

The Sudan is made a focal point for superpower showdown

by Mary Lalevée

Sudan will be the flashpoint for a new international crisis, a source in Europe closely connected to Israeli circles warned the first week of June.

"It will blow up," he said. "There will be civil war in the south of the country; Egypt will intervene, Ethiopia will intervene, and the Libyans too." He predicted that the United States would get drawn in on the side of Sudan and Egypt, against Soviet-backed Ethiopia and Libya.

A September explosion?

The source stressed that "a trap [was] being laid for the United States by the Soviets" and that Israel was also deeply involved. "Moscow, via Libya, is aiding the secessionists," he went on, referring to the secessionist movement in the deperately poor southern region of the Sudan, "and Israel is playing both sides." He cited former Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon's reported brief visit to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, last year.

Another source stated that the various operations would come to a head in September, speculating that these could include a Libyan attack on Egypt as an explosive civil war occurred in the Sudan.

Sudan has had a long history of internal strife, with the primarily African animist population of the south fighting the mainly Arab Muslim population of the north. The civil war of 1955-72, when the south attempted to secede from the north, is not forgotten.

The population caught in this staging ground for superpower confrontation is faced with a holocaust. Three million Ethiopians alone are threatened with death by starvation this summer, due to drought, to the chaos of threatened civil war and invasions, and to the fact that any attempts at developing northeast Africa have come to a halt in the course of the world economic and strategic crisis.

Egypt, the key U.S. ally in the region, has very close ties to Sudan, for reasons which become clear by looking at a map of the area.

The Nile River, the focus of all Egyptian agricultural and economic activity, flows through Sudan before reaching

Egypt. As one African commentator noted, "If there were a government in Khartoum hostile to Egypt, they could simply build a dam and cut off the flow of water to Egypt. Sudan is Egypt's 'Achilles' heel.'" He pointed out Sudanese President Gaffar Mohammed Nimeiry's problem with the loyalty of sections of the army, and indicated the important role played by Egyptian intelligence officers posted in key positions in the Sudanese army, enabling the Sudanese authorities to nip potential rebellion in the bud.

The anti-Nimeiry secessionist movement is being aided by the World Council of Churches (WCC), which is very active in southern Sudan, ostensibly proselytizing and running charitable organizations. It is the small elite of southern Sudan, educated on grants and scholarships from the WCC and the German Evangelical Church, and not the population in general, which favors secession. The Council's proselytizing consists of strenuous efforts to "convert" the animists in the area to a belief structure which retains the most primitive animist beliefs, including the existence of witch doctors and "voodoo" cult practices. Such "converts" from a poorly educated population are easily manipulated.

The WCC has set up a special task force on Sudan and has recently circulated a confidential memo on the situation there to the members of its Committee on International Affairs. This report "predicts" a civil war in the near future. A European source who had read the report assured a journalist that "civil war in the Sudan is bound to happen."

The Ethiopian question

Claims have been made that Ethiopia is aiding the secessionists, and there are reports of rebels being trained in Ethiopia by Libyan officers. A top military source in Egypt commented that it was a "well-known fact" in Egypt that Ethiopian forces have occupied outright parts of the Sudan when pursuing Ethiopian rebels across the border. In addition, numerous small secessionist movements operating against the Ethiopian government base themselves in Sudan.

The anti-Ethiopian activities of the Eritreans, the Tigre Liberation Front, and others—groups supported both by German and Swedish Protestant networks and by the networks of the Nazi International in Switzerland associated with the sister of the Swiss Defense Minister, Madame Chevallaz—could easily be used to destabilize the tenuous relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia.

The influential Ethiopian Orthodox Union Church, or Ethiopian Coptic Church, one of the Eastern rite sects, has played a central role in the growing Soviet influence in Ethiopia. The Soviets have been cultivating ties with the Church since the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974, according to a British source. Another European source compared the current rapprochement between the Church and the Ethiopian regime to the pact Stalin made with the Russian Orthodox Church during World War II to mobilize the population to defend "Mother Russia."