

Appendix

Learning Lessons from Past Engagement with Sudan

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Overview

This appendix consists of brief case studies of four instances in which Sudan government policy changed for the better, or in which atrocities were brought to an end. The four case studies are:

1. Ending Khartoum's support to al Qaida;
2. Ending abductions and enslavement in the war in the South;
3. Ending genocide in the Nuba Mountains;
4. Achieving the North-South peace agreement.

The purpose of these four case studies is the following:

- They show the complex admixture of factors that has led Sudan, in the past, to abandon extremely abusive or destabilizing policies. In particular, they highlight the importance of domestic and regional factors.
- They illustrate that the U.S. has played a significant role when it has acted in coordination with others domestically, in the region and in Europe.
- They demonstrate that the most important factor in ending human rights violations is achieving peace.
- They point to the perils of drawing simplistic conclusions about how to change the behavior of the Sudan government.

1. The Ending of Sudan's Active Support to al Qaida

Immediately after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Hassan al Turabi declared his support for Saddam Hussein. He did this in direct contravention of the policy adopted by President Omar al Bashir, who had assured the governments of Egypt and Saudi Arabia of Sudan's firm support for them. This led to Sudan's isolation from the west and its embrace of *jihadi* groups including al Qaida.

The U.S. was slow in latching on to the threat posed by Usama bin Laden in Sudan. Sudan's chief interest in him in 1991 was as an investor, at a time when the country had been cut off from almost all western assistance, and for several years he was chiefly an agricultural investor and Afghan veterans support service. Meanwhile there were other terrorists of greater concern to Washington present in Khartoum, who were active in

destabilizing neighboring countries. The Egyptians, Eritreans and Ethiopians were quicker off the mark in reacting to the terrorist threat emanating from Sudan. Even before an al Qaida affiliate tried to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995, those three countries had entered into a state of de facto war with Sudan. After the Mubarak assassination attempt, the neighboring countries stepped up military support to the SPLA and the National Democratic Alliance. In addition, the armies of the three countries, plus Uganda, became more actively engaged, crossing Sudan's borders. This was a covert war but was conducted on a significant scale. Egypt annexed a piece of Sudanese territory, the Halaib triangle. Eritrea provided direct assistance to Sudanese opposition groups in eastern Sudan as well as the SPLA. Ethiopia sent tank divisions into Sudan and provided the firepower and command to enable the SPLA to capture towns. In contrast to the Eritreans who took a high public profile and closed down the Sudanese embassy, both the Ethiopians and Egyptians maintained diplomatic contacts with Khartoum and linked their military activities to specific actions undertaken by the Sudanese. For example they demanded that Khartoum close down specific *jihadist* bases and expel named militants. The U.S. provided diplomatic cover when Bashir protested that he had been invaded and slapped sanctions on Sudan. Later on, *after* Usama bin Laden had been expelled and the great majority of terrorist facilities had been closed down, the U.S. itself became more active in providing military assistance to what it called the "frontline states" and in pursuit of an explicit policy of regime change.¹ It was later still that the U.S. fired cruise missiles against the al Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, displaying remarkable precision in destroying the factory. The balance of evidence indicates that al Shifa was what it claimed to be: a pharmaceutical plant and not a site manufacturing chemical weapons.

The June 1995 assassination attempt against Hosni Mubarak was a turning point in the internal politics of the Sudanese regime. It showed that the terrorist groups in Sudan had overstepped the mark and endangered the security of their host country. This occurred because the Sudan government had multiple security agencies operating in parallel and not informing one another. President Bashir had not been informed about Sudanese security agencies that were cooperating with the *jihadist* cells planning the assassination attempt. After the attack he summoned his senior colleagues and furiously demanded that they fall into line. He was able to rein them in but not to exercise complete control—multiple power centers remained in Sudanese security and foreign policy.

It was the coordinated actions of the neighboring governments, supported by the U.S., that brought Sudan's support for terrorism to an end. Sanctions had an effect but those who followed events closely consider that the Ethiopian tank division camped on the outskirts of Damazin town—a town whose adjacent dam supplies the water to the Gezira

¹ The military assistance package was given in November 1996, a political assistance package to the NDA was announced in July 1997, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with opposition leaders to express her support for them, as members of a future government, in December 1997. Usama bin Laden had, however, left Sudan in April 1996.

scheme and the electricity to Khartoum—concentrated Bashir’s mind somewhat more.² Military pressure undoubtedly had a major impact.

2. Ending Abductions and Enslavement

In late 1986, reports of children and women enslaved by the Baggara Arab militia of South Kordofan and South Darfur began to circulate in Khartoum. In 1987, two Sudanese academics, Ushari Mahmoud and Suleiman Baldo, published a report in which they documented the resurgence of this activity.³ Khartoum newspapers published stories around the same time.⁴ The origins of the resurgence in enslavement lie in the encouragement of the Arab militia, known locally as Murahaliin, by the Transitional Military Government of 1985-86, when military intelligence turned to the militia as a cheap alternative to mobilizing the army to fight the SPLA. This policy continued under the elected government of Sadiq el Mahdi. Every dry season between 1985 and 1988 the militia rampaged through northern Bahr el Ghazal, killing, burning, looting cattle and abducting women and children. By the time of the military coup in June 1989, Sudanese human rights activists estimated that somewhere between 6,000 and 10,000 women and children had been taken into slavery. The prime purpose of the raids was to destroy communities suspected to sympathize with the SPLA. Cattle raiding was also very profitable for the militia. Abductions of women and children was a terrible byproduct of this vicious method of warfare.

The numbers of people enslaved and the pattern of enslavement became a high profile issue in the mid-1990s, when international agencies began paying money in slave redemption programs. When the U.S. became actively engaged in the North-South peace process in 2001, one of the tests set by the U.S. President’s Special Envoy, Senator Jack Danforth, was an independent investigation into slavery. That investigation was completed in May 2002.⁵ The investigation concluded that slavery did indeed exist but did not provide a definitive figure for the number of individuals enslaved.⁶ It also provided much information about the context of the enslavement that had occurred.

Enslavement was a by-product of the war and specifically the militia strategy. Abductions went in waves: they went up whenever there was a series of militia raids or an operation such as escorting a military train. They went down when the SPLA was strong and could deter the raids, when there were local peace deals between the Baggara

² For more details see, Alex de Waal (ed.) *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*, Indiana University Press, 2004, especially chapter 6.

³ Ushari Mahmoud and Suleiman Baldo, “El Diein Massacre and Slavery in the Sudan,” pamphlet, Khartoum, 1987.

⁴ E.g. “Escaped slave girl arrives in Khartoum to tell her story,” *Sudan Times*, September 10, 1987. Other stories can be found in the *Sudan Times* on September 20, 1987, January 21, 1988, February 18, 1988, May 9, 1988, October 9, 1988, and April 30, 1989.

⁵ “Slavery, Abduction and Forced Servitude in Sudan,” Report of the International Eminent Persons Group, Khartoum, May 22, 2002.

⁶ The Group noted that the estimates by Save the Children (which had monitored the issue closely), the Dinka Chiefs’ Committee, and the official Committee on the Elimination of the Abduction of Women and Children, had broadly similar total estimates of 10,000-17,000, with a convergence on a median figure of 14,000, Christian Solidarity International was using a much higher figure of 100,000

and the Dinka (and hence between the militia and the SPLA) and when, for one reason or another, there was reduced military activity. Local factors were the key, and prominent among these was peace. Thus the peak of slaving activities occurred during 1985-88, when the militia encountered no real resistance from the SPLA in northern Bahr el Ghazal, but decreased in 1989 and 1990 when the SPLA entered the area. It increased again sporadically in the mid 1990s, when the SPLA was weakened by internal splits, and when militia were involved in escorting trains. It was reduced by a series of local peace deals—which the Eminent Persons Group prefers to call “neighborhood agreements” between formerly belligerent parties. While these agreements did not completely halt abductions, they substantially reduced them.

The army closely supported the murahaliin militia but also had its differences with them, especially when the militia pursued their own interests which were in opposition to those of the army. The Eminent Persons Group reported armed clashes between army and militia in 2000 and 2001. This highlights the fact that while three successive governments supported the groups that carried out abduction and enslavement, and turned a blind eye to the practice, the government itself did not have a policy of enslavement—rather, slavery was the byproduct of how the government fought the war.

While slavery achieved considerable profile in the U.S. media and among activists, at no time was it the leading consideration driving U.S. government policy towards Sudan. The U.S. administration condemned slavery but did not design specific threats to try to bring it to an end. The U.S. government did not threaten force to end slavery, though it did provide political support to the SPLA, which used its forces to prevent the militia raids.

The most important factors in reducing enslavement were domestic, especially the politics of the Baggara tribes responsible for most abductions. The key factor in bringing enslavement to an end was the end of the war, achieved in January 2005.

3. Ending Genocide in the Nuba Mountains

The third case is the Nuba Mountains. In the early 1990s the Nuba of South Kordofan suffered an onslaught just as terrible and even more sustained as and systematic than the 2003-04 offensives in Darfur.⁷ At this point the Khartoum regime was at the height of its ideological hubris and the plan was explicit and ambitious: to remove the Nuba from their ancestral homeland in their entirety and relocate them to “peace camps” elsewhere. The aim was to create a monolithic Islamic state, and the Nuba, because of their traditional culture and their armed resistance, stood in the way. The result was a far more systematic policy of ethnic cleansing than anything attempted in Darfur. Senior security officials confessed that there was a policy of rape. The campaign was officially labeled a *Jihad* and blessed by the most senior members of the government. It reached its height in 1992 with a massive land and air onslaught on the SPLA forces in the Nuba hills and a program of trucking displaced Nuba out of their home province and dumping them on the edges of towns elsewhere in the country.

⁷ African Rights, *Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan*, London, June 1995.

This campaign continued during the first half of 1992 at an intense level, with day-and-night military onslaughts and aerial bombardments. Then, the offensive was scaled back and the relocations were halted. It became no longer a genocidal campaign and instead a nasty counterinsurgency. During the critical months of 1992 there was no international attention to speak of. The campaign was scaled back for two reasons: one was that SPLA resistance was too strong and the government could not sustain the military offensive indefinitely. The second was because senior members of the government could not agree on the aim of the campaign. The radicals wanted complete ethnic cleansing and socio-cultural transformation. Others wanted to halt the rebellion but go no further. Although the radicals still nurtured their dreams after the middle of 1992, they didn't have the means to prevail.

In January 2004, a seminar was held at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum under the title, "Stepping Back from the Brink." It consisted of six case studies of how genocides had ended, one of which was the Nuba, and some comparative and theoretical essays.⁸ The conclusion of the Nuba study was that the two most important reasons why the genocidal violence and displacement ended were the internal disagreements within the government and the resistance of the Nuba SPLA. Pressures from wider Sudanese society—including residents of the Northern cities who were appalled to find destitute Nuba dumped on their doorsteps—ranked third, and international pressure ranked a distant fourth.⁹

What did continue was a vicious low-intensity war. In 1995 there was some publicity—my colleague Julie Flint and I flew in to the Nuba Mountains and opened it up for journalistic coverage and humanitarian access. Among other things we documented the policy of rape. There is some evidence to show that the reduction in the level of rape that followed occurred because the government was embarrassed by the publicity.

Subsequently there was a great deal of international clamor on the Nuba (though it was minor compared to Darfur today). That helped in the pressure for a ceasefire and the end to the severe and ongoing human rights abuses. But well before the international pressure was ratcheted up, the threat to the survival of the Nuba had already passed. The Nuba saved themselves.

4. Achieving the North-South Peace Agreement

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Nairobi on January 9, 2005, was a milestone in Sudan's modern history. It marked an end to more than 20 years of war in Southern Sudan and promised not only peace but democratic transformation. It brought the SPLA into a government of national unity.

⁸ They were later published on the SSRIC Webforum, "How Genocides End," <http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/>

⁹ Alex de Waal, "Averting Genocide in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan," http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/de_Waal2/

The U.S. government played an important role in bringing about this peace agreement. The key step was taken in the first six months of the George W. Bush presidency, when the incoming Republican administration reviewed U.S. policy on Sudan. The reason for the review was that although the Republicans were no more sympathetic to the Sudan government than their Democrat predecessors, their assessment was that the policy of regime change had failed, and in addition had no realistic chance of succeeding. The conclusion of the policy review was that peace was possible, though the odds against it were long. Senator Jack Danforth was appointed Presidential special envoy for Sudan on September 6, 2001, with the initial task of assessing whether the two parties—the government and the SPLA—were serious about achieving peace. Just a few days later, the terrorist crime of September 11 put the peace initiative in a new context. President Bashir was worried that Sudan might be a victim in the administrations “global war on terror.”

Sudan at that moment was weak. Although it had begun exporting oil in 1999, its oilfields were still vulnerable to attack. The national budget had risen sharply from its low plateau of just under \$900 million per annum in the late 1990s, but if the SPLA or a regional power were to cut off oil exploration or exports, the country would plunge back into financial crisis. Major Chinese investment and patronage lay in the future and Sudan’s most powerful neighbors were still suspicious, though not actually at war with Khartoum. The SPLA had won international respect and was a partner in a peace process—albeit a painfully slow, almost moribund exercise—led by the north-east African subregional organization, the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which had a Sudan Peace Secretariat based in Kenya. And the U.S. had an unequalled global status following September 11 and the successful overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Despite those exceptionally favorable conditions, the U.S. approach was cautious and multilateral. Its efforts were channeled in support of the IGAD initiative and in close cooperation with European allies, notably Britain and Norway, who with the U.S. created a troika of support to the peace process. Senator Danforth’s approach was focused: he insisted that the Sudanese parties should initially show good faith by meeting certain tests (the tests were overwhelmingly aimed at testing Khartoum’s good faith, but challenged the SPLA to respect a ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains and respect civilians elsewhere). When the tests were passed satisfactorily, Danforth stressed that the Sudanese parties should work out their own peace deal, insisting that international guarantees and peacekeepers would be a minor adjunct to a deal worked out by Sudanese, on Sudanese terms. Most importantly, the aim was a simple and clear one: peace. This aim was accepted by everyone internationally and domestically. It was the primary and overwhelming focus of effort for three years. The deal was: if the Sudanese parties could agree and faithfully implement a peace accord, the U.S. government would gradually normalize relations with Sudan.

In this context, U.S. pressure worked. There was a cohesive policy agreed in the region and internationally. Both the process and the outcome were accepted by the key parties. The policy was pursued consistently. The focus was clear and simple. And the U.S. had

more leverage than any time before or since. Yet the outcome was never predetermined and at several points in the process there could have been disaster. The leadership of SPLA leader John Garang and Sudanese vice president Ali Osman Taha were needed to achieve success.

With patience, leverage, and international cohesion, the U.S. played a leading role in obtaining an outcome that all parties had defined as acceptable, namely peace.

This context has not been replicated in the case of Darfur. The U.S. policy has had multiple objectives, has not commanded consensus internationally or in the region, has been exercised at a time when Sudan has the support of China and Arab countries, when Khartoum is vastly more financially stable (the national budget in 2007 is estimated at \$11.7 billion), and when U.S. standing has plummeted following the Iraqi fiasco. It is unsurprising that the results on Darfur have been much less impressive.

Conclusion

There is no denying that pressure can work. Military action by Sudan's neighbors was critical in ending Khartoum's support for international terrorism. U.S. and European pressure was important in bringing about the CPA. The key question for policy makers is not whether pressure works, but under what conditions pressure can work, and what can be achieved by pressure.

The most important lesson from these four case studies is that U.S. policy has rarely been the main determinant of what happens in Sudan. Domestic politics and the politics of north-east Africa have usually been more important. U.S. policy has worked when it has aligned itself most effectively with those domestic or regional forces, and when it has a single clear policy objective, consistently pursued. Good evidence-based analysis is the essential basis for effective action.