

# **Counterinsurgency in Southern Sudan: The Means to Win?**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since early 1992, the Sudanese Government has made a concerted effort to conclude militarily its long-running civil war with the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), led by John Garang. While Khartoum initially made serious inroads into insurgent-held territory, these gains were confined largely to former rebel garrisons, leaving the SPLA controlling much of the countryside. Moreover, the insurgents exacted a terrible price in terms of the number of government soldiers killed, while the financial cost of the escalated fighting took a continued toll on the Sudanese economy. Now, more than three years after the government launched the "final" assault against the SPLA, the two sides appear to be mired in a conflict in which both lack the means to win, yet which neither can afford to lose. The purpose of this essay is to briefly examine the origins and nature of the Sudanese Civil War, then describe and assess the government's counterinsurgency campaign against the SPLA in 1992, and finally, comment on the outlook for the future in Sudan.

## **ROOTS OF CONFLICT**

The current struggle between the government of Sudan and the SPLA is rooted in the imperfectly implemented agreement that ended Sudan's first civil war in 1972. Known as the Addis Ababa Agreement, this accord was designed to reintegrate the south, and southerners, into Sudan's political, economic, and social mainstream. Although the terms of the agreement were implemented in the short-term, the accord's spirit was not, dooming its long-term prospects.<sup>1</sup> According to Peter Woodward, the Addis Ababa Agreement was a series of compromises intended to give sufficient regional powers to appease the south, while maintaining its ties to a unified state.<sup>2</sup> Two areas were, however, left ambiguous: the right of the national president in Khartoum to appoint the president of the south's High Executive Council; and, sharing economic resources. These deficiencies would haunt attempts to create an integrated society, leading eventually to the abrogation of the agreement and instigating the current insurgency.<sup>3</sup> Woodward adds that, "Sudan would clearly be walking a tightrope, impelled largely by the fear of falling,"<sup>4</sup> and fall it would, into the abyss of civil war.

Three factors interacted to create a climate of distrust and insecurity that led southerners to revolt. The first involved the south's economic marginalization. Long denied an equitable allocation of economic resources, and with few resources of its own, the south viewed itself as an economic outcast. Decisions such as the one to build the Jongelai canal, which would increase the Nile River water available to northern Sudan and Egypt, only aroused suspicions further.<sup>5</sup> It was, however, the government's attempt to change the north-south boundary in order to exploit economically the 1978 discovery of oil around Bentiu in Upper Nile that caused real consternation. Although Khartoum backed off this attempt, subsequent announcements that the refinery for the oil produced at Bentiu would be built at Kosti and not in the south caused an uproar. Worse still was the decision not to refine oil in Sudan but rather to export crude from the Red Sea. Although this would permit Sudan to benefit financially from this resource more quickly, the south perceived this as an attempt to deny it the profits from one of its few natural resources.<sup>6</sup>

The second factor destabilizing relations between north and south was President Numeiri's tinkering with southern politics. Although he had interfered occasionally during the 1970s to ensure that his supporters were elected, his direct involvement in southern politics increased during the early 1980s. The dissolution of the regional assembly in 1980 and 1981, and his appointment of a military governor for the south were examples of a growing inequality between the south and the remainder of the country. Moreover, Numeiri's growing closeness with the Islamists in the north, eventually leading to the implementation of Sharia in 1983, heightened southern distrust.<sup>7</sup> It was, however, his attempt to divide the south into three regions, thereby diluting its political power vis-a-vis the north, and his subsequent disregard and distrust of southern soldiers that caused the final rift. According to Millard J. Burr and Robert O. Collins, "the most discordant political issues were the question of redivision, which could destroy the Addis Ababa Agreement, and the treatment of southern units in the Sudanese army."<sup>8</sup>

The third factor undermining national unity was the growing insecurity in the south. Although armed conflict had been endemic to this region, the limited objectives of the competing parties and their primitive weapons had confined the damages. The droughts of the 1970s and early 1980s had, however, increased competition for grazing areas and water, while the increasing availability of modern weapons, first from Ethiopia<sup>9</sup> and then from Idi Amin's overthrow in Uganda,<sup>10</sup> made the traditional conflict much more lethal.

This climate of insecurity was aggravated further by increased guerrilla activity in response to the manner in which the Addis Ababa Agreement had been implemented. By the early 1980s numerous groups of former Anya-Nya fighters, several based in Ethiopia, were operating throughout the south. While some were undoubtedly little more than outlaws, others were more ideologically motivated; yet Khartoum lumped all of them under the banner of Anya-Nya II. There was, in fact, little connecting these disparate groups, which often fought each other as much as they did the government." Moreover, at this time many former Anya-Nya soldiers remained loyal to the government and fought the Anya-Nya II vigorously.<sup>12</sup> This

failure to distinguish between the various factions of oppositionists would subsequently prove disastrous for the north, as it led Numeiri to treat all southern army units with suspicion and attempt to rotate them north, replacing them with more reliable northern soldiers. This would, in effect, give an ethnic/regional cast to what had been a political disagreement.

To help combat growing insecurity, and fearing that southern soldiers were supporting the insurgents, Numeiri began to transfer southern units to northern garrisons.<sup>13</sup> In January 1983, the 105th Battalion stationed in Bor refused orders to redeploy north and Lieutenant Colonel John Garang, sent from Khartoum to quell the mutiny, became its leader. After government attempts to dislodge the mutineers failed, Garang led the soldiers of the 105th into exile in Ethiopia in May 1983, where they joined forces with other guerilla groups operating out of that country. In July 1983, these groups formed the SPLA and its political component, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Thus, Khartoum's unsophisticated attempts to stem the revolt had the opposite affect. By failing to recognize that many southerners did not support the guerrillas, the government had given the impetus for the disparate rebel bands to organize, thereby presenting both a more unified and a more formidable front with John Garang as its leader. According to Douglas Johnson and Gerard Prunier,

[the] Bor mutiny was thus the culmination of a long process of disaffection both within and without the armed forces. It brought together two previously opposed groups of military dissidents and made possible organized and coordinated resistance to the national government.<sup>14</sup>

### **SPLA AT THE CROSSROADS**

The first year of the SPLA's existence was devoted mainly to eliminating threats to Garang's leadership, primarily from groups of Anya-Nya II. By August 1984, these threats had been eradicated,<sup>15</sup> and the SPLA began to expand in southern Sudan. This culminated in 1991, when the insurgents controlled virtually the entire south except for a few government garrison towns. The largest of these towns, Juba, along with its 10,000 soldiers, was then besieged by the rebels.

At this point, rebel leader John Garang faced the choice of how best to exploit this success. Should he concentrate his available resources on these remaining garrisons, or should he expand the war by taking the fight into the north?<sup>16</sup> Another possibility was to expand the inroads he had made in Kordofan and Darfur Provinces since 1987. The SPLA first gained a foothold in southern Kordofan Province in 1985 when rebel units attacked several towns in this region. These attacks were, however, predatory in nature rather than a true attempt to foster local support, and gained little for the SPLA.<sup>17</sup> By 1987, however, Garang had adopted a more sophisticated approach and soon experienced greater success.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent accounts of military activity in both southern Kordofan and Darfur Provinces suggests that Garang had decided to exploit this success.<sup>19</sup>

## **EMERGING REBEL VULNERABILITY**

Despite SPLA advances, three factors converged in 1991 suggesting emerging rebel vulnerability. These factors were the loss of Ethiopian support for the SPLA, the splitting off of a dissident faction of SPLA members, and a political/ military reorientation within the Sudanese Government. Although significant, none of these factors was sufficient singly to cripple the SPLA. Together, however, they gave Khartoum an overwhelming advantage during the 1992 offensive.

By mid-1991, Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam had fallen and the new rulers in Addis Ababa terminated Ethiopia's longstanding assistance to the SPLA, forcing Garang to relocate much of his support infrastructure to southern Sudan. Although the loss of a safe haven in a neighboring country was a serious blow, even more damaging militarily was the need to realign lines of communication (LOCs) to SPLA fighters in Sudan at a time when the insurgents were preparing to expand the conflict.

Another important factor was the split in the SPLA. Internal dissent had plagued the SPLA since its inception in July 1983 as essentially a coalition of diverse insurgent groups.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the 1980s, however, a combination of tactical success and Garang's leadership mitigated these centrifugal tendencies and kept the movement focused. Then, on 30 August 1991, Riak Machar, a Nuer and Zone commander for Upper Nile, and Lam Akol, a Shilluk and John Garang's deputy broke with Garang and formed a splinter faction that became known as the SPLA-Nasir, after the location of its headquarters.

The group's main grievances were with Garang's authoritarian leadership and with his focus on maintaining a unified Sudan.<sup>21</sup> News of the split was heard initially with great enthusiasm by many southerners, few of whom viewed favorably the prospect of continuing to live with northerners in a unified Sudan. Most southerners longed for their own country, an aspiration that can be traced back to the pre-independence period, and the pronouncements of the SPLA-Nasir faction seemed to capture this sentiment. It would soon become apparent, however, that despite the dissidents' legitimate concerns with the direction of the SPLA, this new movement had little more than a narrow, personality based platform.<sup>22</sup> Although Garang would recover politically among the southern community, the split was more serious militarily.

Considering the SPLA's relatively stronger position vis-a-vis the government, these events would not have been critical had it not been for a coinciding political/military reorientation within the government. By mid-1991, Khartoum's ruling military Revolutionary Command Council had been in power for two years and, despite periodic and feeble coup attempts, had consolidated its position. Subsequent operations suggest that Sudan's rulers, if not military planners, were astute enough to realize that this fortuitous, and possibly fleeting, convergence of events offered a unique opportunity to deal a potentially crippling blow to the SPLA.

## **KHARTOUM LEARNS FROM PAST FAILURES**

Years of declining fortunes against the SPLA apparently led Khartoum to assess its inability to counter insurgent activity effectively. While a multitude of deficiencies prevailed, Sudan's rulers realized that its past practice of relying primarily on southerners to fight its war was ineffective.<sup>23</sup> Most southerners had ties of some sort to the SPLA, if only through extended family networks,<sup>24</sup> and had little interest in killing their compatriots.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the past practice of deploying units to the south for extended periods<sup>26</sup> also degraded fighting efficiency. Soldiers forced to spend years fighting against a highly motivated, competent and elusive enemy, quickly lost the will to fight. Also contributing to a defeatist attitude was a senior officer corps that had little vitality after spending most of their careers fighting the SPLA.<sup>27</sup>

To rectify this situation, the Sudanese People's Armed Forces (SPAF) reoriented its approach to the southern insurgency. Recognizing the unreliability of southern troops, Khartoum apparently decided that units consisting predominantly of northerners would conduct future operations. These units would be spearheaded by elements of the Popular Defense Force (PDF), a people's militia that, at least in theory, had greater motivation and religious zeal.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, units that had operated for years in the south would, in the future, only defend garrisons.

Recognizing that the insurgents were going through a potentially vulnerable transition period, as they attempted to reorient their LOCs and rear bases, the Sudanese government planned to take advantage of this unique, and possibly fleeting, opportunity by launching a major offensive to strike at rebel-held areas in the south.

## **KHARTOUM PREPARES FOR THE 1992 OFFENSIVE**

The tactical reorientation was necessary to address serious problems within the SPAF, but it was insufficient to assure success. Renewed offensive operations on a large scale required extensive material and financial support; Khartoum would have to obtain this support before dealing the insurgents a decisive blow. Khartoum's past actions, not to mention its increasingly radical orientation and its ties to terrorists, had, however, led most of its previous benefactors to cut off support, complicating logistic preparations for military operations. Offsetting this was Khartoum's improving relations with Teheran, which apparently resulted in sufficient financial assistance to permit the SPAF to buy large amounts of military supplies and equipment from China. While the extent of this assistance is unclear, reports at that time mentioned figures ranging from \$300 to \$500 million.<sup>29</sup> The amount of equipment received, however, as well as subsequent operations, suggests that the true amount was only a fraction of these inflated figures. Starting in late 1992, significant amounts of equipment transited the capital from Port Sudan on the way to units stationed in the south. This equipment included primarily older generation combat systems such as tanks, armored personnel carriers, field and air

defense artillery, and significant amounts of munitions. Support equipment such as trucks also arrived.<sup>30</sup>

Training was increased both at the unit and individual level, and troops were rotated south from garrisons in the north and east to reinforce southern forces.<sup>31</sup> The Juba garrison was the primary beneficiary of this effort as it was augmented by at least another two brigades. These units consisted almost exclusively of northerners.<sup>32</sup>

While the government never announced publicly the objectives of this operation, subsequent developments suggest that there were four general goals<sup>33</sup> (see Map 1.). First, the government wanted to open a water route from Malakal to the main southern government garrison at Juba, which had been interdicted by the rebels for several years forcing Khartoum to resupply the town by air. The ability to resupply this key southern garrison by water would permit much greater quantities of provisions to be sent there much more economically than by air. Next, Khartoum wanted to capture the insurgents' tactical headquarters at Torit and their main in-country logistics depot at Kapoeta.<sup>34</sup> A third objective was to seal off the border with neighboring countries. While attacking directly at rebel base areas within Sudan was a key first step in defeating the SPLA, the government could only succeed by interdicting the insurgents' supply routes into Sudan. This suggested an attack south of Juba to capture the towns of Kajo-Kaji and Nimule on the Ugandan border. Further attacks in western Equatoria Province would capture towns on the Zaire border such as Kaya. A final objective was undoubtedly to capture towns in Bahr al-Ghazal, which had only recently been lost to the SPLA.

### **KHARTOUM ATTACKS**

Sudanese government forces overran the rebel-held town of Pochala in southern Sudan along the border with Ethiopia on 9 March 1992, as a prelude to subsequent attacks leading to the eventual capture of the insurgents' logistics hub at Kapoeta.<sup>35</sup> Although the SPLA claimed that the attacking forces comprised two battalions, supported by a mechanized unit, and that the Ethiopian military was involved in the attack,<sup>36</sup> it was most likely a much smaller affair. First, this town's location would have made it impossible for Khartoum to initiate a large-scale operation, especially one supported by mechanized assets. LOCs on both sides of the border in this area would make it difficult to support anything other than small-unit operations without the establishment of a logistics depot. This would have presupposed significant and active assistance by the Ethiopian government of which, despite rumors to the contrary, no evidence has surfaced. Also, an assault by a brigade-size force against what was nothing more than an SPLA border post would have been unwarranted. A limited number of Sudanese military personnel could, however, have used Ethiopian territory without the cognizance of Addis Ababa. Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi's one-year-old government did not control thoroughly this part of the country.<sup>37</sup>

More typical of government operations would have been employing the services of government-armed tribal militias to capture the town.<sup>38</sup> Although some

SPAF personnel were undoubtedly involved in the operation, Pochala did not become truly a government garrison until the town's capture permitted the large-scale aerial redeployment of government troops.

At this time the government also attempted to open the Nile River from Malakal to Juba. Closed since 1985, this route could improve significantly Khartoum's ability to resupply its southern garrisons. This effort, consisting of at least seven barges of military supplies and escorted by a brigade,<sup>39</sup> made slow-progress against sometimes intense SPLA resistance.<sup>40</sup> By early April 1992, government forces numbering between 1,600 and 2,000 took the town of Bor, approximately 160 kilometers north of Juba. Rather than contest the issue, the SPLA withdrew in the face of superior government firepower, a tactic it would use throughout this offensive. To assist the progress of the river column, Khartoum sent units north from Juba, finally capturing the town of Mongalla, approximately 80 kilometers north of Juba, linking up with the southern advance.<sup>41</sup> This victory was limited, however, since this link up indicated only that two separate government forces had fought their way to a juncture; neither the land nor the river route were secured. Future resupply efforts would also be required to fight their way through.

Also during late March 1992, the SPAF moved from Juba east toward the rebels' tactical headquarters at Torit. Government forces achieved several victories during the next few months. In each case, however, the rebels withdrew in the face of overwhelming force.<sup>42</sup> Continuing government advances soon forced rebel leader Garang to evacuate his headquarters at Torit on 24 May 1992 for Kajo-Kaji, on the west bank of the Nile River along the Ugandan border. SPAF units finally took the former SPLA headquarters on 13 July 1992, ending a three-year rebel occupation.<sup>43</sup>

The effort to retake the rebel's tactical headquarters was complemented by a concurrent attempt on Kapoeta, approximately 150 kilometers further east, and just 75 kilometers from the Kenyan border. The attack on this town was a continuation of the attack on Pochala. Government forces continued west to Pibor and then south to Kapoeta, using local Toposa tribal militia against the SPLA units defending the town's northern approaches and to capture the town.<sup>44</sup> Due to its strategic importance, the rebels defended Kapoeta heavily. Nevertheless, unlike the capture of other insurgent strongholds, reports of this town's capture do not indicate that any fighting took place. This supports reports circulating in Khartoum at the time that the armed forces used local Toposa tribal militia against the SPLA units defending the town's northern approaches. The Toposa, longtime enemies of the Dinka-dominated SPLA, had excellent knowledge of the local terrain and were used as guides by government forces operating in this area.

To complement its operations in Equatoria, Khartoum attempted to roll back the insurgents in Bahr al-Ghazal Province where government forces had been confined to the garrison town of Wau, 1,000 kilometers southwest of the capital. Rebel bases in this area had been a key factor in the SPLA's ability to expand operations west and north into Darfur and Kordofan Provinces. While military

operations in these two areas were undertaken to deal directly with the insurgent threats there,<sup>45</sup> these efforts would not enjoy long-term success unless the government could eliminate rebel bases in Bahr al-Ghazal.

The government appears to have experienced moderate success in this attempt. The rail link with Wau was reestablished on 24 June 1992, when a train rolled into the refugee-jammed town, ending seven years of siege.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, government forces captured the towns of Yirol and Shambe<sup>47</sup> in western Equatoria Province in early April. Although these towns could have been captured by forces of the river column, the timing and sequence of the attacks suggests that units from Wau were used in this operation.<sup>48</sup>

Other than improving conditions in Wau somewhat and facilitating Khartoum's efforts to open the Nile to barge traffic, however, these operations appear to have had little impact on the tactical situation in Bahr al-Ghazal Province.

### **AN OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT: THE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES**

At first glance, the Sudanese government achieved significant tactical, if not strategic, success in its 1992 operations. Khartoum, bolstered by extensive new-foreign assistance from Iran and China, and driven by renewed religious fervor, was better prepared to launch an offensive than it had been in years. The SPLA, on the other hand, suffered from both internal cleavages and external assaults on its integrity. The insurgent organization, which in early 1991 had appeared on the verge of expanding its own operations into the north, was rocked by the fall of the Ethiopian government in May 1991. This event denied the insurgents their foreign bases, forcing them to find new sources of external support and to reorient their supply lines into the south. The subsequent split of a dissident faction of the SPLA also hurt the insurgents by not only denying Garang access to a sizeable military force, but by forcing him to engage in bloody battles with the dissidents only months before the government offensive. Thus, the SPLA was weakened critically at a time when the government was well prepared to deal the insurgents a serious blow.<sup>49</sup> Appearances are, however, often misleading. Government gains during this offensive were more than offset by tactical deficiencies and strategic errors that impeded Khartoum from exploiting its limited success.

#### **Tactical Deficiencies**

By the time the offensive concluded with the mid-July 1992 capture of Torit, Khartoum had retaken more than a dozen towns from the SPLA, some of which appeared to have important strategic or psychological value. For example, Torit's capture forced Garang to relocate his tactical headquarters to Kajo-Kaji along the Ugandan border and interfered with command and control, while Kapoeta's loss denied the rebels access to their major supply base in this area.

The impact of the loss of these rebel garrisons was, however, mitigated by the precipitous decline in the importance of these bases since Mengistu's fall, which



had eliminated Ethiopian support for the insurgents. The quick redeployment close to the Ugandan border suggests that the SPLA had been reorienting its LOCs to this area for some time. The fall of Bor, Garang's birthplace, was touted as a psychological blow, although this town had little tactical or strategic significance in SPLA planning. Also important was the fact that the insurgents still controlled much of the southern countryside.<sup>50</sup>

Other factors, however, offset government gains. First, Khartoum suffered extremely high casualties during this offensive. In late May 1992, the army acknowledged the high cost of the operation and that the military hospitals in Khartoum and Omdurman were overflowing with wounded soldiers.<sup>51</sup> This supports subsequent rebel statements after the fall of Torit that the government had lost more than 1,500 personnel in the assault on the town.<sup>52</sup> Although the fiercest fighting and highest casualties occurred on this axis, total casualties sustained during the four-month offensive could easily have doubled this figure.

Moreover, despite widespread rejoicing at the first string of government victories in years, public enthusiasm for the war had waned considerably. Few northerners in Khartoum, for example, did not know of someone who was wounded or killed in the conflict. This was a significant change from previous fighting against the SPLA, when southern soldiers had felt the brunt of the conflict. The numerous casualties not only brought home the true impact of continued fighting, but stood in stark contrast to President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Beshir's earlier statements that this offensive would lead to the SPLA's defeat. Government inroads into rebel-held territory had merely driven the rebels deeper into the bush, signalling still more years of guerrilla conflict. The resulting lower morale would be felt more fully during subsequent government offensives in late 1993 and early 1994.

Another negative consequence resulted from the manner in which Khartoum pursued this offensive. Rather than defining it in strictly military terms, the government gave military operations a distinctly religious cast. For example, at the start of the campaign the government press announced that military operations were intended to "wipe out" the Christian and animist rebels.<sup>53</sup> This news, combined with the direction of the attack toward the borders with Kenya and Uganda, undoubtedly encouraged these countries to support the rebels.<sup>54</sup>

### **Strategic Errors**

While tactical deficiencies, serious enough to undermine Khartoum's attempt to defeat the rebels, have plagued the SPAF since armed conflict resumed in 1983, this operation revealed a more fundamental weakness underlying the government's approach to counterinsurgent strategy. Specifically, two strategic errors undermined Khartoum's efforts to eradicate the rebel threat. First, the government's focus on large-scale conventional operations has lacked effectiveness and efficiency. While permitting Khartoum to retake towns, this approach has done little to alter the strategic balance, nor has the government inflicted a decisive military defeat on the rebels.

More important, however, is the strategic error of attempting to defeat the insurgents through a military-first approach. While many southerners support the SPLA, large numbers lack a particular affinity for the rebels; others, represented by the tribal militias fighting alongside government forces, oppose the insurgents actively. Khartoum's failure to exploit these divisions in any other than a tactical manner, has been a major shortcoming of its counterinsurgent effort.

## **OUTLOOK**

While the impressive strides of the Sudanese military in preparing for and conducting this operation cannot be ignored, the SPAF is virtually a moribund organization incapable of exploiting the tactical success it enjoyed in the 1992 offensive. Continued purges of mid- and senior-level officers have impacted negatively on their professional competence as they have been replaced by younger officers whose religious and political correctness outweigh their professional skill. While this infusion of religious zeal may have increased the motivation and drive of government forces in the short-term, it did little to improve force capability substantially in the mid- to long-term. This factor has subsequently declined in importance as enthusiasm has waned in the face of continued high casualties.

Moreover, the government lacks sufficient resources to achieve a military victory. The economy is in a shambles and Khartoum's newfound friends (Iran, China, Iraq, and Libya) have, since the 1992 offensive, appeared unwilling or unable to provide more than token support to Sudan's continuing war effort.

For its part, the SPLA's continued inability to build a viable political platform has doomed it to failure. Nevertheless, continued concern with Khartoum's true aims will assure sufficient support for the rebels to permit the war to fester. While the SPLA's concentration close to the Uganda border suggests enhanced support from Kampala, both as an originator and a conduit, the clandestine and limited nature of this assistance will surely serve to curtail the insurgents' ability to conduct operations.

Prospects for a peaceful solution are equally gloomy. Despite the looming prospect of military stalemate, with all of the attendant negative consequences, little likelihood exists that the two sides will agree voluntarily to a political agreement. While past peace talks have focused on the numerous details of a potential agreement, the true problem runs much deeper and is, at the same time, more fundamental. Southerners' distrust of Khartoum is so strong that it is unlikely they will accept any government concessions, short of outright independence. Sudan's independence history, particularly the abrogation of the Addis Ababa Accords and the increasingly Islamic orientation of the government, has so colored southern perceptions that popular support (within the southern community) for anything short of southern independence is unlikely. This, obviously, is unacceptable to Khartoum and leads to the inescapable conclusion that the war will continue its indecisive course for the foreseeable future.

Map 1  
Sudanese  
Government's Axes of Advance



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### Endnotes

1. Indeed, the manner of implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement and its eventual abrogation have led some southerners to develop their own conspiracy theory. According to this view, the Addis Ababa Agreement was only one step in a conscious and coherent northern plan for dominating the south. Rather than a means to create an equitable and egalitarian society, the accord was merely a subterfuge to end the first insurgency, which the north could not win, and a transition to legalistic, constitutional means to secure northern ascendancy. The lesson learned from this is, obviously, that negotiations are for the naive; only military action will achieve a secure south. Although possibly confusing effect with intent, this perception has become reality for many southerners, some very influential, and will affect the prospects of a negotiated peace dramatically.
2. This agreement's compromises included the following: it established a federal government with an autonomous southern region; Arabic was made the official language but English was acknowledged as the principal language in the south; equality of rights was granted to all citizens irrespective of origin, language or religion. Moreover, 6,000 former guerrillas would be incorporated into the army. Along with 6,000 northerners, these former Anya-Nya members would constitute the southern command. See Marc Lavergne. *Le Soudan contemporain* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1989), p. 400; and J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), pp. 7-9.
3. Lavergne, *Le Soudan contemporain*, p. 400; and Burr and Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 9.
4. Peter Woodward. *Sudan 1898-1989: The Unstable State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p. 142.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 160. Woodward notes that the decision to build a canal at Jongelai would create a channel saving 4.7 million cubic meters of water from evaporation annually, increasing the flow at Aswan by 3.7 million meters. This water would be divided evenly between Egypt and Sudan: Sudan's share would obviously be devoted to the arid north. This project was seen as typical of Khartoum's focus on the northern areas of Sudan, to the exclusion of the south.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 160-61. Also see Lavergne, *Le Soudan contemporain*, p. 411; and David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 67. Due to Sudan's large external debt at this time, there was a legitimate concern with bringing oil production on-line as quickly as possible in order to enhance foreign exchange earnings.
7. The implementation of Sharia, often referred to as the "September Laws" in Sudan, has been a major point of contention in attempted efforts to reconcile north and south. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the implementation of Sharia in Sudan in September 1983 occurred after the mutiny of southern units and the formation of the SPLA (see below).
8. Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 11; and Keen, *The Benefits of Famine*, p. 68.
9. Ethiopian aid was in response to Sudan's support for Eritrean insurgents.
10. By the end of his reign, Idi Amin relied increasingly on foreign mercenaries, many of them from Sudan, to man his army. See Samuel Decalo, *Psychosis of Power: African Personal Dictatorships* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989), p. 101. On Idi Amin's ouster, these soldiers returned to Sudan where they contributed ominously to the growing insecurity in the south. See Lavergne, *Le Soudan contemporain*, pp. 408-9; and Douglas H. Johnson and Gerard Prunier, "The Foundations and Expansion of the Sudan People's Liberation Army," in M.W. Daly and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, eds., *Civil War in the Sudan* (New York: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 121.
11. Johnson and Prunier. "Foundations and Expansion." pp. 121 -23.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 123; and Jean R. Tartter, "National Security," in Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Sudan: a country study* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1992), p. 242.
13. See BurvandCollins, *Requiemforthe Sudan*, pp. 11-12 for an excellent discussion of the attempted rotation of southern units.
14. Johnson and Prunier, "Foundations and Expansion." p. 125.
15. ***Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.**

16. This dilemma, as well as the resulting decision, were evident in a presentation Garang delivered. at which the author was present, in 1991 in Washington DC.
17. Johnson and Prunier, "Foundations and Expansion," p. 135.
18. Apparently hoping to capitalize on existing antipathy toward Khartoum among residents in the Nuba Mountain region, a Nuban, Yusuf Kua, was appointed to command the "New Kush" battalion, itself composed predominately of Nubans. This unit was then sent to expand the war into southern Kordofan Province. The size of the SPLA force operating in this area would soon grow to 3,000 personnel. See Ibid., p. 135; and Africa Watch. *Sudan: Destroying Ethnic Identity. The Secret War Against the Nuba* (Washington. DC, 1991) p. 5.
19. Daily newspapers in Khartoum during the latter half of 1991 and early 1992. routinely carried reports of increased activity, both rebel and government, in the west. Despite the obvious pro-government tilt of this information, it was evident that the SPLA did not enjoy the same success in this area as it had in the south. Considering that the rebels were operating far removed from their ethnic base, this is not surprising. Another possibility was that the August 1991 split in the SPLA and the elimination of Ethiopian support had forced the insurgents to reorient their lines of communication to forces operating in Kordofan and Darfur. By complicating resupply at a time when these forces were attempting to expand operations, these two events were critically important. For this second explanation see Africa Watch. *Sudan*, p. 10.
20. Johnson and Prunier. "Foundations and Expansion," p. 125.
21. Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 300.
22. The author lived in Khartoum at the time of the split. The reaction of most southerners to the Nasir faction's pronouncements in favor of a separate south were little short of euphoric. Even Dinkas who favored Garang, believed that fighting for their own homeland was the only worthwhile goal. By mid-1992, however, this goodwill had dissipated, due mainly to the SPLA-Nasir faction's unwillingness to fight the government militarily. This, along with the general acceptance of the allegation of government financial and military support for the Nasir group, had precipitated a dramatic decline in the dissidents' popular support. Nevertheless, the damage to the SPLA from a military perspective had been done.
23. Since Numeiri first demonstrated a disinclination to permit southern soldiers to fight on the front line against the SPLA. the government had recognized that it was more efficient (in terms of northern lives lost), if not always more effective, to rely on southern troops. In fact, the typical refrain heard in Khartoum at the time of the author's arrival there in the summer 1991. was that the north would continue to fight to the last southerner.
24. One must be careful here not to draw too general a conclusion. While the majority of the troops deployed to the south were southerners, not all had an affinity for Garang's organization. Differences among southern ethnic groups are often as great as those between the north and the south.
25. Few southerners joined the SPAF due to notions of loyalty or national commitment. Rather, they did so as a means to secure employment and possible advancement in one of the few avenues open to them. Thus, their commitment was often to staying alive and maintaining their families, not to killing the enemy.
26. la theory units sent to the south were to remain there for one to two years before rotating to other areas of the country. In practice, however, once deployed to southern garrisons, these units were often forgotten.
27. By the early 1990s. most general officers had nearly thirty years' service. For many, this included as many as twenty years in an army fighting a civil war against either the SPLA or the Anya-Nya. As evidenced by the ultimatum issued by senior officers to then president Sadiq al-Mahdi in early 1989 to end the fighting, the main lesson these men had learned from the war w'as that it was futile. This view was hardly conducive to developing the kind of fighting spirit necessary to counter the insurgent onslaught effectively.
28. The People's Defense Force is widely misunderstood. During an open discussion with the author, a previous commander of this force indicated that it was patterned on the US National Guard. Its purpose was mainly to protect villages and farms, freeing the army to pursue the SPLA. Although this description was a bit of an exaggeration, it was not completely off of the mark. The PDF lacked

the permanent organization necessary to function as a true reserve system. Units required for operations were raised through public appeals on the radio and in the newspapers. Units were then created in an ad hoc manner, assigned a cadre of regular military personnel and sent to the south for periods of three to six months. Local newspapers typically described and praised the service these units performed. Although the PDF was grounded strongly in Islam, it lacked the sinister intent and capability many observers, especially Western, ascribed to it. It was never intended, structured, or resourced as a replacement for the army, nor has it ever been a militia of the National Islamic Front. Rather, it was more a means of mobilizing the mass of northerners in an effort to increase their commitment to the war, and also to enhance their military capability. This effort was, however, unproductive: the army resented the PDF and was reluctant to cooperate with it; the military training the PDF personnel received was inadequate; and, the religious orientation alienated more recruits than it motivated. See Raymond Bonner, "Letter from Sudan," *The New Yorker*, 13 July 1992, for a description of the impact of PDF training on recruits.

29. "Sudan Opposition Says Iranians Helping Army," in *The Renter Library Report*, (Cairo), 12 March 1992; and Burr and Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 306.
30. During the months preceding the March 1992 offensive, large amounts of Chinese military equipment, including tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces and support vehicles transited Khartoum. While extensive, however, neither the quantity, type nor vintage of this equipment was consistent with the larger dollar values listed in the text. Interestingly, little or no attempt was made to hide these shipments: they were normally out in the open for any passerby to observe.
31. Troops departed daily for Juba from Khartoum International Airport. Travellers on commercial flights could easily observe the troop presence at the staging area.
32. See John Turner. "Operational history of the insurgency in southern Sudan from 1983," unpublished manuscript, p. 27. which cites a figure of 20,000 soldiers in the Juba garrison. Prior to this reinforcement, the First Infantry Division, most likely reinforced due to Juba's importance, manned this garrison. See Tartter, "National Security," p. 245. This division would total between 12,000 and 15,000 personnel. Thus, the 20,000 figure represents a reinforcement of at least two brigades.
33. See Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 309; and Human Rights Watch-Africa. *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by all Parties in the War in Southern Sudan* (Washington, DC, 1994) p. 36, for discussions of government objectives during this offensive.
34. Kapoeta drew its importance from its position astride key LOCs in eastern Equatoria Province, especially the road running from Kenya to key SPLA garrisons at Torit and Pibor.
35. Paul Eedle. *The Reuter Library Report*, (Cairo). 12 March 1992.
36. *The Xinhua General Overseas News Service*, (Khartoum). 10 March 1992, Item No: 0310245.
37. Jane Perlez, "Trek to Misery by 12,000 Pawns in Sudan War," *The New York Times*. 10 June 1992. p. A1.
38. Since the mid-1980s, Khartoum has armed a variety of ethnic groups in southern Sudan under a program started by then President Sadiq al-Mahdi to capitalize on inter-tribal disputes and to complicate SPLA operations in the area. See Tartter. "National Security," pp. 255-58; and Woodward. *Sudan 1898-1989*, pp. 211-12 and 217-18. While this program initially did little more than destabilize the situation further, the Sudanese government was eventually able to improve coordination and employed the tribal militia's effectively during this offensive. Also, see Alex de Waal, "Some Comments on Militias in the Contemporary Sudan." in Daly and Sikainga, eds.. *Civil War in the Sudan*, for an excellent discussion of the history of government-supported militias in Sudan.
39. Didrikke Schanche, "Offensive Forces Aid Workers to Leave Southern Sudan," *Associated Press*, International News. 18 March 1992. Although this report mentions a 1,500 man military escort, Sudan's basic unit of operation in the south is an infantry brigade. Although this report could refer to an under strength brigade, the importance that the government attached to the operation suggests that it was supported by a force somewhat larger, probably in excess of 2,000 personnel.
40. Jonaman Clayton. "Rebels Hold off Army but Misery for Sudan," *The Reuier Library Report*. 30 March 92.

41. "Sudanese forces open up road to south," *Agence France Presse*, (Khartoum). 25 April 1992.
42. "Sudanese government recaptures town near rebel headquarters," *Agence France Presse*, (Nairobi). 14 May 1992.
43. Alfred Taban. "Sudanese Army Captures Key Rebel Base." *The Renter Library Report*. (Khartoum), 14 July 1992. Some accounts suggest that the force capturing Torit was as large as 10,000. See Burr and Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 309. This is, however, very unlikely. A force this size would have been nearly a division and the SPAF never committed more than one or two brigades to a single operation since the army lacked the command and control capability to maneuver a force this large effectively. Furthermore, the terrain in this area of Sudan would not have supported a force this large on a single axis.
44. See *Ibid.*, for a government spokesman's acknowledgement of Toposa aid; also, see Turner, "Operational history of the insurgency," p. 32.
45. During this period the local press was replete with accounts that the SPAF, supported by the PDF, had enjoyed considerable success in these areas. Foreexample, see the Sudan News Agency account of Darfur operations in "Government militia sent to wipe out rebels in Bahr al- Ghazal," *Agence France Presse*, 9 June 1992. While the reporting of the government-controlled press was always suspect in this regard, conversations with travellers returning from these areas indicated that Khartoum had indeed made considerable inroads into rebel activity there.
46. Alfred Taban. "Sudan Reopens Railway to Key Southern City." *The Renter Library Report*. (Khartoum). 25 June 1992.
47. See "Sudan says its Troops Retake Southern River Port," *The Renter Library- Report*. (Nicosia). 15 April 1992: and, "Sudanese government recaptures town near rebel headquarters," *Agence France Presse*, 14 May 1992.
48. Also see Millard Burr, *Sudan 1985-1992: Food Aid, Famine, and Failure*. (Washington, DC: US Committee for Refugees, May 1993). p. 26; and Human Rights Watch-Africa. *Civilian Devastation*.
49. These factors, and the limited results of subsequent operations, suggest that the ultimate success enjoyed by the government may have been due as much to insurgent debility as it was to its own efforts.
50. Aidan Hartley. "Sudan Conflict Enters New Phase after Rebel HQ Taken." *Reuters*. (Nairobi), 15 July 1992.
51. Chris Hedges, "Sudanese Rebels are Reported to be Near Defeat," *The New York Times*, 23 May 1992. p. A9.
52. Mohamed Osman, "Government Seizes Rebel Headquarters Town." *The Associated Press*. (Khartoum). 14 July 1992.
53. *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*. Part 4, The Middle East, Africa and Latin America; The Middle East; ME/1326/a/1.
54. See Aidan Hartley, "Sudan Rebels Fight to Regain Lost Credibility." *The Renter Library Report*. (Pageri, Sudan), 26 July 1992. Also Aidan Hartley. "Sudan Rebels step up attacks on Southern Capital." *The Renter Library Report*. (Pageri, Sudan). 25 July 1992, in which SPLA wounded are described as being trucked to Uganda and flown to Kenya for treatment.