

## Africa Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Is Sudan out of control?

*A hit attempt on the defense minister is being blamed on the prime minister, and things may not cool off.*

**T**he Nov. 19 assassination attempt against Sudan's defense minister, Gen. Abdel Majid Hamid Khalil, and the Chief of the Army, Gen. Fathi Ahmed Ali, was not just one more incident in Sudan's ever troubled political life. The attempt took place when a SAM-7 ground-to-air missile was fired at Khalil's plane, just after take-off, in the southern region of Bahr al Ghazal.

Though hit, the plane was able to land safely.

Intelligence provided to *EIR* indicates that the assassination attempt was initiated and planned by Sudan's Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi, with the help of the National Islamic Front of Hassan al Turabi, the present justice minister.

Yet, as soon as news of the attempt began spreading, al Mahdi didn't hesitate to put out an official statement blaming the southern forces of rebel John Garang as the culprit, underlining that this showed that "Garang does not want peace."

Why did the Sudanese prime minister want to kill his own defense minister, who was only appointed last spring? Could he not just decide to fire him?

Apparently Mahdi had a plan to kill two birds with one stone. The attempt took place after weeks of negotiations in Addis Abeba, between emissaries of John Garang of the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Mohammed Osman el Mirghani of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which is a member of Mahdi's coalition government.

A mutual agreement was then ratified, stipulating that, provided the

government in Khartoum would review the implementation of the Sharia (Islamic Law) in Sudan, Garang would go for a ceasefire and political negotiations.

Behind these provisory commitments stand several layers of pressures. First, the obvious fact that years of civil war in the south has exhausted the entire country from the north to the south, and has aggravated Sudan's problems in the wake of this fall's severe floods in the region.

Second, there are international pressures from both East and West to reach a regional package which would see the solution of the southern Sudanese war and the wars between Addis Ababa to the Eritrean and Tigres rebellions, as well as the still-existing tension between Ethiopia and Somalia.

A panacea being mooted under the rubric of these New Yalta-style "regional deals," would be the establishment of federated systems in which the rebel minorities would be called on to participate.

Yet the terms of the agreement between Mirghani and Garang were unacceptable for Hassan al Turabi, who wants the Islamic fundamentalist Sharia to be implemented and imposed on all Sudanese citizens, regardless of their religion. Likewise, Turabi's party has been campaigning actively for an actual partition of the country, arguing that Southern Sudan has become an "economic burden to the rest of the country."

On Nov. 22, Turabi's followers organized a mass demonstration in Khartoum, quickly degenerating into

a riot, to protest the agreement.

Though sabotaging an embarrassing agreement, which would go to the credit of his potential rival al Mirghani, was certainly one consideration in Mahdi's mind, this was not the only one. The real motivation is Khalil's determination to reassert the control of the Sudanese national army over Sudan's western province, the Darfur.

Since Mahdi's arrival in power with the overthrow of longtime Sudanese leader Gaafar Numayri in 1986, the Darfur has become, in all but name, a Libyan province. As previously documented in *EIR*, this was the result of a deal made in Paris in 1980 between al Mahdi and Qaddafi.

In exchange for Libyan financial support, while he was an opponent in exile, Mahdi offered to "lease" the Darfur for Libyan military operations against Chad.

To renege on his agreement now would mean his downfall.

However, how long can Sudan's national sovereignty be "leased"? Khalil's decision converges on a growing concern in neighboring Egypt over Sudan's rapid collapse.

Egyptian leaders are having nightmares at the sight of Sudan, whose western province is under de facto Libyan control, a southern province close to secession, and a central government in Khartoum ruled by Islamic fanatics of the ilk of al Turabi, even though his main supporters are to be found in the U.S. State Department and the Faisal clan in Saudi Arabia.

The targeted Defense Minister Khalil, a former military aide to ex-Sudanese leader Gaafar Numayri, shares such concerns, as does al Mirghani, who has been traditionally close to Egypt. The events of the last two weeks of November indicate that Khartoum is now about to witness a showdown on those issues.