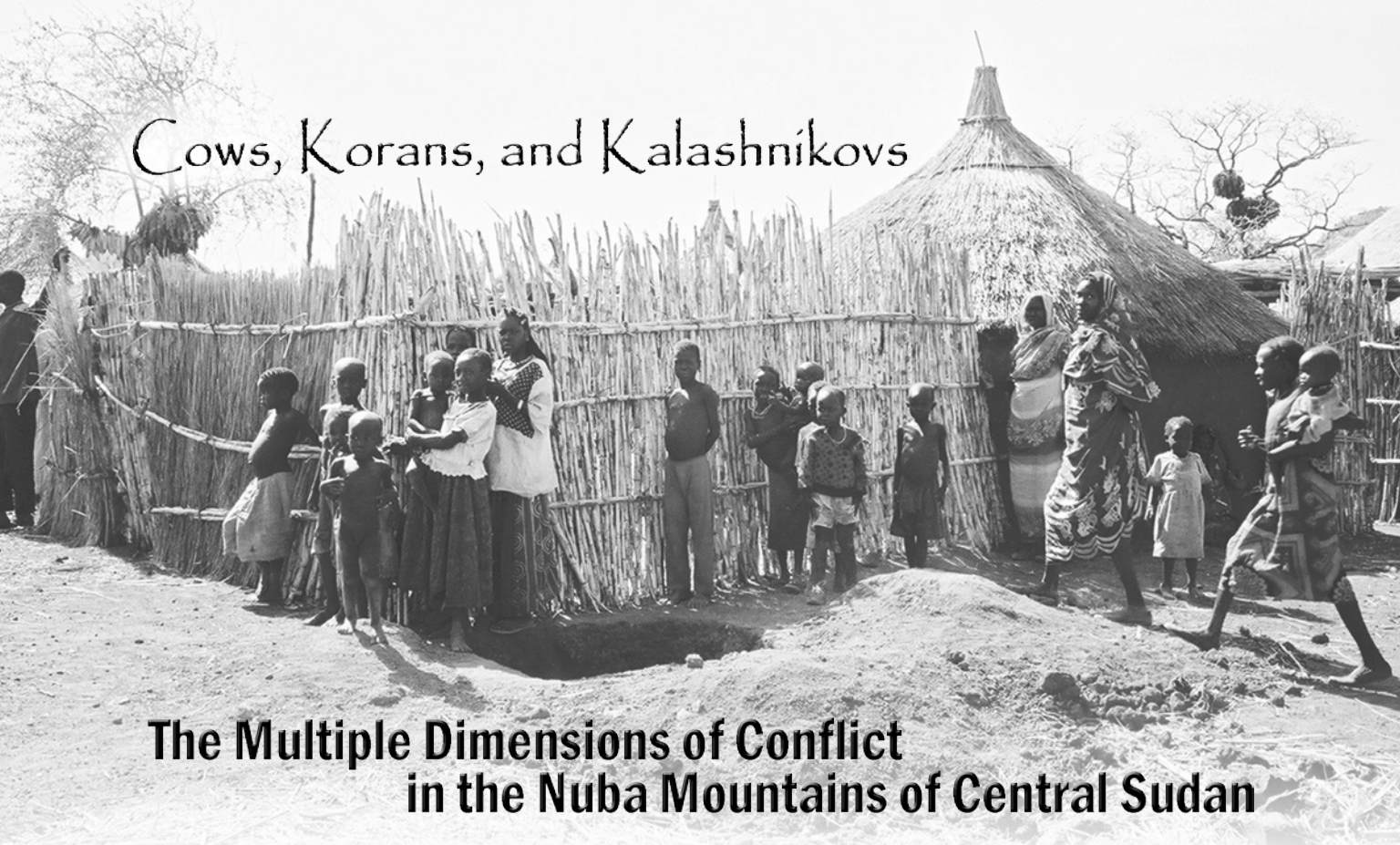# Cows, Korans, and Kalashnikovs

The Multiple Dimensions of Conflict in the Nuba Mountains of Central Sudan

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PHOTO: Villagers of Shatt Daman observe the release of Sudan People's Liberation Army prisoners by the Government of Sudan, June 2002. The prisoners had been taken in violation of the cease-fire agreement, and the Joint Military Commission negotiated their release. (courtesy of the author)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: With continued massive human suffering and violence in Darfur, there is discussion about increasing U.S. and international military involvement in the Sudan. With that in mind, this article provides an overview of the 2002 cease-fire monitoring mission in the Nuba Mountains of central Sudan. Singular, bounded, and often inchoate causes—"It is a religious conflict"; "It is a competition for diminishing resources"—are often given as explanations for the conflict there and in Darfur. These explanations are not wrong in themselves, but they are inaccurate and misleading, if one examines them in isolation. The discord in the Nuba Mountains, for example, predates the actual fighting that began in the 1980s and has roots more complex than ethnic or racial difference between the Arab (primarily Islamic) North and African (mainly Christian) South. The current conflict is the most recent product of historical enmities and clashes that coalesce along socioeconomic lines.

Situation and Environment

THE NUBA MOUNTAINS lie in South Kordofan Province, between Sudan's Arab North and African South. They are inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups, including roughly 90 different African tribes. Although each tribe generally has its own language, the tribes are referred to collectively as Nuba. Over the past 18 years, the mountains have been the scene of heavy fighting between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).[1] In January 2002, with assistance and funding from the international community, the GoS and the SPLM signed a regional

cease-fire agreement (CFA). The CFA applied to South Kordofan Province, but was referred to as simply the Nuba Mountains CFA. Meanwhile, fighting continued elsewhere in the Sudan.

From April to July 2002, I served as a cease-fire monitor with the Joint Military Commission (JMC), a multinational diplomatic observer group comprised of representatives from 11 countries. The international monitors were combined with representatives from the GoS and the SPLM to form teams, and the teams were charged with patrolling the Nuba Mountains to resolve or report CFA violations. The JMC divided its operations into five sectors, with a team assigned to monitor each sector, as depicted in figure 1.

The international monitors came from a variety of backgrounds. Most were military, although France's representative was a foreign service officer and Switzerland's was a professor of anthropology who had lived in the Sudan for 17 years. The representatives from the warring parties were military officers. My sector team consisted of an American (me), a Swede, two members of the SPLM, and two officers from the GoS. In our capacity as monitors, we traveled extensively by car, by helicopter, and on foot. Our mission was to identify and solve issues and cease-fire violations at the lowest level. This required an understanding of the area's cultural, socioeconomic, and political context, as well as each group's military tactics. Our methodology included talking to civil and military leaders on each side and conducting random surveys and interviews with cross-sections of the local population.

South Kordofan's population is a mix of roughly 1.5 million Arabs and Africans. As with virtually any ethnic grouping, however, these distinctions are blurry and socially constructed. In territory, the province is slightly smaller than the state of Maine, with the Nuba Mountains occupying roughly two-thirds of the province. The mountains are low and rugged with broad valleys in between, and the area is semiarid. The terrain was challenging. We could not have accomplished our mission without our two helicopters, which we kept constantly in use.

The CFA restricted military forces from both sides to specific areas within the province. This separated the forces to lessen the chances of any intentional or unintentional eruption of hostilities. The SPLM held Sector I, which contained their headquarters. Sector II was largely government controlled and contained the provincial capital of Kadugli. Another sector was demilitarized, and the remaining two sectors contained the front lines and each side's military forces. In an extension of the historical pattern of Nubian tribes seeking refuge in the mountains from Arab slave raiders, the SPLM generally controlled the mountains and the government mainly controlled the valleys and open areas. During the dry season, the government had the tactical advantage due to its use of wheeled transport over limited road networks and the lack of concealment afforded to the SPLM from aerial observation. During the rainy season, however, when the roads became impassable and it was easy to hide from GoS helicopters, the advantage shifted to the SPLM.
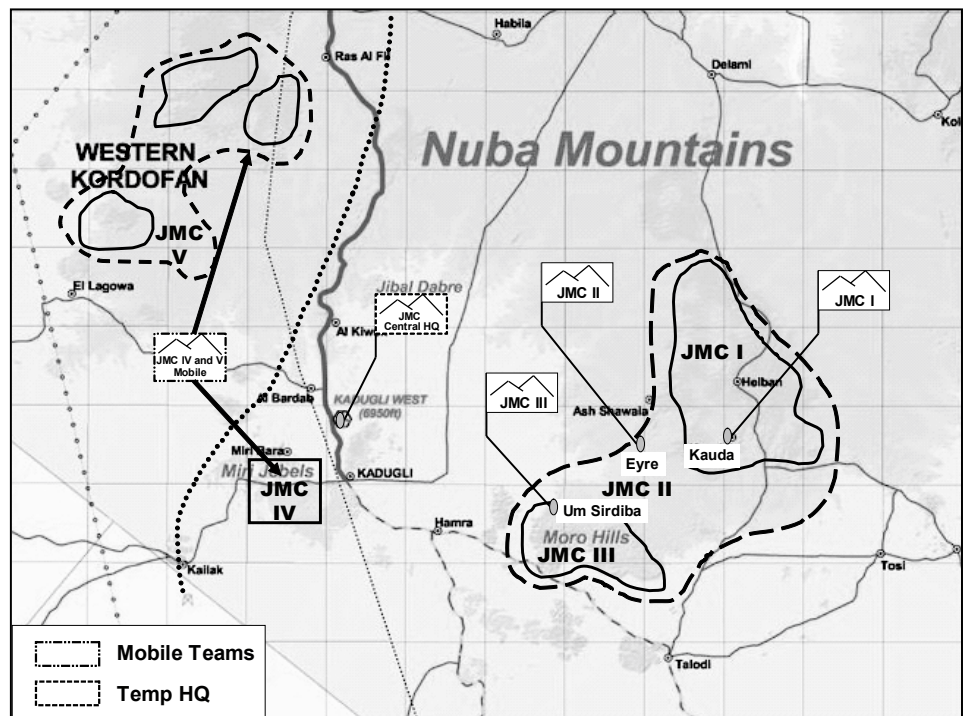

Figure 1. Joint Military Commission Sectors.

War and Economics, Politics, Religion

A trip by air around South Kordofan reveals both the obvious and subtle effects of war. Burned out and destroyed villages, for instance, are a common sight. Fertile land in the valleys goes untilled while at the same time there is extensive agriculture and terracing in the SPLM-controlled mountains. Villages in the mountains are spread out, their buildings dispersed, to make them less attractive to government air strikes. For defensive purposes, village houses are located on high ground, in proximity to the multiple small and marginal agricultural areas. In contrast, villages in the valleys are generally circular in pattern and located near a well. Government positions ring each village, and heavy weapons are always pointed in the direction of the mountains from which the SPLM are likely to strike. In other words, SPLM forces are generally postured to defend against air strikes, while GoS forces are prepared to defend against small, irregular raiding parties.

Historically, Islam has had both an ideological and a practical attraction to its various adherents in the province. Kordofan was where a Mahdist revolt against Egyptian and British rule began in 1881 and where the Mahdi's base was strongest. His support came from the *ansar* (the "helpers," after volunteers who helped the Prophet Mohammed spread Islam), the *mujahadeen,* and the *jellaba* (influential Arab traders). Each of these bases, although transformed, still exists in the Sudan today, and they support the GoS.

In 1989, the GoS legitimized Arab militias and recruited Arab civilians into an umbrella organization known as the Popular Defense Force (PDF). In the Nuba Mountains, the PDF contains three groupings: the *bagherra* (basically armed herders), the mujahadeen, and civil defense forces. A brief survey of each group highlights different dimensions of the conflict. The bagherra, for instance, have economic incentives; the mujahadeen are ideologically motivated; the jellaba seek both economic and political advantage.

Military operations in the Nuba Mountains provide tangible economic benefit to the bagherra. Translated from Arabic, bagherra means *cow people*, from the Arabic word *bagher*, for cow. Bagherras take pride in the word bagherra in the same sense that Americans might take pride in being called cowboys. There are Africans who herd cows, but the bagherra take pains to identify themselves as Islamic and Arab. In 1881, the bagherra supported the Mahdi with large units of cavalry. Traditionally slave raiders who took—and still take—slaves both for sale and local use, the bagherra have been in the Nuba Mountains for several hundred years. In the past, they often came into conflict with African and Arab farmers over slaves and the control of water and grazing resources.

The government uses the bagherra to consolidate control over areas, including land formerly held by the SPLM. In this respect, the bagherra often serve as a buffer between SPLM and GoS forces. The bagherra also consolidate the GoS's position in rear areas, alleviating the need for GoS Army regulars to do so.

In effect, the government's use of the bagherra validates the bagherra's historical practice of capturing new territory to gain greater access to grazing land. The bagherra claim that they use the AK-47 and G3 assault rifles provided by the GoS only to protect their herds from bandits; in general, they deny being employed as an irregular offensive military force. Individually, however, bagherra members will admit to being part of the government militia. The GoS, for its part, openly denies ever having armed the bagherra militias; rather, it declares that it has armed only fixed units of the PDF that have a civil defense role. The government's attempt at dissociating itself from the bagherra stems from the latter's current penchant for using government-supplied weapons to raid both Arabs and Africans. For the GoS, arming the bagherra was like opening Pandora's Box: the tribes generally cannot be controlled.

The GoS does control, and admits to controlling, the area's civil defense forces. Like reserve units in other countries, the civil defense forces are armed and trained by the government and undergo periodic refresher training. To some extent, however, the civil defense units represent collective defensive measures taken by townspeople, traders, and villagers. Although the GoS uses the forces for offensive operations, they mainly fulfill local security functions. For instance, in one village of several hundred residents that I visited, there were no GoS police or military present; armed PDF who worked without pay guarded the village full-time. The village was

not affluent, and it subsisted through agriculture and herding. It could ill afford to waste manpower by maintaining military forces, but it did so because it needed protection from bandits and the SPLM.

In 1881, the ansar provided both ideological influence and military support, mainly as infantry, to the Mahdi. Today, "ansar" denotes the mujahadeen mobilized by a 1992 fatwa to combat the SPLM in the Nuba Mountains. These volunteers were integrated into the PDF, received 45 days of military and religious training, and were used in conjunction with regular GoS military units, usually preceding regular forces in often fanatical charges to attrit or fix SPLM units so that the regular forces could gain tactical advantage. The ansar-mujahedeen charged straight up hills against dug-in SPLM soldiers
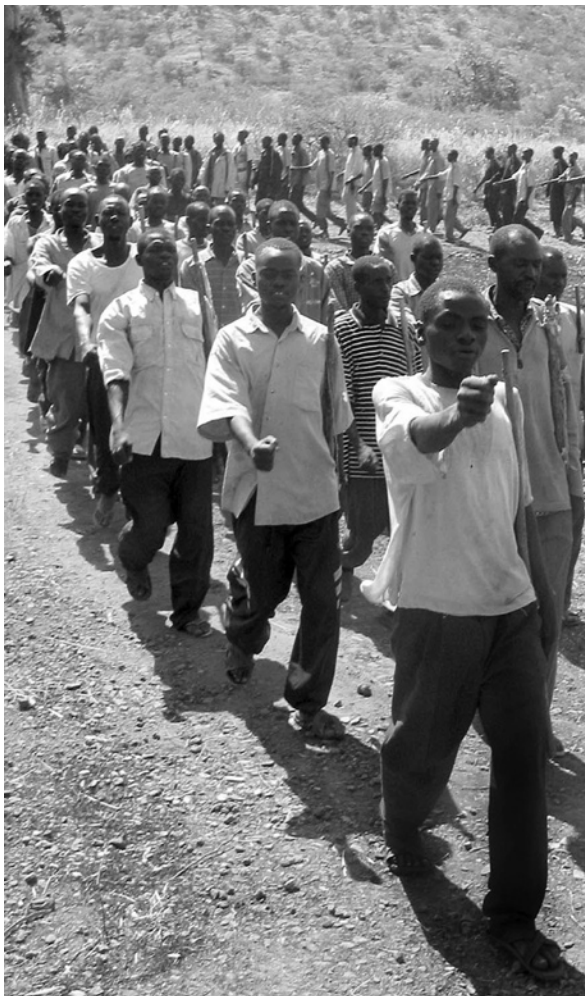
Fighters of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) train at a base in Sudan's Nuba Mountains region, 29 November 2003. A Nuba Mountains cease-fire signed in January 2003 permits routine training but forbids enlargement of SPLA or government forces in the region.

armed with automatic weapons, took high numbers of casualties, made few gains, and often ended up helping the SPLM, who collected weapons and ammunition off the dead fighters.

The mujahadeen ceased operations in 2003, but their appearance on the battlefield underscored the religious dimension of the Sudanese conflict. In 1983, the government exacerbated already existent tensions by institutionalizing Islam in the form of Sharia law. Many Sudanese did not accept Sharia wholeheartedly, even in the predominately Muslim north, while many others, especially non-Muslims in the southern and central portions of the country, considered Sharia foreign and rejected it.

While the nature of the conflict in Sudan is often categorized as being predominately religious, this is a gross overgeneralization. Religion is important to the Sudanese, but they are less doctrinaire about it and less identified by it than might be supposed. For example, Christianity in the Sudan often has more to do with a negative aspect of identity: it represents a unified ideological and political opposition to Islam and the GoS more than it does adherence to an orthodox set of beliefs.[2] Islam, too, has a political aspect as great or greater than its cultural and religious orientations. Consider the case of two brothers, Boutros and Abdelrahman, whom I met during a prisoner exchange in April 2002.

Boutros was an SPLM officer and GoS prisoner released as part of the exchange. He held the rank of lieutenant and professed to have been in the SPLM for 16 years. When I questioned him about his identity, he stated unequivocally that he was Sudanese first and Nubian second. Additionally, although he was born and raised as a Christian, he had two wives, one at his rebel base in the mountains and one at his home village in a government-controlled valley. He acknowledged that this violated the tenets of Christianity, but stated that it was an integral and accepted part of his culture. He made no mention of his tribe. Abdelrahman was a soldier in a GoS unit occupying the village of Shatt, roughly 30 kilometers from Kadugli. When I entered Shatt with Boutros, he and Abdelrahman immediately embraced and invited me to join them for a cup of tea.

Boutros (Peter) is clearly a Christian name, while Abdelrahman is clearly Islamic. I assumed that when they referred to themselves as brothers, the two men were referring to some sort of metaphorical

Brothers Boutros (on the right) and Abdelrahman in the village of Shatt in the Sudan immediately after Boutros's release from GoS captivity in April 2002.

kinship based on a common nationality or origin. However, their relationship appeared inordinately close, and upon further questioning I ascertained that they were actually biological brothers. In short, the two were born as Christians to Christian parents. While in his early teens, however, Abdelrahman was sent to Khartoum, where he eventually joined the GoS army and changed his name to the Muslim Abdelrahman. He explained to me that this made integration into the military easier and advancement more likely.

In a similar vein, one of the SPLM monitors whom I worked with was named Mohamed, yet he stated that he was a Christian. He also explained that although the SPLM had a significant number of Muslims in it, he felt that advancement was more likely as a Christian.

As these cases suggest, Nubian identity, and in particular religious identification, is situational, subject to change for economic, social, or other reasons. This is attested to by the large number of conversions between the two faiths based on the changing military situation.

Mission of the JMC

The JMC's purpose was to observe, report, and resolve violations of the cease-fire, to which both sides had agreed. The commission had to be seen as impartial, and it needed to analyze situations objectively in order to take appropriate action (or not take action). Because the national and religious affiliations of the monitors could be perceived as

undermining their objectivity and neutrality, most of the group received specialized regional training prior to deployment. The JMC's European members, however, received neither regional nor language preparation. Placing regional and cultural specialists in the headquarters and in key sectors partially offset this shortcoming, as did the hiring of local translators.

Unfortunately, translators can come with a cost. One problem with using them is that the employer becomes associated with them, and that association can undermine mission success. This is especially true in a region where religious identity is often tantamount to political identity: a team employing a Christian translator, for example, may have problems when it tries to deal with Muslims. Translators can also exert a disproportionate influence over operations by what they say, do not say, or emphasize. A complaint the JMC received highlights this problem.

Six Sudanese evangelist ministers reported to the JMC that GoS internal security forces in a nearby village had beaten them, held them for four days in a location with no sanitation facilities, and given them inadequate food and water. They said they had been abused for ministering to the religious needs of a village with a population of roughly two thousand people. The specific act that had gotten them into trouble was holding a prayer meeting for 50 or so people in the open air on the town outskirts.

Without a doubt, the complaint pointed to a violation of the principles of freedom of movement and freedom to practice religion guaranteed in the CFA. However, given the political dimensions of religion, acting on this complaint merited caution. The GoS viewed the evangelical ministers as intentionally spreading subversive messages and politicizing large groups of people, many of them supporters or potential supporters of the SPLM. That particular area had been the scene of heavy fighting in which the PDF had driven the SPLM

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from the area. Consequently, the ministers' actions were seen as an attempt to reintroduce the SPLM and to provoke the GoS.

Without recognizing the implications of what he was doing, one member of the JMC acted on the complaint and drove to the village in a JMC vehicle on a Sunday. The predominately Muslim population observed this and subsequently came to identify the JMC as an agency involved in promoting the spread of Christianity. This undermined our credibility, and in the following two weeks, two death threats were made against JMC members. For complaining, the ministers were publicly whipped on their backs and buttocks by Arab villagers.

The interpreters who translated the original complaint were Christian acquaintances of the evangelical ministers, and this complicated the case. Rather than simply translating the complaint and putting it into the queue for assessment and prioritization, the interpreters constantly reintroduced the subject and warned of the implications that could result from the JMC failing to take action. While I am not advocating inaction in such cases, a subtler approach and more thorough gathering of information would have been prudent. The entire team should have gone to the scene of the complaint with GoS and SPLM representatives and talked to local leaders and a cross-section of the population. Traveling as a team maintains the appearance of objectivity, allows both sides to learn of the situation, and lessens the potential of the JMC being used for ulterior purposes.

Overall, complaints posed a challenge to the JMC because they could not be collected in an efficient, effective manner. The initial JMC policy, that all complaints had to be delivered in writing to a commission headquarters, was part of the problem. We had one headquarters in the GoS area and one headquarters in the SPLM area. The large distances involved in getting to them and the dearth of motorized transport in the region drastically limited the information to which the JMC was exposed. The policy defeated the purpose of the sound technique of using roving, language-capable teams to make contact with a wide cross-section of the population. The requirement to submit a complaint in writing also did not take into account the low literacy rate in the Nuba, particularly among women and the elderly, who are a valuable source of information.

Minimal staffing also affected the JMC's operations. Given our numbers, it was impossible for us to investigate all complaints lodged and still conduct the random patrolling that was so critical to ensure cease-fire compliance. And we dealt with a large number of alleged and actual cease-fire violations. My sector alone recorded 47 during a three-month period. There were several notable intentional violations of the CFA by both sides, but we found that most of the breaches were unintentional, the result of lack of information, poor leadership, or conflation of a civil issue with the military situation. This being the case, a major portion of our duties was to educate people about the cease-fire agreement.

Depending on the source, SPLM members and bagherra were characterized as bandits or as legitimate soldiers. It is often difficult in a conflict to distinguish between the two. Like many guerrilla forces, the SPLM is not centralized either geographically or authoritatively, which makes holding it accountable for crimes and violence in its "territory" difficult. Banditry emanating from SPLM territory posed one of the greatest threats not only to the safety of the people and the monitors, but to the cease-fire process. One can refer to bandits in such situations as "spoilers" or as a "conflict constituency"—groups or individuals who benefit from the lawlessness inherent in armed conflict. One such case of banditry provides insight into the problems the JMC experienced due to economic violence.

On 29 June 2002, the JMC duty officer received a phone call from a GoS Army headquarters that a resident of a village roughly six miles away had been shot and killed. The incident was given to me to handle, and within 15 minutes of receiving it, I and a team that included an SPLM monitor, a GoS Army officer, and our camp doctor, a German who specialized in human rights abuses, were on board one of our helicopters. When we landed on the outskirts of the village, village elders, the commander of the local PDF unit, and the commander of the local GoS unit met us. There were no civil police in the area due to its designation as a combat zone.

The deceased was roughly 40 years old and a bagherra member of the Hawazmi tribe. After obtaining background information, we asked to view the body, which had been found approximately eight hours earlier. We found that the individual was wearing a military uniform. A cursory forensic

examination allowed us to conclude that he had been shot once in the back from a distance, twice in the heart from extremely close range (based on burn marks), and at least once in the head from close range, which resulted in the upper half of his head being removed. We established the time of death at about 12 hours before our examination. This corresponded with accounts from the man's family members, who stated that he had been missing since the night before. The deceased was reported to have been unarmed and to have been herding 26 goats, which were missing. The tracks of the goats and of two individuals were found going in the direction of SPLM territory, about four miles distant.

Was the herder a victim of banditry or of an act of war that violated the CFA? He wore a military uniform because he was a member of the PDF, and he had been killed by marauders who retreated into SPLM territory, but his murder probably wasn't an official SPLM military operation. Even so, there was little doubt that the SPLM had armed his killers, that the killers were SPLM members, and that they had taken advantage of SPLM-controlled territory to evade capture.

This crime illustrates the complex, hybrid civil-military nature of the problems peacekeepers often face in South Kordofan. It also could have had dire consequences for the cease-fire. We were afraid that members of the deceased's tribe would arm themselves and take retribution against the group believed responsible for the killing. Families and tribes on each side were also armed members of military organizations, so the civil aspects of this act could have been linked to the military dimension, and the incident could easily have expanded into a larger conflict, a fact that was not lost on the GoS soldiers in the area. To his credit, their commander put them on a high state of alert and directed them to prevent any bagherra from carrying arms. The case was resolved when the SPLM commander agreed to fly to the scene of the killing, issue a guarantee that the SPLM was not responsible, and cooperate with the GoS to find the killers.

Before the war, traditional methods to resolve conflict included councils made up of the concerned villages' leaders. However, with the establishment of separate GoS and SPLM areas, such lateral communication was largely terminated. Our method to resolve this issue was to reestablish—or in some

Slavery…exists in various forms throughout the Nuba Mountains, and…cannot be examined in isolation from its economic, political, social, and historical contexts.

cases, newly establish—channels of communication between village leaders, GoS forces, and, most important, SPLM leaders, who were often in remote locations. The channels of communication took the form of area councils comprised of village leaders from both sides of the fighting. JMC air and ground assets facilitated transportation to the councils to bypass front lines and hazardous areas.

Another type of complaint the JMC commonly received had to do with slavery. One such case involved a 13-year-old boy shot in a bagherra village. The boy was not from that area, and interviews indicated that his parents had sold him as labor. Slavery, defined as the involuntary servitude of a person who can be bought or sold as a commodity, exists in various forms throughout the Nuba Mountains, and, like other elements of the overall situation, cannot be examined in isolation from its economic, political, social, and historical contexts. Slavery is not simple to categorize, but for discussion purposes, I will divide it into three broad areas, two of which I have experience with.

The first category is an old, well-known one: Arab tribesmen raid African villages to gather slaves. The Hawazmi tribes of bagherra, for instance, have historically been slave raiders.[3] For the most part, the Hawazmi are agropastoralists who tend to reside in the area between GoS and SPLM positions. Their type of active, forced slavery is enabled by tacit government approval (and/or a complete lack of government control). Undoubtedly, the government did not want its complicity in such an outrage exposed to the world and, partly for this reason, there was no open slave raiding in the Nuba Mountains while I was there. There is significant evidence, however, of slave raiding having occurred throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.[4]

A second, more common, and largely overlooked form of involuntary servitude takes the form of

economic transactions between different tribes in which poor African families sell a child for a cow or a number of goats. This exchange results in one less mouth for a poor family to feed, a significant consideration given recent famines and the constant scarcity of food. Such transactions usually involve African Nubian families selling or trading individual children to bagherra. The child is then raised with the new tribe and generally used as a herder and agricultural laborer.

The last category of slavery, arranged marriage, is perhaps the subtlest, most accepted, and most pervasive kind. Males frequently have multiple wives and daughters, whom they often view as they do their livestock—like commodities. I commonly encountered this type of human transaction in both "African" and "Arab" villages.

Typically, after I visited a village several times and was introduced to its elders, it was just a matter of time before the discussion shifted to my marital status and why I did not yet have a Sudanese bride. (The feeling was that there was something dysfunctional with me because I did not take a wife after living somewhere for several months). Despite my explaining that I had an American wife and would be returning to America, the typical response was that my only obligation would be to send support payments back to the Sudan. While this may not agree with the "traditional" image of slavery, the female, usually an adolescent, had no say in the matter. The transaction was between the family and the would-be husband—the female was little more than a commodity to be used for pleasure and reproduction. Less attention is paid to situations of this nature than to the less common occurrence of entire villages being captured and sold.

The latter two forms of slavery are an integral and accepted part of the collective cultures in the area. Efforts to halt them would be challenging and counterproductive to any cease-fire and mediation efforts.

## Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid

For both the warring parties and for the JMC, the local population is the center of gravity. The monitoring mission faced the challenging mandate to ensure humanitarian aid flowed to all areas in South Kordofan, yet, because the JMC's success rested on its ability to be (and be perceived as) neutral, any association with groups not seen as neutral

undermined the mission's credibility. Such groups included the UN and aid organizations.

Although many in the UN and nongovernmental organization (NGO) communities thought of humanitarian aid as neutral, it mainly benefited the SPLM because it diminished GoS efforts at population control and resettlement. The UN sent flights to airstrips in even the remotest regions. In areas where it was impossible to land, humanitarian aid was dropped by parachute. The delivery of aid to the SPLM areas of the Nuba Mountains started in May 2002 under the parameters of the CFA and the aegis of the JMC. However, given the control the SPLM exercised over food distribution and the close ties that some international and nongovernmental organizations have with the SPLM, food aid often went directly to the SPLM, from whence it was distributed to both the combatants and the local population (including SPLM families). Humanitarian aid thus served as a logistical enabling factor, permitting the SPLM to conduct and sustain combat operations. I make this observation not as a comment on the morality of providing aid, but merely to point out that this fact is often lost on some of the groups promoting humanitarian aid that do not see their organizations as actively supporting one side or the other.

The GoS attempted to use aid and the threat of starvation to control the population and limit the SPLM's influence. This tactic is not new in counterinsurgency warfare, because government control of population centers precludes insurgents from gaining bases of support. Consequently, few people have the luxury of remaining neutral during a counterinsurgency. The occupation of a village, the forced conscription of its residents, and the appropriation of its commodities to supply a warring party may draw even remote villages into a conflict. In the Sudan, the GoS may categorize a village supplying the SPLM with food (even unwillingly) as hostile and target it, a response very apparent in the destroyed, burned-out villages that are a common sight throughout the Nuba Mountains. The GoS destroyed these villages and resettled their inhabitants in "peace camps," which have become a focal point of international criticism against the GoS.

Peace camps are usually existing villages that have been greatly expanded and are controlled through a GoS agency known as the Peace and Resettlement Commission. They are located in the
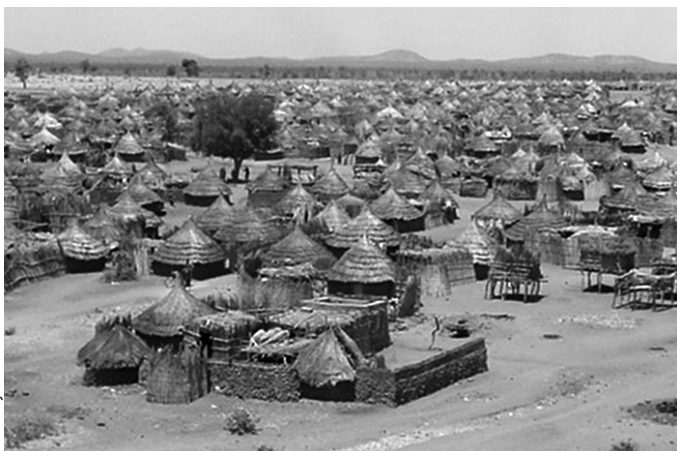
Government of Sudan peace camp in the Nuba Mountains.

valleys and the plains, where they can be easily defended, not in the mountainous areas controlled by the SPLM. While villages in SPLM areas are spread out to capitalize on smallholder agriculture and to avoid being easy targets for GoS forces, peace camps are extremely concentrated. The area around them has generally been cleared of vegetation in a circle approximately one kilometer wide to prevent SPLM forces from infiltrating them and residents from leaving them. GoS-affiliated NGOs and food programs sustain the camps, and GoS soldiers (generally a platoon of infantry) are garrisoned in them.

The primary GoS agency coordinating relief in the Nuba Mountains is the Humanitarian Action Committee (HAC), which, despite its name, is a political organization with the mission of coordinating NGO operations in government areas and controlling NGO access to SPLM areas. For example, the HAC approves international humanitarian flights into rebel areas, and despite the dire circumstances of much of the population, in April 2002 alone it cancelled 109 scheduled flights into SPLM-held areas. The government claimed the HAC cancelled the flights to prevent weapons and ammunition from being smuggled to the SPLM.

Since one of the JMC's main goals was to reinstate relief flights, the government in Khartoum agreed to allow World Food Program (WFP) flights into SPLM areas if JMC monitors inspected the flights. The planes I inspected contained subsistence crop seeds and agricultural tools such as sickles and hoes. The WFP's intent was to enable the local population to begin planting before the rainy season began in

June. Knowledge of planting cycles thus became a critical element in the cease-fire's success.

The SPLM is not concentrated in garrisons. Its personnel are dispersed over large areas and generally live in family units. SPLM members who have come from the south have tended to take local wives. Because shortages of food do not affect just the SPLM, but their families as well, differentiating between humanitarian aid and military aid is problematic.

Food can be a powerful weapon, and the GoS uses it as such, not only by denying food imports into SPLM areas, but also by destroying crops. The GoS fosters famine conditions in the hope that SPLM soldiers will desert and resettle with their families in peace camps. In response, the SPLM in the past prevented people from leaving territory it controlled, even if starvation conditions were present. As this case illustrates, humanitarian aid can subvert the government's efforts to use food as a weapon against the rebels.

Throughout the Sudan, Islamic and Arabic groups have criticized humanitarian aid as a tool of foreign domination meant to undermine existing economic structures at the groups' expense. A 1992 fatwa, for instance, refers to the "forces of arrogance who have been supplying [the SPLM] with food and arms."[5] Propaganda that accompanied humanitarian aid delivered by the Red Crescent, an Islamic NGO, also capitalized on this theme. Proselytizing members of a religion often accompany Western aid, and Muslim clerics from the Red Crescent frequently accompanied Red Crescent aid. In the Nuba Mountains, these Muslim clerics (typically from Egypt or Saudi Arabia) spoke directly against Western aid and the JMC, accusing both of being tools of a Western plan to destroy Islam. This complaint was not unique to Islamic NGOs.

Some aid groups clearly sided with the SPLM and refused to operate equally in government and SPLM areas. For instance, one U.S. NGO that operated only in SPLM areas was critical of the CFA since it felt the government was not operating in good faith. The NGO's own partisanship, though, was not in doubt. Not only did its representatives discourage SPLM members from embracing the cease-fire, but they also combined proselytizing with aid distribution and donated used tractors to SPLM members for military purposes. This is noteworthy because agricultural tractors are the only vehicles able to move
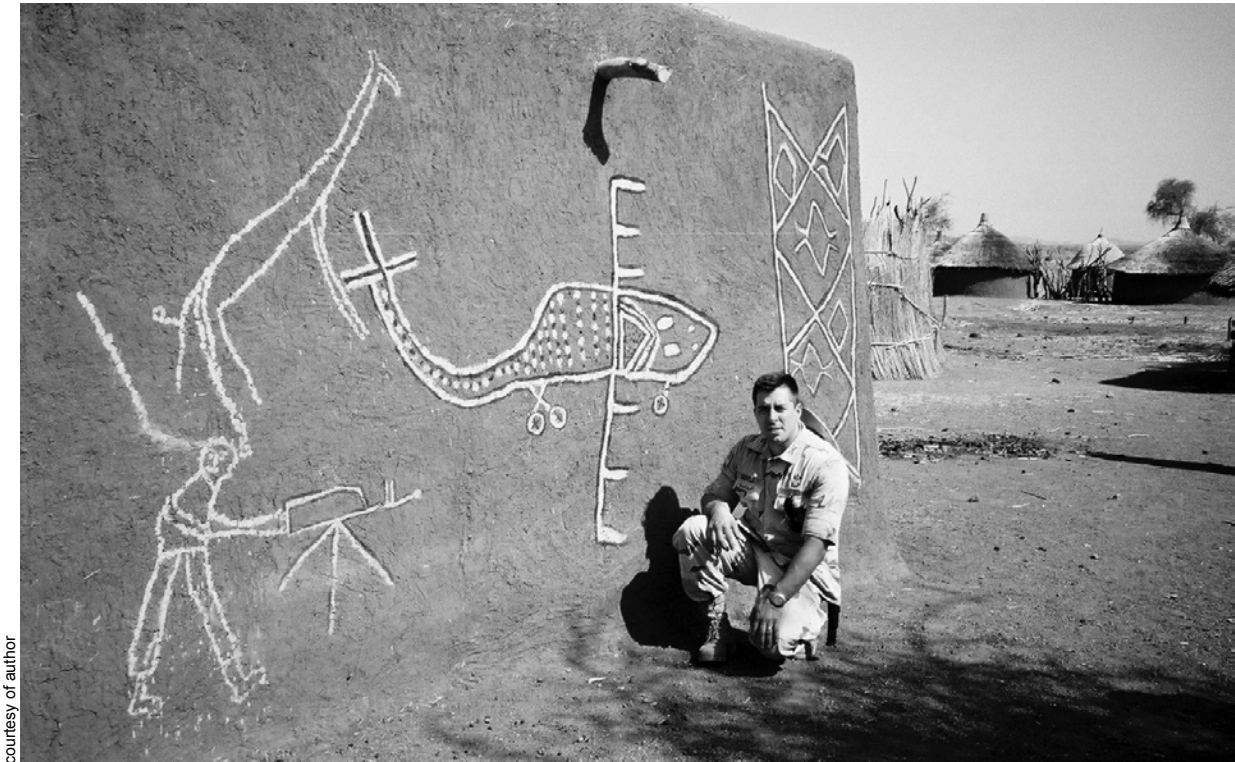
courtesy of author

The author next to a clay drawing in a village that was a former SPLA stonghold. The drawing depicts a GoS helicopter as a snake being shot at by SPLA fighters. The snake is a metaphor for the devil. The giraffe is significant because there are no giraffes in the area, most likely indicating that the artist was from Southern Sudan.

along the muddy roads during the rainy season. The tractor violation was discovered when Mohamed Tutu, chief of intelligence for the SPLM in South Kordofan, was killed along with five others when the tractor he was on struck an antitank mine. The tractor had come from the aforementioned NGO, and the occupants were not farmers, but SPLM soldiers.

Keys to Success

At the direction of the GoS, the cease-fire monitoring mission in the Nuba Mountains ended in 2005. During its 3-year existence, the mission made some mistakes, but overall it successfully maintained a cessation of hostilities that had been ongoing for 20 years. The JMC's success was the result of constant analysis of the social, economic, religious, and cultural factors that influenced the conflict. In the Sudan, we were acutely aware that although it might take years to build a cease-fire agreement, it could take only seconds to destroy one. As a result, it was critical to understand what the incentives were for disrupting the cease-fire and who had them, and to know how the work of NGOs

and other international organizations could either further the process or undermine it.

In an unstable, multidimensional environment like the Sudan's, dogmatic claims are more often an indication of ignorance than of intelligence. One fact, however, is certain: military forces are often necessary to maintain a cease-fire or to keep the peace, but military force alone will not be sufficient. Conflict has many overlapping, mutually transforming dimensions, and success in stopping it requires knowledgeable personnel, informed planning, and tremendous flexibility. *MR*

NOTES

1. The military wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In practice in the Sudan, the terms are interchangeable. I have opted to use SPLM for this essay.
2. Mohamed Salih, "Some Methodological Problems in the Study of Nationalism and Nation-Building in the Sudan," *Bayreuth Journal of African Studies Series* 1: (1984).
3. P.M. Holt, *The Modern History of the Sudan: From the Funj Sultanate to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), no further information provided.
4. Alex De Waal, *Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan* (London: African Rights Publications, 1995), no further information provided.
5. In Muslim writings and speeches of this nature, the terms "forces of arrogance" or "the Great Arrogance" invariably refer to the United States.