

FOCUS

CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN

Sudanese politics are turbulent at the best of times, with the army providing the power base of President Jaafar Nimeiri as he balances between the ambitions of rival religious, political and regional factions. Recent reports suggest that Nimeiri's balance may finally have slipped, and that the Sudan is seeing the re-emergence of civil war between the Islamic north and the non-Islamic south.

The recent introduction of Sharia (Islamic) law in the Sudan has only made the renewal of civil strife more likely. It is opposed by groups from all parts of the country; however, particularly vocal opposition has come from southerners, who make up one-third of the population, and who perceive any Islamicisation of Sudanese institutions as a direct threat to their rights as non-Islamic peoples. The south is particularly concerned at the moment as this measure follows others which have re-organised the administration in the southern region, and which are seen as contravening the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 which established the south's status as an autonomous region, a status won after 17 years of armed struggle by guerrilla forces known as Anya-Nya.

Tension has been building in the south for well over a year now. Since September 1982 anti-government guerrillas calling themselves Anya-Nya 2 have been attacking army detachments, police posts, and Arab merchants in a band of country across the northern part of the southern region. At the end of June, five foreign missionaries and wildlife experts were held hostage on the isolated Boma plateau near the Ethiopian frontier, in an attempt by a faction within the rebel movement calling themselves the Southern Sudan Liberation Front to gain publicity. Southern army detachments have mutinied at Bor, Pibor, Aiyat, Akobo, Nassir, Nzara, Rumbek, Torit, Malakal and Kapoeta. The scale of these mutinies varies: however, it appears as if over 1,000 armed troops, many of them experienced in guerrilla warfare, have left their posts to form the backbone of the Anya-Nya 2 movement.

The goal of the rebels is to achieve the secession of the south. Their political stance is unclear; however, certain key leaders appear to be communist. For the bulk of those involved the issue is primarily one of nationalism. It seems that the rebels are receiving support from Libya and Ethiopia in the form of arms, training and



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broadcasting facilities. There have been attempts to set up a political wing of the movement, once again broadly communist in orientation, although it contains members not previously noted for their communist sympathies.

The origins of the current unrest go back to the colonial policy of the Anglo-Egyptian government which left the southern Sudan at independence in 1956 under-developed even by the poor standards of other peripheral areas of the country. Southern opposition to being administered from Khartoum, fears about being policed by northern soldiers and policemen, and concern over Islamic economic and cultural domination led to the development of a long and bloody civil war in which several thousands of people lost their lives and over half a million refugees fled to neighbouring countries.

This ended in 1972 with the signing of the Agreement in Addis Ababa enshrining the southerner's rights to their own assembly and government. Anya-Nya guerrillas were absorbed into the police force and the army. It was provided that there should be a 50:50 balance between northern and southern troops in the region, and that the southern troops would be exempt from rotation to the north. The south was given the right to trade across its own frontiers with limited northern interference.

The peoples of the south were worn by 17 years of war, and most welcomed the chance to lead their lives within an autonomous region, rather than continuing a stalemated struggle. However southern mistrust of northern political intent has always remained close to the surface. Over the past few years several issues have emerged which have renewed southern

suspicion that the north is not truly committed to a real equality between the north and the south. Development efforts in the south have virtually all ended somewhat ignominiously with funds running out before project completion. There are, however, two massive capital intensive programmes currently underway in the southern region, oil exploration and the digging of the Jonglei canal. Southerners claim that the main beneficiaries of this work will be the north. The decision to pump the oil unrefined to Port Sudan has been regarded by many southerners as the theft of their resources and as an attempt to deprive the region of a valuable industrial investment. The Jonglei canal, designed to make more water available in the north and Egypt for irrigation agriculture, may affect the size of the Sudd marshes which in turn will alter the cattle carrying capacity of the land, and possibly result in social-economic problems for Dinka and Nuer cattle pastoralists.

The harassment of Dinka in the Abyei area, and the lack of response from Khartoum to their demands for a plebiscite to determine their regional affiliation, has provoked much bitterness in the north-west of the southern region. In October 1982 the national government signed a Charter of Integration with Egypt, which was greeted with alarm in the south, and provoked a riot in Rumbek where school students burnt down the provincial offices of the Sudan Socialist Union, the sole legal political party in the country. Meanwhile the impression that the northern government was attempting to cement relations with the Arab world at the expense of southern links with the Sudan's black African neighbours was reinforced by the restricting of trade across southern

frontiers.

On May 24 of this year the Addis Ababa Agreement, the symbol of Sudanese unity, was disregarded by Nimeiri through the issue of a presidential decree that divided the autonomous southern region into three. Southerners argue that under Article 2 of the Addis accord the abolition of the old regional government by decree is unconstitutional, and that it represents an attempt by Khartoum to divide and rule. Redivision has been a major contributory factor in the rapid growth in the nature and extent of armed opposition to the government. The prediction that the south would now be powerless to resist unwelcome northern legislation has now been legitimated by the introduction of Islamic law.

What are the prospects for the south? The demonstrations in Juba in mid-October protesting against Islamic law would appear to herald the increasing involvement of the Equatorian peoples of the southern part of the southern region in opposition to the central government. Nimeiri appears to have banked upon political rivalry amongst southerners preventing a united opposition emerging to counter northern measures. He was initially correct in this assessment as the regional government, elected in 1982 and predominantly composed of Equatorians, was in favour of redivision, seeing it as a strategy for removing their Nilotic opponents permanently from the political scene. However as the political and economic consequences of redivision have hit home, Equatorian opinion has swung round to the opposition. Any doubts in peoples' minds about where they stand have probably now been dispelled by the introduction of Islamic law. As it appears that it will be politically impossible for Nimeiri to rescind his re-division and Sharia law decrees, it would seem that the armed rebellion hitherto concentrated in Nilotic areas will shortly be spreading to Equatoria.

It is tragic enough that this exceedingly poor part of Africa should be sliding back into civil strife. However, on top of this, the sheer size and position of the Sudan make it a conflict with international ramifications. The extent of the oil reserves in the south suggests that Nimeiri will fight very hard to retain control over the southern region. Nimeiri is one of America's staunchest allies in north-east Africa, supporting the US policy towards Libya and Chad, and providing occasional facilities for the Rapid Deployment Force. The US cannot afford to leave him undefended in the face of Libyan attempts

to depose him, and in recent years have channelled considerable amounts of arms into the country. So far Libyan backed insurgency has involved dissident northern Sudanese in the northern part of the country. However the south is now turning to the Libyans for support. Meanwhile it is possible that the Ethiopians could gain from promoting the southern cause, enabling them to put pressure on Khartoum over the Sudan's attitude to the Eritrean and Tigrean issues.

In mid-November Nimeiri visited Europe and the United States where he met with Reagan. Whilst he was abroad reports were released by Khartoum of the massing of Ethiopian troops along the border opposite Kurmuk district. It was claimed that this was the prelude to an incursion into Sudanese territory. Meanwhile 11 foreign technicians working on the oil and Jonglei programmes were kidnapped in two separate incidents in the Bentiu and Jonglei areas. Khartoum reported that they were being held under threat of execution if political demands, including the repeal of Sharia law, were not met.

The Ethiopians have vigorously denied building up forces along the Sudanese border, a denial that must be given some weight following reports of independent observers. The foreign technicians have all been freed, through the intervention of the army according to Khartoum. Independent reports, however, suggest that they were released voluntarily by the rebels and were not under threat of death, rather that they were being held out of the way during Anya-Nya troop movements. It would seem that the reporting of these incidents should be seen in the light of Nimeiri's hopes to gain further arms from the West. Whether or not he has been successful has yet to be announced. The international wheeling has begun.

Brian Armstrong