be seen in the light of Sudanese Shari'a law instead of the Islamic faith in general.

The enactment of these laws throughout Sudan was clearly an imposition on southern life, and in 1983 the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed. During the 1980s, the SPLA gradually extended its control so that by 1990 it controlled all of the south except for the capital (Juba) and one or two garrison towns. However, 1991 marked a turning point in the SPLA's fortunes when a new Ethiopian regime came to power that was sympathetic to Khartoum (thereby ending the SPLA's main weapons source from the former Ethiopian government, closing its radio station, and pushing it out of rear bases in Western Ethiopia). These setbacks were insignificant when compared with what followed.

The war eventually divided the two biggest tribal groups in the south - the Dinka and the Nuer. The split in the SPLA occurred in August 1991 when several senior members rebelled against John Garang, the former scholar and soldier, who had led the movement since it began in 1983. The rebels accused him of being dictatorial and imprisoning opponents within the movement, and broke off to form the Sudan People's Liberation Army United (or the Nasir faction). Led by Giak Machar, one of the young SPLA commanders, they argued that the movement should be democratic and stand for human rights. There were also policy differences. Mr. Garang's SPLA stood for a united, but secular Sudan, in which the south would have greater autonomy and southerners in the north would not be subjected to Shari'a law, while the Nasir faction wanted total independence from the north. Mr. Garang is a Dinka, and while he attempts to represent the southern region as a whole, he generally appoints other Dinkas as overlords in the areas run by the movement. Giak Machar is a Nuer and while he does have Dinkas within his movement, his fighters are almost exclusively Nuer.

In January 1992 the Nasir faction launched a vicious attack on Dinka areas that has set the tone of southern infighting since. Garang's troops were destroyed, and the victorious Nuers streamed into the town of Bor killing every person and animal in sight. Two hundred thousand Dinka refugees fled south as the Nasir faction murdered between 2000 and 5000 civilians. In a particularly gruesome act, the Nuer proceeded to blind thousands of Dinka cows with pangas (Dinkas revere their cows and treat them almost as though they were part of the family). Since then tribal war has raged across areas of the south causing more devastation in the Upper Nile than the previous eight years of war against the government. Both sides of the SPLA officially claim that the conflict between them is a leadership struggle, while most ordinary fighters see it as a tribal war. The important thing to remember, however, is that they see it as a temporary diversion from their insurrection against the north.

With the SPLA weakened and split by tribal war, the Sudan army, re-equipped by Iran and China, launched a counter-offensive, capturing almost all major towns within the south. Then bending to western pressure for peace, it

called for a cease-fire with the SPLA in April 1993 and has been holding talks in Abuja, Nigeria since. Regardless of the extent to which they disintegrate, the north cannot take the south by force and expect it to be the beginning of a meaningful stability within Sudan.

## THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT

Each of Sudan's previous administrations has been undermined by one or more of the three principal dilemmas of Sudanese politics (see above). Throughout these years the National Islamic Front (NIF), in one name and political configuration or another, has been a consistent factor in the politics of Sudan. The NIF is a political organization that is inspired by the Islamic faith but is using Islam as a rationale for the final conquest of southern Sudan. In the past they have usually remained in opposition, though sometimes overtly or covertly supporting government initiatives, but today the NIF stands internationally isolated, though domestically (in relation to the northern two thirds of Sudan) securely in control.

When they took power in a 1989 coup, they imposed press censorship, banned all trade unions and political organizations and suspended the Sudanese constitution. Since then the NIF has established an extensive security network including a new People's Defence Force as a balancing mechanism against army influence. Education has been taken over by Islamic figures right up to the University level, there have been significant military personnel changes and all political appointments down to the local level are emanating from Khartoum.

Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the NIF, is the brains behind the military regime in Sudan. His government has been accused of: vigorously pursuing the civil war against the south; blocking international aid efforts; systematically violating human rights; being a conduit for arms and money into terrorist Islamic fundamentalist groups, while providing a safe haven for their training; offering a series of non-starters as the basis for negotiations with the south which it knows will not be accepted by them; and cultivating close relations with Iran and Libya, while supporting Iraq in the Gulf War. Needless to say, this has left the regime relatively isolated from the majority of the international community, including most of its neighbours in the region as well as the IMF and the World Bank, who have suspended any further financial assistance to Sudan.

## THE NUBA

The Nuba are a tribe of more than one million people in the central Sudanese province of Kordofan. All indications suggest that their only real interest is in being left alone, but this is not on Khartoum's agenda. Although up until now they have not revolted they have become a prime target of the Sudanese government. The Nuba claim that in late 1991

and early 1992 at least 5 000 children were kidnapped by government militia's, their villages were attacked by helicopter gunships, and thousands of people were killed in raids and massacres.

On December 29, 1991, the official Sudanese press declared that a Jihad (Holy War) had been declared on the Nuba and reports of atrocities in these areas have been leaking out ever since. Khartoum has for decades been trying to assimilate the tribe into mainstream Sudanese life by forcing them to wear clothes and accept the rules of "Islamic civilisation". For decades they have resisted. It appears as though the government has now lost patience with the Nuba and has offered their land as reward to neighbouring Muslim tribes who are currently attacking them. These tribes, with the help of the central government, have embarked upon a genocidal program to clear Nuba homelands and assimilate the survivors into urban areas. It is a tragic chapter in a ruthless civil war.

### THE JULY OFFENSIVE

When negotiations began in April 1993 the SPLA, the Nasir faction, and the NIF proposed such different solutions to the civil war that few people believed an acceptable outcome could be achieved. In July, after a few months of uneasy stalemate, Khartoum began a new offensive in an attempt to disrupt SPLA supply lines from Uganda. The offensive displaced another 100 000 Southerners, and almost 30 000 people have fled across the Ugandan border. After being repulsed from the town of Nimule (straddling the border), the government successfully took control of Morobo, an important supply link with Uganda. As the government embarked on a new offensive against the SPLA, it has become increasingly obvious that they are now assisting the Nasir faction in the inter-guerrilla war.

If the government is successful in defeating the SPLA they will still have the Nasir faction to deal with. Both SPLA factions see their own dispute as a temporary distraction from the civil war with the north, and have no intention of settling for anything less than their demands. If the government was able to occupy Nasir faction strongholds they would still be left with a protracted guerilla war against southern fighters operating in the countryside. The government's military strategies will not lead to a political solution, and this leaves little hope for Sudan's future.

On 18 August 1993 Sudan joined Iraq, Libya, Syria, North Korea, Cuba and Iran on Washington's pariah list of "states sponsoring terrorism". Khartoum has been linked to various terrorist organisations and has now been accused of being involved in an alleged plot to stage explosions at the UN, a new New York building housing FBI offices, and the city's Lincoln and Holland motor-way tunnels. Sudan has been moving itself into alignment with the policies of Iran and this has led to suspicions regarding Khartoum's direct involvement with terrorism. It has also

created a significant amount of tension between Khartoum's Islamic neighbours (such as Egypt) who feel that Sudan is attempting to export its revolution abroad.

### CONCLUSION

Sudan's infrastructure is shattered. Both the northern and southern forces seem unwilling to compromise. This war has never been of great interest to the international press and except for the United Nations and other international aid agencies, Sudan has been deserted by the global community. Even if the world could devote the kinds of resources necessary to bring the war to an end, and judging by the fiasco in Somalia this is not feasible, it is difficult to imagine a lasting peace settlement that would not involve independence for the southern provinces. Since this is unlikely in the short term, Sudan will remain chaotic and unstable.

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