



Marginalisation and violence

Considering origins of insurgency and peace implementation in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan

INTRODUCTION

Renewed interest in investigating the causes of conflict in Africa's Sahel region can be partly credited to Homer-Dixon's work¹, in which he links 'environmental scarcity' and violent conflict. This framework has led to a number of analyses on the causes of insurgencies in the Sahel, which have supported the role of natural resources in conflict.² However, although natural resources are an important factor in local conflicts in the region, it is necessary to view them in the social and political context in which they acquire significance.

This paper addresses two issues. First, it builds on an argument in earlier research on the Nuba Mountains that purely resource-based explanations are not sufficient to find comprehensive measures for conflict resolution,³ showing that any resource scarcity explanation needs to be incorporated in its prevailing socio-cultural and political context. It is further argued that the mere existence of resources is not necessarily a reason for conflict and that resources only gain prominence and become conflict-prone in the social context that dictates their desirability and value. For instance, in the case of the prolonged wars in Sudan's periphery, resource-focused analyses alone cannot explain why conflicts have been triggered in these politically and socio-economically marginalised areas. An explanation incorporating resource politics in a broad state and governance-based analysis with a significant socio-political dimension does, however, allow a conceptualised interpretation of these conflicts.⁴

Second, the paper provides insights into the causes of conflict in the early 1980s and the current situation, which to an extent resemble each other. Whereas in the late 1970s and early 1980s economic, political and security conditions deteriorated sharply in southern Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains in conjunction with the failure of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, the current deterioration is linked to the exclusive

and narrow base of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Both agreements were essentially exclusive power-sharing deals between the main rebel organisations and the government regime. Consequently, a broad-based analysis of the origins of war in the 1980s is necessary for a deeper understanding of the current situation and to provide well-founded policy recommendations to minimise the possibility of another large-scale conflict in the future. In an effort to implement any such recommendations, the extensive role of the international community is fundamental.

The paper consists of six sections. The following section provides a brief historical background to the Nuba and their general relationship with neighbouring peoples and the Sudanese state in an attempt to highlight Nuba grievances against the state and the governing elite. Subsequent sections examine the process of conflict formation in the Nuba Mountains in the 1980s, provide insights on the conflict and the peace processes that culminated in the CPA, and analyse the current and possible future situation in the Nuba Mountains.

THE NUBA: BRIEF BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Although the Nuba are often referred to as one people in context of the largely shared history of external oppression and subjugation, they comprise over 50 distinct ethnic communities with individual languages, dialects and cultural practices.^{5,6} The Nuba are mainly farmers, but also animal herders. The majority are Christianised and Islamised, although some practice traditional religions as well. They inhabit the Nuba Mountains region in central Sudan, which comprises between 30 000 km² (narrowly defined) and 80 000 km² (broadly defined).⁷ The total Nuba population is estimated at 3,7 million with the majority living currently in the Nuba Mountains region.⁸

Little is known of the origins of the Nuba except that they inhabited more extensive areas in south-central

Sudan before they withdrew under pressure towards South Kordofan from the margins of the Keira and Sennar kingdoms, which governed Darfur and the central riverine region of contemporary Sudan. These kingdoms subjected the Nuba communities in Kordofan to violent extraction of resources, in particular slaves. Caravan routes were established to send many Nuba captives to Egypt and beyond the Red Sea. In the process the Nuba were driven to the mountains by the Baggara,⁹ who occupied the plains in the western, northern and central parts of the mountain region in the 16th century. The ecosystem in the Nuba Mountains, which is fertile during the rainy season (June to September), could not sustain a large Nuba population, even with the adoption of terraced farming methods. Consequently, the Nuba willingly participated in the slave trading practices of the Keira and Sennar, selling off excess population, including children, largely through barter arrangements with their neighbours.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the kings of the Tagali Nuba, whose villages were also raided by the Keira and Senna, enslaved parts of neighbouring Nuba communities. By the 18th century the region became renowned as a source of slaves and gold, with the slaves being often sold in the slave markets of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹

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In the 1820s Muhammad Ali, Ottoman viceroy and governor of Egypt, annexed Kordofan as part of his newly created Turco-Egyptian polity. As a result the people of the Nuba Mountains were subjected to even more intense and violent attack.¹² Every year thousands were sent to Egypt as part of an official policy to man Ali's army with men from all over the reign. Others were either carried into slavery to northern Sudan or other parts of the Ottoman Empire, or were captured by the Baggara to pay the taxes levied by the Turco-Egyptian administration. In general, men became slave soldiers, while women were often sold to harems. It was normal for soldiers to keep pregnant women and children for themselves in lieu of salary.¹³ However, as a result of European abolitionist pressure, the Egyptian crown moderated this policy in the late 1800s. Officially at least, the Nuba became less pressed, although unofficial raids by the Baggara and slave lords persisted. The official policy change allowed the Tagali kingdom to regain limited power and even defy Turco-Egyptian overrule in parts of the Nuba Mountains.

In the 1880s and 1890s the Nuba Mountains region was severely affected by the Mahdist rule in Sudan. Although Tagali kings had promised the Mahdi neutrality during the rebellion against Turco-Egyptian overrule, Mahdist troops turned against the kingdom and its royal family was eventually massacred. At this time, the Mahdi's followers, principally the Baggara *Ansar*, subjected parts of the mountains to rampant slave raiding, mainly for the military, until Mahdist rule collapsed in the face of an Anglo-Egyptian invasion. Most Nuba captives returned home, bringing with them the Islamic religion and firearms.¹⁴ Overall, the 19th century experience '... imposed a common destiny upon the Nuba conducive to the development of a loose unity and a feeling of a common identity of being "Nuba". In other words, a common ethnic identity was created among diverse groups by the actions of other more powerful groups.'¹⁵

Initially, Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule brought more violence to the Nuba, as well as greater isolation from the neighbouring Baggara. Pacification and subjugation of the Nuba Mountains required tens of punitive patrols organised principally during the first three decades of the Condominium period. During this period the troops serving the Anglo-Egyptian administration conscripted men forcibly into the army, confiscated cattle and razed villages.¹⁶ From the 1920s onwards the Nuba Mountains were administered as closed district¹⁷ in accordance with a 'Southern Policy' intended to hinder Arab cultural, Islamic and nationalist influences extending southwards from the northern provinces. This policy also included the replacement of the northern *jallaba*, an influential class of north-central riverine 'Arab' merchants, with Greek and Syrian Christian traders. As part of a policy of native administration the colonial masters handpicked local leaders to attend to policing and taxation, functions quite distinct from traditional conduct, and the Nuba were encouraged to provide labour for agricultural ventures in the plains.¹⁸

According to the 'Southern Policy', the Nuba were expected to maintain their own cultures and to reject Arab influences. As a result, the Nuba Mountains was governed as a separate entity within greater Kordofan. The policy of separation was reflected in the education policy implemented by rudimentary and scarce Christian missionary schools monitored by the government, but abandoned during the 1940s and Arabic was made the general language of instruction. The 'Southern Policy' proved unviable in the Nuba Mountains, in part because of its historical links with the northern provinces and in part because of objections by the Baggara, who were exerting pressure for the Nuba Mountains to be re-incorporated in Kordofan.¹⁹

Meanwhile, cotton cultivation was introduced to raise tax income and to provide employment, but the farms

were quickly taken over by small Arab entrepreneurs for whom the Nuba began to work, thereby negating the policy of isolation. Nuba migrants in the north looking for employment also became an increasing problem, as the British were unable to implement feasible alternatives for local development.²⁰ Although the policy of cultural separation was maintained, in 1929 the Nuba Mountains were linked to Kordofan as a single administrative zone.

When the 'Southern Policy' was abandoned in 1946 and Sudan was preparing for independence, very little progress had been made in the southern provinces and the Nuba Mountains with regard to improving the level of development. These regions had been marginalised relative to those of north-central Sudan where practically all economic infrastructure and services were being deliberately concentrated. However in the process of de-colonisation an attempt was made to encourage Arabic in the Nuba Mountains, some roads and facilities for water supply were built, and cotton cultivation was promoted. However, as in the case of southern Sudan, these efforts were too few and too late, and despite the British later congratulating themselves for having supervised the integration of the Nuba into colonial state structures,²¹ they remained subjected to the sustained northern Sudanese perception of being largely primitive, uneducated, and poor second-class citizens and low-level labourers, which deprived them collectively of economic development and opportunities.²²

Growing political consciousness among the Nuba resulted in the leadership challenging the Arab-Muslim dominated hierarchy

This view of the Nuba has dictated relations between 'Arab'²³ groups in northern Sudan and the Nuba over the centuries. But growing political consciousness among the Nuba, which has inspired heightened expectations for improved well-being and opportunities, has resulted in the leadership increasingly challenging the Arab-Muslim dominated hierarchy institutionalised in societal and state structures.²⁴ Unequal treatment based on attitudes arising from this hierarchy,²⁵ ongoing discrimination stemming from a perception that Arab culture and language are superior, and racial differentiation continue to be significant elements determining relations. The attitudes of some 'Arab' groups towards the Nuba resuscitate memories of slavery, since they are rooted in 'arrogance' and continue to be 'racially motivated'.²⁶

After Sudan's independence, such attitudes have resulted in growing political confrontation between a part of the Nuba intelligentsia, who demand improved social status and material life, and the 'Arab'-Muslim government that seeks to maintain the social *status quo* by deliberately limiting development in the marginalised areas in the periphery of state control, including the Nuba Mountains. This situation has encouraged some Nuba to adopt Islam superficially as means of social ascendancy, while at the same time retaining their older cultural customs and beliefs.²⁷

Sudan achieved its independence in the midst of growing political turmoil in the southern provinces. Disturbances in various parts of the south in 1955 resulted in government reprisals, but increasing pressure by political groups of the marginalised periphery resulted in the country's democratic leadership handing over political power to the closely associated military in 1958. The conflict escalated during the Abboud regime (1958-1964) as the army embarked on a heavy-handed policy of Arabisation and Islamisation in the southern provinces. The Nuba Mountains were hardly affected by the conflict, except in terms of the regime's assimilation policy that translated into the increased use of Arabic, the introduction of Arabic names and conversion to Islam. However, even Christianity gained some ground among the Nuba during this period, although religious conversion became more pronounced during the war in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1964 a sustained civilian uprising in the northern provinces toppled the Abboud regime and resulted in a period of renewed democratic politics that permitted the proliferation of political parties. A year earlier, members of the Nuba intelligentsia had founded the General Union of the Nuba Mountains (GUN), headed by Philip Abbas Ghaboush, which was subsequently legalised and won eight parliamentary seats in the 1965 elections.²⁸ The stated motive for this political mobilisation was to improve the well-being of the Nuba, although personal aspirations played a significant role. Despite high expectations and collaboration with southerners and the Beja,²⁹ GUN achieved little at the national level towards elevating living standards in the Nuba Mountains or elsewhere in the marginalised state periphery.³⁰ The democratic interlude came to an abrupt end as a group of army officers, under influence of the free officer movement in Egypt, took power in 1969 and established another military regime headed by Jaafar Nimeiri. The Nuba political leadership suffered a major setback around this time since Abbas was forced to flee the country and was sentenced to death *in absentia* following an aborted coup scheduled ahead of power being seized by Nimeiri.³¹

Following the 1965 elections GUN had split into two factions. The faction led by Abbas emphasised the

common Nuba identity and African solidarity, while the other faction headed by Mahmud Hasib collaborated with the neighbouring Baggara and *jallaba*.³² Such divisions, involving the aspirations of Nuba politicians, jobs, personal influence and higher financial status, were often manipulated by the northern sectarian parties and other elements of the governing elite, and have been a persistent theme among Nuba political intelligentsia, thereby perpetuating the weakness of the Nuba political movement.

Economic improvement in Sudan in the early 1970s, stimulated by external financing, opened new opportunities for the Nuba. It encouraged labour migration northwards where the economy was strongest and where the main development projects continued to be initiated. As in the past, the Nuba generally continued to be employed in lower-level jobs as labourers and assistants, and in the security services, including the military in which they have a long tradition. Labour migration placed strain on many women who in the absence of their men became the heads of households. This increased their desire to move to the cities.³³ After Nimeiri's increasingly Islamic orientation in the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, the government provided grants to Nuba in the north to study Islam and return to their communities to proselytise. However, the penetration of Islam, along with Christianity, continued to be hindered by the prevalence of traditional beliefs and customs.³⁴

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CONFLICT FORMATION IN THE NUBA MOUNTAINS IN THE 1980S

In the mid-1980s large-scale violence broke out in the Nuba Mountains. This was the result of a number of factors related to the political and economic marginalisation of the Nuba by groups dominating the Sudanese state. The effects of marginalisation were compounded by increasing political awareness and organisational capability among the Nuba intelligentsia, which sought to increase its political influence and improve the social status and living standards of its constituents. However, by the 1970s the belief that the Nuba politicians were

able to deliver³⁵ on their promises of improved well-being was wavering.

Central government policies added fuel to the discontent. Its agricultural development policy in South Kordofan from the 1960s until the mid-1980s, which was aimed at transforming the sector, was largely founded upon promoting the activities of the state-owned Mechanised Farming Corporation (MFC), which received financing from the World Bank and the EU, among other institutions.³⁶ In 1968 the government passed the Mechanised farming Corporation Act, which threatened the Nuba-owned land, traditionally considered community property, but that ultimately belonged to the families exploiting it. A clause in the act stipulating that 60 per cent of the land belonged to local people and that land claims were restricted to one estate per individual owner were ignored, principally by the *jallaba* and commercial enterprises controlled by high-level northern military officers.³⁷ The main concentration of agricultural schemes was in Habila where large-scale government concessions secured land for private exploitation to grow food and cash crops. Only some poorer Nuba found benefit in working as labourers in the ventures.³⁸ It should be noted that these ventures continued after the war broke out, as the interests of the owners merging with those of the military resulted in a strategy aimed at generating displaced people as laborers for the schemes.³⁹

The Unregistered Land Act of 1970 deprived the Nuba of more land to permit the extension of large agricultural schemes. The act stipulated that all land not registered before it came into force would be deemed state property. This dispossessed many groups, including large numbers of Nuba of the land they had cultivated for generations and added to the population pressure in the plains of the Nuba Mountains as increasing numbers of Baggara and other northerners came to settle, manage and work on the agricultural schemes.

In addition, following the introduction of these mechanised agriculture schemes, the Baggara, principally Misiria Zuruq and Hawazma who were neighbours to the Nuba and who grazed their animals in the mountains during the dry season, found their traditional pasture routes sealed off. They increasingly reoriented their herds to the Nuba lands where these destroyed crops and occupied wells.⁴⁰ The situation was compounded by a drought that obliged sections of the Baggara to encroach on the lands of the Nuba for longer periods. Local administrative reforms also undermined the standing of the traditional leadership and weakened annual dispute settlement mechanisms, in particular the annual meetings on land and water between the Nuba and the Baggara.⁴¹ As a consequence, the Baggara-Nuba relationship deteriorated,⁴² a situation that was affected further by an economic downturn in the late 1970s.

The rapidly worsening situation in the early 1970s gave renewed impetus to political agitation by many Nuba leaders. In 1972, the Nuba League (*al-Abna Jibal al-Nuba*), presided over by Kamil Kuwa Mekki, was formed by secondary school students in Kadugli to counter an attempt by the Islamic Direction (*Ittijaha al-Islami*), linked to the emerging National Islamic Front (NIF) and its leader Hassan al-Turabi to control student organisations at Tilo. In 1977, those members of the Nuba League who had entered Khartoum University in 1976 and 1977 formed Komolo, a group led by Yousif Kuwa Mekki. It secured the membership of prominent Nuba leaders, such as Abdel Aziz al-Hilu, Daniel Kodi, Ismael Khamis Jelab, Telefon Kuku and Neroun Philip. Operating in a clandestine manner, it began recruiting students and teachers in the Tilo Secondary School where Yousif Kuwa started teaching in 1980.

Dissatisfaction in the 1970s related to the dispossession of land, political manoeuvrings of the national and regional governments, and economic deterioration

By 1977 the situation in Kordofan had deteriorated to such an extent that even Hasib, who had used his ties with the Baggara and *jallaba* to become governor of Kordofan, called publicly for regional autonomy despite the fact that this put him at odds with Nimeiri. In 1981 Yousif Kuwa was elected to the recently established regional government of Kordofan in El Obeid and became deputy speaker. But he was overwhelmed by 'Arab' representatives from both North and South Kordofan, who used their political influence to distribute material benefits, including land, to their supporters along ethnic lines.⁴³ Meanwhile Nuba concerns relating to education and development remained largely ignored. Goods, such as fuel and commodities, including sugar and wheat that were rationed by the regime in the times of scarcity in the early 1980s, were deliberately distributed along ethnic lines through a district system.⁴⁴ Roughly at the same time, Kodi became a member of the National Assembly, but was unable to affect policy. Still, Komolo support had been instrumental in propelling the two leaders to their respective political positions.

At this juncture, yet another Nuba party, the Sudan National Party (SNP), appeared. It was led by Philip Abbas, who sought to form a regional movement at the national level, instead of strictly Nuba-based organisations such as Komolo and GUN. The SNP became a rallying point for those Nuba who believed that they had been marginalised. It began collaborating with southern as well as western (Fur) and eastern (Beja) groups and later joined a coalition, the Union of Sudan African Parties (USAP), in the national parliament, with Abbas becoming the chairman. The SNP also maintained contact with the residual armed southern factions, the Anyanya II.⁴⁵ Whereas USAP campaigned against Nimeiri's 1983 Islamic laws and for the redistribution of wealth and political power, Abbas encouraged Nuba recruits to join the Anyanya II based in Ethiopia, while Kodi, a member of the Komolo underground organisation in Khartoum and Kadugli, arranged for its members to join the rebel camps. Later, in 1982, returning Nuba recruits engaged in Anyanya II training in the Nuba Mountains. Even so, there was little violence, unlike in the southern Sudan where a number of army mutinies among southern troops broke out in 1983.

Frustration within the Nuba political class was an important factor encouraging the orchestration of clandestine subversive activities against the government. The cultural estrangement and employment difficulties resulting from the deemed low status of the Nuba under the Arab-Muslim-dominated social hierarchy fed such feelings among the intelligentsia. This is expressed in the following quotation:

'Those who benefited from the government-sponsored schools became alienated from their people and culture. After completion of secondary and tertiary education, Nuba graduates were frustrated further as they found themselves not considered for high prestigious jobs. This in turn led frustrated Nuba intellectuals to participate in the civil war that broke out in 1983.'⁴⁶

These sentiments compounded the heightened general dissatisfaction of the 1970s related to the dispossession of land, political manoeuvring of the national and regional governments, and economic deterioration. The Nuba leadership sought to overcome the discontent among their followers concerning the personal ambitions of politicians, power struggles and the ineffectiveness of the SNP in promoting the general well-being of the Nuba at national level.⁴⁷

In 1983 a rebellion broke out in the south. A long-planned military conspiracy by selected southern officers led to a number of simultaneous mutinies and culminated in the establishment of the SPLM/A, which was headed by Colonel John Garang, initially from Ethiopia. Links between the armed southern opposition and part of the Nuba political leadership had already started in the

1960s, when Abbas had allegedly maintained contacts with the Anyanya and the Nuba had supplied the rebels with ammunition.⁴⁸ Kodi had also maintained contacts with southern underground groups during the Nimeiri regime, a relationship that was facilitated by his position in the National Assembly. Because of his relations with the secret officers' group that later became the SPLM/A, Kodi was aware of the conspiracy to mutiny that triggered the war in the south. This may have resulted from his relationships with Lam Akol, the SPLM contact in Khartoum, or Edward Lino, a recruiter for the movement who belonged to the same secret cluster as Akol and another recruiting officer, Peter Nyot. The group took over the leadership of the Khartoum SPLM upon the departure of Garang for Ethiopia.⁴⁹ Kamil Kuwa's role in the establishment of the local SPLM/A office in Libya, which channelled military aid from Libya's leader Muammar al-Gaddafi to the movement, is another indicator of the close links between some in the Nuba leadership and the SPLM/A.

A conviction that the Nuba sided with the rebels was believed to justify violence against them

In 1983 Garang sent the SPLM/A Manifesto to Kodi to persuade the Komolo leadership to join the movement, while Lino was sent to talk to Yousif Kuwa in Kadugli about the matter. Kuwa later met with Akol, Kodi and al-Hilu in the house of Abbas in Khartoum, from where he left for discussions with Garang in Ethiopia. In 1984, while still in Ethiopia, he decided unilaterally to join the SPLM/A, announcing his decision on the SPLA radio station and encouraging the Nuba to join the war of liberation. According to Lino, the SPLM/A at that time already included a group of Nuba that had joined the Anyanya earlier.⁵⁰ Although not all Nuba and not even some Komolo members approved of Kuwa's decision, it resulted in them being considered rebel collaborators as well and becoming subject to government persecution which, in turn, promoted rebel recruitment among the Nuba.⁵¹ Subsequently, Kuwa was assigned to head up the SPLA office in Yemen and was appointed as an alternate member of the SPLA High Command. Garang used these developments strategically as evidence for the national extent of the SPLM/A struggle in order to generate support in other marginalised regions of the Sudanese periphery.

In the course of 1983 and 1984 the Komolo leaders continued their subversive activities by involving

themselves in two coup attempts. Both efforts were discovered and the conspirators, including Abbas, Kodi, Ismael Khamis, Mudir Batallah Kapitulek and Yunis Abd Sadr, were imprisoned briefly, after which Kodi left for Ethiopia and was employed in the SPLA office in Addis Ababa. Subsequent to Nimeiri's overthrow in 1985, Abbas, Khamis, Batallah and Abd Sadr staged another failed coup attempt, this time against the Transitional Military Council (TMC) that succeeded the Nimeiri regime and this again led to their detention. Upon their release, Khamis, Batallah and Sadr left for Ethiopia, while Abbas participated in elections as an SNP candidate, formed the Rural Solidarity coalition with GUN and collaborated increasingly with USAP.⁵² Apart from their general interest in the Nuba cause, the politicians remained divided by different political agendas, alignments and personal objectives.⁵³

In these deteriorating political circumstances the rule of law became increasingly contested and insecurity escalated, particularly in the areas south of the Nuba Mountains. A period of drought and politically manipulated famine between 1983 and 1985 exacerbated the situation, particularly in Kordofan and Bahr al-Ghazal.⁵⁴ The government began to supply arms to the Misiria Baggara of Kordofan and to organise informal militias to secure land claims and to protect Chevron's oil infrastructure in the area. Some of the Baggara took up arms and began looting to compensate for property lost during the drought.⁵⁵ A conviction that the Nuba sided with the rebels, if only to an extent, was believed to justify violence against them. In this situation, the politically legitimised violent transfer of economic assets became prevalent.⁵⁶

In July 1985 the SPLA organised a raid on a Baggara camp in al-Gardud, killing militia members and civilians. This provoked an immediate government response because al-Gardud is considered part of the north. Due to the insistence of the TMC's defence minister, Fadallah Burma Nasir, himself a Misiria Zurug, the local Misiria (Zurug and Humr) were supplied with arms and their militias became referred to as the *murahaleen*.⁵⁷ Mobilisation was achieved with the propaganda message that '... the Nuba rebellion was primarily directed towards the very existence of the Arab tribes in the area, as well as hostility towards the government'.⁵⁸

During the democratic period that lasted from 1986 to 1989, Sadig al-Mahdi's government adopted the policy of promoting the establishment of militias, and expanded it in southern Kordofan by arming the Hawazma. In fact, a number of high-level government officials and military officers involved in putting the policy into practice originated from among the Baggara.⁵⁹ During this time the militias began using systematic violence and cattle looting in their interaction with the Nuba. Armed intimidation

became the norm, particularly in the western part of the Nuba Mountains, and was justified on the basis of leading Nuba from the region having joined the SPLM/A.⁶⁰ The number of Nuba victims during this period is unknown, but according to an African Rights report –

The various Murahaliin groups were active raiding cattle, burning and killing Nuba civilians in ones and twos from 1985 onwards. On one occasion at least, they escalated their activities and perpetrated a massacre, on the pretext of SPLA presence. This was in March 1987 at Saburi, just east of Kadugli. The Rawawga, Fukhara and Dar Bilal sections of the Hawazma militia were responsible.⁶¹

Local sources claim that on this occasion the *murahaleen* killed 83 people, and looted and burned their village.⁶² In response to such violence, some Nuba resorted to armed retaliation, but were often defeated by the well-armed militias. When a small SPLA task force entered the Nuba Mountains in 1986 to recruit for the SPLM/A camps in Ethiopia, many young Nuba men joined the movement in response to increased militia violence.⁶³

The use of the *murahaleen*
as a counterinsurgency tool
led to a further deterioration
of the situation

The first SPLA fighting force, the Volcano Battalion, led by al-Hilu and Kuwa, entered the Nuba Mountains during the rainy season in May 1987 to recruit members. It engaged the government forces first at Rimla in June 1987 and later in Um Dorein and Um Dulu. Prior to the first battle the army employed scorched-earth tactics by destroying a number of villages to slow down the SPLA in the southern part of the mountains. In the following year, the incidence of looting, detention, abduction, torture and execution of suspected SPLA collaborators increased, with hundreds of people being killed and settlements burned. Such actions encouraged SPLA recruitment further and many persecuted Nuba intellectuals and professionals joined the movement, or escaped to the north.⁶⁴ Moreover, the poor treatment and marginalisation experienced by the displaced persons in the northern provinces highlighted their Nuba identity, and Arab-Muslim dominance enforced the sentiment of resistance, especially among those Nuba who decided to return to the mountains.

The main SPLA force left the mountains shortly after its first recruiting task was accomplished, but returned in early 1989 as the New Kush Division. It consisted of six battalions under Kuwa's leadership.⁶⁵ This marked the beginning of large-scale hostilities between the SPLA Nuba and the government forces and their militia allies.

TO WAR, TO PEACE ...

The New Kush Division consolidated itself in the Nuba Mountains by advancing to the vicinity of Kadugli by April 1989. In response, the army and militias attacked villages suspected of SPLA collaboration, while the SPLA targeted the Nuba communities cooperating with the government, captured soldiers and some 'Arab' civilians, and assaulted mechanised farms and Hawazma villages. The cycle of violence continued, with retaliatory action by the army and militias that included provoking famine, displacing and capturing Nuba for labour, recruiting young Nuba men forcibly into the army, and turning women and girls into sex slaves or concubines.⁶⁶

The use of the *murahaleen* as a counterinsurgency tool and their formalisation as the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) led to a further deterioration of the situation. In May Al-Mahdi proposed a defence act in an attempt to legalise the *murahaleen* along the lines of an earlier agreement with the Baggara. However, parliamentary objection resulted in the militias obtaining the official stamp of approval only after the NIF took power in a coup on 30 June 1989. In the period before the coup the parties had negotiated a temporary ceasefire in the south and agreed on Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) to channel relief to the area. However, the Nuba Mountains were not included in the OLS and the NIF governor of South Kordofan ordered international NGOs to cease their activities in the area.⁶⁷

Threatened by an extension of the war to the Nuba Mountains, the new Islamist regime embarked on a military campaign underpinned by a radical religious ideology. It included an attempt to assimilate Nuba society by eradicating its identity by means of a violent extension of a politico-religious and cultural project based on Arab culture and Islam. Related to this was NIF's attempt to consolidate its control at the local level by supplanting traditional local leaders, such as omdas and nazirs, with sectarian loyalties to Al-Mahdi through Umma party and Ansar affiliations, and with regime emirs who had personal connections to president Omer al-Bashir, while promoting PDF mobilisation and training among the Baggara.⁶⁸ Subsequently, the NIF orchestrated abductions by the Military Intelligence, and massacres and executions by the army and the militias to eliminate the Nuba leadership in towns and rural areas.⁶⁹

The displaced educated Nuba in Khartoum were also deliberately harassed, and many were arrested.^{70, 71}

In 1991 the government provoked an all-out war between the regime and the SPLA Nuba. This was a fight for Nuba survival. Apart from continuing the violence in the Nuba Mountains, the NIF adopted a religious-ideological approach to the conflict. The army, which was firmly under the control of the NIF cadres, assumed an increasingly significant role in the conduct of the war. This approach was driven by the regime's intransigent objective of Islamising the region, which was seen as a threat since it forms part of the northern provinces that the 'Arab' governing elite considers as the heartland of Arab culture and Islam in Sudan.⁷² In January 1992 the authorities declared the counterinsurgency operations to be a *jihad* and president Bashir as *Imam al-Jihad*, which obliged all Muslims to participate in the war effort, while all rebels and their supporters were considered apostates regardless of many of them being Muslims.⁷³

During this time Christians and other non-Muslims were targeted in particular. Centres of worship became military objectives, while priests, religious workers and Christian relief agencies, along with other Western NGOs, were pushed out of the region, and denied access and permission to return. Often, mosques were left standing while churches were destroyed,⁷⁴ and Christian children were compelled to study Islam.⁷⁵

Displacement to 'peace camps', forced Islamisation and the deliberate creation of famine became part of the regime's strategy

The militias, and to a lesser extent the army, continued to commit atrocities,⁷⁶ driven by orders and personal interest in looting cattle and obtaining labour. Displacements to 'peace camps', systematic mass rapes, forced Islamisation, the military recruitment of children, the breaking up of families and the deliberate creation of famine became part of the regime's overall counter-insurgency strategy.⁷⁷ People were forced into 'peace camps'⁷⁸ operated by the government's Peace and Rehabilitation Administration of South Kordofan (PRASK), with the intent to depopulate the mountains. The stated policy was to remove a total of 500 000 people from the area in order to advance local 'Arab' dominance after the administrative annexation and incorporation

of predominantly Baggara Western Kordofan into South Kordofan.⁷⁹ Allegedly, the 'peace camps' were used to produce labour resources for mechanised agricultural schemes, promote Islamisation and recruit soldiers for the army.⁸⁰ In the camps the women were separated from men to prevent marriage and many were raped to produce a new Arabised class of people without Nuba identity.⁸¹

In addition, a campaign was launched to remove around 5 000 Nuba minors with a view to train them as Islamic militants. The education of these minors portrayed their local Nuba culture as inferior and the SPLA Nuba leaders as infidels.⁸² However, the emphasis given to their deliberate degradation by such methods as flogging in public and rape, and the destruction of social structures, heightened the determination of many Nuba to fight for survival.

Moreover, the deliberate provocation of famine through a policy of systematic isolation and destruction was aimed at making survival impossible.⁸³ According to de Waal the army and the militias –

... disrupted trade and closed markets, destroyed farms and looted animals. Raiding, abduction and rape prevented any movement between villages and to markets. Thousands died of hunger and disease, while the flow of basic goods (including soap, salt and clothing) to the rebel areas almost completely dried up.⁸⁴

The razing of villages and the deliberate disruption of health services, development projects and education by targeting teachers also complemented this policy,⁸⁵ which resulted in the worst famine of the early 1990s in Sudan.

In October 1993, First Lieutenant Khalid Abdel Karim Salih, the brother of the governor who had responsibility for security in Kordofan, announced in Switzerland that the army and the PDF had killed between 60 000 and 70 000 Nuba in the May 1992 to February 1993 period alone, with both Christians and 'impure' Nuba Muslims being targeted and churches, mosques and Quranic and missionary schools in the Nuba Mountains being destroyed.⁸⁶ At about the same time, the people displaced by conflict numbered anywhere from 250 000 to 450 000, with 33 000 housed in the 'peace camps' in Dilling, and 40 000 people were moved out of Kadugli from June to August 1992.⁸⁷

Yet, despite its destructiveness, the 1992-3 *jihad* policy failed and was abandoned when militant leadership elements waging the holy war in the Nuba Mountains were transferred out of Kordofan. The failure to transform Nuba society was in part because of an internal contradiction. Consensus within the Sudanese political and military elite about the jihadist project was lacking, as it was among prominent Baggara religious

leaders. This resulted in the indecisive execution of the campaign as ‘...an interplay between ideology, greed, war strategy, political competition and personal ambition’.⁸⁸

The SPLA Nuba resistance was another contributing factor to the programme’s failure.⁸⁹ The dedication of the Nuba to the protection of their homeland and to acquiring SPLA training and battle experience gave the Nuba the upper hand against their less experienced although often better-armed enemies. Yousif Kuwa’s role in the struggle was significant since he organised the resistance and mobilised the Nuba as part of the SPLA.⁹⁰ This heightened his reputation as the defender of the Nuba identity and culture. Kuwa also set up a rudimentary civil administration, schools and clinics in rebel-held areas in the mountains. In September 1992, symbolically admitting responsibility for the war, Kuwa formed an Advisory Council and obtained consensus on whether to continue fighting or surrender. The people in the SPLA Nuba areas opted to continue the struggle despite the unprecedented hardship being suffered by them.

The failure to transform Nuba society was in part because of internal contradiction

Even though the government attempted to keep news of what was happening in the Nuba Mountains out of the media, using the remoteness of the area to its advantage,⁹¹ information trickled to the outside world. The government-endorsed Islamic organisations utilising relief supplies to convert the Nuba to Islam were incapable of dealing with their large numbers.⁹² The increasing flow of the displaced Nuba alerted many northern Sudanese and some foreign observers. Yet, the international community stood by largely idle, despite efforts by Nuba representatives abroad to raise awareness. Its role was limited to subtle inquiries on the Nuba issue in Khartoum by the Head of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Eliasson, in September 1992, even though pressure was growing to expand the OLS to the Nuba Mountains but not at the cost of endangering humanitarian access to southern Sudan.⁹³

Because of all these factors, the government started changing its counterinsurgency strategy. It began mobilising Nuba under its control to fight the SPLM/A, co-opted Nuba leaders to the government with varying degrees of success, incorporated a Nuba faction to its structures in July 1996 and organised military operations against the local population on a lower-scale and intensity.⁹⁴

By the mid-1990s international momentum began gathering after the head of the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Society (NRRDO), Neroun Philip, convinced some Western Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to defy the regime’s no-fly zone to provide covert relief and encouraged an African Rights-British Broadcasting Corporation human rights fact-finding operation to visit the Nuba Mountains.⁹⁵ The resulting reports caused an international outcry and developed into an initiative to put pressure on Khartoum. Consequently, Sudan gave permission for international relief to flow to government-controlled areas in South Kordofan. The relief began to arrive consistently only from November 2001, encouraging further population movement to the ‘peace camps’,⁹⁶ and facilitated growing UN intervention. At the same time, the US Special Envoy, John Danforth, pressed for a ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains, which was eventually signed in January 2002 in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, being witnessed by Swiss and American representatives.⁹⁷ New humanitarian aid and development projects led to a gradual improvement of conditions in the mountains and allowed the hundreds of thousands of displaced Nuba to start returning home.

... AND BACK TO WAR?

Meanwhile, Garang’s SPLM/A in the south had been engaged in a peace process with Khartoum for more than a decade. The negotiations culminated in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Despite division in the SPLM/A leadership between those preferring a unified Sudan and those advocating southern secession, an interim arrangement was hammered out as part of the CPA to form an autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS). General and presidential elections were scheduled for 2009 and a referendum on unity of secession for the south and Abyei was agreed upon for 2011. The division in the Nuba leadership between those headed by Kuwa advocating adherence to SPLM/A policy for new but unified Sudan, and those led by Suleiman Musa Rahhal demanding an independent Nuba state, was addressed at two conferences in 2002 in Kampala and Kaunda respectively. The leadership concluded that while the Nuba’s aspiration for self-determination should be pursued, this should occur within the framework of a united Sudan.

It is alleged that when the Nuba issue came up for discussion at the CPA negotiations, the SPLM/A consistently avoided addressing self-determination for the Nuba, and were able to persuade the SPLA Nuba leadership to provide unconditional support for the southern negotiating team.⁹⁸ Although Nuba leaders such as al-Hilu and Kodi pushed for official recognition of Nuba’s

self-determination demands in the CPA, they were sidelined largely because the SPLM/A and the National Congress Party (NCP, the former NIF) government and its Nuba representatives objected to this. While the NCP feared a secessionist domino effect in the Sudanese periphery, the SPLM/A leadership considered any strong support for the Nuba demand for self-determination as detrimental to its own its objectives in the south.⁹⁹

As a result, the Nuba were left with a relatively vague status, with indirect 'popular consultation' to come about through elected parliamentary representatives in the 2009 elections. Subsequently, the elected South Kordofan state leadership would determine whether it endorsed the whole CPA, or rejected parts thereof, and whether South Kordofan should form part of north or south Sudan in case the south would secede. In addition, South Kordofan would be granted a degree of autonomy and national political representation under the Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile States signed on 26 May 2004 in Naivasha.¹⁰⁰

SPLM/A leadership considered any strong support for the Nuba demand for self-determination as detrimental to its own objectives

John Garang's untimely death in a helicopter crash in July 2005 came as a shock to Nuba aspirations because its leadership had accepted his vision for a unified Sudan, an ideal that seemed to be evaporating under the SPLM/A leadership of Salva Kiir, who has been coined as a secessionist. A break-away from the partnership with the SPLM/A was avoided, but the Nuba leadership is determined to win the national elections in South Kordofan, now postponed to April 2010, which would allow them a degree of political autonomy at state level and express views through the 'popular consultation', even though the level of autonomy would still be dependent on the central government that is likely to continue under NCP control. Yet, divisions among the Nuba leadership remain problematic, some siding with the SPLM/A, some with the NCP and some with other political parties. In addition, South Kordofan's significant Baggara population is unlikely to support any initiative for Nuba self-determination because it could undermine its interests for access to land.¹⁰¹

CPA implementation has been slow, marred both by NCP unwillingness to co-operate and SPLM/A

incapacity. There is a growing feeling among the Nuba that the SPLM/A and the international community, in their eagerness to strike a deal with the NCP, sold them out and that the Nuba politicians' demands for the mountains to be included in the self-determination referendum for the south and Abyei were never voiced forcefully enough. Specifically, sections of the Nuba accuse al-Hilu and Kodi of signing the agreement despite later voicing their dissatisfaction.¹⁰² Their faction of the Nuba leadership is regarded as having been conditioned by its intimate relationship with the SPLM/A.

There are also concerns about the manner in which the CPA has been implemented in the Nuba Mountains to date. First, the return of the displaced Nuba, who left the area during the war and are estimated at some 289 000 persons,¹⁰³ has been complicated by issues related to insecurity, the need to ensure livelihoods and land issues, since areas vacated by the refugees have often been settled by others. The resettlement of such a large number of people has put a strain on resources such as water and land, especially as there has been very little development or improvement in the quality of life for the local people since the signing of the CPA. Progress in the SPLM/A areas has been largely dependent on the efforts of NGOs, which run services and small-scale development projects, while various organisations charged with the development of government areas have been largely ineffective.

Second, as an exclusive power-sharing agreement involving two parties competing for influence in the region, the CPA has had a destabilising effect, particularly as the 2010 elections and 'popular consultation' draw closer. While there has been sufficient cooperation among the protagonists to keep the CPA implementation process from coming to a halt, their local representatives in South Kordofan have developed personal interests in maintaining power.¹⁰⁴ For instance, in 2008 the competition for local influence between the SPLM/A and the NCP was personified at the highest levels of state government with the sacking of the SPLM/A state finance minister, Ahmed Saaed, by the NCP-appointed governor. This was followed by the recent contentious appointments of Ahmed Haroun as the new governor and al-Hilu as his deputy. The appointment of Haroun, a staunch NCP official from North Kordofan, followed an NCP reshuffle prompted by pressure from Arab states after president al-Bashir's and Haroun's indictment by the International Criminal Court for war crimes in Darfur, where the latter has served as the acting state minister for humanitarian affairs. Although al-Hilu (SPLM/A) is highly valued among the Nuba for his leadership during the war, he is a Masalit and a controversial character for sections of the local population.

The division of power between two parties has had a direct impact on economic development. The 55 to 45 per cent representation ratio in the state government in favour of the NCP has complicated the situation because it allows neither party a significant majority to implement policies. A lot of contention exists over development financing, which is mostly controlled by the NCP as the main party to the government of national unity, and 'only 30 to 40 per cent of the 115 contracts ... have been implemented three years after the CPA was signed'.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, frustrations run deep, as indicated by Halima Kuku Adam, a Nuba tea-seller in the Kolba area: 'We need education, healthcare and support in agriculture. Roads are still lacking in the rural areas and water is a big cause of conflict. I do not know what the CPA is about ... but I feel there is no need to celebrate'.¹⁰⁶

Political stability has also been affected by the lack of integration between government and SPLM/A-held areas. Two local government structures with separate education, health, judicial and administrative policies continue to run in parallel,¹⁰⁷ which prevents the adoption of laws and hinders the reintegration of returnees. Lack of goodwill hinders work in the area and trade has been discouraged by a system of double taxation when traders cross from one area to another. In the SPLM/A territories the lack of improvement in transportation and communication has left some areas largely isolated, heightening levels of discontent. This has encouraged hard-line elements, especially among the youth, as many are upset with the SPLM/A leadership in Kadugli that has directed resources to other areas.¹⁰⁸

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In fact, the local SPLM/A leadership's credibility in South Kordofan suffers from the region's division. Some leaders collaborating with government are deemed to be corrupt, while, on the other hand, it is reported that nepotism exists in favour of the Tima section of the Nuba to the exclusion of supporters of al-Hilu. This has only begun to change recently after al-Hilu assumed the deputy governor post. Such developments have been instrumental in the emergence of ethnic divisions among the Nuba and polarisation between those who sided with the rebels and those who lived under government supervision. Whereas the NCP has exploited such divisions, its former

Baggara allies have also grown increasingly discontent after it has become clear that they were co-opted through land grants and other material incentives to advance NCP aspirations. The abolition of Western Kordofan has generated fissures among the Baggara, and Misiria leadership has been wary of the July 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) award¹⁰⁹ that reaffirmed the Ngok Dinka authority over traditional Baggara grazing lands and routes in southern part of South Kordofan and Abyei. While the decision was favourable for the NCP because it recognised the national government's authority over the Heglig and Bamboo oilfields to the detriment of the of SPLM/A controlled GOSS, it alienated sectors of the Misiria, which the SPLM/A has wooed for support and recruits.

In addition, the former principally Baggara PDF fighters have been largely left without compensation or peace dividend, which together with promises of competitive salaries have inspired Misiria defections to the SPLM/A and contributed in emerging opposition movements amongst frustrated Baggara youth, such as the Kordofan Authority for Development (KAD) and the Youth.¹¹⁰ Whereas the KAD, which has orchestrated strikes and does not rule out armed struggle, maintains contacts with armed opposition organisations principally in Darfur,¹¹¹ the Youth has attempted to reconcile unsuccessfully with its former enemies, the Ngok Dinka of Abyei.¹¹² In addition, issues that continued to further polarise the population relate to the fact that the Nuba began to view themselves increasingly as 'African' as opposed to 'Arab', and that many Nuba erroneously believe in a possibility of secession through 'popular consultation' with SPLM/A support. Any major political loss by the SPLM/A and an undermining of the idea of 'popular consultation' in the region would therefore heighten propensity for violence among the Nuba.

Local inter-ethnic violent incidents involving both farmers and nomads, which result in ongoing deaths, are exacerbated by the proliferation of firearms, an issue that needs to be addressed promptly. Young men without employment, off-duty soldiers and former SPLM/A fighters can be identified as particular risk groups as developmental stagnation and lack of opportunities creates an increasingly explosive atmosphere.

There are also concerns, fuelled by the SPLM/A, about the outcome of the elections since large numbers of Nuba were not enumerated in the April 2008 national census, either because they were absent or because they resided in SPLM/A areas that were not included in the count.¹¹³ Discontent among the Nuba has been heightened further by the absence of a commission to implement the proposed 'popular consultation' and the fact that the land issue (ownership, access and land-use rights) remains unresolved largely because the South Kordofan

Land Commission remains to be constituted. The latter issue is particularly contentious, as the CPA does not define whether land continues to be customarily owned, and because the dispossession of Nuba lands was at the heart of the tension in the late 1970s and early 1980s that led to the war. Emotions have been inflamed further by the return of the Baggara to their transhumance pasture routes, further expansion of mechanised farming and the escalating tensions resulting from the return of thousands of Nuba who attempt to secure themselves by curbing the economic activity of the Misiria and Hawazma.¹¹⁴ This denies the Baggara access to their traditional pastures and is perceived by some as a Nuba attempt to demonstrate their strength.

External manipulation of local politics, ethnic alliances and animosities have resulted in a breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms

All these factors have led to a deterioration of the security situation in the region and an escalation of violent incidents. Even so, this has more to do with political manipulation than with ethnic conflict over resources. The external manipulation of local politics, ethnic alliances and animosities have resulted in a breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which have not been re-established since the end of major hostilities. For instance, the NCP has exploited ethnic divisions and has been accused of provoking instability and conflict to prevent the presidential and parliamentary elections conditioned by a successful north-south border demarcation, and the resolution of a dispute over the national census results that, according to the SPLM, overestimate the numbers of 'Arabs' in Darfur and underestimate the number of southerners.¹¹⁵ The postponement of the elections could also affect the referendum on self-determination for the south and Abyei despite the SPLM/A insistence on its timely celebration. The NCP has stepped up recruitment in South Kordofan to ensure its position in the region after the elections, also arming and training its police force and the PDF, with the latter becoming increasingly ethnically defined. Some of the forcibly conscripted Nuba have left the PDF, while Arab supremacist groups with designs on dominating Darfur and Kordofan¹¹⁶ have gained ground since 2007. Militias have been armed and encouraged to commit violent acts

to create insecurity and displacements by systematically attacking local 'African' groups.¹¹⁷ This has resulted in increasing SPLM/A mobilisation and a proliferation of local defence groups. According to one observer: 'Signs of insecurity are widespread in the western area where grievances about lack of access to services and employment and the blockage of pastoralist movement towards the South have led a number of Misseriya youth to resort to armed violence'.¹¹⁸

If current conditions persist, an escalation of the situation is likely. While the Joint Military Commission (JMC) has been replaced by troops of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), the latter has been criticised for having been less able to diffuse the Baggara-Nuba, Baggara-Baggara and Nuba-Nuba tensions.¹¹⁹ The Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), composed of 6 000 SPLM/A and government troops, and the local police forces remain divided and are unequally equipped and trained.¹²⁰ Following the completion of the CPA-dictated SPLM/A military pullout from the Nuba Mountains in January 2008, the state security apparatus (army and armed police) has tightened its grip on the area by moving in heavily armed battalions on the pretext of countering a possible attack by the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement rebels. Meanwhile some NCP leaders reportedly continue to reorganise the PDF along stricter ethnic lines and to arm and mobilise sections of other groups, allegedly as part of its strategy to manipulate the 2010 elections.¹²¹

Wary of NCP aspirations, the SPLA continues its presence in the vicinity of the mountains. It has voiced its concerns about deployment by the army and demanded an investigation into the rearming of militias. But SPLA withdrawal from the Nuba region, seen as giving in to the NCP, has fuelled local bitterness. Some Nuba commanders, unconvinced of future SPLM/A support, are storing arms and training rebels for a possible return to war in 2011 when the south and Abyei are to vote for self-determination.¹²² The tension between the NCP and the SPLM/A has also drawn in parts of eastern South Kordofan, resulting in violence.¹²³

The first half of 2009 has been marred by a number of clashes. In January, Baggara militia attacks on the JIUs killed at least 16 persons¹²⁴ in Khor at al-Dalayb. In March, clashes between Al-Ghulfan and Dar Naeela in Kuannas near al-Dalanj, triggered by the looting of 170 cows, caused 23 deaths.¹²⁵ But the most severe confrontation took place in May near the village of Meiram, close to the South Kordofan's Darfur border, when police attempted to break a dispute between small groups of Misiria and Rizaiqat and were attacked by 3 000 armed horsemen, resulting in 244 deaths (89 Misiria, 80 Rizaiqat and 75 police).¹²⁶

This violence is alarming in the light of hopes for a stable transition after the 2010 elections, 'popular

consultation' and the 2011 referendum in the south and Abyei. The militarisation and escalation of violent events among and between the Baggara and the Nuba, together with internal divisions within the Misiria, Hawazma and Nuba provide a highly fractional and conflict-prone lead-up to the elections. There is a real possibility that violence will escalate to such a level that it will prevent the elections from being held in parts of South Kordofan. This would adhere to the NCP objectives to undermine votes for the SPLM/A Nuba and secure an electoral victory for local groups affiliated with it.

In such a scenario, the future would be highly volatile. In the case of an undesired result for the Nuba in the 'popular consultation', the likelihood of renewed large-scale violence in the Nuba Mountains is considerable. Indeed, if one considers these developments in the light of the large number of frustrated ex-combatants and unemployed youth, some of who are organised and have access to weapons, largely from Khartoum,¹²⁷ political instability and insecurity are likely to escalate further.

Results of 2010 elections will
be critical as many Nuba
harbour high hopes for the
'popular consultation'

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research findings suggest that the resource-scarcity explanation often applied to conflicts in the Sahel has its limitations in capturing the process of conflict formation in the case of the Nuba Mountains. Rather, conflict formation in this region is orchestrated largely by external actors and forms part of a greater national political and economic context. The war in the Nuba Mountains emerged under conditions of political and economic deterioration during the latter years of the Nimeiri reign, and in the context of the conflict in southern Sudan, which permitted some prominent Nuba leaders to conspire against the government and collaborate with rebellious elements in southern Sudanese leadership.

Moreover, while the conflict in the Nuba Mountains emerged within the context of the wider war, Komolo's alignment with the SPLM/A brought increasing violence upon the Nuba. This culminated in the NIF regime's *jihad* campaign in 1992–3 before hostilities gradually gave way to the ceasefire agreement roughly a decade later. The Nuba leadership's aspiration to defy systematic marginalisation and exclusion, in which their personal

objectives also constituted an element, was based on the prevailing interpretation of the Arab-Muslim dominated social hierarchy that aimed to subjugate the Nuba. Purely resource-focused analyses rarely capture such socio-culturally derived political elements in the process of conflict formation.

Considering Nuba history within the Sudanese polity, a peaceful future for the Nuba Mountains and its peoples remains far from certain. Subjected to manipulation by external forces and to a CPA framework that hardly meets Nuba demands or satisfies the frustrated Baggara, discontent and anger continue to mount among the largely unemployed ex-combatants and youth, creating opportune conditions for violence, particularly in the light of the continuing availability of arms. The CPA is debilitated by its nature as a power-sharing agreement between two parties, with local leaders mostly forced to associate with either one of the protagonists. The Nuba and the Baggara leaders and their followers remain divided, some by ideological differences.

Thus, similar conditions to those that prevailed in the early 1980s exist today in South Kordofan, including political instability and insecurity, inter-ethnic tensions and violence, economic deterioration and gradual stagnation in development, marginalisation, the rearming of local groups, and manipulation of the local leadership by the government and the SPLM/A.

Under any scenario, the results of the 2010 elections will be critical, especially as many Nuba harbour high hopes about the 'popular consultation' that is to take place after the elections. They believe that their interests in South Kordofan will prevail over those of the NCP and the Baggara even though there is little certainty that they will win the elections despite majority population, or that the 'popular consultation' will actually take place in a fair and transparent manner.

It is, however, unlikely that the elections will be free and fair.¹²⁸ Sudan's track record is stained by electoral manipulation as common practice by both authoritarian regimes and democratic governments, with gerrymandering, manipulation of vote counts and the uneducated vote, the misuse of influence and public resources and deliberate malpractice. There are also concerns over capacity as the number of competent officials available to run the electoral process is limited and almost insurmountable logistical challenges will be experienced in terms of transportation and an adequate supply of voting materials. The historically low voter turnout in the peripheral regions will also be a limiting factor, while the elections, likely to be manipulated by the NCP, need to be satisfactory enough for the SPLM and other parties to avoid political deterioration and possible renewed war.

Under these circumstances, greater international involvement and a refocusing of international attention

on South Kordofan is necessary, particularly as the two CPA protagonists are only working together minimally at the grassroots level. More support should be allocated to the JIUs, the activities of the militias require attention, and local disarmament and reconciliation needs to be encouraged, as should integration of local government and security forces.¹²⁹ All this should be possible if sufficient international pressure, which the CPA implementation process essentially depends upon, is applied, and greater UNMIS engagement is endorsed. Ensuring successful elections with widely accepted results would set the stage for the formation of a new political scene in which gradual inclusion of marginalised political forces without staging an outright challenge to the NCP and the SPLM/A could enhance prospects for democratisation and a more peaceful future.

The formation of a new political scene could enhance prospects for democratisation

ACRONYMS

GEA	African Studies Group, UAM
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
GUN	General Union of the Nuba Mountains
GOSS	Government of Southern Sudan
JIUs	Joint Integrated Units
JMC	Joint Military Commission
KAD	Kordofan Authority for Development
MFC	Mechanised Farming Corporation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
NCP	National Congress Party (the former NIF)
NIF	National Islamic Front
NRDDO	Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Society
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
PCA	Permanent Court of Arbitration
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
PRASK	Peace and Rehabilitation Administration of South Kordofan
SNP	Sudan National Party
SPLM/A	Southern People's Liberation Movement/Army
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UAM	Autonomous University of Madrid
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
USAP	Union of Sudan African Parties

NOTES

- 1 Thomas F Homer-Dixon, Environmental scarcities and violent conflict: evidence from cases, *International Security* 19(1), 1994, 5-40, and Thomas F Homer-Dixon, *Environment, scarcity and violence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
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- 3 Mohamed Suliman, The Nuba Mountains of Sudan, resource access, violent conflict and identity, in Daniel Buckles (ed.), *Cultivating peace: conflict and collaboration in natural resource management*, Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Development Centre, 1999, http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-27982-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (accessed 5 April 2009).
- 4 Aleksy Ylönen, Political marginalisation and economic exclusion in the making of insurgencies in Sudan, in Kaare Ström and Magnus Öberg (eds), *Resources, governance and civil conflict*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2008, 125-146; and Aleksy Ylönen, The shadow of colonialism: marginalisation, identities and conflict in the Sudan, in Chantal Cornut-Gentile (ed.), *Culture and power: culture and society in the age of globalisation*, Zaragoza: University of Zaragoza Press, 2005, 153-168.
- 5 Douglas H Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*. London: James Currey, 2003, 21.
- 6 Small Arms Survey, The drift back to war: insecurity and militarisation on the Nuba Mountains, *Sudan Issue Brief*, 12 (August 2008), 2.
- 7 Facing genocide: the Nuba of Sudan, *African Rights*, July 1995, 10; International Crisis Group, Sudan's Southern Kordofan problem: the next Darfur, *Africa Report*, 145, 1; and Small Arms Survey, The drift back to war, 1.
- 8 In 1993 the Sudanese government estimated the total Nuba population in the Nuba Mountains region to be 1.1 million. According to a UN census in 1998 it was 1 025 772 people, see <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EVOD-6FACKE?OpenDocument> (accessed 5 April 2009), while Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*, 131, cites 1.3 to 1.6 million. These numbers largely exclude the roughly 600 000 to 1 million Nuba displaced internally. In 2008, Minority Rights Group estimated the total number of Nuba to be around 3.7 million, see <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,463af221,2,469f2f422,49749ca43c,0.html> (accessed 6 April 2009).
- 9 The Baggara are cattle nomads who consider themselves 'Arabs' in a cultural sense. In Kordofan the main groups include the Misiria Humr, the Misiria Zuruq and the Hawazma. For the period referred to see S F Nadel, *The Nuba: an anthropological study of the hill tribes in Kordofan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947; and Roland C Stevenson, *Nuba of Southern Kordofan Province: ethnographic survey*, Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1985.
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- 11 Janet J Ewald, *Kings of Taqali soldiers, traders and slaves: state formation and economic transformation in the Greater Nile Valley 1700-1885*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,

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- 12 Ewald, *ibid.*, 7.
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 - 14 Stevenson, *Nuba of Southern Kordofan Province*, 58-61; and H A MacMichael, *The tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan*, London: Frank Cass, 1912, 43-50.
 - 15 Paul Wani Gore *et al.*, Eight grassroots conflicts in Sudan, Khartoum: UNICEF, 2003, 28-9.
 - 16 Justin Willis, Violence, authority and the state in the Nuba Mountains of Condominium Sudan, *The Historical Journal* 46(1) (2003), 89-114.
 - 17 Mark Bradbury, Sudan: international responses to war in the Nuba Mountains, *Review of African Political Economy* 25(77) (1998), 464.
 - 18 Willis, Violence, authority and the state in the Nuba Mountains of Condominium Sudan, and Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*, 131.
 - 19 *Ibid.*
 - 20 Ahmed Uthman Muhammad Ibrahim, *The dilemma of British rule in the Nuba Mountains, 1898-1947*, Khartoum: University of Khartoum, 1985.
 - 21 Stevenson, *Nuba of Southern Kordofan Province*.
 - 22 In this regard the Nuba have many similarities to the peoples of southern Sudan who have also been perceived traditionally in the northern region as enslavable. See, for example, Jok Madut Jok, *Sudan: race, religion and violence*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.
 - 23 'Arab' in this sense refers to highly heterogeneous culturally Arab and Muslim Sudanese populations that trace their ancestry to the Arabian Peninsula. A vast majority of Sudanese falling into this identity category are a hybrid product of centuries of intermingling and are frequently deemed as non-Arab in neighbouring Arab states. Locally, however, this 'Arab' population, concentrated in northern Sudan and often characterised by lighter skin than peoples from the margins of the Sudanese state, perceives itself as socially dominant, a view that is buttressed by the political and economic power achieved by its privileged classes as a result of historical processes.
 - 24 Black southerners and the Nuba who manage Arabic and are devout Muslims are still often not accepted fully as 'Arabs', which points to the institutionalisation of Arab culture and historical racial perceptions on social stratification that dictate social status as part of contemporary society in Sudan.
 - 25 Bradbury, Sudan: international responses to war in the Nuba Mountains, 464.
 - 26 Wani Gore, Eight grassroots conflicts in Sudan, 29.
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ABOUT THE PAPER

The latest conflict in the Nuba Mountains of southern Sudan began in the mid-1980s and forms part of a larger conflict in which the main protagonists have been the National Congress Party (NCP) government of Sudan and the Southern People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The Nuba Mountains conflict has its origins not only in the relations between the 'Arab' Baggara groups and the neighbouring 'African' Nuba communities, who consider themselves systematically marginalised, but also in the deteriorating national political and economic conditions that have given rise to the SPLM/A rebellion in southern Sudan.

This paper explores conflict in the Nuba Mountains from 1985 to 2002, in which socio-culturally and economically influenced political determinants, manifested in inter-ethnic relations and local associations with the government and the SPLM/A, and in the politico-economic context, including the relationship between the state and local communities, are pivotal. The paper compares this period with the scenario after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and provides some thoughts on the efforts currently needed to minimise violent conflict in South Kordofan. The findings suggest that it is necessary to analyse resource scarcity and disputes in their socio-cultural and political contexts to capture the origins of insurgencies accurately, as in the case of Nuba Mountains where 'external' actors, namely the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A, have largely orchestrated war and peace. Moreover, it is important for the international community to refocus its efforts in South Kordofan by resuming its pressure on the signatories to the CPA to improve the possibilities of the agreement's successful implementation.

The views expressed in this paper are the author's own or retrieved from the sourced material and do not necessarily reflect those of his institution of affiliation.

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