

A detailed historical map of Sudan and surrounding regions, including Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Red Sea. The map is densely labeled with place names, dates, and geographical features. A large black rectangular box is superimposed over the upper right portion of the map, containing the title text in white.

# SUDAN AND KOSOVO: A FALSE AND DANGEROUS COMPARISON

THE EUROPEAN-SUDANESE  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
COUNCIL  
17 Bedford Square,  
London WC1B 3JA ENGLAND  
Telephone: 020 7872 5434  
Telefax: 020 7753 2824

WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

# **SUDAN AND KOSOVO: A FALSE AND DANGEROUS COMPARISON**

The attempts by NATO to militarily force the Yugoslavian federal government to change their policies with regard to the Yugoslavian province of Kosovo, initially to force the Yugoslavian state to grant Kosovo some form of self-government or autonomy (NATO aims changed as the war progressed), has led to calls to repeat this action with regard to other countries also experiencing ethnic conflict. Sudan has been mentioned by several commentators. Typical examples have been articles such as that written by Francis Deng, entitled 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', in the *Washington Post* of 30 April 1999; 'Sudan: The Unending War', the same newspaper's editorial of 7 May; and, in Britain, articles such as that entitled 'A moral imperative - then why not Sudan?', which appeared in the *Scotsman* newspaper on 1 April 1999. The Christian fundamentalist lobby within the United States has also made the most of the opportunity to further Islamophobia, with broadcasts such as 'Sudan: An African Kosovo', by Gary Lane of the Christian Broadcasting Network. All of these comments have presented a remarkably superficial, and inaccurate, comparison between events in the Yugoslavian province of Kosovo and southern Sudan, calling at the same time for American intervention.

While both Yugoslavia and Sudan clearly have internal conflict within their borders, political, constitutional and social circumstances within the two countries are very different and defies any further comparison.

## **Southern Sudan is administered and governed by southern Sudanese**

All the articles in question conspicuously failed to mention that the political status of southern Sudan and the involvement of southern Sudanese within the Sudanese political process. The Sudanese Vice-President is from southern Sudan, several Federal government ministers are southerners, scores of Members of the Federal Parliament are southern Sudanese, and four hundred southern Sudanese occupy other key government positions. By way of comparison, no Kosovars have served as Vice-Presidents of Yugoslavia; there were no Kosovar federal or state ministers or governors in Yugoslavia: there clearly were no Kosovar governors of Kosovo. Yet southern Sudanese have occupied, and continue to hold all these positions, and more, in Sudan. The federal system in Sudan ensures that each of the ten southern states in Sudan has a governor and legislature elected from within the state. The 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement also established a southern government, the Southern Coordinating Council, headed by Dr Riek Machar, a prominent southern leader and former rebel, which governs from Juba, the capital of southern Sudan.

## **There is no Islamic *sharia* law in southern Sudan**

While more than two-thirds of the Sudanese population is Muslim, southern Sudan is largely non-Muslim. Christians account for between 10-18 percent of the southern population. There is also a sizeable Muslim population in the south, but by far the majority of southern Sudanese are animists. Whereas previous Sudanese governments had administered southern Sudan under Islamic *sharia* law, the present Government exempted southern Sudan from *sharia* law in 1991 precisely because there was no Muslim majority. Even the American government has confirmed this exemption.

It is self-evident that there has been a clear attempt by the Sudanese state to meet southern Sudanese political and constitutional aspirations. In comparison, it is clear that there was not even a token attempt to integrate Kosovo and Kosovars within the Yugoslav federal government, or to address any of their political concerns, and certainly nothing which in any way matched southern Sudanese engagement within the Sudanese government.

### **Sudan has agreed a referendum on southern secession**

Perhaps more importantly, given attempts to compare Sudan and Kosovo, the Sudanese government has since 1997 offered an internationally-recognised referendum whereby the people of southern Sudan would be able to choose for the first time ever whether they wish to remain part of a united Sudan or to go their own way. This offer has even been acknowledged by the SPLA rebel movement in the south. This offer has also been written into the 1998 Sudanese Constitution. It is clear that in Kosovo, the federal government of Yugoslavia was not even prepared to offer limited autonomy, let alone separation. From the humanitarian perspective, the Sudanese government has been cooperating since 1989 with the United Nations in the unprecedented Operation Lifeline Sudan, which provides humanitarian relief to both government and rebel-controlled areas of southern Sudan. The government has also been party to a year-long ceasefire in Bahr al-Ghazal, that part of southern Sudan most affected by the 1998 famine, and in August 1999 declared a unilateral comprehensive ceasefire throughout all of Sudan.

### **Southern Sudanese flock to Khartoum: few Kosovars fled to Belgrade**

Perhaps the most telling contradiction of attempts to draw a comparison between Sudan and Kosovo are the choices made by southern Sudanese refugees. One of the stark features of the Kosovo tragedy was the physical flood of Kosovar refugees out of the province, refugees forced to leave their home by Serbian ethnic cleansing. As was all too evident these Kosovars largely fled to Albania, to be with their fellow ethnic Albanians. None of the articles in question mentioned the fact that at least two million southerners, refugees from the war in southern Sudan, now voluntarily live in Khartoum, Sudan's capital located in northern Sudan. That is to say that almost half of the southern population now live in the north of Sudan. In 1998, the Catholic Church stated that at one point one thousand southerners a day were flocking into Khartoum, a one thousand kilometre trip northwards. These southern refugees have chosen to head north towards Khartoum rather than to cross open borders into neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Kenya, areas geographically and ethnically much closer to them. In the Kosovo example, quite the opposite was very clearly the case, with refugees fleeing central government rather than heading towards the capital. In Sudan, therefore, quite the reverse of ethnic cleansing appears to be the reality. It is a largely unspoken reality which fatally undermines the credibility of those who naively or maliciously seek to portray Sudan as a second Kosovo.

We have seen the difficulties and dangers of international intervention in the case of Kosovo, where there would appear to have been a clear case for action. Attempts to superficially impose the Kosovo model elsewhere, and particularly on Sudan, are simply unrealistic and reckless. Ill-informed articles such as those which appeared in the *Washington Post* and *Scotsman* may naively serve to fuel Christian fundamentalists and Islamophobes in their religious crusade against an independent Sudan. Such articles also consciously or unconsciously provide those sections of the United States government which continue to seek to militarily destabilise Sudan with the facade of the justification of acting in response to "public opinion". Such articles are also encouraged by the American government as a means of diverting attention away from Washington's

disastrously-flawed 1998 cruise missile attack on the al-Shifa medicines factory in Khartoum, part of its equally disastrous policy of destabilising Sudan in general.

### **American Government support for ethnic cleansing in southern Sudan**

If there is a comparison to be made between southern Sudan and Kosovo by way of ethnic cleansing, it is one which reflects very badly indeed on the American government. It is an open secret that Washington has been militarily and politically supporting the SPLA rebel movement in southern Sudan.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is the SPLA that has been actively involved in the most blatant and ruthless ethnic cleansing seen in southern Sudan.

The *Economist*, for example, has described the SPLA as “at its worst... little more than an armed gang of Dinkas... killing, looting and raping”. Africa Watch, African Rights, Amnesty and others have provided chilling examples of SPLA ethnic cleansing of tribes such as the Nuer, Shilluk, Mandari, Taposa and Murle in southern Sudan.

Amnesty International states that the SPLA has attacked other rebel factions and civilian groups “for ethnic reasons”. Amnesty International also stated that the SPLA has destroyed Nuer villages, murdering tribesmen and displacing tens of thousands of people<sup>2</sup>. As but one example of SPLA ethnic cleansing, Amnesty reported that in April 1993, Garang’s forces “massacred about 200 Nuer villagers, many of them children, in villages around the town of Ayod. Some of the victims were shut in huts and burnt to death. Others were shot.”<sup>3</sup> In Kosovo, this would have been a war crime: in Sudan, such activity is militarily and diplomatically supported by Washington.

Even John Prendergast, who until recently served on the White House National Security Council, has confirmed that the SPLA showing an “absolute disregard for (the) human rights” of the population in Equatoria in southern Sudan. Prendergast stated that the SPLA had engaged in “village burning, cattle and crop stealing and destruction, denial of food aid” resulting in “increasing displacement of rural populations.” Prendergast personally stated that the SPLA is seen in Equatoria as “an army of occupation.”<sup>4</sup> The BBC has spoken in almost identical terms, reporting in June 1999 that the SPLA is seen as “an army of occupation” by Equatorian tribes.<sup>5</sup>

This American support for ethnic cleansing and terrorism was studiously ignored by those articles calling for American intervention. Any American intervention would only but serve the interests of a rebel movement that is clearly engaged in the murder and displacement of people because of their tribal or ethnic origin. It is disturbing that the United States government is militarily and financially supporting such an obviously questionable movement. It is also precisely such support for the rebel movement which is bolstering the SPLA’s intransigence with regard to the peace process in Sudan. The American government has already intervened far too much in the Sudanese conflict. Those advocating further intervention should refrain from making superficial comparisons between Kosovo and Sudan and acknowledge the bloody consequences of previous American involvement in Sudan and Africa in general.

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<sup>1</sup> See, ‘Sudan’s American-aided guerillas’, *The Economist*, 25 January 1997; ‘Sudan Accuses US of Supplying Rebels with Mines’, News Article by Xinhua, 21 January 1999, at 12:53:58; ‘Albright Meets Sudan Rebels, Pledges US Support’, News Article by Reuters, 10 December 1997, at 09:05 EST.

<sup>2</sup> *Sudan: The Ravages of war: Political Killings and Humanitarian Disaster*, Amnesty International, London, AI Index: AFR 54/29/93, 29 September 1993, pp.21, 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Amnesty International Report 1994*, Amnesty International, London, 1994, p.275.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.57.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Growing friction in rebel-held southern Sudan’, News Article by BBC, 9 June 1999, at 16:36 GMT