

Michael Kevane
Department of Economics
Santa Clara University
mkevane@scu.edu
August 21, 1998

To Fight Terrorism from Sudan, More is Required

In the fight against international terrorism, the United States is playing a risky hand with the bombing of Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum. The current military rulers of Sudan do indeed pose a serious threat to global stability, not to mention to the thousands of Sudanese who will continue to die in the famines and fighting that have followed the regime's intensification of the civil war in the south. But the solution to the problem must lie in the overthrow of the regime. The bombing may have delayed that, by undermining the fragile coalition of parties opposing the regime. Those parties form the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which since 1997 has been coordinating with the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in opening a second front along the Ethiopian border with Sudan. All observers agree that the southern rebel movement needs to be allied with the majority northern (and religious-based) political parties. Those northern parties now have a problem: will they have the stomach to continue to oppose the regime as it uses the bombing to rally ordinary citizens with nationalist, Islamic and anti-American rhetoric?

This is a serious problem because the leaders of the northern-based parties, Sadiq al-Mahdi of the Umma Party and Mohamed Osman al-Mirghani of the Democratic Unionist Party, have a long history of vacillating, conciliatory politics. They both have had agendas promoting Islamic-oriented rather than secular constitutions for the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Sudan. They have wavered on the fundamental conundrum of *shari'a*, Islamic law, in Sudanese society. The bombing may be the 'wedge issue' that drives some of the NDA members back into the camp of the National Islamic Front's military regime. That would spell disaster for the millions of southern victims of famine and civil war.

The foreign policy of the United States has to be based on a combination of protecting its own citizens from international terrorism *and* concern for the enormous suffering in southern Sudan caused by the regime's internal terrorism. That suffering is simply too large to ignore. Hundreds of children are dying every day from starvation and associated disease; others are captured as hostages and slaves; others are forced to fight using weapons they can barely carry. The nightmare of the people of the southern Sudan demands remedies.

For the bombing to be successful, then, the United States has to follow-up with tangible actions to consolidate and strengthen the NDA, the SPLA, and the United Nation's-run Operation Lifeline that provides emergency food relief to the starving. An invitation should be extended to John Garang, leader of the SPLA, Sadiq al-Mahdi, and Mohamed Osman al-Mirghani, to come to Washington with other key players for intensive strategizing. This should be done immediately, in advance of the NDA general meeting in Eritrea of September 26. The United States should be prepared to offer specific assistance for the rebel forces, beyond the \$20 million in non-military equipment pledged last year. In addition, should encourage the United Nations to take a much more aggressive stance in sustaining Operation Lifeline. Should the military regime once again threaten relief flights and convoys, peacekeeping escorts should be made available immediately.

Finally, the United States should commit itself in advance to a generous package of development assistance for specific projects that will lead to tangible and immediate benefits to ordinary Sudanese citizens once a transition regime is installed. Most ordinary Sudanese do not actively support the NDA because they are not convinced that their situations will be improved. They fear the factionalism and endless rhetoric of past experiments with parliamentarianism. They already have a stick, in oppression of the current regime, now they need a carrot. Promise to rehabilitate the giant Gezira and Kenana irrigation schemes, the power stations and dams, the destroyed roads, the southern capital Juba, the burned out schools of the south. Development expenditures by the U.S. might total a lot more than the costs of the military operation, and getting involved in the messy politics of Sudanese factionalism might divert attention from other foreign policy concerns, but they are likely to be far more successful in the long-term in reducing the threat of international terrorism.

Michael Kevane is co-editor of a forthcoming book about western Sudan, where he lived for two years. He teaches economics at Santa Clara University.