

Many targets in worldwide campaign against Sudan

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

A concerted action by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) unfolded in the last week of January, reportedly to promote a United Nations intervention into Sudan. But a closer look reveals that the move resembles a psychological warfare operation, with a multiplicity of targets and goals.

Amnesty International led the pack, with well-publicized press conferences on Jan. 25 to announce it was launching a "worldwide Sudan campaign," whose immediate goal was to have a permanent U.N. observer mission mandated to impose oversight over the human rights situation in the Horn of Africa nation. In its Nairobi press conference, Amnesty charged that the Sudanese government since 1989 had used "political assassination, torture, and arbitrary detention to increase the hatred in Sudanese society," as well as in areas "not immediately affected by the war." According to a new twist of Amnesty's logic, it is not the war, but rather the "continuing violation of human rights" that is "the source of the humanitarian catastrophe . . . with numerous cases of starvation and millions of refugees."

Departing from earlier campaigns which had focused blame exclusively on the Khartoum government, Amnesty now asserts that everyone in Sudan is violating human rights; "the government *and* the armed opposition groups SPLA [Sudanese People's Liberation Army] . . . and SSIA [South Sudanese Independence Army]" are responsible for killing, raping, enslaving, or eliminating civilians, thus creating refugees and "conflicts over increasingly scarce food." The shift in emphasis was prompted by widespread, well-documented reports of atrocities committed over the last months by the SPLA and other rebel groups engaged in internecine, tribal warfare. Since military clashes between rebel groups and the Khartoum government over the past months have been minimal, following a unilateral cease-fire declared by the government, it is impossible to ignore the devastation wrought by rebel groups fighting each other.

If such is the situation portrayed by Amnesty in the south, in the north, it asserts, "the military government is trying to secure its power through a radical interpretation of Islam," which includes "amputations, whippings, and stonings" against "opposition politicians, students, journalists, trade unionists, and women."

U.N. intervention sought

Thus, concludes the press release issued on Jan. 25, U.N. action must be taken. "The international community gives large sums of money yearly to limit the terrible humanitarian consequences of civil war and political oppression in Sudan," sums estimated at \$2.4 million in 1994. Now, states Amnesty, "it is high time to take measures to fight the *source* of the humanitarian disaster in Sudan, the violation of human rights on the part of *all* parties to the conflict" (emphasis added).

In an ostensibly unrelated development, the very same line was presented on Jan. 24, by a London-based "Sudanese Womens Union," which announced it was organizing an April "peace march" on U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to demand a U.N. intervention into Sudan. Sudanese exile Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, formerly a leading communist, who is coordinating the initiative, echoed Amnesty's approach, that civilian suffering was the result of human rights violations by both the government and the rebels. Furthermore, the government is accused of ordering soldiers to marry southern women, of forcing women to abandon traditional Sudanese dress in favor of the *hijab*, and generally imposing Islamic customs on the population. The Sudanese Women's Union joins Amnesty in alleging that women are whipped "for dressing differently, or for prostitution." Others are reportedly whipped "because they sell alcohol," which is forbidden in Sudan.

In Germany, where significant media coverage was devoted to the two initiatives, a new barrage of articles and television features appeared simultaneously, rehashing similar allegations of human rights violations, among them a feature in the Hamburg-based weekly *Tempo*. And finally, during an international symposium on the role of Islam in the West, promoted in Germany by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the German leader of the Society for Endangered Peoples, Tillman Zulch, took the floor to hurl a string of invectives at the Sudanese government, accusing it of torture and genocide.

The timing is significant

Such a concentration of attacks leveled against one nation in such a short time span prompts the obvious question: Why now?

The timing of the Amnesty-led campaign is significant on several accounts. First, regarding Amnesty itself—a British intelligence outlet which pretends to apply its moral fervor and sumptuous budgets to the scrupulous investigation of human rights violations—the group has never even visited Sudan. After having received invitations repeatedly from the Sudanese authorities to make a fact-finding tour, Amnesty had agreed for the first time in six years to accept, and a date in March was set. Instead, however, it preferred to jump the gun, issuing a report, based not on field research, but on reports of “eyewitnesses” apparently interviewed in Uganda, Kenya, or other nearby localities. Rather than examine the situation on site, it chose to launch a worldwide campaign, urging U.N. intervention.

Secondly, Amnesty’s precipitous action came in the context of financial, military, and political developments which might tip the scales in the other direction. Sudan reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in December to reschedule debt payments on its relatively small (\$1.2 billion) debt, and in mid-January the IMF announced its willingness to continue technical assistance, reversing earlier threats to expel Sudan. Had the IMF taken the unprecedented step of expelling the country, Sudan would have been officially blacklisted and its trade relations severely cut. Sanctions against the country, like those imposed on Iraq and Libya, would deal a deadly blow. Therefore, the Sudanese leadership found the means to reach a temporary compromise with the IMF without jeopardizing its long-term international economic development objectives.

The military front

On the military front, where hard factual information is not easy to confirm, it appears that government forces, following the termination of the rainy season, were in a position to complete their reconquest of territory on the extreme southern border region from the rebel forces of John Garang’s SPLA. As months-long reports of bloody inter-tribal warfare had underscored, the rebel factions were in disarray. The Paris daily *Le Monde* reported on Jan. 22-23 that Garang needed a victory somewhere in order to put wind back into his sails, and SPLA sources put out the estimate that they were on the verge of retaking Kapoeta, a town near the border with Uganda and Kenya.

The victory, according to humanitarian groups in the area, was seen to be more important psychologically than militarily. To take any effective military action, Garang would need massive supplies of weapons and food. In addition to matériel regularly delivered by the Uganda dictator Yoweri Museveni, and reportedly from Zimbabwe, Garang was also receiving arms from the “humanitarian” organizations on hand. According to *Le Monde*, support came from “certain NGOs of Christian obedience who see in the black people, Christian or animist, of southern Sudan, the last bastion in Africa against ‘Islamic terrorism.’” The leading

“Christian” NGO there is Christian Solidarity International, led by the British Baroness Cox. The Sudanese government named Operation Lifeline as one such NGO giving support to the warring rebel faction.

The importance of NGO support, as summarized to *Le Monde* by “an observer in Nairobi,” cannot be overestimated. “To have an idea of Garang’s projects,” the observer is quoted as saying, “you have to follow the movements of populations. Now the Dinkas have recently been directed toward three destinations: the Kakuma camp in Kenya, or the Nakush camp, near Kapoeta—because if he takes this locality, Garang will want to turn it into a military base, and therefore he needs a displaced persons camp around it in order to feed his soldiers with the humanitarian aide that is confiscated.” Any action on the part of the U.N. to facilitate such “humanitarian” supplies to Garang’s forces would of course be crucial.

Impact on Algeria

Finally, in the broader strategic picture, whipping up international hysteria against Sudan at the current juncture would help those, led by the British, who are doggedly resisting a negotiated, political solution to the civil war in Algeria. Although officially uninvolved in the affair, leading Sudanese personalities such as Dr. Hassan Al Turabi have exerted their influence among Algerian Islamist forces toward shaping a political approach. Opposition forces from Algeria met in Rome in mid-January, where they hammered out a platform for negotiations with the Algerian regime.

Immediately thereafter, the forces opposed to mediation moved: The British government, which leads the confrontationist charge against “Islam,” deployed its interior minister to coordinate with his French colleague Charles Pasqua, also prominently in the confrontationist camp, the military means to fight “integrism” and “fundamentalism.” The British-French parley was rapidly followed by a Mediterranean interior ministers conference in Tunis, presided over by Pasqua, who again called for a coordinated struggle against “integrism,” particularly in Algeria. Just days thereafter, on Jan. 30, the worst terrorist attack to date in Algeria took place when 38 people were killed and 256 injured in a car bomb explosion. Many in the French press openly mooted that it had been the handiwork of Algerian intelligence services—either acting as such or through their agents infiltrated into the so-called Islamic Salvation Army—to sabotage the motion toward reconciliation.

To help create a climate of opinion which rejects a negotiated peace process in Algeria, it is necessary to demonize the “Islamists” inside the country, attributing to them such violent crimes. Furthermore, as nearby Sudan is often held up as the “Islamic state” model which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) opposition movement in Algeria would like to replicate, any further smears on Sudan’s image would tarnish the perspective of FIS participation in government responsibility.