SUDAN 1990-1992:  
FOOD AID, FAMINE, AND FAILURE  
by  
Millard Burr  

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This paper was written by Millard Burr, a retired U.S. government official and a consultant to the U.S. Committee for Refugees. It reflects his views on the situation of displaced people in Sudan. It is based on his experience as director of logistics operations for The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Sudan from January 1989 to March 1990, and subsequent investigations.

For a review of the history of the Khartoum displaced, see the author's Khartoum's Displaced Persons: A Decade of Despair, U.S. Committee for Refugees Issue Brief, August 1990.
SUDAN 1990-1992:
FOOD AID, FAMINE, AND FAILURE

On June 30, 1989, a small group of Sudanese Army Officers calling themselves the Revolutionary Command Council (hereafter RCC) succeeded in overthrowing the civilian government of Sadiq al-Mahdi. The coup occurred literally hours before government representatives were to meet in Addis Ababa with members of the rebel Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (hereafter SPLA). The SPLA was led by John Garang, a former army officer from southern Sudan, who assumed the leadership of the southern Sudanese movement in 1983. In an increasingly Islamicized Sudan, at stake was the question of regional autonomy for the African tribes that inhabited the country’s three southern provinces. The RCC, led by Brigadier Umar al-Bashir, was backed by Islamic “fundamentalist” elements, including leaders and members of the National Islamic Front, a political party antagonistic to any rapprochement with the SPLA. The RCC and the same Islamic fundamentalists also mistrusted both the aims of and the participants in Operation Lifeline Sudan (hereafter OLS), a United Nations-sponsored food aid program that was created in March 1989 in response to a terrible famine that struck southern Sudan in 1988. The OLS began operations in April 1989 and, after distributing slightly more than 100,000 tons of food aid to displaced southerners and meeting most of its ambitious goals, it concluded six months later. OLS was unique in the annals of modern African history because in the midst of a civil war, humanitarian assistance was delivered to the dispossessed, regardless of where they were located or by whom they were governed.

OLS was designed to assist the hundreds of thousands of displaced southern Sudanese created during six years of war and three major droughts. Unfortunately, the program excluded the more than one million southern displaced who by 1989 congregated in more than thirty settlements ringing the capital district. The overwhelming majority of Khartoum-, Khartoum North-, and Omdurman-displaced were Nilotic peoples—Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk—who had fled Upper Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal provinces. They had settled where they could, took what jobs were available, and survived despite years of government neglect. Sporadically, and for nearly a decade, the various governments in Khartoum instituted Kasha campaigns that resulted in the dispersion of southerners and the destruction of their encampments. At every turn, the southern Christians and followers of traditional religions, preponderantly women and children, were forced to confront the enmity and prejudice of Khartoum’s Arab inhabitants. Indeed, in 1990, a displaced southerner, whether in Khartoum or elsewhere in northern Sudan, could hardly expect to own land, drink clean water, attend school, be vaccinated, vote, or raise objections to the Revolutionary Command Council’s prosecution of the war in southern Sudan. Meanwhile, a small number of expatriates from international private voluntary organizations (PVOs) such as OXFAM, CARE, and CONCERN did what they could to attack the myriad nutrition, health, education, and housing problems that southerners faced in both northern and southern Sudan.

OLS Reconsidered

Following the revolution of June 30, 1989, and after months of jockeying, the RCC and SPLA
Source: The Minority Rights Group
opened peace talks in Nairobi late in 1989. Simultaneously, the United Nations, in conjunction with Western food aid donors and PVOs, explored the possibility of a second Operation Lifeline Sudan that would continue the neutral approach to the distribution of humanitarian assistance. In December 1989, the peace talks broke down over the question of the imposition of Islamic law (shari'a) in Sudan, and the two antagonists—the RCC in the north and the SPLA in the south—went their separate ways; in contrast, the United Nations, the foreign aid donors, the RCC, and the SPLA began to consider an OLS II program seriously.

In New York, the pressure built within the UN system to move ahead with OLS II, but in Washington, Andrew Natsios, the new director for the Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (AID/OFDA), was not consumed by either Sudan or OLS. AID/OFDA—which had taken the lead in the creation of OLS—had numerous demands on its limited budget. And as Natsios was aware, with or without an OLS II, the USAID-Sudan mission had in March 1990 nearly 40,000 tons of food aid on hand to meet emergency needs. USAID-Sudan once had had a shortage of local currency needed to pay the internal costs for its relief program, but that problem was overcome when AID-Washington received approval to ship to the government of Sudan some 100,000 tons of wheat. The grain was exchanged for its cash value ($20 million) in Sudanese pounds—albeit at the unrealistic official exchange rate of 4.5 to the dollar. With that influx of local currency, USAID-Sudan's 1990 program to transport 20,000 tons of food aid to displaced camps in northern Bahr al-Ghazal and South Kordofan was well on its way to achieving its goal by March 1990. Elsewhere, in Nairobi, USAID-Kenya swapped 16,000 tons of United States wheat for 17,000 tons of local maize and beans for delivery to southern Sudan.

Like U.S. Ambassador to Sudan James Cheek and USAID-Sudan Director Frederick Gilbert, Natsios held little sympathy for the SPLA, and after he visited Khartoum in early March 1990, Natsios developed a visceral dislike for the RCC as well. Following a meeting of AID-Washington and USAID-Sudan personnel in Khartoum, no one, including Natsios, thought an OLS II program would succeed given the RCC's repressive political agenda. Natsios appeared ready to cut OFDA funding and reduce substantially its activity in Sudan, but in an abrupt about-face after discussions with Ambassador Cheek, he followed the State Department lead and announced his support for OLS II. OFDA would, however, maintain an arm's length relationship with the SPLA, and in 1990 only a minuscule percentage of its Sudan budget was employed to assist the needy in SPLA-controlled territory.

By March 1990, most PVOs were convinced that the RCC wanted an OLS II for its propaganda value, and it also wanted them to depart Sudan as soon as possible. The RCC contested both the neutrality of food aid and of PVO activity, and it seemed loathe to re-open the neutral "Corridors of Tranquility" used by PVOs during OLS to transport food to SPLA-controlled territory and to the government's southern garrison towns. In Kordofan, where PVOs supervised assistance to more than 70,000 southern displaced, the final report of an RCC-sponsored regional "dialogue" held in January 1990 urged greater state control of PVO operations and the expulsion of all foreign Catholic missionaries. Indeed, the PVOs were being squeezed out of South Kordofan—the so-called Transition Zone between North and South—and the Sudanese military would soon block the creation of new and improved displaced camps in North Kordofan. Cheek, whose appreciation of Ethiopian geopolitics far outstripped his knowledge of Sudanese realities, was convinced the PVOs were overreacting. He met with leaders of the international aid community on March 12, and after a long meeting, finally grasped just how many grievances the OLS community had and how difficult it had become to work with the RCC. In addition, PVOs working in northern Darfur and Kordofan expressed their concern that the drought-impacted districts of the desert fringe badly needed a food aid program, but the RCC was allowing the situation to drift rather than call on PVOs for assistance. After the meeting, Cheek was never again so optimistic that an OLS II program, then under final consideration by the donors and the RCC alike, would succeed.

**The Self-Sufficiency Campaign**

Among the myriad "national campaigns" that the RCC would initiate in 1989-1990, the drive to achieve self-sufficiency in food production was undoubtedly the most important. It would have an extensive impact on Sudan's economy and on the government's ability to respond quickly to incipient drought conditions. Traditionally, sorghum accounted for three-quarters of all Sudan's cereal production, but only two-thirds of all cereal con-
sumption. Wheat imports had increased dramatically in response to domestic demand, and Sudan used the United States and Saudi Arabia to supply its annual deficit of the more expensive grain. It was a situation that galled the RCC, which reduced the subsidy on wheat bread and increased its price from 15 to 20 piasters per 140 gram loaf in July 1989. Bread price increases were long overdue, but they had a significant impact on the urban dweller—including the 1.6 million displaced from southern Sudan that the RCC estimated had made their way to the capital region since the civil war began in 1983. In October, the RCC again increased the price from 20 to 25 piasters and decreased the loaf size from 140 to 120 grams.

When the 1989-1990 (October-January) grain harvest promised to be less than expected, on October 31, the government next suspended sorghum exports. Exception were made, however, and sorghum and edible oils located in Port Sudan and inventories held by brokers possessing valid export permits were exported. As the economy continued to deteriorate and the RCC scrambled to obtain hard currency, it issued export permits for more sorghum than existed in Sudan. Exporters, anticipating that the Junta might soon take over the grain trade, shipped abroad as much grain as they could lay their hands on.

To respond to the growing food grain deficit, in January 1990, the RCC made the near-term elimination of wheat imports a national goal. “Self-reliance and the liberation of the national will” would be of fundamental importance, and cereal self-sufficiency and the growth of exports were considered essential components of national well-being. The RCC Economic Committee ordered an increase in wheat cultivation (to 630,000 acres), and the President kicked-off a national self-sufficiency campaign at Hasahisa in the Gezira. Bashir informed cotton and cereal farmers that the Government would execute the slogan “to eat what we grow and wear what we make,” and, in a speech abounding in xenophobia, called for increased productivity to “preserve the honor and dignity” of Sudan.

Following the speech at Hasahisa, rallies were held in Darfur region where Bashir reiterated the themes of self-sufficiency and “national salvation.” The people were told: “Because we do not want to beg for our food, and we do not want the relief agencies to humiliate our dignity, through you the homeland, and through your production, we will rid ourselves of this bitter humiliation.” (Emphasis added) With Bashir insisting that the RCC would practice what he preached, the theme threw Darfur into a panic. In speeches given at El Fasher, Geneina, and Nyala, Bashir derided the need for igatha—a local term that directly referred to donor-derived food—and left no doubt that the RCC wanted to dispense with expatriate food aid. As Khartoum had done little to forestall famine in Darfur, and because residents remembered and were thankful for the foreign aid they had received, especially during the 1984-1985 famine, Bashir raised fears at a time when North Darfur had just suffered a calamitous 1989-90 harvest. Although the RCC leader promised that his government would deliver 50,000 tons of grain to make up Darfur’s existing food deficit, few believed him. The region had no disaster relief administration in place, and when February turned to March and no government food arrived, village officials in northern Darfur were convinced the RCC would do nothing. When complaints became too vocal, RCC Economic Committee chairman Colonel Karrar warned that the government would carry out its policy of self-sufficiency and would not tolerate the complaints of “defeatist voices.”

Nothing more was heard of the 50,000 tons of cereals, and in March, the more affluent villagers from drought-impacted northern Darfur were seen at El Fasher, El Obeid, and Omdurman purchasing what grain they could with what funds they had. Simultaneously, commercial truckers were busy hauling grain from the important wholesale market at Gedaref to Port Sudan. When the price of sorghum began to rise, the government explained away regional shortages by claiming that increased wheat production would make up the shortfall (even though both farmer and consumer knew that wheat self-sufficiency was a distant possibility and not an overnight phenomenon). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) would later claim that the precarious state of food reserves in 1990 was caused by the sale of “large stocks” of grain abroad, and the New York Times would claim that much of the foreign exchange it earned was “spent on weaponry from China to continue the civil war.”

OLS II Commences

Despite SPLA protests that the United Nations food aid was hardly neutral, and RCC complaints that the Western nations favored the SPLA, an OLS II “conference” was finally convened in Khartoum on March 26, 1990. It caused no more than a ripple of interest, and received none of the fanfare that characterized the OLS conference of March 1989. As one journal remarked, “It is strik-
OPERATION LIFELINE SUDAN II
SUMMARY BUDGET

<table>
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<th>Sector</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Expenditures</td>
<td>7,880</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td><strong>Subtotal:</strong></td>
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|                      | Relief Costs:    | $73,786   |
|                      | Food Reserve:    | 2,368     |
|                      | Support Services Costs: | 9,187   |
|                      | Transport & Logistics Costs: | 33,055 |
| **GRAND TOTAL OLS II:** | **$118,396,000.00** |

ing how little noise has been made about the second phase of a program whose first part the UN loudly trumpeted as the salvation of hundreds of thousands of starving Southerners." The meeting, attended by a handful of donors and RCC officials, was a pro-forma exercise to which the SPLA was not invited. The donors, with varying degrees of apathy, agreed to support a program that would cost a hefty $118 million and entail the delivery of 103,000 tons of emergency relief food.

In contrast to OLS I, the program would include a Western Relief Operation and a program of assistance to the displaced persons found in metropolitan Khartoum. To ensure that the program got off to a fast start, the UN included all food aid distributed since November 1, 1989 in its calculations for OLS II. Thus, of the 103,000 tons of food programmed for OLS II, well over half had already been distributed or consigned. As conceived, OLS II would assist at least 4.5 million people—some 2.2 million people in the South, 400,000 southerners in the North, 1.6 million Khartoum displaced, and an undetermined number of people in northern Darfur and Kordofan. In all, about one in six Sudanese would receive some sort of assistance. Daily rations would be provided "vulnerable groups" while 65 pounds of grain would be given out per person, along with seeds, packages and tools to promote wherever possible the return of displaced to their villages. An estimated three million people were to receive primary health care, with UNICEF acting as lead agency, and efforts would be made to provide education to the displaced. The RCC Ministry of Relief also requested funding for a number of "pilot projects" whose vague "relocation and income generation schemes" seemed to require the forced relocation of displaced southerners. The program, which the UN offices in Khartoum found very interesting, received no support from the European Community or USAID.

Following the OLS II conference in Khartoum, Michael Priestley, the UN-Sudan director and UN Secretary General's representative, met with the SPLA in Addis Ababa. The SPLA already distrusted Priestley because the UN had been very slow to respond to its requests for food aid for the 150,000 southerners displaced as a result of the rebels' "Bright Star" campaign that began in November 1989. The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), the SPLA's relief agency, was especially unhappy because its 1990 food aid forecast was halved, and though OLS II programmed 73,000 tons to support RCC
programs, it had allowed only 19,000 tons for SPLA-held sites. Nonetheless, the SPLA swallowed its disappointment, rescinded its threat to boycott OLS II, and agreed to its commencement as long as the program was “coupled simultaneously” with a UN assessment of the South’s “actual needs.” SPLA representative Lam Akol announced that following his discussions with Priestley, the SPLA had “agreed to allow the resumption of the operation, effective immediately.” Akol added that in the future the donors need not have “any fear whatsoever from the rebel side.”

Certainly, the nutritional situation in areas under SPLA control had improved significantly in 1989, and the 1989-90 harvest in the South had been good. Thus, despite its disappointment with OLS II’s tonnage figures, the SPLA speculated it could meet its emergency needs and asked donors to earmark more funds for development projects rather than food aid.

**OLS II Begins**

On April 2, when OLS II began, a UNICEF plane departed Lokichoggio, Kenya, for Bor, Upper Nile region, carrying seeds, tools, medicines, and UN personnel. Simultaneously, a UN/World Food Program aircraft took off for Juba where 300,000 people remained almost totally dependent on airlifts. During OLS I, the donors transported 40 percent of all food aid and most non-food items by air at an average cost of $700 a ton; they did not want to continue expensive airlifts when other more efficient means of transport were available, but Juba was always the exception. Throughout the South the spring rains appeared normal, much to the relief of the agencies that had distributed more than 700 tons of seeds and 220,000 tools since January. With luck and continued good rains, it was hoped that beneficiaries would produce as much food as OLS I had supplied in 1989.

In the North, where transport was hampered by frequent fuel shortages, the OLS II/Western Relief Operation for Darfur and North Kordofan was very slow off the mark. Yet, despite fuel shortages and exorbitant per ton transport costs, USAID-Sudan soon managed to deliver 10,000 tons of food to Kordofan. A witness found, however, that the general distribution in North Kordofan was not carefully monitored, “and much of what actually reached the people went to the relatively well-off who fed the grain to animals while others, the truly needy, received far too little, and continued to starve.”

Next to the United Nations, the United States was OLS II’s most important advocate. Nevertheless, the U.S. Embassy’s honeymoon with the RCC was about to end. A law mandated by the U.S. Congress—governing relations in countries where a democratically elected government was overthrown—required that all United States foreign aid excepting humanitarian assistance be cut off to the Sudan on February 28, 1990. In response, the RCC-controlled media were uniformly critical, and rejected what was called a U.S. attempt to impose a “policy of humiliation.” The European Community received similar treatment after France, the U.K., the Netherlands, and West Germany reduced aid because of the RCC’s “failure to end the civil war, alleged human rights violations,” and its inability “to resolve long-standing problems with the IMF.”

Certainly, human rights organizations mistrusted the RCC, and many expatriates agreed with Roger Winter of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, who, at a hearing held in March 1990 by the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Hunger, worried that despite the promise of OLS II, “when all is said and done—a future viable international relief operation in south Sudan may not materialize.”

Ironically, while the OLS II program began very slowly, a UN program to provide food aid to drought-ridden Ethiopia received substantial international support. Both the European Community and the United States diverted personnel in Khartoum to help create relief corridors and coordinate the movement of food aid from Sudan into Eritrea. For months thereafter, the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum considered the Ethiopian relief effort as important, if not more important, than OLS II, while representatives of a variety of Ethiopian rebel forces friendly to the RCC were welcomed at the U.S. Embassy. Elsewhere, the UN’s Michael Priestley, continued the kind of action that had made him a pariah with much of the RCC and SPLA hierarchy. He obtained SPLA approval to airlift 400 tons of food to the growing number of displaced in government-held Yambio only to find the RCC would not go along with the plan. When Priestley then decided to move the commodities from Uganda along the Yei-Mariidi road without first obtaining SPLA clearance, the rebels found out what was afoot and warned that it would attack any overland convoy to relieve the government garrison at Yei or Yambio. In addition, the UN leader was unwilling or unable to modify junta policies in Kordofan that were designed to halt the flow of southerners to the north by eliminating the various displaced persons
camps scattered throughout the region. With regard to the Khartoum displaced, UN efforts were generally devoted to planning rather than implementation of OLS II.

**The Khartoum Displaced**

Despite UN pleas, OLS II was born underfunded and continued that way. Donors did not immediately step forward to fund the $31 million UNICEF component of OLS II, a large part of which would be spent in Khartoum. The displaced there continued to endure with limited government assistance, and in May UNICEF director James Grant “went public” at a press briefing at UN Headquarters in an effort to move the OLS II program along. He beseeched donors for assistance to four and a half million people, “mostly women and children,” but the response continued to be lukewarm. The need was there, and Grant and others could point to studies of the Khartoum displaced whose horrific data indicated that nearly a quarter of the children under three years of age were severely malnourished. Additionally, less than 50 percent of all Sudanese children had been vaccinated, two-thirds of Khartoum families lived in unsanitary conditions, and almost 90 percent of the displaced children did not attend school.¹²

Khartoum was indeed a horror, and Western PVOs found it almost impossible to work with Government ministries and agencies involved (the Ministry of Health, the National Urban Water Corporation, the Commission for Khartoum, the Sudan Council for Voluntary Agencies) and domestic aid agencies (Islamic Da’wa, Islamic African Relief Association) operating in the capital. The aid dollar no longer went very far, and even the agencies that decided to hang on in Sudan wanted “to know that the money will be well spent.”¹³ Despite RCC promises, by June only one PVO had succeeded in exchanging money at the favorable rate (12:1) the government had promised all OLS II participants. Significantly, only 23 international relief agencies had been registered by the government—a decided diminution from OLS I when the Ministry of Social Welfare had quickly registered 82 voluntary agencies avid to work in Sudan.

**Return to Village and Human Rights Issues**

In late spring 1990, the UN and PVOs began to receive reports from a variety of sources that thousands of Khartoum displaced were making an effort to return home. AID-OFDA investigated the reports and found that in early 1990 the government had initiated a “controversial return program” designed to move 50,000 Khartoum displaced to the south. (Southern leaders reported that it was in fact 50,000 families, or about 300,000 people.) According to an AID/OFDA report:

The military reportedly used intimidation tactics to force many of the displaced out of Khartoum. Furthermore, the GOS attempted to lure displaced south by promising them assistance from the international community once they returned to the south; such promises had not been agreed to by the international community.¹⁴

One plan, apparently sponsored by RCC member Brigadier Pio Yakwan, entailed the return of 35,000 displaced to Bentiu and 30,000 to Mayom, and the Upper Nile regional office located in Khartoum notified USAID-Sudan that the first 500 families would leave Khartoum on April 15. While potential returnees were being rounded up (including those in jail), Khartoum received a new report that Dinka were returning to the South through Abyei, South Kordofan. Displaced passing through military checkpoints at Abyei village were stripped of their belongings and charged a fee of thirty pounds before they could depart. Jane Perlez, of the *New York Times* (who, unlike USAID-Sudan officials, could not be prevented by the U.S. Embassy from visiting SPLA sites), visited SPLA-controlled Akon in Aweil District, Bahr al-Ghazal, and reported in early July that UNICEF had determined that some 60,000 ethnic Dinka had already returned to northern Bahr al-Ghazal. Perlez reported that the government “was forcing tens of thousands who fled to Khartoum from the South to return home,” and in the Akon area, food supplies were already badly strained by their unexpected arrival.¹⁵ That such a large movement of people had gone unremarked was due in part to the diminished aid agency presence in the field, including the severe reduction of relief workers in South Kordofan and northern Bahr al-Ghazal.

After a good start, the spring rains failed in much of Sudan, and by mid-1990, tens of thousands of southerners—in the South and North—were again on the move. Thousands of displaced from Upper Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal arrived at the Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia. Other thousands of hungry Dinka appeared at Leer, in SPLA-held

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western Upper Nile, and the SPLA reported that their numbers included "some of the 40,000 to 60,000 families who returned mostly from Khartoum to Akon/Mayen Abun areas of northern Bahr al-Ghazal between December 1989 and April [1990]."16 The SRRA reported that there was a "mass population movement" of displaced southerners who had been motivated to return home after the government spread rumors that the UN was delivering food "to all war-affected areas of south Sudan."17 Eventually, given the growing adverse publicity, the RCC finally admitted that it "was helping" about 190,000 displaced to return to the South, but Pio Yukwan denied the claims of human rights violations and statements that displaced were being "forced to return" to villages in Bahr al-Ghazal.18

While the State Department tended to powder over the RCC's many blemishes, the junta was branded by an Africa Watch report that claimed it had "embarked upon the repression of political opposition in Khartoum on a scale never before seen in Sudan." The human rights organization added, "The outside world has yet to realize that it is not dealing with pragmatic soldiers, but with a ruthless and intolerant regime following an ideology of Islamic fundamentalism." The RCC junta forced the resignation of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society leadership, and the society itself, a nonpolitical institution that was officially recognized by the Government of Sudan in 1956, was thoroughly cowed. Its board of directors and local branches were seized by Muslim fundamentalists, and an active Muslim brother was named president. On a national level, the Ministry of Orientation and Guidance and the proselytizing Islamic Da'wa (Da'wa Islamiya, or "Islamic Outreach"), founded by Libya's Muammar Qaddafi in the nineteen seventies and transferred to Sudan a decade later, were working hand in hand, and the enhancement of the latter's work in Kordofan was called "one of the most essential issues" to be addressed by regional officials.

Despite Bashir's claim that the junta was not composed of "crazy people" and that RCC officials were responding to "a war situation" involving "people who seek to undermine the government," the Junta was daily more repressive. An April coup attempt was put down with unexampled savagery. People's Committees intruded into affairs of ordinary Sudanese citizens, and the Junta began to increase the number of Peoples Defense Forces (PDF) under arms, forecasting that by mid-1991 it would be able to call on more than 150,000 armed Muslim vigilantes. As violations mounted, in June the European Par-

New York Times asked in June 1990: "What does it take to get the United States Government to express revulsion and horror?"

Sudan 1990-1992
A defensive State Department denied that its policies had failed, even though in the six months following the June 30 coup it had downplayed the importance of the Muslim fundamentalist element within the RCC; when its fundamentalist leanings became pellucidly clear and human rights violations pyramided, it still muted its criticism of what nearly everyone outside the RCC agreed was indeed a government of "brutal fundamentalist thugs." Certainly, all would be forgiven if the United States could broker a cease-fire and a peace agreement that would end the civil war. Very quietly, and nearly simultaneously with the beginning of OLS II, the State Department had begun a mediation effort involving a cease-fire, the imposition of a multilateral peace force between the opposing armies in Sudan, and the convening of peace talks either in Sudan or a neighboring state. Like OLS II, it too would prove to be a forlorn hope.

The Peace Process Plays Out

Despite the failure of the December 1989 peace talks in Nairobi, there was substantial international interest in continuing the process. The State Department carried out a two-track policy: politically, it supported the efforts exerted by Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, "in his capacity as Chairman of the OAU current session, to maintain peace in Sudan"; economically, it had demonstrated its good intentions by offering the RCC a $20 million wheat deal. In addition, Ambassador Cheek informed the Sudanese press that the United States was ready to help solve Sudan's economic problems if Sudan reached agreement with the IMF or the World Bank to initiate long overdue economic reforms.

When Mubarak failed to wean Bashir from his fundamentalist advisors, one Western diplomat foretold that "Mubarak just does not want to be dragged into active mediation in the Sudanese civil war... He knows that if he does he runs the risk of monumental failure." Still, he was a key player when Herman Cohen, the State Department's Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, surfaced a Sudan peace plan in March 1990 that called for a cease-fire, following which a multinational force would be interposed between the belligerents. Next, a conference with no set agenda would be convened and the two sides could take as long as necessary to negotiate their differences. Certainly, the United States left the impression it would provide generous support to rebuild Sudan once the war was over. Zaire's Mobutu, entrusted by Mubarak in his capacity as OAU Chairman with personal negotiations, met separately with Bashir and Garang in March, and in April a personal representative of the Zairian President indicated that a conference would soon begin.

Indeed, neither side rejected the Cohen initiative, but there was significant disagreement with regard to the "Agreement on a Framework for the Peaceful Settlement of Sudan's Conflict" that the United States had helped prepare. Both sides did in fact agree to a federal system of government, but the SPLA insisted on the wording "Sudan will remain united in a multi-national and multi-religious state. There shall be no discrimination among the citizens on the basis of race, religion, sex or area of origin." Both sides found problems with a four-phased settlement process, but the "Modalities for Disengagement of Forces in Sudan" produced the greatest friction. The RCC, which returned its comments to the State Department in early April, accepted four "fundamental principles" but rejected one outright—the "multi-party" democracy the SPLA wanted—and couldn't agree on the use of "international monitors" to ensure the disengagement of military forces. In May, Ambassador Cheek met with Bashir to discuss RCC objections and, most importantly, RCC opposition to the interposition of a multinational force to keep the peace. The RCC argued it did not want "to internationalize the problem," and if forced to go along it would only accept forces from a neighboring country or those provided by the OAU.

Moving the process along, Cohen met with John Garang in Nairobi on May 18, to try to persuade the SPLA chief to agree to an internationally supervised cease-fire. Cohen found that the SPLA would accept a supervised cease-fire and the use of a multinational force as long as all government forces were "pulled north of the 13th parallel." The RCC would not agree, nor would it budge from the demand that the SPLA "consolidate below the Bahr al-Ghazal, Bahr al-Arab, Sobat River Line," and that areas in Kordofan and Blue Nile "contested by SPLA forces" should be "demilitarized." The SPLA rejected the demand, especially as its hand had been strengthened following a major victory at Melut, Upper Nile. The SPLA campaign, which threatened barge traffic on the Nile and sorghum production near Renk, was occurring in a region that had been relatively free of SPLA raiding since 1987. The U.S. Embassy, which continued to demonstrate little affection for the SPLA, considered the rebels' Melut campaign an impediment to the peace process; for
SPLA commander Riak Machar, it was simply the continuation of diplomacy by other means.

In June, the RCC rejected outright the State Department’s mediation, and a plan that Colonel Khalifa once described as "commendable" was termed "this strange proposal calling for withdrawal of the Sudanese government forces from its own territory." The RCC discontinued discussion of what it called an effort "to internationalize the south Sudan question," and the war effort, which the RCC had muted, was reactivated almost at once. Within hours, two government planes bombed Torit killing 20 civilians, most in a crowded marketplace. It was the first of a series of government bombing raids directed against the civilian population and the relief infrastructure. Bor, Yirol, Akon, and Waat all were bombed repeatedly by TU-22 bombers causing scores of civilian casualties. The SRRA claimed, and the Khartoum media agreed, that the bombing had a simple objective, "to stop the ongoing relief effort" in the South. To demonstrate its unhappiness with RCC policies, no U.S. Embassy personnel attended the June 30 gatherings celebrating the RRC's first anniversary. In return, no RCC member attended the Embassy's Fourth of July celebration.

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Famine Early Warning and OLS II

By June 1990, Western private voluntary organizations operating in Sudan were on the defensive. The expatriate PVO presence in western Sudan was greatly reduced, and in the case of North Darfur, was almost entirely gone. Regional insecurity, brought about by battles between the forces of Chad President Hissene Habre and Chadian rebels operating in Sudan and supported by the RCC, and between the Fur and their Arab attackers, were one aspect of the problem. In the latter case, representatives of Africa Amnesty International and Africa Watch claimed that:

Two particular ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Fur, have been targeted by General Bashir's junta for extinction. Though the circumstances for the two groups are different, the common themes between the two are that they are both non-Arab and large enough groups to be considered a threat to reactionaries like Bashir to what he would consider "his people" -- fundamentalist Moslem Arabs.

Without aid agency presence in the field, reporting on incipient famine conditions in Sudan's far west was greatly restricted, and travel permits to and from Darfur were almost impossible to obtain.

In Darfur, the 1989-1990 harvest was poor, and the panic to purchase grain pushed its price upward until it surpassed 300 LS a sack in El Fasher in April 1990. Then, when the early rains failed, the price spiral spared neither Darfur nor any other region. To ensure the availability of bread in Khartoum, the Junta contracted for 155,000 tons of Saudi Arabian wheat at a cost of $25 million -- payment in advance. The arrangement was kept very quiet, Khartoum did not suffer from bread shortages, and the RCC continued to trumpet the virtues of self-sufficiency.

In May 1990, the AID-financed Famine Early Warning System (hereafter FEWS) reviewed remote sensing data for Africa and alerted AID-Washington and the RCC that farmers in western Sudan would be particularly vulnerable in the coming months. FEWS had already calculated that there had been an unexpectedly large -- 1.2 million ton -- cereal shortfall in the 1989-90 harvest year, and reserve stocks from the previous and more productive years of 1987-88 and 1988-89 had been seriously depleted. FEWS warned that in the seven Sahelian nations it monitored, more than 5 million people, nearly all in Sudan and Ethiopia, were at risk of famine. It was a budding catastrophe, but the RCC response was to alert Sudanese that "they might well have to sacrifice food and health" to assure the "fight to the finish" with the southern insurgents with whom there could be no peaceful solution.

By May, sufficient omens existed to alert aid agencies that it would be necessary to reevaluate the Western Relief Operation component of OLS II. Indeed, the donors were aware that whether in Kordofan or Khartoum, OLS II was dying in the North, and the program was in trouble just as the prospect of an adequate harvest in northern Sudan, also appeared unlikely. Ominously, in the major production areas of northern Sudan, the rains arrived 50 to 60 days late, and insufficient rainfall in eastern and central Sudan necessitated massive replanting. OLS II also limped along in the South, where the government had road-blocked UN/World Food Program attempts to move food from Kenya and Uganda to Juba. In June, the UN was forced to resume its on-again, off-again food airlift from Entebbe, Uganda, using prohibitively expensive aircraft chartered by the Sudan government. By mid-year, no OLS II food target had been met even though the UN office in Khartoum claimed that "60 percent of relief food
requirements for government areas and 50 percent of relief food needed for SPLA-held areas were either in stock or delivered. More to the point, nearly half the percentages claimed were in stock and yet to be delivered.

By July, OLS II was moribund, and when sparse August rains were followed by searing heat, widespread drought was predicted in the Sahelian belt from Darfur to the Red Sea Hills. In North Kordofan, where USAID-Sudan was in the process of trucking 2,000 tons of emergency food aid, the Military Governor ordered CARE, one of the last of the major PVOs, to continue operations in Sudan, to turn over the USAID commodities to "his agents," after which he allowed them "to conduct untargeted general distributions." In sum, OLS II food aid in the West had become captive of a capricious policy.

In Khartoum, a new tide of displaced appeared, and for the first time since an RCC crackdown in July 1989 cleared Khartoum's streets, beggars appeared in the capital. There were few opportunities for employment, and the majority of the displaced who had lived by their wits began to suffer acute privation. On September 1, Minister of Guidance and Orientation Abdallah Deng Niyal called an outdoor mass meeting in Khartoum, during which even Muslim participants, in what was essentially an African ritual, prayed for rain. Meanwhile, FEWS warned: "We may be seeing the initial stages of a major, nation-wide food crisis of 1984 proportions in Sudan." The crisis was most extensive in drought-impacted Darfur. In that huge region, there were almost no PVOs at work, and the Regional Agricultural Planning Unit that had been sponsored by the U.K. and provided superior data on crops and harvests had been forced to close.
Problems in the South

At mid-year, the food supply situation in the North was so serious that the civil war and the possibility of drought in the South were largely forgotten. However, in mid-August, AID of OFDA reported, with the exception of western Equatoria, rains were almost everywhere inadequate throughout the South, and only unusually heavy rains in September and October could save a deteriorating harvest. Already, hundreds of thousands of displaced were “seriously at risk,” and food aid inventories in Juba, Wau, and Malakal were dangerously low. In SPLA-held Kapoeta, crops were desiccated, and seed distributed under OLS II was destroyed when minimal rains were followed by very high temperatures. The SPLA’s Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association predicted a catastrophe if food was not soon moved in quantity to the South, and when the rains completely failed in northern Bahr al-Ghazal, the donors worried that crop and cattle losses could result in a repeat of the massive loss of life that occurred in 1988.

In Malakal, some 100,000 displaced were in desperate need of food, and the UN’s Michael Priestley continued his futile effort to gain RCC approval to move food aid by barges standing by at Kosti. Although the SPLA had agreed since 1986 not to attack barges carrying humanitarian assistance as long as the convoys were not accompanied by government military forces (a promise reiterated during Priestley’s visit to Nairobi in July 1990), Malakal had not received a single food aid barge in nearly a year. The army, which had suffered a series of defeats in battles between Renk and Malakal and had failed to dislodge the SPLA from Melut, used “regional security conditions” to block the movement of food aid. With no food in Malakal, thousands of southerners began to move up the Nile toward Kosti (and Khartoum). When fighting then spread through Upper Nile, military officials who wanted no expatriates to report on the large numbers of displaced that had begun to flood into Renk from Malakal and Upper Nile villages forced the departure of the last of the expatriate PVOs working in government towns south of Kosti.

The RCC and the Aid Agencies

The issue that perfectly limned the deterioration of aid donor-RCC relations involved the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with-
starving displaced at Lasu, near the Zaire border. At the makeshift camp—which would soon housed 20,000 refugees—deaths from starvation averaged five a day. The aid agencies that continued to work in the South were nearly overwhelmed by the dimension of the displaced problem; yet, Lutheran World Federation continued to fly food to Juba, and east of the Nile, World Vision and Norwegian People’s Aid persisted in their work with the SRRA. By September, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese were on the march. In Ethiopia, the UNHCR counted more than 430,000 refugees in its four Sudanese camps, and new arrivals stated that others were on the way. In the North, the number of displaced in Kosti reached 100,000, and a large percentage of those arriving were malnourished. There were reports of starvation deaths in the Red Sea Hills, and the scarcity of food in northern Darfur and Kordofan was every day more apparent. Yet, even as the drought worsened, the government continued to ignore the situation—just as Sudanese President Jaafar Numayri had in 1984, and President Sadiq al-Mahdi had in 1988.

Drought, Food Aid, and Kuwait

By October 1990, OLS was moribund. Although United Nations agencies had begun the consideration of an OLS III, donor petulance ensured that such a structured program would be very unlikely. Only half the OLS II budget had been pledged by a donor community that was increasingly skeptical of RCC humanitarian and political policies. The United States had provided $10.4 million in disaster relief aid and $24 million in food aid, but the AID OFDA program soured once the relationship between the RCC and Western aid agencies became openly antagonistic. Aid workers, now virtually personae non gratae, and diplomats (including U.S. Ambassador James Cheek) were denied travel permits to visit drought-stricken areas. Unappreciated and unwanted, expatriate aid organizations were forced to confront the moral dilemma of whether to remain in the Sudan or leave. Only the possibility of yet another massive drought and the potential for extensive loss of life restrained the remaining donors and private voluntary organizations from leaving Sudan. Indeed, Western experts were already postulating that Sudan would require more food aid in 1991 than the amount provided through OLS I and OLS II combined. FEWS analysts even suggested that Sudan might require more food aid than the total delivered during the gigantic Sudan Western Relief Operation of 1984-85.

United States participation in an OLS III was entirely out of the question following the RCC support for the August 1990 Iraqi invasion, conquest, and assimilation of Kuwait. While the State Department sought to quarantine Iraq and its allies, on humanitarian grounds it decided to continue to provide disaster relief to the government of Sudan. Meanwhile, Sudan was isolated politically when, as a member of the Islamic Conference Organization, it abstained on a vote supported by 45 Islamic states that called for an immediate Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. In supporting Iraq, the junta virtually ended any hope of maintaining cordial relations with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Coast states, and Britain, all of which "washed their hands of Sudan"; Egypt officially suspended its support for mediation efforts to end the Sudan civil war, and for a time closed its airspace to Sudan Airways flights transporting Sudanese expatriates from the Gulf to Khartoum. The Sudan economy was buffeted when Saudi banks demanded "iron-clad guarantees for loans and concessionary funding" from their own government before they would consider loans to Sudan.41 Most importantly, with up to 750,000 Sudanese expatriates working in the Gulf states, including 15,000 Sudanese in Kuwait alone, the crisis would cost Sudan as much as $1 billion a year in lost hard currency remittances.

Sudan was not, however, about to dump Iraq, an ally who, along with China and Libya, had been the RCC’s principal source of arms and financial support. A thankful Iraq sent ten plane loads of arms to the Sudan, after which Bashir reportedly made a secret trip to Baghdad ostensibly to thank Saddam Hussein for the donation to the Sudanese war effort. The decision to align itself with Iraq created a deep fissure within the RCC, and Council hardliners led by Bakri Hassan Salih, Shams al-Din, Muhammad al-Amin Khalifa, and Muhammad Kheir berated their southern colleagues—Kassiano, Yukwan, and Malwal—for their lack of enthusiasm for Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. In September, there were reports of a stormy RCC meeting during which some members sought "the reversal of the junta’s support for Baghdad."42 The hardliners won out, and subsequent reports regarding divisions within the RCC were more smoke than fire.

In Sudan itself, support for Iraq’s brutal occupation worsened an already unhappy relationship that existed between donor nations and aid organizations and the RCC. The British Embassy ad-
Roger Winter of the U.S. Committee for Refugees called on Congress to "achieve the same sort of economic embargo against Sudan" as that which the United Nations had in place against Iraq;
and Sudanese currency had already been turned over to USAID-Sudan in exchange for the wheat that had been diverted.

Much legal haggling followed over the ownership of the grain, and the accompanying anti-American demonstrations organized by the RCC and beginning on October 14 caused the British ambassador to recommend the departure of the dependents of British families from the Sudan. It was indeed difficult for British or other expatriates to imagine that relations would soon improve as long as the government-controlled media published headlines such as "'Death to America Should Be the Motto for Every Muslim,' over an article about the Persian Gulf crisis." In the end, the Sudanese government scored a victory because the RCC had actually deposited LS 110 million in the USAID Trust Fund in expectation of the future delivery of 90,000 tons of wheat. The United States was faced with the embarrassing choice of providing the wheat or repaying the cash, and since Sudanese pounds were badly needed to pay local expenses and food aid transportation costs, a new shipment of wheat was soon on the high seas.

Ironically, in the furor over food aid, it was hardly noted in Washington that neither the State Department nor AID was willing to shut off aid to Sudan; on October 1, U.S. Ambassador James Cheek had issued an official declaration authorizing the continuance of disaster assistance to Sudan in the 1991 fiscal year. Seemingly a non sequitur given its problems with the RCC, the U.S. response was dictated by the growing possibility of massive famine in western Sudan. As the situation worsened in western Sudan, it was clear that regardless of the policies the RCC pursued, AID would continue to provide wheat to Sudan's commercial sector, and sorghum and other commodities for disaster relief. It indicated that it would consider favorably a formal request for $150 million of food aid in 1991 that, given the reluctance of other donors agencies, would provide the "kick-start" for a 1991 relief program in western Sudan.

**Drought in the West**

A FEWS evaluation of satellite imagery maps produced between September 10 and October 10 indicated that crops had failed in Umm Keddana, El Fasher, En Nahud, Umm Ruwaba, and Bara districts. Elsewhere in Kordofan and Darfur, crop losses were expected in Nyala, Mellit, and Soderi, and a UN/FAO field survey carried out in October 1990 estimated that from five to six million Sudanese "could starve" in 1991 without some multinational assistance. In the South, which was only partially covered by FEWS monitoring, a pocket of drought was located in the area surrounding Mayen Abun, Bahr al-Ghazal. To the east, drought in Upper Nile had been followed by flooding in Nasir, Akobo, Waat, and Kongor, and displaced southerners who tried to escape the drought by walking to refugee camps in Ethiopia found themselves trapped by rising rivers flowing out of the Ethiopian highlands. By November, UN analysts felt that in a "worst-case scenario" drought could have a direct impact on as many as 11 million people, or about forty percent of the population of Sudan, three quarters of whom lived in the North.

The UN's preliminary calculation determined that in 1991 the Sudan would need at least one million tons of relief food—most of which should be delivered before the spring rains. Such a prospect was, however, pure fantasy. The Sudanese transportation system was quite incapable of handling such tonnage even if the RCC allowed such a mammoth food aid program for Sudan. Internally, the small USAID-Sudan food stock, which the government had finally returned to it, was committed to northern Kordofan, and the UN/World Food Program and the European Community had almost no food supplies. Thus, by October, "the responsibility and burden of food aid" had already been handed over to USAID "by default." For USAID, the reduced PVO presence made distribution even more problematic, particularly as the Government's own Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, created in 1985 to work with expatriate aid agencies, had been relegated to bureaucratic irrelevancy.

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On November 5, President Bashir personally denied the possibility of famine in the Sudan and accused the Western media of tarnishing the Sudan’s image.84 Regardless, and RCC rhetoric aside, the prospect of widespread famine, starvation, and death was inescapable. In November, the RCC’s blase response to a late-October FEWS report warning that “as many as 8.9 million Sudanese may be at risk of starvation next year”; the junta seemed utterly unconcerned either with the shrinking number of friends it had in the international community or by the impending famine in the South and the West.85 Despite satellite data and the UN/FAO harvest assessment, Abu Ghozeiza, the advisor to the RCC on relief aid, predicted in November that the Sudan would produce a grain surplus. Minister of Agriculture Ahmad Ali Geneif declared that there was no famine in the Sudan, and Minister of Finance Abd al-Rahim Hamdi asserted that such scurrilous rumors were spread by “the Zionist media.” Hamdi added that the harvest was normal and that the government had never requested assistance to confront the famine, as “antagonistic Zionist circles claimed.”86 The RCC did admit, however, that displaced were flocking to Khartoum, including some 8,000 from Kordofan who arrived during the last week of October.

On November 3, the government’s new English language newspaper, New Horizon, proclaimed that there was “No Famine in the Sudan,” while international relief agencies were blamed “for causing [Sudan’s] current food shortage.” The agencies were said to have made large purchases of domestic sorghum when, if they had truly “wanted to help Sudan by feeding the refugees and displaced population,” they would have imported sorghum.87 The editor of Al-Sudan Al-Hadith, Al-Naguib Qamr al-Din, summed up the junta’s attitude toward the khawaja (foreigners):

"The Sudanese people are smart enough to understand that most of the relief agencies have religious objectives and many of the Western agencies understand relief as offering assistance to the rebels in southern Sudan. It is not beyond the Sudanese people’s intelligence to know that the problem of the South would not have been so aggravated if the Western agencies had not supplied [the SPLA] with the means of subsistence and added fuel to the fire in the form of arms, ammunition and food."88

On November 5, President Bashir personally denied the possibility of famine in the Sudan and accused the Western media of tarnishing the Sudan’s image.84 Regardless, and RCC rhetoric aside, the prospect of widespread famine, starvation, and death was inescapable. In November, the RCC’s representative at the United Nations quietly appealed for “immediate food assistance of 75,000 tons” for “urgent delivery” to drought stricken areas.89 In response, the State Department acknowledged that there were “conflicting views from Sudanese officials,” but that it was making its own plans to deal with the drought. It urged other donors “to make substantial contributions on their own.” The department concluded: “We continue to believe that prompt action by the Sudanese Government is needed in order to avoid another major human tragedy.”90 Certainly, the food aid donors were not easily persuaded to join the relief effort as long as the RCC played-down its 1991 relief requirements, and they worried that it would be difficult to monitor food once it was turned over to local relief committees appointed by the local People’s Committee (which in turn was controlled by the RCC). In sum, the RCC might obtain food aid, but it still could not secure the donors’ trust, which like sorghum, was in very short supply.

In November, the government continued its self-sufficiency campaign and announced that more than a million acres of wheat would be cultivated in Sudan in 1991. Still, there was practically no sorghum to be had on the open market, and its price at the important Omdurman suq had soared to unheard of heights, which prompted the RCC to seize grain from farmers. When the RCC found that such measures were counterproductive, particularly after the shortage of sorghum became apparent in Khartoum itself, the ministry of commerce announced it would not interfere with the marketing of the 1990-91 crop. The movement of grain between regions was permitted, but a total ban on sorghum exports remained in effect. Meanwhile, the numbers of destitute increased dramatically and the flux of dispossessed continued. In November, it was reported that “even the birds have moved south” from northern Kordofan, and Soderi, a town of 20,000, was nearly deserted.91 Carcasses of dead cattle littered the road from Soderi to El Obeid, and at El Obeid itself, the arrival of thousands of displaced had drastically reduced the city’s water supply. When reservoirs and wells ran dry, water had to be trucked from the Nile. Where the displaced congregated, severe malnutrition was found, and when Kordofan governor and RCC member Colonel Faisal Medani Mukhtar openly objected to RCC policies in the face of an impending crisis, he was placed under a form of house arrest until it was judged that he had regained his composure.
In the midst of famine, and despite the number of accusations holding it responsible for human rights violations, the government decided in November to level the notorious displaced camp for southern Sudanese at Hillat Shook. Located a few kilometers south of Khartoum’s international airport, it had been built by waves of Shilluk and Dinka who, with patience, perseverance, and adaptability, had spent years constructing a small city atop a garbage dump. It took a joint army-police crew just three days to tear it down; bulldozers cleared the area of huts tukuls and fires were set to the mounds of rubble. A clinic, schools, a church, and a chapel were leveled, and the 35,000 inhabitants were forced at gunpoint to pack their belongings or have them destroyed on the spot. Some displaced managed to settle in other displaced camps that ringed the city. Hundreds of mothers who escaped the roundup became indigent beggars throughout the capital seeking food and collecting scraps of material for a new shelter. At least 5,000 people, mostly women and children, were piled into vehicles and driven to the Jabal Awlia “resettlement site” 30 miles south of Khartoum, where they were dumped in a desert wasteland with no shade and little groundcover, and only a single small tank to hold water. They were soon joined by another 5,000 displaced who had been forcibly removed from settlements in Khartoum. The United Nations called the Jabal Awlia site unsuitable for settlement, but Brigadier Pio Yukwan assured the donors that RCC motives were “purely humanitarian” and, despite complaints, that water was “abundant.”

In fact, it was a very long walk to the Nile bank. In addition, there was no fuel, food, housing material, or administrative support, and the RCC left the provision of such services to the Western relief agencies.

Hillat Shook’s destruction was not so surprising because the RCC had advertised its determination to rid the capital of as many southern displaced as it possibly could. It was the prelude to a campaign to raze other displaced sites. In the end, hundreds of thousands of southern displaced would be forced onto wasteland (like Jabal Awlia), into camps located well beyond the capital’s city limits, or to ephemeral “Peace Villages” in Upper Nile and Kordofan. The RCC assumed that Western aid agencies would take up the responsibilities for feeding and resettling the displaced in locations miles from any work and where the cost of a bus ride to work was beyond the means of nearly all displaced. Left without hope, the displaced deserted government camps by the thousands, some returning to Khartoum, some returning to the South (which was what the RCC hoped would happen).

The SPLA Offensive

While the RCC was losing friends at home and abroad and actively sponsored the mistreatment of its southern Sudanese citizens, SPLA leader John Garang went on the offensive, both diplomatically and militarily. He reaffirmed the SPLA’s commitment to the principles of Operation Lifeline Sudan and the peace process, and strongly supported a 3-month period of tranquility in the Sudan during which UNICEF would be allowed to vaccinate Sudanese children against childhood diseases. Radio SPLA flayed the RCC for rejecting the peace initiative and then offered to disengage long enough to provide time to negotiate a cease-fire. The RCC responded by blaming the war on the SPLA, and both sides continued to fire verbal blasts. Neither side was ready for peace, and in November, the SPLA began its third successive dry season campaign. Deim Zubeir, Bahr al-Ghazal, was captured as were posts along the Central African Republic border. In a surprising development that was probably more a question of greed than political conversion, the government-armed Fertit militia in Bahr al-Ghazal joined the SPLA to capture Raga and then Kafka Kingi in southern Darfur. In December, Bazjia, located 50 miles south of Wau, was overrun, and the SPLA even penetrated into the predominantly Dinka ward of Nazareth on the southern outskirts of Wau. By 1991, all of the Bahr al-Ghazal except Aweil, Wau, Rumbek, and Tonj, was in SPLA hands. Donor food for the displaced that had congregated in Aweil continued to rot on the railroad siding at Muglad where the local militia and the regional military commander opposed its departure.

In Equatoria, Yambio and Nzara were captured in late December, and Source Yubu, a garrison town on the Zaire-Sudan border and the geographical center of Africa, was taken on December 2. Tambura fell five days later, and Maridi shortly thereafter. The army was left with only Juba and Yei, and both were besieged. In effect, the SPLA had reached its apogee after more than seven years of civil war. In response, the RCC resumed its tactic of bombing SPLA towns, and it made Torit a special target. Food aid flights...
continued to land in Juba where the indomitable Lutheran World Federation tried to feed more than 250,000 displaced packed into the city's camps, but the ICRC had finally given up its effort in the South after it was informed that all flights to SPLA-held villages had to land at Juba airport and be cleared after RCC inspection. It was the last insult the famed institution was prepared to take, and it reduced staff and prepared to leave Sudan. Unlike Equatoria, Upper Nile was relatively quiescent. In just a few months, famine had driven more than 100,000 southerners north to Kosti where military security had made life so difficult for the PVO Medecins Sans Frontieres/Holland that the relief agency was forced to leave the displaced camps it had served faithfully since 1988. By December, the Malakal displaced, who numbered more than 100,000, had run out of food, and there were reports that thousands were walking toward Renk.\

**Enter 1991**

In late November, AID/OFDA reevaluated requirements in Sudan and estimated the country would require at a minimum 500,000 tons of food aid in 1991. In New York, the Sudan Mission to the UN announced that the government’s food strategy for 1991 was to import as little food as possible and to increase the wheat harvest on mechanized farms. It was wishful thinking, but at least the Sudanese pledged before UN agencies that donor supplies would be delivered in a “just and equitable manner” in cooperation with PVOs. Then, on New Year’s Eve, Bashir announced the creation of a federal system of government. The Sudan would comprise nine states, including Khartoum State. Islamic law *shari’a* was imposed as the law of the land — albeit with every state given the right to exclude itself from the unwanted consequences of “any religious laws.” In fact, backed by Muslim fundamentalists, the RCC ensured the dominance of *shari’a* in the nation’s capital (Khartoum state), and thus made all Sudanese residents subject to Islamic law whether they wished it or not.

The Junta elected to retain the three political units in the South—Bahr al-Ghazal, Upper Nile, and Equatoria, but the SPLA complained that they were “in effect Islamic federal states” because political power in each resided in the “hands of Muslims” who were “members or affiliates of the NIF.” In each southern state, the governor was a figurehead while real power resided in Muslim appointees to the posts of a Deputy Governor in charge of fiscal and economic affairs, the Minister for State Govern-

**The Gulf War**

In Sudan, the year 1991 began badly. FEWS predicted that “a disastrous agricultural performance” would allow northern Sudan “to satisfy only 63 percent of its food needs in 1991.” The 1989-90 shortfall in cereal grains was calculated at 1.2 million tons, and the national reserve was somewhere between 50,000 to 170,000 tons. Still, despite foreign policy differences and the harassment of Western aid personnel and their Sudanese employees, as the new year began, the international donors had already pledged 313,000 tons of food aid. Unfortunately for the dispossessed and needy, pledges were one thing and the commencement of the UN’s “Operation Desert Storm” and the battle for Kuwait was quite another. On January 16, USAID personnel were evacuated from Khartoum, and nearly forty expatriate employees of the United Nations were sent on furlough; the following day, a UN force began its attack on Iraq. The U.S. Embassy was closed, and the British Embassy maintained a skeleton staff.

With the Gulf War, the RCC could no longer call on the West to make up its cereal deficit, and on January 21, the government doubled the price of a 120 gram loaf of bread. Four days later, the RCC’s Ministry of Commerce, Cooperation, and Supply gave sorghum merchants and farmers a week to report their holdings. As merchants and farmers had predicted, stockpiling was prohibited, grain movements within the private market were restricted, and farmers were required to sell the government three sacks of grain per acre cultivated. Consequently, the sorghum trade was driven underground, and within days the price of sorghum doubled on the black market. Tangentially, the black market price for the dollar jumped to LS 55:1, and then to LS 70:1. Next, the price for black market sorghum soared to LS 3,200 per sack—as opposed to LS 300 in May 1990 and the official price of LS 700 fixed on January 1, 1991. Fuel was severely rationed, and in late January, a 54 gallon drum of diesel fetched LS 10,000 on the black market.

As a result of Operation Desert Storm, the food supply situation deteriorated in Sudan practi-
cally without foreign witnesses. There were also practically no Western witnesses to the continuing human rights violations carried out against the Khartoum displaced. In February, some 10,000 southern displaced located in Khartoum North were forced from their settlement. Still others were moved from Khartoum, and on April 20, the RCC itself approved a program to move an additional 215,000 displaced out of Khartoum in 1991. Ironically, despite the Gulf War, Operation Lifeline Sudan maintained a life of its own, and in February James Jonah, Secretary General Perez de Cuellar's personal representative, visited Sudan to discuss the continuation of the United Nations program and the increased assistance to the Khartoum displaced. Dubbed the groundbreaker for OLS III, there was little likelihood of success until the Gulf War was concluded. Most expatriates had left, and it was very doubtful there would ever be an OLS III, for as one "senior Western official" put it: "We don't trust them, and they don't trust us."69

Although predictions of a major shortfall in grain production were already five months old, in February 1991 the RCC reversed a policy of grudging openness and once again began to denigrate Western concern with the pre-famine conditions in Darfur and Kordofan. Nevertheless, thousands of terribly hungry displaced, whom the Washington Post called "victims of a famine created by misrule and economic collapse," struggled into Omdurman.60 Addressing a March political rally in Khartoum, Bashir accused aid organizations of "defaming Sudan by begging on behalf of the Sudanese people," and promised that self-sufficiency would be achieved "in a year or two."60 The RCC then imposed currency restrictions requiring the exchange of bills of high denominations, only to find it had insufficient currency in the Bank of Sudan to carry out the program; the policy only stimulated a rush to obtain hard currency driving the pound to 100:1 against the dollar on the black market. While the economic crisis deepened, Sudan could expect practically no help from the UN, the West, or even from Saudi-dominated Islamic development banks, as long as it continued its support for Iraq. Even with no one in Khartoum, the United Nations continued to estimate the 1990-91 cereal shortfall at 1.2 million tons, and predicted that seven million people would be at risk, especially in the period from July through September 1991.

The Donors Return

Despite the plethora of human rights violations, limitations on personal freedoms, and Sudanese willingness to support Iraq in the face of a number of United Nations Security Council resolutions condemning the invasion of Kuwait, the United States was unwilling to make a clean break with the RCC. While ready to attack Saddam Hussein and readying an attack on Iraqi troops in Kuwait and Iraq, the State Department had handled the Sudan situation very gingerly. It had no intention of giving any of its enemies cause to say that its policy toward Sudan was symptomatic of a pervasive anti-Arabism. During the war itself, it tended to play down the RCC's moral support for the Iraqi dictator and did nothing to stop a March shipment of 22,500 tons of United States wheat to the government of Sudan that arrived in Port Sudan despite the fact that there was no one from the Embassy or USAID to verify its arrival or ensure its proper distribution. Once the Gulf War was concluded in May 1991, a dozen USAID officials returned to Khartoum where they joined with a handful of UN advisors and Western private aid organizations to try to breathe life into the relief operation in western Sudan. It was, however, already late in the year to begin. The food supply situation was very bad in Darfur, and thousands of Sudanese had fled to Chad in a frantic search of food. Travel restrictions remained and the donors found there was insufficient reporting on famine conditions and food availability in specific locations in both Kordofan and Darfur. Without significant expatriate and indigenous PVO input from the field, the remnants of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's Technical Coordination Committee and Resource Allocation Committee that functioned exceptionally well during OLS I were but useless reminders of once extensive donor-government cooperation. Relief agencies that returned to Sudan "found themselves struggling to deliver hundreds of thousands of tons of grain to stave off starvation... against what have been almost insuperable barriers placed by [the RCC]."71 The donors also encountered problems in southern Sudan. Following the end of OLS II, the relief effort had continued with some cross-border trucking of food aid from Lokichoggio, Kenya. Still, in early 1991, there was a report from southern Sudan that the SPLA and SRRA had become "increasingly hostile" toward Western relief officials. The SPLA, which on occasion seemed to enjoy shooting itself in the foot, was reported to have expelled UN monitors who "asked too many questions" and made life difficult for at least one agency, the Aide Medicale Internationale. Nonetheless, once the Gulf War began, the SPLA-SRRA urged donor nations to ignore the Sudanese government in Khartoum, and it offered "protection for any agencies seeking to initiate a relief operation outside of official Sudanese channels."72
USAID Visits Southern Sudan

As a result of the Gulf War, and because conditions throughout the South were virtually unknown to USAID-Sudan, the State Department, for the first time since the civil war began in 1983, permitted a team of USAID personnel to make a grand tour d'horizon in the SPLA-controlled South. On April 27, a trio of USAID officials departed Nairobi and spent nearly a month travelling in SPLA territory. In Kapoeta, local inhabitants seemed healthy, the hospital was operational, and World Vision and International Rescue Committee personnel were at work. At Chukudum, an agricultural center supported by OXFAM/United States was operational, providing services for more than 6,000 displaced, including some 500-800 unaccompanied boys who were being trained by SPLA military. At Torit, the people seemed healthy. From Torit, the team drove north by road to Bor where, at Tibari near the Juba-Bor road junction, they found 10,000 Bari and Mundari displaced who had succeeded in fleeing RCC-controlled Juba in March 1990; their nutritional status was generally good. At Bor and surrounding villages, a California relief agency, INTERAID, provided food supplements to malnourished children. German doctors were at work at the local hospital — which had been slightly damaged by a March 9 air raid that killed nine patients. Elsewhere around Bor, the populace was quietly farming, fishing, and tending cattle. In sum, the USAID personnel found the region light years removed from reports of drought in Kordofan, Darfur, and the northern districts of Bahr al-Ghazal and Upper Nile.

Near Kongor, a UNICEF team was vaccinating cattle; at Yirol they found the former ICRC hospital without medicines, but the supply of food and the nutritional status of the population were better than expected, given reports of large population movements from northern Bahr al-Ghazal. At Adok, a former Chevron Oil base camp, the team found mounds of fish for sale. At Leer, MSF was operating a primitive hospital and operated a Kala Azar clinic at Duar. At Waat, the local clinic had received basic drug kits from UNICEF, and though malnutrition was present, the cases of marasmus or kwashiorkor were few. In sum, the team verified that there were real signs of progress for civilians in the South, although there did exist pockets of drought north and east of Yirol, north of Tonj, and around Akot which affected an estimated 250,000 southerners. The USAID team found conditions in no way comparable to the autumn of 1988 when starvation was rampant throughout the region.

The Situation along the Ethiopian Border

The team next flew by USAID-funded twin otter from Waat to Nasir on the Upper Sobat River, where they were eyewitness not only to the after-effect of a political implosion within Ethiopia, but, without realizing it, to the birth of an implosion of historic consequence within the SPLA itself. In May 1991, a succession of military defeats at the hands of Tigrean and Eritrean rebels would drive dictator Mengistu Haile Miriam from Ethiopia and reconfigure the shards of the East Africa’s political kaleidoscope. Mengistu had allowed the SPLA to operate from Addis Ababa and inside four huge Sudanese refugee camps. In contrast, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, which took charge of government, was not at all disposed to assist the Sudanese rebels. The SPLA political office was closed down in Addis Ababa, as was the “clandestine” Radio SPLA. In the chaos that affected all Ethiopian regions, the political vacuum in western Ethiopia was filled by soldiers inimical to Sudanese in general and to the SPLA in particular. On May 14 and 15, Sudan Air Force planes bombed Sudanese refugee concentrations and a hospital near Nasir, “claiming they were part of the SPLA.”

When the USAID team arrived at Nasir on May 18, they encountered a number of wounded women and children. They met with SPLA commander Riak Machar and local commander Gordon Khoang, and Machar explained that Operation Lifeline II had delivered no food beyond Ayod. (Machar was told to expect little immediate help given the enormity of the logistical problems.) Riak next reviewed other battlefields — Angola, Iraq, Afghanistan, and even Central America — and wondered aloud why some rebel movements received U.S. military assistance while others, like the SPLA, had not. With a handful of Stingers, he asserted, the SPLA could bring the Sudan conflict to an early end. Asking what the SPLA could do to improve its image with the international community and with the United States government in particular, Riak must have known that the State Department had long ago rejected any military assistance, and only in 1989, after the huge loss of life the previous year, approved the delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas controlled by the SPLA. The problem lay, as
Riak well knew, with SPLA leader John Garang, who the department had concluded was unable to manage the dual role of military and political leader. The USAID team soon concluded their trip, but their report, and other reporting on the disastrous circumstances along the Ethiopian border, spurred AID efforts to airlift and airdrop food. By May 26, the OLF attacked the Sudanese refugee camp at Gambela, and artillery barrages could be heard twenty-five miles away in Itang, creating panic in that UNHCR camp for Sudanese refugees. The OLF, which had first attacked Sudanese refugees at the Asosa camp in January 1990, received both financial and military support from Sudan's RCC. On May 26, the OLF attacked the Sudanese refugee camp at Gambela, and artillery barrages could be heard twenty-five miles away in Itang, creating panic in that UNHCR camp for Sudanese refugees. When Gambela was overrun, Sudanese refugees fled to Itang, and when Itang was threatened, Sudanese refugees, including some SPLA, made off with 50 UN relief trucks as they sprinted out of Ethiopia. The OLF almost immediately began to receive supplies via Sudan Air Force cargo planes that began to use the Gambela airstrip.

Generating More Displaced

By June, tens of thousands of Sudanese who had once chosen sanctuary from drought and war in western Ethiopia were fleeing pell-mell for Sudan. Nasir, normally a town of 3,000 people, was soon surrounded by an estimated 240,000 displaced. In Addis Ababa, the "clandestine" Radio SPLA closed down, and the SPLA hierarchy and northern Sudanese exiles opposed to the RCC fled to the bush or to neighboring nations. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) forces, composed in the main of Muslim soldiers, roamed the Ethiopia-Upper Nile frontier and attacked Sudanese refugees. The OLF, which had first attacked Sudanese refugees at the Asosa camp in January 1990, received both financial and military support from Sudan's RCC. On May 26, the OLF attacked the Sudanese refugee camp at Gambela, and artillery barrages could be heard twenty-five miles away in Itang, creating panic in that UNHCR camp for Sudanese refugees. When Gambela was overrun, Sudanese refugees fled to Itang, and when Itang was threatened, Sudanese refugees, including some SPLA, made off with 50 UN relief trucks as they sprinted out of Ethiopia. The OLF almost immediately began to receive supplies via Sudan Air Force cargo planes that began to use the Gambela airstrip.

Throughout June, the Sudanese air force continued its bombing at Jokau, Nasir, and Akobo, where an estimated 200,000 Sudanese displaced were still milling about. In the United States, AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance Director Andrew Natsios publicly admonished the Sudan government for its attacks on congregations of unarmed civilians. Thanks to Natsios, to many European protests, and "following UN appeals...not to bomb Sudanese refugees returning from Ethiopia," Khartoum agreed in June "to safeguard relief operations"; still, as one Middle East journal evaluated the RCC's probity, regaining international respectability would be "an uphill struggle." In mid-June, John Garang made a surprise trip to the United States to seek backing at a time when the SPLA had lost Ethiopia, its greatest benefactor. His supporters had little more than 12 hours notice of his arrival and were thus unable to use the occasion to repeat a triumphant 1989 tour during which Garang had taken Washington by storm. Indeed, Garang seemed unable or unwilling to seek center stage at a time when the RCC was highly unpopular in Washington and when his appearance in that city could have provided the SPLA with a propaganda windfall. In the end, his visit with State Department officials and on Capitol Hill offered some promise, but ultimately led nowhere. At a time when Garang and the SPLA needed friends, the trip was unproductive, both personally and politically. Although the SPLA leader met with Assistant Secretary Cohen, the meeting did little to further the peace process and ended inconclusively. In a discussion with AID/OFDA's Andrew Natsios, he promised to upgrade the SRRA, and appointed a trusted aide, Elijah Maluk, to cut through the red tape and bad blood that existed between some aid agencies and the SRRA. He then met with and praised Catholic Relief Services and World Vision officials and thanked them for the transport of nearly 6,000 tons of food aid to civilians in SPLA territory since 1989. Efforts to meet with the press were ineffective and thus Garang's visit went practically unnoticed. It ended on a low note when British Airways security guards were forced to disarm Garang's bodyguards before he could enter the plane that would take him to London and yet another inconclusive meeting with supporters and allies before he returned to the bush.

Life in Khartoum

While Garang was in Washington, in Khartoum, the RCC was busy uncovering coup plots, quashing student protests, and destroying settlements of Khartoum displaced. In May, The Guardian reported that dwellings housing 10,000 displaced had just been flattened and the re-displaced were forcibly removed to a "camp" located in a desert wasteland, ten miles to the west of Omdurman where a UN advisor had once claimed that "not even a locust could survive." The point was proved when the children and the feeble began to perish. Soon the graves that had been dug outnumbered the ram-
shackle tukuls still occupied. In June, at least 35,000 displaced were uprooted from the displaced site at Souk Markazi and moved to the desert site at Jabal Awlia. Everywhere the displaced suffered, as did most Sudanese, as the price for sorghum continued its upward spiral. By July, it was selling for LS 1,500-2,000 a 90 kilo bag at Rahad, a major production and marketing center. In Khartoum, public servants found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet even though their salaries were raised anywhere from 40 to 100 percent.

In Khartoum, the second anniversary of the June 30 coup arrived with only Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and Chad’s Idriss Deby on hand to celebrate the event. One Diplomat noted: “That sums up the extent of success achieved by the junta in two years—just Qaddafi and Deby…. I think the West had largely given up on the junta, and Khartoum has given up trying to win friends there.” The United Nations effort to elicit financial support for an OLS III was going nowhere, and in Khartoum, Trevor Page, the UN director of operations, was held in disregard by the remaining private voluntary organizations, and various Western diplomats, including the United States Ambassador, urged their governments to seek his removal. Page was also hated by the SPLA, as he had let it be known that he felt Priestley’s lack of success in Khartoum resulted from the RCC perception that he enjoyed too close a relationship with the SPLA. Page himself had little interest in cultivating a relationship with the SPLA, and thus any UN plan to continue the legacy of food aid impartiality founded in Operation Lifeline Sudan I was doomed.

The Forgotten West

The RCC began its third year in power with famine in the West, food shortages in Khartoum, and no signs of peace. While sorghum was in short supply in Khartoum, stories of terrible privation in the West began to circulate. Thousands of displaced were created in Darfur when the early rains were late and the helpless flocked to El Fasher and Geneina in search of food. In June, the UN noted reports “of deaths from starvation,” and it warned that unless food aid was soon made available in the West, “the rate of starvation could escalate rapidly” and “the situation in could be as bad as 1984-85.” It was not until July, however, that the food aid donors were finally granted permission to make an extensive evaluation of food needs in western Sudan. A report prepared in July by USAID’s Brian D’Silva noted:

We are now witnessing the onset of a major famine in both North and South Darfur. There is no doubt that people are dying from hunger and that hunger exists in widespread areas of Darfur. Furthermore, the relief effort in Darfur is stalled. A major rethink and redirection of the relief effort needs to take place in the next week to ten days so as to stem large scale loss of life and mass migration into towns.

Ironically, the drought and famine conditions were very similar to those that D’Silva encountered during his trip to Darfur in January 1984, after which a similar report had alerted the donors to the potential of a terrible famine.

By mid-1991, in the West, the strong had moved or were on the move to the cities and “only the weak” and the young had stayed behind. Starvation was widespread in Geneina, and the donors immediately funded an emergency airlift. Startled by reports of extensive famine, donors increased their pledges to 650,000 tons of food. Some 350,000 tons had arrived by September, but there were myriad problems trying to force food aid through an archaic and inefficient transportation system. Everything went wrong. There existed serious fuel and driver shortages. There were problems with truck contractors. Finally, the welcome summer rains, which had been good in much of southern Kordofan and Darfur, also did their part to make roads impassable and hamper deliveries. Thus, by October, only 14,500 tons had found its way to Darfur.

UN employees returning from the West reported that when the dead were counted—a handful here, a few there—famine must have killed tens of thousands, certainly more than 100,000. There were, however, no eyewitness accounts of massive deaths similar to 1988 reports from Abyei, Aweil, and Meiram; this time, the tragic mosaic of death was composed of hundreds of tesserà occurring outside the field of vision of Western donors. When finally forced to confront the reality of a massive famine and consequent international criticism, the RCC responded in predictable fashion by criticizing the tardy response of the international relief agencies. The criticism was not appreciated in Washington, as the United States had provided by October 1991 some 320,000 tons of relief food and $113 million to cover their transportation costs. UNICEF, which had taken charge of the OLS office in Khartoum, found that the United States and other Western donors simply were not interested in another campaign.
The SPLA Disintegrates

While drought stalked the North, the southern regions that were likewise affected generally benefitted from heavy summer rains. Although the besieged government garrison towns were short of food, and there were reports of localized food shortages, for once, conditions in the South actually seemed better than the North.

In August 1991, however, that interpretation would change overnight when the differences within the SPLA ranks that had been papered over for years reached crisis proportions. What came to be called the “Nasir Group,” or SPLA-Nasir, led by SPLA commanders Riak Machar and Gordon Koang and joined by SPLA spokesman Lam Akol, broke with John Garang. Confirmed that history had proved conclusively that there was no room for the South in a Muslim-dominated Sudan, the three supported the secession of Sudan’s three southern provinces. They were no longer willing to accept either Garang’s military leadership or his political philosophy of a united and multicultural Sudan. Additionally, Garang was accused of having carried out “a reign of terror” within SPLA ranks, and the three decried human rights violations including the use of juveniles in his military forces. At SPLA headquarters at Torit, Garang denied the charges, especially the SPLA-Nasir claim that he had both sponsored and approved human rights abuses. He did admit, however, that the Nasir faction could “turn the movement toward democracy.” After reviewing the separatist issue at SPLA headquarters at Torit on September 12, ten SPLA commanders declared their loyalty to Garang while committing themselves to an ambiguous course of action: “resolving the war through a united democratic Sudan, confederation; association of sovereign states or self-determination.”

While the SPLA-Nasir insisted on southern Sudanese secession, most of its followers (both in exile and in Sudan itself) could not foresee that its creation would spark a civil war within a civil war. Indeed, few foresaw that the Nasir faction would be as ruthless as the army had been in exterminating its “enemies.” In southern Sudan, the split engendered a shockwave of seismic proportions, especially as it was followed almost immediately by the eruption of an internecine conflict “along tribal lines.” Within days, Riak’s Nuer attacked and pillaged Dinka villages in Kongor, carrying out atrocity after atrocity. In November, they attacked Dinka communities located within the traditional Nuer districts of Akobo, Waat, Bentiu, and Leer. They then carried out a second deadly attack in Kongor, forcing the evacuation of most expatriates aid workers from Upper Nile.

Bor district, which in ante-bellum Sudan had been home to some 350,000 Dinka, then became the nexus of a horrible tragedy. The district, which had already endured a series of shocks including an early drought followed by extensive flooding and then the inundation of tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees fleeing Ethiopia, was literally devastated. An estimated 30,000 Nuer rampaged through the area, burning and killing, leveling hospitals and clinics, destroying crops and stores, killing cattle, and creating chaos throughout the district. In December, the UN reported that “more than 200,000 residents of the Bor and Kongor districts—in an exodus unlike anything seen before in Sudan—fled south in search of food, shelter, and security.” Tens of thousands crossed the Nile to the west or moved south toward Mongalla and Torit. Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), a PVO engaged in the delivery of food aid to the Bor and Kongor districts, reported that by the end of November up to 5,000 Dinkas—mainly civilians—had been killed by Riak’s faction in what was “an outright massacre between Bor and Mongalla.” An NPA videotape made the rounds of the United States and captured on film the terrible atrocities carried out by Riak’s forces in the Gemmiza region north of Bor.

In November, Sudanese and Kenyan churchmen offered their good offices to effect a cease-fire, and, thanks to their exertions, peace talks were opened in Nairobi on November 22. A cease-fire was broken off after four days, after which the SPLA-Nasir forces continued their depredations. There were reports from Nairobi in mid-December that the two sides had patched up their quarrel, but the announcement was premature and the antagonists broke contact. When Garang’s forces counterattacked, the rebels fled toward their bases in Ayod and Waat, stopping at Kongor to continue the fight. Battling occurred in Kongor district in March and June 1992, and for good measure the Sudanese army would attack the town on April 27. Another murderous engagement pitted Dinka clans from Waat and Nuer clans from Ayod in a battle that lasted from June through August 1992. All the while, Nuer forces continued to pillage, rape, destroy crops, kill cattle, and poison wells. They destroyed scores of Dinka settlements and murdered untold thousands of Dinka tribals, virtually depopulating one of the most dynamic population centers of southern Sudan. In effect, the SPLA-Nasir carried out a murderous campaign directed almost entirely against civilian targets, and it was launched by Nuer leaders who had themselves only recently complained of human rights
The year 1991 was yet another terrible year for the Sudanese. A potentially rich country was further impoverished.

1991 - A Summing Up

The year 1991 was yet another terrible year for the Sudanese. A potentially rich country was further impoverished, and 1992 promised no relief. With the split in SPLA ranks, the RCC moved quickly to widen the cleavage between its factions. It also continued its military buildup thanks to the beneficence of yet another arms supplier, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Peace talks sponsored by the OAU and its chairman, President Babangida of Nigeria, and scheduled for December 1991 at Abuja, Nigeria, were postponed indefinitely. Even worse for both SPLA factions, the RCC signed a treaty of friendship with the reconstituted government of Ethiopia, thus placing eastern Upper Nile (held by Riak’s Nuer) and eastern Equatoria (held by Garang’s units) in grave danger from a Sudanese army attack through western Ethiopia. The Sudanese air force began to bomb SPLA-held Bor and Torit.

In the northern cities, mid-level bureaucrats were as poor as anyone else; a government salary of LS 600 a month would not go far when sorghum was selling for as much as LS 2,400 a sack. Not only was Sudan impoverished, but in what was to have been the “Arab breadbasket,” it was malnourished as well. Nearly a third of the inhabitants of Darfur and Red Sea were reported to suffer either severe or significant malnutrition, as did a quarter of Kordofan and Upper Nile residents. Among the Khartoum displaced, it was reported to be 17 percent. In the West, it seemed that the situation would never improve; a FEWS pre-harvest assessment published in October 1991 advised that the 1991-92 crop in the West would likely be less than average because late season drought had greatly reduced the harvest in the Sahelian tier that stretched from El Fasher east to the Red Sea. Nation-wide, it was estimated that 2.6 million tons would be harvested; with that, plus 400,000 tons of food remaining from 1991 commercial import and the large store of donor relief food, Sudan would easily satisfy domestic consumption of three million tons of grain. It would still be necessary, however, to move food aid to Darfur, Kordofan, and northern Bahr al-Ghazal as well as in parts of the South that could still be reached despite the warfare within the SPLA. In December 1991, there were still an estimated 150,000 Sudanese refugees crowded into and around Nasir, and another 35,000 refugees, most from Itang camp, were located at Pakok, a site very near Boma on the Ethiopia-Sudan border where food supplies were scarce. In Juba, there was local grain sufficient for only three months consumption of the 288,000 population.

In late December, FEWS provided both good and bad news: The traditional farming sectors in northern Darfur and northern Kordofan would produce almost no crop, but the irrigated sector between the Blue and White Nile would produce a record crop. Additionally, the crop area taken from cotton and devoted to grain production would augment significantly production from that sector. The 1991-92 harvest would be good, but, as usual, there was no guarantee that food would reach the needy in time to give Sudan and Sudanese a much needed breathing space.

The Khartoum Displaced

According to a Commission for the Displaced statistical report circulated in September 1991, since the RCC had come to power, nearly a million southern Sudanese had disappeared from settlements located within the capital area since the RCC seized power in 1989. Whereas the RRC had recognized the presence of 1.6 million displaced in summer 1989, it recognized only 712,000 two years later. Beginning in late 1990, the RCC instituted one kaza campaign after another, dismantling and destroying a score of built-up settlements of southern displaced. There
was method in the RCC madness, and the destruction of spontaneous settlements also entailed the creation of five government camps: two temporary “transition camps” were created for southern Sudanese who had arrived in Khartoum after 1983, and three “resettlement areas” were created for displaced who could prove they had arrived before 1984. It made no difference, however, when a southerner arrived in Khartoum or whether that person considered him or herself a displaced person; if the displaced lived at a site the government wanted cleared, residences would be bulldozed and displaced would be forced to move whether they wanted to or not.

The first transition camp was created in September 1990 and was located on a wasteland at Jabal Awlia, more than 25 miles distant from the Khartoum city center. Thousands of displaced were forcibly moved there following the army’s destruction of the Bentiu displaced settlement located south of the Khartoum international airport; it was then expanded following the flattening of Khartoum’s Souk al-Markazi site in June 1991. By March 1992, the Jabal Awlia transition camp was home to 20,000 displaced; unable to find jobs or endure at the bleak landscape, thousands of displaced either returned to Khartoum or began the trek toward southern Sudan. The second transition camp, al-Salaam, was created following the destruction in January 1992 of the huge Hillat Kusha and Zagalona displaced settlements in Khartoum. Hillat Kusha, which was located on a refuse dump north of the Khartoum North industrial area, was razed almost overnight, and visitors seeking family or friends were told that local trucks had been commandeered to transport the displaced to a site some five miles west of “Souk Libya,” Omdurman’s easternmost ward. The huge Zagalona camp was next, and then some of the ramshackle neighborhoods that comprised Souk Libya were razed and more displaced were uprooted. By April 1992, there were more than 60,000 displaced at Al-Salaam. They were the first tranche of an estimated 150,000 displaced that the government planned to move to this barren desert site.

In what would cause some confusion, the three government Resettlement Areas were named/located at Dar es-Salaam/Jabal Awlia, Dar es-Salaam/Omdurman, and Dar es-Salaam/Haj Yusuf. Dar es-Salaam/Jabal Awlia was created following the surprise demolition of the Kurmuta displaced settlement in December 1991. Destruction began when the army uprooted thousands of southern displaced and Ethiopian refugees from the neighborhood of the Islamic University, and it ended just before Christmas when the army opened fire and killed two dozen displaced who were attempting to prevent the destruction of their homes at the Kurmuta site. Kurmuta was, in fact, an established settlement that included thousands of mud brick houses, and unlike most other spontaneous settlements in the Khartoum region it had direct access to potable water thanks to a UNICEF project. By March 1992, Dares-Salaam/Jabal Awlia was home to some 60,000 displaced (actually called “squatters” by government institutions). In May, the government bulldozers began the destruction of the displaced settlement at Zarube, and its 1,500 families were resettled at Dar es-Salaam/Jabal Awlia.

The second Resettlement Area, Dar es-Salaam/Omdurman, was simply a government enlargement of a displaced persons settlement founded in the mid-1980s. USAID-Khartoum reported in mid-1991 that the government was forcing thousands of “squatters” into the area. In April 1992, the army began the destruction of the huge Galea displaced settlement site at Omdurman, attempting to force the displaced into Dar es-Salaam/Omdurman. While the displaced scattered, nearby houses were marked “with the ominous ‘X’ for destruction.” (By March 1993, there were more than 180,000 displaced crowded into the site.) The Dar es-Salaam/Haj Yusuf Resettlement Area was created following the army’s destruction in 1990 of a displaced settlement that existed on the same site. Plots were reallocated to “squatters,” and by April 1991, it had a population of 48,000. In all, of the 115 “unofficial” settlements that were counted by the RCC after it took power, some 35 had been destroyed by spring 1982. Despite protests from the foreign aid, community the RCC thumbed its nose and continued to move the displaced where and when it wanted. It was anyone’s guess just how many displaced there were, although most analysts began at a million southern Sudanese; USAID-Khartoum estimated in May 1992 that there were still 1.8 million displaced and “squatters” in the greater Khartoum area. Of the relocated population, some 200,000 displaced had been granted plots on the three official Dar es-Salaam relocations sites. Literally hundreds of thousands of displaced moved from one site to another, trying to stay ahead of the government plans to evict them.

Where once the displaced could count on assistance from the international aid community, by 1992, the settlements themselves were virtually off limits to international aid agencies. The government even denied the existence of certain settlements like New Sahara and Zarube, and the Commissioner for the Displaced, the RCC’s lead agency, restricted access to the government’s “official” settlements. A
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Going Downhill

For most Sudanese, the year 1992 was a disaster. The exception was the RCC leadership and its political and military allies. The army, which had been armed as never before thanks to Iranian largesse and an influx of $300 million in modern weaponry, began a major offensive in February 1992. With the two SPLA factions at war in southern Upper Nile, the government was able to concentrate its military activity on four fronts at once. A large column moved south from Malakal and overran Duk Fadiat and headed toward Kongor. The Army captured Bor on March 8, causing John Garang to accuse the Nasir faction of “allowing the government free passage” in the territory under its control.93

Another SPAF column, attacking through Ethiopia and reportedly assisted by Oromo forces, took Pochala on March 8; tens of thousands of southerners, including more than 15,000 orphans (unaccompanied minors) who had fled the Ethiopian UNHCR camps in May 1991, moved southward toward Kapoeta and the Kenya-Sudan frontier. Continuing their attack, the SPAF captured Pibor on April 23 where the forces of Riek Machar reportedly melted into the bush without putting up resistance. In Bahr al-Ghazal, troops from the Wau garrison began to move toward Tonj and then toward the SPLA stronghold at Yirol. Another column headed north in a campaign that was designed to open the railroad and road routes that had been closed between Wau and Aweil since 1986. The SPAF took Yirol on April 11. Finally, southern Command forces at Juba began to move down the highway toward the besieged Yei, and they also crossed the Nile in force in an effort to take Torit. In April, Norwegian People’s Aid, which still continued to be active east of the Nile, reported that conditions of the civilian population in the South were “the worst it had ever seen in Sudan.”94 Ironically, while the RCC sought to bar PVO activity in southern Sudan, the government gave the UN’s OLS office permission to deliver food and other assistance to Pibor and Pochaia “primarily,” as USAID-Sudan later would report, “to maintain an image of balance between UN assistance for SPLA and GOS-controlled area.”95

On April 14, Shambe, which served as a crucial crossroads in the SPLA transport infrastructure and blockaded river traffic moving from north to south, was captured by the SPAF. Continuing its drive east of the Nile, the Sudan government offensive was halted momentarily at Ngangala where 1,500 government forces were surrounded and forced to endure merciless shelling. Despite reports that the government offensive appeared to have lost momentum, the gains made by the SPLA in eight years of warfare were wiped out almost overnight. Flushed with victory in the South, the RCC announced the creation in Khartoum of a Transitional National Parliament of 300 appointees who would “rule” Sudan until elections to parliament were held in 1995. There was, however, no possibility that the RCC would allow Sudan to return to a multi-party system. Garang’s forces would make a desperate attempt to take Juba in June and then again in July, both times without success.

OLS Essentially Ceases

Given the pervasive insecurity, all PVO operations were halted. Nothing could be done for some 250,000 drought-impacted southerners the UN reported were making their way to the north. In the South, only NPA resumed full operations in April 1992. For PVOs willing to work in the South, the RCC granted permission for food aid flights to Akobo, Waat, and Nasir — sites controlled by SPLA’s Nasir faction; no permission was given to assist the needy in the area under Garang’s control. Nevertheless, NPA continued to move 500 tons of food a month to civilians under SPLA control along with 100 truckloads of other materiel. Even its program was drastically reduced when
Kapoeta fell on May 28. In the same month, NPA reported that of the 3 million inhabitants of Eastern Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr al-Ghazal, more than 1.2 million were seriously affected by warfare. If western Equatoria was included, more than half of all Sudanese in southern Sudan were displaced. With the fall of Kapoeta, the SPLA stronghold at Torit was threatened from three directions, and as many as 150,000 southerners ("a conservative figure") began making their way toward the border with Uganda. SPLA supporters next received a tremendous shock, even perceived by some as a mortal blow, when Garang's headquarters at Torit fell on July 13, to a force of 10,000 army and militia. It was too early to bury the SPLA, but Garang was forced to move his headquarters to Kajo Kaji, west of the Nile and just north of the Uganda border. At mid-year, SPLA units throughout the South (and in the North in southern South Kordofan and South Darfur) were nearly everywhere on the offensive; the exception was Juba where its units, which had invested the city for more than two years, stepped up their activity.

As the government's military offensive wound down, in July the UNICEF/OLS office in Nairobi wrote that military activity combined with crop failure had "affected 668,000 people in accessible parts of southern Sudan"; it admitted that the "plight of hundreds of thousands of others, residing in areas inaccessible to UN/Non-Government Organization assessment teams but affected by crop failure, factional fighting and military activities, remains unknown." For the first time in the civil war, Garang's artillery began to pound away at Juba on a regular basis. In one of the civil war's most ironic moments, the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi was demanding that Garang permit the unhindered movement of humanitarian assistance to Juba just as the UN ceased all air flights to the city. As Agence France Presse later reported, the UN had discovered that the RCC had been using Ilyushin-76 chartered aircraft with UN markings to move soldiers and materiel through Juba airport. Despite SPLA shelling and the discontinuance of airlifts, the people survived on short rations and hate. Well in advance of the SPLA attacks, the military had begun the destruction of displaced camps and neighborhoods and packed the city population into an area one-quarter of its previous size. Some 300,000 people were literally held hostage by the Sudanese army, while the rains made living conditions a perfect hell. When the SPLA attacked the Southern Command inside the city, the army, an occupying force in the first place, was used as an instrument of terror to cow the populace.

When it failed to take Juba, the SPLA still continued on its fissiparous way. The SPLA factions -- despite preliminary peace talks held at Abuja, Nigeria, that involved both SPLA factions and the RCC -- continued to practice mutual destruction, and yet a third faction was formed around William Nyan Bany, who in 1983 had joined with Garang to found the SPLA.

Ironically, the situation was little better for the Fur and Nuba of the North. In South Darfur, the Arab cattle tribes resumed their attack on Fur villages that they had begun in 1988. In South Kordofan, the military began the expiration of villages settled by ethnic Nuba in the Nuba Hills regions; by August 1992, the government had created more than 50,000 displaced, and a diabolical program was undertaken to forcibly relocate tens of thousands of Nuba in the drought stricken districts of North Kordofan. Although most Nuba were eventually allowed to return to South Kordofan, families that travelled from Khartoum to the camps of South Kordofan to collect their relatives and move them to the capital were not permitted to do so. Instead, the regional government began to implement a plan to congregate 160,000 displaced (Nuba and southern Sudanese) in 100 "Peace Villages"; UN officials who were allowed to visit a small number of selected Peace Villages found they were little more than prisons guarded by RCC Popular Defense Force recruits.

Conclusion

Few foreigners were allowed to live in or even visit Sudan following the Gulf War, and representatives of the Western media were treated like typhoid carriers. Thus, it was easy for indigenous Islamic "nongovernmental" organizations, (Islamic Da'wa, Islamic-African Relief Agency, a government-reorganized Sudanese Red Crescent organization, and the Nidda al-Jihad organization that supported the Popular Defense Forces), to supersede PVOS and foreign aid agencies. In July 1982, the United Nations OLS office in Sudan submitted a "Comprehensive Plan for Access" to the RCC, but the attempt to revive OLS and its "corridors of tranquility" went nowhere. Indeed, given the diminished PVO presence in the both the North and the South, and the factional infighting that was shredding the SPLA in the South, the RCC had no reason to support the plan. Certainly, donor interest in Su-
### DISTRIBUTION OF SOUTHERN SUDANESE DISPLACED/REFUGEES IN GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN-CONTROLLED REGIONS/UNHCR CAMPS

**March 1993**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Number Displaced (Estimate 3/1993)</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td><strong>SOUTHERN SUDAN</strong></td>
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ESTIMATED DISPLACED/Refugees 4/1993: (2,715,000+)

ESTIMATED DISPLACED/Refugees 4/1989: (2,000,000+) UN/USAID-Sudan

Compiled by JMBurr, April 1993.

Sudan reached its nadir in mid-1992 when RCC security forces arrested United Nations, European Community, German (GTZ), and USAID personnel employed in Juba. In the latter case, the U.S. Embassy response was both tardy and ineffectual, and a trusted and well-loved Sudanese USAID employee of many years service was executed as an SPLA spy. Thereafter, United States efforts at the United Nations led to the passage of a resolution demonstrating widespread discontent with the
condition of human rights in Sudan. The resolution was supported by 102 nations while Sudan received the backing of only Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Syria in the Muslim world. The non-Muslim nations of Cuba and Myanmar also voted in support of Sudan.

In December, the RCC announced it had reached agreement with the SPLA on a UN-brokered plan to supervise the delivery of food aid in southern Sudan. The plan, similar to that used in the first Operation Lifeline Sudan program, proposed the use of the Nile River corridor to supply food from Kosti to Juba. However, no sooner was the plan presented to PVOs than the RCC imposed a number of strictures within the country agreements that permitted foreign aid agencies to operate in Sudan. Realistically, by 1993, Western agencies had worn out their welcome in northern Sudan. The 1991 rains were generally good, and after the irrigated croplands provided a record harvest, the north probably benefitted from a small grain surplus; in 1992, the rains were again good and the drought in Darfur was finally broken. There were still more than 2.5 million southern displaced located in areas under the control of the Khartoum government, nearly all of whom were in great need. (Note table, on preceding page.) But for Western agencies that had returned to Sudan, the RCC provided practically no opportunity to work either in the regions or among the Khartoum displaced. In the capital area and the countryside, the distribution of humanitarian assistance had been politicized through the instrument of Islamic organizations that coupled proselytizing with services.

In April, the United Nations, in what had become an annual peregrination, approached the international donor community for additional funding for a new OLS program in Sudan. The UN wanted $130 million for a program in southern Sudan where, it claimed, starvation was “rampant” and some 2.8 million people were at risk of starvation.9 Cynics wondered why Western donors would provide funds to a nation that restricted access to areas in need under its own control, or to a nation that the UN’s own OLS information officer scored for its relentless and indiscriminate bombing of “civilian population centers in the south, usually with old Soviet-made cargo planes flying at 12,000 feet or higher over rebel-held areas and dropping 500-pound bombs out of the back cargo hatch.”10

As the Western agencies turned their gaze to southern Sudan and began to consider once again the provision of assistance to the hundreds of thousands of southern Sudanese still snared in a cycle of war, dislocation, drought, flood and famine, they had little to be ashamed of after years of service in Sudan. Certainly, the same could not be said of the RCC, and its unhappy reign that seemed destined to endure for some time to come.
Footnotes


16. The New York Times, “Dying by the Thousands, ...


CARE was the largest of the expatriate NGOs, and it was the organization most willing to work with the RCC. It could not also work in the South, for that might jeopardize its program in the North. Beginning in 1989, its work in the North, whether in the distribution of relief food or in the creation of displaced camps in North Kordofan, had been problem-plagued and thus provided a clear caution to any major food distri-
bution program that USAID-Sudan might undertake. Founded in response to European needs following World War II, CARE has ceased to be an exclusively American aid agency. Nevertheless, because it had extensive contracts with the Agency for International Development, it could usually be counted on--and arm-twisting often occurred--when other organizations were uninterested in taking part in a major food distribution program.

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., Cable 10006, September 24, 1990.

74. Ibid.


81. Ibid.


90. SPLM/SPLA General Headquarters, WP/51/Abuja, TLK, "Legal Framework for the Peaceful Resolution of the Civil War in the Sudan (Interim Arrangements)," (location unknown), August 9, 1992.