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*Girma Kebede*

## SUDAN: THE NORTH-SOUTH CONFLICT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**T**HE PEOPLES of southern Sudan have suffered nearly two centuries of colonial rule under the Turko-Egyptian, the Mahdiya, the Anglo-Egyptian, and the post-independence northern regimes. There is little need to repeat yet again this rather long history. Attention is only called here to the activities and policies of these colonial regimes which have contributed to the cleavage between the predominantly Muslim North and non-Muslim South.

The history of the Islamic conquest and Arabization of northern Sudan was a gradual and incremental process. From the seventh century on, Arab invaders from Egypt moved southward to the richer lands beyond the inhospitable Nubian expanse and forced deals on local rulers who undertook to assist Arab merchants financially and allow the preaching of Islam. Many of the Arabs settled among the sedentary riverian communities in Sudan, taking up cultivation on the fertile alluvial soil. Others moved westward into the savanna regions of what is today known as Darfur and Kordofan and became cattle keepers. Wherever they settled, the Arabs blended with the local cultures, intermarried freely with the different African indigenous inhabitants, and gradually introduced Islam and the Arab culture. Some indigenous tribes, like the Nuba of Kordofan, the Fur of Darfur, and the Beja of the Red Sea Hills, resisted Arab incursion into their respective homeland. In due time, however, they succumbed to the force of the new invaders and accepted Islam and learnt to speak Arabic, but retained their languages and cultures. Staunch resisters were killed, enslaved or fled elsewhere. By the fourteenth century much of northern Sudan was transformed into an overwhelmingly Arabized and Islamized society and three Muslim states had emerged: Sennar on the Blue Nile; Kordofan in the middle, west of the White Nile; and Darfur to the west. The Arab penetration deep into southern Sudan did not occur until the early nineteenth century.

Until then, protected by rivers, swamps and mountains the peoples of southern Sudan had very little contact with northern Sudan—or the outside world for that matter.

Sudan's North-South conflict owes its genesis to the colonial past. Like many territorial demarcations in the continent, Sudan's present borderlines were defined by the colonial powers at the turn of the century. As a political entity, then, Sudan—like many African countries—is a fairly recent creation. Sudan's ethnically and religiously diverse people were brought together for the first time under a centralized government and administration during the Turko-Egyptian colonial rule (Beshir, 1984: 10) which lasted from 1820 to 1882. With full control over much of the northern half of the country, The Turko-Egyptian rulers slowly penetrated the non-Islamic and non-Arab South, establishing trade routes and eventually securing, roughly, the present day borders of Sudan.

The Turko-Egyptian colonial rule was a brutal one for the South, for it promoted the slave trade. Even before the Turko-Egyptian occupation, southern Sudan had become a source of slaves and ivory. The *Jellaba* (the urbanized Arab trading class) and their organized militia armies had already been pillaging the South, extracting tens of thousands of slaves long before the region was brought under direct foreign control. Under the Turko-Egyptian rule the slave trade became a state activity and became rampant and widespread, extending far into the South, the Nuba mountains, and southern Darfur (Beshir, 1984: 13). The trade reached its height in the late nineteenth century when it was estimated that about two million southern Sudanese, predominantly from the Dinka country, were “enslaved and sold like cheap commodities” by Arab, European, Egyptian, and Turkish traders (Salih, 1994: 194).

The Turko-Egyptian occupation ended in 1882 when the northern Sudanese revolted under the leadership of Mohammed Ahmed ibn al-Sayyid Abdallah, who called himself the *Mahdi*, meaning holy savior or redeemer, of the Sudan. The British, having occupied Egypt in 1882, intervened militarily but were unable to stifle the rise of the Mahdi. In 1885 the Mahdi forces occupied Khartoum, defeated the troops of British General Charles Gordon, established Sudan's first theocratic state and used Islam as a unifying force. The rule of the Mahdi was no less brutal for the inhabitants of southern Sudan. The slave trade continued with greater vigor. The Arabic language and Islam were imposed on the South by force and violence. The Holy Law of Islam, or the Shari'a, became the law of the land. Southern resistance was successfully quelled with the help of firearms captured from the defeated Turko-Egyptian army.

The existence of an independent Mahdi state threatened the British plan to bring the entire stretch of territory from Cairo to Cape Town under their rule. In 1898, the Mahdi state fell to the Anglo-Egyptian occupation forces. For more than half a century, Sudan became a British colony in reality, even though

it was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Within the first two decades most of the country's border was defined and nearly all the territory of today's Sudan came under the firm control of Britain. The British built railroads to link important areas of economic interest and along the White Nile to control the Upper Nile. Schools were opened in Khartoum and a few major urban areas for children of well-to-do families and colonial civil servants. Large irrigation and mechanized rainfed agricultural schemes were established to produce commercial crops for export. Almost all the economic infrastructure and development projects were concentrated in the agriculturally endowed north-central region. Very few economic, social, and administrative structures were built in the South.

The North-South geographical division was instituted in 1922 when the British adopted a separate system of administration in Sudan's southern region consisting of the provinces of Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, and Upper Nile. Administratively, the three provinces were segregated until 1947, and were largely ignored in terms of social and economic development. The few social services such as schools and clinics that were available were provided by Christian missionaries for the most part. The "Southern Policy" severed virtually all relations between the northern and southern regions. The law barred northern Sudanese from entering or living in the South, and even those northerners—especially Arab merchants—who had lived in the region for years were forced to leave. Native southerners were also prohibited to travel or seek employment in the North. The spread of the Arabic language and Islam was disallowed in the region, while Christianity and the English language were encouraged (Deng and Gifford, 1987: 15-16). The British abolished and undermined the powerful Arab slave lords and dealers. The detachment of the South from the rest of Sudan and the imposition of a separate system of administration served vital British colonial interests: to prevent Arab and Muslim influence from spreading, to prepare the southern region for its "eventual integration with British East African" Federation (Nelson, 1983: 40), and to control the sources along the length of the Nile.

Pressured by a growing Sudanese nationalist movement in the North, Britain reversed its "Southern Policy" a decade or so before granting Sudan independence. The British nullified all restrictions imposed to separate the southern region from the North and met the northerners' demands for a united Sudan. Movement between the two regions was allowed. Northerners were permitted to return to their administrative posts in the South, and Arabic was imposed as the only official language of administration, replacing English. Arabic was also introduced as a school subject. The interdiction against Muslim preaching in the South was annulled (Nelson, 1983: 44). Within a brief period of time the northern Arabs overwhelmed the region. They managed to

monopolize all the major institutions such as the civil service, finance and banking, education, and security—in the South.

Inevitably, southerners opposed the reversal of this policy that reimposed northern domination, fearing that slavery would return and a united Sudan would jeopardize their cultural and political rights. All along the southerners knew that northern nationalist leaders had always asserted that the objective of their struggle was not only to free Sudan from foreign domination but also to “establish an Islamic Arab culture” in the entire country (Markakis, 1987: 71-72). The negotiations on self-determination of the country in the early 1950s proved southern fears of northern domination. The northern nationalists excluded the southerners from the negotiations. They also reneged on their pre-independence promise to create a federal system of relationship—as opposed to a centralized system—between the northern and the southern regions. These and other subsequent measures taken against the South soon led to the development of a secessionist armed struggle. The movement began in 1955, a few months before independence, when Equatoria Corps in Torit mutinied. However, full-fledged armed activities did not occur until 1962 when the Sudan African National Union organized a guerrilla army known as the Anyanya.

The northern elite leaders of the newly independent Sudan vigorously pursued the process of Arabization and Islamization of southern Sudan with little or no regard to the interests of the non-Arab and non-Islamic peoples of the region. The central government, especially during the Abboud military regime (1958-1964), adopted and put in practice policies that undermined the identity, cultures, and customs of the South. The government despised indigenous beliefs and cultural practices and took forceful actions to suppress them. It imposed Islam and Arabic by force. It declared Friday as the weekly day of religious observance and rest. It closed mission schools and restricted Christian missionaries and later expelled them from the country. The government also gave all major regional government posts to northern Sudanese. A statement by the first Minister of the Interior of the first independence government summarized this state of affairs when he declared in parliament that “Sudan is an Arab country and whoever does not feel Arab should quit” (Deng and Gifford, 1987: 16). All this, inevitably, resulted in the acceleration of a secessionist war in the South. The Anyanya guerrilla forces spread the war throughout the southern region. In the late 1960s, Joseph Lagu, a former lieutenant, brought disparate guerrilla groups together to form a credible armed front known as the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement.

The civilian governments that followed the Abboud military regime continued to follow more or less the same policies pursued by the governments before them. They also made no secret of their desire to Islamize the whole

country and beyond. Sadig el Mahdi, who became Prime Minister in 1966, reiterated Sudan's future by declaring that "Islam has a holy mission in Africa and southern Sudan is the beginning of that mission" (Malwal, 1981: 41). In a speech to the National Assembly he again declared: "the dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one and its overpowering expression is Arab, and this nation will not have its entity identified and its prestige and pride preserved except under an Islamic revival" (Markakis, 1987: 72).

The civilian regimes' inability and unwillingness to resolve the political crisis in the South and their failure to deal with the country's economic problems resulted in a growing discontent of the populace. This situation provided the army an excuse to seize political power once again. In May 1969, a small group of young officers led by Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri took over power in a bloodless coup and constituted themselves as the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Allied with the Communist Party and the trade unions, the Nimeiri regime "portrayed itself as a government of the progressive forces, whose ultimate goal was the liberation of Sudan from dependency, and the adoption of the non-capitalist path of development" (Kurita, 1994: 210) or "Sudanese Socialism." The regime dissolved all traditional political parties, suspended the existing constitution, and took steps to reduce and eventually eradicate the economic power of the religious sects and to undermine their social base. The regime also established a single state party—the Sudanese Socialist Union—nationalized basic economic sectors, and took upon itself the task of formulating strategies for social and economic development. By moving the country into the Soviet orbit, the regime acquired Soviet weapons and instructors and adopted a pro-Soviet alignment at the United Nations and other international fora.

Nimeiri's flirtation with the socialist ideology, his marriage of convenience with the communists, and his pro-Soviet stance did not last long. In July of 1971, the communists—allied with discontented army officers—attempted to oust him in a coup that almost succeeded. After the aborted coup, Nimeiri purged the communists and their sympathizers from his government and executed or imprisoned many of them. Soon after, he abandoned his so-called socialist path of development and shifted to the free enterprise system.

Nimeiri took another dramatic action to end the southern civil war. He realized that neither the government armed forces nor the Anyanya guerrillas were able to achieve a victory after seventeen years of bloody encounters. At that point, the war had displaced about 2 million southerners and took the lives of a million. Nimeiri opted to resolve the problem through political negotiations. Ending the war was also advantageous for this would strengthen his political power base. In 1972, high-level delegates from both the Sudanese government and the guerrilla forces met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and after a series of

negotiations agreed to end the war. The Addis Ababa Agreement gave the South a large measure of regional autonomy, allowing the region to have its own elected assembly and executive body that would be responsible for most matters except external affairs, national defense and national planning. It stipulated that the southern boundaries be “as they stood” the day Sudan became independent. It recognized the southern religious beliefs, languages and traditional laws, and asserted the equality between “Islam, Christianity and indigenous traditional beliefs as religions of the people of the Sudan” (Beshir, 1984: 27). The agreement also pledged to re-integrate the Anyanya guerrilla fighters into the national defense forces, to resettle and rehabilitate people dislocated by the war, and to create better conditions for development opportunities (Deng, 1987: 389-390).

The accord seemed unfeigned. Nimeiri himself declared to his nation that he “recognizes the historical and cultural differences between the North and the South and believes that the unity of our country must be built upon these objective realities. The southern people have the right to develop their respective cultures and traditions in a united southern Sudan” (Beshir, 1984: 27). Indeed, the creation of a single southern region gave its people a greater sense of representation and a better prospect of participating in the affairs of the country than they had previously. The Addis Ababa Agreement was the most important event in the political history of post-independence Sudan. It underscored that national unity is possible in diversity. Nimeiri was justifiably given much credit for acceding to important southern demands.

Sudan enjoyed a period of relative peace and stability in the decade of the 1970s. Nimeiri vanquished his former communist allies and shifted from his earlier Soviet disposition to alignment with the Western world and conservative Arab countries. The country was able to lure considerable foreign investment loans from the Western governments and banks and the multilateral finance institutions. The idea of turning Sudan into the breadbasket of the Middle East gained acceptance and attracted substantial investment from the oil-rich Arab countries, thanks to the oil boom of the early 1970s. Sudan received the largest US economic and military aid in Africa after Egypt for its support of the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel in the late 1970s. Together international lenders “poured more than \$2 billion into Sudan’s agriculture” between 1975 and 1985 (Voll, 1991: 137). Nearly all the investment in agriculture in the 1970s occurred in the northern region.

By the end of the 1970s, however, Nimeiri’s popularity began to languish as the country’s economic situation—exacerbated by the world recession, hiking oil prices, and mismanagement and corruption—deteriorated. As the economic crisis came to a head, the IMF intervened and imposed austerity measures (currency devaluation, reducing subsidies, lifting price

controls, increasing cash crop exports, raising interest rates, freezing wages, liberalization of trade). In the South dissatisfaction escalated as people found themselves in a more pitiful situation socially and economically than they were before the Addis Ababa accord. In spite of relative peace and stability, poverty, disease, and illiteracy remained the lot of the vast majority of the southern population. Many southerners had hopes for their region's economic and social development. However, no meaningful economic development took place in the region after the restoration of peace. Although southern Sudan possesses considerable wealth in agriculture, livestock, and minerals, the Nimeiri government failed to pay significant attention to the social and economic development needs of the region. The number of primary schools increased somewhat, but most lacked adequate facilities and teachers. The central government planned a number of development projects for the South but failed to implement most of them. For instance, some of the unrealized projects included Nzara and Mongalla textiles, Malakal paper industry, Wau brewery, Tonj Kenaf, Melut and Mongalla sugar projects, Kapoeta cement factory, and Beden electric plant (Garang, 1984: 31). The few projects that the government helped implement failed because of poor planning and inadequate infrastructural support. Some projects were not completed, not because of lack of funding, but because the central government attempted to deny the South any substantial benefits. Two such projects are the Jonglei canal water project and the oil exploration project in Bentiu.

As Nimeiri's support in both the North and the South deteriorated, he sought to make alliance with northern opposition parties and the powerful Muslim Brotherhood. This opportunistic political marriage with old foes—especially with the Muslim Brotherhood, the most contumacious opponent of the southern Sudanese demand for self-determination—further alienated the South and tensions began to escalate. In the early 1980s, the twilight of his rule, Nimeiri made a series of blunders that led to the undoing of his most notable accomplishment—peace between North and South.

### **Extraction of Oil**

In 1979, US-based Chevron company discovered significant oil reserves—estimated at 5 billion barrels—in Bentiu District of Upper Nile (Mawson, 1984): 522). Soon after the discovery, the Nimeiri government attempted to deny the South ownership of this precious resource. At first, the government tried unsuccessfully to redraw the boundaries between North and South so that the oil reserves fell within the territorial jurisdiction of the North (Bennett, 1987: 71). This was contrary to the Addis Ababa Agreement that recognized the southern boundaries inherited from the colonial rule. After the annexation attempt failed, the government came up with another plan—to

refine the crude oil at a different site than where it was found. At first it wanted to ship the crude oil to a refinery to be constructed at Kosti in the White Nile Province in the north. A while later, it dropped this idea in favor of pipe lining the crude oil from Bentiu to Port Sudan on the Red Sea for export. As expected, the South—which wanted the oil refined where it was located—vehemently opposed the measure. The South became convinced that the central government intended to plunder the newly discovered oil reserves for the benefit of the North with the South standing to gain very little.

### **Withdrawal of Water from the Sudd**

Another key issue of contention between the Nimeiri government and the South was the use of and control over the upper Nile water. For years, Sudan and Egypt had been planning to increase the total discharge of the White Nile by constructing a 360-mile canal between Jonglei and Malakal—bypassing the Sudd, where an estimated 60 percent of the water (about 31,000 million cubic meters per year) is lost through evaporation. Once it was completed, the estimation was that the canal would be able to carry half the amount of water flowing into the Sudd and deliver it—with some loss to evaporation—to the White Nile at Malakal. The project would have solved the two countries' biggest water problem, especially during the dry season, and it would have significantly augmented the amount of cultivable land. The need for additional water resources has become particularly crucial for Egypt as it has reached its maximum share of the Nile water apportioned by the Nile Waters Agreement of 1959. Egypt has put the water from the Aswam high Dam to the maximum possible use. Sudan also anticipated much gain from this gigantic water project. The construction of the canal not only increases water availability but also creates possibilities to open-up the wooded savanna area outside the central clay region for further exploitation for mechanized farming. In the latter half of the 1970s, the government was already pushing mechanized farming southwards into the Ingessena region in southern Blue Nile province, the Nuba mountains in southern Kordofan, and in northern Upper Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal. With the completion of the canal and drying out of the swamp, turning the Sudd region—which is extremely vital to southern pastoralists—into mechanized farms, was in the government's long-term development plan. The government's plan was expected to "reclaim 300,000 feddans of land in the west bank of the river in its first stage of development, and possibly 3.7 million feddans in the long term" (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1995-96: 17).

The Nimeiri government gave a green light to the excavation of the canal and work began in 1977. The canal was expected to be completed sometime during the mid-1980s and an additional 4.75 billion cubic meters of water would have been available for irrigation in northern Sudan and Egypt.

(The Economist Intelligence Unit, 95-96: 17). However, the project provoked massive resentment in the South, where it was feared that draining the Sudd would not only have deleterious environmental consequences, but also ignored the economic interests of the South. The Nimeiri government neither involved the participation of southerners in the decision making process nor considered the ramification of the project on the livelihood of the inhabitants of the region. Had the canal been completed, it would have deprived the inhabitants—the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk—of dry-season grazing for their herds and, as a consequence, would have possibly forced them to alter their way of life. In the first few months of the resumption of the war, the southern guerrilla army successfully forced a halt to the construction of the canal, with a little less than a third of the project left unfinished.

### **Land Expropriation**

The South is endowed with vast agricultural land. Reliable rains make the region suitable for the cultivation a variety of crops including sorghum, millet, maize, groundnuts, and sesame. As the state exhausted vast tracts of the fertile savanna plains of central and eastern regions, it began to promote the expansion of large-scale mechanized farming in the southern region, particularly in the northern parts of Upper Nile province and in the Nuba country of southern Kordofan. The expansion of mechanized farming in these regions was done by expropriating land belonging to the indigenous farming and pastoralist population. As more and more native populations were squeezed off their grazing and farm lands, resentment and hostilities grew. Even before the SPLM/A started its armed struggle in 1983, people opposed to this encroachment had already begun attacking and burning mechanized-farming schemes .

### **Ending Southern Autonomy**

In 1983 Nimeiri abolished the legally elected regional government and assembly in Juba and duly decreed the South subdivided into three political regions (each with a Nimeiri appointed governor), ending the special status accorded to it by the Addis Ababa Agreement as a single autonomous region. This decree not only capriciously broke the Addis Ababa Agreement, but also proclaimed that henceforth Arabic would be the exclusive official language of the whole country. Several southerners opposed to subdivision were incarcerated or threatened with their lives. Government troops were dispatched to major Southern cities and garrison towns to quell growing spontaneous as well as organized opposition to subdivision. Those who supported subdivision—many of whom were non-Dinka southern elites—were rewarded with political posts and material largesse. It was a prurient effort to ‘divide and rule’ the region “whereby southern leaders and geographical regions were played off against

each other whilst the north remained in control” (Bennett, 1987: 69-70).

Indeed, prompted by Dinka overrepresentation and supremacy in the larger regional government and alleged diversion of resources and development funds out of Equatoria to other areas of the region, some non-Dinka southern leaders, particularly Equatorians, went along with the move to subdivide the region. Nimeiri’s vice-president, Joseph Lagu, the one-time leader of the Anyanya guerrillas in the south, had called for the subdivision of the southern region into three individual provinces, hoping that Equatorians would have control of their own ethnically ‘homogeneous’ political unit. As a non-Dinka, he had been unable to dominate the southern regional government during his time as its leader. The southern regional assembly, however, saw the plan as a measure intended to enfeeble the political strength of a united South and voted decisively against the proposed subdivision (Salih, 1994: 195-196). Even those Equatorians who all along resented Dinka political and economic domination and aspired to establish their own self-government were not willing to accept the complete dissolution of a united autonomous southern political body.

In the 1982 and more so in 1983, as more government troops were brought to the South, disparate armed uprising had broken out in various parts of the South, particularly in Abyei in Kordofan, Bentiu district where oil fields were found, Aiwel and Rumbek in Bahr el Ghazal, and Nasir in Upper Nile. Thousands of southern troops stationed in Pibor, Bor, Pochalla and in a number southern garrisons refused to be deployed in the North and joined one of several armed groups. Under the 1972 agreement 6,000 Anyanya guerrillas were to be absorbed into the national army and to be stationed in the South. The fear that these forces might rebel against him prompted Nimeiri’s decision in 1983 to transfer them to the North. In 1983 opposition forces in the region rallied around Colonel Dr. John Garang de Mabior, a Dinka—the South’s largest tribe—to form the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and its military wing the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM/A, from here on). Sudan’s second civil war commenced.

### **Imposition of Shari’a Laws**

The final rebuke to the southern people came in September 1983 when Nimeiri—with the blessing of the Islamic Sufi sect—imposed his infamous Shari’a Islamic Laws on the whole population of the country—Muslims, Christians, and adherents of indigenous African beliefs alike. Neither the People’s Assembly nor Nimeiri’s own political party, the Sudan Socialist Union, was involved in the promulgation of these so-called September Laws. The new laws broke the secular constitution and reversed the commitment to equal rights for women and men, and for all Sudanese religious groups. The laws were put to practice almost immediately with the establishment of the Shari’a courts.

These courts were nothing but a military justice, with a lacquer of Islamic ostentation. The first and most frequent victims of this cruel punishment were overwhelmingly the urban poor, especially the non-Arab and non-Muslim destitutes from the South, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. Many northern Muslims were outraged at the imposition of Shari'a whose violators were subjected to gross forms of punishment including hanging, flogging, stoning, and amputation of limbs. Those who were opposed to the institution of the Shari'a Laws were either imprisoned or executed. Among those who were executed was former University of Khartoum law professor Ustaz (Teacher) Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, one of Sudan's well-respected and acknowledged educators and Islamic thinkers. By the time the Shari'a Laws became the law of the land, several battles had already been fought between government troops and the SPLM/A, and the decrees essentially destroyed any chance of north-south reconciliation.

Nimeiri's last five years or so experienced a rapid downturn of the economy and the deterioration of the standard of living of the vast majority of citizens. The country's exports were performing so poorly that they were paying for much less than half of the imports. By 1985 Sudan's total external debt at \$11 billion had exceeded the country's entire gross domestic product for that year. The payment to service the debt alone consumed nearly all of the country's export earning. The debt had been incurred to fund massive irrigation projects in the 1970s, to buy chemical fertilizers, pesticides and machinery. The civil war had already erupted again in the South—after eleven year interlude—and was causing widespread famine, death and dislocation.

Deteriorating living conditions in rural areas such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the South caused an influx of hundreds of thousands of impoverished people into urban areas, especially the national capital, Khartoum where they constituted a class of the unemployed and the homeless, known as *shammasa*. These people became not only victims of Nimeiri's Islamic penal code but also became the target of his other infamous policy known as *kasha*, the forceful eviction of rural immigrants from their own national capital and sending them back to their place of origin. In 1984, thousands of poor immigrants were indiscriminately picked up from the streets of Khartoum by security forces and sent back to where they were presumed to have come from or damped in the periphery of the capital or relocated in several sites near major mechanized agricultural schemes in eastern and central regions.

Sudan, like Ethiopia, also suffered from drought and famine. During the first of the 1980s, the rains failed in much of the northern half of the country, stretching right across the country from the north-west to the northeast, including Darfur (North and South), Kordofan and the Red Sea hills. For four years, from 1982 to 1986, harvests were poor and food was scarce. Output for

staple crops like millet and sorghum fell by 38 and 58 percent, respectively, in 1982 and 1983 and continued to fall in 1984 (Richards and Waterbury, 1990: 143) and 1985 as well. Grain prices skyrocketed. The drought wiped out animals. In Northern Kordofan, for instance, the Kababish camel-breeders, once the most wealthy traders who sold camels as far away as northern Nigeria and Egypt, lost all their herds. The Beja nomads lost nine-tenth of their livestock. Overall, as many as ten million Sudanese lives were endangered, the largest famine-affected population in Africa during this period. The country had practically no food reserves to fall back on. Nearly 2 million rural Sudanese were forced from their homes, moving into the Nile valley or further south to less severely affecting areas or to urban areas in search of food.

Signs of impending disaster in these regions were seen after the poor harvests of 1982 and 1983. However, the initial response of the Nimeiri government was one of callous indifference. The government felt that acknowledging the existence of famine would be politically damaging and possibly undermine its effort to entice foreign investors. It was only after tens of thousands of refugees trekked to the capital and in response to internal and external pressure that the government was forced to disclose the disaster and to deliver relief supplies to the famine-stricken regions and initiate rehabilitation programs for the famine-displaced population. Moreover, the government's initial refusal to admit the famine crisis delayed much needed relief aid from the international community, causing too many unnecessary deaths and displacement.

Many of the people in the capital city Khartoum, and its twin cities, Omdurman and Khartoum North, were not spared from the impact of drought and famine in the countryside. The poor and low-income civil servants on fixed income suffered immensely because food prices and the cost of other basic necessities skyrocketed beyond what average families could afford. They had to spend an inordinate amount of time on queues to obtain their daily ration of *kisra* (the staple sorghum bread). The lifting of petrol and food subsidies demanded by the International Monetary Fund also exacerbated the situation.

In April 1985 a series of strikes and demonstrations by workers, civil servants, petty traders, students, and the unemployed prompted the upper echelons of the military to remove Nimeiri from power. After a brief period of transitional military rule, parliamentary elections were held in 1986 and the Umma Party won 99 seats (less than a majority), while the Democratic Unionist Party won 64. The parliament appointed the Umma Party's leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi, to form a new government. Mahdi succeeded in forming a coalition government and became Prime Minister for the second time. Sudan seemed to be moving in the direction of democracy. There were political parties, independent trade unions, human rights organizations, independent newspapers, and

tolerance for anti-government expression. The parliament revoked Nimeiri's subdivision of the South. There was great expectation that Mahdi would seek a political solution to end the protracted civil war and suspend the controversial Shari'a laws. Mahdi himself campaigned on peaceful resolution of the civil war and repeals of the Shari'a Laws. Immediately after his election, he met with John Garang, the SPLM/A leader, and proposed a peace plan that included the abrogation of the Shari'a Laws, one of the main obstacles to peace.

To the disappointment of many, however, Mahdi suddenly backed down from his promises to disavow the Shari'a Laws. The National Islamic Front (NIF) and its leader Dr. Hassan al-Turabi (the brother-in-law of Mahdi) had much to do with Mahdi's change of mind. Dr. Turabi was, and still is, the chief advocate of the Shari'a Laws and the most hucksterish in his quest of the war in the South. Sadiq al-Mahdi's resolve to institute some type of the Islamic penal code—despite its unpopularity with many northern and all southern Sudanese—became increasingly indubitable. In the end Mahdi found himself closer to the NIF's religious and political ideology than to the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), his major coalition partner. The DUP left the coalition government after both the Prime Minister and the Parliament rejected the Party's peace initiatives to end the civil war. The DUP leader, Mohamed Osman al-Mirghani, had negotiated a peace agreement with the SPLM/A leader, John Garang, in November 1988 in Koka Dam, Ethiopia. The agreement had called for an immediate cease-fire, a convening of a constitutional conference, a reprieve of the Shari'a Laws, the creation of an interim government of national unity that would include the SPLM/A, and the termination of Sudan's military pacts with Libya and Egypt. This accord had been supported by the Army, trade unions and all political parties except Mahdi's party, the Umma and Turabi's Party, the NIF.

Thus Sadiq el-Mahdi proved to be a complete disappointment during his three year tenure as the leader of the first democratic in over 16 years. He not only failed to bring political settlement to the civil war, but exacerbated it by arming Muslim Arabic speaking tribal militias (the Missiriya, the Riziyyat, and the Ma'aliya, for instance) in Southern Kordofan and Southern Darfur Provinces—especially in areas bordering SPLM/A's strongholds—to fight the rebels. These were areas where there had been historic enmities between Arabic speaking settlers and southern tribes. Armed with modern weapons the Arab militias carried out, instead of engaging the SPLM/A, destructive activities against southern non-Arab communities. They burned villages, killed innocent civilians, raided cattle, and kidnapped young boys and girls to sell them as slaves in the North. In most instances, these roving militias committed these atrocities with the full knowledge and support of the government army and local authorities. The Dinka civilians were, and still are, the main victims of these

destructive forces. The government's supply of arms is not only confined to the Muslim Arabic speaking tribes; it has also armed (true to its divide and rule policy) rival southern tribes—for instance, the Murle, the Mandari, the Bari, and the Didinga—who view the SPLM/A as a threat.

The Mahdi government continued the war with vigor, believing military force would bring the SPLM/A to its knees. Sudan received military weapons from neighboring Libya, as well as from some other Arab countries. The government had already characterized the North-South conflict as Arab versus non-Arab war to arouse the sentiment of the Arab World and gain material support for the war. When the SPLM/A attacked Ed Damazin in the Blue Nile Province in 1988, Mahdi told the Arab world: "The Arab soil has been invaded from the South." In spite of all this, the war went badly for the Sudanese Army and by the late 1980s the SPLM/A forces managed to control several government garrison towns and most of the vast countryside in the three southern provinces. Army leaders openly admitted that force cannot win the war, and General Khalil, the Minister of Defense, resigned to protest the Prime Minister's refusal to accept the peace agreement negotiated by the DUP. The war forced millions of southerners to flee the South and into Ethiopia, thousands of them dying of starvation along the way.

## **Rise of the National Islamic Front and the Escalation of the War**

The historical roots of the Islamic movement or Muslim Brotherhood began in Egypt in the late 1920s under the leadership of Hassan al Banna. The movement later spread to other Arab countries, including Sudan, in the 1930s and 1940s. (Gurdon, 1984: 68). The Brotherhood started as a challenge to the Western political, economic and cultural domination. The members of the early Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan were primarily students. Many of them were family members of well-known religious sects. In the 1940s and 1950s, the movement acted as a pressure group to insure the post-independence constitution conformed with Islamic principles. In the 1960s, the young Dr. Hassan al-Turabi transformed the movement into a new political force with the formation of the Islamic Charter Front (ICF). The ICF, though numerically small, continued to pressure the two largest political parties—whose social base was derived primarily from their affiliation with religious orders—to support the adoption of an Islamic constitution. Most importantly, with Dr. Turabi's charismatic leadership, the ICF charted a long-term strategy aimed at broadening its social base and to undertake mass ideological work in various private and

public institutions. In the late 1960s, however, the political and social influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamic Charter Front came to a halt when Nimeiri seized political power and disbanded all political parties.

The Muslim Brothers, like other opposition political forces in the country, went underground throughout much of the 1970s. Many of the political leaders, including Dr. Turabi, were forced to go into exile. However, its fortune reversed for good in the late 1970s when President Nimeiri, faced with economic and political crises, pursued a policy of accommodation and reconciliation with his political opponents. This rapprochement allowed the return of Dr. Turabi from exile in 1977. Soon after his return, Dr. Turabi and his movement seized this opportunity to rebuild their political organization. During Nimeiri's final years, the movement worked closely with the government and acquired influential government posts for many of its well-educated members. During this period, the movement acquired a strong bureaucratic experience and built its financial portfolio by establishing a close link with the Saudi-funded Faisal Islamic Bank and other financial institutions in the country.

The post-Nimeiri political environment provided the opportunity for the Islamic forces to consolidate and become a formidable political force. This force culminated in the formation of the National Islamic Front (NIF) [*Jabhatu Islamiyyah al Qawimiyyah*] with Dr. Turabi as its unquestionable leader. Although it finished third behind the Mahdist Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party in the 1986 national democratic elections—taking nearly a fifth of the seats in the National Assembly—the NIF emerged as a dominant political force to be reckoned with.

In the ensuing three years of the al-Mahdi administration, the NIF managed to place many of its highly educated members throughout the administrative structures and the ranks of the military and intelligence organizations. Its highly devoted and disciplined young cadres gained control over the various cultural institutions such as educational, religious, labor, and welfare organizations. Its membership increased significantly to include many professionals in academics, doctors, lawyers, merchants, bankers, small businessmen, military officers, students, and civil servants. It built a financial empire by gaining control over the banking institutions, the media, the construction and transport sectors through the Islamic Banks.\* With these newly acquired political bases, financial power, and efficient organization, it moved to dominate the new post-Nimeiri political arena. In the Parliament, it successfully blocked several legislative attempts designed to repeal the controversial Islamic Laws promulgated by Nimeiri.

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\* The key to its financial success is that as religious institutions the Islamic banks are exempt from central bank supervision, all taxation, and have preferential access to government licenses and export credits (O'Brien, 1989: 34).

Towards the end of the 1980s the country's economy suffered enormously from the crippling consequences of a \$14 billion foreign debt—well over half accumulating in less than four years of the Mahdi regime with very little to show for it by way of development accomplishments—and from the heavy cost of the war, estimated to have consumed over 25 percent of the government's budget. Sadiq al-Mahdi and his coalition partners were more preoccupied with their own political gains and losses and with Islamic future of the nation than with the civil war and other pressing problems facing the country. Finally, on June 30, 1989, a group of Islamic officers, backed and encouraged by the NIF, overthrew the democratically elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi.

Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir and his 15-member Revolutionary Command Council of National Salvation (RCC) led the post-Mahdi Islamic government. Following the coup, the RCC suspended the 1986 transitional constitution, closed down independent papers, banned all political parties, human rights organizations, and trade unions and confiscated their properties, and imprisoned their top leaders. It forced over 3,000 army officers out of their jobs for their non-support of the imposition of the Shari'a Laws and for pushing for a negotiated settlement with the SPLM/A. The new regime also purged the civil service of secularists and leftists. It dismissed thousands of judges, teachers and university professors and replaced them with supporters. The domination of the NIF in the new regime became apparent as many of its radical members and close associates were assigned to head major government and financial institutions. Within a year or so, declaring that "there can be no secular government in Sudan" (*The New Yorker*, 28 May 1990: 27) and "there will never be a political party in Sudan from now on" (Lesch, 1989: 36), the regime reintroduced the Shari'a Laws and moved to make Sudan an Islamic state, and in so doing, further widened the gulf between the government and the SPLM/A. In 1990 army officers carried out a coup to overthrow the new regime. The attempt failed and the coup leaders were executed.

The new Islamic regime paused for a short period to regroup and rearm before it launched a series of offensive military operations against the SPLM/A. It obtained new weapons from Iran and Libya (both supplied jet fighters used to bomb civilians in the South). Iran also paid for Chinese light weapons, ammunitions, tanks and artillery shells. With fresh supplies of sophisticated military weapons and using local Arab militias as a proxy army, its armed forces achieved major victories during 1992, and regained nearly all the garrison towns they had lost in previous encounters. This offensive campaign was accompanied by aerial bombardments which targeted innocent civilian populations. Internecine battles within the SPLM/A may have also contributed to the government forces' battlefield successes.

Encouraged by these and subsequent successes in the war front as well

as by the fracturing of the SPLM/A, the Islamic regime now believes that it has the military capacity to win the war outright, and has turned the conflict into a “jihad” or “holy war” against the southern “godless infidels,” the Dinka being the prime target. Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, the NIF’s leader, has formed a “volunteer” civilian Popular Defense Force (PDF) to fight alongside the army. The PDF recruits young people—including university students and lecturers, doctors, engineers, and other professionals and government employees—who believe that they are waging a religious war against the infidel and fighting to “defend Islam.” The law requires all students to complete a period of military service in the PDF before they are admitted to higher educational institutions. They receive rudimentary military training for three to six months and religious indoctrination. An estimated 400,000 young men and women have completed training for the militia force. These fanatics—who prefer to be called *Mujahideen*, holy Muslim warriors—are perishing in large numbers at the hands of the equally determined guerrilla forces of the SPLM/A and other splinter groups. The civil war, which seemed so remote in the past, is now brought home to Khartoum.

The regime is attempting to dunce the northern Sudanese public as to the true nature of the war through relentless barrage of daily propaganda. It presents the war as one of a sinister international plot against Islam and the unity of Sudan. The southern rebels are falsely portrayed as enemies of Islam who have resorted to burning mosques, killing innocent Muslims, and destroying Qur’anic schools and other religious establishments. In a recent religious decree the government called for jihad or holy war against these so-called foreign supported internal enemies of Islam and Sudan. In February 1995, the government ordered each of the 26 provinces to produce 30,000 PDF troops. This should result in an additional PDF force of over half a million whose job is going to be, in the words of Al-Beshir, to “defend our fatherland and impose fear to our enemies,” and to “liberate” the south from the SPLM/A. (Hulsman, 1995).

The ruling NIF government’s violation of political and civil rights is not confined to the non-Muslim region of the South. The regime is also waging war against Muslim minorities in the North. The latest victims are the Beja, a tribe of about 1.5 million. They are traditionally pastoral people whose territory spreads over 100,000 square miles in the extreme northeastern Sudan. The Beja are Muslims, but practice a more tolerant Islam blended with their traditional beliefs. Whereas some Beja clans support the Khartoum government’s attempt to impose Islamic law on the country, many others including the Hadendawa clans do not. Those critical of the government and unwilling to share NIF’s religious and political ideology are routinely harassed or brutally ill-treated. The government confiscates tribal land and cattle from those opposed to it and

hands them over to its supporters. In so doing, it has forced tens of thousands of Beja to flee into neighboring Eritrea. As a result, a new Beja insurgency guerrilla force operating in the northeast has emerged.

The Nuba nation is also another victim of Khartoum's excessive political suppression. The Nuba live in the mountainous areas of central Sudan, South Kordofan Province. They are sedentary agriculturalists and cattle-breeders. Their number in 1994 was estimated at about 1.5 million. Whereas the majority of the Nuba are Muslims, there are many who are adherents of Christianity and different traditional religions. The Nuba belong to more than fifty sub-tribes and speak an equal number of languages. They are mostly distinguished from the Arab speaking peoples surrounding them by their distinct languages and dark color of their skin. The troubles for the Nuba started under the regime of Sadiq Al-Mahdi, who became Prime Minister from 1986 to 1989. The Al-Mahdi government supplied arms to two Arab nomadic pastoralist tribes, the Baggara and the Mazaria, who live in proximity to the Nuba. The government's intention was that the nomads would use the arms to fight the SPLM/A rebels. Instead, the Arab nomads used the arms against the Nuba to settle old accounts. In the late 1980s, the SPLM/A came to the help of the Nuba and expanded its guerrilla activities in the Nuba country. Thousands of young Nuba joined the ranks of the SPLM/A guerrilla force. As SPLM/A's activities became more active, the Nuba became the targets of the government's Popular Defense Forces and the regular Sudanese army. In the last four years or so, the government forces are reported to have destroyed thousands of Nuba villages, confiscated agricultural lands and livestock, and forced the majority of the Nuba nation to live in what the Khartoum regime euphemistically calls "peace camps" (Hulsman, 1995). The government does not respect the religious freedom of non-Muslims in these camps. Children are given Arabic names and tribal identities and are subjected to a mandatory Islamic religious education. The government also forcibly drafts underage children, without any notice to their families, to fight against their fellow southerners.

## **Making Enemies Everywhere**

The NIF government's continued attempt to enforce Islamic orthodoxy on Sudan's diversity, massive human rights violations against its citizens, and destabilization activities against its neighbors have isolated the country internationally. Sudan is on a list of seven countries that the US State Department contends are sponsors of intentional terrorism. The US considers Sudan second only to Iran as a staging ground for international terrorism (even though it produced no firm evidence to support its allegation) and for the presence of Islamic extremists involved in subverting neighboring, pro-US

states, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, pillars of Western influence in the Middle East. The US cut off aid to Sudan and in February 1995 pulled out its diplomats from the embassy in Khartoum. It has also opposed World Bank loans to Sudan. Up until the late 1980s, Sudan had been one of the largest beneficiaries of economic and military aid in Africa. During the Cold War period, the United States spent \$15 billion securing the allegiance of Sudanese governments (Weiner, 1996: 1). Britain also expelled a number of Sudanese diplomats, citing Sudan's complicity with acts of international terrorism. Sudan has been accused of aiding Islamic extremists in their attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak shortly after he arrived in the Ethiopian capital in June 1995 to attend the annual summit of the Organization of African Unity. Even though Sudan denied any involvement in the assassination attempt or harboring the suspects, the United Nations demanded that Sudan extradite to Ethiopia three people suspected in the assassination attempt. In April 1996, the UN Security Council imposed diplomatic and travel sanctions on Sudan for its refusal to hand over the three suspects. The United States plans to seek further United Nations sanctions against Sudan because of its alleged support of terrorism. Soon after she took office in January 1997, the new US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told the press that the US "will continue to insist that Sudan desist from supporting terrorist activities and will be followed up in New York to try to get additional sanctions."

Sudan shares a 7,687 kilometer borderline with its neighbors. It is bordered by Egypt and Libya in the north, Eritrea and Ethiopia in the east, Kenya, Uganda and Zaire, in the south, and Chad and Central African Republic in the west. The current regime's dream of expanding its versions of Islamic orthodoxy throughout the region has enraged almost all its neighbors except Libya. In the last couple of years Sudan came dangerously close to war with some of these neighbors. Many of its neighbors have openly labeled it as the main obstacle of stability in the region. At the OAU meeting held in Addis Ababa in December 1995, 16 foreign ministers asked the Sudan government to "desist from engaging in activities of assisting, supporting and facilitating terrorist activities and from giving shelter and sanctuaries to terrorist elements" (*Africa Confidential*, 1996: 1).

## Egypt

The relationship between Egypt and Sudan goes back several centuries. But this relation was unequal. Egypt, which is more populous and politically better organized, has dominated Sudan for most of the past four centuries. In the early nineteenth century Egypt controlled most of the northern half of today's Sudan. Egyptian merchants penetrated southern Sudan to extract slaves, and Cairo was a major market for slaves until the British abolished slavery in 1880s. Until 1956, Britain and Egypt ruled Sudan in conjunction, even

though the latter acted as a junior partner. Egypt had wished that the Sudanese would unite with Egypt upon independence. Although many northern Sudanese were sympathetic to the idea of unity, the majority of Sudanese opted for independence. Since independence, successive Sudanese governments pursued, with varying degrees, pro-Egypt foreign policies and cultivated closer economic ties. Former president Nimeiri, who ruled Sudan from 1969 to 1985, was Egypt's best and most reliable partner. He signed a treaty of friendship with Egypt and became the only Arab leader to give full backing to President Sadat's peace accord with Israel. With the overthrow of Nimeiri, however, the relation between the two nations entered an era of uncertainty. Sadiq al-Mahdi, Sudan's elected Prime Minister from 1986 to 1989, froze Nimeiri's treaty of friendship with Egypt and established closer ties with Libya, Egypt's foe.

Relations between them deteriorated further over the past seven years, especially after the NIF regime took power in Khartoum by overthrowing Mahdi through a military coup in 1989. The two countries found themselves in opposite camps during the 1990-91 Gulf War. Egypt accused the Sudanese government of backing Muslim militants trying to topple Arab and non-Arab governments in the region by means of violence. It also charged Sudan with backing an Egyptian Islamic extremist group, *al-Gamaa al-Islamiya*, in its attempt to assassinate its President. Egypt says that not only did the Sudanese government help in the assassination attempt, but it did also allow Egyptian Muslim militants to use its soil for training and as a conduit for arms. Soon after the attempt on Mubarek's life, Sudanese and Egyptian border police skirmished in the Hala'ib Triangle, a vast barren area of 20,580 square kilometers near the Red Sea coast. The Hala'ib Triangle, which is now under Egyptian control but claimed by Sudan, is a potentially oil-rich desert zone. In fact, in 1990, the NIF government had granted a Canadian oil company exploration rights in the triangle, an agreement which Egypt discarded. The area is occupied by about 20,000 al-Basharya and Ababda nomadic tribes who move free between Sudan and Egypt. The Sudanese-Egyptian dispute over Hala'ib has festered since 1956, and has regularly surfaced whenever political relations between the two countries deteriorated. Egypt now has full control of the area by forcefully removing Sudanese policemen who jointly guarded a number of check points in the disputed border area. Sudan has vowed to go to war with Egypt to reclaim the disputed territory. It is, however, unlikely that it will do so for its poorly trained, equipped and war-tired army force of 115,000 is no match for Egypt's 440,000 active troops and 250,000 reserves, the largest military force in Africa.

The Egyptian government wants to see the current leaders in Khartoum removed from power. It supports the efforts by the Sudanese opposition groups to force the Khartoum regime out of power. It has permitted Sudanese dissidents in exile to wage a propaganda war against the regime. Egypt,

however, does not want to see Sudan disintegrate into several political entities. Whereas it has in the past urged the northern Sudanese elites to accommodate southerners' political and economic interests, it is opposed to the southerners' call for self-determination that leads to complete secession from the North.

Egypt sees the secession of the South as a potential threat to its vital interest in the Nile's water. Egypt's whole civilization and modernization is based on the merciful waters of the Nile and the fertile silt they bring along with them. Over the last half century, Egypt and Sudan have maintained close cooperation in utilizing the waters of the Nile. The 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between the two countries, which allowed Egypt the construction of the Aswan High Dam, allocated 75 percent of the annual Nile waters to Egypt and 25 percent to Sudan. In the 1970s, the two countries agreed to construct a bypass around the Sudd in southern Sudan in order to reduce evaporation losses and thereby to increase water yields downstream. The project, when completed, would have benefited Egypt more since Sudan is not yet utilizing its full allocation under the Nile Waters Agreement. Recently Egypt has launched an ambitious plan to make the Western Desert bloom with water channeled from the River Nile. According to the plan, a 200-mile canal will be built across the Western Desert to irrigate about 500,000 acres (200,000 hectares) of land and the newly irrigated land will be populated by hundreds of thousands of people. The water withdrawal for this plan will certainly surpass the limit imposed by the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement. Hence, one would assume that Egypt is hoping that more water would be available with improved cooperation with its upstream riparian neighbors, Sudan and Ethiopia. In this regard, Egypt views the control of part of the Nile by yet another independent, upper-riparian state—in this case southern Sudan—as a potential threat to its very survival. Egypt fears that the extensive use of the Nile in an independent southern Sudan may significantly reduce its share of the Nile waters. A united Sudan is thus in the best interest of Egypt, and that is why it has publicly registered its disapproval of the U.N. Security Council's threat to impose an international arms embargo on Sudan. Past and present rulers of Sudan also know that Egypt will be on their side if the territorial integrity of the country is threatened. And that why, in spite of the rocky relationship between the two countries, the Khartoum regime recently, in January 1997, asked Egypt for military and financial help to fight against its opponents and their alleged neighboring supporters. Egypt, however, declined, saying the conflict in Sudan is mainly domestic and the Sudanese government is trying to disguise the conflict as foreign intervention. As President Mubarak put it: "The truth is there is no Eritrean or Ethiopian attack or any foreign attack. . . . No [foreign force] has entered Sudanese territory."

## Eritrea

Sudan used to have good relations with the former Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) during most of the fronts' three decade of struggle for independence from Ethiopia. Sudan provided the fronts bases and logistical facilities and allowed them to establish representative offices on its territory. Sudan not only gave the liberation forces easy passage back and forth across borders, but it also permitted the transshipment of weapons and other military supplies freely through its territory into areas controlled by the two liberation fronts in Eritrea. The EPLF and ELF leaders were treated as V.I.P. and were allowed to play significant roles in the lives of their respective refugees living in Sudan. Sudan provided a home for hundreds of thousands of Eritrean refugees during their struggle for independence. The exodus of Eritreans into Sudan in large numbers began in the late 1960s following the outbreak of war between the Ethiopian Army and ELF guerrilla forces. Lowland Muslim Eritreans were the first victims of government military attacks, and as a result, thousands of people left their homes to seek refuge in eastern Sudan. The military regime that took power in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution exacerbated the situation by intensifying the war. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Ethiopian regime launched a series of extensive military counter-insurgency operations, which led to the additional mass exodus of tens of thousands of highland Christian Eritreans. The fratricidal struggle in 1970s and early 1980s between the Muslim-dominated ELF and the Christian-dominated EPLF also contributed to the growth of Eritrean refugees in Sudan. In 1991, there were over 500,000 Eritrean refugees in Sudan. Most of these refugees were self-settled among the local Sudanese communities in the eastern region and received very little assistance from the international refugee support system. Through voluntary self-repatriation and under a series of refugee return pilot programs overseen by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, only about 104,000 refugees have gone back since Eritrea gained its independence in 1991 (Kibreab, 1996: 14). The remaining 400,000 or so refugees still live in Sudan, awaiting repatriation. Whereas some of these refugees are dispersed among the Sudanese population, most are settled in villages and small towns between Gedaref and Kassala, near the Eritrean border.

Repatriation of refugees has been low, especially given the fact that many Eritreans in Sudan have been anxiously waiting for the day when they can go back to their homes and regain the confidence and dignity they lost along with their independence during their exile. Most still want to repatriate but are unwilling to do so until their economic well-being is guaranteed upon return. The new Eritrean government is discouraging mass repatriation declaring its inability to shoulder the burden of caring for, maintaining, and resettling returnees. The amount of assistance received from the international donor

community, including the UNHCR, has been woefully inadequate.

Many refugees are also reluctant to go back home for political reasons. A large proportion of the refugees who still remain in Sudan are Muslim lowland Eritreans. They constituted a strong social base for the ELF during the independence struggle and were not particularly well-disposed towards the EPLF. Even though some ex-ELF Muslim leaders and their supporters joined the victorious EPLF-led provisional government in 1991, many were not willing to return home, charging the new leaders of independent Eritrea as being pro-Christian highlanders and spiteful to the interest of Muslim lowlanders.

Relations between the NIF regime in Khartoum and the newly independent regime in Eritrea were initially good. Sudan was the first nation to recognize independent Eritrea immediately after the EPLF captured the last remaining Ethiopian Army-held cities of Asmara and Assab. It also closed the offices of Eritrean opposition forces in its territory, upon the EPLF's demand. Sudan even acted jointly with EPLF military authorities "in hunting down, arresting, and kidnapping members of the Eritrean opposition organizations" (Medhanie, 1994: 94). In return, in the early 1990s, the EPLF government troops assisted the Sudanese army in its attack against SPLM/A forces in the eastern border region inside Sudanese territory. But the relationship later deteriorated as the Khartoum regime created an Islamic state and attempted to export its Islamic political ideology to its eastern neighbors, stretching all the way to Somalia. This clashed with the secularist outlook of the leaders now in power in Eritrean who come from the traditionally Coptic Christian areas of highland Eritrea and northern Tigray. The new leaders are especially worried about the growth of political Islam among their significant Muslim populations inhabiting the western and northern lowlands abutting Sudan. At present, Eritrea is in the processes of drafting a permanent constitution which will prohibit the formation of religious- or ethnic-based political parties.

The regime in Khartoum expected that the liberation front it has supported to gain its independence would reciprocate that support by pursuing foreign policies of its liking. That was not meant to be. The new Eritrean leaders pursued an 'independent' foreign policy which Sudan deemed unacceptable. Sudan, for instance, was incensed by and suspicious of the military training assistance Eritrea received from Egypt and Israel, the latter considered the enemy of Islam by the Khartoum regime. In February 1993, the diplomatic representation of Israel in Eritrea was upgraded to an ambassador level, and there were reports that Israel was allowed to establish military base on Eritrea's Dahlak islands (Medhanie, 1994: 45). Israel "sees Eritrea as part of a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism" (Lycett, 1993: 17). In May 1994, *The Wall Street Journal* revealed the increasing US-Eritrean military and economic relations. In a front-page article on Eritrea, the journal wrote: "US Navy ships

are making port visits, and major oil companies are negotiating exploration deals. The US military is in advanced talks on installing powerful over-the-horizon radar in Eritrea that would allow monitoring of the region as far as Iran” (Brooks, 1994: 1). This development was quite unsettling to Sudan. Eritrea also received loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); Sudan is faced with the threat of expulsion from the IMF for failing to pay its arrears. Eritrea obtained substantial funds from Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia, countries with which Sudan is at odds, to finance a major energy project. Eritrea’s close bilateral relationship with Uganda, which Sudan accuses of supporting the SPLM/A, was also resented by the Khartoum regime.

After Eritrean formal independence in 1993, the Sudanese regime started recruiting disenchanted Eritrean Muslim refugees and incorporated them into an insurgent organization called the Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ). Since the late 1993, the EIJ, trained and armed by the Khartoum regime, has been mounting repeated terrorist attacks in western Eritrea, killing many civilians. Throughout 1994, the Eritrean government participated in a series of negotiations with Sudan but failed to sway the Khartoum regime to stop sheltering and arming the EIJ. Being confronted with continuing infiltration and guerrilla attacks, the Eritrean regime decided to sever all diplomatic ties with Sudan in December 1994 and to openly support armed Sudanese opposition against the NIF government in Khartoum. The Eritrean president, Isayas Afewerki, is unequivocal about his aim to overthrow the NIF regime. In June 1995 and January 1996, Eritrea hosted meetings that brought together northern Sudanese political opposition groups in exile (which jointly formed the National Democratic Alliance) with the southern rebel SPLM/A-mainstream. Eritrea has also handed the Sudanese embassy building in Asmara over to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to use as its headquarters. The Sudanese opposition in exile has set up military training camps in Eritrea close to the Sudanese border.

## **Ethiopia**

Relations between Sudan and Ethiopia have been strained for quite some time. Ethiopia has always been unhappy with the Khartoum regimes’ support of Eritrean and Tigrean liberation movements against it in all manners. In the 1980s, the regime of Colonel Mengistu started to publicly provide military aid and bases to the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in what was considered as a tit-for-tat foreign policy decision. With the independence of Eritrea in 1991 and the eviction of the SPLM/A from Ethiopian soil, relations between the two countries seemed to move in a more positive direction. However, recent events have led tensions to surface once again between these two neighboring states.

In spite of their rocky relations in the past, Sudan and Ethiopia have always been generous to the other's citizens who sought refuge in their territory. In the late 1970s and 1980s, civil war, famine, and fear of political persecution forced over a million Ethiopians to seek refuge in Sudan. Sudan never tried to stop these refugees at its borders, even though it would have been nearly an impossible task to protect the 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) border it shares with Ethiopia even if it had wished to do so. Whereas the majority of these refugees were settled in rural settlements near the border region, quite a large number of them moved to Sudanese cities and competed for scarce jobs with the nationals. Although those refugees settled in the rural areas received some international humanitarian assistance, they had to compete with the native population for basic necessities: land, water, wood for fuel and construction, health and other social services.

Likewise, Ethiopia gave refuge to hundreds of thousands Southern Sudanese refugees. During the first civil war in Sudan (1955-1972), Ethiopia offered unstinting support to tens of thousands of Southern Sudanese. Almost all returned home after the Addis Ababa peace accord in 1972 between northern and southern Sudan, mediated by the good office of the late Emperor Haile Sellassie. Certainly the Emperor had hoped to gain some benefit from peace in Sudan, such as the suppression of anti-Ethiopian Eritrean liberation forces in Sudan. That was not meant to happen, however. The second civil war that resumed in 1983 brought into Ethiopia nearly half a million refugees in the late 1980s. After the demise of the Marxist regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam in May 1991, the new Ethiopian government, unfortunately, forced these refugees to go back to the hell they left behind. Tens of thousands of these refugees died for lack of food during their arduous journey back to their home territory.

In the last three years or so, relations between the two nations have deteriorated. Ethiopia has accused Sudan of sheltering three Islamic terrorists involved in an abortive attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during an official visit to Addis Ababa in June 1995. Sudan has also counter-accused Ethiopia, amongst others, of interfering in its internal affairs by aiding John Garang's SPLM/A-mainstream. Ethiopia's recent announcement of its plans to build two dams on the Blue Nile and the Atbara River—major tributaries of the Nile—has also driven the two countries apart.

## **Uganda**

Uganda cut off diplomatic relations with Khartoum in April 1995, accusing Sudan of supporting rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a fundamentalist Christian cult group that opposes the Kampala government. Although the LRA rebels claim to be fighting to oust President Yoweri

Museveni, they have little support among the Ancholi people in northern Uganda. Their war consists mainly of killing civilians and sowing terror in the countryside in an effort to destabilize the Museveni government. The group survives mostly on the charity of neighboring Sudan, which arms them to retaliate against Uganda for supporting southern Sudanese rebel groups. Sudan is also backing Muslim-based rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) against the Museveni regime operating in western Uganda. Fighting between the ADF and the Ugandan Army has displaced more than 30,000 people many of whom have fled to the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. The relation between the two countries worsened when both exchanged long range artillery fire across their borders at various times in 1996 and 1977. In the past both Sudan and Uganda had hosted tens of thousands of refugees coming across their long international border. During the first civil war in Sudan, many Equatorians were able to flee to the safety of related tribes in northern Uganda. Some Equatorians even served in Idi Amin's army and administration. Many Ugandans were also able to find refuge in Southern Sudan during Amin's reign of terror. Currently Uganda shelters over 200,000 southern Sudanese refugees.

The civil war is spreading to northern Sudan. In November 1996, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of northern opposition groups including the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Umma Party, the Democratic Federal Alliance parties, the Sudan Alliance Forces (SAF), the Beja Congress Forces and the Legal Leadership, which opened a northern front operating out of Eritrea, joined the main faction of the SPLM/A led by John Garang to coordinate military operations to topple the National Islamic Front regime. The forces that make up the northern front are former soldiers who were dismissed from the Sudan Armed forces and replaced by NIF supporters. Garang who has been appointed as the chairman of the opposition military command has vowed that the northeast front will cut the road connecting the Red Sea port of Port Sudan to Khartoum, cutting off the capital from Sudan's only port.

Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda are backing the opposition forces, and the United States' recent decision to strengthen the military capability of these front-line states has opened the way for arms supply to the SPLM/A and to northern opposition forces (Ottaway, 1996: A34.). All the three neighboring states are supporting the SPLM/A and tens of thousands of rebels from southern Sudan are based in their territories. Even though they deny claims by Khartoum that they are taking part in the fighting, these neighboring states make no secret of their enmity toward the Islamic rulers of Sudan. The United States administration believes that the regime in Khartoum is weak, and putting more pressure through the opposition and neighboring states will cause the regime to fall under its own weight.

The northern opposition coalition groups are calling for *intifadh* (popular uprising) to remove the regime from power, hoping that history will repeat itself. In the past, *intifadh* has overthrown two unpopular Sudanese governments, the regimes of General Ibrahim Aboud (1964) and President Jaafar Nimeiri (1985). The *intifadh* that brought down these regimes was based on well organized clandestine organization by trade associations and professional societies. This strategy may not, however, work this time because of the omnipresence of NIF's vigilante groups called Islamic Security.

Whether external pressure will help bring the collapse of the regime in Khartoum remains to be seen. But the United States government's decision to send military equipment to the opposition fighting groups (especially the SPLM/A-mainstream and the Sudanese Allied Forces) through the front-line states will undoubtedly escalate the civil war. It will result in more death, destruction, and displacement. It may also lead to the disintegration of the country.

## Conclusion

Sudan has had a tumultuous existence ever since it became a sovereign political entity in 1956. Like the rest of the African states, Sudan's emergence as a political unit is a product of historical happenstance. It came into being not through the processes of its own internal dynamics and the predisposition of its peoples. The diverse nationalities that make up Sudan were forced by colonial powers to coalesce into the Sudanese nation-state. The northern Arab elites that have ruled the country for four decades failed to pursue an inclusive national strategy which fosters equality for all citizens in the political, economic, and cultural life of their country.

Eight years after overthrowing the elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi in a military coup, the NIF regime remains persistent in its attempt to make Sudan a fundamentalist Islamic state with virtually no regard for the more than 8 million or so Sudanese who neither profess Islam nor speak Arabic. The regime believes in keeping Sudan as a unitary state by force as well as by preaching the virtues of Islam and Arabism to the country's 30 million people, one of the most ethnically, linguistically, and geographically diverse populations on the continent. For the regime, the enforcement of the Shari'a Law is non-negotiable. On the other hand, the southern people—despite political difficulties—are equally determined in their liberation struggle, which the regime in Khartoum fails to understand. The vast majority of the population of the South have no trust and confidence in northern rulers who time and again failed to promote unity among the people they govern on the basis of equality, respect, and shared interests.

The NIF government—despite its lack of military success, growing international isolation, the burden of a staggering debt, and the economy that has hit rock-bottom—is unwilling to compromise to end the war that has lasted almost three decades. Nor has it been able to defeat even a divided SPLM/A, in spite of its “everything-for-the-war” policy which is costing the country over \$2 million a day. The regime has been reluctant or incapable to put a peace proposal on the negotiating table that would interest the SPLM/A. All attempts at mediation have thus far failed. Several unsuccessful attempts have been made by the SPLM/A for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. For instance, the two sides conducted peace talks in Nairobi and Addis Ababa (1989) and Abuja (1992 and 1993). Throughout 1994 mediators from the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), consisting of representatives from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, attempted to negotiate a peace agreement between the government and the SPLM/A. However, these efforts bore no fruit largely because of the government’s unwillingness to compromise. It seemed the parties were willing to meet only to restate their position, not to give and take. Two of the most sticky issues are the question of self-determination and Shari’a laws. The government insists that self-determination not be a principle upon which the negotiations are based and Shari’a laws are non-negotiable. On the other hand, the SPLM/A views the principle as inalienable right and insists that it be included in the peace talks. It also demands that the future status of the Shari’a laws be discussed in the peace negotiations. The third round of IGADD-sponsored talks broke down, when the mediators, siding with the SPLM/A, called for a secular Sudan and a referendum for the South on the issue of independence.

The northern political elites as a whole appear to be divided or unsure as to what to do with the South. Hassan al-Turabi and his NIF supporters who occupy key military and political posts insist that the South must stay with the North and be Islamized by whatever means necessary including the use of brute forces. They believe that the North has a moral responsibility to Islamize the South and reverse the colonial legacy of Christian influence in the region. They argue that if southerners are willing to convert to Christianity, a colonial religion, they could easily accept Islam, which has strong roots in Africa. Turabi himself recently told the Reuters News Agency that he and his followers “want to plant a new civilization in the South.” The head of the National Congress, who is in charge of grassroots efforts in Islamizing the country, also declared: “Ultimately, people in southern Sudan will totally accept Islam and will even claim Arab ancestry” (Shadid, 1996: 3). Hence, this group is bent on making the whole Sudan a fundamentalist Islamic state with virtually no regard to the eight million or so Sudanese who neither profess Islam nor speak Arabic. By trying to instill Islamic orthodoxy amid diversity, this extremist group seems to

have chosen the path of disintegration rather than coexistence.

On the other hand, there are some who favor the secession of the South so that an Islamic republic can be established in the predominantly “Arab” and Islamic North with less difficulty and controversy. They see no reason why the Muslim majority ought to accede a fundamental religious prescript to appease the non-Muslim minority. Some even admit that imposing an Islamic constitution on the whole country will result in discrimination against the peoples of the country in their civil rights and citizenship obligations. They also argue that the sooner the secession takes place, the less killing will occur. There are also others, perhaps a vast majority, who advocate peaceful coexistence with other faiths without imposing Islamic law on the whole country. They favor a secular and a decentralized state.

At present, those who wish to pursue the war—that is, Bashir, Turabi and their followers—have the upper hand. They have opted to intensify the war with bombing raids to terrorize the inhabitants of the South and to demoralize the SPLM/A-Mainstream. The government’s bombing raid during the last two dry-season offensives have killed hundreds of people and displaced several thousands—over 100,000 people in Aswa, Ame and Atepi and 250,000 people in and around Mundiri in Western Bahr el Ghazal in 1994 alone. (*Africa Confidential*, 1994:3). On their part, the SPLM/A fighters—despite political difficulties—are fighting back hard and have made it virtually impossible for the government troops to penetrate the countryside and to bring in crucial supplies (fuel, munitions, and food). Unable to get to enemy territories, the government has now resorted to indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and is carrying out a scorched-earth campaign in a struggle it has termed a “jihad,” or holy war.

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