

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

Sudan: disintegration of a country

With Libyans controlling events in both the south and the Darfur area, Sudan does not appear likely to survive as a nation.

During 1988, two major terrorist actions have placed the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on the front pages of the world's press. In mid-January, a prominent pro-Khomeini Iraqi activist, Mehdi al Hakim, was shot dead in front of his hotel. On May 16, more than 15 died when a terrorist group made up of Syrian, Palestinian, Iranian, and Lebanese, threw grenades and machine-gunned the dining room of the Acropol and Sudan Club hotels, used as the headquarters of Western relief organizations dealing with the famine in the south.

Though the organization to which they belong is unknown, those arrested have admitted to the massacre, which killed Britons, Americans, and Sudanese, and have denounced the actions of Western agencies.

In a country which is receiving millions of starving Ethiopian refugees, and facing a bitter civil war in its southern province, these dramatic events only underline that forces are at work to radically change the political and social structure of Sudan.

Sudan has now joined Peru, Zambia, and more recently, Somalia and Sierra Leone on the International Monetary Fund's blacklist. The country has long since collapsed economically. At stake now is whether it will be able to retain its national integrity.

A new Sudanese government was appointed on May 16, after more than six months of political crisis. The crisis erupted last August when the coalition between Prime Minister Sadeq al Mahdi of the Umma Party, representing mainly the Ansar tribe, and the Unionist Democratic Party of Mohammed Osman al Mirghani, repre-

senting the Khatmiyya community, collapsed. Economic issues were among those that divided them, but more fundamental was the fact that al Mahdi's Ansar has been leaning more and more toward Libya, while the DUP retains traditional ties with Egypt.

Though represented in the new government, the DUP controls only minor positions. The main posts go to the Umma party and to the National Islamic Front of al Mahdi's brother-in-law, Hassan al Turabi. Turabi himself has been appointed justice minister, the same position that he held under the previous ruler, Gaafar al Numayri, in 1983.

A Sunni fundamentalist who does not hide his support for Iran's Khomeini, Turabi was responsible for the imposition of Islamic law (*sharia*) throughout the country, including on Sudan's Christian-animist minority in the south. The result was the creation of the Southern Sudan People's Army led by Col. John Garang, and Sudan's southern civil war. Not the least important outcome of Turabi's action in this regard was the 1985 overthrow of Numayri.

Perhaps similar consequences can be expected now. Turabi's reappointment has provoked a general outcry among non-Muslim communities, as well as among many Muslims who had succeeded in watering down the enforcement of the *sharia* in recent years. Predictably, negotiations between Khartoum and the organization headed by Garang have been halted.

These moves underline a polarization of the country thanks to policies which not only favor Muslims against non-Muslims, but even go a step fur-

ther by favoring Arab Muslims against African Muslims. That step is indicated in the new government, which no longer includes a minister representing Sudan's western African Darfur province. Reports speak of atrocities, such as Black African sold as slaves. More recently, there were reports that thousands of southerners belonging to the Dinka tribe were massacred by the Arab Marahil tribe. The Dinka had fled the civil war in the south in the hope of finding shelter in the Khartoum region, but were systematically attacked as they crossed into the Darfur region.

Coherent with the appointment of Turabi as justice minister, Sadiq al Mahdi has been turning a blind eye to such atrocities, as he does not wish to jeopardize the use of the Marahil against Garang's forces. But it has been revealed recently that Al Mahdi has some other reasons for his behavior.

While in exile in 1980, he signed a deal with Libya's Qaddafi in Paris, promising Libya military bases in the western Darfur province in exchange for political and financial support in his campaign against Numayri. Recent investigations also reveal that in exchange for allowing the presence of up to 5,000 Libyan soldiers on the border with Chad, Al Mahdi's Umma Party receives no less than \$35 million a year from Qaddafi. This money has also bought Al Mahdi's acquiescence in Libya's obvious aim of controlling the entire region.

With Libyan financial and logistical support, the main Arab tribe, the Marahil, has created an "Arabic Sudanese Revolution" organization whose claims to power are open. Most immediately, they have been involved in expelling to Chad or to Central Africa tens of thousands of members of the main black African tribe, the Al Fur.