

Deng, Francis M. *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995.

The latest study by Francis Deng, the noted Sudanese scholar, examines the reasons for the civil war in southern Sudan, which has raged intermittently since 1956. In the author's view, north-south and Arab-African divisions have caused a national identity crisis in Sudan, which in turn has divided the country into two warring camps. Additionally, Deng suggests three alternate approaches for ending the southern Sudanese conflict. These include creating a new common identity, allowing ethnic and religious diversity by establishing a federal or confederal system of government, or partitioning the country along a north-south divide. Apart from the useful analysis of these factors, the book contains a fairly comprehensive, well-documented history of the southern Sudanese opposition movement and the early phases of the civil war. The author's familiarity with all major southern Sudanese personalities also enables the reader to gain a unique insight into the individuals who are struggling to end the civil war and to improve political, economic, and social conditions throughout the southern Sudan.

Having said all this, however, there are some aspects of *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* that warrant a more critical appraisal. A troublesome deficiency is that parts of the book are dated or give insufficient attention to important recent developments. For example, the chapter that deals with the role foreign nations have played in the southern Sudan only contains approximately one page about the 1987-95 period. As Deng correctly points out, this era witnessed several fundamental changes in the insurgent Sudanese People's Liberation Army's (SPLA's) foreign relations. The rebels lost their major source of foreign support after the May 1991 collapse of Mengistu Haile Mariam's Marxist regime in Ethiopia. Additionally, the new Ethiopian government closed SPLA bases in western Ethiopia and the SPLA's office in Addis Ababa. As a result of these actions, the rebels suffered a series of military and political setbacks in southern Sudan.

However, as it became increasingly clear that the Sudanese government, which was dominated by the National Islamic Front, was providing support to radical Islamic elements throughout the region, the SPLA's fortunes improved. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, known collectively as the Front Lines States (FLS), started providing aid and sanctuary to the SPLA. Additionally, the FLS supported the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of Sudanese opposition groups that included the SPLA, which wanted to bring about the downfall of the Sudanese government by opening a second military front in north-eastern Sudan. The SPLA's failure to take full advantage of these developments reflects the poor leadership qualities of its leader, John Garang, who spent as much time and energy fighting rival rebel groups as he did battling the Sudanese People's Armed Forces (SPAF).

In this same chapter, Deng briefly mentions that Iran and China became closely allied to the Sudanese government during the 1987-95 period but fails to assess how arms shipments from those countries enabled the SPAF to occupy several strategically important towns and villages in southern Sudan. More significantly, the author says

nothing about the relevance of Sudan's ties to Iraq, South Africa, Russia, and several East European nations, all of which support Khartoum's war efforts in southern Sudan.

Another vitally important issue that receives insufficient attention concerns the collapse of the SPLA into warring factions. The author only devotes a few pages to briefly describing this south-south struggle and assessing its impact on southern Sudan. Yet most observers agree that the SPLA's disintegration was a seminal event in southern Sudan's history. The emergence of anti-Garang groups, such as the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) and the SPLA-United (SPLA-U), neither of which Deng mentions by name, marked a turning point in the southern struggle against northern domination. From a military point of view, Garang's decision to battle these factions enabled the SPAF to gain the military momentum in southern Sudan. The Sudanese government also took advantage of the failure of the SSIM and the SPLA-U to establish dependable sources of foreign support by courting the leadership of both organizations. Such divide and rule tactics widened the gulf between Garang and his southern adversaries. More importantly, the perpetual squabbling among these groups eroded a considerable amount of the sympathy and support Garang traditionally had enjoyed in many Western and non-Western capitals.

A topic that is completely neglected in *War of Visions* concerns the Sudanese government's military campaign in the Nuba Mountains. This is a curious omission in view of the fact that Khartoum's harsh military tactics in this remote area has generated considerable interest among international humanitarian organizations like Africa Rights (UK) and the US Committee for Refugees (USA), both of which have accused Khartoum of Islamizing the entire region. Given such an ambitious agenda, one could argue that the Nuba Mountains represent the frontline in the conflict of identities, an idea the author should have at least acknowledged.

Despite these and other shortcomings, Deng has made a considerable contribution to the literature on southern Sudan. Indeed, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* will remain essential reading for anyone who is interested in the post-independence period in southern Sudan for years to come. Meanwhile, readers can hope that one day Deng will devote his considerable capabilities to writing a more comprehensive assessment of the conflict that has kept Sudan divided against itself for much of the post-independence period.

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