

## SUDAN AND THE UNITED STATES: IS A DECADE OF TENSION WINDING DOWN?

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Following over a decade of consistently hostile relations with Sudan, the United States indicated a willingness to consider Sudan's bid to rehabilitate its international stature in the fall of 2001. This shift was reflected in the U.S. abstention, rather than a veto, in a Security Council vote on whether to lift the U.N. sanctions imposed on Sudan some five years earlier. The move resulted in the lifting of the sanctions in September 2001. Given Washington's central role in the imposition of the sanctions, their revocation seemed to signal a thaw in the prolonged bilateral antagonism. The Sudanese government, while relieved, was aware, nevertheless, that only the removal of Sudan from the U.S. blacklist of states sponsoring international terrorism would provide the hoped-for basis for a substantial rapprochement. This goal was considered by Khartoum as vital to the survival of the government, which was threatened by mounting internal and external difficulties. As of December 2001, Sudan had not been removed from the list.

The roots and development of the bilateral dispute, which ultimately turned Sudan into a pariah state and adversely

affected the region as well, are analyzed below, viewed mainly through the Sudanese prism. The article also examines the tactics and strategy used by Sudan to cope with the U.N. sanctions, U.S.-imposed punitive measures, and perceived American political efforts at eliminating the Sudanese regime. Research for this study has relied extensively on the Sudanese and other Arab media.

### **EMERGING TENSION, 1990**

The military coup d'état launched by Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir on June 30, 1989, put an end to the three-year-old democratically elected government led by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi of the Umma party. This changing of the political guard marked a watershed in Sudan's domestic and foreign affairs, as the new regime committed itself single-mindedly to turning Sudan into a fully Islamic state. An announcement by the new regime on New Year's Eve 1990 of the inauguration of the Sharia as the law of the land was particularly worrisome to the United States. The Americans feared the impact of Sudan's militant Islam on other countries in the Middle East and Africa, namely, the destabilizing of their govern-

ments and, consequently, the endangering of American interests in the region.<sup>1</sup>

Growing political ties between the Bashir regime and Libya and Iran, as well as support by Bashir for Iraq's annexation of Kuwait, reinforced the American sense of threat. The U.S. State Department became harshly critical of the Bashir regime, with one official depicting it in November 1990 as the "Khmer Rouge" of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Angered, the Bashir regime encouraged the Sudanese public to vent indignation in mass anti-U.S. demonstrations. During one of them, staged in January 1991 just after the outbreak of the Gulf War, Sudanese crowds marching in Khartoum burned effigies of U.S. President George Bush. Concurrently, Sudanese leaders made a point of publicly glorifying Iraq for facing down the "Atlantic aggression" and thereby enhancing "the pride of the Arab Islamic nation."<sup>3</sup>

Sudan's solidarity with the radical anti-Western camp in the Middle East became more pronounced in 1992, reflected in the close political ties maintained by the regime with Iraq and the strengthening of the Sudanese alliance with Iran. Sudan allegedly co-opted Iranian military personnel into its armed forces, permitted Iran to establish a military base on the Red Sea in its territory, and opened its borders to provide a base for terrorist groups financed and controlled by Tehran. In addition, Sudan allegedly authorized the presence of a branch of the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hizballah in Khartoum.<sup>4</sup> All these alleged moves, however, were denied by Sudanese officials.<sup>5</sup>

The escalating conflict of interests and consequent deepening of hostility between the U.S. administration under President Bill Clinton and the Sudanese regime was

perceived by Khartoum as a pretext by Washington to undermine the government in Sudan. A report to Congress by the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Herman Cohen, on March 10, 1993, referring to Khartoum's hospitality toward radical Islamic elements such as Hizballah, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, was viewed in Khartoum as proof. Cohen's explicit warning on that occasion that Sudan was "extremely close" to being placed on the State Department terrorism list heightened anxiety in Khartoum.<sup>6</sup> Conceivably, the timing of the warning was influenced by the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in February 1993, although there was no evidence connecting Sudan to the event.

A condemnation of Sudan by the U.N. Human Rights Commission for widespread domestic executions and terror, and its exceptional decision to investigate these reported atrocities, issued on March 10, 1993, increased Khartoum's apprehensions. Bashir feared an imminent military incursion by the United States under the pretext of insuring relief supplies to Sudan's non-Muslim and non-Arab southern region, which was immersed in a prolonged war against the government.<sup>7</sup> Seeking a way out of the escalating crisis, Khartoum launched a diplomatic campaign aimed at defusing tension, hiring a Washington public relations firm for this purpose.<sup>8</sup> The regime issued profuse denials of any connection with terrorism, simultaneously attempting to project a peace-seeking image. It dispatched a high-ranking envoy to Washington in mid-March, hoping to reduce the hostility toward it, but the mission failed, as signified by a new wave of verbal attacks on the United States

launched by Khartoum in the spring of 1993. America's "ferocious [propaganda] onslaught" against Sudan, Khartoum officials emphasized repeatedly, was in actuality an attack on Sudan's "model of Islamic civilization," which conflicted with that of the West.<sup>9</sup> Sudan also accused the United States of supporting the southern Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the movement fighting the government, thereby impeding the peace process in Sudan. Sudan also implied that the United States was involved in transferring arms from Somalia to the SPLA.<sup>10</sup>

Tension was further heightened when the FBI arrested five Sudanese in mid-1993 in connection with plots to blow up key sites in New York and assassinate American political leaders. Although the United States announced it had no evidence of the Sudanese government's participation, and Khartoum denied any link to the schemes, relations between the two countries continued to deteriorate.<sup>11</sup>

### **THE DESIGNATION OF SUDAN AS A SPONSOR OF TERRORISM, 1993**

American forbearance with the Sudanese regime ran out in the summer of 1993 in the face of mounting threats against the pro-American Egyptian government by Islamic extremists allegedly backed by Sudan. On August 18, having completed a "systematic 180-day review," the U.S. State Department designated Sudan "a state sponsor of acts of international terrorism." The official U.S. statement noted that "evidence currently available indicates that Sudan allows the use of its territory as sanctuary for terrorists . . . [providing] safe houses and other facilities used to support radical groups." Furthermore, it noted, "reports of training in

Sudan of militant extremists that commit acts of terrorism in neighboring countries are credible."<sup>12</sup> Sudan thus joined the club of countries blacklisted by the United States, alongside Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Cuba and North Korea. Besides stigmatizing the regime politically, the step also had negative economic and military implications, disqualifying Sudan from virtually all American economic and military assistance except humanitarian aid.

The announcement triggered venomous verbal attacks by Khartoum, essentially reflecting its fear of a possible American-led Somali-style intervention. Sudanese authorities orchestrated a wave of stormy anti-U.S. demonstrations in the capital, one of which depicted the United States as Sudan's number one enemy.<sup>13</sup> Under pressure from its intense dispute with Egypt, as well as from its international and regional isolation,<sup>14</sup> the regime needed to provide the public with a convincing explanation for the American decision, while absolving itself of responsibility. It therefore hammered on the contention that it was targeted because of its Islamic orientation, emphasizing repeatedly that the American act was a "conspiracy against Islam."<sup>15</sup> Concurrently, it continued to deny America's "baseless accusations" of Sudanese involvement in terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

Sudan's anger toward the United States was fanned in late 1993 by a symposium sponsored by the State Department in Washington with the participation of representatives of the rival southern rebel groups. The conference, Sudan's foreign minister asserted, was "a veil to obfuscate secret meetings between the factions of the rebel movement . . . and to unite these factions against the [Khartoum government]." Other Sudanese officials

went further, accusing the United States of encouraging the southern rebels to demand self-determination, which they claimed was tantamount to the separation of the south from the Sudanese state.<sup>17</sup> A visit to southern Sudan, which was largely under the control of the local fighting opposition, by the U.S. ambassador, Donald Petterson, in February 1994 without obtaining prior permission from the Sudanese government reinforced this resentment. The visit, the regime charged, was "a violation of [Sudan's] national sovereignty" and served as additional evidence of "the open alignment to the rebel movement by the U.S."<sup>18</sup> However, Khartoum soon reversed its position and played down the affair, noting that Petterson's visit had in actuality taken place with the knowledge of the Sudanese Foreign Ministry.<sup>19</sup> This contradictory response may have reflected either governmental malfunctioning or an attempt by the regime to avoid further tension with Washington.

A visit to Khartoum in March 1994 by the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine K. Albright, the first high-level American official to arrive in Sudan since Bashir's takeover in 1989, raised hopes in Khartoum for a thaw in the bilateral stalemate. A statement released by Albright, however, reiterated that if the Sudanese government wanted to defuse tension with the United States and rehabilitate its international position, it had to improve its human-rights record, reach a peaceful solution to the war in the south, and stop its support of terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Angered, Sudan vilified American policy, which, it said, was dominated by "permanent hostility, escalation of contention and arbitrariness." As in the past, Bashir rationalized the rancorous attitude of the

United States as motivated by Sudan's Islamic orientation.<sup>21</sup>

To Sudan's distress, the U.S. administration increased its political involvement in the country's civil war, appointing Ambassador Melissa F. Wells as President Clinton's special representative on Sudan in May 1994. Her mission was "to promote the regional peace effort . . . and to help smooth delivery of humanitarian assistance" to the south.<sup>22</sup> Wells visited Khartoum in June and exchanged views with the Sudanese leadership as part of a comprehensive tour of Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea – the four member states of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) formed in 1993 to resolve the Sudanese conflict. Bashir, hoping to revive relations with Washington, used the occasion to attempt to project a peace-seeking image, but without success.

The Sudanese regime persisted in efforts to effect a reconciliation with the United States, aware that the Americans held the key to ending Khartoum's pariah standing and to resuming a flow of finances and economic assistance to Sudan. In a dramatic move, Sudan handed over the notorious international terrorist Illich Ramirez Sanchez, better known as Carlos, to France in August 1994, after which Sudan's minister of justice, Abd al-Aziz Shiddu, explicitly articulated the regime's expected reward: removal from the U.S. blacklist.<sup>23</sup> This expectation, however, was disappointed; the United States considered the extradition "insufficient" for such recompense. State Department officials reiterated accusations that the regime harbored various terrorist groups.<sup>24</sup>

Frustrated, the Sudanese government retaliated by mounting a smear campaign

against Ambassador Petterson. This evoked a vehement protest by the United States. Sudan's Foreign Ministry hurriedly apologized, fearing further escalation, while at the same time protesting the "unfounded charges" by the United States that Sudan fostered terrorism. Once again, mainly for domestic consumption, the regime claimed that American antagonism toward it resulted from the regime's "cultural [Islamic] orientation and its independent decision-making process."<sup>25</sup>

Bashir's hostility toward, and fear of, the United States was reinforced during 1995 by a series of steps taken by Washington clearly aimed at undermining his regime. Particularly alarming to Khartoum

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was increased American pressure to weaken Sudan's position in the Horn of Africa. In a typical statement, the regime accused the "author of the so-called new world order" of "plot[ing] with some neighboring African states against Sudan," a reference to Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia.<sup>26</sup> A conference held by the Sudanese opposition in Asmara in June 1995 with the blessing and possibly financial and logistic support of the United States was viewed by Sudan as evidence of Washington's determination to bring about the removal of Bashir's government from power. This perception was reinforced by the attendance at the conference of Ambassador Petterson.<sup>27</sup> Sudan was also concerned about what it claimed was American military support for the southern oppositionist SPLA. Another source of tension was a vociferous American condemnation of

Sudan's record on human rights, accompanied by a demand by the United States for the release from jail of ex-premier and veteran leader of the Umma party, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi.<sup>28</sup>

**IMPOSITION OF U.N. SANCTIONS, 1996: THE U.S. ROLE**

Following intensive lobbying by the United States and Egypt, whose hostility toward Sudan escalated further in the mid-1990s, the U.N. Security Council adopted

Resolution 1044 on January 31, 1996, demanding that Sudan hand over to Ethiopia, within 60 days, three Egyptian nationals allegedly present in its territory. The three were suspected of carrying out the

attempted assassination of Egyptian President Husni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995.<sup>29</sup> The resolution also called on Sudan to cease "assisting, supporting and facilitating terrorist activities and . . . giving shelter and sanctuary to terrorist elements." Sudan's failure to comply with the demand, the resolution stated, would necessitate the consideration of further action, a clear implication of sanctions.<sup>30</sup>

The threat was highly distressing to the Sudanese regime, which was convinced that it was being lured into a political trap by the Security Council, or, in effect, by two of its member states that were sworn enemies of the Sudanese regime – the United States and Egypt – regardless of any goodwill act or gesture that Khartoum undertook. This perception was reflected in Sudan's state-controlled media, which portrayed the resolution as tantamount to

“demanding the impossible,” resembling “the throwing [of] a bound person into the river and asking him not to get wet.”<sup>31</sup>

In a step that further delegitimized the Sudanese regime, the Clinton administration evacuated the entire U.S. diplomatic staff and their families from Sudan and advised the 2,100 American citizens living there to leave the country for reasons of security. The move reflected a bid by the United States to capitalize on the momentum against Sudan in the international community and further erode Bashir’s position.<sup>32</sup>

Angered, the Sudanese government was nevertheless careful to avoid provoking further bilateral strain. It asserted that American diplomats would never find a more secure place to live than Khartoum and noted that the evacuation was not based “on concrete or objective evidence.”<sup>33</sup>

With the approach of the Security Council review of the resolution to impose sanctions on Sudan, scheduled for the spring of 1996, the United States stepped up efforts to nurture the international anti-Sudanese atmosphere by deporting the second secretary of the Sudanese U.N. mission, Ahmad Yusuf Muhammad, for his “connections with the terrorist group convicted of plotting to blow up the U.N. building” in New York in 1993.<sup>34</sup> Khartoum called the expulsion “an open violation of international law” and an additional “form of [American] pressure” on the United Nations to tighten its stranglehold on Sudan.<sup>35</sup>

In early May, the Security Council passed a resolution imposing diplomatic and travel sanctions on Sudan, a move that Bashir attributed to American influence.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, the United States ordered Sudan’s information attaché in Washington,

Sadiq al-Bakhit, to leave the country because of his government’s refusal to surrender suspects in the assassination attempt against Egyptian President Mubarak. Moreover, Sudan’s remaining diplomatic personnel in its embassy and its U.N. mission were placed under a restriction of movement limited to a 25-mile radius.

The United States also targeted Sudan on another front. In mid-November 1996, American sources leaked word of a U.S. decision to send nearly \$20 million in military aid to three countries neighboring Sudan – Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. All were committed adversaries of the regime in Khartoum and were viewed by it as staunch supporters of the Sudanese National Democratic Alliance opposition, an umbrella body consisting of banned northern opposition political parties and military groups as well as the southern SPLA oppositionist movement. While, according to American officials, the aid was nonlethal and defensive only, congressional and Pentagon sources heightened the psychological effect of the decision by stressing that “the aid could be expanded to include rifles and other weapons.” The first shipments, according to the announcement, were expected to arrive in East Africa in late December.<sup>37</sup> Alarmed, Khartoum claimed that “a U.S.-backed invasion” was imminent and attempted to mobilize immediate political support from Muslim countries, particularly Iran, on the grounds that the “U.S. is the main colonialist nation that directs all of its military capability toward fighting Islam.” Escalating this terminology, Bashir accused the United States of waging a crusade (*hamla salibiyya*) against Sudan.<sup>38</sup>

Anti-American rhetoric continued to be a major tool of the Sudanese regime in its

efforts to deflect domestic criticism of daily hardships and governmental dysfunction away from itself. The results of the regime's acute economic incompetence evoked widespread violent protest in 1996, while its failure to end the 13-year civil war squeezed the human and economic resources of the country to the breaking point. In addition, Khartoum's iron-fisted control of domestic policy and its failure to broaden its political base of support destabilized the political atmosphere, further fueling popular ferment against the regime. Khartoum persisted in its charge that the U.S. administration was determined to eradicate the Sudanese government.<sup>39</sup> Washington, abandoning any remaining diplomatic niceties, instructed its new ambassador to Sudan, Timothy M. Carney, operating from the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, to pointedly visit the Sudanese opposition headquarters in Eritrea and openly hold talks with its leaders.<sup>40</sup>

Still, Sudan, anxious to rid itself of its pariah status both internationally and regionally, kept up diplomatic attempts to ease the tension with the United States. Bashir explicitly expressed his wish "to keep the doors of dialogue open in order to remove the cloudiness and turbulence tarnishing bilateral relations."<sup>41</sup> Washington, however, remained adamantly antagonistic. Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May 1997, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, George E. Moose, declared that his country must "isolate Sudan and contain its support for insurgents and terrorists, and . . . oblige the Sudanese Government, by exacting a price for unacceptable behavior, to change its domestic and international conduct." Moose explicitly accused Sudan of sup-

porting international terrorism, actively seeking to destabilize its neighbors, and having "one of the worst human-rights records in the world."<sup>42</sup>

### **IMPOSITION OF U.S. SANCTIONS, 1997**

A hardening of the U.S. attitude toward the Bashir government was exemplified in November 1997 by the imposition of sanctions under an emergency executive order signed by President Clinton. Accordingly, Sudanese government assets in the United States were blocked and all U.S. trade and most financial transactions prohibited. The decision to impose the sanctions, stated Secretary of State Albright, was based on the Sudanese government's "continued sponsorship of international terror, its effort to destabilize neighboring countries, and its abysmal record on human rights, including religious persecution against non-Muslim minorities."<sup>43</sup>

In response, the Sudanese leadership castigated the "unjust American trade embargo" and "false allegations" aimed at "undermining Sudan's stability and territorial integrity."<sup>44</sup> Implementing a series of protest acts, the Sudanese government halted transactions with U.S. banks, including foreign branches and subsidiaries outside the United States, while also banning Sudanese banks from executing any export or import contracts with American businesses without the prior approval of the Bank of Sudan. Furthermore, a boycott was placed on the use of the U.S. dollar in commercial dealings. Simultaneously, Khartoum attempted to minimize the effect of the sanctions by stressing that the volume of trade between the two countries "does not exceed 5 percent of Sudan's total external trade."<sup>45</sup>

Strained bilateral relations were further discernible in the exclusion of Sudan from a tour by Clinton of several African states in April 1998. Not only did the American president skip over Sudan, he demonstratively singled out Uganda, one of Sudan's most implacable enemies, as the central pillar of his trip. Not surprisingly, Bashir referred to Clinton's arrival in Kampala as a clear-cut message of support "for Uganda's backing of the Sudanese rebel [SPLA] movement and for the [continuation of the] war."<sup>46</sup> A meeting between American officials and Sudanese rebel leaders in Asmara during the tour reinforced Khartoum's conviction that American intentions were malicious. The Sudanese army spokesman accused the United States of instigating the hostile African alliance against Sudan, exploiting Africa's resources and turning the continent into a market for American weapons.<sup>47</sup>

With this, the Sudanese regime repeatedly professed its desire to initiate an "effective dialogue" with the United States, although Sudanese politicians stressed that eagerness for a dialogue "definitely does not mean that we want to obliterate ourselves . . . [for] we have our own domestic issues." Recurrent statements of this kind were aimed at boosting the regime's image domestically by emphasizing what Bashir constantly vaunted as the independent nature of his leadership and its steadfast commitment to Islam. It was this essence of the Sudanese government, its leaders claimed, that prompted the United States to try "to subdue the regime and bring it to its knees."<sup>48</sup>

Khartoum's sporadic signals that it wished to defuse the tension with Washington were ignored by the Americans, who were deeply concerned by evidence of

Sudan's support of international terrorism; destabilizing activity aimed at neighboring countries in Africa and the Middle East; repressive internal policies and human-rights violations; and, most disturbing, the ongoing civil war. The United States made no explicit reference, however, to the radical Islamic and militant character of the regime.

### **SUDAN-U.S. RELATIONS AT A NADIR: THE MISSILE ATTACK ON KHARTOUM, 1998**

Bilateral tension escalated in the summer of 1998 when the United States accused Khartoum of involvement in the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, in which over 250 people were killed and some 5,000 wounded. Fearful of American retaliation, Bashir's government promptly and unequivocally denied any connection with the incidents.<sup>49</sup> The denial, however, did not have any effect on American policy. On August 20, the United States launched a cruise missile attack on "terrorist-related facilities" in Sudan, along with a similar attack on Afghanistan. The aim of the attack, according to the American leadership, was both retaliatory and preemptive, implemented within the context of what the United States called the "long-term struggle with terrorism" and based on "the legal right to self-defense." More specifically, the United States stressed that the mission was aimed at striking at the network of radical groups affiliated with and financed by Osama bin Ladin, the Saudi-born financial magnate turned terrorist, who had spent time in Sudan and was involved in various economic ventures there.<sup>50</sup>

The attack focused on the Shifa factory located in the Bahri industrial area

of Khartoum. According to U.S. claims, the plant was involved in the production of materials for chemical weapons, namely the deadly VX nerve agent, and was part of an enterprise known as the Military Industrial Complex, to which Bin Ladin was "a substantial contributor."<sup>51</sup> Rejecting these charges and insisting that the plant in question produced only pharmaceutical products, the regime's leadership labeled the missile strike "criminal," "treacherous" and "barbaric." They depicted the attack as an onslaught against Sudan's Islamic orientation and the Sudanese people as a whole, and called for the formation of an international committee to investigate the act. Sudanese authorities also denied any connection between the Shifa factory and Bin Ladin, emphasizing that he had left the country long before the opening of the plant in 1997.<sup>52</sup> Other reports claimed, however, that Bin Ladin's departure was not quite so complete and, additionally, that a link existed between Iraq and the Shifa factory for the purpose of storing or manufacturing chemical weapons.<sup>53</sup>

Hasan Abdallah al-Turabi, the principal ideologue of the regime and the second most powerful politician after Bashir, noted defiantly that "Islam is now entrenched and no one can remove it by force anymore." He also mocked American efforts to "neutralize Osama bin Ladin with missiles," which, he predicted, "would have the opposite effect, creating 10,000 Bin Ladins." Washington itself had made Bin Ladin an Islamic "freedom fighter," Turabi declared, since he had been co-opted by the CIA to fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.<sup>54</sup> Another official defined the attack as a flagrant manifestation of Clinton's "loss of temper," which, he said, was not surprising since the

American president had already been exposed as "a person who cannot control even his most basic instincts."<sup>55</sup> Bashir and Turabi went even further, stating that the "schism between the U.S. and us can by no means be bridged."<sup>56</sup>

Unable to retaliate effectively against American "terrorist aggression," Bashir's regime could only seek to minimize any further erosion of its image. It mobilized domestic public opinion to resist "U.S. terrorism," a tactic that also helped the regime deflect attention from its grave internal problems. In the same vein, Khartoum recalled its entire diplomatic mission from Washington the day after the attack and orchestrated anti-U.S. rallies at the unoccupied American embassy building in Khartoum. The government also banned U.S. aircraft from Sudanese airspace and lodged a complaint about the attack with the U.N. Security Council.

The regime was buoyed by the widespread denunciation of the U.S. strike by governments, non-governmental organizations, academicians and the media throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds, Africa and the international community, including in the United States itself. Of even greater consolation was the failure of the U.S. administration to prove that the plant actually manufactured material for chemical weapons. Opinion grew, particularly in the United States, that the attack was the result of an intelligence blunder or fabrication, which enabled the Khartoum regime to portray itself as a victim rather than a dangerous troublemaker.

While Khartoum continued to issue denials, Washington contended that it had solid evidence to back its claim that the Shifa factory was involved in making chemical precursors, including VX nerve

gas. This evidence, the United States argued, included soil samples from the area around the plant that contained a precursor chemical known as empta, but additional information could not be made public for fear of jeopardizing intelligence sources. Several commentators, however, including Americans, doubted the evidence. Some chemistry authorities argued that the sample was "hardly conclusive," since empta was also used to produce pesticides and herbicides.<sup>57</sup> Its self-confidence enhanced, Sudan reiterated demands that the United States apologize publicly for attacking the Shifa plant and pay full compensation for the losses endured. Whatever these losses, the regime pointed out, Sudan had nevertheless "won this battle – politically and diplomatically."<sup>58</sup> With the eruption of new fighting in Sudan's eastern and southern regions in the fall of 1998, Khartoum further accused the United States of resorting to a "proxy war" by backing military attacks by "agent regimes bordering on Sudan" aimed "against Islam and Arabism."<sup>59</sup>

In April 1999, to Bashir's distress, the United States once again classified Sudan as a state that sponsored terrorism. At the same time, a U.S. decision was made to ease its sanctions policy and allow food and medical items to be sold to Sudan (as well as to Iran and Libya). This, however, did not signify any conciliation in the view of the Sudanese authorities, who perceived the move as aimed solely at serving American interests, i.e., alleviating economic pressures on U.S. farmers and producers.<sup>60</sup>

The issue of the U.S. missile attack resurfaced in May 1999, when a U.S. court released \$24-million worth of assets belonging to the Sudanese owner of the

bombed plant, which had been frozen since the attack. The step, the United States stressed, was a purely legal move and was in no way a political gesture to placate Sudan or acknowledge the commission of an error. The ruling of the court, according to the Americans, was necessitated by the government's justified refusal to disclose intelligence which would vindicate the bombing of the factory.<sup>61</sup> The Sudanese government, however, perceived the court move quite differently, portraying it as an implicit admission by Washington of its failure to prove the production of chemical weapons at the plant or the links to Osama bin Ladin.<sup>62</sup>

Still, Khartoum did not cease its conciliatory overtures toward the U.S. administration, urging it in 1999 to reopen its embassy in Khartoum. In an effort to demonstrate goodwill, Sudan signed an international agreement on the banning of chemical weapons in May 1999, in compliance with one of the American preconditions for reviewing its sanctions policy. That same month, Sudan also signed the 1998 Arab League convention on combating terrorism.<sup>63</sup>

These measures, however, were pointedly ignored by the United States. Moreover, new tension arose in June when the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the Sudanese government for waging a genocidal war in southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains and for ongoing human-rights violations. Shortly afterward, the U.S. Congress called for the imposition of an embargo on flights by Sudanese airlines over these zones in an effort to halt alleged atrocities against Sudanese citizens there, including a slave trade deemed by Congress as having the support of the Khartoum government.

Congress also recommended the adoption of other tough anti-regime measures, along with supplying humanitarian assistance directly to the SPLA.<sup>64</sup>

The Sudanese government denied the congressional charges vehemently. Foreign Minister Mustafa Uthman Ismail, who had diligently attempted to foster a rapprochement with the United States, seemed to lose patience, chiding the Americans: "The U.S. Congress should be a source of peace instead of beating the drums of war." He accused the United States of "actually attempting to partition Sudan," while other Sudanese officials labeled the House of Representatives resolution a preparatory move to "direct foreign intervention" in Sudan's internal affairs.<sup>65</sup>

In the summer of 1999, the United States, concerned by the growing role of a joint Egyptian-Libyan peace initiative in Sudan and the possibility that it might displace the U.S.-backed IGADD peace-making efforts, tried to reinforce the effectiveness of IGADD. It also appointed a special envoy to Sudan, Harry Johnston, to press for an improvement in human rights and to monitor relief activities in the south. The post of special envoy had been suspended for several years following the withdrawal of the previous U.S. representative, Melissa F. Wells. Washington's move evoked indignation and concern in Khartoum, expressed in a series of denunciations by Sudanese political figures, one of whom referred to Johnston's mission as a "plot" against Sudanese unity.<sup>66</sup>

Ongoing bilateral hostility was reflected in a well-publicized visit to Kenya by Secretary of State Albright in October 1999. There, she made a point of meeting with representatives of the Sudanese opposition, including SPLA leader John

Garang, who announced his rejection of the Egyptian-Libyan peace initiative and his approval of a revitalized IGADD effort. Albright declared that Washington would inject more financial aid into IGADD and seek greater international pressure on Sudan's government in a bid to end the prolonged civil war, while also extending by two years a \$3-million program to reinforce civil society in southern Sudan.<sup>67</sup> Albright's message elicited antagonism in Khartoum.

A debate in American political circles and the media in late 1999 over whether the United States should supply food aid to the SPLA further fueled the antagonism between Khartoum and Washington.<sup>68</sup> With food in a war zone such as southern Sudan regarded as a weapon no less essential than guns, Khartoum's leadership reacted strongly to American intentions on this issue. Foreign Minister Ismail threatened to "shoot down any plane that entered Sudan's airspace if it does not carry the U.N. flag, or if it does not have official permission to fly in Sudan's airspace." Bashir, going a step further, claimed that "America [had] declared war on Sudan" in an effort to overthrow his regime.<sup>69</sup>

## **A HALTING RECONCILIATION, 2000**

Late in January 2000, the United States announced its decision not to supply food directly to the southern Sudanese opposition, signaling a possible relaxation of tension between the two countries. Moreover, the arrival in Khartoum of special envoy Harry Johnston about two months later evoked a positive response from the regime, despite the initial objection to his mission. Talks with him in Khartoum were described by an official as a "good start of contacts."<sup>70</sup> This was followed by the

reestablishment of the American diplomatic presence in Sudan in April after a two-year break. Although the United States left the ambassadorial position in Khartoum vacant and assigned only a few staff members to its embassy, the political significance of the move was not minimized.

These steps may have been influenced by Bashir's adoption of relatively pragmatic domestic policies during 1999-2000, culminating in the removal of the influential anti-Western Islamist leader Hasan Abdallah Turabi from any formal governmental position.<sup>71</sup> Bashir also effected reconciliations with neighboring countries that maintained close ties with Washington, particularly Egypt, thereby improving the chances of a U.S.-Sudan rapprochement. These positive developments were symbolically enhanced by Bashir's resounding victory in Sudan's presidential election in late 2000, enabling him to emerge "with his own kind of mandate" and feel more independent in terms of the "development and ideology of his regime."<sup>72</sup>

Presumably, a return visit to Khartoum by Johnston in June 2000 for talks about bilateral ties and the IGADD peace initiative to end the civil war in Sudan were used by the Sudanese authorities to request American help in lifting the U.N. sanctions. Bashir also made intensive diplomatic efforts in Washington to obtain a Security Council seat as Africa's representative – one of ten rotating nonpermanent seats – which was to become vacant at the end of 2000. The United States, however, opposed Sudan's move, and tension between the two countries resurfaced early in the summer. Present in New York in September 2000 to represent Sudan at the U.N. millennium summit, Bashir tried to promote Sudan's prospects for election to the

Security Council, but Sudan failed to obtain the seat in the elections a month later. The regime promptly blamed the United States, denouncing it for waging an anti-Sudanese campaign of "intimidation."<sup>73</sup>

Sudan's anger toward the United States was heightened further in November as a result of a visit to SPLA-held areas in the southern part of the country by a senior U.S. State Department official, Susan Rice, without Khartoum's authorization. Rice declared that "the government of Sudan must put an end to the heinous practice of slavery and brutal raids on the innocent civilian population."<sup>74</sup> By then, Bashir's expectations of Clinton's administration had vanished entirely, and Khartoum awaited its successor. Meanwhile, in December, Sudan declared an American diplomat working in the U.S. embassy in Khartoum, Glenn Warren, *persona non-grata* and expelled him from the country after accusing him of plotting an uprising with Sudanese opposition figures.

To Sudan's great disappointment early in 2001, the new American administration headed by George W. Bush did not deviate from the generally hostile policy pursued by the Clinton administration. However, the policy provoked contention in various circles within the U.S. administration and beyond. One opinion called for toughening punitive measures against Khartoum, while another advocated rebuilding ties with Bashir so as to increase Washington's influence over his regime.

Sudan's appointment of a chargé d'affaires to its embassy in Washington in April 2001; the appointment by the United States of former Senator John Danforth as a peace envoy to Sudan in September 2001; an official visit by U.S. Congressman John Cooksey to Sudan in August 2001;

and a visit by Danforth to Sudan in November 2001 may have signified new prospects for political cooperation between the two countries.

## CONCLUSION

The attitude of Bashir's Islamist regime toward the United States has been dominated by a pronounced oscillation between the poles of rejection and attraction. This has stemmed from the vast discrepancy between the regime's sworn ideological and cultural negation of the "evil, anti-Islamic imperialist United States," on the one hand, and the regime's dire political and economic need for American assistance, on the other.

This inherent contradiction within the Khartoum regime was steadily exacerbated during the 1990s as domestic and foreign threats to Bashir's rule proliferated. Bashir was well aware that he could not afford to continue provoking the United States, contravening Sudan's essential interests both internally and externally, while the Americans tightened the noose around his regime. This awareness impelled the Sudanese regime to reinforce its diplomatic wooing of Washington.

To Bashir's distress, however, his interest in thawing relations with the United States did not converge with that of Washington. The United States remained adamant in its punitive policy toward the

Sudanese regime. Accusing it of sponsoring international terrorism, actively seeking to destabilize its neighbors' governments, and having "one of the worst" human-rights records in the world, the United States continued to perceive Sudan as a threat to its national security. Washington-Khartoum relations were highly strained, dominated by American initiative and control. More than any other event, this was dramatically illustrated by the U.S. missile attack on Khartoum in 1998.

Notwithstanding, or perhaps precisely due to the shock of this attack, which highlighted Sudan's weakness in the asymmetric relationship, Bashir accelerated his overtures toward the United States, a policy that eventually produced a certain measure of tentative, albeit unsteady reconciliation.

It is still unclear to what extent the terrorist attacks September 11, 2001, and the consequent dramatic shift in the map of international terrorism have affected Washington's perception of Sudan. Although Sudan remains on the U.S. blacklist of states sponsoring international terrorism and is still under U.S. sanctions, now that a terrorist threat endangers essential American interests on an unprecedented scale, Sudan's image in Washington as a dangerous beast of prey may be somewhat attenuated.

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of U.S. interests in the Middle East during the 1990s, see Barry Rubin, "The United States and the Middle East," eds. Ami Ayalon/Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *Middle East Contemporary Survey, 1990-99*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992-2001).

<sup>2</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, November 2, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., *al-Quwat al-Musallaha* (Khartoum), January 20, February 8, 13, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., *International Herald Tribune*, January 27, 1992; *al-Wafd* (Cairo), January 19, April 29, September 30, 1992; *al-Watan al-Arabi* (Paris), July 10, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> For the denials, see e.g., *al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), January 7, 1992; *al-Hawadith* (London), February 28, 1992; *al-Wasat* (London), March 23-29, 1992; *al-Hayat* (London), September 5, 1992, interviews with Sudanese leaders. For Sudan's perception of Iraq and Iran in the early 1990s, see Louis J. Cantori and Arthur

Lowrie, "Islam, Democracy, the State and the West," summary of a lecture and round-table discussion with Hasan Turabi, chief ideologue of the Sudanese regime, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992, pp. 55-57.

<sup>6</sup> Wireless File (Washington, DC), March 10, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> For selected research works on Sudan's civil war, see John O. Voll, ed., *Sudan: State and Society in Crisis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Ann Lesch, *The Sudan: Contested National Identities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Yehudit Ronen, "Religion and Conflict in Sudan: A Non-Muslim Minority in a Muslim State," eds. Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor, *Minorities and the State in the Arab World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> See Foreign Minister Abu Salih's interviews with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), April 17, 1993, and *al-Hawadith*, May 21-30, 1993; *Africa Confidential* (London), March 19, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Bashir in an interview with *al-Shira* (Beirut), May 17, 1993; Abu Salih in an interview with *al-Hawadith*, May 21-30, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Top Sudanese officials in *al-Sudan al-Hadith* (Khartoum), July 27, 1993; interviews with *al-Hayat*, June 11, 1993; Sudanese News Agency (SUNA; Khartoum), August 27, 1993 (DR); *al-Hayat*, July 15, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Minister for Presidential Affairs Ali al-Haj Muhammad in an interview with *al-Hayat*, July 15, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Wireless File, August 19, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Agence France Press (Paris), August 21, 1993 (DR), report from Khartoum.

<sup>14</sup> For the sources of mutual enmity between Sudan and Egypt and for Sudan's troublesome regional and international relations during this period, see Yehudit Ronen, "Sudan (Foreign Affairs)," *Middle East Contemporary Survey, 1992, 1993*, pp. 713-19 and 620-28, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Bashir's statement, SUNA, September 9, 1993 (DR), and *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, October 12, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> R. Omdurman (Khartoum), September 2, 14, 1993 (DR).

<sup>17</sup> R. Omdurman, October 27, November 2, 1993 (DR); *al-Hayat*, October 27, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> SUNA, February 20, 1994 (DR).

<sup>19</sup> R. Omdurman, February 22, 1994 (DR).

<sup>20</sup> Wireless File, April 1, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> SUNA, April 1, 1994 (DR); *al-Muharrir* (Paris), April 4, 1994, interview with Bashir.

<sup>22</sup> R. Omdurman, June 11, 1994 (DR), interview with Wells.

<sup>23</sup> R. Omdurman, August 16, 1994 (DR).

<sup>24</sup> Wireless File, August 16, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> R. Omdurman, September 17, 1994 (DR). Also see statement by Turabi, Islamic Revolution News Agency (IRNA; Tehran), December 3, 1994 (DR).

<sup>26</sup> Foreign Minister Abu Salih's interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 22, 1995, and R. Omdurman, June 15, 1995 (DR), respectively.

<sup>27</sup> *Africa Confidential*, June 23, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Mahdi was arrested on May 10, 1995, following his sustained criticism of the regime, describing its performance as a "failure of national standards" and calling for Sudan's "bloodless salvation," i.e., a changing of the guard in the country's leadership. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 11, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> For mutual influences within the U.S.-Egypt-Sudan triangular relationship, see Jon B. Alterman, "Sudan May Emerge as Irritant to U.S.-Egyptian Ties," *Policy Watch*, No. 311, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Wireless File, February 1, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> *Sudanow* (Khartoum), March 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Wireless File, February 1, 1996; *International Herald Tribune*, February 15, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> SUNA, February 2, 1996 (DR).

<sup>34</sup> *Sudan: News and Views* (electronic version), No. 19, June 1996.

<sup>35</sup> R. Omdurman, April 15, 1996 (DR).

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Hayat*, May 5, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> E.g., *The Washington Post*, November 10, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Muslim Students Association News (MSANEWS, electronic site), November 15, 1996; *al-Mushahid al-Siyasi* (London), November 24, 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Statements by Bashir and other Sudanese officials, e.g., in *al-Hayat*, January 24, 1997; *Akhbar al-Yawm* (Cairo), January 25, April 16, 1997; *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, March 14, 1997.

- <sup>40</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 6, 1996.
- <sup>41</sup> Bashir, quoted in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 18, 1997.
- <sup>42</sup> Wireless File, May 15, 1997.
- <sup>43</sup> Wireless File, November 7, 1997.
- <sup>44</sup> E.g., statement released by the Foreign Affairs Ministry, R. Omdurman, November 5 – Summary of World Broadcasting: The ME and Africa (SWB), November 7, 1997.
- <sup>45</sup> *Country Report Sudan* (London), No. 4, 1997, p. 18; SUNA, November 16 – SWB, November 10, 1997.
- <sup>46</sup> Omdurman TV, April 10 – SWB, April 12, 1998. See also Bashir in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 6, 1998.
- <sup>47</sup> Statement by army spokesperson, Abd al-Rahman al-Khatim, to *al-Hayat*, April 2, 1998.
- <sup>48</sup> Foreign Minister Mustafa Uthman Ismail in an interview in *al-Ittihad* (Abu Dhabi), April 1, 1998, and in a press conference in Khartoum, quoted by *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 22, 1998; interview with Interior Minister Bakri Hasan Salih, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 26, 1998.
- <sup>49</sup> SUNA, August 8, 1998 (DR).
- <sup>50</sup> For detailed American explanations for the attack, see President Clinton's statement, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August 20, 1998; U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in an interview with ABC TV "This Week," released by the spokesman of the U.S. Department of State, Washington DC, August 21, 1998.
- <sup>51</sup> National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, press briefing, The White House, Washington DC, August 20, 1998.
- <sup>52</sup> E.g., Turabi quoted by AFP, August 23, 1998; Bashir on Omdurman TV, August 20, 1998; statement by the Foreign Ministry, R. Omdurman, August 21, 1998 (DR).
- <sup>53</sup> E.g., *The Economist* (London), August 29, 1998, quoting the New York-based Human Rights Watch; Sudanese opposition claims in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 24, 1998, *al-Hayat* August 25, 1998, and AFP, August 25, 1998 (DR).
- <sup>54</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 1998, report from Khartoum.
- <sup>55</sup> Information Minister Ghazi Salah al-Din al-Atbani, Omdurman TV, August 20, 1998 (DR).
- <sup>56</sup> Omdurman TV, August 20, 1998 (DR); AFP, August 23, 1998 (DR).
- <sup>57</sup> E.g., *Mideast Mirror* (London), August 21, 28, 30, 1998; *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1998; *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1998; *The New York Times*, August 29, 1998.
- <sup>58</sup> Bashir in *al-Wasat*, September 28, 1998; Omdurman TV, January 18, 1999 (DR).
- <sup>59</sup> R. Omdurman, October 11 – SWB, October 13, 1998; the army spokesperson, Abd al-Rahman al-Khatim, in an interview in *al-Ittihad* (Abu Dhabi), October 23, 1998.
- <sup>60</sup> *Alwan* (Khartoum), April 29, 1999.
- <sup>61</sup> *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1999.
- <sup>62</sup> E.g., Foreign Minister Ismail in a statement to *La Stampa* (Turin), June 1, 1999.
- <sup>63</sup> *La Stampa*, June 1, 1999, and MENA, May 26, 1999, respectively.
- <sup>64</sup> *Sudan Focus* (London), July 15, 1999.
- <sup>65</sup> R. Omdurman, June 27, 1999 (DR); *al-Hayat*, June 27, 1999; *Sudan Focus*, July 15, 1999.
- <sup>66</sup> Statement by Siraj al-Din Hamid, a senior member of the National Assembly, *al-Ray al-Amm* (Khartoum), July 18, 1999. See also statements by Foreign Minister Ismail, *Uktobar* (Cairo), July 25, 1999, and Omdurman TV, August 29 – SWB, August 31, 1999.
- <sup>67</sup> R. Nairobi, October 22 – SWB, October 25, 1999.
- <sup>68</sup> E.g., *The Washington Post*, December 2, 1999; *The New York Times*, December 4, 1999, a letter to the editor by C. William Kontos and Donald Petterson; *Boston Globe*, December 6, 1999.
- <sup>69</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 10, and R. Khartoum, December 15 – SWB, December 15, 1999.
- <sup>70</sup> A top Sudanese official in an interview in *Middle East Times*, March 9-15, 2000.
- <sup>71</sup> For details, see Yehudit Ronen, "The Struggle for Power Within Sudan's Top Leadership," *Policy Watch*, No. 432, 1999; *idem*, "Sudan (Internal Affairs)," *Middle East Contemporary Survey, 2000* (forthcoming).
- <sup>72</sup> United Press International, February 24, 2000, quoting John Voll, professor of Islamic history at Georgetown University and a leading scholar of Sudanese affairs.
- <sup>73</sup> AFP, October 12, 2000 (DR), report from Khartoum.
- <sup>74</sup> CNN Website, November 21, 2000.